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Balancing Academic Rigour and Employability in Assessment: Conflict Management and Leadership for Learning in UK Business Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the conflicts in designing assessments that balance academic rigour with employability outcomes in UK undergraduate business management education. With increasing pressure from stakeholders, including students, academics, employers, and regulatory bodies, including the QAA and OfS, higher education institutions face tensions between delivering scholarly content and responding to the labour market's evolving needs. Business schools, often home to students from diverse educational and professional backgrounds, must navigate conflicting priorities when assessing competencies that matter both in academic contexts and the workplace. This literature review, supported by reflective insights, draws on the Leadership for Learning (LFL) framework and Rahim and Bonoma's conflict-handling styles to examine how institutional leaders can manage these tensions. The study reviews literature and incorporates the author's professional insights to explore integrative and compromising conflict resolution approaches that facilitate inclusive assessment development. It critically evaluates the roles and perspectives of key stakeholders in shaping employability-driven assessments and advocates for co-constructed strategies that avoid undermining educational standards. Findings indicate that constructive leadership rooted in ethical dialogue, shared vision, and institutional awareness can mediate between external expectations and internal academic integrity. The study proposes a framework for inclusive assessment design that actively involves stakeholders in curriculum review, feedback loops, and pedagogical innovation. This framework supports a sustainable alignment between student learning, graduate employability, and institutional accountability. Although limited by empirical data, this research contributes a literature review supported by a reflective, practice-based understanding of conflict management in higher education assessment design, focusing on business management education. It offers actionable insights for academic leaders seeking to enhance employability while safeguarding academic values, thereby addressing a gap in the literature surrounding leadership-led strategies for resolving educational conflict in business schools. This paper's knowledge claim is conceptual and practice-oriented: it synthesises extant scholarship with reflective leadership insights.

KEYWORDS

Employability assessment; conflict management; higher education leadership; business management education; Leadership for Learning (LFL)

Introduction

Graduates and current students may have unique challenges and expectations due to their varied backgrounds (Sarfraz et al., 2018; Alharahsheh, 2019a). Students studying business management can already be employed with flexible hours or part-time, and they may have worked in a range of businesses in the past; however, this may not be the case in other countries where average student age is lower. Though it is possible that some of them come from a professional or vocational foundation rather than an A-level or high school, leading to a higher level of diversity of the students enrolled in British higher education institutions, which

includes conventional and unconventional backgrounds when it comes to prior academic achievements as students may be eligible due to them being mature students rather than being directly coming from high school or college system.

In order to provide an appropriate educational offer that meets the job market's standards, colleges and universities are under increasing obligation to take into account improving skills for employment as part of their curriculum (Harvey et al., 2002; Alharahsheh & Pius, 2019). The appropriateness of this strategy is being questioned, though, as it may lower the standard of education that institutions provide in favour of a more concentrated emphasis on training and acquiring skills (Brigden & Grieveson, 2003).

Employers prefer graduates who exhibit critical abilities such as the ability to control the way they learn, communicate effectively, be open to creative and innovative thinking, and be able to engage in continuous reflective thinking (Pius et al., 2020a; Pius et al., 2020b; Burton, 2016; Haigh & Clifford, 2010; QAA, 2001). Amidst ongoing changes and competing priorities in the UK and internationally, higher education institutions are under pressure to design programmes that are both academically robust and professionally oriented (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Usmani & Alharahsheh, 2020; Alharahsheh & Pius, 2019; Alharahsheh, 2019b; Helmi & Pius, 2018; Helmi et al., 2018).

Multiple researchers have conducted thorough investigations into the mounting strain on higher education institutions, including Mohamad et al. (2018), Helmi et al. (2018), Webb & Chaffer (2016), and Wye & Lim (2009). Nonetheless, several aspects of the academic offer like how assessments are conducted, the implementation of assessment methodologies about business studies in higher education context, and their influence on the advancement of vocational skills are not sufficiently highlighted in previous research with specific reference to how higher education institutes can balance the conflicting priorities to balance between academic focus and skills development that support employment in the labour market (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2019). There is limited literature clarifying how business schools coordinate assessment strategies that simultaneously develop vocational outcomes and maintain academic rigour, meeting the expectations of key UK regulators (e.g., the Quality Assurance Agency and the Office for Students). This gap generates tensions among stakeholders, with some advocating for more skills-based assessments, while others prioritise traditional academic assessments, irrespective of workplace connection.

