



## **Module 1: Soft-skills**

### **Topic 1.1: Introduction to the course**

#### **Video lesson**

- <https://youtu.be/kN-JRjl-SWo>

#### **Reading material**

- Development of Entrepreneurial Competences
- Designing Management Curriculum for Workplace Readiness: Developing Students' Soft Skills

# Development of Entrepreneurial Competences

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ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING seems to promote the emergence of entrepreneurship and enterprising undertakings among students and graduates of higher education institutions. The model of entrepreneurial learning which we describe in this paper consists of five constructs – entrepreneurial competences, self-efficacy, entrepreneurial intention, self-employment or enterprising behaviour and teaching methods. We assume that it is a combination of entrepreneurial competences and self-efficacy which encourages entrepreneurial intentions. On the other hand, a mix of appropriate teaching methods which act as moderating variables promotes the processes of learning and improves entrepreneurial competences respectively. The model assumes as well that more competent students and graduates usually possess stronger entrepreneurial intentions. In the paper, we propose a model of entrepreneurial learning on one hand, and suggest an approach for further research on the model, entrepreneurship and links between the constructs on the other.

## INTRODUCTION

Most countries would like to encourage entrepreneurship among students and graduates of higher education institutions (HEI) or strengthen their willingness to undertake some kind of enterprising projects. It seems that in the higher education (HE) environment, entrepreneurial learning is an important mechanism for strengthening enterprising behaviour of students, or for encouraging them to enter into self-employment or entrepreneurship. It facilitates the acquisition of appropriate competences as well as strengthens the entrepreneurial intentions. Various studies note that only individuals who possess appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes and who have sufficiently strong entrepreneurial intention enter into entrepreneurship or enterprising ventures – establish a firm, create and commercialise innova-

tions, establish coalitions or influence important decision makers in the organisation to undertake innovative or intrapreneurial projects, etc.

[28] In order to successfully implement entrepreneurial learning, it is necessary to choose the right methods of teaching and to adjust them to the objectives and competences that the individuals should achieve. There are some examples and case studies regarding these issues and links between them claiming that, for example, one approach to entrepreneurial learning is more effective than others but clear definitions and classifications are missing. A more systematic approach to entrepreneurial learning would encourage more educational organisations to further improve the quality of teaching and learning to promote entrepreneurial or enterprising behaviour.

In this paper we present a model for developing entrepreneurial competences and intentions and for encouraging entrepreneurial and enterprising activities among students and graduates of HEI. The model is based on some theories related to the cause-effect relationship between the constructs of entrepreneurial competences, self-efficacy, entrepreneurial intentions and entrepreneurial or enterprising action. The paper represents a starting point for further research on how to promote entrepreneurial knowledge, skills, attitudes and intentions. It also presents a short overview of teaching methods used to promote different kinds of entrepreneurial competences. Our purpose is to introduce some future guidelines on how to ensure that more students and graduates enter entrepreneurship or undertake enterprising ventures.

#### ENTERPRISING INDIVIDUALS

Antončič et al. (2002) define entrepreneurship as an independent process in which the entrepreneur creates something new and worthy, which requires some time and effort, and assumes the financial, psychological and social risk but also possible reward in the form of money or personal satisfaction and independence. This definition also applies to intrapreneurship or corporate entrepreneurship (Jong and Wennekers 2008), with the difference that intrapreneurs operate within the organizational boundaries and are therefore less autonomous, their



potential financial benefits are weaker and the risks are lower. Organizational context certainly places some restrictions, but on the other hand it offers the entrepreneurs greater security, especially in the case of failure – they usually don't suffer personally.

The concept of entrepreneurship includes professional and behavioural dimensions (Jong and Wennekers 2008). Professional refers to the functioning of individuals who either own and operate a business or are employees in firms owned by others, and the behavioural dimension which focuses on specific behaviours – whether entrepreneurial or managerial. In this way, it is possible to recognize three different entrepreneurial roles – business owners, independent entrepreneurs, and employees with entrepreneurial or enterprising behaviours – intrapreneurs. On the basis of this classification we can define so-called enterprising individuals, including independent entrepreneurs, managers who show an entrepreneurial and not merely managerial mode of behaviour, and enterprising employees. In this paper we focus on students and graduates who may appear later in their professional career in any of these three roles.

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#### ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

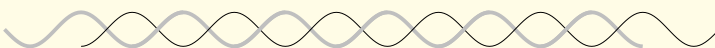
Research confirms the high importance of entrepreneurship education. It recognises influences on the emergence of entrepreneurial intentions, as well as on the quality of entrepreneurship – on the survival rate of new businesses and on their growth (Lans et al. 2008). The policies regarding education and training of most countries recognize the need for entrepreneurship education and for fostering the entrepreneurial mindsets of young people and for encouraging the emergence of new firms or other enterprises (European Commission 2008).

Lans et al. (2008) divide entrepreneurship education into educational efforts in terms of changes in the state of mind, in terms of enhancing entrepreneurial behaviour and in terms of mastering some specific business situations. In the first case, the education should focus on the creation of appropriate values, beliefs and attitudes associated with successful entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship as well. In the second case, considering entrepreneurship as a matter of behaviour, education should encourage transfer of specific abilities re-

[30] lated to entrepreneurial behaviour (whether on the role of independent entrepreneur, entrepreneurial manager or enterprising employee). In the third case, in which entrepreneurship is aligned with mastering of specific situations, education should focus on handling functional expertise – such as, how to start a business, how to explore the market, etc. The latter situation relates especially to individuals who are considering establishing their own firm.

In entrepreneurship education literature, two names appear as synonyms for entrepreneurship education – entrepreneurship teaching and entrepreneurial learning. The former consists of two components (European Commission 2002) – the transfer of entrepreneurial attitudes and skills developing relevant personal characteristics which are not directly linked to the business context (e. g. creativity, risk-taking, responsibility), and specific training on how to create a new firm (e. g. technical and business skills). On the other hand, entrepreneurial learning is defined as all forms of education and training, both formal and informal, which contribute to the entrepreneurial spirit and learning with or without commercial objectives (Gribben 2010). Holcomb et al. (2009) define entrepreneurial learning as a process in which people absorb new knowledge from direct experience or from observation of other peoples' behaviour, actions and consequences, make intuitive conclusions or heuristics because of environmental uncertainty and inconsistent information, and organize acquired knowledge by linking it with pre-existing knowledge structures.

Studies identify many possible approaches to entrepreneurial learning in the HE environment. Most of them are consistent with definitions of entrepreneurial learning or entrepreneurship teaching. Jones-Evans, Williams and Deacon (2000) for instance indicate the action learning approach (Revans 1980). Hampden-Turner (2010) describes a similar approach integrating simulations and games of managing the business, and organising meetings with some of the world's leading entrepreneurs. Harkema and Schouten (2008) indicate examples of student-oriented learning of entrepreneurship based on psychological tests for selection of appropriate students, and on planning of learning by the student himself/herself, and using personal coaching. As Hanke, Kisenwether and Warren (2005) note, the introduction of



the problem-based learning and distance learning approach enhances students' self-efficacy and their capacity to manage uncertainty. An interesting approach involving works of fiction or film productions is indicated by Bumpus and Burton (2008). Such approaches can result, for example, in understanding of the ethical and economic concepts, understanding of concepts related to the human resource management, encouraging the use of different management styles, introduction of important strategic management principles, organizational culture analysis, and understanding of the organizational behaviour concepts.

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Obviously, many authors note that entrepreneurial learning methods should be interactive and action oriented. The teaching should involve students as much as possible, and the teacher should have some real life entrepreneurial experiences and build the learning content as much as possible on them. As motivation for the students to start their own firm, role playing and discussion of case-studies could be beneficial, while for recognition of business opportunities action learning approaches are appropriate and, for learning about the process of business idea commercialization, guests from practice and competitions involving business plans are best suited. Creativity, which seems to be very important for the entrepreneurial individual, could be encouraged by the use of group techniques for generation of new ideas and 'live' case studies, which stem from existing business cases and current business models. Within entrepreneurial learning business planning workshops, guests from practice and business simulations should be introduced as well. The Expert Group of the European Commission (European Commission 2008) also notes that the approaches (and contents) of entrepreneurial learning should differ in business and non-business HEI, and there should be a distinction between approaches at the first and the second level of study as well.

In table 1 we give a summary of possible teaching methods in entrepreneurship learning at HEI (European Commission 2008).

