

[MUSIC PLAYING]

KAREN FOLEY: Hello, and welcome back. Well, in this session I have the B100-- well, some members of the B100 team. Welcome Alessandro, Anya, and Paul to the studio. And it's great to see so many of you hooking up and thinking how can we connect. We put the Facebook link for the B100 group up.

Now these aren't things that are moderated by the OU. But some students, and some students only, can find them a really useful place for support to meet up and share ideas. You also have forums. You also have cafes. There are a huge network of ways to connect.

But what students say they really love is seeing members of the module team who've written some of the chapters, created some of the audiovisual materials. And I have some of them here for you today.

So Alessandro, firstly, could you give us a bit of an overview of B100 and what students can most look forward to for this module.

ALESSANDRO: OK. So B100 is a fantastic model. And I'm pretty sure you'll enjoy working to B100. And it does quite innovative design. And actually, it was taught by Anya. So the merit goes to her.

But we have the first four modules that basically will introducing you into the main traditional business functions, such as for example, accounting and finance. And Paul has written the third block of B100. So he is an expert on accounting and finance.

The second block is about HRM. And the fourth one is about marketing. While the first one will give you a gentle introduction into general management.

But I will say that the most innovative side of B100 are the last three blocks that are about the external environment that affects business and management. And I wrote actually the block five. It is about the economic and political context. So don't be scary, because it's challenging. But of course, you will cope with that.

And basically in this specific block you will learn how actually business and management now operate in international context. And you will learn how political events and economic events like let's think about the global financial crisis, for example, may impact on business and

management. And the last few blocks are about business ethics and the globalisation.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, we've got some students who are already six weeks ahead. Some have already started working on their tutor marked assignments. So we've got a real range of people out there.

But as you say, it's a very, I guess, interdisciplinary module where people are going to come to a lot of different touch points in terms of subject matter, ways of doing things, skills that they're learning also, and a range of material. So you've shown the books.

But Anya, I wanted to talk to you about some of the video assets that we've got incorporated throughout the module. So the virtual learning environment and the student home page will give students those links on the module website to the various assets.. Now you've done some really interesting work here on Schaefer Kalk.

Can you tell us a little bit about that? And we're going to put a video as well on the Resources page so you can see some of the things that we're talking about, and some of the things that Anya's created.

ANYA: Thanks for giving me the opportunity to talk about that. I think that is one thing that we really wanted on B100 when we designed it, that it would have a lot of case studies. And there are some written case studies, there's some audio material, and there's quite a lot of video material. And this is all on the virtual learning environment. So that is the online element.

And then there are quite a number of activities that the students can also do online. So I would encourage all of our students to really start working from the virtual learning environment. And that will direct them to the readings in the books at the right times. But if they follow the time frame and the order of activities on the VLE, they can be absolutely sure not to miss out on anything that they might need for their assignments, but also that they will need in order to get the most out of B100.

We were really lucky, because we had the opportunity to shoot a video specifically for B100 that hasn't been shown anywhere else. So this is exclusive to B100 at the moment. And we were extremely lucky that we had an opportunity to go inside a company in Germany. The reason why it was possible is that this is my family's company.

So it was founded in 1860 by my great, great grandfather. And it's still owned and run by my family, although I myself have little to do with it. So we had the opportunity to go in there and make a series of videos. I think there are 13 altogether.

They're all about 45 minutes long. And they illustrate various aspects of the module material. So various aspects of business that we're talking about in B100. So there's something on what a company even is, and how one can classify them. But then there's something about human resource management, about people at work. There's something on working with customers.

There is quite a bit on the economic context and how, for example, something like the global economic crisis has impacted consumer demand, which then has impacted the demand for raw materials for example, for cars. And surprisingly enough, students will find that the main product that the Schaefer Kalk company makes, which is lime in various forms, goes, amongst other things, into steel production.

And so that is derived demand, it's called. A number of steps back. And then somebody from the company talks about how a short-term slump in demand was something that they had to deal with, and what they would have done if that slump in demand had been sustained over longer periods, and the possibly quite difficult decisions that would have needed to be made.

The company also operates globally. So we have another two videos that talk about the operations in Malaysia and China, in particular. So we thought it was a great case study to use because for a start, it's a little bit unusual. It's not the kind of case you find everywhere. And it's a company of the right size and complexity.

