

Opportunity and the Pandemic: Re-imagining Business Management Curriculum for First-generation Students under Cover of Pandemonium

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Abstract

First-generation university students negotiate with clear and evident difficulty the transition from the familiarity of secondary (high school) education to tertiary (university) education. The impersonal nature of tertiary education generally—and particularly so since the pandemic advent—accentuates marginalisation of vulnerable youth and impinges on effective learning and a favourable learning experience. A more desirable state would include demystification of the processes of becoming a student-customer, firstly, and thereafter a learner-initiate. Teaching faculty, in the (necessarily virtual) classroom, serve as the user-interface with the impersonal and often impenetrable administrative and teaching dimensions of the university exosystem. The rationale is that, were the pathway from high school graduate to student-customer and learner-initiate to be less harrowing, the transition would be more composed and the journey to degree completion more gratifying. Scaffolding this rationale as a reconceptualised first-year management studies curriculum draws upon Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of learner development, and the foundations established by Vygotsky’s socio-cultural model of learning. In this frame, proximal processes arising as learner interaction with microsystem and exosystem dimensions of socio-economic and socio-cultural inheritance, can be addressed in the classroom to transcend learner disaffection. An entry-level management principles curriculum delivered to a substantial cohort in the second semester of 2021 served as object of phenomenological observation and interpretation. The student-experience pathway was emphasised as instructor-directed, student-focused and compensatory. Two foci are brought to the fore in this paper, rendering the curriculum content accessible for the student profile, and overcoming assessment helplessness and despondency. These accomplishments are

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elaborated as features of backwards design and emphasis on teaching and learning as social interaction with a more knowledgeable other.

Keywords: first-generation students; management studies curriculum; proximal processes; instructional design

Introduction

The features of higher/tertiary (university) education, under the uncertainty of the conditions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, may have been rendered fluid, but the context has remained more or less the same. This context is one of substantial social inequality, youth unemployment (and the concomitant ambition for further education), student cohorts that are chiefly first-generation students (FGSs), constrained institutional munificence, and ungainly national supplementary student funding mechanisms. We know from progression and pass rates that FGSs negotiate the transition from the familiarity of secondary (high school) education to tertiary (university) education with difficulty. Any institutional prevarication in facing up to the contextual reference points acting on this phenomenon intensifies the injury of the less privileged.

This paper explains the reference points informing the redesign of a first-year introductory university module in management principles forming components of both commerce and humanities degree programmes in a large traditional South African university. This redesign was inspired by a desire to correct the misdirection of talent resulting from inappropriate epistemological assumptions and pedagogical practices. It is observed that this does not necessarily represent a challenge to all course leaders—as an aggregated group—but many instructors are unfortunately unwittingly imprudent in their ostensible sincerity. It is possible to achieve pass rates and progression, but with students enjoying little comprehension of the subject matter of the course and limited cognitive and skills development. Notwithstanding, three polestars guide this ongoing project:

1. Foundational understanding of the ecology of business and the manner in which the resources of a business are managed, are material for authentic personal development and for establishing a sound platform for further disciplinary study.
2. FGSs enjoy no material pre-knowledge of business, formal sector employment, business relationships and the inter-dependence of business enterprises in a business ecosystem. Conventional instruction (as may be expected to be effective for privileged learners) is inaccessible for FGSs, their handicap resulting from both their often substandard basic education and their business domain contextual unfamiliarity.
3. Teaching for understanding to FGSs can best be devised as a function of backwards design.

These three standards steered the reconfiguration of the student-experience pathway as one which was instructor-directed, student-focused and compensatory. Presenting this case is intended to inspire not only reflection but perhaps a dialogue. In so doing, the effectiveness of pedagogy in South African universities everywhere may be advanced, if only by virtue of prompting considered re-examination of curricula and instructional standards. The case is presented against the background of the four reasoned predicates carrying the curriculum redesign, within the framing of backwards instructional design, whilst mindful of the theoretical underpinning of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of learner development and Vygotsky's socio-cultural model of learning.