To connect literature to practice in UK business management courses, this paper focuses on the assessment types commonly used in the sector, including live client briefs, simulations, consultancy reports, reflective portfolios, and group pitches. Each of these can be mapped to employability competencies (communication, problem-solving, teamwork, adaptability) and to academic criteria (theoretical integration, critical analysis, evidence use). The leadership challenge, therefore, is not to replace academic criteria with skills criteria, but to co-specify both within a single assessment design and rubric.

Through the main emphasis on the UK's higher education sector, it is clear from my brief introduction and justification that the objective of this research effort is to investigate how business management schools can overcome possible conflicting priorities to improve employability outcomes through assessment and evaluation, which is an essential part of the business educational institutions instruction. To support the inclusive understanding of the contexts, I aim to utilise the Leadership for Learning (LfL) framework developed by MacBeath and Dempster (2008) and Swaffield and MacBeath (2009), conflict management key concepts and theories, as well as including employability for assessment principles, models, and frameworks to support the reflective focus on the specified context and to understand how conflict of interests can be managed in a manner where all included stakeholders' are considered including students, academics, academic and professional management within higher education contexts, and employers. The recommendation to make adjustments will also be provided as strategies to manage conflict in the selected context, to provide direction on how to put the changes into practice.

Key Terms Defined

To support clarity and conceptual consistency throughout this research, the following key terms are defined. These definitions provide an explicit foundation for understanding how the research engages with assessment design, educational leadership, and employability-focused practice within higher education.

Employability assessment refers to the design of assessment activities that extend beyond traditional academic measures to include the development of skills, behaviours, and attributes that enhance students' readiness for the workplace. These assessments aim to embed real-world relevance by targeting competencies such as communication, adaptability, critical thinking, and collaboration, which are increasingly valued by employers in the graduate labour market.

Academic rigour is used in this study to denote the intellectual depth, challenge, and scholarly integrity embedded in assessment practices. It involves maintaining high standards of critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and theoretical engagement to ensure that students are not merely trained for employment but also prepared for complex academic and professional challenges. Academic rigour safeguards the educational value of degrees while ensuring assessments meet regulatory expectations.

Leadership for Learning (LfL) is a conceptual framework that guides educational leadership by promoting shared responsibility, ethical dialogue, evidence-informed decision-making, and inclusive engagement with all stakeholders. Developed by MacBeath and Dempster (2008), LfL supports a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement within educational institutions, particularly in addressing competing demands in assessment design.

Conflict management in higher education refers to the strategies used by academic leaders and institutions to navigate competing interests, such as balancing educational integrity with vocational demands. Drawing on the work of Rahim and Bonoma (1979), this study frames conflict management as a leadership responsibility requiring integrative and compromising approaches to mediate between academic priorities and external stakeholder expectations.

Lastly, *stakeholders in higher education* are understood as all parties with a vested interest in the educational process. These include internal actors, such as students, educators, and academic managers, as well as external ones, including employers, professional bodies, and regulatory agencies, such as the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the Office for Students (OfS). Each stakeholder group brings differing priorities, which can create tension when aligning assessments with both academic and employment goals.

Collectively, these definitions establish the conceptual parameters within which the research is situated and ensure consistent interpretation of key constructs across subsequent analysis and discussion.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, conceptual literature review supported by reflective methodology to examine the conflict between academic assessment standards and the need for enhanced employability outcomes within undergraduate business management education. Rather than using empirical data collection methods such as surveys or interviews, the study relies on a critical review of relevant literature, established educational frameworks, and supported by contextual reflective insights drawn from the author's professional leadership role within a UK higher education context. This aligns with Schön's (1983) concept of the reflective practitioner, where leadership decisions are informed by both scholarly knowledge and lived professional experience.

The Leadership for Learning (LfL) framework developed by MacBeath and Dempster (2008) and later refined by Swaffield and MacBeath (2009) serves as a core lens through which the educational leadership challenges and potential strategies are analysed. This framework supports inclusive leadership practices that promote collaboration, shared vision, and active dialogue among stakeholders. It is used here to explore how business schools can address conflicting pressures from quality assurance bodies (e.g., QAA and OfS), academic staff, students, and employers.

Additionally, the study integrates established conflict management theories, including Rahim and Bonoma's (1979) five conflict-handling styles, to assess how educational leaders might mediate between diverse stakeholder expectations. This provides a conceptual foundation for understanding institutional tensions and proposing leadership responses grounded in compromise and integration (Rahim, 2000).

Finally, this study uses a stakeholder-informed perspective, drawing on the published views and expectations of students (Lizzio et al., 2002), employers (Haigh & Clifford, 2010), and regulatory agencies (QAA, 2018; OfS, 2022) to understand the complexity of designing assessments that are both academically

rigorous and vocationally relevant.

