

NEW IMPERATIVES IN UNDERGRADUATE MARKETING EDUCATION?

James Beckman, University of Redlands
P. O. Box 1753, Lake Arrowhead, CA 92352
(909-337-1893)

Norton E. Marks, California State University
San Bernardino, CA 92407
(909-880-5778)

ABSTRACT

Periodically, the business press admonishes business educators about the relevance of their instruction. Caught between global competition and imploding technology, American enterprise has a menu of cost reduction, new product development, and shifts in promotional and channels' strategies. While a sample of sixty-four firms from the two counties east of the economic drivers of Los Angeles and Orange Counties is not representative of American business, a few generalizations about instructional needs may be appropriate. Communications and direct marketing skills were found to be paramount at the baccalaureate level for marketing majors, using an Adaptive Conjoint Analysis Program.

INTRODUCTION

Few in marketing education would challenge the assertion that domestic and global business are undergoing great change. *Fortune* magazine recently spoke of six trends shaping the present workplace (Kiechel 1993). Included in these trends are smaller firms which will rely upon temporary employees and business alliances. Other trends include a flattened business hierarchy, focus upon the satisfaction of customer needs over "moving product", and the constant learning of new techniques and technologies. More recently, in a provocatively-titled article, "What's Killing the Business School Deans of America", O'Reilly (1994) opined that business schools were producing too many specialists, and not enough persons who could motivate work groups and analyze complex business settings.

Of course, business schools are making curriculum changes. Many of us now have courses in ethics, international marketing, or direct marketing, which have been instituted quite recently. However, there may be more to do. What follows perhaps can be useful as a partial bench-mark, to compare the

curriculum of our individual departments with needs expressed by some businesses in an area of Southern California.

Literature Review

Ducoffe and Ducoffe (1990) found in a sample of advertising executives that they believed entry-level positions in their firms could be best filled by those with excellent communication skills and high personal motivation. These observations fit the results of Gaideke, Totelian, and Schaffer (1983), and McKendrick (1986). Indeed, particular courses were rated relatively lower than communication skills and motivation, even for careers in market research (Joby and Needel 1989). In the possibly most detailed foray into management education done in this country in the past ten years, Porter and McKibbin (1988) reported to the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business very much the same thing.

Particularly important to our study is the article of Arora and Stoner in the *Journal of Marketing Education* (1992). Their sample consisted of fifty marketing managers in the vicinity of a mid-Western city. These managers included representatives of advertising agencies, direct marketing firms, sales companies, consumer product firms, and marketing research firms. Certainly, in this sample one might expect more interest in particular technical skills, especially at the MBA level which was the focus of their study. The conjoint utility analysis produced communication skills at a relative importance of .28, with selling skills tied with analytical/statistical skills at .18. Leader/manager/self-starter skills were lumped together at the .14 level of the conjoint analysis.

The authors of the present study had access to marketing managers at sixty-four regional business firms, the well-rounded purveyors of goods and services to business and retail clientele. Six of the firms provided market research (two) and advertising services (four)

to business. The authors were interested in the response of these sixty-four to the above issues.

METHODOLOGY

The present study closely parallels Arora and Stoner (1992). We also examined six skill variables: sales, analytical, new product introduction, leaderships. The marketing managers or owners in our study are categorized as follows:

TABLE 1
Type of Product X Sales Volume Past Year

PRODUCT TYPE	\$200K -\$500	\$500K -\$1M	\$1M- \$1.5M	Margi- nal
Manufacture	4	5	3	12
Bus Service	3	7	3	13
Retail	9	6	6	21
Con Service	7	4	7	18
Marginal Tot	23	22	19	64

The two market research and four advertising firms obviously were placed in the second row, business services. Consumer services encompassed such common activities as real estate, insurance and auto sales.

Following Arora and Stoner we utilized the Adaptive Conjoint Analysis Program from Sawtooth Software. The sixty-four potential employers were asked to complete two tasks:

1. Examine each of the six skill categories, at two levels, as indicated below; they were asked if they would trade off each one of the 6x2 data points for any one of the remaining eleven: e.g., give up good sales skills for low analytical and statistical skills.
2. Examine various two-item combinations of these 12 data points, and rate on a probability scale of 0 to 100 the likelihood of their hiring job applicants with each of these two-item combinations.

The terminology used to describe each of these 12 data points is given below in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Skill Categories and Corresponding Levels
(After Arora and Stoner 1992)

SKILL CATEGORY	-----LEVEL-----	
	HIGH	LOW
Selling	Good in person/ on phone	Low in person/ on phone
Analytical/statistical	Good	Low
New Product Introduction	Familiar	Not quite familiar
Leader/Manager/ Self-Starter	Born Leader/ Manager, etc	Learn to Lead/ Follower
Direct Marketing Communication	Familiar Good in verbal/written	Superficial Will learn/ May be rusty.

For the purposes of this paper, we shall indicate only the relative importance of each attribute, and its importance ordering. The numeric utility values are excluded. To provide a comparison with the results of Arora and Stoner, in Table 3 we provide in parenthesis their findings.

TABLE 3
The Response of 64 Businesses to Some Attribute Skills

ATTRIBUTE SKILLS	RELATIVE IMPORTANCE	IMPORTANCE RANK
Communication	.27 (.28)	1 (1)
Direct Marketing	.24 (.11)	2 (5)
New Product Introduction	.16 (.11)	3 (6)
Selling	.14 (.18)	4 (2)
Leader/Manager/ Self Start	.11 (.14)	5 (4)
Analytical/Statistical	.08 (.18)	6 (3)
Summation	1.00 (1.00)	

IMPLICATIONS

A more complete comparison of this study with that of Arora and Stoner would require a listing of all companies, their company cultures, their marketing plans, and the point in time during which the data were collected. Such an investigation would also require a thorough investigation of the environments of the companies in each study. For our project, with an almost total emphasis upon organizations whose business is NOT to provide marketing guidance to other firms, in the Inland Empire region of Southern

California in the Fall of 1994, the implications from our work would seem to be the following:

1. Communication skills, verbal and written, remain the most critical for both studies.

2. Perhaps due to the enormous cost of covering the Inland Empire by newspaper, television, and in person, and due to the current sophistication of data bases for mail and telephone, direct marketing skills appear most desired.

3. New product introduction skills can incidentally refer to new channels, but seem primarily to reflect immense innovation in products of all kinds--goods, services and ideas.

4. Selling skills remain of some importance, but appear less important for new hires than direct marketing.

5. Leader/Manager/Self-Starter skill are lower than in Arora and Stoner, perhaps because the hiring in our study is not at the M.B.A. level as was the case for them.

6. The analytical and statistical skills appear to be last in our project, because most of our sample seem driven by basic considerations of sales volume and cost containment. Certainly the four year recession in Southern California must have had a significant effect. Obviously also, telephone and mail reduce some of the friction between culturally diverse populations which generally have little sense of community. At least in the counties to the east of Los Angeles and Orange, anomie seems the norm.

As for research implications, we believe interviews in depth with the sixty-four subjects are in order. Another direction would be to apply Arora and Stoner's techniques in new settings to new subjects. In either instance, for those of us who are training business students for a chiefly local market, such research is likely to be fruitful for our instruction.

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