Background

The Covid-19 pandemic induced a lockdown lasting for two years (2020 and 2021) and represents a tipping point in tertiary education in many respects. Facility-rich contact institutions mothballed amenities in March 2020 and embarked on the quest to equip students and staff with the necessary accoutrements of remote learning and teaching and, lest we forget, remote institutional administration. Contact university academics have had to undertake the necessary workarounds to accommodate students' socio economic profile (SEP) and concomitant deficits in technology platforms and broadband access. Sometimes this resource and capability paucity even overflowed into the teaching and institutional administration domains.

Notwithstanding our numbed awe as the comfortable fabric of our contact teaching habituation was rent asunder, it appears universities have made the shift—to a greater or lesser extent—to the *next normal*. This is a consequence of the apparent scalar advantages of massive open online courses and distance learning generally, with all institutions obliged to make their contact programmes available as virtual or distance learning programmes.

The goal, then, of mandatory remote learning and teaching in an ordinarily contact institution would be to confine dropout rates, learning entropy, and test score dispersion (Chetty et al. 2020; DELVE Initiative 2020) while conceding the obliteration instigated by the pandemic of the social benefits of campus mingling. In other words, contact universities had little choice but to hurdle the mandatory step-change if they were to remain in business.

A primary component of this step-change was the redesign of curricula. Confined in some institutions, at least, to assessment protocol redesign to achieve continuous assessment routines, the pre-2020 curricula were often uncomfortably carried over into the pandemic-era with scant regard for the sense and sensibility thereof. The *first predicate* carrying this paper's argument, is that distanced learning and teaching in contact universities require curriculum redesign. The luxury of contact, arising in the forms of classroom tone, cadence and the general theatrics underpinning the retention of student attention over double-periods, requires the stripped-down iteration of contact

university teaching to be ontologically rich with categorisation, coherence, and organisation.

The *second predicate* carrying this paper, however, is the loaded question of whether contact learning is, in fact, an essential for satisfactory learning, particularly so in the context of a first-year management principles module. It is likely undisputed that conventional contact classes can achieve a learning and teaching premium relative to the remote alternative. However, remote learning and teaching offer substantial advantages in production and cost efficiencies, arguably outweighing the reduction in effectiveness resulting from no contact.

This paper does not seek to argue the effectiveness conundrum, however. The pandemic obligated a step-change in praxis, and the challenge was met in the case presented here as a phenomenological insight into curriculum revision. This establishes the *third predicate*: the pandemic pandemonium arising from the redirection of teaching faculty, students and staff, together with the requisite approval of continuous assessment protocols, enabled a redesign of a first-year management principles curriculum free of committee and collegial approval. While at first glance, this appears to be nothing more than a renegade breach of process and protocol, it was not the case. The redesign encompassed negligible changes in respect of content, but substantial changes in respect of the form in which that content was scaffolded, supplemented and facilitated.

Finally, this paper (and the case it reports) was predicated on the requirement for university curricula, together with systems and processes, to align with the SEP of the institution's primarily FGS student body. This has not specifically encompassed the decolonisation, so to speak, of the curriculum of the entry level module serving as the case reported here. As Gray (2017, 95) points out, decolonisation encompasses "*paradigmatic challenge*" (Gray's emphasis). The redesign of the case module very specifically set out to address the marginalisation noted to arise from presumptive instructorship more appropriate to privileged student bodies enjoying generational advantage. This represents less of a challenge to the discipline than it does to the tenets by which comprehension of the discipline's constructs are traditionally considered to be mastered.

Conceptual Keystones

Where as many as three quarters of a transformed traditional university's student body are FGSs (SASSE 2021, 2014; USAf 2018), students' SEP exhibits social, economic and cultural capital characteristics which may, if not compensated for by the traditional institution, impede satisfactory learning and capability development and hence, functioning as a young (and quite conceivably, graduated) adult. This is not about *otherness*, or deficit—where FGSs' SEP is the primary defining class of the current student body it should serve, sensibly so, as a primary vector in informing curriculum, teaching design, and student experience.