Review Scope and Selection

This conceptual review drew on peer-reviewed journal articles, sector reports, and UK regulatory guidance published primarily between 2000 and 2024. Sources were identified via keyword combinations such as assessment design, employability skills, business management education, Leadership for Learning, conflict management, Rahim and Bonoma, QAA assessment, and Office for Students. Inclusion criteria prioritised: (a) relevance to assessment and/or employability in higher education; (b) applicability to UK or comparable systems; (c) conceptual or empirical clarity on leadership/management of assessment. Exclusions included purely K-12 contexts and studies without clear assessment implications. The knowledge claims are analytic and synthetic rather than empirical: evidence is marshalled to propose a practice framework, not to test causal effects.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

As a conceptual literature review and supported by reflective insights, the findings are presented and discussed as a response to learning from the literature and being supported by the author's professional reflections. However, they are limited by the absence of primary empirical data. The conclusions rely on the author's interpretation of literature and professional insights, which may introduce a degree of subjectivity and restrict generalisability. However, bias is mitigated through several strategies: engaging with a broad range of scholarly and regulatory perspectives; grounding reflections in established theoretical frameworks; and prioritising transparency in articulating stakeholder needs, including students, academic staff, employers, and quality assurance bodies. Additionally, the study consciously avoids privileging one stakeholder's voice over others, instead advocating integrative and compromising leadership approaches to ensure balanced outcomes. The research adheres to ethical academic standards by ensuring accurate referencing, fair representation of viewpoints, and responsible reflection on the implications of leadership practice in higher education.

Learning from the literature

Defining Conflict

There is no one precise definition for the word "conflict." Scholars engaged in understanding conflict from multiple fields have contributed significantly to the confusion. Fink (1968), and Thomas (1976, 1992) conducted comprehensive reviews of the conflict domain and found basic agreement that describes conflict. Fink (1968) has demonstrated a great deal of variation in conflict definitions in his seminal review. He found a number of generic definitions that aim to be inclusive as well as a range of definitions tailored to particular interests. Both of Fink (1968), and Thomas (1976, 1992) agree on the following understanding of the term conflict. However, this understanding may vary from a discipline to another. Upon analysing interpretations of conflict, it was found that while definitions vary, they share the following characteristics:

1. In an unfavourable scenario, conflict arises when people or groups have divergent objectives.
2. The existence of conflict requires the recognition of such divergent interests.
3. A conflict arises when there is a belief on both sides that the other will hinder their goals, or has already done so.
4. Conflict is an occurrence that arises from pre-existing connections among individuals or organisations and is a reflection of their prior exchanges as well as the environments in which they occurred.

Conflict and conflict management

Although there has not been much research on conflict in business educational settings, this does not imply that there is not conflict there (Hearn & Anderson, 2002). According to Gmelch and Carrol (1991), the working, social, and interpersonal features of academic departments might make conflict in educational institutions common. Higher education institutions are the ideal setting for conflict, argues Miklas and Kleiner (2003), since there can be a wide range of differences amongst those participating in the educational process, including students, faculty, administrators, and leaders. According to Stanley and Algert (2007),

administrators manage conflict roughly 40 percent of their work hours.

Higher education institutions are no longer viewed as peaceful havens free from the disputes that commonly occur in all bureaucratic organisations, according to Folger and Shubert (1995). Conflict may arise from disagreements over objectives or strategies for allocating resources, from misreading or applying institutional rules inconsistently, from violations of either formal or informal agreements, from power conflicts, or from personal rivalries.

The definition of conflict that Robbins (1998) has proposed is as follows: a procedure that starts when one party thinks another party is going to hurt something that the first party worries about, or has already hurt it. While a possible source of conflict has been described as a disagreement over priorities or views by Esquivel and Kleiner (1997). Both definitions here represent a form of a disagreement between two parties over a particular topic, argument, goal...etc. One of the fundamental responsibilities for leadership is handling conflict, which presents a significant challenge for leadership in all contexts, including leading and managing in higher education (Adomi & Anie, 2005). Human relationships require conflict as a necessary and constant practice (Loomis & Loomis, 1965). It will persist as long as individuals compete for status, income, employment, materials, and acknowledgment (Henry, 2009). Every single individual has a unique approach of addressing conflict, and this is indicative of their conflict management style (Black & Mouton, 1964; Moberg, 1998). Multiple researchers have created various conflict management strategy approaches. The conflict literature makes extensive use of approaches developed by Black and Mouton (1964) and Rahim and Bonoma (1979) among others. However, conflict management can also be multidiscipline related, where different theories of management and leadership can also be connected such as the Leadership for Learning (LfL) framework developed by Swaffield & MacBeath (2009).

