

**GLOBAL
BUSINESS
TRENDS**

CONTEMPORARY READINGS

1999 EDITION

EDITED BY

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**A PUBLICATION OF THE
ACADEMY OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION**

PREFACE

We are pleased to publish the 1999 edition of the Global Business Trends Readings Book. Each of the contributions in this volume was selected using a double blind review process and each was presented at the Academy of Business Administration's Global Trends Conference which took place in Curacao, Netherlands Antilles, from December 18 through December 23, 1998.

The research reported in this Readings Book is indicative of the Academy's mission of fostering high quality, interdisciplinary, international research by practitioners and academicians. We hope that you will take the opportunity to examine the advances in the theoretical and practical considerations of all aspects of global business.

Many thanks are owed to the numerous people who helped make this publication a reality. The authors who sought to have their work disseminated via this medium are the most apparent; however, we would be remiss if we failed to acknowledge the incredibly important contributions of the excellent corps of reviewers who were instrumental in selecting appropriate manuscripts and offering ideas on how to make many of the manuscripts even better. Additionally, we must recognize the dedication and tireless work of the Program Committee; the members did an excellent job of attracting participants and organizing an outstanding conference. The result of these collective efforts is a body of literature which provides the reader with a great deal of insight about today's global business environment. We trust that you will find it beneficial.

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AN EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF THE MARKETING TOPIC TEAM PROJECT IN THE INTRODUCTORY MARKETING CLASS

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes and evaluates an analytical exercise that is available to marketing professors, namely the marketing topic team project (MTTP). Briefly, this exercise requires student teams to conduct a literature review of a marketing topic and to present a summary of the findings to the class. Student rankings of the activities necessary to complete the requirements of the MTTP revealed that "reading the articles" provided them with the most educational value, but the most challenging aspect of the project was "critiquing the articles." When the MTTP presentations were compared to presentations of other analytical exercises (i.e., a situation analysis, a simulation game, and a marketing plan), the MTTP presentations were rated by students as being significantly more interesting and informative.

INTRODUCTION

Previous surveys of the business community have revealed that graduating students need strong oral communication skills not only to find employment but also to succeed on the job (Cohen 1983). Yet, the business community has continually revealed that business graduates are deficient in oral communication skills and in other areas as well, namely written communication, analytical thinking, and interpersonal skills (Bryan and Sherwood 1990). Perhaps because of these deficiencies the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) now mandates that written and oral communication shall be an important component of business courses (AACSB 1994).

Because of the pressures placed on the business schools from both the business community and the accrediting bodies, marketing professors have learned to use a variety of pedagogical tools to encourage their students to become more adept at public speaking, writing reports, analytical thinking, and working with others. A technique to promote public speaking is to require students to give in-class presentations of major written assignments (Cohen 1983). This technique works well provided students are given proper instruction on how to prepare and deliver a topic and so long as the spectators can learn something of value from the presentation. To encourage interpersonal skill development, students have been required to work in teams. Teams can be especially useful for working on complex problems that require more information than one individual possesses (Maier 1967; Robbins 1974).

Professors have been able to challenge their students analytically through a variety of assignments in the introductory marketing class. Since the early 1960s, end-of-the-chapter discussion questions and marketing cases have been used to stimulate thinking among business students. Although these tools are still used today, the rapid development of the computer has introduced computer simulation exercises into the marketing tool bag. Academic researchers have found that computer simulations enhance student motivation and learning (Bryan and Sherwood 1990; Sherrell and Burns 1982; Tompson and Tompson 1995). Other assignments that have been used by marketing

professors to encourage analytical thinking include the marketing plan team project (Cohen 1985; Alexander, McCorkle, and Diriker 1992) and the marketing environment group project (Nastas III 1984).

