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## EMPOWERING STUDENTS THROUGH REAL-WORLD PROJECTS, ACTION RESEARCH OF HRM MODULE AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

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**Abstract** - The study aims to report the results of action research in the scope of the Human Resource Management module authentic assessment to examine students' and industry practitioners' attitudes to the task. The action research involved task setting, collaboration with companies involving them in the task process and assessment of presentations, collecting feedback from students and examining industry practitioners' attitudes to the authentic assessment. A questionnaire was used to explore students' feedback about the assessment. Generally, there was positive feedback from students and companies eager to continue collaborating with the university and participate in projects and other activities.

**Keywords** - human resource management, authentic task, presentation, attitudes, collaboration with industry

## INTRODUCTION

Assessments play an important role in shaping students' learning experiences, influencing not only what they learn but also how they learn. Higher education institutions have increasingly adopted authentic assessment as an alternative to traditional testing methods, as it lets students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world practices and develop practical skills relevant to their future careers. Authentic assessment has a specific relevance within the Human Resource Management field due to the dynamic and practice-oriented nature of the discipline. HRM professionals are expected to engage in real-world decision making, recruitment, selection, employee management, and organizational development, thus, involving students to tasks that reflect these responsibilities can better equip them for future employment. One way to achieve this is through the industry collaboration, enabling students to experience workplace expectations, interact with practitioners, and gain insights for organizational practices.

Despite the recognized value of authentic assessment, there remains limited research on the perspectives of both students and industry partners when such assessments involve direct collaboration with companies.

This study reports on action research project conducted within level 5 HRM module, where students engaged in an authentic assessment developed in collaboration

with industry partners. The research analyses students’ feedback on the assessment experience and examines the attitudes of industry practitioners involved in supporting and evaluating the task. The findings offer insights into the effectiveness of collaborative authentic assessment in HRM education and highlight potential areas for further development.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching and learning activities contain a variation of assessment methods, and among them, authentic assessment has been regarded as important and appropriate to be used since it involves numerous forms, and its purpose is to create a meaningful learning (Moria et al., 2017). Authentic assessments employ open-ended tasks requiring students to generate detailed responses, carry out actions, or create products within real-world scenarios or situations (University of Hull, Teaching Excellence Academy, n.d.). Authentic assessment, different from conventional tests, consists of activities that closely mirror realistic tasks and issues, requiring students to apply knowledge, skills, and abilities in meaningful situations.

The purpose of the authentic assessment is to evaluate students’ abilities in tasks and scenarios that they are likely to encounter in their professional lives and roles as citizens (University of Bath, Centre for Learning and Teaching, 2024). These tasks emulate real-world challenges and the performance expectations that professionals or experts commonly experience in their respective fields (Koh, 2017). This form of assessment is becoming more highly regarded in academic settings due to its capacity to more effectively equip students for the challenges they will face in their future occupations by offering them chances to display proficiencies through projects, presentations, and other practical tasks (Brown & Sambell, n.d.). Numerous examples of authentic assessment include the following: projects, portfolios, grant applications or proposals, writing an article for a newsletter, creating a poster for a conference or scientific fair, presentations, information leaflets, consultancy reports, business plans, training session plans, dataset analysis for a client, community service projects, blog, reflective commentary. Research results demonstrate that students’ interest and critical thinking are effectively stimulated by authentic assessment (Moria et al., 2017). Gulikers et al. (2004) suggested five-dimensional framework for authentic assessment, which includes task, physical context, social context, results or form, and criteria:

- Task: what are the required actions?
- Physical context: where should these actions take place?
- Social context: who are the individuals involved?
- Result or form: what is expected to be produced? What are the outcomes of the actions?
- Criteria: how is your work assessed or evaluated? (Gulikers et al., 2004)

It is also critical that students get timely and constructive feedback from lecturers and peers so that learners can employ the feedback to enhance the quality of their work (Koh, 2017). Authentic assessment may influence students positively in terms of their satisfaction with learning, and it “can enhance student engagement, foster transferable skills and achieve lasting change for sustainability in the community” (Asgarova et

al., 2023, p. 42). Still, students and industry practitioners who host students in a working setting while conducting authentic assessment attitudes are underexplored. This study aims to examine authentic assessment as action research from the perspective of students and industry practitioners.

## METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted at Westminster International University in Tashkent, an accredited institution working in close partnership with the University of Westminster in London. The university actively supports and promotes self-directed and student-centered learning within the interactive educational setting. In this context, the current study focuses on the Human Resource Management module, delivered at level 5 or the second year of a bachelor program, authentic assessment that was conducted through action research methodology. This approach was chosen because it allows teachers to engage in the process through systematic reflection and analyse students' attitudes towards their educational experience (Vaughan and Burnaford, 2015).

The primary goal of the authentic assessment was to empower students through real-world HRM projects. To achieve this, teachers collaborated with sixteen industry companies. Representatives of these companies actively participated in the assessment by providing students with the necessary information regarding their HRM practices. Once students gathered this data, they were tasked to analyse HRM practices and propose suggestions for improvement. At the end of the process, company representatives participated in students' presentations and provided feedback. The action research addressed the following question:

- What are the students' and industry practitioners' attitudes towards authentic HRM assessment?

To address the research question, the following objectives were formulated:

- To design an authentic HRM assessment
- To collaborate with industry partners and involve them in the assessment
- To conduct the authentic assessment and analyse the results and feedback from students and industry practitioners.

Feedback from industry practitioners was collected during and after the presentation task following an unstructured interview. Students were asked to fill in the **questionnaire presented below.**

### Questionnaire (students)

1. On a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) rate the following statements:

- I. Overall, I am satisfied with the HRM Assessment 1 task (group CWK)
- II. I feel this assessment helped to enhance my understanding of HRM practices
- III. I think this assessment was effective in terms of applying theoretical knowledge to a real-case (industry) context

IV. I received adequate support and guidance from lecturers during the assessment process

V. I received adequate support and guidance from company representatives during the assessment process

VI. This assessment helped me to improve my research and presentation skills

VII. I think that the experience of analysing a real company's HRM practices was beneficial for my learning

VIII. I think that the company representatives were mutually interested to cooperate with us on our assessment

2. Would you prefer a similar real-case analysis for future assessments? Why or why not?

3. Recommend any changes to this assessment process

4. Would you recommend this module to other students?

### ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The authentic HRM assessment was comprised of a detailed and structured procedure, ensuring real-world relevance. The authentic HRM assessment process began with the formation of student groups, that consisted of approximately five members each. The group size of five members is intended to encourage effective collaboration and fair distribution of tasks. Each group signed and submitted a learning contract outlining the roles and responsibilities of all members.

The unique feature of this assessment was the collaboration with the industry partners. A total of sixteen companies agreed to participate in the HRM group project assessment. Invitations were formally sent to company representatives, inviting them to participate in student groups. Once companies confirmed their participation, the module leader allocated 3-4 student groups to each company. This allocation ensured a diverse range of analyses and recommendations for each company, benefiting both the students and the companies involved. The task of the students was to interview key HR representatives of the companies, such as HR Directors or HR Managers, to gain deeper insights into the company's HR practices and to provide recommendations in real case scenarios.

The monitoring progress and feedback giving were key parts of the assessment. A mid-semester progress meeting was held during the fourth week of the module between students and their lecturer. This meeting served to track the group's development, provide feedback, and address challenges. In addition to academic guidance, company representatives also supported the groups by offering practical insights and clarifying company-specific information. This double layer of academic and industry mentoring ensured that students remained on track and aligned their group project assessment with real-world HRM practices.

The main task of the assessment was to analyse the assigned company's HRM practices and deliver a 30-minute presentation. The presentations followed a structured format that included several key components: an introduction of the company's background,

an analysis of HR roles and functions, workforce planning strategies, preparation of a job description and person specification, and the application of motivational theories to job design. Students were also required to evaluate the company’s recruitment and selection processes, design a job advertisement, and evaluate the company’s induction process. As an innovative feature, students created short employer branding videos to showcase the company’s attractiveness as an employer. At the end of student presentations, students provided recommendations for the further improvement of the HR practices based on the groups’ analyses.