It's big and complex enough that we can show lots of different aspects of business. But it's not so big or so complex that one gets lost in the detail.

KAREN FOLEY: We've asked you some questions as well, which I'd like you to vote on, because I'm going to bring those into my discussion very soon. So we've asked you to say some words about what business means to you. So you can do that in the chat. Or you can connect with our interactive widgets. And you have a range of options. So select the one that feels most appropriate in terms of the options we've given for business means to you.

The other question we'd like to know is in your view, what is the most important challenge that voluntary organisations face nowadays. And if you were a business manager, which activity would you think to do better among those listed below? So have a look at those, and we'll bring those into discussion if you haven't voted already.

Just select the answer that most applies to you. And decrease that widget. You can only do

that if you're in the Watch and Engage option from the website. So if you're in Watch Only, do reconnect with us from the website. Put your student or your staff ID into that, and you can then tell us what you think.

So Anya, this idea of case studies is really great, because you get a sense of what's going on. So whilst you're talking about a lot of issues, there's also this context. And it's also really nice for students to be able to watch something instead of just reading things.

And Paul, I wanted to ask you how students experience this, because you're an associate lecturer. So a tutor. How do students find their navigating virtual learning environment and dealing with this range of videos that are integrated throughout the module.

PAUL: Most students are over the very first shock of finding that there's not just a set of printed materials, but also a set of online materials in what we call virtual learning environment. The VLE. Then they cope with it pretty well. The spine of the module, B100, is on the VLE. That's where students start. And if they start in the right way-- and the tutor should point them in the right direction-- they'll work their way through. They'll be taken to the printed readings, then back to the VLE, and so on and work their way through the modules as a whole. And that's the same in each block.

KAREN FOLEY: Wow. And you are a central academic. And so you've written some of block five as well, which this case study runs throughout. How was it then dealing with some of this material that was thematic throughout the module, whilst you were then talking about a specific area, so international business.

ALESSANDRO: I think as Anya has already said, we try to have integrity with a systemic view, because actually one of the most important things that students should learn is that business should not be seen with silos way of thinking. But everything is interrelated.

And again. As I was saying before, business happens in a context. So the challenge is to keep an eye on what is going on, and trying to connect what you are studying with your life.

And it was also very, very nice that doing one of the TMAs that you will be doing, actually one of our student found a job after doing this TMAs, because it was a TMA on HRM. And we asked our students to find a job ad, and to reflect on that job ad through the lenses of HRM.

And that was so useful that at the end, the student was able to find the job for the job ad she has found. So again, I think there is a big connection between what you will be studying and

your life and your professional life, but also your life as a citizen, I would like to say.

KAREN FOLEY: We asked our audience what business means to them. And I'm going to show you the answers. But before I do, out of the choice of realising a profit for economic activity, creating a value for organisations and clients, providing goods and services in a sustainable way, or improving conditions of society throughout economic activity, which do you think they went for?

PAUL: Raising a profit would be the first one, usually.

KAREN FOLEY: OK. So you're going for raising a profit.

PAUL: I'm not saying it's the right answer.

KAREN FOLEY: Now these can change over time. So I've got the results from a couple of minutes ago. And I bet they'll be increased by what we say.

What would you two say?

ANYA: Well, it is all of those, really. So I think the audience could have very legitimately clicked on any of these.

KAREN FOLEY: This is very diplomatic of you.

ANYA: Business is not just about making a profit. And I think that is very much the message of B100. It is a vital part of society, and needs to be understood as such.

That doesn't mean people are in business in order to give money away or be charitable organisations. Of course they're not. But it needs to be understood that a business is part of the social fabric of which we are all part. And in some ways, that makes it more exciting and it makes it more interesting, I think.

So I'm hoping that if our audience hasn't clicked on that yet, they might do after, some of them certainly have studied B100.

KAREN FOLEY: Let's see how we've skewed the results. OK. I'm going to show you what they are right now. They're pretty similar to what they were before.

So we've got the highest level of votes on 45% about providing goods and services in a sustainable way. Next highest on the list is realising a profit through economic activities,

followed, as you can see, by the other two options that are there. So quite a split. And those splits have slightly mellowed out, I guess, in terms of what you and Anya have just said in the last couple of minutes.

We'll be showing those other widgets. If you haven't voted yet, please do click on the options that apply to you most.