The purpose of this paper is to describe and evaluate another analytical exercise that is available to marketing professors, namely the marketing topic team project (MTTP). Briefly, this exercise requires student teams to conduct a literature review of a marketing topic and to present a summary of the findings to the class. Many professors will recognize the MTTP as perhaps a welcome return to the basics, for it forces student teams to learn how to use library databases, to read articles critically, to organize material, and to make an oral presentation. The exercise will be described in detail, and student evaluations of the MTTP and other analytical exercises will be provided and compared.

THE MARKETING TOPIC TEAM PROJECT

During the first class meeting in the introductory marketing class, students are told that they will be forming two-person teams to conduct secondary research on a marketing topic. Each team is required to find eight articles on a marketing topic, to hand in a written critique for each article, to organize a presentation based on the eight articles, to make a concise presentation outline (not to exceed two pages), to develop six multiple choice questions that every student should be able to answer after having heard the presentation, and to make a class presentation that lasts between nine and twelve minutes. Each team, on the day it is scheduled to make its class presentation, is required to submit the following items to the instructor: 1) a copy of each article; 2) a one-page critique of each article; 3) an outline of the presentation; and 4) a set of six multiple choice questions. In addition, each team is required to give each student in the class a copy of the presentation outline along with the set of multiple choice questions.

Topics Offered by the Professor

The marketing topics that student teams may consider for their research and presentation are offered by the instructor. Each topic included on the marketing topics list should meet the following criteria: 1) it should not be a topic that is given in-depth coverage during the professor's lectures; 2) it should have the potential for enlightening students about marketing practice; and 3) it should not be so minor or obscure a topic that would make it impossible for students to find articles on the subject. There, of course, should be least as many topics on the list as there are student teams in the class.

Team Selection

Students are allowed to form their own two-person teams. The instructor can facilitate team formation by asking each student to introduce himself, to indicate where he lives, and to indicate the days he is most likely on campus. Persons who find it difficult to find a teammate can be introduced to each other. After all the teams have been formed, any "odd" person who is left out may be allowed to do the exercise by himself (with a "four article" requirement) or may be allowed to join a two-person team (with a "twelve article" requirement).

Topic Selection by the Student Teams

Teams are told that only one topic is available per team, and that no two teams may work on the same topic. They are also told that topics will be assigned to teams on a "first-come, first-served" basis. These requirements encourage the teams to make their topic selection quickly and to begin their secondary research without delay. Should a team find itself saddled with a topic that it finds difficult, it may be allowed to trade that topic for one that is still available on the topics list.

Presentation Days

Instructors will need to set aside several days near the end of the term to accommodate the presentations. Once the presentation dates have been specified, the student teams can rank their preferences for each of the dates and the instructor can then assign student teams to the dates.

Finding the Articles

Since some students will have limited experience in conducting secondary research, it is important for the instructor to spend some time teaching students how to efficiently find information on their topics. Students find it especially helpful to be given guidelines on the use of their library's electronic information resources, e.g., the literature databases and the search engines on the Internet.

Critiquing the Articles

So that students will have a common understanding of how to critique an article, it is necessary to give them critiquing guidelines. Students should be taught to evaluate their articles in the following areas: its overall significance; the quality of its introduction, the degree to which it covered the topic; its biases, its use of examples, the soundness of its conclusions, the appropriateness of its future suggestions, the adequacy of its methodology, and its writing style.

Presentation Guidelines

To increase the public speaking skills of the presenters and to ensure that students know what is expected of them during a presentation, instructors should give presentation guidelines to the students. Students can be coached on techniques that will enhance a presentation, namely good preparation, rehearsal, speaking extemporaneously vs. simply reading, good eye contact with the audience, good voice inflection, good speed of delivery, relaxation strategies, and use of visual aids. To prevent the presentations from using too much class time, the instructor should forewarn the students that presentations that do not stay within the nine-to-twelve minute time limit will be penalized.

Progress Report

During the middle of the term, the instructor should ask students to complete a brief progress report. The report can inquire about the activities of the team and the degree to which the team members are getting along with each other. Should it be apparent that the team is incompatible or having difficulties, the instructor can arrange a meeting with the team members to serve as a mediator. In extreme cases where, for example, one or both team members are acting irresponsibly, it may be necessary to dissolve the team and to have each member work individually.

