INCORPORATING A PROMOTIONAL TOOL IN BUSINESS SIMULATIONS: THE POSTER EXERCISE

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Simulations are commonly employed as tools in college of business courses and management development programs. Here, a teaching exercise is described that involves using the poster as a tool enabling managers and participants to market their simulated companies. The exercise could be used for any course or development program wherein the instructor would like participants to promote a product, company, group or even student organization. The authors feel that the exercise provides participants with a meaningful alternative to writing another research paper or management development exercise, and note that participants report great satisfaction with ***The Poster Exercise****. Readers of* The Journal of Marketing Management *may download the exercise at http://courseinfo.cba.uakron.edu/dunphy/Poster. The PowerPoint presentation is saved as a "Poster Teaching Exercise" and is named "posterteachingex.ppt." Because it is only 903 KB large, it may be directly downloaded onto a floppy disc. Examples of actual work products are also provided at that same URL under "Poster 1" and "Poster 2."*

INTRODUCTION

Group work is an organizational fact of life. Unfortunately, most educational activity is centered on individual exercises rather than group work. The most typical of these exercises involves reading a text and taking an examination or reading a text and engaging in supplemental reading to write a report. In most cases these didactic exercises may not involve sequential learning. Hence, subsequent work is not dependent upon prior course work.

This paper presents an exercise designed to address a number of these concerns. The proposed use of a poster as a promotional tool is designed as a group exercise that synthesizes previously attained knowledge, whether through course work or experience. More specifically, it enables instructors and participants to break away from the reading and testing or reading and term paper rubric, and it enables participants to draw upon skills learned from other courses such as Computer Applications, Advertising, Marketing and Management or learned in real-world work settings. While the technique is applicable to many business school classes and to management development programs, here we provide an example of its use in the commonly encountered Business Policy context.

The Business Policy Course

The American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (the main accreditation body of business schools) requires universities to establish curricula in accordance with their mission statements. Most accredited universities have determined that the Business Policy class is integral to accomplishing their missions. The Business Policy course is almost universally the capstone course in a College of Business. As such it integrates the core business disciplines of accounting, economics, finance, management and marketing.

The Marketing Management Journal
Volume 11, Issue 2, pages 132-136

Simulation games (Goodwin and Franklin 1994; Grunewald and Baron 1999; Doyle and Brown 2000) fit into this mission in that they typically require participants to engage in **financial planning** as they launch their simulated business, **marketing** and **production** as they find demand for and produce their product, and **management** as they respond to the changes that the simulated marketplace confronts them with. At the same time participants are presented with the opportunity to get "results" from decisions they make. While management development programs usually do not provide the time frame available in a college setting, often their outlines and goals are much the same. These exercises are good for reinforcing accounting and finance principles and some marketing elements such as price and product, but are lacking when it comes to reinforcing the marketing function of promotion. The poster exercise is a way to incorporate the important matter of promotion into the simulation assignment.

THE POSTER EXERCISE

System

In one Business Policy example, the course grade is based on five major assignments: 1. an individual case study, 2. a group case study, 3. a group presentation, 4. the simulation, and 5. the promotional poster. Class participation contributes approximately 5 percent to the overall grade and each of the previously mentioned assignments contributes roughly 20 percent with the exception of the presentation that contributes 15 percent.

Parameters

The widely used *Airline* simulation book (Smith and Golden 1994) includes a chapter titled, "Management Audit." The student teams consider the questions posed by the management audit and then construct a "Poster" promoting their airline company centered on a "theme" contained in the management audit. The poster must include text art, contoured text, an Internet graphic, and eye catching layout, etc. This is a group exercise.

The directions given participants read:

> Each student team will construct an 11x17 inch one-page color poster promoting their airline company. The poster must also incorporate a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, a heading, interesting text, and a demonstration of student knowledge regarding design. The use of standard "pre-selected backgrounds" is not permissible.

Student teams must choose the target audience for the poster and create it accordingly. For example, the poster could be aimed at stockholders, travel agents, or customers. Depending on the target audience, the poster might be useful for display at the corporation's annual meeting, placing on the wall of a travel agency, or displaying in a promenade with significant walk-by traffic, respectively.

The entire PowerPoint "Poster Exercise Presentation" can be viewed online at http://courseinfo.cba.uakron.edu/dunphy/Poster. A poster PowerPoint exercise is available for downloading by other faculty (the authors give permission to readers of *The Marketing Management Journal* to download the exercise) and sample posters ("Poster 2" and "Poster 3") are provided.

Tools

The tools recommended to participants include Microsoft Word, Microsoft Power-Point, and Microsoft Publisher. Word and Power Point are available to most students in college computer labs and are commonplace enough to permit use of this exercise in management development settings. Students are directed to select the 11x17 paper size on the print menu and it is suggested that they print the poster using a color printer. Although a color printer may not be immediately available, color printers are available at Kinko copy centers nationwide. Lamination services are also available.

The results can be dramatic. A variety of posters are viewable at http://courseinfo.cba.uakron.edu/dunphy/Poster.

User Satisfaction with the Poster Method

The University of Akron regularly surveys graduating seniors to determine overall satisfaction rates with their program. Unfortunately, seniors often report being dissatisfied with group work in the program. Some complain about free-riding team members. Others suggest that their instructors did not adequately explain the group project. Others note that they were quite simply "overwhelmed" with group work at the end of the semester.

