2-2015

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Topics, Texts, and Critical Approaches: Integrating Dimensions of Liberal Learning in an Undergraduate Management Course

James C. Spee¹ and Allison Fraiberg¹

Abstract
In light of recent critiques of management education, this article examines the Carnegie Report’s argument that the core components of liberal arts education (Analytical Thinking, Multiple Framing, The Reflective Exploration of Meaning, and Practical Reasoning) can and should be integrated into the undergraduate business curriculum. It then reviews prior efforts to draw on liberal learning in management education and provides an illustration of integration in the design of a required undergraduate management course for working adults. Included is a template that faculty can follow to better integrate Colby’s four dimensions of liberal learning into their business and management courses, with emphasis on the reflective exploration of meaning. In addition to course specifics, the article explores learning outcomes and student/administrative/institutional responses, as well as limitations, challenges, and opportunities for the future.

Keywords
undergraduate, interdisciplinary teaching, teaching and learning, rhetoric and discourse, complexity, written exercises, music, films, works of art, theatre, poetry

This article is part of the Special Issue, “Integrating Liberal Learning, Humanities, and Management Education: Putting the Carnegie Report Into Practice.”

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The need to integrate liberal learning, humanities, and management education as called for by the Carnegie Report (Colby, Ehrlich, Sullivan, & Dolle, 2011) reflects the ways in which management education in general and business schools in particular have been divorced from the mainstream life of universities—that is, from the historic roots of higher education in the arts and sciences. Although management researchers have adopted standards of rigor from the liberal arts and social sciences, management educators have been separated from their colleagues on the rest of campus for many decades (Khurana, 2011) and have only recently begun to reestablish their relationship by integrating the core skills of the liberal arts into management education.

This article identifies the core components of liberal arts education (Analytical Thinking, Multiple Framing, The Reflective Exploration of Meaning, and Practical Reasoning) proposed by Colby et al. (2011) and examines why they should be integrated as part of the undergraduate business curriculum. It briefly reviews prior efforts to draw on liberal learning in management education and offers a detailed illustration of integrated liberal learning in the design of a required undergraduate management course for working professionals. The illustration provides a template that faculty can follow to better integrate Colby et al.’s four dimensions of liberal learning into their business and management courses. In addition to course specifics, the article explores learning outcomes and student/administrative/institutional responses, as well as the limitations, challenges, and opportunities for the future of such integration.

Integration and the Central Dimensions of Liberal Learning From the Carnegie Report

In their report for the Carnegie Foundation, Colby et al. (2011) describe four central dimensions of liberal learning, listed below in Figure 1. These dimensions coincide with the ways in which liberal learning has been infused in management education over time, with varying degrees of success.

We see these four dimensions as interconnected and mutually dependent. Being good at one requires being good at all four; therefore, integration of these skills should be a priority. Colby et al. (2011) make five clear recommendations to enhance integration of liberal learning in the business curriculum:

1. Make a strong liberal education part of the undergraduate experience for every business major.
2. Incorporate liberal learning into the undergraduate business curriculum.
3. Link together business and arts and sciences curricula in ways that help students make connections.
4. Intentionally integrate arts and sciences with business education.
5. Encourage business educators to contribute to teaching and learning in the arts and sciences (p. 60).

The illustration that follows specifically addresses the first four recommendations and opens the door for fulfilling the fifth. However, before describing how our specific integration incorporates these recommendations, we will briefly review how management education has addressed Colby et al.’s four dimensions and how management educators have drawn on liberal learning in the existing literature.

Figure 1. Liberal learning and its central dimensions.  
Source. Adapted from Colby, Ehrlich, Sullivan, and Dolle (2011, p. 60).
Practical Reasoning

Colby et al. (2011) define Practical Reasoning as “the capacity to draw on knowledge and intellectual skills to engage concretely in the world” (p. 60). They argue that “Practical Reasoning allows the individual to go beyond reflection to deliberate and decide on the best course of action within a particular situation” and that “such thinking is a characteristic of professional judgment, including that of business leaders, as well as being a key capacity of citizens and statesmen” (p. 60).

Practical reasoning has been at the core of the management curriculum since the founding of the first business school more than 150 years ago (Khurana, 2011). Much of Khurana’s work traces how efforts to standardize and “improve” management education shifted over time. The initial view of the manager was as someone who balances competing requirements for differentiation and coordination between various stakeholder groups. This eventually led to the view of the manager as a pure economic agent who must be incentivized to do what is best, not for society as a whole but for himself (or, rarely, herself) based on inducements such as stock options and bonuses tied to stock price. Within business schools, faculty usually agree that practical skills are necessary, but political disagreements about which functions and skills should be foremost still abound (Navarro, 2008).