Evidence suggests that where FGSs represent the preponderance of students in a classroom, module cohort or campus, the inherited social and cultural deficits relative to more privileged counterparts are less significant for the FGSs (Heymann and Carolissen 2011). These authors' systematic literature review conducted in 2011 found only one paper addressing South African FGS's disadvantage in tertiary education. They reasoned that the particularities of FGS disadvantage must be addressed not as aspects of inferiority (relative, say, to the Western sense of social and cultural capital) but as first-order priorities for efficient and effective higher education in the South African context. To this, we must add, however, that the tools and techniques, the systems and processes, the presumptions and beliefs of the institution and its academics and administrators do not spontaneously align with the social and cultural capital of the FGS student body. Regrettably, these institutional attributes may be firmly rooted in the heritage of the original institutions, no matter how transformed these institutions may be (frequently self) regarded to be.

The consequences of highhanded administration and teaching practice are grave. The position that higher education leads to elevated functioning and more fulfilling life outcomes is unassailable. Universities represent the toll keepers on the evolutionary passage from high school learner to university student and, ultimately, graduate. Were this passage from high school graduate to student-customer and learner-initiate to be less harrowing, the voyage would be more composed and the journey to degree completion more agreeable.

This circumstance is a function, it is contended, of demystifying the two-step process of becoming a student-customer and, thereafter, a learner-initiate. The first step can be a tricky one; observed by many to be complex, intricate and with especially limited interface where it is conducted virtually. Application, admission, and enrolment are functions of institutional administrative processes. The annual merry-go-round of destroyed university infrastructure and social friction bears testimony to these processes not always being up to the task.

Where these preliminary barriers are successfully hurdled, newly anointed learner-initiates must reconfigure themselves to the rigours of curricula and teaching imposed by faculty, sometimes out of step with the necessary parameters of compensatory teaching to an FGS profile. It is contended that the impersonal nature of tertiary education generally—and particularly so since the pandemic advent—accentuates marginalisation of vulnerable youth and impinges on effective learning and a favourable learning experience. Teaching faculty, whether in the virtual or campus classroom, serve as the user-interface with the impersonal and often impenetrable administrative and teaching dimensions of the university exosystem. For the purpose of redesigning the introductory module in management principles (serving as the case under consideration), the foundations established by Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of learner development and Vygotsky's socio-cultural model of learning are asserted to

provide a theoretical underpinning. These foundations are entrenched by observing the principles of so-called backwards design.

Theoretical Footings

In the contested terrain which is higher/tertiary education, a premium is placed on pass rates. However, the dreaded cult-of-13, or in other words, the prescription of 13 chapters selected from developed-world texts (or their local revisions) to match 13-week teaching semesters, are evidence of *coverage-focused* teaching. This instructional fall-back is what Wiggins and McTighe (2005, 3) refer to as “Teach, test, and hope for the best.” Rejecting this threadbare maxim in favour of deliberate *outcomes-focused* instructional design is the animation behind the redesign of the case module.

The premise, which underlines outcomes-based instructional design, is that of “working backwards from goals to the requirements of instructional events ... one of the most effective and widely employed techniques” (Gagné and Merrill 1990, 23). Popularised as *backwards design*, this logic prevails that a sequential process—akin to the waterfall methodology of information systems development and project management—directs the curriculum development process. Waterfall methodology presumes all known project, or system, or curriculum requirements in this case, to be both distinguishable and distinguished at the commencement of the design and development process. In this respect, and as illustrated in the accompanying figure, the goals for instructional outcomes are distinguishable and can be distinguished as knowledge and skill constituents. This facilitates the deliberation of the declarative knowledge by which instructional outcomes can be assessed as achieved. Accordingly, instruction and education technology (EdTech) with appropriate and aligned probatory utility can be decided. This, finally, permits the formulation of a course outline or module guide. This process is a far cry from what must be called out as an inexcusable practice—that of reproducing 13 select chapters of a text prescription as a curriculum!

