

Tri-Party Collaborative Course Design: Proposal of a Framework for Higher Education Courses

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This article presents a tri-party collaborative course-design framework using a case study based on the launch of a new 4th year course at the University of Toronto, Mississauga, Department of Management. This study employed a multi-method qualitative approach consisting of a survey, followed by three focus groups with distinct stakeholder groups: students, industry practitioners, and academics. The results revealed a surprising overlap of interests among the different groups, with the data supporting the design of the new course, which was launched in the Fall of 2022. In addition, data from current students indicated robust positive acceptance of both the course content and class dynamics. The results confirm the proposed framework's promise for use in designing new courses or redesigning existing ones.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, course design in higher education is a solitary activity wherein the instructor, who possesses technical expertise in the subject area, decides which topics will be included in the course and how the learning will be assessed. The former consideration can be guided by the instructor's expertise or by adopting a textbook that outlines the main subjects that should be considered (McFarlane, 2017).

Recently, instructors have been able to enlist the help of educational developers, whose role is to offer pedagogical support using applied scholarly work relating to teaching and learning. Historically, course-design approaches have indirectly positioned instructors as "retainers of knowledge" due to their technical expertise, and students as the recipients of this knowledge. However, what happens when this approach becomes obsolete, or when the instructor is unable to address their blind spots (I do not know what I don't know)? Or what happens when the course covers a relatively new topic, and knowledge is being produced on a near-daily basis?

This paper proposes a new tri-party collaborative approach to designing higher education courses, and supports its viability with empirical evidence from a case study with a new 4th year course in the University of Toronto, Mississauga, Department of Management. In addition, this work also assesses how current students perceive the proposed approach and considers potential avenues for future research. The motivation for this study was to explore a framework that would consult different perspectives in a field that is not quite established yet (in this case, organizational change management) and gain insights from the inputs of all involved or impacted by the course outcome. This study was also motivated by the possibility of using this framework to re-design existing courses through a more collaborative approach whereby regulatory bodies, employers, faculty, and other stakeholders can bring novelty and interest into the learning experience.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Collaborative Course Design

Historically, course design in higher education has been a solitary process wherein the instructor alone decides the content, mode of delivery, and assessment methods, and crafts policies and proce-

dures aimed at ensuring students receive an effective learning experience. This modus operandi has remained the norm because university faculty are formally trained as subject matter experts, not teachers (Diamond, 1998; Weimer, 2002). However, some instructors are able to access educational developers or pedagogical centres to help enhance this process and improve the overall quality of their courses (King, 2003; Shapiro & Cartwright, 1998). Recently, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) literature has documented the growing number of instructors who have begun to invite students to collaborate in the course-design process (Jafar, 2016; Hudd, 2003; Bovil, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2011; Mihans, Long, & Felten, 2008). These initiatives are known as collaborative course design (CCD) (Ziegenfuss & Lawler, 2008), which aims to bring together people with different skill sets to create a consistent method of teaching students.

Collaborative course design makes sense when creating a high-quality course requires access to several areas of expertise that are not available through one individual. Proponents of distance and online education argue that the "lone ranger" model, in which an instructor learns how to design and teach an online course by him or herself, is not scalable and does not lend itself to the diffusion of innovative practice in an organization (Bates, 2000, p. 2). One could also argue that the same critique applies to in-person courses.

Most commonly, collaboration in course design occurs between instructors and students. Previous research on collaborative course design has demonstrated myriad benefits to this approach. Most of these benefits are highly desired by instructors and include greater student participation (Brown, Lyobe, & Riley, 2013; Chow et al., 2003), more student engagement (Cordner et al., 2012; McDuff, 2012), and better relationships between students and instructors (Cordner et al., 2012; Chow et al., 2003).

The benefits of CCD regarding learning outcomes in the eyes of students was corroborated in multiple studies which focused on autonomy and guidance (Helden, Zendbergen, Specht & Gill, 2022), transdisciplinarity and self-regulation (Kilic-Bebek, Nizamis, Vlutters, Bebek, Karapars, Unal, Yilmaz & Ugurly, 2023), and the activity of sharing remixing and composing between students (Yu, Pardo & Scott, 2018).

The involvement of students in course design is referred to as, "student voice," which posits that students have a unique

perspective on learning and, therefore, should be given space to share their insights (Fielding, 2001; Rudduck, 2007). Giving students a voice in the course design process can increase their engagement in many respects, such as allowing them to be co-creators of teaching approaches, course design, and curricula (Bovill, Cook-Sather, & Felten, 2011). Although the importance of involving students as co-creators is self-evident, in this research we looked to expand the received inputs by adding other sources of information, as described in the model.

THE TRI-PARTY CCD MODEL

The tri-party CCD model involves three sets of stakeholders, as shown in Figure 1.

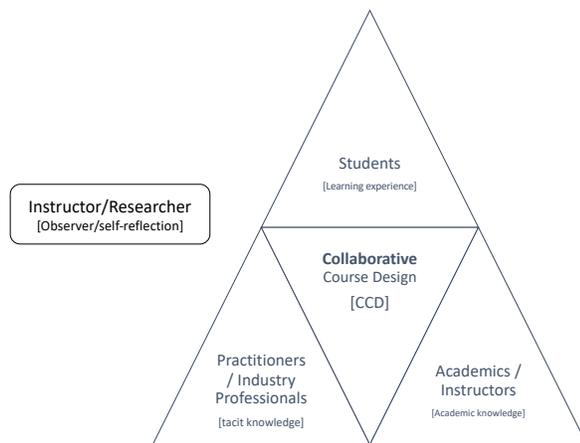


Figure 1. CCD Framework

Rationale for Inclusion of the Proposed Stakeholders

Students

Placing the student at the centre of the learning experience is crucial to their performance, competence, and satisfaction (Altay, 2014). Additionally, adopting a human-factor approach when designing courses can enhance the design and learning experience (Pazell & Hamilton, 2020). Students have an active voice and have proven to be valuable “insiders” with respect to their inputs relating to learning.