In relation to entrepreneurial learning, contents of sustainable development apply as well. Modern societies expect from educators to fully prepare the young people, including future entrepreneurs, for their professional life and/or for continuing education as well (Sleurs

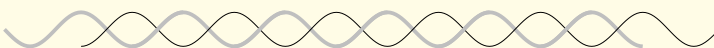
TABLE 1 Overview of teaching methods for entrepreneurial learning

Learning through experience and experimentation	Learning by observation and examples
Action learning	Meetings with leading entrepreneurs
Simulation	Integration of works of fiction or film productions
Role playing	The integration of teachers' real life experience
Use of personal instruction	Case studies with discussions
Self-directed learning	Study of 'live' entrepreneurial cases
Problem-based learning	Guest speakers – entrepreneurs as lecturers
Distance Learning	
Business plan competition	
Group techniques to create new ideas	
Business planning workshops	

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2008). Educational systems largely assume the important role of socialization. They are in fact expected to prepare the young people to take responsibility for the society in which they live. Educational programs in many countries include the contents of sustainable development – such as environmental education, health education, citizenship education, education for peace, etc.

Schools should encourage individuals to reflect about their life styles and associate them with issues of sustainable development and their life (Scott 2002). European universities and some other partners (Sleurs 2008) note that the role of education is in promoting independent thinking as well, and therefore they strongly emphasize the importance of critical reflection about the vision of sustainable development. Education should encourage and teach individuals how to (1) think about their own situation and the situation of others recognising their interdependence, (2) critically assess situations, (3) self-reflect about the role, possibilities and limitations of personal and collective responsibility, and (4) make responsible decisions and take actions at both personal and societal level. It seems that the approaches to learning about sustainable development are consistent with the teaching methods mentioned in table 1, particularly in the case of self-directed learning, problem-learning, discussions and case-studies, etc. – methods that encourage reflection, self-reflection and transfer of views and values.



We believe that the choice of teaching methods is crucial for the effectiveness of entrepreneurial learning, and respectively, entrepreneurial education. Košir and Bezenšek (2009) and also Burke et al. (2006) and Arthur et al. (2003), in their meta-researches on organisational training effectiveness, note that the mix of implemented teaching methods significantly influences the quality of learning in the sense of students' satisfaction, possible changes in their knowledge structures and behaviour, and also in the sense of the individual and organisational performance. On the basis of such considerations' we state the following proposition:

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- P 1 *The mix of teaching methods used as a mean of HE entrepreneurship learning has an important moderating impact on the process of entrepreneurial learning and on the creation of entrepreneurial intentions.*

#### ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCES

The Dictionary ([www.answers.com](http://www.answers.com)) defines competence as the ability of implementation, especially of something physical, mental or financial, or as a legal power to achieve something. It is either a natural or an acquired skill or talent. Despite such a relatively clear definition, Lans et al. (2008) note that in practice the construct of competence is surrounded by a great deal of confusion.

Due to the differences between the components of competences – achievements, capabilities, tasks, and personal characteristics – competences are a 'fuzzy' concept (Le Deist and Winterton 2005).

As identified by Lans et al. (2008) competences are a mix of knowledge, skills and attitudes. They can also be defined as broader personal characteristics necessary for superior behaviour, but also as an outcome of a proper application of knowledge (Brown 1993). Le-Brasseur, Blanco and Dodge (2002) note that when considering competences 'the emphasis is on behaviour and performance.' They understand a competency as 'an effective performance of a task or activity in a job setting, due to the underlying characteristics of the individual: motives, traits, skills, self-image, social role, or knowledge and experience.' Obviously competences can be defined as professional standards as well. They can be therefore identified by conduct-



[34] ing a job analysis within different work or social contexts. Furthermore, Le Deist and Winteron (2005) also recognise so called meta-competences. They define them as a capacity to manage uncertainty, learning and reflection and are usually related to 'learning to learn' ability. As a kind of meta-competence, Gagne (Richey 2000) recognises so-called cognitive strategies. He defines them as intrinsically organised skills directing personal behaviour at learning, memorising and reflecting. They are related to self-management and self-control of learning and thinking, and not to the context in which the individual operates. To acquire them it takes a lot of practice and opportunities to reflect.

Competences are closely related to work contexts (Sandberg 2000). In many cases they can be considered as tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1966), which individuals automatically have at hand when they need it, but they are usually not aware of having such knowledge (Dermol 2010). Related to this, Cope and Watts (2000) recognize the developmental aspect of competence. When the competences are used in practice, even unconsciously, experiential learning takes place which on the other hand improves these competences – e. g. by reflection on critical incidents, by testing the learning or by observation. We can conclude that entrepreneurial competences are not fully given to individuals at birth, but are created through the processes of education, training and experience (Lans et al. 2008)

Personal history is also very closely linked to the concept of the competences. It is actually the outcome of experiential learning, which is considered by many authors to be the most important method of adult learning (Jarvis, Holford and Griffin 2006). It takes place anywhere and at any time and includes the acquisition of all types of knowledge, skills and experience (Trunk Širca and Gomezelj Omerzel 2006). Experiences in the sense of trial and error processes and observation of other people are the basis for learning, but they are also a very important learning stimulus (Jarvis, Holford, and Griffin 2006). Boyd and Vozikis (1994), for example, highlight the findings of various studies showing that very often the parents of entrepreneurs are self-employed, which seems to affect the future entrepreneurs' inspirations and desires for training and education.



*Cognitive Competences*

Cognitive competences are primarily related to 'knowing that' and 'knowing why' knowledge. Le Deist and Winterton (2005) for example define cognitive competences as conceptual or theoretical knowledge on one hand and understanding on the other. Gagne in his studies about learning domains recognises so called verbal information and intellectual skills which are both tightly related to cognitive competences (Richey 2000). Verbal information consists of facts, principles and generalizations presented and organized in a meaningful context and represents the basis for learning. It is usually called 'the knowledge'. Intellectual skills can be defined as skills that allow better understanding of different rules and concepts, differentiation between the latter and also as skills enabling action and decision making. Gagne states that they don't offer the answers to the question 'What do individuals know?' but to the question 'What are individuals capable of doing?' (Dermol 2010). Cognitive competences seem to be learned formally within an organised learning environment, but they can be gained informally by experience as well (Le Deist and Winterton 2005).

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There are various social, cultural, political and economic factors which influence the realisation of entrepreneurial intentions and the formation of new businesses. Boyd and Vozikis (1994), who summarize the findings of various authors, highlight factors such as: change in employment, previous work experience, the quality of urban life, membership in certain ethnic groups, etc., as well as the availability of venture capital, governmental impacts, availability of buyers, suppliers and transportation options, educated labour force, land and equipment and other support services. Relevant information availability and perception of environmental factors may play an important role in the construction of individuals' expectations and their views on the feasibility of possible entrepreneurial ideas. The knowledge and understanding about these issues seems to be an important entrepreneurial competence and an important learning outcome of entrepreneurial learning at HEI as well.

In the last 30 years many scientists have been trying to identify the characteristics that distinguish entrepreneurs and nascent entrepreneurs from all other people (Boyd and Vozikis 1994). As Carter

[36] and Jones-Evans (2006) note, psychologists highlight the importance of entrepreneurial personal traits – the need for achievement, locus of control, propensity to take risks, tolerance for uncertainty, etc. Attempts to develop the personal profile of a typical entrepreneur, based solely on psychological constructs have been proven largely unsuccessful. These psychological constructs may be part of entrepreneurial (cognitive) competences, but empirical studies show that only a very small part of differences in entrepreneurship (e.g. measured performance of new businesses) could be explained by them (Lans et al. 2008). Bloom (Richey 2000) classifies cognitive learning objectives and consequently cognitive competences hierarchically as (1) *knowing* of terminology, concepts, rules, procedures and theories, (2) *understanding the knowledge* with capabilities of self-change, foresight, integration and forecasting, (3) *using the knowledge* in terms of operation, problem solving, and knowledge transfer, (4) *analysis* with capabilities of information interpreting, (5) *synthesis* with capability of new conceptual links creation and experimentation, and (6) *evaluation* with the capabilities of value judgments about the use of different methods, technical solutions and products (Dermol 2010). According to that, Pagon, Banutai and Bizjak (2008) define the following types of cognitive competences: divergent thinking, critical thinking, problem solving, strategic thinking, analytical skills, and numerical abilities.

The European Commission (2008) notes that in the context of entrepreneurial education and HEI it is necessary to impart the knowledge and understanding on how to establish a new business and how to encourage its growth – at the first study level especially through the promotion of self-employment concept; at the second level, however, through the knowledge and understanding of business planning processes and in the environment available entrepreneurial support mechanisms. Also, at non-business HEI the entrepreneurial learning should provide some practical basics about: economics, marketing, management techniques, protection of intellectual property, commercialization of innovation, and venture capital availability. Humanities and arts students should be aware of the problems concerning self-management issues, social entrepreneurship, options for partial self-employment and also of the innovation issues, especially the ones based on user's needs.