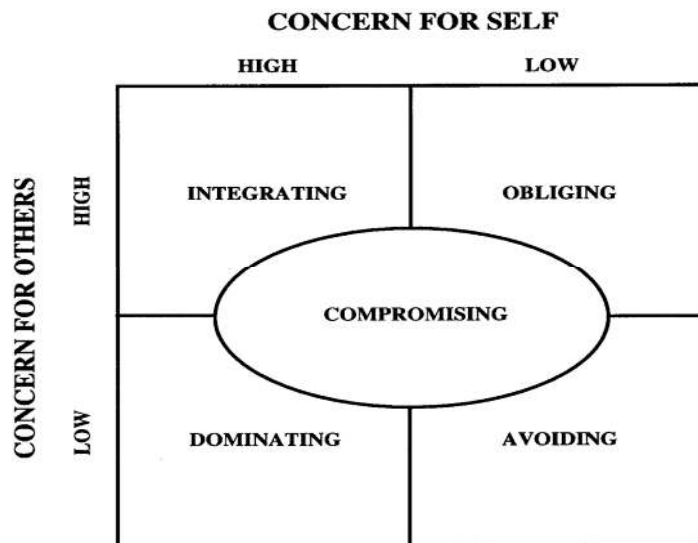
The two fundamental elements of concern for oneself and concern for other people have been used by Rahim and Bonoma (1979) to categorise conflict management into five styles. These five conflict management styles are:

1. Integrating
2. Obliging
3. Competing
4. Avoiding
5. Compromising

Figure 1

A Two-Dimensional Model for the Styles of Resolving Conflict with Others

A Two-Dimensional Model of the Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict



Source: adopted from Rahim (2000) and Rahim & Bonoma (1979).

Application to the assessment problem (Integrating vs. Competing). In the assessment design context, the Integrating style operationalises as co-creation workshops with students, academics, and employers to surface non-negotiables (e.g., academic theory use, authentic workplace tasks) and to jointly draft rubrics that weight both. The Competing style maps to unilateral imposition of assessment formats by any one party (e.g., only exams or only workplace projects). This paper argues that integrating, with selective compromising on weighting and format, best sustains rigour and employability.

Integrating style: High concern for oneself and others is indicated by this style. Another name for this approach is problem-solving. Collaboration between both sides is required (i.e., transparency, sharing of knowledge, and examining differences to obtain a mutually agreeable solution). According to Prein (1976), this approach is characterised by two key components: solving issues and confronting. Analysing the root reasons of disagreement, resolving misunderstandings, and maintaining open lines of communication are all part of confrontations. This is a requirement for solving issues, which entails determining the actual problem or difficulties and finding an answer to maximise the relief of all parties' problems.

Obliging style: This approach suggests a low regard for oneself and a great regard for others. Another word for this is accommodating. This approach is linked to trying to minimise the differences and highlight the similarities in order to allay the other party's concerns. This style incorporates a self-sacrificing element. It could manifest as unselfish giving, charitable giving, or following the directive of another person. In order to ease the other party's concerns, an obliging individual disregards their own. Someone who responds to an act that appears to be hostility from another with low rivalry or even positive warmth, as proposed by Boulding (1962), is similar to a confrontation absorption.

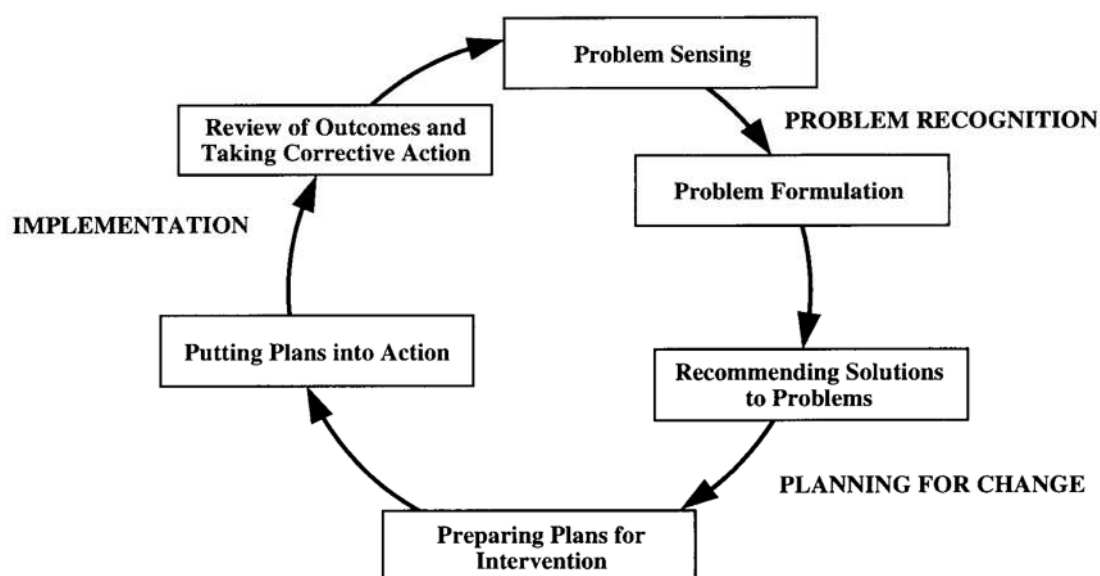
Competing style: According to Rahim and Bonoma (1979), this approach conveys a low regard for other people and a tremendous interest for oneself. Another name for this is contesting. This type of behaviour is frequently linked to a win-lose mindset or to exerting pressure to get what one wants. A person who is dominant or competitive will stop at nothing to achieve their goal and thus frequently disregards the demands and expectations of the opposing party. Protecting one's privileges and/or supporting an opinion that one feels is right might be examples of dominating. A dominant individual may have a win-at-all mentality. A bossy manager is likely to utilise their positional authority to force their agenda on their staff and demand their compliance. Authority can be exercised by someone without a formal position through deception, bluffing, gaining the help of their superiors, and other strategies.