Industry Practitioners/Professionals

Very few studies have included the active participation of industry practitioners in CCD (Huston et al., 2018). While some initiatives have attempted to involve industry partners via focused, one-time activities such as hackathons (Wang, Pamnani, & Capasso, 2018) or project-based assignments (Jin, Yang, Piroozfar, Kang, Wanatowski, Hancock, Tang, 2018), industry partners have yet to be involved in the early stages of course design. This represents a significant oversight, as their expertise and knowledge in their fields can contribute valuable insights into trends, pain points, and future skills related to the area.

Academics/Instructors

As with industry practitioners, the consultation with other academics has been absent from the course-design process. This is another major omission, as the active involvement of other

academics can ensure evidence-based oversight of theories, frameworks, best practices, and many other vital components of the course.

In traditional course design, the instructor is both the designer and deliverer of the content. Unfortunately, this approach might inadvertently embed the instructor’s biases and create unintentional gaps due to blind spots relating to content, assignments, and course workload.

In the CCD framework, the instructor/researcher removes himself/herself as the sole guardian of knowledge and instead acts as a participant-observer directed by the outcomes he/she wishes to produce. This role is a dynamic one, and exists due to the novelty of the field (Organizational Change Management). As a result of his “novelty condition,” one can define this knowledge as an ongoing practical activity dictated mainly by the exaltation of practice backed up by surrounding theories (Rock, 1979).

CONTEXT

The research was conducted in the Department of Management at the University of Toronto, Mississauga, where a new course, entitled “Organizational Change Management,” was proposed and accepted under the Special Topics academic umbrella. This was a 4th year course for management (BBA) and commerce (BCOMM) students at the undergraduate level.

METHOD

This study utilized a multi-method approach comprised of qualitative and quantitative analysis. The quantitative component consisted of cross-sectional surveys (phase 1), while the qualitative component consisted of focus groups with different stakeholders (phase 2).

Ethical procedures

This research project received clearance from the Ethics Review Board in the Summer of 2022 when the research team began data collection. All data collection and analysis procedures used in this study fully comply with the ethical guidelines for preserving participant confidentiality and anonymity. All survey responses were anonymous except for the last question, which allowed those interested in participating in phase 2 of this study to leave their email address. All participants were assigned an ID number during the focus group phase to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Any personal information was removed from the contact files (e.g., name and email) upon the completion of phase 2.

Participants

Phase 1 - Survey

Phase 1 of this project consisted of a cross-sectional survey comprised of quantitative and qualitative questions relating to various aspects of higher education courses, including content, mode of delivery, assignments, grading, and lectures. Three surveys targeted at different groups were designed using Qualtrics software and distributed via email and social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Twitter.

A total of 98 surveys were submitted after the recruitment campaign. After removing incomplete or partially incomplete entries, 72 responses were accepted as reliable data. The results of the survey were used to help improve the design of phase 2. In addition, the insights obtained from the survey results provided

the researchers with direction regarding areas that should be probed in greater detail during the focus groups.

Phase 2 – Focus Groups

This focus groups were conducted at the University of Toronto, Mississauga, with the participants being divided into three separate groups: (1) students/recent graduates, (2) academics/instructors, and (3) industry practitioners/professionals. Table 1 summarizes the criteria for inclusion, as well as the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants.

Kvan (2000) maintains that a collaborative design should clearly indicate the purpose of the effort and the interdependencies among participants, and it should also invite members of diverse professions to contribute their distinctive knowledge to the design situation. To ensure that the purpose was clear and consistent, all participants were provided with a clear description of the research project, the sets of different stakeholders, and their expected roles in the discussion. We hoped that bringing different stakeholders together would foster new ideas and insights into the collaborative endeavor (Arias, Eden, Fischer, Gorman, & Scharff, 2000)—in this case, the development of the proposed course.

The following is an example of the introduction to the focus group for industry professionals outlining our expectations:

Good afternoon all, and thank you for agreeing to participate in our study.

I'll try to be brief and concise and go over some procedures before we start:

This study is for academic purposes only and represents an advancement in how higher education courses are idealized and designed.

You will not be identified: all participants will be assigned a number, and your thoughts will be collected via notetaking by my research assistant [name]. Any information you provide that might be sensitive will be redacted to ensure anonymity. Please remember we are not looking for right or wrong answers, but rather, your thoughts as subject matter experts.

Here is the scenario:

We are designing a new 4th year course at the University of Toronto, Mississauga. The course is called “Organizational Change Management,” (OCM) and it will be offered to management and commerce students. The students taking this course will have a finance, marketing, HR, and accounting background, meaning they have already learned their business fundamentals in previous years.

Considering that OCM is a relatively new discipline, we have decided to consult with industry practitioners like yourselves to listen to your thoughts about what could be covered in a course like this.