*Functional Competences*

In this case the competences are associated with *practising* the profession and with *mastering* various entrepreneurial situations (Le Deist and Winterton 2005). Functional competences are practical intellectual skills related to the understanding of entrepreneurial concepts and relationships between them, mastering different rules connected with these concepts and entrepreneurial decision making as well (Richey 2000). They are actually 'know-how' knowledge, which a person operating in a particular occupational or entrepreneurial field should be able to perform or exhibit.

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Entrepreneurial learning related to the transfer of so-called functional competences needed to carry out certain tasks or to implement some innovative work or business approaches, should focus on actual business situations, on innovation, on intrapreneurial initiatives, or on creation of new firms, and on finding the ways to enter new markets, etc. It is especially worth mentioning that such competences should enable the learner to identify entrepreneurial opportunities (acquisition of information and its interpretation), to create new business concepts (products, services, markets, customers), to conduct market research or acquisition of assets (funding, human resources, etc.) and to organise the business (to enter into arrangements, to establish working routines and organisational structures) (Jong de and Wennekers 2008). Zinger et al. (2001) identify ten areas of managerial competences, which are related to entrepreneurial situations as well: customer service, business image, pricing, operations, supply management (purchasing, inventory control), ability to develop new products and services, financial management (monitoring receivables, developing financial projections), general management (monitoring business trends, delegating), using computer technology, advertising and promotion, and financial control (using budgets for setting targets and evaluating results).

*Behavioural Competences*

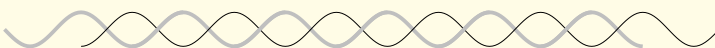
Behavioural competences are personal, learnable competences related to entrepreneurial or enterprising behaviour. They represent the answer to the question – how to behave in certain entrepreneurial situations (Jong and Wennekers 2008). Within the concept of behavioural

competences we can distinguish between social competences and meta-competences.

[38] Social competences are the skills related to successful functioning in a society. They are outward orientated. Meta-competences on the other hand are inward orientated. They are conceptual skills of learning and reflecting. They encourage the acquisition of other competences as well (Le Deist and Winterton 2005). Gagne identified them as cognitive strategies because they direct the behaviour of individuals in the moments of learning, memorising and reflecting (Richey 2000). According to him, learning of these skills requires a lot of practice – especially in terms of allowing the opportunity to challenge thinking.

Among the social competences we can also place the ethical competences with ‘the possession of appropriate personal and professional values and the ability to make sound judgements based upon these in work-related situations’ (Le Deist and Winterton 2005, 35). In addition, Elmoose and Roth (2005) recognized three kinds of competences of sustainable development: understanding and being able to change a person’s own life conditions, participating in collective decision making and showing solidarity with those who are unable to control their living conditions. Sustainable development is seen as a core value for every citizen, to be always present in their minds.

Among the behavioural competences associated with entrepreneurial behaviour we should highlight in particular competences related to: researching and realisation of entrepreneurial opportunities, production of creative ideas, taking responsibility for the execution of such ideas or other activities, handling the uncertainties and risks, creating favourable coalitions within an organisation, selling skills, initiative taking, problem solving and overcoming potential barriers (Jong and Wennekers 2008). Miller and Friesen (1982) and Miller (1983) identified three entrepreneurial orientations defining different kinds of entrepreneurial behaviour: product-market innovation, risk-taking for large benefits, and proactivity in the market. Entrepreneurial orientation is a firm-level concept, but it can be easily translated to the individual level of entrepreneurial behaviour as well. Quinn et al. (1996) on the other hand proposes eight managerial roles: mentor, facilitator, monitor, coordinator, director, producer, broker, and innovator. Each



role demands some specific competences – in most cases related to communication skills – for example, entrepreneurs as mentors should be able to communicate effectively with their subordinates and to develop them as well. LeBrasseur, Blanco and Dodge (2002) in their study of entrepreneurial competences identify the top five competences required during the survival stage of a small firm: perseverance, effective communication, judgement, individual productivity, and creative thinking. In the fast growth stage of a small firm less importance is attributed to innovating in products/services and planning and monitoring cash flows competences, on the other hand, more importance is attributed to developing subordinates and effectively delegating competences.

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#### ENTREPRENEURIAL SELF-EFFICACY

Self-efficacy can be defined as person's belief about his or her ability and capacity to accomplish a task or to deal with the challenges of life (Bandura 1993; 1997). It seems that self-efficacy affects the individuals' beliefs about possibilities to realise the objectives, as well as their personal choices, desires, efforts and perseverance – even in case of setbacks or obstacles (Boyd and Vozikis 1994). On the other hand, if individuals perceive that a given behaviour exceeds their capacity, they do not react – even in cases when society encourages such behaviour. Bird (1988), who focuses his study on enterprising individuals linking individual self-efficacy with entrepreneurial intention, also believes that only individuals who believe that they are capable of implementing certain activities actually realise their enterprising or entrepreneurial desires. Because of such considerations we state the following proposition:

- P 2 *Students and graduates with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to challenge themselves with difficult tasks, be intrinsically motivated and are therefore more likely to form firm entrepreneurial intentions.*

Lans et al. (2008) believe that the motivational concept of self-efficacy relates to the concept of competences, but it is not a part of it. Empirical studies show that self-efficacy has a reciprocal effect on entrepreneurial competences. Absorption of competences and past

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performance enhances self-efficacy and helps to strengthen the desire and improve future performance. This applies vice versa as well – self-efficacy affects the acquisition of competences and individual performance. Boyd and Vozikis (1994) note that self-efficacy is obtained through life stages, it is developed in line with experience since it enables the development of complex cognitive, social, linguistic and/or motor skills.

Individuals create and strengthen their beliefs about their self-efficacy in four ways (Boyd and Vozikis 1994; Erikson 2003): (1) through experience (experiential learning), (2) by observing others or by vicarious learning (e.g. influence of parents, mentors, etc.), (3) by the means of social persuasion (e.g. providing feedback, existence of social norms and conduct of discussions), and (4) through an assessment of their own psychological state. Namely, empirical studies suggest a negative correlation between the degree of anxiety and self-efficacy. In order to enhance the self-efficacy, it is necessary to improve the individual's emotional and physical condition and reduce stress. The individual's estimates of availability of assets and possible personal or situational limitations also affect the beliefs about self-efficacy (Fishbein and Ajzen 1997). In accordance with the described findings we state the following propositions:

- P3 *Teachers at HEI can use various strategies to build students' and graduates' entrepreneurial self-efficacy, but all of the strategies are based on the processes of enhancing the entrepreneurial competences.*
- P4 *Enhanced entrepreneurial self-efficacy positively influences the construction of entrepreneurial competences.*

#### THE MODEL OF ENTREPRENEURIAL LEARNING

The emergence and development of the entrepreneurial intention is influenced by the individual's beliefs and potential reactions to environmental impulses (Fishbein and Ajzen 1997). Each individual develops a repertoire of beliefs and his or her potential reactions to environmental impulses. Beliefs are formed on the basis of personal variables and variables related to the context in which the individuals operate. They are the products of the individual's personal history (experiential learning,



vicarious learning, action learning, problem learning, trial and error learning, etc.) and changes in his or her social context. They are obviously based on different kinds of learning and, respectively, on the mix of the individual's competences. As Boyd and Vozikis (1994) state, these beliefs and potential reactions are some kind of 'saved information' which directs personal behaviour and are a function of personal (personal history, personality and abilities) and contextual variables (social, political, economic context). On the bases of 'saved information', individuals construct their expectations and attitudes which subsequently affect the individual and his or her intentions.

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It seems that entrepreneurial competences are closely linked with behaviour and performance and are considered to be a predictor of entrepreneurial intentions. On the basis of entrepreneurial competences, individuals' beliefs and expectations are formed about the tasks and expected performance. We therefore state the following proposition:

- P 5 *Entrepreneurial competences which are actually learnable and measurable knowledge, skills and attitudes are the base for construction of individuals' beliefs, potential reactions, expectations, and attitudes about their potential performance and of their views on the feasibility of possible entrepreneurial ideas and as such they positively affect entrepreneurial intentions.*

As an important construct which is involved in the process of creating intentions, Boyd and Vozikis (1994) include self-efficacy (Bandura 1993; 1997) as well. Entrepreneurial intention seems to be crucial for the realization of the ideas that emerge in the minds of enterprising individuals (Bird 1988; Boyd and Vozikis 1994). The intention has a significant influence on the critical strategic thinking of enterprising individuals. It is a state of mind, which directs the actions of individuals and leads them towards the development and realization of their ideas and/or business concepts. Individuals with the intention are more able to focus their attention, experience and knowledge in a specific subject or a method of behaviour. Based on such considerations, we state the following proposition:

- P 6 *Entrepreneurial intention positively influences the emergence of entrepreneurial or enterprising behavioural and cognitive change.*