Avoiding style: According to Rahim and Bonoma (1979), this approach shows a lack of regard for oneself and other people. Another name for this is suppressing. This is also linked to circumstances where people leave, avoid, shift the blame, or pretend to witness, sense, or talk about nothing unpleasant. It could be as simple as leaving a dangerous circumstance or delaying a problem until a more suitable time. A person who avoids situations does not address both their own and the other party's concerns. This approach is frequently described as having a disinterest in the problems or parties that are at dispute. Such a person can decline to admit in public that the dispute exists and needs to be resolved.

Compromising style: This manner demonstrates a middling level of self- and other-care. It involves cooperation or give-and-take in which both sides sacrifice something in order to reach an agreement that works for everyone. It could entail dividing the disagreement, making an arrangement, or trying to find an early compromise. In comparison to a dominant party, a compromised party forfeits more, but less than an accommodating party. Similar to an avoidance party, this kind of gathering tackles a problem openly but does not go as deep into it as an incorporating party.

Figure 2
Problem solving process

Problem-Solving Process



Source: adopted from Rahim (2000) and Rahim & Bonoma (1979).

Operational steps for programme leaders (derived from the problem-solving cycle).

1. Define the shared problem: Evidence of misalignment (external examiner feedback, NSS/TEF indicators, employer feedback).
2. Surface interests: Academic standards (theory, critique), student development (support, fairness), employer expectations (transferable skills), regulator requirements (validity, reliability, integrity).
3. Generate options: Alternative assessment mixes (e.g., 40% analytical essay + 60% live consultancy report) with draft rubrics showing dual criteria.
4. Evaluate trade-offs: Pilot marking of sample scripts/artifacts; moderation for consistency.
5. Agree actions: Adopt revised assessments; publish rubrics and exemplars; schedule staff-student review checkpoints.
6. Review: Use external examiner and stakeholder feedback to iterate annually.

Moving forward and taking the given problem solving process into account to make a balanced approach to address the need to develop assessment for employability, the integrating and/or compromising styles may seem to be more appropriate to my own context given that I have a wide number of internal and external stakeholders involved including students, academics, academic management, quality assurance bodies such as the QAA and OfS, and employers given that they aim to employ our graduates after they leave the business school. Additional justifications for me to adopt these styles are as the following:

- The problem itself is ongoing and complex as it involves a number of internal and external parties.
- Greater levels of commitment are needed from all parties to reach appropriate understand of the nature of the problem, then developing options as solutions.
- Time as a resource can be made available to engage with stakeholders in formal or informal settings such as annual reviews or module/course feedback.
- One party such as me as the academic leader or educator can not solve the problem as other inputs are needed to develop an inclusive approach to problem solving.
- The nature of the problem tends to affect all parties involved.

According to Marks and Prity (2003) and Moorman (1990), as a leader, I must exercise ethical and

dialogue-based leadership by using my unique position to involve everyone in the institution and the outside world in clarifying and prioritising core educational ideals. When discussing the larger community in the context of business education, significant internal and external stakeholders are included, including employers, quality assurance organisations, and lecturers, as well as students and other specialists inside the business school.