Each group received a similar initial statement tailored to their role in the research project. All notes were taken by one research assistant and the principal investigator. These notes were later compiled and compared. A summary of the participants' socio-demographic information is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants in phase 2 (focus groups)

Group	N	Criteria for inclusion	Avg. Age	Avg. Experience (years)
Students	7	Senior-level students enrolled in Management or Commerce undergraduate programs for 3+ years. Students enrolled in a graduate program with the completion of an undergraduate degree in Management or Commerce.	22.5	N/A
Academics	6	Teaching responsibilities within accredited higher education institution within Canada. PhD with minimum 2 years of teaching experience.	42.8	12.3
Industry Practitioners	6	Professionals with expertise in the field, currently directly involved with activities (job, consulting, supervision) pertaining to the course scope.	43.3	16.4

A large portion of this research was conducted during the summer, which made it difficult to schedule a time that worked well for all the participants. As such, we decided to move forward with mini-focus groups. In this scenario, “there is a small potential pool of participants [who] are difficult to reach, yet the research design requires that the topic must be discussed in a group” (Ochieng, Wilson, Derrick & Mukherjee, 2017, p. 24). Under these circumstances, researchers can only convene a small group of between two and five participants (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005).

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The data from the focus groups were coded in two stages. In the first stage, the data were coded using broader categories with no limit on the number of codes used. This approach was selected because it is conducive to cataloguing emerging ideas, drawing relationships, and identifying keywords frequently used by the participants (Charmaz, 2006). In total, approximately 38 categories were identified between all three groups, including “assignments,” “projects,” “tests,” “lectures,” “content,” “real-life,” “frameworks,” “models,” “cases,” “case studies,” “employment,” “plagiarism,” “academic skills,” “professional skills,” and “academic integrity.”

In the second stage, we focused on eliminating, combining, or subdividing the coding categories identified in the first stage, with particular attention being given to the recurring ideas and broader themes connecting the codes (Charmaz, 2006; Krueger, 1994; Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). This process allowed us to map the similarities and disparities among the stakeholders. Table 1 below lists the similarities between all groups after the second stage of data coding.

While all of the focus groups were characterized by high levels of participation, some groups focused on some categories more than others. For example, the industry professionals group provided the highest amount of suggestions for content (notably, nudging their comments towards an approach based on “less textbook, more practice”). In contrast, the student group was significantly more preoccupied with assignments and assessments. Finally, the academics/instructors group dedicated more time to discussing course dynamics and a balanced quantity of both content and assignments.

Table 2. Similarities between groups after stage two of data analysis

Categories	Industry Professionals Applicability of content (learn by doing)	Students Applicability of content	Academics Applicability of content	Similarity Index (%)
Course Content	Less theoretical	Building knowledge as you go	Less theoretical	42.1
	Fewer concerns with frameworks	Clear Takeaways	Communication skills	
	Political acumen	Being in the leadership role	Work ethic	
	Discussions about Power	Learn about difficulties during change	Consult previous syllabi	
	Discussion about use of self			
	Business perspective of change			
	Real-life examples and cases	Real-life examples	Real-life examples	
Assignments & Assessment	Case studies	Case studies (from companies we know)	Case studies	60.0
	Role playing	How do we assess cases fairly?	Plagiarism precaution	
	Project-based assignments	Project-based assignments	Project-based assignments	
	Grading based on critical thinking	Grade cases based on rationale	Grades based on rationale & critical thinking	
		Fair assessment and workload	Academic integrity mechanisms (for cases)	
	Quizzes for some classes			
Course Dynamic	Interactive discussions	Interactive discussions	Interactive discussions	75.0
	Tangible		Experiential learning	
	Simulate businesses	Simulate real businesses	Problem-based learning	

Despite the diversity of all groups in terms of age, experience, and background, we found a surprising level of overlap in their responses, suggesting that all three stakeholder groups shared similar perspectives about the design of the course in question.

Industry Professionals/Practitioners Focus Group

The industry professionals focus group contained five participants. Four of these individuals participated approximately equally and enthusiastically, resulting in a rich exchange wherein they engaged with and built upon each other's inputs. The participants ranged in age from 25-55 years, with four of the five participants possessing more than 10 years of experience in the corporate world. At the time of the focus group, all of the participants were leading change management efforts.

All five participants were equally invested during the first discussion. They were specifically interested in what change management is, which sometimes sidetracked their focus from what could be put in a change management course or how it could be assessed. The participants all had experience with change management, which allowed them to discuss the subject at a high and in-depth level. The participants discussed the experiences they had accumulated over the past 25 years of their careers and used this knowledge to assess the proposed course. All participants agreed that, while theoretical knowledge is important, hands-on experience is far more valuable.

A big theme for me is tangibles. I have been through my share of theoretical education, and it really hits you when you try to apply it in the real world without a lot of tangible application. A lot of case studies, a lot of hands-on exercises, and scenarios together. 9/10 people in the workplace are working near change management. They understand 10% of it. Making this a really tangible experience and not just theoretical. (Participant #2 – Industry Professionals)

We need case studies from different sectors/industries like healthcare, financial services, etc. because if you just give someone a case study of the big five banks, it is not going to give the students the context. Secondly, a lot of students might be receivers of change, so how do you enable change in these positions- taking into consideration. (...) Also, role-playing could be very interesting underlying factors such as stakeholders." (Participant #1 – Industry Professionals)

I thought of something when the previous discussion was going on, that's the concept of the use of self. I think something I don't see in new grads is a trivial skill to cultivate as a change practitioner because, at the end of the day, if we are not able to be aware and sense what is happening with stakeholders and organizations, how can we design an intervention that is going to be effective? And I think, your own self is instrumental. The use of self is so important. It is a skill you have to learn. You can teach through role plays and students by asking them "how did you think you did" "what can you change" "how did the stakeholders react". That thinking is really helpful. (Participant #4 – Industry Professionals)

Students Focus Group

From the student's perspective, the dynamic was different. Specifically, deeper connections were observable among those in the alumni group with a few years, or at least one year, of work experience.