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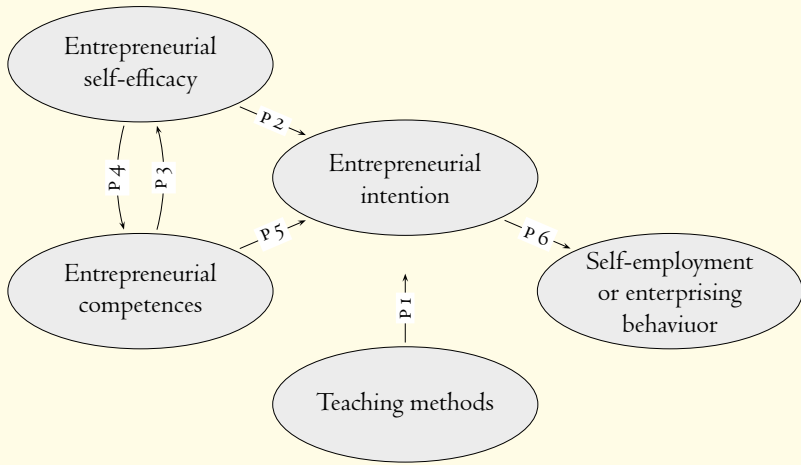


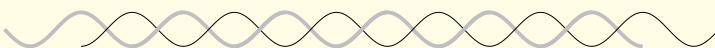
FIGURE 1 Model of entrepreneurial learning

Figure 1 illustrates the final model of the entrepreneurial learning consisting of all the described constructs and links between them.

DISCUSSION AND GUIDELINES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In this paper we recognize the factors – competences and self-efficacy – which promote and enable the decisions of individuals, students and graduates, about the possible realization of their entrepreneurial or enterprising ideas or their potential entry into self-employment. We are of course interested primarily in students and graduates of HEI. In the paper there is a short review of the competences which in the entrepreneurship literature are usually attributed to the independent entrepreneurs, business owners – managers and enterprising employees (intrapreneurs). These are the competences that enable individuals to absorb or use the entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and attitudes (competences), but also reinforce their beliefs in being able to successfully implement entrepreneurial intentions (self-efficacy). The proper combination of competences and self-efficacy may enhance individuals’ entrepreneurial intentions and serve as an action guide when performing their intentions.

Based on these considerations, we propose empirical verification of



the model, illustrated in figure 1 within the HE environment. The study we propose could be based on the findings in some already existing studies. Jong and Wennekers (2008) in their study, for example, state indicators which they found in entrepreneurial and management literature and which allow for the measurement of entrepreneurial competences. Liñán and Chen (2006), in their study based on the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 2002), define indicators of entrepreneurial intentions. The study, which is tightly connected with the model presented in figure 1, confirms the theory of planned behaviour within HEI. Indicators of the construct of general self-efficacy are developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995), and could be used in the proposed research as well. To conclude, the model presented in this paper, and the proposed indicators measuring dependent and independent variables in the model, may be a sound starting point for a detailed study of entrepreneurial learning in the context of HEI. As a possible approach to analysing the data and to obtaining some theoretical and practical guidelines we propose structural equation modelling, which is probably the best way to simultaneously test all cause-effect relationships in the model and to explore possible moderator effects of using different kinds of teaching methods.

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In this paper, when referring to the typology of entrepreneurial competences (Le Deist and Winterton 2005) we also recognize the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be possessed by enterprising individuals, in order to be successful. At the same time we try to recognize the contribution of some teaching methods that have been successfully used in entrepreneurial education practice (European Commission 2008) to develop or improve the entrepreneurial competences. In the literature there are, for example, several studies examining the influences of using different teaching methods or a mix of them on Kirkpatrick's levels (1998) of training outcomes (participants' satisfaction, individual's learning, individual's behaviour and organisational results). On the other hand, there is a lack of studies examining the causal links or correlations between the components of entrepreneurial competences and teaching methods in the literature. There can be found only some sporadic reflections and reasoning about that issue (see Gibb 2002). Therefore, further research related to entrepreneurial learning

[44] should be conducted in this direction, because the findings may have a significant impact on the strategies to promote entrepreneurial learning and to improve entrepreneurial competences and intentions of students and graduates, as well as the quality of their entrepreneurial and enterprising activities.

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# Designing Management Curriculum for Workplace Readiness: Developing Students' Soft Skills

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## Abstract

The increased complexity of today's work environment has made the need for soft skills, such as teamwork, communication, leadership, and problem solving, more salient than ever. Employers hire for these skills because it is increasingly the human resources that give organizations a competitive advantage. Therefore, academia must respond to these external stakeholder needs by reexamining curriculum in light of how degree programs, particularly in management, are preparing students for the demands of the workplace. We describe a curriculum redesign that used a backward design process to focus on developing the soft skills that employers need, focusing in particular on developing teamwork-related skill sets.

## Keywords

curriculum design, teams/team dynamics, program development, experiential learning

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In the current business environment, enhanced global connectivity and increased technology capabilities have resulted in work organizations that are both fast-paced and ever-changing with overwhelming amounts of data to be sorted but often with incomplete information on which to base decisions (Cappelli, 2009; O'Toole & Lawler, 2006; Roach, 2005; Whitley, 2009). Given this level of complexity, the importance of employee soft skills receives increased attention in the literature and the workplace (e.g., Ingols & Shapiro, 2014; Shuayto, 2013). Soft skills are generally defined as interpersonal skills that are linked to emotional intelligence, such as communication and teamwork (Caudron, 1999; Halfhill & Nielsen, 2007; Shuayto, 2013). In contrast, hard skills include knowledge that can be learned in the classroom or from experience, and its proficiency is more directly related to typical conceptions of intelligence. Hiring employees selectively based on important soft skills and treating them as a source of competitive advantage is thought to lead to substantial benefits in quality, productivity, and profit (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2002; Guthridge, Komm, & Lawson, 2008; Hagen, Udeh, & Wilkie, 2011; Halfhill & Nielsen, 2007; Pfeffer & Veiga, 1999). Hence, employers today demand a labor pool that is able to effectively exercise soft skills by working with others one-on-one and in groups.

In this article, we describe how our college addressed the needs of the current work environment by transforming the three-course introductory sequence of management courses to focus on building student soft skills by improving student ability to effectively work in teams. While a large number of articles exist describing singular activities or assessments that develop related skills, the literature related to effective curriculum initiatives is lacking (Kemery & Stickney, 2014; Loughry, Ohland, & Woehr, 2014). That is, there are few resources in the literature that describe curricular efforts encompassing multiple courses on a widespread scale. In this article, we describe a macro initiative that goes beyond singular course activities, to present a systematic effort to address soft skills at the curricular level. What stands out in our example is that the focus on soft skills begins early in the curriculum with the introductory management course and carries through to courses more proximate to graduation. Indeed, an integrated approach through multiple levels of the curriculum is best to truly prepare students with needed skills and abilities (Ritter, 2006).

There is much evidence that curriculum initiatives related to soft skills are necessary for students' success beyond college. Reports such as the Graduate Management Admissions Council (GMAC; 2016) survey of corporate recruiters, for example, suggest that employers are looking for organizational culture fit, the ability to work in teams, and the ability to make an impact. Teamwork skills in particular have received attention as an attribute of



importance. For instance, in the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE; 2016) survey of employers, the ability of employees to work in a team consistently ranks in the top four desired attributes by employers, with nearly 80% of respondents indicating that it was a desired attribute every year since it was included in the 2012 outlook report (along with leadership, problem solving, and communication skills). In an employer survey conducted in 2009 on behalf of the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AACU), evidence showed that over 70% of employers wanted universities to place more attention on teamwork and collaboration skills.

Consequently, the field of higher education has faced pressure to provide such training in the classroom in addition to the provision of hard skills (Kemery & Stickney, 2014; Loughry et al., 2014; Navarro, 2008). In the revised 2013 Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business standards, for example, it is explicitly stated that general skill areas in business schools should incorporate the ability to work in diverse, team environments. As the focus shifts to including soft skills as areas of importance, the institutions of higher education that adequately prepare students in these areas create a distinctive advantage that is directly related to increased outcomes for students such as job placement and career success (according to the AACU, GMAC, and NACE employer surveys).

Given the importance of teamwork to future success in the workplace combined with the high likelihood that employees will operate in a team (Goltz, Hietapelto, Reinsch, & Tyrell, 2008; Halfhill & Nielsen, 2007; Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1998; Nielsen, Sundstrom, & Halfhill, 2005), the faculty in our college made the decision to focus on this soft skill in a large-scale curriculum effort. The importance of this initiative was reinforced by an active external board of visitors, made up of past and future potential employers, who made it clear that such a focus in the curriculum would be welcomed. The faculty felt that the performing well in a team environment is an ideal skill to address in introductory management courses, as these courses provide a foundation of content about topics important for successful collaboration (e.g., individual differences, conflict management, perception, motivation, project management, and communication). Furthermore, introducing and practicing team skills early in the curriculum form a basis on which later courses can build, many of which include team projects themselves.

