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FACTORS AFFECTING EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF STRATEGIC PLANNING: SOME PRELIMINARY EVIDENCE

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ABSTRACT

Strategic Planning/Business Policy as the unifying discipline within accredited graduate business schools has undergone significant changes in course content. The discipline has been expanded to include more concepts with a substantial empirical and conceptual base. These changes have had effects on the pedagogy of the course. An empirical test within a limited sample has shown that perceived teaching effectiveness is affected by the mix of pedagogy as well as the educational background of the instructor. Furthermore, this paper introduces a questionnaire with sufficient validity for use in further testing the effectiveness of various teaching pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

The strategic planning/business policy course has evolved considerably since its emergence as a unifying discipline integrating previously acquired knowledge from the functional area disciplines in the curriculum of the graduate and undergraduate business administration major, i.e. accounting, finance, management, marketing and production management. A substantial body of knowledge has emerged delineating business policy/strategic management (BPSM) as a separate and distinct field of study for researchers and teachers. This body of knowledge recognizes a paradigm yielding theories testable by empirical methodologies (Lane & Dittrich, 1982). However, there has been a shift in emphasis as the traditional functional content of the course has been supplemented by strategic planning models integrating concepts from organizational theory and behavior, portfolio theory, systems theory, and econometric theory for forecasting.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the role of the BPSM course in the graduate business curriculum through examination of course content and design, teaching skill prerequisites, and student skill preparation. Critical issues facing BPSM teachers will be addressed through an empirical test of the range of educational objectives presented by Dooley and Skinner (1977).

Early research critically points to the needs of: 1) establishing a differentiated discipline of strategic management; 2) developing a business policy curriculum; 3) changing the teaching objectives of the policy course and 4) re-evaluating the needs of our students (Unterman, 1979,p.492). This paper will focus upon the latter two issues in evaluating the graduate BPSM course at a single institution with different instructors.

TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Schendel and Hofer (1979) suggest that a traditional view of BPSM is as the capstone and integrative course. This view has continued to be the primary objective of the course within most business schools consistent with American Collegiate Schools of Business requirement for accreditation (e.g. AACSB, 1981). For example, a random selection of syllabi from three accredited universities list the first objective as: "...to integrate the functional administrative process..."; "...[the] integration of management and behavioral science principles, techniques and concepts..."; and "...[the] capstone course involving integration of previous education in business..". This sample corroborates the results from the sample of 198 business school deans (Eldredge & Galloway, 1983).

Therefore, the policy course is conceptualized and taught as the required capstone course in the business curriculum. It is often presented as an integrative course utilizing various pedagogical techniques including lectures, case analysis, computer simulations, field projects, and term papers. These techniques provide different process mechanisms for achieving educational objectives. Sufficient research has not been undertaken to test these various teaching methods in achieving specific educational objectives. However, Hoy and Boulton (1983) operationalized a Jungian measure of decision-making styles among undergraduate business and non-business majors. The research addressed the question of the effectiveness of undergraduate business curriculum in developing useful problem solving skills. Their results suggested using varied problem solving approaches in the business curriculum. Jemison and Lenz (1980) also encouraged the use of various pedagogic approaches to facilitate the understanding of an inherently complex subject area. This complexity exists because the nature of the strategic decision-making process is not defined and therefore, unstructured (Mintzberg et al., 1976).

INSTRUCTORS ROLE

As the concept and structure of the business policy course has changed, those who teach the subject have also changed. The professor of the traditional policy course was usually a senior faculty member, who by virtue of their diverse experience, often outside the university, was able to present the "expert" knowledge from within the functional areas. He or she was often trained within a functional specialty.

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The BPSM-trained professor has typically studied the concepts of strategic management and has been formally or informally trained as a process person 'with a working knowledge of the functional business areas. He or she facilitates the integrative process for the students, acts as a sounding board for their ideas, and provides direction and the necessary tools for analysis within the emergent substantive base of strategic management. In this learning environment, the students are provided the opportunity to test concepts and theories and implement skills learned from the functional disciplines.

This preliminary research effort provides an analysis of the importance of the policy professor by selecting one from the traditional school, i.e. a senior faculty member with government and industry experience, with a Ph.D. in a non-business area and the other with a Ph.D. in Business Policy without full-time industry or government experience.