Participants ranged between 21-26 years of age, and it was evident that those in their upper 20s drew more upon practical life experiences when supporting their contributions. Nonetheless, all participants drew upon their experiences when describing what would constitute a positive learning experience in an upper-year course.

The dynamic in the focus group was intriguing. It was noticeable how the alumni would often initiate the discussion, with current students adding their thoughts afterwards. One expla-

nation for this phenomenon could be that the current students had not yet had the opportunity to take part in 4th year courses, or that they could not relate to the intricacies of applying their learning due to limited working experience.

(...) I think a great course is when the professor makes time and space open for more discussion, and students are able to ask more questions. Smaller class size helps with that; in large lectures it is intimidating and there is not enough time to ask questions in class. (Participant #5 – Students)

I can jump in here - I like when there is an interactive piece... in my experience I enjoyed classes that had a stimulating piece when there is actively a problem to solve at the end of class, when there is an intention at the end of every lecture, for example, like a follow-up activity or problem to solve. I like a class structure that builds upon from day 1, what we learned on day 1 still applies to day 10, continuity that builds from day 1. I like to be able to look back and understand why I had to learn this – like learning how to build the foundation and then in a few classes you learn how to build a bridge, and you understand why you needed to learn how to build the foundation. (Participant #6 – Students)

The common denominator we found during the analysis is that students want to be part of a course that adds and provides value to their careers and life post-graduation. The underlying theme of the responses was the question of how to make a course meaningful and worth their time.

I can start. I think a great course is a course where concepts are applied in real life. Like when we are able to study examples and about things that are going on, and understanding how it will benefit you in future, it is collaborative, not just the professor talking, it is an ongoing discussion between professors and students. (Participant #3 – Students)

The responses to all five guiding questions indicated that the participants realized that traditional learning routes hardly apply to their lives and learning experiences. That is, participants expressed a desire for curriculum that makes them *want* to learn, not one where they *have* to learn.

I think it's better to steer away from standardized assessments because the course is new. From a work perspective, I am thinking that if we are using new tech, how will we assess the success at the end of it? Part of it is taking aspects of this topic and applying what we already know, compiling aspects of courses that students have already taken, and apply it to the new topic. Using group discussions, cases that align with the class, and being able to draw from previous experience, people have the flexibility to pick their own topic. Basically, you understand what OCM is, then you pick a topic where you think the topics we talked about could be applied. Showcase maybe one problem with multiple solutions so that they could gain different perspectives, qualitative assessments, and not a standardized test; this will help to identify the gaps of where students need help or where attention needs to be placed. (Participant #2 – Students)

By the end of the focus group, participation levels increased once the conversation was fully underway. Although this could be due to the students becoming more comfortable expressing their opinions, the participants also emphasized their belief that case studies should replace traditional examinations. The conver-

sation seemed to have sparked their interest, which may indicate topic relevance to course design from the students' perspective.

I believe the best classes I had were based on case studies. We used to read articles and [discussed them in] class. What really made it memorable, they were companies that I knew, not a lot of numerical stats, relevant...like a story type of case study. We would discuss [the case study] and there were questions where we could have different opinions, but it helped us to understand when participating and gives us the opportunity to hear different opinions. (Participant #3 – Students)

Academics/Instructors Focus Group

All the participants in the academics/instructors focus group had previous experience designing and teaching higher education courses; however, their specific experiences were highly diverse (i.e., different programs, different schools, different disciplines, and even different countries). Although the sample size was relatively small, this diversity of backgrounds allowed for greater probing into different cultures and experiences.

One common theme that arose was that an ideal course should include a focus on experiential knowledge and group projects. The participants emphasized the importance of conceptualizing a course that covers the fundamental theories and concepts and links this knowledge to practical issues faced by organizations.

I agree with Participant #2 and so, assuming you have that background about what a structure should look like, I think it might also be beneficial to try and think about [showing students] what it looks like in practice as well. They might already be familiar with the theoretical concepts of change management, so it might be beneficial to see what the pitfalls are realistically—practicality in the real-world vs the textbook. (Participant #1 – Academics)

Real-world experience can be helpful; something like a case/project that is ongoing. Not like a or b is correct, but rather, the answer [requires] a decent amount of reflection. (Participant #2 – Academics)

Regarding course design, another critical theme emerged: collaborating with peers and incorporating ideas/knowledge from different sources. According to the participants, this gathering process can include consulting with different programs/departments and schools, which can lead to the exploration of past similar resources (i.e., textbooks and course syllabi).

2017 was the last time I designed a course for accounting. First step is the academic piece, such as gathering syllabuses of other similar courses to the one I am designing. It is also important to look at other institutions and get their input. There wasn't much accounting for sciences courses at my University. HR courses at another institution had the blend between financial accounting and management accounting that I needed. (Participant #2 – Academics)

Another common principle proposed by the group was that cases should allow for assessment based on the students' "process of thinking," rather than a simple "right" or "wrong" framework. The participants emphasized that business cases provide more opportunities for student participation and reduce the pressure of selecting only one correct answer. Moreover, the group stressed that business cases are more effective at fostering critical thinking

skills and preparing students for the business world, thus supporting the value of augmenting theoretical content with experiential learning opportunities.