The process of backward design formed the steps from which faculty engaged in the curriculum revision (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Backward design begins with desired results, generally in the form of learning outcomes. Hence, our faculty first considered goals, content expectations, and preexisting expectations, keeping in mind that the ultimate goal is for learning to transfer

skills to other settings. In this regard, a common perceptual frame for faculty was provided by the mission statement of the college, which had been revised recently to emphasize innovative and experiential learning that prepares graduates for success in a global world. In addition, the student learning objectives (SLOs) for the management degree program included the effective management of relationships. In the next stage of the backward design process, faculty considered assessment evidence to measure the desired results. Indeed, instructors used such evidence on a continuous basis to improve the content in specific courses and the interweaving of the required sequence of courses. Finally, learning experiences and instruction methods were created by the faculty to align with assessment methods and learning goals. In all cases, best practices in applied learning were used, as student involvement via active learning has been shown to engender higher order thinking (Diamond, Koernig, & Iqbal, 2008) and enhance critical thinking skills (Burbach, Matkin, & Fritz, 2004) and has been empirically linked to positive outcomes such as increased test performance (Yoder & Hochevar, 2005) and satisfaction (Butler, Phillmann, & Smart, 2001).

### *The Curriculum Revision Process*

Prior to 2012, the management department offered a 15-credit major in management. The curriculum consisted of a traditional three-course sequence, including a principles of management course, an organizational behavior (OB) course, and a human resource management (HRM) course. In the fall of 2012, the department implemented a restructured management major to provide students with options for specialization within management. Specifically, the department began offering (in addition to the general management major) four concentrations: (1) entrepreneurial management, (2) HRM, (3) international management, and (4) operations and technology management. The major also increased from 15 to 18 credits to allow for more specific courses. To maintain commonality across the management major for assessment purposes, the traditional three-course sequence remained the requirement for all management students.

On implementing the concentrations, the faculty in the management department believed that the common three-course sequence needed to be reevaluated to focus on the development of soft skills related to managing relationships in the form of teamwork in addition to hard skills (including knowledge of management principles, HRM, and project management). With these important outcomes and relevant assessment data in mind, a faculty task force began discussing how to transform the core three-course introductory management sequence for management majors.

## *Recommendations for Curriculum Change*

The recommendation of the task force, phased-in beginning in the fall of 2013, was to revise the content of the three-course introductory sequence to better address later courses and focus more explicitly on important soft skills. The result was the following three 3-credit courses, with the respective course descriptions:

1. **Management and Organizations:** This course surveys the basic principles of management with emphasis on social and behavioral issues and provides the basis for thinking about complex business situations in the framework of the management process.
2. **Leading High-Performance Teams (prerequisite: Management and Organizations):** This course provides exposure to essential concepts related to working with and leading others in small groups and teams. It explores aspects of interpersonal dynamics, including power, communication, trust, team decision making, and conflict. Students practice organizing, leading, and collaborating in a team environment. As a result, this course devotes significant time to personal leadership development and the improvement of interpersonal skills, such as conflict management, active listening, and supportive communication.
3. **Managing Human Capital (prerequisite: Management and Organizations):** This course presents how human resources contribute to organizational performance. It examines how human behavior theories about personality, perception, conflict management, and motivation influence the development of human resource systems for staffing, evaluating, and rewarding people. Students develop interpersonal and technical competencies to improve their workforce readiness.

Compared to the typical Introduction to Management course, the first course in this sequence (Management and Organizations; see Appendix A for a comparison of SLOs prior to and after the curriculum change) had three main differences. First, explicit attention was given to ensuring that the management concentrations were introduced and promoted in this introductory course, giving students a broad exposure to all management content areas for the purposes of developing students' hard skills related to the first departmental learning goal (i.e., demonstrate knowledge and understanding of basic management principles and concepts) and, at the same time, aligning the content with subsequent curricula. Another change was based on results from previous standardized tests administered to seniors, which suggested that the area of task and project management needed more focus. Consequently, a

content module focused on project management and quality was introduced into this course. This change had the additional result of providing an introduction to one of the concentrations (i.e., Operations and Technology Management), which had not been addressed previously.

The introductory course is designed not only to provide a foundation for the management major but also to prepare students for the two courses that follow (i.e., Leading High-Performance Teams and Managing Human Capital). Hence, much of the content relates to people management and interpersonal skills. Consequently, although the Management and Organizations course still includes much of the content one would expect in a typical survey of management course (e.g., basic functions of management and strategic management), it also includes a heavy focus on introducing students to the principles of OB. Individual assessment methods vary somewhat between instructors; however, course engagement, case studies, and group work are generally included in addition to more typical quizzes and/or exams. Currently, we are exploring innovative models to provide the course content (i.e., classroom as an organization), but those efforts are beyond the scope of the current article.

The other two courses in the three-course management sequence underwent more dramatic changes. Specifically, the faculty wanted to consider more integrated course options than the traditional OB and human resource management structure and to focus on providing students with soft skills related to managing relationships effectively. First, because the literature suggests that interpersonal skills relating to the ability to work in a team are among the skills most desired by employees (GMAC, 2016; NACE, 2016), this topic was selected as the foundation for one of the core management courses—Leading High-Performance Teams. Second, the faculty wanted to engender transfer of these concepts to the work environment by integrating the theoretical perspectives in OB with the applied skills associated with HRM. This was the foundation for the Managing Human Capital course.

A comparison of course SLOs prior to and after the curriculum change is included in Appendix A. This comparison illustrates the shift to a more skills-based curriculum built around specific collaboration and leadership skills (in Leading High-Performance Teams) and around managerial skills (in Managing Human Capital). Appendix A also illustrates how the content and theory typically associated with OB and HRM courses was not eliminated; rather, it was distributed across the Leading High-Performance Teams and Managing Human Capital courses such that it could be applied in these contexts. For example, prior to the curriculum change, one of the SLOs in the OB course stated, “A student should be able to assess the values, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors that affect how you interact with others.”

The content related to values, attitudes, and perceptions is still addressed in both of the courses in the revised curriculum. In *Leading High-Performance Teams*, this content is addressed in terms of self-monitoring (i.e., SLO4 reads, “Monitor personal performance in leadership skill, knowledge and ability areas, for example, time management, emotional intelligence, personal values and ethics basis, . . .”). In *Managing Human Capital*, this same content is addressed as part of SLO1: “Describe the impact of human behavior concepts of individual differences, personality, motivation, and perception, and conflict management influence decision-making concerning human capital.” In this way, we built courses focused on applying theory for skill development in specific areas related to team collaboration as well as personnel management.

The *Leading High-Performance Teams* course was designed to provide students with an experience that introduces theories and best practices, then reinforces that knowledge with active learning to build interpersonal, teamwork, and leadership skills (Appendix B provides example course activities). The course uses the best practices of active and experiential learning to enhance the transfer of interpersonal skills to other settings (Berry, 2009; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). For example, to teach students about interpersonal interactions, students first examine their own leadership skills, values, and preferences by completing a series of self-assessments (e.g., the five-factor model of personality: McCrae & Costa, 1987; core self-evaluations: Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998; emotional intelligence: Goleman, 2006; the Implicit Association Test: Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998; etc.). They reflect on their scores to gain self-awareness about how their individual differences may affect interpersonal interactions and teamwork. As the course progresses, students are given opportunities to use what they have learned about themselves via the self-assessments when interacting with others in class as they receive feedback about their effectiveness in managing these interactions through role-plays and peer evaluation. As another example, within this course students first learn about leadership theories, then about topics such as strategies for facilitating meetings, managing team conflict, and providing team members with performance feedback. After presenting each topic, students build their applied skills by actively engaging in, and then reflecting on, role-plays depicting examples of these situations. Finally, students are introduced to theoretical knowledge about teamwork, team design, dynamics, decision making, planning, and communication. Then, they actively experience teamwork via team service projects. These projects focus as much on the practice of designing, managing, and evaluating team processes effectively as they do on producing deliverables to clients (see Michaelsen, Knight, & Fink, 2004).

The objectives of the Managing Human Capital course are to develop students' hard skills related to HRM content and to show the intersections between OB theories and how they are applied via HRM. For example, students learn about perceptual biases and information processing (OB topics) and then discuss how this affects employment interviews and performance management reviews (HRM topics). They then participate in activities that allow them to practice engaging in effective interview processes and giving behavioral feedback (applied skills). In this course, we ask students to take a dynamic role in their education by using their understanding of OB concepts to solve HRM problems relevant or potentially relevant to all managers.