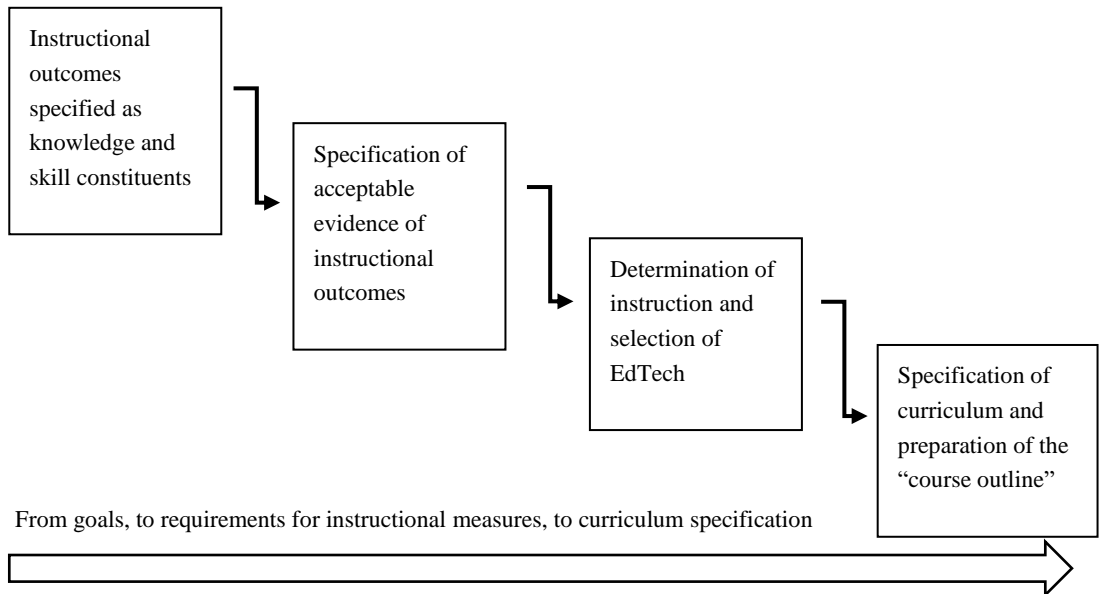


Figure 1: Stages of backwards instructional design (Author’s original)

The mechanist paradigm directing cult-of-13 adherents cannot accommodate the complexity of human development as necessarily contextual (Tudge 2008). “From a contextualist point of view, development results from interactions among different influencing factors (e.g., environmental and biological), which cannot be treated independently and whose effects are greater than the sum of their parts” (Merçon-Vargas et al. 2020, 1). Urie Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory sets out these parts, evolving since his introduction of the ecological theory of learner development in the 1970s. By ecological theory, we understand the interaction of individuals and their environments.

The ecology of human development is the study of progressive and mutual accommodations taking place across the life span between individuals and their changing immediate environments; relations taking place within and between the immediate settings, as well as the larger formal and informal social contexts (in which these settings are embedded), have an impact on this accommodation process. (Merçon-Vargas et al. 2020, 3)

These *settings and contexts* are nested, as illustrated in figure 2.

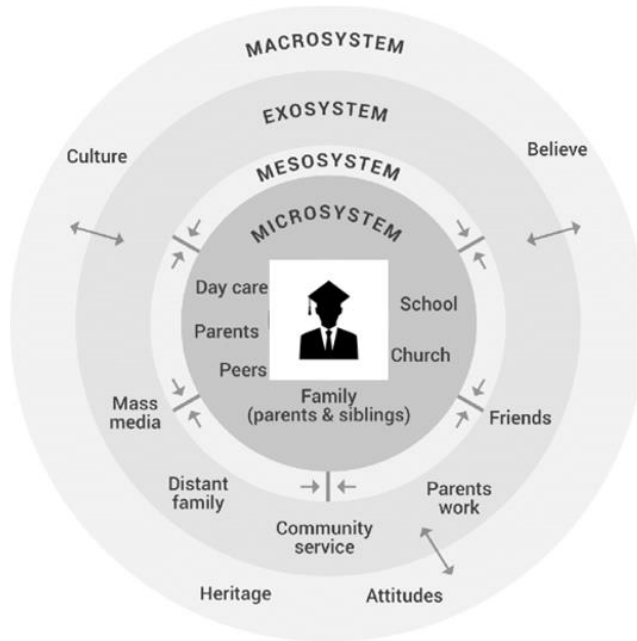


Figure 2: Nested systems: Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development (Author's adaptation)

At the centre of this nested system, nestled in the microsystem of family and peers, school and adolescent care, is the learner. This, for FGSS, establishes the foundations of the SEP known to characterise what transformed traditional universities boast as their quintile one, two and three student intake.