The business school’s emphasis on quantitative analysis that yields a single right answer or on case study analysis that results in a single best recommendation may be appropriate in many situations, but the business environment of the 21st century has increasingly taken on the characteristics of what Rittel and Webber (1973) labeled “wicked” problems, as opposed to “tame” ones. Camillus (2008) points out,

A wicked problem has innumerable causes, is tough to describe, and doesn’t have a right answer . . . . Environmental degradation, terrorism, and poverty—these are classic examples of wicked problems. They’re the opposite of hard but ordinary problems, which people can solve in a finite time period by applying standard techniques. Not only do conventional processes fail to tackle wicked problems, but they may exacerbate situations by generating undesirable consequences. (p. 100)

The types of practical skills recommended by Colby et al. (2011), which center on the role of liberal learning’s core elements, differ from the traditional approach used in business schools in ways that are particularly well suited to understanding wicked problems and beginning to resolve the irresolvable. Business school curricula tend to treat practical reasoning as if it exists in isolation from the other core dimensions. However, without analytic
thinking, practical reasoning can become a heuristic-based decision, missing deeper systemic issues that analysis could reveal. Without consideration of multiple frames, practical reasoning can become a reinforcement of the manager’s existing worldview that could miss the insights that diverse viewpoints could add. Without reflective exploration of meaning, practical reasoning could result in solutions that appear sound but result in negative consequences for the individuals involved and for society as a whole at a deep existential level. Practical reasoning, therefore, cannot stand on its own as a core dimension of business education.

**Analytical Thinking**

Analytical thinking, Colby et al. (2011) argue, “abstracts from particular experience in order to produce formal knowledge that is general in nature and independent of any particular content” (p. 60). They add that analytical thinking is “methodical and consistent, beginning with a particular set of assumptions or categories and proceeding to develop the implications of these concepts through deduction” (p. 60). Analytical thinking is the first of the four core dimensions Colby et al. list in their model, and it has been historically a core element of management education as well. After business schools became part of universities, business educators needed desperately to position their work in relationship to their liberal arts and sciences colleagues. That positioning came through a widespread borrowing and adaptation of analytic models from social sciences and humanities (Khurana, 2011). As Khurana notes, business education continued to be widely variable and focused almost entirely on practical reasoning until the late 1950s when the Ford Foundation began funding to make business schools academically competitive with other university departments, with little concern for practical application. According to Khurana (2011), the dominant analytic model in business education has been that of economics, which uses a combination of mathematics, logic, and deductive reasoning to come to conclusions, although the underlying assumptions can reflect the political views of the analyst.

The single-minded pursuit of profit as the only measure of success can lead managers to overlook how that pursuit might affect wider communities. Clearly, analytic thinking must be integrated with the other core dimensions of liberal learning to be effective. Without application to practical reasoning, analytic thinking is just an academic exercise. Without multiple framing, analysis will rely on single models or ways of knowing that may only partially encompass the social, cultural, technical, and political dimensions of
the business environment. Without a reflective exploration of meaning, analytic thinking becomes an empty exercise without a deeper purpose.

**Multiple Framing**

Colby et al. (2011) define “Multiple Framing,” the third essential component of liberal education, as “the ability to work intellectually with fundamentally different, sometimes mutually incompatible, analytical perspectives” (p. 60). They add that “it involves conscious awareness that any particular scheme of Analytical Thinking or intellectual discipline frames experience in particular ways” (p. 60). While business educators may have stayed true to their liberal education roots by emphasizing analytic skills, Khurana (2011) provides strong evidence that doing so may have hampered their graduates’ ability to see how others might view their actions when they seek only to maximize profits above all other goals.

The liberal education dimension of multiple framing helps mitigate this danger. Moral imagination (Werhane, 1999), a conceptual model used in business ethics, was integrated specifically to help managers see broader consequences of their decisions even when key stakeholders were not present in the discussion. Multiple framing in Colby et al.’s (2011) view goes beyond the level of individual or groups expressing their opinions in a decision-making process to involving deeper analysis using different ways of knowing.

Although much of the discussion of multiple frames takes place in ethics and social responsibility courses, it can also take place in courses on management theory (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Morgan, 1986), in business capstone courses that integrate knowledge from across business functions, and in courses on global and cross-cultural management. For example, Bolman and Deal (2008) recommend viewing organizations through multiple lenses including structural, human resources, political, and structural frames. An even more critical view might include frames that do not fit into the typical business school approach, such as gender, ethnicity, and epistemology. Some management courses examine the configurations of power, gender, and discrimination in business, but these are less prevalent. Outside of management, courses in economics, finance, accounting, and operations also bring different analytic frames to bear on issues in business, but they may not necessarily reflect a different epistemology.

It is also clear, however, that multiple framing that brings together competing analytic models, some of which have only been marginally tested for practical application, will only confuse students and encourage them to use heuristics rather than deep analysis of the issues that arise in their business careers (Navarro, 2008). The frames chosen should help enlighten practical
reasoning and analytic thinking. To make decisions about which models to use, which voices to privilege, and how best to apply what they have learned, business school graduates need to understand their role within bigger systems of commercial enterprise and in society as a whole. Therefore, business educators need to develop a much fuller relationship with liberal learning by helping their students reflectively explore the meaning of what they learn.