Interpersonal and technical skill development is an explicit focus of the Managing Human Capital course as well, as is evident in both the course description and SLOs (see Appendix A). Interactive and applied exercises account for a large percentage of points contributing to the course grade, further supplementing the positive effects of an integrative course experience with principles of active learning. Examples of these interactive exercises for each course SLO are provided in Appendix C. For example, students practice giving performance feedback in a role-play scenario where they are asked to develop a plan for addressing an employee performance issue. They must role-play the interaction in class after engaging in relevant planning and decision making. Students also practice interviewing (from managerial and employee perspectives) in behavioral and situational interview formats. Case studies are also used to facilitate decision-making skill development in areas related to recruitment and selection and employment law.

## **Evidence of Effectiveness**

### *Data Collection*

To examine whether the curriculum changes improved students' ability to work effectively in teams, we compared performance outcome data for time periods prior to and after the changes described. The 2013-2014 catalog year was the first to require the revised introductory Management and Organizations course, plus Managing Human Capital and Leading High-Performance Teams. To accommodate for the transition from the old sequence of OB and HR, these courses were cross-listed with the old versions (teams with OB, human capital with HR). However, the previous courses were no longer offered starting in the 2013-2014 academic year. As the previous OB and HR courses were no longer offered starting in 2013-2014, it is safe to conclude that more management majors who were in their senior year that year would have taken the old management course sequence (OB and HR), which is

generally taken by second-semester juniors or first-semester seniors. In the academic year 2015-2016, virtually none of the graduating seniors would have taken the old sequence of management courses. Hence, comparing data over time is helpful in understanding the effects of the curriculum change, particularly comparing 2013-2014 (or before) to the academic years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016.

During these time periods, information was routinely collected via standardized test scores, student exit surveys, and internship provider surveys. Standardized test scores and exit surveys were collected in the students' capstone course during their final semester before graduation. Internship providers were asked to complete a survey about each intern's performance at the conclusion of the internship experience; most internships are completed during the students' junior or senior year.

### ***Standardized Test Scores***

The Educational Testing Service (ETS®) Major Field Tests (MFT) are comprehensive undergraduate outcome assessments designed to measure critical knowledge and understanding obtained by students in the major field of study. The bachelor's degree in business assessment achieves this purpose by using an assessment instrument with 120 multiple-choice questions in nine content areas. The ETS MFT Item Information Report provides an analysis of student performance on nine major areas (accounting, economics, management, quantitative business, information systems, finance, marketing, legal and social environment, and international issues). The report further partitions student performance into content and subcontent areas (including Group/Team Dynamics). The college administers the ETS MFT at the conclusion of the fall and spring semesters to each student in the required capstone strategic management course. The results of ETS MFT contribute to 5% of the capstone course grade. Following ETS exam administration it is possible to separate out management majors and examine performance on each of the subcontent areas to compare across time.

Table 1 examines student performance on the Group/Team Dynamics subcontent area of the ETS MFT. These reports provide a question-by-question analysis of student performance on the test compared with a larger reference group for the nine areas of the assessment. The report provides the percentage of students responding to each question correctly as well as the percentage of students responding correctly from the national sample. Because the results are proprietary information, the key evidence provided in Table 1 is based on the annual result in comparison to the 5-year college average. That is, we benchmark our performance based on differencing the annual student

**Table 1.** Comparison of Scores on Group/Team Dynamics Across Academic Years.

Year	Form	N	% Above/below 5-year college average	% Change
2011-2012	4GMF	110	-11.48	0
2012-2013	4GMF	125	-12.78	-1.3
2013-2014	4GMF	144	-23.58	-10.8
2014-2015	4JMF	141	22.82	46.4
2015-2016	4JMF	132	25.02	2.2

Note. Form refers to the assessment form; Educational Testing Service® Major Field Tests changes forms when it updates assessment content.

performance from the most recent 5-year average student performance for the Group/Team Dynamics subcontent area.

In the subcontent area of Group/Team Dynamics, the ETS MFT report provides evidence that we are improving student knowledge and understanding of how to work in a team. Table 1 shows that 2014-2015 senior-level student performance in the subcontent area of Group/Team Dynamics increased 22.82% following catalog year 2013-2014, the first to require the introductory course, plus Managing Human Capital and Leading High-Performance Teams for junior-level students. Table 1 shows that this subcontent area performance was sustained as 2015-2016 performance increased an additional 2.2%.

One concern regarding the comparison of ETS MFT student performance over the past 5 years is that coincidental with improved results in the subcontent area Group/Team Dynamics, the assessment instrument changed from Form 4GMF in 2013-2014 to Form 4JMF in subsequent years. We investigate this concern by examining students' summary ETS MFT performance over academic years 2011 to 2016. Table 2 shows that student summary ETS performance decreased only slightly (-2%) in 2014-2015 and recovered (3%) in the following academic year. This finding provides modest evidence that the change in ETS MFT forms is not the reason for the improvement in student performance noted in Table 1.

Given the improved student performance in the Group/Team Dynamics subcontent area, and yet relatively constant student summary performance, it is interesting to examine the impact of curriculum change on other management subcontent areas. One question of interest, for example, is if there were trade-offs with more abstract, theoretical principles as the courses transitioned to focus on practical and applied soft skills. Evidence does indeed



**Table 2.** Summary ETS® MFT Performance Over Academic Years.

Year	Form	N	% Above/below 5-year college average	% Change
2011-2012	4GMF	110	2.4	0
2012-2013	4GMF	125	3.4	1
2013-2014	4GMF	144	-1.6	-5
2014-2015	4JMF	141	-3.6	-2
2015-2016	4JMF	132	-0.6	3

Note. ETS® MFT = Educational Testing Service® Major Field Tests. Form refers to the assessment form; ETS® MFT changes forms when it updates assessment content.

**Table 3.** Comparison of Scores on History/Theory Across Academic Years.

Year	Form	N	% Above/below 5-year college average	% Change
2011-2012	4GMF	110	5.4	0
2012-2013	4GMF	125	13.4	8
2013-2014	4GMF	144	11.6	-1.8
2014-2015	4JMF	141	-14.6	-26.2
2015-2016	4JMF	132	-13.4	1.2

Note. Form refers to the assessment form; Educational Testing Service® Major Field Tests changes forms when it updates assessment content.

suggest that this is the case with a 26.2% decline in student performance on the ETS® MFT subcategory History and Theory (see Table 3). This evidence pinpoints the importance of a discussion about trade-offs in the process of curriculum design focused around specific learning goals.

### Student Exit Surveys

Student exit surveys are administered in the month before graduation in the required capstone strategic management course. The survey instrument is administered and collected in person to students during class by the course instructor. The exit survey consists of 37 questions related to student experience in the college. Of particular relevance to this study, students were asked to assign a value to their confidence in their ability to work in teams using a 7-point Likert-type scale, where 1 = *not at all* and 7 = *extremely* (see Table 4). In the academic year 2013-2014, the item was reverse scored in that it asked,

**Table 4.** Student Exit Survey Results.

Academic year	Total N	Confident		Neutral		Not confident	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
2013-2014	115	72	62.6	10	8.7	33	28.7
2014-2015	265	246	92.8	17	6.4	2	0.8
2015-2016	255	249	97.6	5	2.0	1	0.4

“How much improvement do you need in this area.” Although the items across years may not be equivalent, they represent an interesting point of comparison. Table 4 reports responses to the teamwork item from the years 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016. In this table, the survey data from the year 2013-2014 were reverse scored and Likert-type values from 5 to 7 are labeled confident, 4 is neutral, and 1 to 3 are not confident (note that these numbers include all business students; however, management majors make up 40% of the college and all majors take the Management and Organizations course).

Table 4 provides evidence that students are confident with their own perceived ability to work on teams. In 2013-2014, only 62.6% of survey respondents were indicating that no improvement was needed with their teamwork skills. In 2014-2015, 92.8% of respondents identified as being confident in their ability to work in a team. By the academic year 2015-2016, nearly all students, 97.6%, reported being confident with their perceived ability to work in a team.

Other items of interest include *ability to apply theory to practice* (mean values of 5.65 and 5.80 in 2014-2015 and 2015-2016, respectively) and *knowledge in the basic business disciplines* (mean values of 5.82 and 5.98 in 2014-2015 and 2015-2016, respectively). Notably, when asked how confident students are in knowledge in the basic business disciplines, students express quite a bit of confidence, providing a new piece of evidence related to the question regarding trade-offs between skills and knowledge as the courses transitioned to focus on soft skills.

### *Internship Provider Surveys*

Internships are not required in the management major; however, about 20% of students college-wide complete internships in a variety of different organizations. In the spring of 2015, surveys were administered to a sample of internship providers ( $n = 15$  for management majors) before the conclusion

of the internship. One item asked employers to rate interns' teamwork skills on a 7-point Likert-type scale, where 7 = *very satisfied* and 1 = *not at all satisfied*. The results suggest that employers believe that students demonstrate excellent teamwork skills in their place of employment, with an average response of 6.90. Furthermore, of the 15 employer surveys of management interns' teamwork skills, 14 of the interns received the highest satisfaction rating (7) and 1 student was rated a 6. Notably, internship providers also responded positively to an item regarding how satisfied they were with their interns' basic business knowledge, with a mean of 6.54 out of 7.