The exosystem arises for university students chiefly as their university. All of the learners' interactions are indirectly impacted by the macrosystem within which they are located. This comprises the social and cultural considerations impelling the world view, expectations and ambitions of the learner. Finally, the chronosystem is viewed in this theoretical framing as the life course changes that impact the learners' life development paths. These changes encompass not only the major life transitions of individuals generally, but also the revolutionary markers of the current student life course. Several examples spring to mind: the 2015 #Feesmustfall student-led protest; the advent in 2018 of the State Capture Commission; the 2020 coronavirus disease-impelled lockdown of the global economy and the ensuing retreat by FGSS to their homes, far too often established as balefully inadequate places to situate higher learning. Mediating the intersection of the learners and the exosystem into which they will transition as learner-initiates, is the mesosystem. Comprising the attributes of the learners' microsystem, but in the domain of exosystem interaction, this means much of the FGSS' understanding of the institutional system into which they will plummet, is a received wisdom.

Distal and proximal mechanisms can be distinguished in this schema. University senate and council determinations on institutional learning and teaching, for example,

represent a macrosystem distal mechanism. It is noted, though, that distal mechanisms can only reach from afar the learners' immediate ecology. On the other hand, proximal mechanisms introduce immediacy. The assignment of an instructor to a course or module is a proximal mechanism. The instruction, and the explicit and hidden curriculums, are thence proximal processes. Proximal mechanisms give rise to proximal processes, being the interactions, which directly impact the learner-subject (Merçon-Vargas et al. 2020).

Three foci manifest in these interactions: the learner, the context, and the developmental outcome (Bronfenbrenner and Evans 2000). It is here that the bioecological model is fitted to the instructional redesign of the case module: "... throughout the life course, human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of time" (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998, 996).

The three foci—learner, context, and developmental outcome—map to the instructional design considerations earlier elucidated: instructional outcomes and their evidence; instruction and EdTech intervention; and the FGS learner-initiate profile. In what is clearly a sociocultural contextual framing, Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development—maintaining as it does that higher mental processes have their origins in culture-rich social processes (McLeod 2018)—buttresses the thesis prompting the redesign of the case module. Principally, this support arises through Vygotsky's emphasis of learning as an exercise in social collaboration. This comes about through the interaction between learners and a person of significance (teachers, more knowledgeable peers) and the integration of these events into the learners' mental structures (Wass, Harland, and Mercer 2011).

Underlying this conception is the notion of the zones of current development and proximal development. The Zone of Current Development (ZCD) represents the learning independently attainable by the learner without significant external intervention. It is reasonable to assume that the FGSs' SEP is one which correlates to limited *a priori* knowledge, and a developmental level likely to make independent learning of non-contextually relevant facts and theories arduous at best, and improbable at worst. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), on the other hand, represents "the distance between the actual developmental level, as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development, as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky 1978, 86).

With this theoretical underpinning in mind, the goal of the entry-level management principles module curriculum redesign was to focus on these six contextual aspects:

1. Recognise, and accommodate, the actual development levels of first-enrolment FGSs.
2. Determine instructional goals aligned to meaningful cognitive development and, ultimately, meaningful graduate attribute development.
3. Devise an assessment regimen incorporating structures and hurdles capable simultaneously of building confidence (as a consequence of accomplishment), presenting challenge (incorporating questions that first-year students might regard as difficult), and distinguishing a distribution of performance.
4. Conclude a “building blocks” curriculum stripped of superfluous facts and fancies.
5. Select and exploit EdTech appropriate to both student profile and contextual circumstance.
6. Specification of a curriculum in a form stripped of all but the essential content to inform, advise and reassure.