Motivating the Audience

To ensure that students attend class and actively listen to the presentations, the instructor should inform the students that presentation material will be on the final exam. In some cases, the instructor can simply place on the final exam one or two of the multiple choice questions that have been prepared by each student team. In cases where the student multiple choice questions are not well designed, instructors can design their own questions.

Since the students will be exposed to much material during the presentations, it is important that the instructor emphasize the main points to remember from each presentation. This can be accomplished by asking pointed questions of the presenters or by recapping what is important.

Grading the Team

This project has five major components: article selection, article critiquing, the presentation outline, the review questions, and the class presentation. Each component can be graded and multiplied by an appropriate weight to determine the team's grade.

None of the components is easy to grade. Judging the adequacy of a team's selection of articles is fairly subjective. Unless the grader is an expert in the topic under investigation, it is difficult to know how well the articles represent the topic. In most cases, however, more credit is given to articles that represent reviews of the field or that demonstrate rigorous research than to articles that are written in the trade journals. To evaluate the quality of the critiques, the instructor needs to select two of the eight articles that are submitted by the team, read them, and then see if the written critiques for those articles are accurate. The presentation outline can be evaluated on the basis of its being well organized, complete, and clear. Similarly, the multiple choice can be evaluated on the basis of clarity and relevance. Finally, the presentation itself can be evaluated in terms of content, organization, delivery, and whether the duration of the presentation stayed within the nine-to-twelve minute time limit.

METHOD

Survey 1: Student Evaluations of the MTTP

Following all of the presentations for the MTTP, students who had been exposed to the MTTP were asked to answer the following types of questions:

- 1) How do you rank the difficulty and educational value of the various phases of the project?
- 2) What did you like and/or dislike about the project?
- 3) Were there any teammate problems?
- 4) Do you believe that you deserved the same grade, a lower grade, or a higher grade than your teammate?
- 5) What do you think is an optimal team size for the project?
- 6) How do you feel about the nine-to-twelve minute time limit allowed for the presentations?
- 7) Do you think it was appropriate for the instructor to consider the style of presentation (e.g., eye contact, voice inflection, voice speed, etc.) when determining the team grade?
- 8) What course weight should be assigned to the project grade?
- 9) How did you feel about the process of developing your team's presentation?
- 10) How did you like listening to the other teams' presentations?

Survey 2: Evaluations of Presentations Given in Other Introductory Marketing Classes

During the time of the above study, several other introductory marketing classes were being taught in the college, and the students in these classes were required to be on teams and to conduct a different analytical exercise. One professor required that his students conduct a "situation analysis" for a product, i.e., his students were required to evaluate the competitive, economic, social, political, and legal environments for a given product. Another professor had his students play and analyze a computer game that simulated the marketing environment. A third instructor required his students to develop a marketing plan for a new product, i.e., to analyze the environment for a new product and to recommend a marketing strategy. Although the various exercises differed in a variety of aspects (e.g., complexity, team size and formation, and percentage of the final grade), they had in common at least one element - each team was required to make a presentation to the rest of the class. To provide a basis for comparing the MTTP with these other analytical exercises, a second survey was conducted among students in the other introductory marketing classes. This second survey dealt only with the presentation to which the students were exposed, and asked some of the questions that were used to evaluate the MTTP presentations. That is, students in these other classes were asked how

they felt about the process of developing their presentation and how they liked listening to the other teams' presentations (refer to questions 9 and 10 above)? Both Surveys 1 and 2 were collected during the same time period - near the end of the term after all student presentations had been delivered.

