THE BEHAVIORAL IMPLICATIONS OF NON-TRADITIONAL PEDAGOGIES WITHIN THE BUSINESS CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

This research assesses the behavioral aspects of the newer pedagogies within the business curriculum with the express purpose to advise business faculty regarding potential student behavioral responses to these newer pedagogies. As students experience curriculum changes, it is important that faculty understand the potential student behavioral responses so that they can takes steps to anticipate and mitigate adverse responses on the part of some students that might limit the effectiveness of the newer pedagogies.

INTRODUCTION

Despite criticism that business schools need to revise their curricula and employ newer pedagogical strategies, there is little evidence that business curricula and pedagogy have changed over time [2]. The business curriculum has many large introductory courses in which the focus of instruction is on the lower levels of the cognitive domain (knowledge and comprehension), and the more traditional instructor-centered and individual-learning strategies are particularly efficient and effective. As a result, students are quite familiar and understand clearly what is expected of them when traditional strategies are employed in the classroom. Also, faculty, through extensive use, are very proficient when employing these strategies. However, these traditional approaches do not reach for the more complex outcomes such as application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of information. Nor do these traditional approaches address and develop the essential skills deemed as necessary for success in the business professions: oral and written communication skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, critical-thinking abilities, teamwork, and decision-making abilities. If business schools are to respond to their critics, more of the non-traditional pedagogical strategies need to be employed within the business curriculum.

Teaching and learning are fundamentally different in their orientations. The former is focused on input and the teacher, while the latter is focused on outcomes and the students. Consequently, a learning approach places greater attention on the students and how they respond to the educational process. This paper focuses on the learning side of this equation by surveying undergraduate business students on how they perceive the ability of various pedagogical strategies in facilitating their learning. The purpose of this paper is to develop an understanding of the potential student behavioral responses to non-traditional pedagogies. As students experience these curricular changes, it is important that business faculty be aware of potential student behavioral responses so that they can take steps to anticipate and mitigate adverse responses on the part of some students that could potentially limit the effectiveness of the non-traditional pedagogies.

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

Employing the delineation described by Weston and Cranton [3], pedagogical strategies used in this research are grouped into four general categories: instructor-centered strategies, individual-learning strategies, interactive strategies, and experiential-learning strategies. The first two categories represent the more traditional teaching strategies, while the latter two represent non-traditional teaching strategies. Senior business students from AACSB accredited institutions, were provided with a list of twenty different pedagogical strategies representing each of the four general categories and were asked to indicate how helpful each strategy was in facilitating their acquisition of knowledge or learning on a 5-point scale (1 = *unhelpful*; 5 = most *helpful*).

Needs theory [1] was employed to investigate the behavioral implications of the newer pedagogies. Needs reflect relatively stable personality characteristics that one acquires through early life experiences and exposure to selected aspects of one's society. Needs theory predicts that people will be motivated to seek out and perform well in assignments that match their needs. Moreover, understanding need patterns among students may help to explain dissension among students when assignments fail to address and satisfy the students' needs. Also, recognizing individual student needs may help educators to use a student's talents in a manner consistent with his or her underlying motives. This research focuses on four widely investigated needs: (1) need for achievement (*n* Ach), (2) need for affiliation (*n* Aff), (3) need for dominance (*n* Dom), and (4) need for autonomy (*n* Aut). To determine the behavioral impact of a student's personality on his or her rating of the individual pedagogical strategies, these four psychological measures were correlated with the student's ratings for each of the twenty pedagogical strategies.

A high *n* Ach is characterized by an aspiration to accomplish difficult tasks, the maintaining of high standards, and a willingness to work toward long-term goals. This individual responds positively to competition and is willing to put forth effort to attain excellence. High *n* Ach students also have a preference for situations in which personal responsibility can be taken for outcomes, a strong desire for performance feedback, and a tendency to set moderately difficult goals that provide for calculated risks. However, high *n* Ach students may tend to become too individualistic to be very successful in any group situations unless their high *n* Ach is moderated by their other needs.

> *Hypotheses 1: n Ach will be positively related to the perceived helpfulness of experiential learning strategies (internships, case analyses, management simulation, experiential exercises, and role playing) and select, feedback-oriented individual learning strategies (homework, exams in general, problem exams, term papers).*

N Ach is positively related to helpfulness ratings of all five of the experiential learning strategies (*r*'s ranged from .12 to .25). In addition, n Ach is also positively related to helpfulness ratings for two of the four hypothesized individual learning strategies (exams in general and term papers; *r* = .10 for both). Thus, in general, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

A high *n* Aff is characterized by the enjoyment of being with people, acceptance of people readily, and making efforts to achieve friendships and maintain associations with people. Students who are high in *n* Aff have a strong desire to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships. More specifically, they have a facility to learn social networks quickly and a proclivity to communicate often with others, either face-to-face or by telephone, letter, or e-mail. Also, they prefer to avoid controversy and competition with others, and they sometimes exhibit strong conformity to the wishes of their friends. Unless

moderated by other needs, these individuals will tend to be more concerned with developing and maintaining relationships than with assignments and decision-making. These students are often perceived as ineffective helpers, probably because they are generally not task-oriented. Because of the strong desire to relate to and interact with people, it is plausible that students with a high n Aff will perceive interactive strategies which require them to work collaboratively with others as very helpful to their learning process, and therefore be quite motivated to learn in such situations. Likewise, because many of the experiential learning strategies involve a high degree of interdependence, high n Aff students will excel in these strategies as well.