**Reflective Exploration of Meaning**

“Reflective Exploration of Meaning,” Colby et al. (2011) argue, “involves the exploration of meaning, values, and commitment” and “raises questions such as what difference does a particular understanding or approach things make to who I am, how I engage the world, and what it is reasonable for me to imagine and hope” (p. 60). Reflective exploration of meaning is of special interest to management educators for several reasons. First, it is closely tied to the concept of calling or vocation (Dobrow & Tosti-Kharas, 2012; Mouw, 1980; Sullivan, 2004): What does it mean to be a manager, a business owner, or an employee? This question strongly resonates with Khurana’s (2011) analysis of the ways business education can lead students to a narrow and venal view of the business career as a means for personal gain as opposed to a way to increase the well-being of society. Second, reflective exploration of meaning is a skill to which liberal arts education is particularly well suited, although that aspect can be overlooked when faculty focus only on the technical side of their fields, even when that field is philosophy or a language. Third, the exploration of meaning goes beyond ethics and social responsibility, to core values and commitment to deeply held beliefs about self and others, both in the present and in the future. What is the point of achieving financial success if it leaves you lonely and unhappy? The search for meaning helps students explore these issues in new ways, trying out various frameworks in a safe environment.

**Prior Efforts to Draw on Liberal Learning in Management Education**

The practice of drawing on the liberal arts to evoke analytical thinking, reflection, and practical reasoning in business studies, and especially management classrooms, is not new. Perhaps the most pronounced way in which management studies have drawn on liberal learning practices has been to promote critical thinking within management classrooms (Boyce, 1996; Healey, 2005; Whyte, 2007; Wisendanger, 1994). Often, that critical component focuses on raising levels of reflection in practice (Carson & Fisher,
Recent literature (Spee and Fraiberg, 2006; Hedberg, 2008; Hibbert, 2013; Pavlovich, Collins, & Jones, 2009; Welsh & Dehler, 2013) highlights the importance of liberal learning practices in management education. Liberal learning practices have been employed in management teaching settings, furthering discussions of emotion, particularly passion, and emotional intelligence (Bilimoria, 1999; Goleman, 1998; Grisham, 2006; Huffman & Kilian, 2012; Kostera, 1997; Morris, Urbanski, & Fuller, 2005); as a way to provoke creativity in thinking (Brown, 2006; Buswick, 2005; Essex & Mainemelis, 2002; Grisoni & Kirk, 2006); and as a way to promote authenticity of voice and identity (Eriksen, 2012; Gallos, 1997; Hiley, 2006). It is worthwhile to note that this journal has demonstrated a profound and continuing commitment to the integration of liberal learning components into management education, as evidenced not only by this issue but also by the regular appearance of scholarship devoted to the subject matter.

Most commonly, management course developers have drawn on subject matter and practices within the arts and humanities for such endeavors (Gagliardi & Czarniawska, 2006). Under that substantial umbrella, scholars have turned to the fields of art (Colakoglu & Littlefield, 2011; Cowan, 2007); music (Comer & Holbrook, 2012); history (Kohn, 2013); and, more extensively, film (Billsberry & Gilbert, 2008; Bumpus, 2005; Champoux, 1999; Clemens & Wolff, 1999; Holbrook, 2009; Smith, 2009; V. F. Taylor & Provitera, 2011).

Within the humanities, literary texts have served as a remarkable resource for management classrooms, and those texts have been employed in several ways. Most often, faculty members have used literary texts as nontraditional types of cases to analyze concepts of leadership, management strategy, and organizational behavior. In this vein, literary fiction has become a popular resource (Badaracco, 2006; Brawer, 1998; Clemens & Mayer, 1999; Levy, 2007; Puffer, 1991; Short & Ketchen, 2005; Short & Reeves, 2009; Watts, 2003; Westerman & Westerman, 2009). Drama, particularly Shakespeare, has become a genre ripe for “case analysis” (Corrigan, 1999; Watts, 2003; Whitney & Packer, 2000), and theater skills have also been integrated into management courses (Huffaker & West, 2005). Poetry, interestingly enough, has served as a prominent resource for educators in these areas of study (Morris et al., 2005). Because texts in the literary humanities rely on language complexity, symbolic language, and ambiguity, they demand analytical mulling, invite reflection, and summon multiple perspectives.

**Critical Analysis in Context—A Course Illustration**

Critical Analysis in Context, which emerges primarily from this final approach, is a required upper-division course for undergraduate majors in a
School of Business at a private southern California liberal arts university. The course, required within the major (not a prerequisite general education course), was designed and administered by School of Business humanities-trained faculty and has been taught regularly for many years. Because our undergraduate students are working professionals re-entering college, often after a significant break, the faculty originally conceived of Critical Analysis in Context as a more traditional service course in writing. However, the evolution of the course from that skills/service purpose to one that integrates business content and Colby et al.’s (2011) central dimensions of liberal learning serves as the focus here. In its 2014 form, Critical Analysis in Context is unlike traditional critical analysis courses that apply analytical skills to humanities-based content (usually literature since, most often, these are English department service courses) because no separation of critical thinking skills development, business content, and reflective application exists in the course.