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

In relation to the necessary attributes required to teach business policy, both implicit and explicit goals deserve attention. Sociologists have presented the terms 'manifest' and "latent" functions to designate the officially-defined purposes of a particular institution and the underlying purposes, respectively (Berger & Keller, 1981). For example, the manifest function of a liberal arts education is to transmit a broad base of knowledge; its latent function is to preserve and enforce specific values and behavioral norms.

The manifest function of the policy course as defined in the majority of business schools is to provide the graduating student an opportunity to integrate his or her educational experience and to develop business problem solving skills. For this reason, it was believed appropriate for the course to be taught by a person of considerable industry experience. An examination of the latent functions of the policy course indicates somewhat different and more diversified set of skills necessary to teach the course. As proposed by Schendel and Hofer (1979, p.14), BPSM process is comprised of six components: 1) goal formulation, 2) environmental analysis, 3) strategy formulation, 4) strategy evaluation, 5) strategy implementation and 6) strategic control. Within each of these component areas sufficient descriptive and normative literature exists for doctoral curricula (Unterman, 1979). The latent objectives of the policy course could include the ability to analyze unstructured problems and to implement solutions. Therefore, the policy class must also be considered a process course that teaches students how to analyze complex problems and develop solutions that could be implemented in the context of the organization.

The traditional teaching objectives of the policy course may need re-examination. For example, is the content of the present policy course different from what had been traditionally taught? Are the assumptions we make about the skills and abilities of the students different? Consistent with their skills and educational needs? If the content and student components have changed, as it is hypothesized herein, a reexamination of the pedagogy of BPSM is required.

PEDAGOGY

Unterman (1979) presented a matrix from Dooley and Skinner (1977) identifying teaching objectives with methods for their achievement in the BPSM course. The teaching methods employed to achieve these objectives are 1) lecture, 2) case discussion, 3) role playing 4) computer and other games and 5) "In Basket Technique" and "Incident Method". Unterman (1979) suggested that the most effective combination for achieving course objectives was the case method combined with lectures. Lang and Dittrich (1982) identified three major objectives of the BPSM course as: 1) the development of analytical and decision making skills, 2) information acquisition of tools, techniques, tactics and cumulative experience of strategic decision making, and 3) the development of problem solving skills. The information acquisition objective could be considered a manifest objective and the others are more closely associated with latent objectives. Lang and Dittrich (1982) provided a useful conceptual framework distinguishing for levels of skill building within the strategic management paradigm. However, in their pedagogy there may be an overemphasis on the skill-building objective, considered a manifest objective, diminishing an understanding of the synergistic aspect of the BPSM problem solving process. Jemison and Lenz (1980) recommended beginning the BPSM course by identifying a viable co-alignment between environmental conditions and strategy. This sets the stage for students to understand that the models presented in the functional area courses are generally insufficient for analyzing complex issues in the strategic framework.

When a complex case is assigned in the policy course, several assumptions are implied. First, it is assumed that the student has adequate familiarity with the functional business areas obtained from previous courses. Students working on a case are sometimes assigned to groups on the basis of their functional major, e.g. accounting, marketing, management, finance or computer science, so that a diversity of expertise is available to analyze the problems in the cases. It is also assumed that any policy student could respond to the issues in the case, but functional majors could provide the particular expertise.

Secondly, it is assumed that the students possess the skills needed to identify and

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obtain useful information. Finally, it is assumed that the students can organize information logically in writing and speaking. These assumptions may need to be fortified to a minor extent, however the emphasis in the BPSM class should be on the latent objectives. These objectives fulfill a more enduring educational purposes especially as the MBA graduate may not initially have the opportunity to make strategic decisions in an organization.

In the following sections an empirical basis is presented for testing the various pedagogical approaches identified above. The primary objective of this research is to distinguish factors that may affect the teaching of BPSM.

