

## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN TEAMS: THE NEW PRODUCTS COURSE

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### ABSTRACT

Experiential learning is desirable and beneficial to student learning. It stimulates and increases student involvement, enhances learning, especially critical thinking, and can be designed to develop or enhance problem solving, planning, decision-making, creativity, and communication skills (Kolb, 1984; Bobbitt et al., 2000). Marketing educators have been utilizing experiential methods in a wide range of courses from principles of marketing to the capstone marketing management classes (Hernandez, 2002; Titus & Petroschius, 1993; Dommeyer, 1986; Malhotra et al., 1989; Castleberry 1989, 2001; Anselmi & Frankel, 2004; Batra et al., 1997; Haas & Wotruba, 1990).

Much experiential learning also involves working as part of a team. Team skills are important and valued by organizations, a very real part of operating within an organization (Malhotra et al., 1989; Haas & Wotruba, 1990). Team learning also provides a way to overcome the problem of active involvement often observed in a typical classroom (Hernandez, 2002; Karp & Yoels, 1976) where a small number of students are responsible for almost all of the interaction.

Team learning and perhaps more accurately "group projects" do not always deliver on the promised benefits. Students are often frustrated by team members who do not pull their own weight on the project – social loafing or the free-rider problem (Aggarwal & O'Brien, 2008; Dommeyer, 2007; Beatty et al., 1996; Strong & Anderson, 1990). A strong team member or leader that does not listen to others or know how to collaborate or actively engage in the team may also intimidate some students.

Ineffective communication and coordination is another source of frustration that can also undermine team motivation and the quality of work produced. While many marketing and business school faculty use groups or teams in our classrooms or for projects, we are often guilty of not teaching students how to be a team. How many business programs actually have a teams course as part of the core curriculum?

The importance of experiential and team based learning in marketing has led to efforts to optimize these experiences. Basing the development of a new experiential team based project on the functional aspects of team based learning (Kayes, Kayes, & Kolb, 2005), the author describes the course project created for the new products course. Specific parts of the project are mapped against the six functional aspects of team based learning: (1) purpose, (2) membership, (3) roles and role leadership, (4) context, (5) process and (6) action. Outcomes, measured through project performance and peer evaluations, are compared between different sections of the new products course.

Conclusions are somewhat tenuous based on only one semester's experience with the new project. However, there are indications that while the range of overall project performance seems to be similar to that from previous sections of the course, the number of teams expressing dissatisfaction with the performance of team members, as measured by peer evaluations, appears to be lower with the new project.

**References Available on Request**