Instead of having writing assessments, it's better to have project-based assessments where a group of students are attached to a mini project in their final year, and they are supervised by a supervisor and then [they] give a presentation to the program coordinators and the employer they are working for/with. (Participant #4 – Academics)

Nonetheless, most participants stated that one major drawback to using case studies was the heightened risk of academic offenses. Since selecting and preparing new case studies each semester requires significant work on the instructor's part, it is not uncommon for instructors to recycle them. This practice allows students to search out the answers on different online platforms that unethically profit from academic malfeasance. The participants agreed that the most plausible solution to this issue is to use a wider variety of cases. However, this also requires more time and energy on the instructor's side.

I've heard instances where case study solution [was] leaked, and this is why [the use of a] case study may be bad. (Participant #3 – Academics)

You need to come up with different case studies so that this academic offense doesn't come into play; this may create extra work for professors, but this is why the experiential knowledge and longer cases are needed. (Participant #5 – Academics)

The conversation about assessment then transitioned to a discussion about the skills students should develop during the course. All participants agreed that strategies like quizzes, tests, and multiple-choice exams should not be utilized in a course like change management. Instead, the participants emphasized the value of using group projects and simulations.

One participant stated that the development of "soft skills," rather than "hard skills" (i.e., job-related knowledge) would be more relevant in this scenario (i.e., the OCM course). Two other participants agreed, noting that hard skills could always be taught on the job. Indeed, many students coming out of university lacking strong soft skills such as communication, professionalism, and interpersonal relationship as curriculums generally tend to do an inadequate job of cultivating them.

I would integrate a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) approach. Last winter I worked as a course instructor in engineering. Giving the students a problem up front and looking at the perspective of an organization and having hands-on learning. I would have anti-racism integration as well into these change management courses, and I've seen how different organizations impact different racial groups and that is why it's important to have a different perspective on this too. (Participant #4 – Academics)

THE OUTCOME – COURSE DESIGN

The course was designed to mimic professional discussions as opposed to traditional lectures, adopting the use of "meeting" language instead of traditional academic discourse. As in regular corporate meetings, participants were encouraged to read the briefing (case or email) and bring their ideas to discuss with the

group and the instructor. The following is an example, extracted from the course syllabus.

Conduct of Class Please shift your mindset when attending this course.

We will try to steer away from traditional classes (lectures). Instead of classes, we will have **weekly business meetings**, and I fully expect you to do your homework. That means, simply: COME PREPARED. Read the suggested material and the cases.

Pay attention to these expectations:

There will be cold calling in this course.
A big portion of your work will be done in teams: please expect to step up and be a good team member or team leader. **Speak up:** I want to hear your questions, opinions, and informed comments on the cases and readings.
Be on time: your group will depend on you.

The academic components were introduced between meetings whenever the participants encountered a new problem, which was purposefully introduced via a case they knew very little about. We worked with three business cases in total, spending an average of 2.5 classes discussing each one in detail, utilizing the in-class assignments to hone specific skills.

All in-class assignments were designed to increase the hands-on dimension of the course emphasized by each of the focus groups. The assignments required the students to apply change management frameworks for making decisions, running simulations, and solving the problems presented by the cases. In addition, in every class, students were required to participate in a detailed notetaking activity called "My Learning Canvas," which was formulated by the author in another SoTL project. This notetaking activity allowed the students to compile all their material (i.e., cases, class discussions, and suggested readings) in one place.

As suggested by all of the groups during the research phase, the course employed an assessment methodology that placed greater importance on critical thinking processes than on traditional "right-or-wrong" tests.

The learning outcomes for the course were clearly stated in the syllabus, which each student received at the beginning of the course. These outcomes were as follows:

- LO 1. Understand and describe the different processes of organizational change.
- LO 2. Break down critical aspects relating to the planning and execution of change projects.
- LO 3. Formulate and examine strategies to conduct successful change endeavors.
- LO 4. Design a proposal for a practical change initiative.

The syllabus also listed the skills the students would develop by actively engaging in the course, namely, strategic thinking, problem solving, public speaking, and systemic thinking.

Students received a weekly message via LMS (Canvas) reminding them of the preparation required for that week, followed by a nudge from the instructor regarding potential problems that would be addressed during the "meeting." This nudge could be an excerpt from the case, followed by questions such as "What would you suggest in this case?" or "How to avoid this

pitfall?” or it may be a piece of media with relevant issues pertaining to the course domain (change management).

The course’s final project required the students to develop a change management pitch relating to something on campus or for an external company. The majority of groups elected to suggest a change within the campus. This experiential project featured most of the characteristics that were stressed during the focus groups, such as tangibility, critical thinking, hands-on activities, and the application of knowledge to solve real-world issues.