The Case Module Redesign

There is a confirmed relationship between SEP and educational outcomes. Vocabulary, literacy, cognition, academic performance, and productive social integration with students enjoying generational capital, are compromised for disadvantaged FGSs (Galina 2016; OECD 2010).

Tellingly, this handicap may present as poor epistemological framing, where this is understood as compromised student expectations of requisite preparedness and effort, compared to that of the educators responsible for facilitating the taught curriculum. Influentially, the expectations of students enjoying generational capital are demonstrably closer to that of educators. Recognising, then, the relative aspiration and achievement deficits of the FGS student body, the objective should be to establish an *equitable learning context*, regardless of SEP.

Educational attainment, while representing a “way out of poverty” for FGSs, should revolve primarily around a baseline level of proficiency. In South Africa, that proficiency is declaratively and administratively provided in the form of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) qualifiers. With no intention of prompting debate, three of the 10 Level 5 NQF expected learning outcomes are suggested as fundamental, and are summarised in the following table.

Table 1: Three primary expected learning outcomes guiding benchmark tertiary student proficiency.

Expected learning outcome	NQF5 (degree Level one) expected learning outcome descriptors
Scope of knowledge	Demonstration of an informed understanding of fields of practice
Information processing	Demonstrable ability to gather information from a range of sources, to select information appropriate to the task, and to apply basic processes of analysis, synthesis and evaluation on that information
Management of learning	Demonstrable ability to evaluate own performance (or the performance of others) and to take appropriate action when necessary

The three expected learning outcomes raised to prominence in table 1 identify primary baseline personal capability, resonating with Nussbaum's (2009, 2000) framing of proficiencies necessary to live a flourishing life. These three standards served as the primary instructional design consideration for the case module curriculum.

Galina (2016), himself a first-generation graduate, promotes transparency in assessment. He points out that FGSs cannot make the transition to tertiary education and the expectations of the academy that students, enjoying a generational capital premium in this respect, make with relative comfort. He presents persuasive evidence to support this claim:

McNair, Finley, Winkelmes and colleagues [2016] found that greater instructor transparency increased students' academic confidence, sense of belonging, and mastery of the skills that employers value in new employees. Gains were seen in all students as a result of increased transparency. The effect, however, was much more significant for first-generation and low-income students. (Galina 2016, 6)

In pursuit of transparency, whole-syllabus assessment, *assessment fluency*, and multiple assessments made up the assessment regimen of the case module. Each of the five learning themes was closed out with an assessment (each assessment equally weighted in contribution to a final mark). Each assessment piece was administered virtually during the hard lockdown and campus closure in 2021, exploiting the Learning Management System (LMS) facility. A generous test window of opportunity (of 12 hours) was provided for the completion of an hour-long objective test incorporating randomisation. The security risks of this strategy are acknowledged, as, of course, are the fickleness of national electricity supply, mobile phone-accessed bandwidth, and numerous other compromises intruding capriciously on the life-and-study styles of rural-dwelling FGSs!

The technical advantages of this assessment strategy include flexibility around multiple logins (governed by internet access and contained within the maximum duration within which to complete the instrument); adequate security controls (acknowledged as imperfect); and whole-syllabus assessment. The psychosocial benefits are assessment fluency and reduced assessment-anxiety, elevated confidence, and in many instances, prideful accomplishment.

In this vein, missed formal assessment deadlines and sub-standard performance should not instil student anxiety. The instructional goal is to craft capability to a benchmarked standard, not to “pass” students. If sub-standard teaching and/or compromised learning have unfortunately led to poor performance, is there a canon to which we must bow, denying the student opportunity to make good the deficit? Rules establish behavioural expectations, while procedures determine how things should happen (after Wong and Wong 2018). Hence a procedure was incorporated into this module for reattempt of failed assessments. Students were dissuaded from deliberately avoiding assignments by making the scope and duration of the supplementary opportunity assessment far more onerous. However, where technical issues (electricity, internet access, technical platform) could have capriciously intervened, high-stakes prejudice was precluded.

