

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Learning, Volume 11, 1984

A MARKETING PLAN EXERCISE: DEVELOPMENT OF INTERTEAM COOPERATION USING A COORDINATED EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

A class project designed to develop a marketing plan and created to reinforce behavioral concepts. In this project students must cooperate and coordinate efforts since the entire class creates the marketing plan and the marketing plan is given a single grade which is shared by all members of the class. If class members are rewarded for extra effort or penalized for reduced effort, the special recognition comes from peer evaluations. As in the world of business, performance is a team effort with the weakest link affecting the final output.

INTRODUCTION

Use of multiple team projects or cases as an experiential learning method often results in problems of coordination and integration of real world situations into a classroom environment. Students commonly view their assignment as unique and unrelated to the efforts of their classmates. Instructor efforts are often duplicated in dealing with a variety of projects. Even when an entire class is used to develop a single project, students normally are concerned only with "their" part and cooperation between teams remains minimal. As a result, the instructor is left with the responsibility of being sure that individual efforts are coordinated and in line with a common goal.

The purpose of the following paper is to describe a class project which requires a maximum amount of interpersonal communication between teams as well as the usual intrapersonal communication among team members themselves. Goals are set by the class as a whole. Team efforts are all aimed at achieving these goals. The project puts emphasis on the fact that output will be greater when functional areas cooperate in an attempt to achieve this common goal. Cooperation is reinforced by assigning a single grade to the entire project and thus tying an individual's grade to the efforts of others. In addition, the responsibility of several teams involves coordination of individual efforts and overall presentation of project results. Students quickly learn that their performance not only affects others but also that the performance of others can directly affect them.

BACKGROUND

During the fall of 1982 a representative of the Buick Division of General Motors contacted the School of Business at California State University at Fresno. As a result of this contact, several professors from the Marketing Department met with the Buick representatives to discuss a situation which would ultimately call for the student project used in this report.

Basically, Buick was interested in development of a plan to market two new models, Century and Skyhawk. It was their

feeling that students might shed a fresh insight into the problems of target market and methods of marketing the two new models. Although there were no funds for the project other than \$200 for final preparation of reports, the Buick Division was willing to spend the money needed to implement the plan in Fresno. The challenge of preparing a marketing plan for Buick using two senior marketing classes was the underlying reason for development of this experiential simulation.

Once the initial project was outlined, the task was to create a classroom format which would permit development of a marketing plan in a limited time frame, one semester. In addition, there was concern about providing students with a valuable learning experience using this "real life experience."

The following limitations were inherent in the project:

1. Time. The project had to be completed within the constraint of a single semester.
2. Money. Students would not be given funds for research. The two constraints of time and money meant that all research would be of a cursory nature and would thereby limit results. All parties were aware of these problems from the outset.
3. Student Learning. Everyone was also aware of the fact that the primary consideration would be student learning. Useful plans were desired but not the primary consideration.

PROJECT ELEMENTS

A. Organizational Design

In order to provide maximum learning, the pedagogical technique of simulating a company marketing department was employed. No one marketing organization fit the needs of the class. (I) Thus, the use of the following organizational chart was decided on as the best for this project.

On the first day of class, students were given a syllabus with the organizational chart shown in Exhibit 1. In addition, responsibilities of the committees were explained (Exhibit 2). Students were informed that their term project for the marketing problems class would be a true class project. This meant that the class would develop a marketing plan. Members of the class would be given an opportunity to sign up for committees. Two criteria would be used in assigning committee members: interest in subject of committee responsibility and availability for outside class meetings consistent with others having like interests.