Through analytical thinking about business-related texts from multiply-framed disciplines and time periods, students reflect on and interrogate the conditions and practices of contemporary working life and apply discoveries from their reflection to their own organizational experiences. Although Critical Analysis in Context implements all of Colby et al.’s (2011) recommendations for rethinking undergraduate business education, it pays particular attention to two dimensions of liberal learning: Reflective Exploration of Meaning and Multiple Framing of Perspectives.

Three aspects of the course will be highlighted in detail to illustrate how liberal learning objectives are integrated into this business education course. First, we describe how grounding the course in analytical thinking and the reflective exploration of meaning can determine a range of topics and themes. Second, an explanation of the course’s “juxtapositional,” or companion, approach to text selection illustrates how to implement a multiple framing device to promote reflective exploration of meaning. Third, we introduce a set of critical approaches that employ practical reasoning, which students apply to diverse business situations and problems. The sequencing of the integrations follows this course design process: (a) choosing course topics and themes, (b) choosing course materials and readings, and (c) developing a framing device for specific analytical assignments.

**Integration 1: Reflective Exploration of Meaning to Determine Course Purpose, Topics, and Themes**

Analytical thinking in Critical Analysis in Context is grounded in reflecting on the processes and key concepts of business itself. In his collection
Reflections on Commercial Life, Patrick Murray (1997) astutely stated, “Living in a commercial society does not endow us with a reflective knowledge of its structuring forms” (p. 2). We live in commercial society, yet the mere fact of doing so in no way guarantees that we understand why we do so or how we came to be here. How did business come to look like it does now? How do we learn about where we come from in terms of commercial culture? What do we know about commerce and how do we learn to reflect on it? These questions ground Critical Analysis in Context.

Our students are working professionals immersed in business culture. They spend a lot of time at work, doing work, and finding work. This course offers students a chance to step away to reflect on the meaning of work and their place in its structures and to analyze work culture from a critical perspective. Instead of just learning how to get tasks done (reports, business proposals, accounting spreadsheets), this course asks students to hesitate—to question why projects look the way they do, why certain systems are in place, and how things might work in other ways. After all, if all a business school does is teach students how to do obediently the things we already do in business, we suffocate innovation and imagination—and we fail both our students and the true spirit of business. Below are descriptions of two iterations of Critical Analysis in Context, each grounded in the purpose of building reflective exploration of meaning into the process of analytical thinking.

Course Topic: The Meanings of Work

One version of the course stems from a fairly simple premise: to guide students through ways of reflecting on the meaning of work, something less common than one might expect in business programs, particularly those geared to working adults. Students come to the school from all areas and levels of industry. In their business and management courses, they learn how organizations function, how to analyze data, how the economy works, how human resources operates, how to determine and analyze their own productivity and effectiveness, and perhaps how to resolve conflict and communicate effectively.

However, very, very few students are asked to reflect on the meaning of work for themselves, for their families, and for the cultures in which they live. And that is precisely the focus—the context—of this theme of Critical Analysis in Context. Students are assigned key texts in the history, sociology, or literature of work, but in their efforts to make sense of the ideas presented, they are asked to grapple with how they have experienced those ideas and how the concepts and practices they are confronting have determined the nature of work for themselves and for others they know. How has working
life altered and constructed their identity or how they engage the world? How has work influenced what we imagine and hope to be possible? These are the overarching guiding questions of this version of the course.

When working with specific texts, the emphasis is on reflecting on how concepts animate and condition students’ lives. For example, when working with the sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild’s (1983) concept of emotional labor, guiding questions include the following: What have been the personal and professional consequences of emotional labor I have performed? Why is this meaningful? Or when analyzing practices of Taylorization, key questions include the following: How is my organization Taylorized, and how does that constitute and limit my work and home life? How does it determine my hopes and possibilities? Why does this matter?

In all cases, the objective is not limited to understanding the material or efficiently applying it to a business case or organization. Instead, the goal is to reflect on the meaning of that concept in relation to students’ experiences and identities. The course introduces a critical perspective that asks students to consider why these ideas took hold, what the consequences were, and to what extent these ideas have contributed to who they are as people working in the world.

Course Topic: The Assumptions of Globalization

In this iteration of the course, the focus is on the concept, practices, and experiences of globalization. This is not, however, a traditional global business course in which students learn how to globalize business practices, how businesses have emerged in international contexts, or how businesses have participated in a global marketplace. It is also not geared toward how to practice management in a globalized organization. Instead, the focus is, once again, on applying analytical thinking to explore the unstated meanings of globalization in a reflective manner, to use reflection as a means to adopting a critical perspective on this often unexamined yet far-reaching concept. What assumptions about globalization do we neglect to notice when we teach traditional “global” courses in business and management?