From a cognitive perspective, learning is enhanced when non-essential material is eliminated from the curriculum (Chandler and Sweller 1991; Cooper 1990). Non-essential material is, quixotically, nice to know, but it remains superfluous. More importantly, incorporating what is seemingly useful “learning material” can be heartless—especially so when it must be absorbed in a second, unfamiliar language. Paring down the content of a legacy module may, therefore, not find favour with traditionalists. There is an expedient amenity to downloading instructor materials—the prescribed text publisher’s PowerPoints and test banks in the main—but this not only precludes meticulous curriculum construction, it also constrains the deliberation of instructional design appropriate to FGSs. Instead, textbook coverage prevails.

In what appears to be a contradiction of this caution, the case module redesign trimmed only two chapters from the prescription of the most recent iteration of the module (in the first semester of 2021) and added a chapter (provided to students as a supplement in terms of “Fair Use” arrangement) drawn from a more readable and far simpler text. Devised as a pattern of five themes, the first foundational theme attempted to make clear the building blocks of business and enterprise activity.

Table 2: The foundation theme of the module

FOUNDATION THEME	WEEKLY THEMATIC CONTENT
What is business, what is management, and how do they go together?	Week one: What is a business? What is a “manager”? How do business organisations and managers go together?
	Week two: Evolution of management thought. (An anthropological dive into the theory of the past century)
	Week three: What does it take to be a manager? Values, attitudes, emotions and culture.
	Week four: The environment within which managers manage. What are the things managers should be on the lookout for?
	Week five: What do managers actually “manage”? How do business enterprises “do business”?

The fifth week indulged opportunity to make clear, with example and illustration, how human actions and endeavours impel and direct business actions and endeavours. This was “unfolded” with opportunity for embellishment, which publisher PowerPoint presentations cannot begin to mimic. The overarching instructional ambition was to strip the acute detail of a prescribed text (prepared for an American audience where best estimates suggest less than a fifth of the student body are FGSs). The skeletal frame of business (and management) was dismantled and reconstructed with appropriate theatre and flair, seeking to impress a picture (figuratively and literally) of the drama of business enterprise.

In the process of presenting the equivalent of four chapters of the prescribed text, the necessity to depend on the text was rejected. Might this approach have neglected the detail a text prescription affords? Snell (2008) points out that FGSs bump up against an institutional work ethic that expects lecture attendance (in class or virtual sessions), punctual task completion, preparation for class work, and studious and comprehensive critical reading. Snell postulates a “dark side of the work ethic ... that ... education exists solely to improve work opportunities and salary” (Snell 2008, 28), and continues to observe how (social) “place, with its socioeconomic peculiarities, affects student behaviour and school ‘culture’” (Snell 2008, 30), with little interest in reading as a means of ingesting information. “The lower the income, the more apt students are to be dualistic learners, reading for data alone and looking for correct answers in the classroom” (Snell 2008, 31). This data is most easily obtained by memorisation of presentation bullet points. Gloomily, instructor capitulation in the face of what manifests as student clamour for “the slides” is illustrated by the widespread practice of disseminating publisher PowerPoint presentations on the institutional LMS platform. This is observed to be crudely effective at soliciting favourable student evaluation of

teaching, the imprecise practice inexactly employed by institutions to measure “customer satisfaction” with received instruction.

The facilitation of the case module was deliberately distanced from this stance. In light of the confirmed lunacy in overloading students ill-equipped to deal with content coverage overload, the practice of deliberate simplification is defended as imminently aligned to the taught cohort profile. The essence of the curriculum content is excerpted from the course outline in the following table.