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Organizational Chart for Class

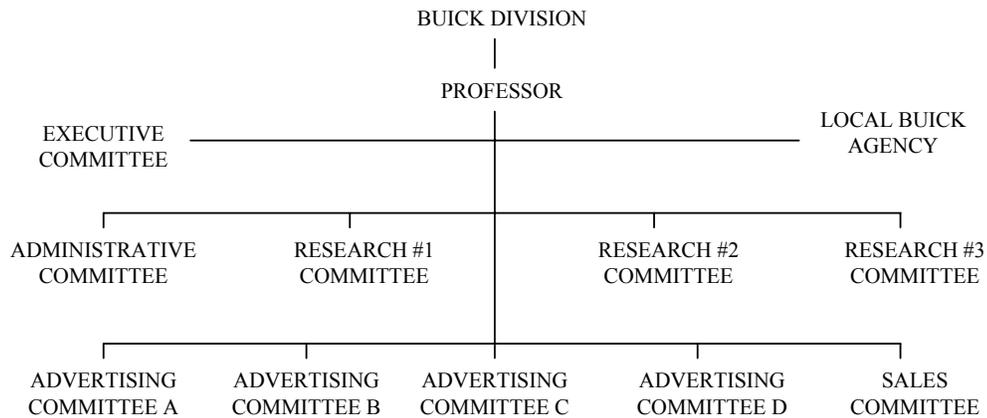


EXHIBIT 2.

COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES	
COMMITTEE	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY
Administrative	To prepare the executive summary for the marketing plan. To determine the format for committee reports. To determine the place for the final report. To make the final report to Buick. To assist in coordination.
Advertising A & Advertising C	To prepare ads suitable for radio and TV. (A for Skyhawk and C for Century) To prepare a budget for the ads. To prepare a suggested schedule for the ads. To prepare the final report on radio & TV ads for inclusion in the marketing plan.
Advertising B & Advertising D	To prepare ads suitable for print media. To prepare a budget for the ads. (B for Skyhawk and D for Century.) To prepare a schedule for the ads. To prepare the final report on print media for inclusion in the marketing plan.
Research A	Development of secondary research. Preparation of material for inclusion in the marketing plan.
Research B & Research C	Plan and coordinate research of a primary nature. (B for Skyhawk and C for Century.) NOTE: ALL members of the class will support research activities in data gathering. Preparation of material for inclusion in the marketing plan.
Sales	To develop incentive plans and point of purchase displays. To prepare the material for the marketing plan.

B. Establishment of Committees

Exhibit 3. represents the form which was distributed for class members to designate committee preferences and to stipulate ideal meeting times. Use of this form made it possible to assign

students to committees with a minimum of conflict. As a result, all except five (5) were given either their first or second choices. Students who were assigned their third choice had given very restrictive options

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EXHIBIT 3

PERSONAL DATA SHEET	
NAME _____	TEAM ASSIGNMENT _____
ADDRESS _____	USE COMPUTER? YES _____ NO _____
Home Phone _____	Work Phone _____
Best time to call? _____	Best time to call? _____
Please rank the following areas in order of your preference: 1 is highest.	
ADMINISTRATION _____	SALES _____ RESEARCH _____ ADVERTISING _____
Below is a form for a schedule. Mark a "c" for class, a "w" for work, and an "m" for meeting. There will probably be several meetings of your committee outside of class. Be sure to mark times which are going to be easy for you to meet with your classmates.	
	7-10AM 10-12 12-2 2-4 6-8 8-10
MONDAY _____	
TUESDAY _____	
WEDNESDAY _____	
THURSDAY _____	
FRIDAY _____	
SATURDAY _____	
SUNDAY _____	
You must mark at least three times when you can meet	

for meeting times. Use of this form helps overcome one of the frequent complaints students voice concerning team projects. Specifically, it helps control for intrateam performance.

In an attempt to provide a structure for committee organization, meetings, and evaluation; the following instructions were provided:

Committee Structure

1. Each committee will elect a chairperson.
2. Elected chairpersons will serve as a member of the Executive Committee.
3. The Executive Committee will meet only during class time and be responsible for coordination.
4. The elected chairperson will serve as the communicator with the Buick Division and or the local agency to prevent many students taking up the time of busy people with similar questions.