THE OUTCOME – STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS

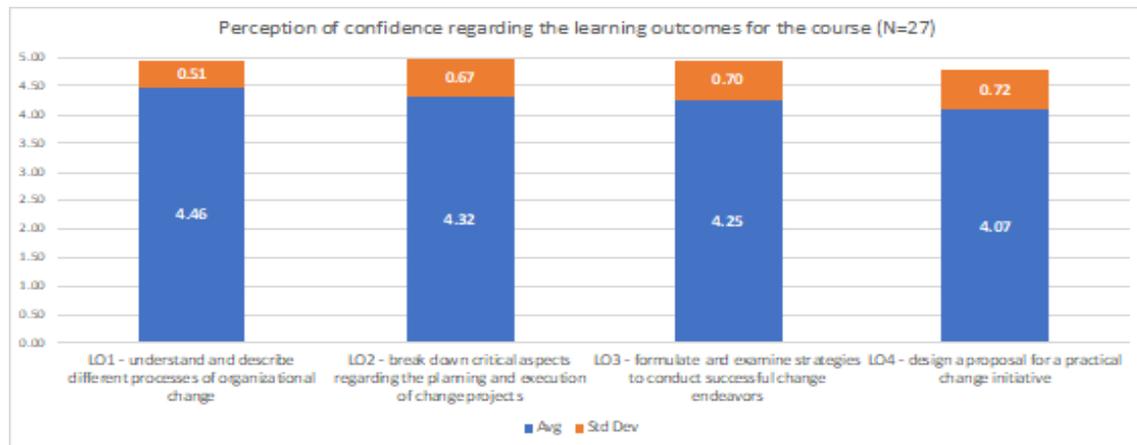
The developed course was piloted in the Fall of 2022 for a group of 33 students in an active learning classroom (ALC). ALCs have a round-table distributed format wherein students are grouped around a perimeter, with the instructor usually in the middle (see appendices for details). We conducted an anonymous midterm review via Qualtrics, asking students what they thought about the course (4-5 weeks in). A total of 23 students participated in the survey, but only 13 completed it in full. Nonetheless, the students gave the course an average score of 4.1 out of 5 (1-Completely dissatisfied; 5-Completely satisfied). Some comments were succinct and objective such as “class is going super well” and “keep fostering class discussions,” while others were more structured towards specific elements, such as the notetaking activity.

In the last week of the term, students were invited to complete a reaction survey about the course. This survey also assessed the students’ perceptions against the learning outcomes and skills envisioned for the course. Unlike the earlier survey, this one had a high participation rate (81% of students completed the survey). The results are displayed in graphics 1 and 2 below.

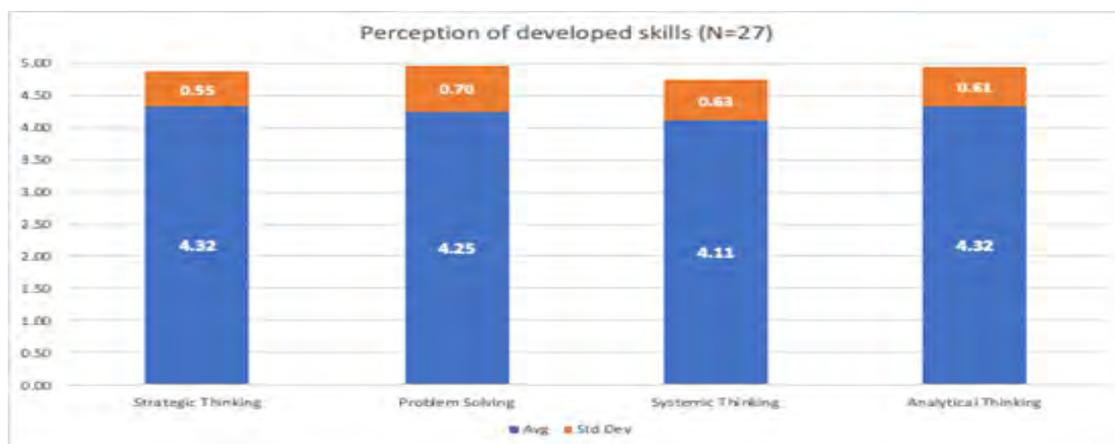
All questions were phrased in the same manner: “Please rate how confident you are with each of the statements below: ‘I can formulate and examine strategies to conduct successful change endeavors.’” As shown in Graphic 1, the students reported high levels of confidence in all learning outcomes for the course. The qualitative data corroborated the quantitative results, with students opining that their learning had been positively impacted by factors such as the choice of cases, the class dynamic, and the real-life applications of the material covered.

We also asked the students to rate their perceptions regarding the skills they had developed during the course. As shown in Graphic 2, they reported high levels of perceived development for the elected skills for the course, which indicates a significant link between the course’s design and outcomes.

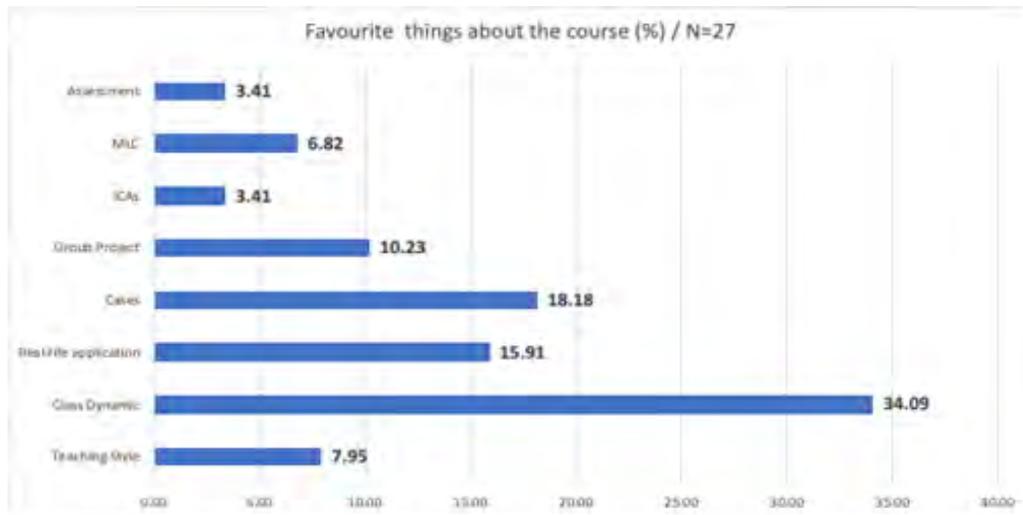
The qualitative data was also coded and quantified using the content analysis framework (Bardin, 1977). Here, students were asked to highlight what they liked most and least about the course. The results are summarized in Graphic 3.