METHODOLOGY

Previous research has concentrated mainly on studying the effectiveness of different pedagogy. It is apparent that teaching methods affect learning outcomes. The process, is a dynamic system of transmitting knowledge from instructor to the student. One may consider this system as comprised of inputs and outputs. The inputs include the instructor's behavior and training, his or her role in the classroom, e.g. directive versus facilitative, the students background, departmental course policy, course content and teaching methods. The outputs include the final outcome of an educated student body. This Outcome may be viewed at two levels: 1) the degree of student learning, i.e. course content, and 2) the degree to which the student can implement this body of knowledge. The first level identifies short term or manifest objectives. The second level considers the long run or latent objectives. The latent objectives are the final outcome objectives and they are proposed as the more significant objectives of education. Manifest objectives are necessary to the achievement of the latent objectives.

Hypotheses

Through this preliminary analysis, an attempt is being made to broaden our understanding of the effectiveness of different teaching methods in the graduate BPSM course. The factors that contribute to the outcome of an educated BPSM student on both the manifest and latent level are as follows

1. Instructor's role: the way he/she presents the material, responds to the students needs, conducts the class and evaluates the students performance.
2. Departmental policy: the role the department has in selecting the text and prerequisites for the course.
3. Student input: the amount of effort the student provides in the course and the background knowledge of the student.
4. Course content: the structure of the course and the information given to the student.

5. Teaching methods: the different kind of teaching techniques, i.e. lecture, case analysis, and class discussion.

These five factors are proposed as affecting the manifest and latent objectives of BPSM. The following hypotheses are proposed:

1. PTME is positively related to the instructor's role.
2. PTME is positively related to course content.
3. PTME is negatively related to departmental policy, i.e. decreasing the flexibility of the instructor in selecting appropriate pedagogy (centralization vs. decentralization).
4. PTME is positively related to student input -
5. a. The instructor's role has a positive effect on the manifest and latent objectives.
b. The higher the perceived effectiveness of the instructor, the more positive the impact on latent objectives.
6. There is a distinction for preferred teaching method and the hierarchy of objectives as measured by the student's rank ordering of methods.

Sample

Two groups of students were selected from four sections of BPSM.. The first group included two sections of 66 students who took the course with Professor A, a junior faculty member trained in BPSM without full' Lime industry experience. The second group consisted 61 students who took the same course with Professor B, a senior faculty member not trained in BPSM with full-time government and industry experience. Each group received the same questionnaire in the last week of the semester.

Research Setting

As mentioned earlier, the sample consisted of two equivalent groups from the same school using the same course materials. The only differences were the instructors and the different teaching methods emphasized. In group one, the instructor lectured for approximately 15% of class time and otherwise conducted class as a facilitator and process leader for case discussions.

In group two, the instructor was more directive using lectures for approximately 50% of class time and case examples to emphasize strategic issues.

Measurement

The questionnaire was used for class and teacher evaluation. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part consisted of 21 Likert-scaled questions aimed at evaluating the instructor, homework, class discussion and teaching method. The second part was comprised of six Likert-scaled questions aimed to specifically evaluate the student's perception of teaching method effectiveness in terms of their manifest or latent effects. The items used from the questionnaire to measure the various scales exceeded the required reliability of scales exceed the required level with the exception

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only of scale. i.e. student input (Nunnally, 1967). The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to test the relationship between the dependent variables included for the perceived teaching method effectiveness and the independent variables (see Tables 1,2 & 3).

Results

The high positive relationship between course content and teaching method is similar in both groups (see Table 1). The results provide some Support Hypothesis 1 that more than one factor affects the perceived teaching method effectiveness.

TABLE 1. CORRELATIONS BETWEEN INPUT AND OUTPUT VARIABLES

Group 1 (n=66)		PTME		
	LECSP	CASISP	CASGSP	
INST	.41**	.46**	.38*	
DEPTPL	-.03	.01	-.18	
COURSE	.32*	-.007	.24	
STUDIN	.34*	.27	-.09	
TEACHM	.51**	.15	.46**	

Group 2 (n=61)		PTME		
	LECSP	CASISP	CASGSP	
INST	.08	.14	.15	
DEPTPL	.19	-.05	-.15	
COURSE	.33**	.31**	.26*	
STUDIN	.26*	.24*	.23*	
TEACHM	.14	.43**	.40**	

* significant at the .05 level.
 ** significant at the .01 level.