## **Discussion**

This article presents our story of curriculum change and results. In 2012, the management department redesigned the curriculum to purposefully focus on the application of soft skills, and teamwork in particular. The results suggest that this initiative was effective in increasing both actual and perceived teamwork knowledge and skills. Furthermore, self-report data suggest that students have a high level of confidence in working in a team over the implementation span for this change. Notably, there is a finite amount of time available in any college curriculum; hence, the decision to focus on one area deemed as important may lead to trade-off in terms of knowledge in other areas. In our example, standardized test results would suggest that a focus on more applied soft skill development may lead to a decrease in knowledge of history and theory. On the other hand, data from the student exit surveys and internship provider surveys would suggest that the revised curriculum is meeting the needs of students in both basic knowledge and teamwork skills.

Although we consider this an interesting avenue for discussion (i.e., how can the curriculum be reenvisioned to best provide both hard and soft skills), given the focus and purpose of this curriculum change, we are satisfied that we are preparing students with the skills most in demand by employers. Indeed, there is a preponderance of data suggesting that the soft skills such as the ability to work in a team, leadership, problem solving, and communication are the most sought after in prospective employees (AACU, 2009; GMAC, 2016; NACE, 2016). Furthermore, skills such as the ability to work in a team may be more difficult to be taught on the job than knowledge and understanding of tasks.

## ***Practical Implications***

These findings suggest that higher education institutions can and should reexamine the typical introductory management course sequence in light of

employer needs. Specifically, they suggest that management curricula can be changed to successfully develop students in the soft skill areas most needed by potential employers. Implementing these programs and training students in these soft skills should provide a more qualified applicant pool from which employers could selectively hire. Furthermore, the implementation of a backward design process by faculty experts may be useful in the accomplishment of curriculum change goals (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

However, the implementation of this soft skills–focused curriculum was not without its challenges. One practical caveat in designing curriculum in this fashion is that the three-course sequence for management majors at our institution is unlike the typical three-course sequence (i.e., Introduction, OB, HR) found at other institutions. In some cases, this can make transferring the courses across institutions difficult.

We also found, anecdotally through course evaluations and in-class discussions, that some students may react negatively to the idea of a “teams” course. When we first implemented the course *Leading High-Performance Teams*, some students expressed dismay in the first week of class, when discussing their reservations about working collaboratively with others. Specifically, their concerns centered on the number of team projects in other courses in the curriculum, scheduling issues that result from that, and prior issues working with students who did not perform to standard. Although the purpose of this introductory discussion was to elaborate on how the class was designed to help them develop skills and tools to mitigate some of the common challenges of working in teams, students often begin the course with a less than positive outlook. So students’ initial negative connotations about “teams” are a barrier that we have found must be overcome in effectively implementing this curriculum.

Finally, developing students’ teamwork and collaboration skills requires faculty to use more experiential teaching and learning methods. Research on experiential learning suggests that it requires students to be engaged in the learning process either physically or mentally, to understand the relevance of the activity to their lives and learning, to connect the experience to their own experiences, and to reflect on their learning experience (Carver, 1996). To effectively facilitate this kind of learning, faculty must tailor the classroom environment to meet these needs. Therefore, this type of course design may require some faculty members to rethink their own teaching methods and styles, shifting from a lecture approach to one that actively engages students in activities designed to practice and experience applying content (Wurdinger & Carlson, 2010). Providing students with the opportunity to learn from experiences that are relevant to them, and that may include learning from failure, requires that both student and instructor be willing to tolerate a

certain level of ambiguity. Faculty must also be able to assist students in the reflection process to allow them the opportunity to get the most out of the experience as possible. Consequently, colleges and universities should be willing to invest in the development of these teaching skills to effectively implement a change in curriculum to focus on building soft skills. This can be accomplished through internal training programs (e.g., through university centers for effective teaching) and/or by supporting faculty member development through external conferences and workshops focused on management education and experiential learning.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

As we implemented the curriculum changes in the management major, we were fortunate to have several sources of data collected routinely at the college level. From these data, we were able to draw preliminary conclusions that the changes were having a positive impact on student learning goals. One limitation of this study, however, is that we were unable to set aside a treatment and control group before the changes were made to more accurately measure related outcomes. We are pleased that triangulation of data sources (standardized test scores, student perceptions, and employer perceptions), however, suggest reliable results.

Relatedly, assessment of team-based learning could be revised to better capture the skill acquisition after the management introductory course sequence. Although the current study provides initial support for the efficacy of the revised management course sequence in terms of student confidence and knowledge acquisition in the area of teamwork, future assessment processes could be expanded to include observational data. Specifically, faculty trained to observe soft skills related to teamwork could observe students interacting in a team activity and examine changes in behavior. This would provide behavioral support for this type of skills-based training program. Likewise, longer term data from internship providers and employers would bolster support for the transfer of this training to the workplace.

Exploring this curriculum through a different lens such as the concept-based curriculum model (Burch, Burch, Bradley, & Heller, 2015), parallel curriculum model (Tomlinson et al., 2008), or the multiple-menu model (Renzulli, Leppien, & Hayes, 2000) may be interesting to identify areas for continuous improvement. Another interesting mode in which to view these changes would systematically apply the principles of team-based learning (see Michaelsen, Knight, & Fink, 2004) to the teamwork course in particular. Many concepts from team-based learning were inherently built in during the curriculum revision process; however, there is opportunity to intentionally analyze the

teamwork course for the essential elements of team-based learning, including properly forming and managing teams, holding teams accountable for individual and group work, building in frequent and timely feedback, and building assignments to promote team development and learning. As noted above, there is a plethora of literature surrounding effective exercises and assessments within one course (vs. a full-scale change across multiple courses). There is much opportunity to apply research results to each of our revised courses in a more micro fashion beyond the scope of the current article.

Overall we are pleased with the curriculum revision process and the outcomes related to student development of teamwork skills. Although improvement in our curriculum at the course level, in learning goal development, specific content, and pedagogical approach is always ongoing, we believe that the changes implemented to this point will best serve students as they transition from college to work life.

## Appendix A

Comparison of Course Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) Prior to and After Curriculum Change.

Original course SLOs	Revised course SLOs
<p>Management and Organizations</p> <p>On the completion of this course, a student should have developed the following competencies<sup>a</sup>:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A working knowledge of core management concepts, theories, and terminology, including but not limited to the following:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Managerial activities, roles, skills, and characteristics</li> <li>b. The four primary management functions: planning, organizing, leading, and controlling</li> <li>c. Current and future management challenges, including issues related to ethics, diversity, and the global environment</li> <li>d. The role of management in strategic decision making, organizational design, and change</li> <li>e. The effects of managerial behavior on individuals and groups (e.g., motivation, leadership, communication)</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p>Management and Organizations</p> <p>At the conclusion of this course, a student should be able to do the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Define the functions, activities, roles, skills, and characteristics of managers and describe the history of management</li> <li>2. Define basic organizational strategy, structure, and culture concepts</li> <li>3. Describe entrepreneurship and the role of innovation and change in organizational success</li> <li>4. Explain the role of quality and quality control in establishing a competitive advantage</li> <li>5. Describe how work plans can be used to manage the project life cycle</li> <li>6. Describe how theories of individual differences, motivation, and leadership affect the management of individuals and groups</li> <li>7. Describe the primary human resource management functions</li> </ol>

(continued)

**Appendix A. (continued)**

## Original course SLOs

2. An ability to relate management theory to real-life examples. A primary goal of the course is to make the relevance of management theory obvious even to students who may lack exposure to or experience in a “real-life” management context.
3. Critical thinking skills. As part of the course, you will gain practice in analyzing a situation, identifying a problem, and applying your knowledge of course material to solve the problem.
4. An understanding of your own abilities, skills, beliefs, perceptions, and management potential. A portion of the course will be devoted to increasing your self-awareness.