RESULTS

Survey 1: Student Evaluations of the MTTP

To complete the MTTP, teams were required to conduct six activities, from finding the articles to presenting the results. Each student was asked to rank each of the six activities on two dimensions: its difficulty and its educational value. The results indicate that students felt that the most difficult part of the project was "critiquing the articles" (median rank = 2), followed by "finding the articles," "developing the outline," and "giving the presentation" (median co-rank = 3) and by "reading the articles" and "developing the questions" (median co-rank = 5). As for education value, students felt they learned the most from "reading the articles" (median rank = 2), "critiquing the articles" (median co-rank = 3), and "giving the presentation" (median co-rank = 3) and the least from "developing the questions" (median rank = 5).

When asked what they liked most about the project, respondents ($n = 71$) stated that the presentations were informative (25%), that they learned good information from reading the articles (23%), that the speaking experience was enjoyable (17%), that they enjoyed learning how to access data from the library (11%), that the presentations were a nice break from lectures (7%), and that they enjoyed working with a partner (7%). Those students who had negative comments about the project ($n = 57$) said that the grade should be given more weight (28%), that they had fears giving the presentation (19%), that they had difficulties with their partner (15%), that it was difficult to organize the presentation or write the critiques (12%), that they needed more time to give the presentation (5%), that the presentations took too much class time (3%), and that the project took too much time (2%).

When students were explicitly asked whether they had teammate problems, twenty-five percent of the respondents acknowledged problems. The most common problem expressed was difficulty in getting together with their partner: 39% said their work and/or class schedules made it difficult to find time to meet, 12% said they had no time to meet, and 4% said they lived too far away from each other. Another type of teammate problem appeared to be more of an interpersonal nature: 27% said their partner was irresponsible and 12% said they had serious disagreements with their partner.

Whether teammates felt they deserved the same grade on the project as their partner is a surrogate indicator of teammate problems. When students were asked whether they deserved the same grade, a lower grade, or a higher grade than their partner, 85% said the same grade, 1% said a lower grade, and 14% said a higher grade. The latter two figures suggest that 15% of the students did not feel that equal effort was present between the teammates.

The majority of the students appeared to be content with most of the parameters of the project: 68% felt that the optimal team size was two students, 68% believed the nine-to-twelve minute time limit allocated to the presentation was fine, and 82% felt it was appropriate for the instructor to consider the style of presentation when considering the team grade. The only area where students disagreed with a project parameter was in terms of the weight assigned to the team grade. The weight assigned to team grade was 10% of the total grade; the students felt the weight, on average, should be increased to 23% of the total grade.

Survey 2: Comparing the MTTP Presentations to Those in the Other Classes

Evaluations of the MTTP presentations were gathered in the survey reported above, while evaluations of the presentations for the other analytical exercises (i.e., the situation analysis, the simulation game, and the marketing plan)

TABLE 1
GOING THROUGH THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING
MY TEAM'S PRESENTATION WAS:
(MEANS¹)

| | Situation Analysis (n = 59) | Simulation Game (n = 89) | Marketing Plan (n = 98) | MTTP (n = 105) | Sig. of F-Statistic ² |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| Interesting | 5.20 | 5.69 | 5.37 | 5.19 | p = .12 |
| Informative | 5.46 | 5.60 | 5.54 | 5.70 | p = .68 |
| A Good Learning Experience | 5.25 | 5.80 | 5.48 | 5.46 | p = .11 |
| Frustrating | 4.31 | 4.11 | 4.43 | 4.22 | p = .63 |
| A Difficult Exercise | 4.36 | 4.53 | 4.81* | 4.26 | p = .03 |

¹Data were collected using seven-point semantic differential scales. The adjective or phrase that was at the high end of each scale is shown in the above table.
²When the F-Statistic was significant (i.e., $p \leq .10$), Scheffe's test was applied to determine which of the various means are significantly different from each other. Means that have dissimilar asterisk notations are significantly different from each other at or below the .10 alpha level.