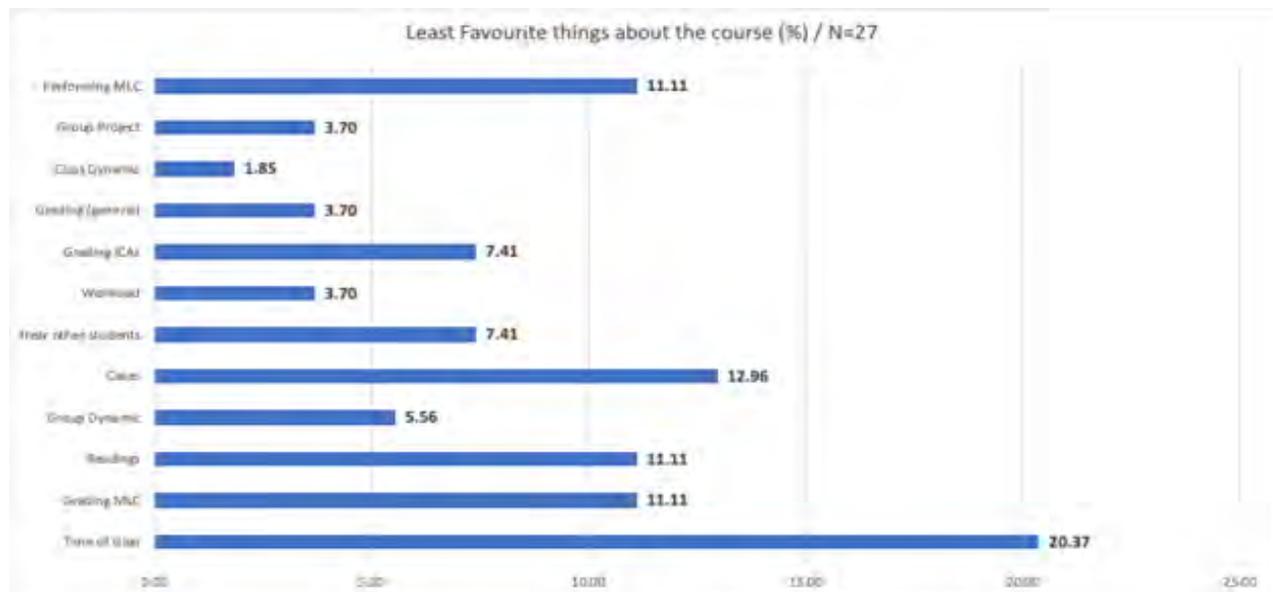
Graphic 1. Students’ perceptions about their confidence regarding learning outcomes.



Graphic 2. Students’ perceptions regarding developed skills after completing the course.



Graphic 3. Content analysis of favourite things about the course.



Graphic 4. Content analysis of least favourite things about the course.



Graphic 5. Satisfaction with different factors of the course.

The original 17 categories were narrowed down to eight broader categories, with the results showing that the students were most fond of the “meeting” concept and the class dynamic (34.09%), followed by the choice and discussion of cases (18.18%) and the perception of real-life application of knowledge (15.91%). These results are an indication of the successful application of the collaborative course design framework, as the exact same categories were highlighted as critical to the course design during the three focus groups.

Assessing the students’ least favourite aspects of the course was somewhat trickier due to the high diversity of elements present. The class time (9 am-11 am on Wednesdays) was identified by 20.37% of students as the least favourite aspect of the course, making it the most common answer for this portion of the assessment. Here, students listed issues such as having to wake up early, the time required to commute to campus, and driving conditions during snow falls in the Canadian autumn and winter as the main reasons for their dissatisfaction with this time slot. All other answers were very close (between 11 and 13%) and included the length of the suggested readings (cases included), the grading of assignments like in-class assignments (ICAs), and the use of My Learning Canvas (MLC). Despite some level of dissatisfaction, the quantitative analysis indicated high overall satisfaction with the course, as shown in Graphic 5.

Students had positive assessments of all aspects of the course, with the most popular aspects being the instructor (4.95), followed by the weekly meetings (4.77) and the cases (4.66). These results support the qualitative analysis and affirm that the students’ experience with the course’s format and dynamics (4.66) was positive overall. This is a testament to the effectiveness of the collaborative course design framework.

When describing their learning experience, the students identified numerous aspects that had positively impacted their experience in the course:

I believe I have learnt a lot in this course. I have learnt how to analyze a case and debrief a case on daily basis. I got to learn how change management in different organizations took place. The examples of cases helped in developing a deeper understanding of change management processes as I was able to see real life examples. It helped in understanding what can go wrong in a change process and how leaders play an important role. I feel that I have become more confident about reading and analyzing the cases. (4th year student)

MGT414 was the first course which allowed us to every week apply our knowledge into real life cases. I really enjoyed how the classes were structured; it was more of a business meeting with discussions instead of just a lecture. The layout of the classroom also fostered communication, especially with our team. I also enjoyed the in-class assignments, as [they] allowed our team to get closer and get to know each other better, while reflecting on the cases at the same time. Overall, it was a great experience and I recommend teaching this course again in the future. (3rd year student)

Overall, my learning experience was fruitful, as it taught me concepts outside just theory and frameworks, but instead allowed me to gain more real-life experiences. The learning curve was well-structured, and each week built onto the next and helped with the case application. We also covered a wide range of change management concepts and different

approaches, which showed that there was not a singular approach to a solution. It helped me better understand the reality of change management and how it works outside classrooms. (4th year student)

Students have pointed out many aspects that were discussed with all groups of stakeholders during the focus group stage of the project. Naturally, some students struggled with the course’s more dynamic format, which goes beyond traditional teaching methods (lecture and memorization-based exams).

