

CONSIDERATION OF RUSSIAN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING METHODS FOR U.S. MARKETING EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

The Russian higher education has used the traditional lecture format which is a primary learning environment for university's instructors and students. In fact, Russian business higher education currently faces the transformation from the traditional teaching methods, such as educator-centered, knowledge-transfer, and lecture-based learning to a variety of innovative learning techniques. The Russian universities began this process ten years ago and continue at the present time. The American universities across the country experienced this transformation process in the late 80s and the 90s (Bahl & Frontczak, 2008).

The marketing education literature provides a few definitions of the traditional teaching methods. One of the definitions was identified by Alan Guskin (1994). He defined the traditional teaching method as a fairly passive lecture-discussion format where the faculty talks and most students listen, which is contrary to almost all principles of an optimal setting for student learning. Most educators would agree that the traditional lecture format is not the most effective method for today's marketing classroom (Bobbitt et al, 2000). In the 90s, a major shift occurred in American universities moving from an "instructional paradigm" to a "learning paradigm" (Barr & Tagg, 1995). The instructional paradigm views instructors as deliverers of content knowledge and students as passive recipients of knowledge. The learning paradigm suggests that instructors should be designers of the learning environment in which students are active participants in the learning process.

Although there are many definitions of experiential learning in the literature, the following two represent the primary meaning of the concept: (1) Experiential learning combines direct experience that is meaningful to the student with guided reflection and analysis. It is a challenging, active, student-centered process (Chapman, et al, 1995); (2) "Learning by doing" must include reflection and consideration of the experience which include high student involvement and an interactive two-way

approach to learning (Frontczak, 1998). We would like to mention that the experiential learning method in Russian higher education is described as an innovative learning method. However, in our paper we will use the term experiential learning, instead of an innovative learning method.

It is clear now that lecture alone is not the most effective pedagogical technique in Russian universities. Apparently, there are now many more opportunities in the business education program to develop experiential projects, assignments, and other innovative approaches that can provide practical experience for students (Gladkish, 2007). Our research indicates the increasing popularity of experiential learning theory in Russia which leads credence to the innovative methods of teaching. In fact, the majority of the Russian educators have the big interest in moving toward the experiential learning methods in business education. Current research in Russia shows that 80% of the business Russian educators have used case study methods, 54% - situational analysis/task, and 35% - cross disciplinary projects (Kuzmina, 2008). We review the following examples of successful Russian experiential learning methods below.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING METHODS IN RUSSIA

To increase our understanding of the variety of experiential learning methods in Russian higher education, we conducted analysis and classification of them. To understand the differences, we categorized them by using the game appeal factor appropriate to Russian education. There are two groups of the experiential learning methods: (1) methods using the "gaming" elements; and (2) methods using the "non gaming" elements (Figure 1). The research shows that the game appeal element presents in a majority of innovative assignments in Russian marketing education (Volgin, 2006, Spivak, 2006). The method, using the "gaming" elements, helps to apply the wide spectrum of business problems and situations, as well as gives the opportunity for students to provide a deep analysis of the situation (Grabovskay, 1991).

Game appeal elements and competitiveness in marketing classroom are well discussed in American marketing literature. For example, the live case studies (Elam & Spotts, 2004, Wood & Suter, 2004), the integrated course project (Bobbitt, 2000, Athaide & Desai, 2005), and the field trips/site visits (Doren & Corrigan, 2008) are well documented.

**FIGURE 1
CLASSIFICATION OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
METHODS IN RUSSIAN UNIVERSITIES**

Methods using "gaming" elements	Methods using "non gaming" elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business game (BG) • Role-playing/Simulation • Discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situational exercise • Case study • Crossword puzzle

Apparently, many businesses are adopting a team/group approach with the game appeal elements to motivate the creativity and problems solving skills in their employees. Businesses are expanding these teams outside of traditional functional boundaries. Managers are recognizing the benefits of looking beyond the structure of functional silos where department act independently of each other to structuring cross-functional teams (Bobbitt, 2000). One of the methods which uses the "gaming" elements and is well adopted in Russian business education is called the Business Game (BG). As an example, the implementation process of the BG, "Developing a New Company", is shown in Figure 2.