> *Hypothesis 2: n Aff will be positively related to perceived helpfulness of interactive learning strategies (cooperative learning, group projects, seminars, small-group discussions, large-class discussion, and argumentative discussion) as well as those experiential learning strategies that typically involve interaction with others (internships, management simulation, experiential exercises, and role playing).*

N Aff is positively related to perceived helpfulness of all but one of the interactive strategies (r's ranged from .09 to .26). Likewise, n Aff is positively related to helpfulness ratings for all four of the hypothesized experiential learning strategies (r's ranged from .11 to .17). Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is generally supported.

A high n Dom is characterized by attempts to control the environment and influence other people, the forceful expression of opinions, and the enjoyment of the leadership role. Students who are high in n Dom strongly desire to make a significant impact or impression on others, seek out social settings in which they can be influential, and tend to act in a high-profile, attention-getting manner. Also, some people who are high in n Dom show a strong concern for personal prestige. Therefore, like the high n Aff students, high n Dom students will likely benefit (i.e., have their needs met) when they are able to interact with others. The only way a person with a high n Dom can assume a leadership role is if there are others around whom they can influence and impress. Thus, although the reasons are different, high n Dom students should prefer the same learning strategies as high n Aff students.

> *Hypothesis 3: n Dom will be positively related to perceived helpfulness of interactive learning strategies (cooperative learning, group projects, seminars, small-group discussions, large-class discussion, and argumentative discussion) as well as those experiential learning strategies that typically involve interaction with others (internships, management simulation, experiential exercises, and role playing).*

N Aff is positively related to helpfulness ratings of all of the hypothesized experiential learning strategies (r's ranged from .10 to .25) and three of the six interactive learning strategies (group projects, small-group discussion, and argumentative discussion; $r = .12, .15, .16$, respectively). Thus, overall, Hypothesis 3 is generally supported.

A high n Aut is characterized by attempts to break away from restraints or restrictions and the enjoyment of being unattached and not tied to people, places, or obligations. High n Aut students have a strong desire to work independently, tend not to work well within teams, and do not enjoy participating in discussions. Unless moderated by other needs, these individuals tend to not be successful when working with other students and may be rebellious when faced with restraints. Therefore, unlike students with a high n Aff who desire to be liked in social interactions and high n Dom students who desire to be influential in social interactions, high n Aut students prefer to avoid the more interactive learning

strategies. They will thus have a negative reaction to such situations and demonstrate a lower learning motivation when forced into them.

>*Hypothesis 4: n Aut will be negatively related to perceived helpfulness of interactive learning strategies (cooperative learning, group projects, seminars, small-group discussions, large-class discussion, and argumentative discussion) as well as those experiential learning strategies that typically involve interaction with others (internships, management simulation, experiential exercises, and role playing).*

Hypothesis 4 is largely unsupported. *N* Aut is only significantly negatively related to perceived helpfulness of one of the six hypothesized interactive strategies (small-group discussion, $r = -.20$) and one of the hypothesized experiential learning strategies (role playing, $r = -.11$).

DISCUSSION

As expected, student needs tend to be unrelated to a preference for the traditional pedagogical learning strategies. With the exception of the hypothesized relationships between *n* Ach and a preference for exams in general and term papers, only one significant correlation with the instructor-centered and individual-learning strategies was found between *n* Aut and a preference for applied lectures. Given the passive nature of student involvement with instructor-centered strategies and the lack of interaction with others with the individual-learning strategies, opportunities for students to satisfy their four psychological needs are clearly restricted. These traditional instructor-centered and individual-learning strategies do not have the ability to motivate students to the extent that interactive and experiential-learning strategies do. These newer, nontraditional strategies offer students more opportunities to be active participants in their own learning, thereby satisfying their needs. Consequently, students become motivated.

On account of the differing student-behavioral responses, excellent traditional-strategy instructors find that when they first attempt one of the newer non-traditional teaching strategies in the classroom, they often experience frustration and are unsatisfied with their results. Unfortunately, many times they abandon the new approach to teaching and return to the traditional strategies with which they feel more comfortable. Because the instructor is not aware of the behavioral implications of the non-traditional strategies, the instructor cannot anticipate the subsequent student-motivated behavior. However, by making business faculty aware of the potential student responses to the more non-traditional methods, they may anticipate problems that might occur and undertake strategies to mitigate any adverse responses.

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