Extensive classroom time is committed to interrogating the ways in which we have inherited our concepts of the globe—the world, its people, places, and positions. For example, we analyze maps and cartograms to show the hidden assumptions of representation. What assumptions do we have about our cartographic representations of the world? What are the consequences of putting north “on top” and south “on the bottom”? How does the way we see the planet affect the way we engage economically on it? Students also reflect on the implications of the vocabulary embedded in discussions of
globalization. What values and assumptions are produced and reproduced when we talk about “first world” and “third world” or “developed” and “developing”? Who and what are included and excluded when we say “global”?1

This integration strategy relies on bringing the central dimensions of liberal learning to traditional business program subjects. In other words, by reflecting on the meanings created by the metaphors, assumptions, and categories already circulating within business curricula, we can look at what we already teach in business programs to discover underlying liberal arts education elements and essentials—to work from the inside, if you will. When business students actively engage in this kind of reflection, they become students pursuing a liberal arts education. And they become reflective citizens capable of changing the structures of business they inherit. Globalization is just one standard business subject ripe for this kind of reflective examination. What structures, assumptions, and vocabularies do we inherit, for example, in our organizational behavior, managerial leadership, strategy, and marketing courses? The possibilities for strategic integration based on analytical reflective exploration of meaning abound across other business topics, if applied in ways similar to those described above.

Integration 2: Multiple Framing—a Juxtapositional Approach to Course Materials Selection

This integration example illustrates ways to choose and organize materials in the course in order to create ways for students to make connections and, perhaps more important, confront conflicts across disciplines. We employ a juxtapositional, or companion, approach to materials selection in which texts from diverse disciplines, different time periods, different sociocultural locations, and a range of genres and form are selected to form a conceptual unit of study. This approach invokes Colby et al.’s (2011) description of multiple framing to promote liberal learning. Multiple framing, as noted earlier, is “the ability to work intellectually with fundamentally different, sometimes mutually incompatible, analytical perspectives” (p. 60). By choosing texts across disciplines, across time periods, and across form and genres, students can confront contrasting epistemologies and analytical frameworks.

For example, if the course topic is “meanings of work” (from Integration 1), the specific topic within a segment of the course might be “reflecting on efficiency.” Typical materials selected for analysis might include the following: (a) a historical management theory text, such as F. W. Taylor’s (1911) Principles of Scientific Management; (b) a poem, such as Auden’s (1991)
“The Managers”; (c) a sociocultural critique, such as Braverman’s (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capital*; (d) a historical “social guidance” film, such as *The Easier Way* (Handy Jam, 1946); (e) a selection from a contemporary company training manual; and (f) a chapter on efficiency in a current standard management textbook.

These materials might be covered over a 2-week span, but students are meant to study them as a conceptual unit. Crucial here is that the materials come from a range of disciplines, including literature, sociology, management, cultural studies, business, film, and as some would argue for Taylor, engineering. These texts appear over a 100-year time span and include multiple forms and genres, including business theory, visual media, trade/organization publications, and educational textbooks. This multiple framing technique can create the pedagogical conditions not only to find what resonates across these positions on efficiency but also to highlight contrasting meanings, attitudes, and questions posed about the topic that come about because of analytical differences. For instance, the “how-to” narrative spirit of a textbook chapter is complicated by a cultural-political critique found in a sociology of work text (e.g., Braverman, 1974). The ideological visual imperative embedded in an old industry film prompts recognition of similar, although ostensibly more sophisticated, expressions in a company training manual. The use of metaphor, image, and ambiguity in a poem about managers highlights the presence or lack of linguistic complexity in a managerial text such as Robbins and Coulter (2013).

If all course materials are from a single discipline (e.g., management), then the way that discipline frames experience can be taken for granted. If all course materials are from the present, or if a gradual chronological approach is employed, the sociocultural changes across time are elided or minimized. If all material stems from a textbook, diverse analytical perspectives become invisible. The multiple framing approach to text selection encourages reflection about compatibility issues across disciplines, time periods, and formats. It embraces enthusiastically what can be a rather jarring cross-disciplinary, cross-genre, and time-collapsing experience.

**Integration 3: Practical Reasoning—Critical Approaches for Business Analytical Study**

The final design aspect of Critical Analysis in Context relies on essential tenets of critical thinking to develop comprehensive critical approaches to business analysis that promote the liberal learning objective of practical reasoning. These critical approaches frame all analytical assignments in the
course. Each critical approach is built on the idea that good analysis involves a demonstration of understanding of the subject in question (business theory, problem, or case) and a significant contribution by the writer that adds to the discussion.

These critical approaches attempt to force students out of the habit of (a) simply summarizing research, cases, or organizational information or (b) what has become all too common in student work, using research merely to validate, or “back up,” what they already think. Each critical approach demands that students articulate their understanding of the business subject and relevant research and, at the same time, contribute original thought to the issue. In particular, use of each of the approaches below builds into the process what Colby et al. (2011) define as practical reasoning: that which “allows the individual to go beyond reflection to deliberate and decide on the best course of action within a particular situation” (p. 60). Each approach relies on central critical thinking skills: application of a concept, determination of appropriate levels of comparison, and evaluation of assumptions. These critical approaches take the ingredients of critical thinking but transform them into a framework for practical reasoning (Table 1).