The implementation process introduces two scenarios: (1) one marketing course with the stages of the BG, for example, the marketing seminar course for the senior students; (2) the cross disciplinary courses with the teams/groups of students. Russian higher education uses both scenarios to achieve a good understanding of the interrelationship that exists in many business areas, especially within the marketing area. Based on a cross-disciplinary approach, the BG involves six business courses, including the marketing courses: principles of marketing, marketing research, and new product development. This learning method has several objectives. The first objective is to help students to integrate many business and marketing core concepts. There are several studies in the marketing literature that support integrating courses on order to achieve student learning (Laverie, 2006, White et al., 2003).

**FIGURE 2
IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS OF THE
BUSINESS GAME, "DEVELOPING A NEW
COMPANY"**

	Student/team	Instructor	Course
Stage/ Group 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the learning objectives and BG procedure • Organize the teams (optional) 	All course's instructors
Stage/ Group 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose the industry and company • Prepare the detailed descriptions of the company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide student with the options of industry and company 	Entrepreneurship
Stage/ Group 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the organizational structure and size of the company • Prepare the report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the report • Provide the feedback with the recommendations and grade 	Management/ Marketing
Stage/ Group 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration of a new company • Preparation of the legal documentation • Open business account • Prepare the report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide student with the forms and procedure • Review the report and provide the feedback with the recommendations and grade 	Business Law
Stage/ Group 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct the marketing research • Define the consumer' needs (survey) • Market segmentation • Prepare the report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide student with the marketing statistics • Review the report and provide the feedback with the recommendations and grade 	Marketing/ Marketing Research
Stage/ Group 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a new product/service • Prepare the report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the report • Provide the feedback with the recommendations and grade 	New Product Development
Stage/ Group 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the Marketing/Business Plan • Prepare the presentation in class • Self/team evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the Marketing/ Business Plan and presentation • Review self/team evaluation • Provide student with the feedback and final grade 	All course's instructors

Bobbitt, Inks, Kemp and Mayo (2000) developed the trade show project that involve three marketing courses: principles of marketing, personal selling, and sales management. The second objective of the BG is to improve/enhance skills in areas of critical thinking, problem solving, planning, written and oral communication, creativity, as well as a team/group decision making.

Based on the first scenario of the BG, the instructor of the marketing course follows the implementation stages of the BG (Figure 2). Based on the second scenario of the BG, students from different business and marketing courses organize into groups. Each group has special area of the process developing a new company. For example, the students in the entrepreneurship group prepare the detailed description of the industry/company; students in the management group define the organizational structure and size of this company. The instructor provides the students with additional information and recommendations. Mediation occurs when an instructor works with students in completing and given task by translating and clarifying its details without simply doing the task for them (Jeltova et al., 2007). Our research shows that the Business Game approach allows educators:

- to track whether students understand the basic concepts and design those concepts to come up with a higher level of understanding
- to provide the interactive methods with competitive elements
- to receive immediate student feedback
- to apply the wide spectrum of business situations
- to increase students motivation about learning new marketing knowledge, skills and equip them with "outside of the box" thinking
- to help students to become marketing professionals

Another example of the BG method is the focus group method. The focus group technique has been used in Russian graduate marketing programs as a learning method. The students apply their marketing knowledge to the real situation by using the focus group technique. The small version of the business game learning method is the role-playing or simulation method.

The Business Game method provides students and educators with an experiential exercise and effective teaching technique. Because of its "gaming" elements, this method gives the students an opportunity to compete with each other and encourage students critical thinking and problem solving skills. Our research shows that the BG method helps students to become marketing professionals. Marketing professionals are expected to possess the ability to identify problems; search out related information; analyze; synthesize, and evaluate the diverse information; and describe solutions in a critical and reflective manner (Laverie, 2006).

As mentioned previously, Russian higher education widely uses a variety of learning methods based on "non gaming" elements (Figure 1.) The situational exercise is one of them. This method distinguishes from other learning methods because the situational exercise assumes a diversity of the decisions. The student analyzes the situation, identifies the problem and comes up with various decisions to the situation. Finally, the student defines the best or most favorable decision which is suitable to the situation. We distinguish a variety of situational exercises. For example, possibilities are *micro situation*, *situation-illustration*, *situation-evaluation*. The *micro situation* is used as an addition learning method to the traditional lecture method. The description of the situation is usually short and has a concise style which describes the problem while maintaining contact with the external environment. The *micro situation* could be a good illustration of the marketing concept, principle or technique which helps students use their critical thinking skills to understand the statement. The *situation-illustration* is used when analyzing chronological data, such as the history of a company or the chronological framework for a marketing campaign. The *situation-evaluation* is used not only to analyze but also to evaluate the practical situation by using the analogy method.