## Organizational Behavior

At the conclusion of this course, a student should be able to do the following:

1. Correctly use organizational behavior concepts and terminology in the workplace
2. Assess the values, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors that affect how you interact with others
3. Develop and enhance the essential interpersonal skills for being an effective coworker and manager.
4. Use ethical organizational behavior frames of reference to diagnose individual and group situations in organizations
5. Work as a productive member of a work group or team

## Revised course SLOs

8. Explain how diversity and cultural differences affect the management of individuals, groups, and organizations
9. Recognize ethical dilemmas in the decision-making process
10. Recognize management concepts in organizational contexts

## Leading High-Performance Teams

At the conclusion of this course, a student should be able to do the following:

1. Identify the type of team appropriate for use in specific organizational settings and to meet different organizational goals
2. Monitor personal performance in leadership skill, knowledge, and ability areas—for example, time management, emotional intelligence, personal values and ethics basis, critical thinking/problem solving, self-control, oral communication skills, and formal/informal persuasive presentations and written technology-mediated communication skills
3. Demonstrate use of team decision making based on creative and critical thinking while considering ethical, organizational, and quality standards
4. Create and use teamwork progress tools such as team meeting reports, using formal feedback techniques such as milestone reports, peer evaluations, and outcome quality assessments along with informal feedback opportunities.

(continued)

**Appendix A. (continued)**

Original course SLOs	Revised course SLOs
<p>Fundamentals of Human Resource Management</p> <p>At the conclusion of this course, a student should be able to do the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Describe and explain emerging trends in human resource management and their impact on organizational effectiveness and efficiency</li> <li>2. Explain the legal context for decision-making about recruitment, selection, performance appraisal, training and development, compensation, workplace safety and employee rights</li> <li>3. Evaluate recruiting and selection tools for reliability, validity, and associated legal consequences</li> <li>4. Explain the process for developing an employee training program</li> <li>5. Evaluate performance appraisal criteria for validity and potential bias</li> <li>6. Describe and explain compensation strategies and legally required benefits</li> <li>7. Describe employee rights and discipline models in both union and nonunion work environments</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Demonstrate effective use of interpersonal skills in managing team interactions over the team’s life cycle</li> </ol> <p>Managing Human Capital</p> <p>At the conclusion of this course, a student should be able to do the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Describe the impact of human behavior; concepts of individual differences, personality, motivation, and perception; and conflict management and influence decision making concerning human capital</li> <li>2. Describe and explain emerging trends in human resource management and their impact on organizational effectiveness and efficiency</li> <li>3. Explain the legal context for decision making about recruitment, selection, performance appraisal, compensation/benefits, and employee rights</li> <li>4. Evaluate recruitment and selection systems and provide recommendations for improvement</li> <li>5. Evaluate performance appraisal criteria for validity and potential bias based on perception</li> <li>6. Describe and explain compensation strategies and how they are influenced by motivation theories and an organization’s legally required benefits</li> <li>7. Describe employee rights and discipline models in work environments</li> <li>8. Demonstrate effective decision making in the application of fair employment laws, interviewing, performance evaluation, and disciplining for corrective action</li> <li>9. Demonstrate interpersonal and technical competencies to include writing effective job descriptions, interviewing, conducting a self-appraisal, giving/receiving constructive feedback, and determining corrective action in disciplinary procedures</li> </ol>

<sup>a</sup>Prior to the curriculum change, the Management and Organizations course had identified course objectives; SLOs were not documented.



## Appendix B

Leading High-Performance Teams: Alignment of Course Activities With Student Learning Objectives.

Student learning objectives (SLOs)	Example activities used to address SLOs
<p>Identify the type of team appropriate for use in specific organizational setting and to meet different organizational goals</p> <p>Monitor personal performance in (a) leadership skill, (b) knowledge and ability areas—for example, time management, emotional intelligence, personal values and ethics basis, critical thinking/problem solving, self-control, oral communication skills, and formal/informal persuasive presentations and written technology-mediated communication skills</p>	<p><i>Mini case studies</i>—Small teams of students must identify goals for the team in the case, then identify the type of team needed to meet organizational goals. Students then share and discuss their recommendations with the class.</p> <p><b>Leadership skills:</b></p> <p><i>Lead team project</i>—Students are required to lead portions of the team project and receive feedback about their performance from completing self- and teammate evaluations about their leadership. Thus, they get feedback about their performance from both teammates and the instructor.</p> <p><i>Role-plays</i>—Students participate in, reflect on, and receive feedback about their performance in role-plays, which illustrate facilitation techniques, effective coaching behaviors, and delivering feedback.</p> <p><b>Knowledge and ability areas:</b></p> <p><i>Time management</i>—Students are required to create, maintain, and update a Gantt chart for a semester-long project.</p> <p><i>Emotional intelligence</i>—Students are required to complete self-assessments to increase awareness of their emotional intelligence, five-factor model of Personality dimensions, and perceived locus of control. Then, students are asked to reflect on their scores, discuss them, and identify what implications their strengths and weaknesses may have for their leadership and teamworking effectiveness.</p> <p><i>Critical thinking</i>—Student teams develop, propose, collect data for, then develop recommendations for internal clients about how to improve an initiative on campus.</p> <p><i>Formal presentations</i>—Student teams present their project proposals and final project to internal campus clients. Feedback is given about presentation skills and effectiveness.</p>

(continued)

**Appendix B. (continued)**

Student learning objectives (SLOs)	Example activities used to address SLOs
<p>Demonstrate use of team decision making based on creative and critical thinking while considering ethical, organizational, and quality standards</p>	<p><i>Team project:</i> Within semester-long team projects, students are required to identify client needs based on data collection. Student teams are required to brainstorm ideas for, propose, get approval from the IRB (institutional review board), then carry out an action plan that involves collecting data for, and then making recommendations to, the internal client based on the data they collected. Quality of the work is then assessed by the instructor and the campus client based on the team’s creativity, research, recommendations, and professional presentation.</p>
<p>Create and use team planning and organizing tools, such as team contracts, basic work plans/developmental plans, scheduling of people, resource, and time, meeting management techniques</p>	<p><i>Project planning:</i> Within the semester-long project, students are required to create team contracts (which include addressing schedules, norms, decision-making strategies, how they will manage meetings, etc.). They are also required to create, complete, and update Gantt charts for their projects.</p>

**Appendix C**

Managing Human Capital: Alignment of Course Activities With Student Learning Objectives.

Student learning objectives (SLOs)	Example activities used to address SLOs
<p>Describe the impact of human behavior; concepts of individual differences, personality, motivation, and perception; and conflict management and influence decision making concerning human capital</p>	<p><i>Discussion questions</i>—Students are asked to provide examples from their own lives (work, school, personal, sports, etc.) illustrating concepts of individual differences, motivation, and leadership. They are asked to discuss their best and worst managers or teachers, describing their perceived personalities, for example. They might be asked to describe how reinforcement theory was applied at work or school or in sports. They could be asked to describe a situation in which they were involved in a conflict with another person or group and explain the interaction in terms of types and causes of conflict and discuss the conflict management style utilized.</p>

(continued)

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**Appendix C. (continued)**


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Student learning objectives (SLOs)	Example activities used to address SLOs
Describe and explain emerging trends in human resource management and their impact on organizational effectiveness and efficiency	<p><i>Video cases</i>—Students are asked to watch videos (fiction or nonfiction) and analyze the decision-making behavior of a central figure as it relates to personality, conflict management, or perception.</p> <p><i>Semester-long written case study</i>—Students are asked to examine an organization and identify and analyze problems related to each major topic area covered in the course. They must pose actionable solutions based on their knowledge of the concepts and their research related to the organization in the case.</p>
Explain the legal context for decision making about recruitment, selection, performance appraisal, compensation/benefits, and employee rights	<p><i>Role-plays</i>—Students engage in role-play scenarios, where they must interview an applicant or provide performance feedback to a poor-performing employee.</p>
Evaluate recruitment and selection systems and provide recommendations for improvement	<p><i>Mini case studies</i>—Students are provided a vignette of an organization's recruitment and selection plan and must analyze and provide suggestions for improving it.</p>
Evaluate performance appraisal criteria for validity and potential bias based on perception	<p><i>Mini case studies</i>—Students are provided a description of an organization's performance appraisal and must critique it and provide suggestions for improving it.</p>
Describe and explain compensation strategies and how they are influenced by motivation theories and an organization's legally required benefits	<p><i>Discussion</i>—Students discuss their employers' (past or present) compensation approaches and how they relate to motivation theories.</p>
Describe employee rights and discipline models in work environments	<p><i>Debates</i>—Students debate controversial issues such as drug testing and privacy. They must research and argue in a point and counterpoint format.</p>
Demonstrate effective decision making in the application of fair employment laws, interviewing, performance evaluation, and disciplining for corrective action	<p><i>Mini case studies</i>—Students are given scenarios involving potential employee misconduct and are asked what the appropriate managerial action would be given the specifics of the situation and organizational policy.</p>

(continued)

## Appendix C. (continued)

Student learning objectives (SLOs)	Example activities used to address SLOs
Demonstrate interpersonal and technical competencies to include writing effective job descriptions, interviewing, conducting a self-appraisal, giving/receiving constructive feedback, and determining corrective action in disciplinary procedures	<i>Role-plays</i> —Students engage in role-play scenarios, where they must interview an applicant or provide performance feedback to a poor-performing employee.

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