So the take-home message here is that there are lots of aspects. And perhaps because we've been talking about sustainability and about being an entrepreneur and committing back to the community, that may have had an impact in terms of how our audience are thinking about things right now. But clearly, there are more ways of viewing things. And in such an interdisciplinary module, I guess you're proposing different ideas.

Something that I've noticed students can find when they're starting out is they might have an idea about where they're going. They might have a qualification that they're lined up for. It might be one of these certain aspects on our sign post here.

And these introductory modules are a great way to try lots of different activities and learn lots of new things, which is really exciting. So let's see what they said in terms of if you're a business manager, which activity would you think you could do better in terms of those listed on the below.

So again, I guess you're trying to get people to think about different ways of being in business, is it?

ANYA: Yes.

ALESSANDRO: Yes, of course, different ways, but also each student can have his or her own talents. So in a business, in an organisation, you can have your role. And it depends also on the functions you're going to push. So it was a question for challenging students to how to think at how they see themselves within a company, within an organisation, which place.

PAUL: We've had a number of instances of students who've worked their way through B100, and have actually changed the whole course of their career. So they pick up a module, whether it's HRM or marketing or finance, And it's resonated with them. And they've changed their point of view.

And we've got a number of very uplifting stories about people who've changed the focus of

their career. And it's great to hear that B100 can have such a powerful effect on students.

KAREN FOLEY: Now it can. And we've had recently from an alumni who came in and told us about how she had been doing lots of different things, and ended up doing accounting, which wasn't maybe something that she'd initially thought about doing. And in fact, we're going to talk to some alumni a little bit later on this afternoon.

So let's go to the social media desk, Sophie and Kristen, and see what's happening there. Cause I hear there's a lot of lovely chat going on. Are there any particular questions anyone's got about B100? Or are you talking more generally about things?

KRISTEN: Well, actually we found that everybody is really excited about starting the module. Some of them are a little bit nervous, and certainly wanted some tips for studying it. Although Andrew said that he made it through to B100, and told them that he really found it an enjoyable module.

And he did say that it gets a little bit more intense toward the fourth or fifth TMA. So maybe Alessandro, Anya, and Paul might talk a little bit about how to tackle the TMAs for the module.

ANYA: I think one of the first things to bear in mind is that right now you do not need to be tackling any TMA. So if you're worried about your first TMA now, give it a bit of time until you've actually had more time to study the materials, you've been through your first tutorial, have had an opportunity to talk to your tutor. And do them in sequence. Study the materials, and then attempt the TMAs. Do not start with the TMAs in the first place.

And yes, there is a certain ramping through the material. We're starting quite gently. And that is taking into account that students come from a very many different backgrounds. So some may have studied at university level quite recently. And others may not have done any formal educational courses in quite a long time.

So they might need different amounts of time to really get to grips with it, which is why at the beginning it is quite gentle. But towards the end, we think that students will have developed the strategies of coping with it. They will have learned that sometimes if a bit of material seems quite difficult the first time around, you read it again. And sometimes you may have to do that.

You may have to discuss it with somebody else, your tutor, for example. And then suddenly it does make sense. So by the end of it, you should be able to cover or to cope with the slightly greater challenges of the later TMAs. And it will then stand students in really good stead for

further study beyond B100.

PAUL: The assignments do build. The assignments do build as we work our way through. And with each assignment we're using, we deliver to students-- this is part of the tutor's role-- we give the students the capability, the theory, and a series of tools and techniques to approach business problems from different perspectives to give the students the capability to look at business problems from different angles, and come up with a set of potential solutions, which have been very well thought out. And these build as they go through the module.

So to say that the TMAs get more intense, I don't think they do. They use more of the techniques and tools that we provide throughout B100 as we go along. But by the end, it's a pretty well-rounded module that gives students an all-around perspective on various different disciplines within business.

KAREN FOLEY: I hope that's answered your question, Kristen. Sophie, I hear you have a lovely story for us.

SOPHIE: Yes. I mean, there's quite a few people doing B100. And they're starting it same. So Morbena, James, Maria, good luck.

KAREN FOLEY: Good luck!

ANYA: Absolutely

SOPHIE: We've had a really nice comment from Karen, who was doing her career. And she hit a bit of a ceiling. And now actually just saying that she's doing a degree has helped her get an internship after a long stretch of unemployment. So congratulations, Karen. I hope that's all going really well for you. And it's lovely seeing how chats say thank you.