Committee Minutes

1. Each committee will keep an accurate up-to-date set of minutes of all meetings.
2. Minutes will be part of the student's grade. You will get full credit IF minutes are maintained and kept up-to-date.
3. Minutes will contain:
 - a. time and place of each meeting.
 - b. members present.
 - c. assignments made to members.
 - d. report of whether assignments were completed and on time.
 - e. time and place of next meeting.

Peer Evaluation

1. At the end of the term, each person on the committee will be evaluated by her/his peers.
 - a. possible 30 points for attendance.

30 pts. for 100%	24 pts. for 90%
20 pts. for 80%	16 pts. for 75%
0 pts. for less than	75%

- b. possible 70 points for attitude.

Each member will rate members other than self. Member score will be the average of the peer attitude rates. Attitude will be assessed on the basis of the following scale.

	7 6 5 4 3 2 1	
cooperative		uncooperative
open minded		opinionated
prompt		late
high quality work		low quality work
contributed		disrupted
enthusiastic		not care at all
would like to be with on a team again		would never like to be with on a team again.

2. Late or lost minutes will result in 0 points for all members of committee.

C. Goals

Class Goals

The class period following student designation of preferences was used to make actual committee assignments. As soon as everyone knew his/her assignment, the groups met to get acquainted. Committee organization and responsibilities were reviewed. Next, the class goals of development of a marketing plan was defined. Elements of the plan were provided and committee input to the elements was clarified. As often as possible the need for cooperation was stressed.

Company Goals

After committee assignments had been made, a representative from the Buick Division of General Motors and the local dealer came to the class to discuss the need for a marketing plan for the two models of Buick, Century and Skyhawk. The introduction of the cars had not been

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as solid as had been hoped. There was also some concern as to the appropriate target market. Data as to past sales, past promotions, performance and other pertinent information was provided to the class. During the presentation, both Buick and dealer goals were given but were not directly identified. Students had to read between the lines and make inferences to determine these goals.(2)

Committee Goals

During the next class period, students were given class time to get committees organized and set committee goals. All business students have been exposed to the need for goal setting in virtually every course. Yet, students found the task cumbersome because they had never been required to create a goal. Goals had been given, discussed, or gleaned from a case, but never originated. Since all marketing activities are supposed to support corporate goals, it was hoped that the first step would be to determine the goals of the Buick Division or the local dealer.

Students were permitted to flounder. It was felt that any professor input at this point would discourage independent action. Even so, several concerns were voiced. As each committee posed a question, the question was repeated for the entire class to hear. It was then opened up for any or all to answer.

Common concerns seemed to be:

- a. how can we get to our work until does their work?
- b. how can we set our goals without knowing what we are to do?
- c. how can we get to work until someone tells us what to do or until someone tells us what they want from us?
- d. how will what we do be reflected in our grade? e. how will we know what others are doing?

At first, students were more concerned with problems than with solutions. When this fault was pointed out, attitudes seemed to shift and work was undertaken. Next, they were told that perhaps the committee for secondary research could get them going by providing data from the library. At this point the need for joint effort became more apparent. The other research groups realized that they needed to collect data before the other committees could make their contribution to the marketing plan.

As usual, the first questions resolved around what should be researched. They were told to examine anything they felt would help with a marketing plan. After a couple of days, the committee returned with data. Then the class asked why they had not also included certain additional information. The research committee responded that they had not been told to get it. Hence, another need for cooperation came to light. Now, a need for inter- as well as intragroup communications became clear. Even so, at the end of the term, the most common complaint with the project was lack of adequate intergroup communications.

The administrative committee also provided goal direction since it was a part of their responsibility to determine a format for committee reports, set deadlines, and make an initial assessment of quality. They had the power to return any work to the committee for rework if it did not meet specifications.

Individual Goals

Goal direction was also provided by the common grade. Nearly twenty (20) percent of each person's grade was riding on the term class project. It was clear that encouragement was needed as well as peer pressure to get a quality product.