**Critical Approach 1: Application**

With this approach, students take a concept or theory that was introduced in class and apply it to a specific business situation, case, context, or problem. To be successful, this kind of analysis must demonstrate understanding of the concept and contribute to the scholarly conversation about that theory by reflecting on how it operates within a certain business context. Typical guiding questions to promote reflective exploration of meaning with this approach include the following: How does concept X apply to business situation Y? Why is this significant?

**Critical Approaches 2 and 3: Unexpected Similarity or Difference**

These two approaches replace traditional compare and contrast types of assignments, which, unfortunately, typically evoke from students glorified, unreflective laundry lists of similarities and differences between subjects. Instead, with these two critical approaches, students take two business cases, situations, or problems and focus on one unexpected similarity or difference. If the two situations seem alike, the approach asks students to uncover an ironic difference. Conversely, if the two situations seem rather different,
students work to uncover a veiled similarity. In each case, students must demonstrate an understanding of the reasons for comparison in the first place but must also persevere to discover distinguishing or resonating meaning between subjects. Typical guiding questions to promote practical reasoning with these approaches are the following: Why is the similarity/difference I have found unexpected? How and why would this matter in this business context?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical approach</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Works best when</th>
<th>Typical analytical question to guide reflection toward practical reasoning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Application</td>
<td>Application of a specific concept or theory to a business situation, case, context, or problem</td>
<td>Analyzing one concept in relation to one specific situation</td>
<td>How does concept X apply to situation Y? Why is this significant?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unexpected similarity</td>
<td>Identification of an unexpected similarity between two business situations, cases, positions, or problems that appear to be quite different</td>
<td>Comparing two ostensibly opposing positions</td>
<td>Why is the similarity I’ve found unexpected? How/why is this significant?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unexpected difference</td>
<td>Identification of an unexpected difference between two business situations, cases, positions, or problems that appear to be quite similar</td>
<td>Comparing two ostensibly similar positions</td>
<td>Why is the difference I’ve found unexpected? How/why is this significant?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omission</td>
<td>Consideration of a business issue not currently included in the research, case, situation, or stakeholders’ positions</td>
<td>When analyzing three or more positions, cases, or situations</td>
<td>Why is issue X absent from the research, case, or situation? Why does this matter?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumption</td>
<td>Consideration of an assumption made in the research, case, situation, or stakeholders’ positions</td>
<td>When analyzing three or more positions, cases, or situations</td>
<td>How has this assumption developed in the research, case, or situation? Why is it significant? How does it affect consideration of the problem?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recuperation</td>
<td>Reconsideration of a position deemed unimportant by the research, cases, or stakeholders’ positions</td>
<td>When analyzing three or more positions, cases, or situations</td>
<td>Why has this position/idea been dismissed? What does recuperating it offer to the discussion?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Critical Approaches 4, 5, and 6: Omission, Assumption, and Recuperation

These final three approaches require that students notice patterns within and across business research, cases, situations, or stakeholders’ positions. They are designed to eliminate the tendency of students to use research in order to validate a preconceived idea. With these approaches, students are required to notice patterns of omission, assumption, and dismissal within the business context. Students here must begin noticing what stakeholders have left out, assumed, or dismissed in the analysis to this point in order to determine a course of action based on practical reason. Typical guiding questions to promote practical reasoning with these approaches include the following: (a) Omission: Why is issue X absent from the business research, case, or situation? Why does this matter in this business context? (b) Assumption: How has this assumption developed in the research, case, or situation? Why is it significant? How does it affect consideration of the problem and decisions about courses of action? (c) Recuperation: Why has this position/idea been dismissed? What does recuperating it offer?

This collection of critical approaches to analysis offers students a vital framework to generate practical reasoning skills. Whether they are applying a newly learned concept to a business setting of their choosing, teasing out a subtle difference or similarity between cases, or noticing patterns of omissions, assumptions, or dismissals, students’ contribution portion of the analysis demands analytical thinking and practical reasoning. The bulk of the discovery process is in their hands. To contribute, students must consider what it means to leave a subject out of the scholarly conversation, what values are reproduced when a perspective is dismissed, or what difference it makes to them when certain assumptions about business are perpetuated. These critical approaches, by framing how to search for meaning in a reflective way and then decide on the best course of action, create a contribution imperative for students.

Student and Institutional Responses

It is meaningful to note that this course owes its genesis to one introduced almost 30 years ago in our undergraduate professional program in business and management titled Philosophical Foundations of Management, described in the 1986-1988 course catalog as “A liberal arts analysis of selected theories of human nature that underlie management theories” and a “personal application of learning theory” (University of Redlands, 1986, p. 152). Critical Analysis in Context, a required course within the major for the past
15 years, emerges from a rich institutional tradition that traces a journey toward the integration of Colby et al.’s (2011) dimensions of liberal learning described above.