Applying the cycle can help build assessment for employability strategy that is truly reflective of the demands of all stakeholders. In order to effectively lead education, I must interact with stakeholders and solicit their opinions. It is also crucial to include all viewpoints, even though this could result in some stakeholders disagreeing with me. I do not aim to change the existing structure; instead, I aim to be systematic in defining how to balance employability-focused assessment with academic standards, and then being able to take different views, leading to appropriate action plans where I can embed a more balanced assessment for the employability strategy that can benefit all parties involved.

Upon reviewing Harlow's (1962) research on leadership, which highlighted the importance of recognising beliefs and the role of other individuals as the main considerations in the decision, implication, and day-to-day understanding of a learning objective, it is clear that the current views of the OfS (2022) that education ought to be concentrated around offering value and that educators ought to be aware of keeping what they teach offer appropriate for the outside world including workplace.

Rowan (1995) suggests that leaders ought to be pioneers in the development and implementation of novel teaching methods in educational institutions. They ought to gain a thorough understanding of the ever-growing body of literature on learning and teaching that is the basis of these innovative strategies. Meanwhile, examining the situation of business management higher education, collaborative input and conversation should be developed inside educational institutions to gain a greater awareness of opinions, ideas, and difficulties faced by all parties involved, such as students, their educators within, and others such as companies and quality assurance bodies outside (QAA, 2018).

According to Deakins (2007), considering the input and conversations provided by different stakeholders, in my context, including students and teachers, can produce helpful comprehensive knowledge and based on evidence recommendations that lead to the review of a range of managerial options, including the creation of an assessment approach that can develop employability skills for students which can also meet the needs of all other parties including quality assurance agencies and employers.

The role of leadership in managing conflict in higher education context

Educational leaders bear the primary duty for implementing improvements within their institutions (Fullan, 2001; Pont et al. 2008; Neeleman, 2019). Moreover, leadership in academia and its development are recognised globally as critical to the creativity and advancement of universities. Leaders in education need to be engaged in growth initiatives within the organisations they lead for the sake of themselves as learners, the academic achievement of their schools or academic departments, and the improvement of techniques to support further understanding of the needs of all internal and external stakeholders associated with the learning process within business schools (Dempster et al., 2011). Nonetheless, it might be argued that educational leadership should not be limited to a single leader as they may not full establish complete understanding of the requirements such as academic or employment related requirements, rather there should be an inclusive engagement with key partners such as students and academics to avoid misunderstanding or conflict (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009).

The three foundations that comprise human agency, setting, and aim are the focus of leadership scholars and theorists (Pont et al. 2008; MacBeath & Dempster, 2009). The foundations of good institutional management are these three essential components (Dempster, 2009). A clear guiding purpose for educational leaders is to maximise educational benefit for students. In business management education, this entails designing learning and assessment that enhance students' academic development and professional preparedness. Moreover, educational leadership serve to guarantee that their establishments prioritise enhancing students' education and, eventually, their achievements (Dempster, 2009). The school's purpose is to help its students learn. Leadership never occurs in a vacuum from its environment. It has a setting and reacts to its surroundings constantly. In light of this, one of the most important abilities for leaders in schools to

possess is the capacity to perceive the environment where they operate (Dempster, 2009).

Previous studies conducted in a variety of organisational sectors have consistently demonstrated how conflicting it may be to transfer fresh information or knowledge from one context to another, even within a single organisation (Szulanski, 1996). The acquisition and growth of organisational knowledge involve the person, team, and institutional levels (Crossan et al., 1999). The institutionalisation of new behaviours and personal or group learning serve as the link between these levels in an organisational learning cycle (Crossan et al., 2011). In my case, I believe strong student-faculty partnership is consequently commonly necessary. This partnership can take many different forms, such as official and unofficial interactions with educational projects, committee membership, and participation in significant activities outside of school to understand how I can balance the development of assessment for employability strategy, while taking all views into my consideration (Robertson, 2013; Robertson & Earl, 2014).

According to Hunzicker (2011), educational and professional development acquires relevance and value for mature students in significant contexts including business management courses when they are connected to jobs and their requirements, practice or workplace focused, participatory between peers, and supporting. In order to give students meaning and relevance to the demands of the labour market, educational institutions are expected to implement new changes, according to both national and local education regulatory organisations such as the QAA and OfS (OfS, 2022; OfS, 2019; QAA, 2018).

Essential leadership approaches must also be appropriate for the institution's current environment and any relevant surrounds that may have an influence on the calibre of instruction and student achievement in order to handle change without causing disruptive conflict (Robertson & Earl, 2014). Thus, educational leadership in business management educational institutions seeks to address problems and obstacles that prevent students from having applicable and genuine educational experiences in their environment, including job settings, as well as to develop important initiatives that include collaborative leadership, digital education, and more creative instructional techniques (QAA, 2018).