It is a different experience from all the other courses I have ever taken. There is no textbook and no framework or bullet points to memorize. Instead, we learn from experience, which is all the cases that we have gone through in class. Then we learn from it. In a way, it is hard to study for this course because there is no framework. (4th year student)

My learning experience is the topic, and the cases are wonderful, but the time management and grade results made me stressed. (3rd year student)

This paradox was expected, as most higher education courses are still based on traditional tools and approaches wherein students must provide “the right answer” in order to get good grades, as opposed to focusing on how to problem-solve and analyze complex issues in an ambiguous business scenario (Cantillon, 2003).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One of this study’s key limitations is the relatively small number of participants. Therefore, we suggest that future research expand the number of participants in both the survey and focus group stages to obtain a broader range of input from all stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents a tri-party collaborative course design framework and shows that including multiple stakeholders in a consultative capacity can offer invaluable insights and enrich the course-design process. The results revealed significant overlap in the interests and suggestions of the three stakeholder groups, which was surprising given the diversity of their educational contexts, backgrounds, experiences, and roles.

Additionally, by involving diverse stakeholder groups and analyzing data systematically, instructors and educational developers will be exposed to different perspectives that can enrich their course design and introduce new and challenging ideas for their courses. With a growing number of collaborative initiatives in courses that overlap traditional disciplines—for example, business and coding, or data science and urban innovation—a more dynamic approach like the tri-party CCD can create fertile ground for innovative perspectives and scenarios.

In the realm of SoTL, it is imperative to continually assess and refine pedagogical methods to ensure they align with students’ evolving needs and expectations. By advocating for a CCD approach that prioritizes input from students, regulatory bodies, and experts from various disciplines, this study promotes a more student-centered and responsive approach to education. Integrating diverse perspectives and experiences into course design aligns with SoTL’s objective of creating evidence-based practices that foster deep and meaningful learning.

Furthermore, the study’s recommendation to revisit and redesign existing courses through the framework aligns with

SoTL's commitment to ongoing inquiry and reflection. This approach encourages educators to engage in a continuous improvement cycle, where the effectiveness of their teaching methods is regularly assessed and adapted. By emphasizing the importance of course redesign, this study encourages the SoTL community to explore how established courses can be transformed to better meet the educational needs of today's diverse student populations.

Applicability across different disciplines and internationally

Higher education course design can include several parties depending on the field of practice. For example, in highly regulated practices such as Nursing, Law, and Accounting, it is common for faculty and course designers to receive direct input from the regulatory bodies on content, focus, and critical competencies that will further be tested in an accreditation process for a professional certification (Hager & Goncz, 1994).

The proposed framework here seeks to further enhance the granularity of content even when overarching guidelines are present. For example, even though a regulatory body can provide national guidelines for a certain profession, including practitioners from a remote rural area might bring additional insights that will help the instructor to verify for blindspots caused by a lack of resources which might happen frequently in certain regions (even basic things like electricity or internet, which might be intermittent in some geographical locations). Moreover, learning from students from a particular Institution with distinct challenges, such as having a full-time job and studying at night or being in areas that are more prone to violence, might give instructors and course designers insightful information about how to structure the whole learning dynamic.

Proactive listening and learning from those who directly impact or are impacted by that learning can be highly beneficial to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education courses. This framework is also valuable for fostering a more inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environment within a specific discipline across different academic fields and international contexts. Recognizing that diversity extends beyond geographical boundaries, the proposed framework encourages educators and course designers to engage with a global perspective.

Higher education institutions are welcoming students from diverse cultural backgrounds in an increasingly interconnected world. By actively seeking input from international students, this framework can help better tailor course content and delivery methods to accommodate various learning styles and cultural norms (Sinjini, 2021). For instance, understanding international students' unique challenges and expectations, such as language barriers or different educational backgrounds, can lead to developing more effective teaching strategies and support systems.

Furthermore, the applicability of this framework extends to interdisciplinary collaboration. As academic disciplines become more intertwined, exchanging ideas and expertise from different fields becomes crucial. By involving experts from various disciplines in course design, educators can create a holistic learning experience that prepares students to tackle complex, real-world problems that often require a multidisciplinary approach.

The proposed framework promotes inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and interdisciplinary collaboration in higher education course design, benefiting educators and students across diverse

disciplines and international settings. It is a powerful tool for enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education in an ever-evolving global landscape.

As a suggestion for future research, we recommend applying the framework to revisit and redesign existing courses instead of creating new ones. This amplified perspective might expand on the benefits of a CCD approach for instructors, educational developers, and, ultimately, students. By taking this approach, researchers can delve into the potential for revitalizing outdated curricula and improving students' learning experiences in these courses. This could lead to a deeper understanding of how course redesign impacts student engagement, retention, and overall academic performance. Additionally, investigating the challenges and successes of implementing the framework in established courses can provide valuable insights into the practical aspects of its application and inform best practices for educational institutions looking to enhance their existing offerings. Such research would contribute to the ongoing evolution of higher education and its ability to meet the ever-changing needs of diverse student populations.

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APPENDIX

Active Learning Classroom picture



Source: University of Toronto Mississauga