The presentations were held during the seventh and eighth teaching weeks of the module, with some taking place on the university premises and others at the participating companies’ locations. This arrangement provided students with opportunities to present in both academic and professional environments, giving them a taste of real-world corporate settings. Two academic staff members assessed each presentation to ensure fair and objective evaluation. In several cases, company representatives attended the presentations, further enriching the learning experience with their feedback and insights.

At the end of the HRM group project, the participating companies reviewed the students’ works and selected the best group projects. These winning groups were awarded with letters of recognition for their achievements, with one group receiving a diploma directly from the company. Additionally, some companies extended paid internship offers to students, acknowledging the value of their work and the potential they demonstrated.

At the end of the module, the student feedback was collected about their experience with the module and assessment. Students shared their feedback through an online survey (google docs), which was shared with students via the telegram channel of the module. Seventy-five students responded to the survey, which included both Likert scale and open-ended questions.

The survey results, shown in Table 1, highlighted high levels of student satisfaction and provided suggestions for further improvements. Overall, students expressed very high satisfaction with the HRM group project, as indicated by an average score of 4.7 for the statement, “*I am satisfied with the HRM Assessment 1 task*”. This reflects the positive reception of the project structure and tasks. Furthermore, students rated the enhancement of their understating of HRM practices with a score of 4.5, suggesting that the project succeeded in achieving one of its main objectives – to bring theoretical concepts with practical application.

Table 1.

*Students’ responses average (mean) scores.*  
Source: (Questionnaire)

| Questionnaire Item:                                                            | Average Score |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| I. Overall, I am satisfied with the HRM Assessment 1 task (group CWK)          | 4.7           |
| II. I feel this assessment helped to enhance my understanding of HRM practices | 4.6           |

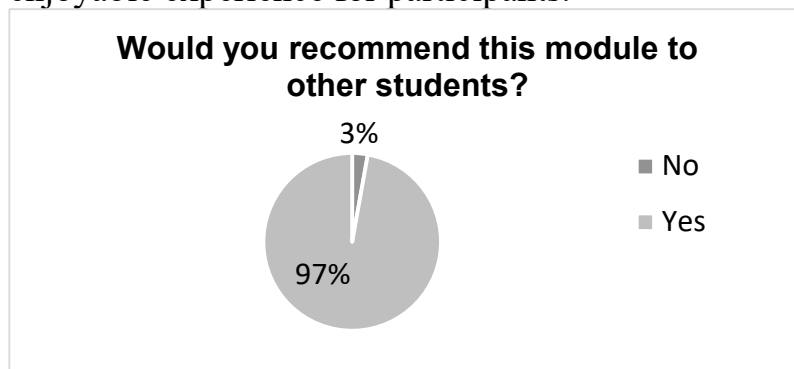
|                                                                                                                         |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| III. I think this assessment was effective in terms of applying theoretical knowledge to a real-case (industry) context | 4.5 |
| IV. I received adequate support and guidance from lecturers during the assessment process                               | 4.7 |
| V. I received adequate support and guidance from company representatives during the assessment process                  | 4.5 |
| VI. This assessment helped me to improve my research and presentation skills                                            | 4.5 |
| VII. I think that the experience of analysing a real company's HRM practices was beneficial for my learning             | 4.6 |
| VIII. I think that the company representatives were mutually interested to cooperate with us on our assessment          | 4.4 |

The assessment's ability to integrate theory with real-world industry contexts was also appreciated, scoring 4.5 for the item, “*This assessment was effective in applying theoretical knowledge to a real-case (industry) context.*” This demonstrates the value of involving companies in academic projects, helping students contextualize and operationalize HRM concepts beyond the classroom. Additionally, the practical skills developed through the project were recognized, with students rating their improvement in research and presentation skills at 4.5, which indicates that the experience had a tangible impact on their professional development. The survey stresses the role of guidance and mentorship in shaping students' experiences. Both the support from lecturers (4.7) and company representatives (4.5) received high scores. This suggests that students feel well-supported by both academic staff and industry partners throughout the process, which likely contributed to their confidence and success in completing the task.