KAREN FOLEY: Thank you, guys. And do keep sharing those ideas. And I hope you all enjoy the module. And it's great to see how excited you all are about it.

Right. You gave us another question. So I'm going to talk about the second one that we have here, which is in your view, what is the most important challenge that voluntary organisations face nowadays? And we asked people to vote on this. And I'd like to take a look at what the answers were.

So we can see here that in the lead, coping with austerity measures being taken by the public sector organisations is the highest one here at 54%. These have changed ever so slightly as

we've been talking. But generally the pattern has been fairly similar from the start of the session.

So I'd like to ask you, what do you make of this? Is this some of the key issues that you think are important that our students have identified?

ALESSANDRO: I think so. And actually we ask you this question because this model is not only about business, but it has some space for thinking about the role of the public sector and the voluntary sector. Actually, I think yes, probably it is one of the biggest challenges. So the relationship between the public sector and the nonprofit sector. And what is happening in the public sector is of course hurting many voluntary organisations.

But I think also the other three answers after B100 may make more sense for you, probably. So.

KAREN FOLEY: So we're going to get you back then when our students have gone a little bit further in their journey--

ALESSANDRO: Yeah. It's an idea.

KAREN FOLEY: --and ask them and see what some of the complexities are, and the nuances. OK.

Let's look at the next one as well. Because we only have about five minutes left of our session today. And I don't want to miss out on what the students are saying at home.

Our third question was, if you're a business manager, which activity do you think would be better among those listed below? OK.

So we still have in the lead analysing key future activities that may impact on the business, in the lead with 61%. What strikes me with these is that whilst we're saying that many of these aspects apply to the certain scenarios that we're talking about, there's quite a high distinction in terms of the number of votes that people are putting in one particular category. It's not really a normal distribution, considering that what you're saying seems to be that a lot of these could apply.

What do you think of that answer? And why do you think this distribution is such?

PAUL: I was looking at the other end of the answer. I see that understanding financial flows attracted 4% of the votes.

KAREN FOLEY: You would say that, being an accountant.

PAUL: I am a chartered accountant. And I have all of that baggage with me. But a lot of these answers-- all of these answers-- are of course, interrelated. And one needs to understand a broad base of information, data, knowledge. One needs to be able to put the data together in some reasonable way, and to extract meaning.

And that's what we try to teach on B100, is to extract meaning from all information. But I'm talking about financial information. And extracting meaning from financial information gives people the basis on which they can look at other aspects of the business.

So I'm hoping that the 4% will move in some way as we work our way through the module.

KAREN FOLEY: Well, I hope you're going to come back, because we have regular Student Hub Live events. So we will check in with you at some point later to see what's happened.

But hey, this idea, then, I guess of almost asking sort of trick questions to students when there are so many complexities and nuances around things, and saying, well, it could be any of these things. Students are putting their mind-- I guess because we're only giving them one option in terms of the one they think is most popular.

So this is clearly going to happen when we have this way of looking at things in the sort of form of data capture.

But how do students sort of interact with this idea where you go into something, especially when you're just starting studying, as many of our students are? And you think right this is my priority. Or I think this is the big issue.

I remember when I started. And I was saying, is qualitative better than quantitative? And I had very broad questions. And then only later did I realise that that wasn't actually the question.

What would you say to students who maybe are looking at things in quite black and white or binary terms?

ANYA: I think this is a very normal starting point. And we all do it, particularly in a new area where we have some ideas of what the big issues might be. But we haven't got a deep insight, because otherwise we wouldn't be studying this module, right? So I think it's entirely normal.

I do also think that students will realise as they go along that there is much greater complexity. One of the things that I have actually enjoyed most about B100 in the first presentation and the second is there are numerous occasions where we are asking the students to reflect on what they're learning. And there is one in particular where we're asking them to share this with their fellow students in the tutor group forum.

And this is looking back on what you've learned from B100 so far, how does that apply to the work you do, or that you might want to be doing? And the number of answers we've got that said, I'm now realising that business is indeed a much more complex affair. And it has many more different facets than I had realised before. And that was even after the end of Block 1, when they're first asked to reflect on this.