The one exception to this group work dissatisfaction score is the Business Policy class that receives high marks in student satisfaction (4.6 on a 5.0 scale) and includes high levels of reported satisfaction with the group work. Why? A number of reasons are plausible. The poster exercise is a project everyone can get involved with. One team member might work on the layout. Another might construct the Excel charts. A third can arrange printing services. So called free-riders are bound to find something that they enjoy and are therefore more likely to abandon their do-nothing tendencies and get involved in the exercise. Also, by requiring that the poster be handed in at some point during the middle of the semester, instructors enable participants to spread out the workload thereby minimizing the feeling of being overwhelmed during the last week of classes. Lastly, this is an exercise that is enthusiastically greeted and executed with great satisfaction probably because it is as much of a crafts project as an academic exercise.

CONCLUSION

The authors, of course, do not offer their experiences with this training tool as proof of its applicability in all settings. However, the levels of acceptance and approval it met do allow it to be recommended as a new and unique teaching/learning project for academic courses and management development programs that use simulations or that would benefit by an exercise focusing on promotion.

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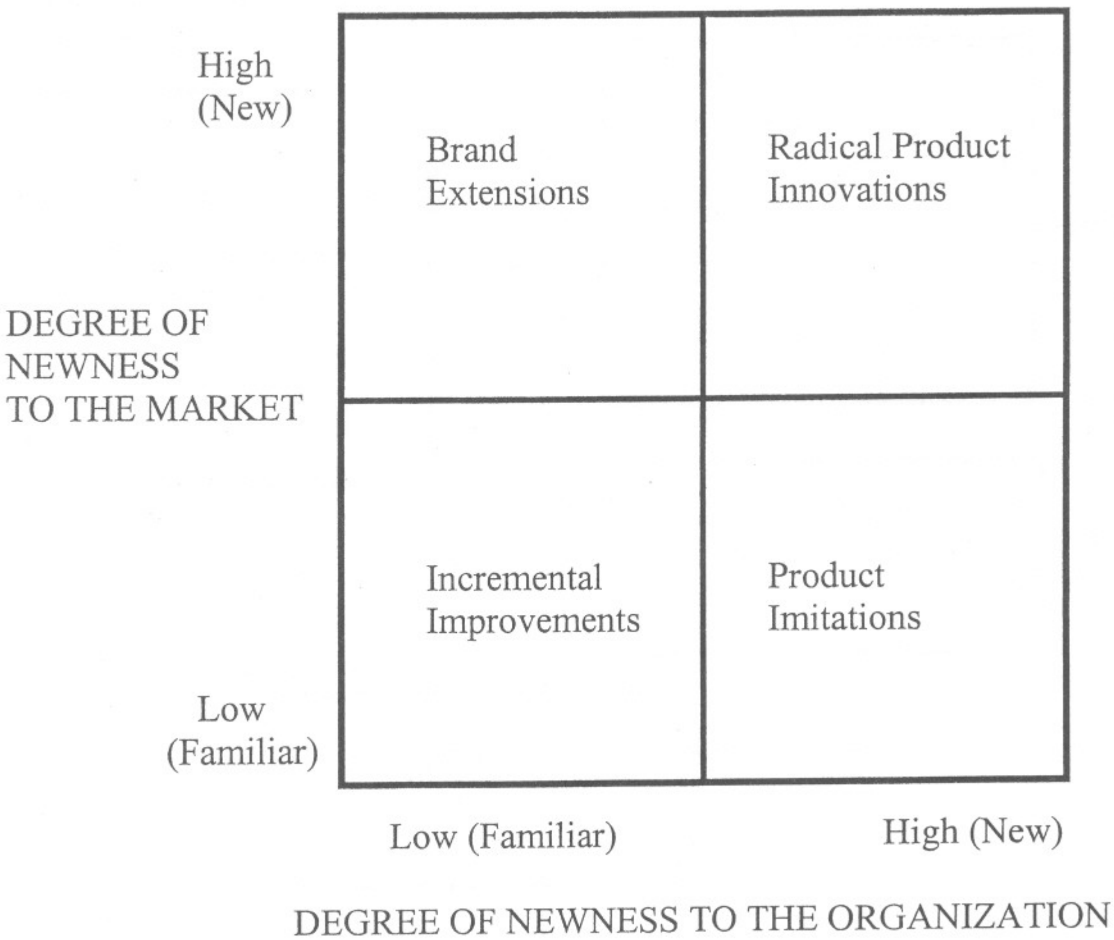
ERRATA

The following Figures were incorrectly printed in the Volume 11, Issue 1, Spring 2001 *Marketing Management Journal*. The Figures appeared on page 40 and page 44 of "Enhancing Brand Equity Capital with Enterprise-Wide Complementary Innovations" by R. Ray Gehani. The Editors regret these errors.

Figure – 1

NEW PRODUCTS BY DEGREE OF NEWNESS TO AN ORGANIZATION AND A MARKET



Source: Adapted from Booz, Allen, and Hamilton. 1982. *New Product Management for the 1980s*, New York: Booz, Allen, & Hamilton, Inc.

Figure – 2

ENHANCING BRAND EQUITY AND REPUTATIONAL CAPITAL BY INTEGRATING ORGANIZATION-WIDE INNOVATIONS