That rich tradition continues, in substantial part, due to enthusiastic administrative support. Explains the Business School’s dean, “‘What every employer wants is someone who can understand a problem, analyze its components, offer creative solutions, and effectively communicate those analyses and solutions orally and in writing’” (Beierle, 2013, p. 13). That support has been echoed in curricula, as course offerings grounded in these dimensions of liberal learning have expanded significantly in the past 5 years, a fact made even more remarkable given dramatic budgetary cutbacks and concerns experienced since the recession. There are currently seven required liberal learning foundation courses in the graduate and undergraduate business and management programs within the School of Business at the University of Redlands.

Long-term, continuing institutional support contextualizes student responses to Critical Analysis in Context, which have been very positive generally over the years. Typical patterns in student responses to the course include reflection on how they have not done this kind of analysis before, how they have appreciated the opportunity to explore questions about working life and the assumptions we make about it, and how looking at different kinds of texts has changed their analytical perspective. Comments such as “I had never thought about how my work affects my life” and “this kind of analytical thinking gives me a new way to look at problems and issues at work” are very common. The pattern of student response to the experience of confronting resonating and conflicting texts about a specific business concept from different time periods, genres, and disciplines has been very encouraging. Students regularly note how what they had thought of as new or unique problems in business are actually age-old issues addressed by thinkers from a range of fields. Tellingly, the following is the most common complaint: “Why didn’t I have to take this course even earlier in the program?”

The focus on analytical thinking over traditional argument modes created a shift from “how-to” to “why” for students. Self- and organizational analysis, prompted by integrating reflective exploration of meaning into the choice of course topics and themes, seemed to capture students’ attention and validate their perspectives as working adults. Framing the course with texts from multiple disciplines and genres has, in addition to rendering explicit differing modes of constructing meaning, tended to create a more accepting initial response from students. The syllabus looks like it should be in a management program, which was less the case when the course was more of a straightforward service course in analytical writing. The focus on practical reasoning,
embedded in the critical approaches described earlier, has provided students the opportunity and methodology to go beyond reflection to develop applicable solutions to organizational issues. It is common, for example, to hear students talk about how they used one of the critical approaches in a meeting at work to resolve disagreements. Students refer to the critical approaches most often as “tools.” Most encouraging, however, is the pattern of response to the course in which students describe themselves as more “fully prepared” for the future at school and at work.

**Limitations and Challenges**

Although Critical Analysis in Context has been a long-term success from the students’ and the institution’s perspectives, limitations and challenges persist. At the institutional level, the challenge is to maintain administration and faculty support for this type of course. Because business and management programs are already multidisciplinary, space is limited for unconventional courses like this to be required. Adding to the challenge is the increasing number of popular articles and media outlets questioning the relative value of liberal arts education in the 21st-century employment landscape. Despite spirited and frequent defenses of liberal learning from the liberal arts, as well as projects such as the *Carnegie Report* and this special issue, the burden of articulating for inclusion remains heavy.

Moreover, the mind-set of faculty within business and management programs often works against courses such as Critical Analysis in Context, which are seen more as “prep work” courses that get students ready to perform tasks that will be required of them in their “real” business courses. Chew and McInnis-Bowers (2004) lament that business education has “not ‘embedded’ liberal arts into the student’s program of study, but rather isolated it, by separating it from the business education process” (p. 56). Chances are, however, that business faculty members are just fine with that. The service course mentality about the liberal arts pervades professional school education. As we work to change that mentality, we must also realize how deeply embedded it is in the culture of the business school.

In terms of course design and classroom instruction for a course such as Critical Analysis in Context, one of the greatest challenges is to limit our impulse to seek seamless integration of liberal arts perspectives into business and management education. If the reflective exploration of meaning has taught us anything, it is that we need to reflect on the diverse and often conflicting ways in which meaning becomes constructed in different contexts. For instance, a researcher in the humanities will, most likely, attend to ambiguities, slippages, and overdetermination of language in any study, whereas a researcher in
management might engage a more transparent, Cartesian construction of language in order to focus on empirical data. Embracing disciplinary tensions and conflicting epistemologies can be a jarring, uncomfortable process; how much more pleasant it is to argue for a seamless integration of liberal learning into professional studies. As we continue to integrate dimensions of liberal learning, we need to resist smoothing over these differences, for they form the foundation of the process to reflect on meaning construction itself—perhaps the most intriguing dimension of liberal learning in the long run.

**Implementation and Replication**

It is understandable that we have accepted the recommendations of the *Carnegie Report* by Colby et al. (2011), because our own analysis, begun well before the report was issued in 2011, led to the like-minded conclusions. However, for business schools that have not yet begun a conversation around the issues raised by the report, adding a course such as the one described in this article should probably not be attempted until faculty and administrators have deeply engaged in that dialog.

