A MODEL OF STUDENT LEARNING AND SATISFACTION FROM STUDENT DEVELOPED MARKETING PLAN PROJECTS

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ABSTRACT

Using survey data from students at three universities, this study explores a framework of the relationships of student learning and satisfaction with aspects of the student developed marketing plan assignment. Several project attributes, student attributes, team cohesiveness, and client supportiveness contribute to the performance of several learning tasks which in turn further develop numerous important knowledge and skill learning outcomes. The study supports many instructional design recommendations made by earlier authors.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores a model of student learning and satisfaction associated with student developed marketing plans. The purpose is to help marketing educators further understand which aspects of the assignment's design and the associated learning process are most closely related to increased learning performance, further development of students' learning outcomes, and enhanced student satisfaction.

BACKGROUND

Client-sponsored projects, including student developed marketing plans, have been very widely used in marketing curricula. They are a means of adding realism and experiential learning in order to promote higher involvement and higher thinking, knowledge and skill development, improved employability, and higher student satisfaction.

Extensive lists of desired knowledge, skill, and affective learning outcomes for business/marketing students have been developed. Included outcomes are: knowledge about the concepts of market segmentation and selection of target markets, customer analysis, competitor analysis, industry trends, and the marketing management process, critical-thinking, teamwork, communication skills, creativity, information literacy, technology skills, attitudes towards marketing, and self-confidence.

Design Issues

Several factors have been raised for marketing educators to consider in designing and managing experiential learning activities, such as student-developed marketing plans. Using these elements, a behavioral framework of learning is proposed in which performance on the marketing-plan project is driven by student attributes, assignment attributes, learning environment attributes, team attributes, and instructor and client support. Knowledge, skill, affect, job, and satisfaction outcomes result from the project performance achieved by the student team.

METHODOLOGY

Students and alumni from three universities participated in a survey about student developed marketing plans. Of the 807 contacts in the sample frame, usable responses were obtained from 146 respondents

(18.4% response rate). Of those, 117 undergraduates were selected for analysis. Seven-point semantic differential and Likert scales were used along with several categorical items. Factor analysis was used to create composite scales. Regression modeling using item ratings and factor scores was employed to explore the proposed framework.

MODEL RELATIONSHIPS

Of all the proposed drivers of project performance taken together, only team cohesiveness and the student interest factor had significant coefficients. Including the project performance factor increased explanatory power for the development of strategic knowledge. Project performance and strategy knowledge are significant in the development of Implementation Knowledge. The model including the learning performance factor and the two knowledge factors was marginally stronger than using the earlier first stage attributes alone to explain problem-solving skill development. All of the models for information communication skill development were weak. The project performance factor and the knowledge factors made a marginally stronger explanatory model over the first stage attributes. The model for relationship skill development is somewhat stronger. The enhancement of knowledge and skills appear to be the basis of enhanced self-confidence and a more positive attitude toward marketing. Affect is increased as students mature (class level) through the curriculum, as one would expect.

The job usefulness outcome factor appears redundant to the knowledge and skill outcome factors. The drivers behave here in a similar fashion as they do with regard to the affect outcome factor. It may be that both affect and job usefulness should be seen as by-products of knowledge and skill development.

Including the learning outcomes does not add explanatory power for understanding student satisfaction. The fun factor attribute of the marketing plan project and the student interest factor are significantly related to satisfaction. It appears important that marketing educators endeavor to assure that students see the assignment as good, helpful, relevant, practical, and, yes, fun.

REVISED FRAMEWORK

To account for the remaining unexplained variation in knowledge and skill outcomes, especially the information communication skills, a new conceptual element may be needed – Other/Prior Learning Activities. Emphasis in the model should be placed on the project attributes, then student and team attributes as drivers of project performance. Knowledge development results from project performance. Knowledge and project performance contribute to developing problem-solving, information communication and relationship skills. Student satisfaction arises from the doing of the marketing plan project (project performance).

Based on separate stepwise analysis, the fun project attribute is driven most by team cohesiveness, major status, class level, client supportiveness, and client size. The student interest factor is related to the fun factor project attribute. Fun and project structure form an alternate model of knowledge development. Fun and strategy knowledge more simply explain problem-solving skill. Implementation knowledge more simply explains information communication and relationship skill development. Fun, major status, and the strategy and implementation knowledge factors form a simpler model of affective outcomes. The fun factor project attribute is also the only variable needed to explain satisfaction. While this reduced approach corresponds with higher adjusted R^2 values, it seems lacking in conceptual integrity.

CONCLUSION

The proposed framework is a useful start to developing a conceptual framework of learning from student developed marketing plans. While some aspects need re-ordering and additional research is needed, the basic architecture seems appropriate. Marketing educators should focus on the design of the project's requirements. Students should see the projects as fun, interesting, personally relevant, and helpful. These projects should emphasize problem-solving for a product or service that the students see as worthwhile. Making sure that the project workflow is sufficiently structured is also important. Despite the high level of required effort and the incumbent added stress to students' overall workload, the project does engender active engagement in learning together. Out of this active engagement student knowledge, skills and confidence are further developed.

While working with marketing majors who have higher interest in marketing will be easier and have high "learning yield", marketing educators can also heighten student interest and learning among non-majors through these projects. The project is definitely appropriate for the senior marketing capstone course, yet it can also be used effectively in introductory marketing courses. In contrast to the suggestions of earlier studies, using instructor assigned teams (team member selection) may be less important than making sure that the teams are cohesive. Assuring client supportiveness also adds to the overall effectiveness of the project. Prior solicitation is probably wise, but not strictly necessary. Working with local organizations seems to be important, contributing to client supportiveness and to student interest.

figures, references & models available upon request