TABLE 2
WHEN I LISTENED TO OTHER STUDENTS GIVE THEIR PRESENTATIONS,
I THOUGHT THEIR PRESENTATIONS WERE:
(MEANS¹)

| | Situation Analysis (n = 59) | Simulation Game (n = 89) | Marketing Plan (n = 98) | MTTP (n = 105) | Sig. of F-Statistic ² |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| Interesting | 4.17 | 4.81* | 4.68 | 5.34** | p = .00 |
| Informative | 4.71 | 4.96 | 4.96 | 5.50* | p = .00 |
| Good Use of Class Time | 4.21 | 4.81 | 4.89* | 5.30* | p = .00 |
| Good Learning Experience | 4.88 | 5.37 | 5.45* | 5.59* | p = .01 |

¹Data were collected using seven-point semantic differential scales. The adjective or phrase that was at the high end of each scale is shown in the above table.
²When the F-Statistic was significant (i.e., $p \leq .10$), Scheffe's test was applied to determine which of the various means are significantly different from each other. Means that have dissimilar asterisk notations are significantly different from each other at or below the .10 alpha level.

were gathered in a second set of surveys in marketing classes taught by other professors. This section will compare the results obtained from the various surveys. Any observed differences among or between the groups will not be considered statistically significant unless they are at or below the .10 alpha level.

Following the project presentations, students were asked to use a set of semantic differential scales to evaluate the process they went through in developing their presentation. As displayed in Table 1, all of the students, regardless

of the project or class to which they were exposed, felt that the process they experienced was leaning towards the "interesting," "informative," and "good learning" sides of the semantic differential scales. To a lesser degree, all of the students felt the process was "frustrating" and represented "a difficult exercise." When Scheffe's test was applied to the last row of means in Table 1, it revealed that the marketing plan exercise was perceived as slightly more difficult than the other analytical exercises.

Students rated the presentations they observed by completing a set of four semantic differential scales. The data displayed in Table 2 indicate that the most interesting and informative presentations were heard by students exposed to the MTTP. Moreover, those students who were exposed to either the marketing plan or the MTTP were more likely to rate the presentations they heard as representing a "good use of class time" or as being "a good learning experience."

DISCUSSION

The results of this study cast a favorable light on the MTTP. While it may not be as rigorous an exercise as the marketing plan, it does offer challenges to the student that parallel those of "situation analysis" or the "simulation game." It is an exercise that enlightens students on literature searches, critical thinking, making presentations, and on working with others. It, therefore, offers many of the features that would satisfy the concerns of the business community and the AACSB.

One of the greatest benefits of this exercise is the presentation it produces. Of all the analytical exercises compared in this study, the presentations emanating from the MTTP were rated as the most interesting and informative. This result is probably due to the uniqueness of the assignment: each presentation covers a completely different marketing topic. In contrast, the presentations given for the other exercises, for the most part, cover the same material in a repetitive fashion.

Professors who use the MTTP over several terms might find it wise to rotate the topics available to the students. By weeding out popular topics and introducing new topics, the professor can receive two benefits. First, presentations given on the new topics will present the instructor with fresh marketing material. Second, by rotating the topics, the professor makes it more difficult for students to plagiarize the material presented in a previous term.

When using the MTTP, future adopters may need to fine tune some of its parameters. It is not clear, for example, how much weight should be assigned to the entire project. A 10% weight was used in this study, but the student evaluations revealed a need to increase the weight to about 23%. Another concern is the amount of weight that should be assigned to the elements submitted and presented by the teams. These weights could be determined by analyzing the survey data that related to the students' perceptions of the difficulty and educational value of the various aspects of the MTTP. That is, the elements that were ranked as the most difficult and/or as providing the greatest educational value could be given the greatest weight. If this strategy were applied to the ranking data from Survey 1, "critiquing the articles" would be given the greatest weight and "developing the questions" would be given the least weight. Another area of concern is team size. A team size of two appeared to work well for this study, but other instructors may find it beneficial to experiment with larger teams. A final area that requires further research concerns the development of interpersonal skills. While team situations force students to use interpersonal skills, they do not necessarily bring out the best interpersonal relationships among students. Some students, for example, may use team situations to take

advantage of other students' willingness to work. Future users of team exercises need to develop techniques that will ensure a good working relationship among the teammates.

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