In my business education context, communicating and listening are both necessary parts of the mutually beneficial process of expressing views and aspirations, and this process can only occur in a supportive environment where people feel comfortable (Clutterbuck, 2007). Relevant stakeholder groups, such as learners, educators, instructional leadership, oversight organisations, and employers, should be involved in the collaborative approach of developing assessments in business management learning to manage expectations of all groups that are directly and indirectly involved (OfS, 2019; QAA, 2018).

Educational leaders ought to be familiar with individuals, groups, environments, and circumstances surrounding their institutions. They should be aware of what is happening in educational settings, they can also aim to pose questions rather than just provide answers, and they can work collectively with all related stakeholders to devise strategies to help students and educators reach their full creative capacity. One way to ensure balance and understanding of key stakeholders in educational settings is the adoption of Leadership for Learning (LfL). The basic goal of Leadership for Learning (LfL) in the context of education is supported by basic leadership views, practices, styles, conduct, principles, and concepts, where leaders aim to build dialogue in the process to manage and overcome conflict. Leadership for Learning (LfL) is a common goal of education to unite a varied and collaborative process. It involves not just individuals but also institutions, such as subject matter institutions like quality assurance agencies, and a range of professional groups involved in non-educational operations. Thus, I intend to apply the Leadership for Learning (LfL) framework (Swaffield & MacBeath, 2009) to my own context of conflict management to provide fresh perspectives and a deeper understanding of how educational leaders can enhance the standard of assessment for employability in the business management education context.

In practical terms, LfL informs assessment design by: (a) convening dialogue to co-articulate assessment purposes; (b) sharing evidence (grade profiles, moderation reports, employer input) to inform decisions; (c) distributing leadership across modules so staff and students co-own assessment change; and (d) building evaluative capability (e.g., students using calibrated exemplars) to strengthen academic standards while developing workplace-relevant judgement.

Figure 3

Shows the Leadership for Learning (LfL) framework (adopted from Swaffield & MacBeath, 2009).



Source: Adopted from Swaffield & MacBeath (2009)

The (LfL) framework, when applied to business management education, can provide me with new insights into the importance of a shared vision that connects the practices, methods, and viewpoints of all parties involved, which includes educational leaders, teachers, and learners, with appropriate active involvement from employers, governing bodies outside of the educational system, and the community inside the education institution as internal stakeholders to jointly set effective learning aims to bring all expectations together, where a mutual understanding can be developed. At the faculty or school level, as a leader, I can support, facilitate, and aid teachers in accomplishing these goals. In particular, I can do this by developing their pedagogic and academic skills and talents and by setting clear goals for them. To establish the essential and sufficient circumstances so that educators, learners, and other stakeholders may feel they have the right resources and assistance available to them when they complete assessments in order to aid in the process of connecting with employability. Applying the LfL framework would also help me learn more about how business management educators can build an open dialogue to inspire students, encourage innovation, work alongside peers, provide a safe space for candid discussion, streamline tasks, and collaborate with them to create assessments that can enhance employability skills.

The possible conflict that educational leaders may have in developing assessments for employability

Assessments can be administered formatively, in conjunction with the method of instruction and learning, for example, throughout course tasks, or summatively, after the teaching and learning process, in accordance with Mahshanian et al. (2019). Consequently, it is feasible to sustain appropriate levels of accomplishment about designated learning goals (QAA, 2018). The QAA is explicit about its goals for finding an acceptable compromise between academic requirements and job readiness for graduates, with the objective to maintain excellence and consistency throughout the academic field (QAA, 2018). In addition, the QAA (2018) makes it apparent that developing an employability assessment should involve a team effort rather than being a process managed just by educators. Instead, it should be comprehensive of internal as well as external stakeholders, with a focus on industry and students, and it should adhere to the standards set by organisations that provide quality assurance, including the OfS and QAA.

The job of assessment is growing more and more challenging due to various causes such as evolving methods of instruction, student numbers, requirements for quality control, and a requirement to meet students' demands in being fully ready professionals (Bryan & Clegg, 2006). Consequently, programme leaders must

treat assessment as a designed system, not a set of isolated tasks: formats, criteria, weightings, and feedback processes must be aligned to both learning outcomes and employability competencies. In addition, Boud & Falchikov (2007) suggested that assessing may be more important than teaching on its own since it can direct students' attention towards what is important, act as a catalyst for students' development as learners throughout the course of their education, and eventually get them ready for suitable jobs.