The *case study* also uses the situational analysis as well as practical work experience which have affect on student perception. *Case studies* provide students the opportunity to apply their education and professional experience to corporate problems or challenges presented in the case (Forman, 2006). The *case study* method has been used in American undergraduate and graduate marketing programs for many years. Russian higher education has used *the case study* in business courses for only the past 10 years. This experiential learning approach is most popular in graduate business programs and is well adapted in many Russian universities. As a pedagogical strategy, students apply their experience, knowledge, analytical skills, and creativity to the course context depicted in a particular case study (Harrison-Walker et al., 2000). The *case study* is the common learning method in Russian business higher education. Apparently, the majority of Russian educators use existing, published cases which are well developed by American or European professors or practitioners and then translated. We recognize the difference between the Russian and the American case study. The major distinction of the Russian *case study* is the volume of the information. The majority of the Russian cases contain no more than three pages of information and questions. Our research indicates that the case

writing student assignment has not been well adapted in Russian universities yet.

Another learning method, using a "non-gaming" element is the *crossword puzzle*. According to Webster's Dictionary, the *crossword puzzle* consists of words which correspond to numbered clues which are fitted into a pattern of horizontal and vertical squares (Random House Webster's Dictionary, 1998). The *crossword puzzle*, as a student learning assignment, is a wording puzzle consisting of a grid of squares and blanks into which words crossing vertically and horizontally are written according to the marketing clues. The marketing clues could be the definitions, names of concepts, theories or any marketing terms which the instructor includes as a learning objectives. The *crossword puzzle* assignment helps students to learn the marketing terms and write them in the squares pattern in a fun way. In our experience, students have used not only the knowledge received in lectures and textbooks but they also use many supplementary business sources. The instructor can use the *crossword puzzle* as an addition to the assessment, as well as an independent assignment. It is important to understand that this learning method creates a few challenges for educators. In many instances, educators should be knowledgeable in *crossword puzzle* technique creation. In this case, the practice provides a variety of models of the crossword puzzles where the special literature should be studied. To reach a high student involvement in this learning method, we recommend the next level of difficulty. Educator asks students to create their own marketing *crossword puzzle*. At this point, our experience shows that the student receives the most valuable benefits by creating the *crossword puzzle* individually instead of in a group.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study offers valuable alternatives to educators who would like: (1) to teach or plan to visit the Russian university; (2) to interest in an innovative approach in marketing classroom.

Based on our research we have the recommendations for educators related to adapt experiential learning methods. Students learn more and have quality learning experience when the in-class activities are enjoyable, challenging, and real world based (Karns, 2006). We believe that a variety

of experiential learning methods used in Russian higher education. These methods provide a new experience to marketing student, give them an opportunity to develop marketing skills, and increase their preparation for the competitive business world. First, the Russian business higher education currently faces the transformation from the traditional learning methods to a variety of the innovative learning techniques. Second, the study discovered two groups of the experiential learning methods in Russian universities: methods using the "gaming" elements; and methods using the "non gaming" elements. Third, the research shows that the game appeal elements present in a majority of innovative assignments in Russian marketing education. Fourth, this paper supports one of the popular learning method which uses the "gaming" elements. The method is called the Business Game and is well adopted in Russian business education. The research provides the implementation process of this learning method, which is based on a cross-disciplinary approach. The Business Game method helps students to integrate into business core, makes strategic connection between courses focusing on specific aspects of marketing, as well as to improve their skills in areas of critical thinking, problem solving, communication, creativity, and team/group decision making. Fifth, the study indicates that Russian marketing education widely uses a variety of the experiential learning methods. The crossword puzzle method is one of them. This learning method helps students to understand the marketing terms, concepts, and theories and write them in the squares pattern in a fun way. At the same time, this learning method creates the few challenges for educators and students. Sixth, the research shows that the case study method is much more popular in graduate marketing programs and is well adapted in many Russian universities. Seventh, the situational analysis, as a learning method, is well presented in Russian marketing education. This learning method includes a variety of forms: the micro situation, the situation-illustration, and situation-evaluation.

Furthermore, we hope this research helps to change the way marketing educators view the learning methods in Russian universities. Adaptation of the recommendations of our research is likely to improve teaching marketing methods in the American and Russian universities.

References Available on Request