Such a dialog could lead to some difficult questions regarding what integration might look like if a university or a faculty had a particular religious or philosophical orientation that is part of the University’s branding/image. Certainly, the particular mission and orientation of a university could inform and expand the choice of what materials to bring to the Critical Analysis in Contexts course. For example, Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota has drawn heavily on the concept of calling in implementing its mission through a process they call “Vocational Reflection” that applies to everyone in the college (Gustavus Adolphus College, 2013). In our view, it may not be possible or desirable for a faculty to divorce itself from that orientation in the discussion. At the same time, they would need to be careful not to exclusively privilege a single epistemology or worldview. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to examine the rich literature of religious epistemology, articles such as that of Evans and Evans (2008) might be a good place to start.

In a multicultural school of business with diverse religious views, dialogues about epistemology of this sort could provide a great entrée into the broader discussion of what business and management mean to students who would otherwise never have the opportunity to express their views. This might also be an interesting conversation to have with administrators and even trustees. Support from the administration would be important, but a lot would depend on the level of agreement among the faculty and their shared desire to move forward and to build bridges with their colleagues outside the school or department of business.
When faculty separate themselves from their own narrow self-interest to look at issues critically, it is easier for them to model critical thinking to their students. Their ability to do so may be dependent on the level of exposure to liberal learning the faculty have had across their undergraduate and graduate education. When they separate themselves, they are better equipped to teach others analytical thinking, multiple framing of perspectives, reflective exploration of meaning, or practical reasoning. Moreover, faculty who did their undergraduate and graduate work in business and did not have strong preparation in the humanities and the liberal arts may need to learn more about this approach before they can support it.

For business schools and programs whose faculty members have already developed strong agreement around the need for integration, implementing a course such as Critical Analysis in Context might require finding a member of the business school faculty with a strong interest in the humanities, perhaps because of an undergraduate degree or previous graduate study outside business. Another strategy might involve finding an ally in the humanities who could help find interesting texts and build reading lists for the course that reflect unique aspects of a particular school or university mission, or its university-level learning outcomes. Additional resources and sample syllabi are also available from the authors.

**Final Thoughts on Integration of Liberal Learning and Management Education**

The illustration described in this article provides strong evidence that collaboration between management educators and liberal arts faculty can result in stronger integration of the four dimensions of liberal learning and improve learning outcomes for students. Ultimately, our hope for students who take Critical Analysis in Context rests on the consequences it might have on students’ use of the core component of practical reasoning. Colby et al. (2011) remind us that practical reasoning is “a kind of synthetic capacity, entailing the integration of a range of knowledge, skills, and dispositions and manifest in decisions and actions” (p. 59). It is about engaging, as they say, “concretely with the world” (p. 60). A functional, vocational approach to business education often focuses on creating efficient, even smooth, applications of management concepts. A “solve for X” or “how-to” mentality can develop if we think of practical reasoning as merely a clear, applied skill. This remains true, sometimes, even when management educators turn to texts and concepts from the liberal arts, as, for example, literary and film texts are added to management curricula but treated essentially as case studies.
The approaches introduced in our course attempt to complicate straightforward thinking about application of knowledge and practical reasoning. Engaging concretely with the world, in business and in life, is a messy, uncertain, and often difficult process. Analytical thinking, reflective exploration of meaning, and multiple framing approaches ought, we argue, both to enable and complicate practical reasoning. Perhaps most important, integration is not always about resolution, and empathetic impulses do not necessarily reduce essential conflicts and tensions. How students draw on intellectual knowledge, including for what purpose and to what end, becomes paramount. Practical reasoning can be about a certain kind of productive troubling.

That is why it was so important for us, as writers, to work in what might be considered a type of extreme collaboration here across not only business disciplines but also across often contentiously related academic units. One of us is a management educator with an engineering background, the other an English professor housed within the School of Business. How we each come to make decisions, how we each engage concretely in the world (and with our students), and how we practically reason are differing processes framed by disparate training. Collaborating allowed us to experience the complexities of practical reasoning generated by the three other modes of liberal learning.

In their own practical reasoning, students need to be encouraged to linger within the complexities, tensions, and complicated nature of what it means to “deliberate and decide on the best course of action” (Colby et al., 2011, p. 60). The course illustration presented here attempts to create the conditions of possibility for such a pedagogical endeavor. When students can grapple with and reflect on the meaning of what they are learning as they study functional skills, their motivation to learn can be driven in a way that goes beyond vocational instrumentalism to a deeper understanding of how the tools and techniques benefit, complicate, and sometimes harm society as a whole. They may also come to grips with where they fit in the system through personal reflection on the meaning of their career choices.

Moreover, integration of liberal learning’s central dimensions can provide faculty the opportunity to see their work from a deeper and more meaningful perspective by seeing the whole of the curriculum as more than just the sum of its parts. In this way, the integration of liberal education and management education can prosper and be rewarding for all.

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.
Funding
The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes
1. See Fraiberg (2009) for more on course design and classroom activities.
2. Thank-you to our anonymous reviewer for suggesting these questions.
3. The first author attended a faith-based college that made the study of religious epistemology a cornerstone of its philosophy program. The approach there was informed by a particular set of views within evangelical Christianity. Integration of faith and learning is a cornerstone of that college’s educational philosophy (Office of the Provost, 2013).

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