A SUCCESSFUL SOFT SKILLS HYBRID COURSE DESIGN MODEL FOR MARKETING EDUCATORS: EVIDENCE FROM A 4-YEAR LONGITUDINAL STUDY

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Extended Abstract

Current marketing graduates are students who have grown up with more digital relationships than ones involving live human interaction; this has negatively affected how they manage interpersonal relationships. As a result, unemployment rates have been partly attributed to a lack of qualified applicants in the workforce due to soft skills gaps in the applicants' skill set.

Scholars and employers alike are now placing the onus of teaching soft skills on educators. The present research examines relevant extant literature which supports the critical need for a soft skills class in the marketing curriculum. A series of research propositions serve to offer a conceptual framework for creating a successful soft skills course utilizing a hybrid instructional model. Validation for the efficacy of this model is presented using longitudinal data from 253 marketing students at a large California university spanning seven semesters over the course of four years.

The proposed soft skills instructional model contains the following elements: A hybrid delivery, videos exemplifying the concepts, integrated use of apps to vary instructional delivery method, activities and assignments that require students to practice outside of class the skills they learn in class, a selection of relevant activities for each topic in lieu of one required activity, required reflection on the effects of students' soft skill implementation/practice, discussion boards to facilitate student subject matter discourse, an active instructor cyberpresence by responding to students' discussion board posts frequently and in a timely manner, guest speakers to speak about their experiences with and the importance of soft skills in the corporate world, and a face-to-face course segment for students to practice/demonstrate appropriate business dining etiquette, professional dress, handshake, networking skills, and wine selection/tasting/pairing.

Results from the empirical study reveal a significant increase in learning across all 30 soft skills tested using the proposed course design model. The largest gains were in the marketing students' ability to give a presentation, give an elevator pitch, manage their procrastination, tactfully call attention to people's mistakes, and in their ability to use appropriate dining etiquette as well as choose a wine at a business dinner. Students' overall soft skills index after the course was significantly higher than it was prior to taking the course, $t(236) = 20.013$, $p < 0.001$, indicating the overwhelming success of the course design model. This research offers a marketing instructor the framework (with empirical support) to build a successful hybrid soft skills course.