The results in Table 1 suggest:

1. The positive correlation between the instructor and PTME for Professor A (Group 1) partially supports Hypothesis 1.
2. The positive correlation between course content and PTME for professor B (Group 2) partially supports Hypothesis 2.
3. The negative correlation between departmental policy and the PTME for both groups support Hypothesis 3.
4. The positive correlation between student input and PTME especially for Group 2 partially supports Hypothesis 4.

Group 1 (n=66)		PTME				
	LECL	LECM	CASIL	CASIM	CASGL	CASGM
INST	.33*	.40**	.18	.50**	.24	.41**
DEPTPL	-.13	.02	-.01	.02	-.33*	-.12
COURSE	.31*	.26	.02	.005	.17	.23
STUDIN	.10	.41**	.01	.37*	-.13	-.03
TEACHM	.43**	.41**	.09	.14	.25	.46**

Group 2 (n=61)		PTME				
	LECL	LECM	CASIL	CASIM	CASGL	CASGM
INST	-.05	.10	.19	.12	.02	.16
DEPTPL	.12	.20	.04	-.15	.03	-.12
COURSE	.19	.34**	.26	.22	.24*	.25*
STUDIN	-.03	.31**	.11	.22	.08	.24*
TEACHM	.16	.11	.31*	.20	.36**	.33**

* significant at the .05 level.
 ** significant at the .01 level.

The results in Table 2 suggest:

Table 2. The Relationship between the Input variables and the Short Term (Manifest) and Long Term (Latent) Variables

1. The positive correlation between the instructor's role and the manifest and latent PTME partially supports Hypothesis 5 (a). However, a distinction cannot be made for latent versus manifest PTME providing no support for Hypothesis 5(b).

Table 3. RANK ORDER FOR THE TEACHING METHODS AND THEIR PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS FOR MANIFEST AND LATENT OBJECTIVES

	MANIFEST*				LATENT**	
	A	B	C	D	E	F
Lecture	2	2	2	3	3	3
Case (Ind.)	1	1	1	1	1	1
Case (Group)	3	3	3	2	2	2

Manifest Objectives: A) acquire knowledge; B) develop conceptual understanding; C) understanding teaching and B) acquire skill in using teaching.

Latent Objectives: E) ability to analyze unstructured problems; and F) understand the multifaceted implementation process.

A rank ordering for the two groups supports Hypothesis 6 (see Table 3). The individual case method was the first choice for manifest and latent objectives. The lecture method was considered second in importance for the manifest objectives and third for the latent objectives. This result is consistent with Unterman (1979) as the lecture method was considered less effective than the case method.

SYSTEMS MODEL OF EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

A systems model has been developed to understand the relationship between the independent variables, i.e. instructor's role, student input, course content, and department policy, and the dependent variable, the perceived teaching method effectiveness. The effectiveness was considered in two ways: short-run effectiveness (manifest) and long-run effectiveness (latent). The manifest effectiveness criterium was measured by the immediate gain of knowledge, i.e. acquire knowledge, develop conceptual understanding, understand techniques and acquire skill in using this technique. The latent effectiveness criterium was measured by the ability to apply the acquired knowledge i.e. acquire skill in analyzing business problems and acquire skill in implementation.

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The dynamic aspect of the model includes a feedback loop from the output (effectiveness) to the input (independent variables). Assuming that the degree of effectiveness will affect the instructor's role either in the class at the present or in the future, the course content and departmental policy, to a lesser degree, will be affected. Considering the student input, the degree of effectiveness will either encourage the student to provide more effort or not. In this research, more emphasis could be on increasing latent knowledge.

The results lend partial support for the distinction between manifest and latent objectives. The research is however preliminary and not generalizable. The lack of generalizability exists because the samples were taken from a single institution and the measures are being employed for the first time. In addition, an objective measure of individual performance was not included which may have been confounding the results.

However, the study suggests that the instructor does have an effect on the perceived effectiveness of different pedagogy. This may be attributed to the different educational training that the two professors received. It may also suggest that differently trained professors should employ a different mix of existing pedagogy to maximize the manifest and latent educational objectives of the class.

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