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EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING MARKETING IN EXECUTIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS: AN EXPLORATION IN AN EMERGING MARKET

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Abstract

Although there is a long history of scholarship and research on the teaching of marketing in business degree programs (Conant et al., 1988; Desai et al., 2001; Faranda and Clarke, 2004; Kelley et al, 1991), there is little research on teaching marketing in non-degree executive education programs. The aim of this paper is to understand what marketing professors in India are doing to achieve excellence in executive education programs.

The literature on marketing teaching in executive education is quite limited. Weinrauch (1979) has stressed the need for understanding and addressing adult learning characteristics. Lazer and Frayer (2000), and Das (2007) have provided overviews on executive marketing education. Narayandas, Rangan and Zaltman (1998) have discussed the pedagogy of executive education in business markets. There is hardly any research on how to achieve excellence or how to improve marketing teaching within executive education. Based on a review of available literature, the following research questions have been developed for this study:

- How different is executive education teaching compared to teaching in MBA courses?
- What do the successful faculty members do in their pursuit of excellence in executive programs?

Because of the paucity of empirical literature on the subject, an exploratory research design using depth interviews was chosen. The informants in this study were faculty of leading business schools in India who teach marketing both in full-time graduate programs and in executive education. A snowball sampling method was used to obtain names of faculty. Fourteen faculty members from nine business schools across India agreed to be interviewed. The interviews lasted between 40 to 75 minutes. The interviewer took extensive notes which were later transcribed. The transcripts were read three times and a list of categories and sub-categories was inductively created for each research question based on the data. After completing the categorization, data was coded into the respective categories. The results are discussed below.

Marketing faculty in India perceive that teaching in executive education is quite different as compared to teaching in graduate business programs. Differences are perceived across three key areas-motivations of participants, participant characteristics, and what participants value.

For most participants of executive programs in India, coming for a program to a leading business school is a dream come true and they are therefore highly motivated to make the most of the opportunity. Executives attend programs for a variety of reasons-some of them come to update their knowledge, some are preparing for transitions, some to make a space in their lives for reflection and renewal, and others may come just because they have been nominated for the program. There are significant differences between executive participants and MBA students with respect to age, amount of work experience, and exposure to business and emotional

maturity. These differences affect expectations and learning orientation and have to be considered in planning and delivery of marketing teaching.

Informants in this study indicate that executive education participants do not appreciate abstract ideas. They want inputs that are practical, that can be applied in their work. Participants are usually focused on what is there for them, how they can apply what was discussed in class. They want solutions to problems. Sometime it appears to faculty that participants really want consulting instead of training. Successful marketing faculty pay attention to program design, application focus, preparation, building credibility and rapport, pedagogy and choice of cases, and classroom behavior

In their pursuit of teaching excellence in executive education programs, marketing faculty in India pay attention to program design, preparation, pedagogy and cases, establishing credibility and rapport, and application focus. Experienced faculty members try to orchestrate the entire experience so that participants enjoy the overall program experience which includes the campus ambience, class experience, reading material, and linkages between different sessions and the experience outside the classroom. Successful faculty set aside sufficient time for preparing for their executive education programs. Preparatory activities could include discussions with the program director on objectives of the program, topics are to be covered, linkages between various sessions, and specific ideas for the sessions. Faculty members also take the time to go over the participant profiles and do some research on the industry, the firm, and the challenges confronting the firm.

Marketing faculty at India's leading business schools use multiple pedagogical tools in executive education. These include cases, short videos, in-class exercises, experiential learning, and group tasks. Cases are selected on the basis of perceived relevance to the participants. Participants appreciate contemporary cases from their industry. Sometimes relevant cases are just not available and it is quite a challenge to find interesting material. Cases are handled differently in executive programs compared to MBA classes. Successful executive education teachers recognize that establishing credibility and building rapport with participants is vital to the success of the program. They believe that it is important to communicate that the professor knows about the industry and the firm and they do this by using appropriate language and jargon from the industry. Faculty makes it a point to communicate to participants about how the program will be beneficial. All the informants in this study mentioned that their teaching approach in executive education programs was different compared to MBA programs. In executive education, they focus more on application and less on theory. They try to tune the content of sessions to the participants' context. They provide lots of examples to ensure that participants can absorb the concepts. Rigor is not sacrificed but theory is interpreted in ways that executives can understand and use.

Discussion

Most faculty mentioned that executive participants in India want less theory and more application and that they adjust their executive education teaching appropriately. The teaching approach used in executive education in Indian schools contrasts with executive teaching in leading US and European business schools where programs are designed around recent research. Tushman *et al.*, (2007) have indicated that one of the key challenges in executive education is balancing rigor and relevance. Future research can examine how Indian marketing faculty ensure rigor along with relevance in executive education.

The importance of preparation in marketing teaching has been regularly mentioned in the marketing education literature (Conant *et al.*, 1988; Kelley *et al.*, 1991; Faranda & Clarke, 2004). In this study we found that in addition to preparing content and teaching material, successful

executive education teachers in India study participant profiles and do background research on the industry and firm. Executive participants in India value cases and reading material set in the Indian context. This suggests the need to encourage case writing in India in order to produce more Indian cases. Informants in this study use multiple pedagogical tools and cases of varying lengths in executive education programs. Several faculty members mentioned that they use short cases. Indian faculty should write more cases of the shorter variety so that there are enough cases available for use in executive education. One of the inferences from this study is that the classroom strategies that Indian marketing teachers currently use are well suited for face to face delivery of executive education. Distance programs and MOOCs are expected to become more popular with participants in future because of lower cost and higher convenience. Indian business schools and their faculty will have to adjust their teaching strategies for the new medium.

This study had a few limitations. Faculty members who are active in executive education were selected using snowball sampling. In future research, faculty can be identified through multiple avenues such as opinions of marketing area chairpersons, suggestions from executive education directors, and on the basis of participant feedback. The second limitation was that excellent teaching was explored by interviewing only the faculty. A more comprehensive view of excellence in marketing teaching would be obtained by also interviewing the executive participants and sponsors at participants' firms. The third limitation of this study is the small sample size. With a larger sample size, quantitative evaluation of the informants' responses would be meaningful. These limitations should be addressed in future research.

References Available upon Request