

A PROBLEM-BASED APPROACH TO THE MARKETING MANAGEMENT COURSE

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Abstract

This paper presents an innovation inspired by a 2010 MEA paper about a course modeled after *The Apprentice*. The design included a more fully-formed problem-based learning (PBL) approach. PBL promotes achieving learning outcomes that employers seek and brings the real-world into the classroom by making learning a journey of discovery through challenging, real-world problems, coaching, and reflection.

The learning goals included developing mastery of market assessment, customer and competitor analysis, strategic positioning, and creating value; application in real-world settings; and development of critical-thinking and analysis, communication (i.e., proposals, reports, and pitches), teamwork, and professional skills. Students read Kotler & Keller's *A Framework for Marketing Management*, completed, on a team basis, a suite of marketing management problems and two client-sponsored campaign projects, and, as individuals, reflective essays.

The course was "more like work and less like school" emphasizing connections with employer demands, the responsibilities of marketing managers, experiential learning, and students' performance as professionals. Students developed their understanding of content via reading and asking questions. Classes were devoted to the problems and projects. Students were encouraged to embrace challenge and ambiguity.

The problems addressed market selection, forecasting, buyer behavior, competitor assessment and positioning, creating, communicating and disseminating value, and customer retention. Each set included a problem related to the campaign. Teams completed the entire plan-do-check cycle as full-service marketing agencies for two clients, about 4 weeks for each engagement. The campaigns were launched by issuing RFP's. Teams gave 5-minute pitches of their proposals. Clients required adjustments before the teams were "hired". After implementation, teams gave 15-minute presentations to evaluation panels of client representatives, business professionals, and the instructor. Students were told which team won the challenge and received feedback from panelists. All were invited to lunch for networking. Campaign debriefings occurred in the following class session and students submitted reflective essays.

The Community Kitchen Challenge involved helping launch a once-per-month, campus-based community meal for 10-15 food-insecure persons. The RFP called for raising awareness, driving attendance, and raising donations. This challenge served a new venture, had an ill-defined audience, and the teams had no budget. The MiiR Challenge was for an online metal water bottle retailer with a social purpose, providing clean water in Africa. The RFP called for generating funds for the social cause (sales) and brand building. The client provided a \$200 budget to each team.

The realism of the projects, having clients with worthy purposes, requiring campaign results, and using business community partners as judges generated significant student engagement. The course became “the talk” of the business school, in a positive way! Students were unaccustomed to PBL and struggled with ambiguity, with self-learning, uneven team member contribution, and the overall workload.

Their “head knowledge” did not translate into real-world application which gave opportunity for deep learning from the feedback they received especially about comprehending the target audience and aligning creativity with goals. The teams vastly improved from the first to the second project. The clients were all very satisfied as were the business/marketing panelists.

Supplemental instruction in the basics via pre-recorded lectures and problems on the marketing management process, project management, and managing team performance need to be provided. Also, using business community partners as team coaches during the projects would be helpful.

References & Exhibits Available on Request