And I must say, I found out wonderful reading some of this, because I thought, there's something here that obviously students can relate to, and that on the one hand can open their eyes, and on the other hand, relates to questions that are important to them in their own lives, or in their own work. And that was always the aim behind B100, to be able to produce something that students could relate to their own current or future work or other practises, but that would also allow them to look beyond what they're doing at the moment.

And I think that is what a module and a university education should do. It should do both.

KAREN FOLEY: Paul, you're agreeing a lot. And I wonder if I could just get your final thoughts. We've heard a lot about the role of tutors and what students can do more generally in terms of how to seek the help. But students specifically doing Level 1 business modules, what would your one piece of advice be to those students?

PAUL: Listen to your tutor.

KAREN FOLEY: Ah, yes.

PAUL: That's it. Go to your tutor.

KAREN FOLEY: They're always right, aren't they?

PAUL: Um. Listen to your tutor. I mean, in these days of the interconnected world, students can go to many places to get answers. They're not always necessarily the best places.

Go to your tutor. Tutors provides a line of first support if you're confused about something.

The tutor provides feedback on your assignments. And it's the feedback that help develop students.

And the tutor, as I said earlier, the tutor provides the way into the materials which gives students a tool kit of techniques, which allow them to examine business problems from a number of different points of view. That's really the role of the tutor summed up.

KAREN FOLEY: Excellent. So listen to your tutor's advice. Paul, Anya, and Alessandro, thank you so much for joining me today.

And James is saying he's new out there. And he's really wondering where to start. And there's a lot of advice that you guys are throwing up in the chat. To look at your Student Home page, to look at your study calendar, to connect with your tutor. When your tutorials are published, find out where they are, make a note of them, go to them.

And if you are wanting more information, James-- and there must be a lot of other James's out there. We've done a whole series of events on our boot camp on the Student Hub Live website that you can catch up on all around getting started, finding your OU live room, or even accessing online tutorials. There's a lot of help and support and advice out there.

But any other questions, do put those to us on an e-mail. And we will get back to you. StudentHub@open.ac.uk.

I'd like to thank the B100 team. And we now have a short video from B100 that we're going to show you. And we'll be back in five minutes after this break.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

-As the recession deepens, car sales are down by nearly a third, and production has fallen by more than half.

-When that credit crunch impacts on the real economy, that's when sales effectively dried up, almost overnight for many car producers. And they didn't see this coming.

-We're still getting people. But we're not getting as many people through the showroom doors. And that's because they don't have the confidence that they're going to have a job, or the

future is secure.

-So consumer confidence, the willingness to borrow and to spend, has really hit the industry.

-Well, the economic crisis came by surprise, and came also not be by surprise, because it started off in other business areas before it actually hit Schaefer Kalk. Within a very short time, I should actually say weeks, the supply or demand dropped to a level of almost 40%, which is a disaster.

The supply went on for a certain time, because for example, car manufacturers had high stock levels. But when were they were depleted, at least to a certain extent, rather quickly, and then also production stopped. This has a consequence. We still talk about cars, for example, has a clear impact also to the steel industry as one example.

They also almost stopped production at some point. Well, if they don't make any steel, they also don't need lime. At some point, we just have to stop production and stop kilns.

-As consumer spending decreased, the knock-on effect for businesses was severe. Many went out of business. While others like Schaefer Kalk sought to balance their output with reduced demand. But stopping the kilns can have other ramifications.

-Reducing the output of a kiln is not good for the structure, you know, the construction of the kiln, and the bricks on the inside. Therefore, this is sort of final resort. The last step that you should do if you can't find other solutions.

-As the crisis hit all areas of industry, it also provided the company with the opportunity to look at how it would manage in a reduced market.

-Of course, when it came, we were thinking about a lot of options. How to run the business in the future at this turnover level of 40%. At that point, you're talking about not pleasant solutions. Yeah. Fortunately, I must say, we had never had to put that in place. And they can remain in the filing cabinet.

-In reality, firms like Schaefer Kalk have to face the prospect of making staff redundant, not only impacting on the lives of local families, but also losing the cumulative skills and experience of decades of work with loyal teams.

-The whole industry was affected. So there was also a decreased demand for product, for raw

materials, from our customership. Of course you talk to them. And whatever measure you do, you of course try to satisfy those customers. And this is what actually makes our partnership, that you can talk to each other and find solutions at times when one of the two is hit by whatever crisis.

[END VIDEO PLAYBACK]

[MUSIC PLAYING]