One of the most valuable aspects of the assessment was the involvement of the companies. Students rated their experience of analysing real company HRM practices with a score of 4.6, showing that they found value in interacting with actual HRM professionals. The participation of company representatives was also appreciated, with a score of 4.4, though slightly lower than other survey statements. This suggests that, while industry involvement was largely positive, there may have been some variability in the extent of engagement from some companies.

In response to whether students would prefer a similar real-case assessment in the future, the majority expressed a strong preference for continuing this type of experiential learning. The qualitative responses reveal that students found the project highly engaging, with several highlighting the opportunity to connect theoretical knowledge with practical cases as particularly rewarding. Many students described the experience as ‘*challenging but valuable*’ and emphasized the motivational impact of working with real companies. Some even mentioned that the project “*opened new horizons*’ and helped them visualize how HR concepts apply in real work environments. However, a few students expressed concerns about group work dynamics, indicating that collaboration challenges may have affected their experience. While these responses were in the minority, they underscore the importance of managing group work effectively and offering support to students struggling with teamwork collaboration matters.

There were no major criticisms raised in the open-ended feedback, where students provided constructive suggestions. Some mentioned that they found the assessment challenging, particularly when working in groups, while others suggested even greater involvement from companies in future projects. These responses highlight areas for further improvement, such as refining group management strategies and expanding opportunities for industry engagement. The great 97% portion of respondents (see Picture 1) indicated that they would recommend the module to other students, reinforcing the overall success of the assessment. This high recommendation rate suggests that the module not only met its learning objectives but also provided a meaningful and enjoyable experience for participants.



**Picture 1. Students' responses (Would you recommend this module to other students?).**

**Source: (Questionnaire)**

Feedback from companies was gathered through interviews during the task or after presentation. Generally, companies expressed interest in continuing their collaboration with WIUT through internships and other projects. Industry practitioners' participation in the assessment process and presentations of students demonstrated involvement from the industry side. Some companies also showcased WIUT HRM students project in their social media.

The survey results indicate that the group-based HRM assessment project was highly effective in promoting student learning, developing practical skills, and enhancing student engagement. The assessment's integration of academic content with real-world HRM practices was particularly well-received, with strong support related to group work, the overwhelmingly positive feedback highlights the value of experiential learning and authentic assessment based on industry collaboration. This assessment model enriched students' academic experiences and strengthened their professional competencies and motivation to pursue careers within the HRM sphere.

Overall positive outcomes of the HRM authentic project assessment:

- ✓ Extremely positive student feedback and engagement
- ✓ Students' understanding of HRM importance
- ✓ Popularization and appreciation of HRM as an important field
- ✓ Students' motivation to pursue HR as a career
- ✓ Growing interest in pursuing a degree in MA HRM & TD at WIUT
- ✓ Positive image of the module

- ✓ Positive image of WIUT in the community
- ✓ Strong collaboration with the industry
- ✓ Growing companies' interest in collaborating and partnering with WIUT Career Center
- ✓ Companies offering students internships and job opportunities
- ✓ Interest from companies to undergo executive courses within HRM field
- ✓ Students feeling the vibes of working in companies
- ✓ Students using AI to create employer branding videos.
- ✓ 92% percent module pass rate
- ✓ 97% of students recommend this module to other students

To conclude, this group-based HRM assessment was a well-organized and impactful initiative that combined academic learning with industry engagement. Through structured teamwork, continuous feedback, and meaningful collaboration with companies, students gained practical experience in HRM practices. The involvement of industry partners not only enriched the learning experiences but also strengthened the university's connections with the business community, resulting in internship offers, networking opportunities, and positive social media coverage. This comprehensive procedure ensured that students developed critical skills while building professional relationships that could benefit them in their future careers.

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