Biard et al. (2017) state that the content to be taught, as well as the practical abilities and knowledge, should guide the planning and execution of the assessment strategy. Furthermore, the data gathered from the results of assessments can shape the course of action for regulators, businesses, institutions, and academics in future periods, such as checking for eligibility for a job or even when the business school or the university is reviewed by the regulator, such as the QAA or the OfS (Hayward, 2015).

Academics believe that students who think assessments are unsuitable for their future employment and academic growth are more inclined to concentrate only on the superficial learning and development of information related to their specialisation (Lizzio et al., 2002). As a result, learners would have fewer opportunities to develop their unique vocational and intellectual personalities (Lynam & Cachia, 2018).

As a result, recent research (Ibarra-Sáiz et al., 2020; Biard et al., 2017) suggests that assessments ought to be designed and enhanced differently to account for current developments such as digitalisation. Instead of hiring graduates with specialised instruction, employers may favour hiring candidates who are adaptable and efficient in ever-changing business environments (Brigden & Grieveson, 2003). However, very little research has been done on how school leadership responsibilities could encourage efforts to balance competing demands for professional and academic achievement in order to improve employability outcomes assessment in UK undergraduate degree business management courses.

Proposed co-design framework (synthesising LfL with Integrating/Compromising styles)

1. Map tensions (where academic criteria and employability competencies currently clash or duplicate).
2. Co-specify dual criteria (each assessment includes explicit academic criteria and explicit employability criteria; both are graded).
3. Align formats (e.g., analyses require the application of theory and professional outputs).
4. Calibrate standards (use exemplars and moderation to keep rigour consistent across applied tasks).
5. Close the loop (publish changes; collect student/employer feedback; review annually).

Conclusions And Implications For Practice as An Educational Leader

This paper conceptualises conflict in assessment design as a multi-stakeholder alignment problem. Using LfL and Rahim & Bonoma's styles, it argues that Integrating (with selective Compromising) enables programme leaders to co-design assessments that protect academic rigour and develop employability. A conflict may contain several factors, such as competing interests among multiple sides, understanding of these preferences, and convictions held by each that the other will undermine or oppose their own interests; it may also be characterised by the idea that disagreement is an event and that actions taken by either or both sides may prevent the other parties from achieving their objectives.

Among the components of conflict is the limit, which suggests that before participants become aware of and get into a conflict, there must be a sufficient degree of discord, dissatisfaction, or incompatibility among groups of people. Conflict entails competitiveness. There is a range of conflicts that range from collaborative to competing. If the two sides get good results, the dispute is collaborative or positive; if one side succeeds and the other side fails, it is competing or one-sided. Mixed-motive disputes, which involve both collaborative and competing elements, are the most common type of managerial dispute.

While taking into account all of the various competing priorities and interests from the internal and external stakeholders, my integrative and/or compromising approaches in accordance with the five styles included in my conflict management section will provide new and original context-based understanding of how we as business school leadership, can contribute to assessment and employability in the field of business management at the undergraduate level.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of how to integrate employability into assessment throughout the learning process in an educational institution and be a part of school leadership, my well-rounded approach

can be further developed as a framework for teachers, legislators, higher educational institutions, employers, regulatory organisations in the UK including QAA and OfS, and ultimately for students their own.

I approach and handle conflict in a compromising manner by dividing primary audiences' needs and expectations into the following categories:

- The management of the academic institution.
- Quality assurance agencies and business policy makers.
- The job market and employers.
- Researchers, educators, and leaders in academia.
- Students.

As a leader, I can develop two-way dialogues to incorporate all points of view about assessment for employability via a variety of channels, such as:

- Conducting or attending workshops both inside and outside the organisation to exchange and adopt best practices for important professional and scholarly national and international events.
- The creation of a framework that executives can apply to business management education which can embed key employment requirements as part of the academic offer.
- Increasing the participation of important parties in the development of assessments, such as learners, employers, regulators, and academics at various levels, to serve as change agents and influencers.
- Provide training to representatives of educators, students, and other parties involved, such as professional departments, including career services within the business school.
- Hearing students' views through formal and informal communications to understand what they expect in their assessments and connect with employment or the workplace.

Implications for programme leaders (actionable steps):

- Publish dual-criteria rubrics showing where theory/critique and employability competencies are each assessed.
- Require one explicitly “authentic” assessment per core module (e.g., client-brief or simulation) with an accompanying analytical rationale/essay to evidence theoretical integration.
- Institute annual staff–student–employer assessment panel to review and collect feedback.
- Use moderation with annotated exemplars to secure consistent standards across applied tasks.
- Report annually on assessment alignment using agreed indicators (e.g., grade distributions, external examiner comments, employer satisfaction, student perceptions of fairness and relevance).

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