Table 3: Reconceiving the curriculum content for a management principles module for FGSs

WEEK	THEME	CONTENT
1	What is business, what is management, and how do they go together?	What is a business? What is a “manager”? How do business organisations and managers go together?
2		Evolution of management thought. An anthropological dive into the theory of the past century.
3		What does it take to be a manager? Values, attitudes, emotions and culture.
4		The environment within which managers manage. What are the things managers should be on the lookout for?
5		What do managers actually manage? How do business enterprises “do business”?
6	Planning	Decision-making, and using plans to achieve goals. What sort of goals? What sort of plans? What sort of decisions?
7		Planning, strategy and competitive advantage. How do managers plan for the future? How far into the future should they plan?
8	Organising	How are planning and organising linked? What are the theories about “organisation” and how do they suggest things should be planned?
9		Designing organisational structure: how is a company like Famous Brands organised?
10	Controlling	Defining control: What do we mean? Are there different types of control a manager can practise?
11		Managing operations and processes. What has to be done, and why is it a good idea to do it?
12	Leading	Defining leadership: What exactly does it mean to lead? Is it different to managing?
13		The difference between managing staff, and leading teams.

The course outline was disseminated to enrolled students via the LMS in the week prior to the commencement of the teaching term. While the LMS was a useful repository for materials in the previous decade, a rapid reconfiguration ensued following the national

lockdown in March 2020. The LMS is undoubtedly a primary and premier interface with students in a virtual learning and teaching environment. To this, Zoom was added as the principle means of reaching out to students across time and space. This is also where the SEP realities of many FGSSs' existence roughly interjected. Bandwidth and technical platform limitations compromised the best instructional intentions. As localised anecdotal evidence emerges, it has become apparent that FGSSs suffered disproportionately in accommodating the burden of forcibly distanced, technology-reliant teaching and learning.

Reflections and Conclusion

Enacting the curriculum redesign and reconsidered delivery, represents a phenomenological insight derived from personal interactions at group and individual level, framing an agenda and objective for institutional curriculum design. While measuring the outcome of a reconsidered approach to curriculum construction and conveyance remains a work-in-progress, the early evidence is favourable. However, the true value will exhibit only when there is a longer-term trace of impact on this cohort's psycho-emotional and academic performance outcomes.

The explicit curriculum could not be substantially revised. The module is common to multiple degree programmes and sites of delivery, across both teaching semesters. Substantial curriculum revision requires procedural adherence. It also requires buy-in from other instructors responsible for the parallel module facilitation in the other semester iteration. The nature of teaching and performance management does not reward instructional fealty, and one must remain cognisant of instructor resistance to taking on the burden of unrecompensed effort. Additionally, return to campus in-person learning represents a challenge to the nature of the instruction characterising virtual teaching and to the possibilities for fine-tuned assessment parameters. This is a splendid opportunity, but quite possibly only feasible (in the current institutional Covid-response climate) in 2023.

The case phenomenon is, therefore, more representative, arguably, of a minor *reconditioning* than a complete *rebuild*. It does not embody a departure from what might be regarded as the norm. That said, it is palpably more substantial and qualitatively refined than the parallel semester companion iteration it was intended to displace.

Ultimately, education seeks to render graduates employable. Employability is a function of human development exhibiting self-efficacy, personal competence, workplace competence, and knowledge and understanding (Griesel and Parker 2008; Yorke and Knight 2006). As Nussbaum (2009, 2000) considers it, human development establishes the prospect for a flourishing life; a life typified by an ability to act upon opportunity and to influence personal circumstances. Gluchman concurs: "We can agree with Nussbaum and, picking up on the work of Socrates and the Stoics, state that knowledge and critical thinking both liberate and strengthen the human capacity for decision making and acting" (Gluchman 2018, 330).

A single entry-level module, however, represents less than 5% of the eventual degree. In unstructured programmes, particularly, little overarching control is exercised in scaffolding the human potential each student represents. The management module under review must, therefore, be considered independent of the degree programme of which it is a component part, at best a stepping stone on the road to a disciplinary specialisation and, at worst, a beneficial and stimulating free elective module.

Finally, this short paper is not a treatise. It is simply a snapshot of an intervention sincerely conceived and authentically executed. It represents neither a comprehensive handbook nor an instruction manual. But if it stirs a course leader—if it resonates with an emptiness arising from teaching that is increasingly removed from authentic human development—then it is a conversation starter at the very least, and a plank to cling to in a storm of managerialist opprobrium.

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