D. Integration

A major objective of the project was to help students learn the necessity of working as a unit. One of the complaints often voiced about college students is an inability to deal with interpersonal interactions. By forcing them to perform as a class it was hoped that they would be exposed to the necessity of cooperation for the good of the class.

Another goal of the project was to interface a real world situation with classroom material. To this end, all committees were given an assignment pertaining to classroom work. This effort did not require interface with Buick but did offer an opportunity for students to give some study to the material that was directly applicable to their team. Each committee was required to make a formal oral presentation. The oral presentations were sequenced to fit the needs of the class for information and to fit the cases which were a part of the day-to-day course work. Exhibit 4. indicates how oral reports covering course related topical areas were integrated into the various committee responsibilities.

EXHIBIT 4

PROJECT INTEGRATION WITH ORAL REPORTS	
COMMITTEE	ORAL REPORT ASSIGNMENT
Research A	#1 Marketing Segmentation
Administration	#2 Marketing Organization & Goals
Sales	#3 Organization of Sales Force
Ad A	#4 Selection of an Ad Agency
Ad B	#5 Preparation of an Ad Budget
Research B	#6 Forecasting
Ad C	#7 Legal Environment of Marketing
Ad D	#8 Channels
Research C	#9 International

In a class of 75 minutes, the reports were to be 30 minutes long. Each team was to have a hand Out summary or outline and was to make assignments for homework ahead of time for class participation. Oral reports were not supposed to be text book lectures. Rather, they were to be up-to-date material from magazines and/or journals. At the end of each oral report, the professor gave a summary and lecture on the material.

Further integration was obtained by introduction of a fifteen session at the close of each week to access time and sequencing problems. As a means of keeping students synchronized with real world problems, the rest of the grade and class sessions were case oriented.

E. Final Report

Throughout the semester students struggled with problems of communications between teams, fellow students who were not cooperative, missed deadlines, and several less categorical problems. However, when

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the final report was made to the Buick representatives, everyone was pleased. One factor that contributed to the success of the final report was a scheduled dress rehearsal. The administrative committee made a full rehearsal presentation in front of the class. At this presentation, classmates were free to make constructive comments. The administrative committee presentation was compiled from reports submitted by the various other committees. Thus, some of the student comments were actually criticisms about the content of their own committee reports rather than of the Administrative Committee summary. At this point in time the professor had not been privy to the student's work.

At the actual presentation, representatives of the Buick Division were very greatly impressed with the quality and professionalism displayed by the students. Everyone agreed that the rehearsal had given them confidence. Naturally, the entire class was praised for this good performance. Each final report was given in a location suited for a presentation of this nature. Students had made arrangements for use of a meeting room. Every student had been instructed by the executive committee to attend in clothing appropriate for an interview not in attire usually worn to class. This also impressed the Buick representatives. Thus, the lesson of showmanship had also been taught.

F. Debriefing

The last class session of the term was reserved for debriefing. A formal debriefing summary, Exhibit 5, was distributed. As usual, the debriefing contained statements addressing the lessons that could have been learned, lessons that were probably learned, and lessons that were probably missed.⁽³⁾ Each class was somewhat unique, thus, a separate debriefing sheet was prepared for each class unit.

HIGHLIGHTS

1. THIS FORM OF CLASS PROJECT IS DESIGNED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO SIMULATE A REAL WORLD ORGANIZATION.
 - A. Teams or committees are developed to approximate functional areas in a business or marketing organization.
 - B. Relationships among committees are predicated on use of an organizational chart which can be adapted to individually unique situations.
 - C. Another dimension could be added by presenting the situation to the students and have them provide input in designing the organizational structure for the project.
2. A SINGLE SET OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES IS USED FOR ALL TEAMS.
 - A. A single grade is assigned to the entire project.
 - B. A single project also reduces the instructor's burden of having to deal with multiple projects, papers, and presentations.
 - C. The concept stresses that individuals must not only be concerned with "their" team efforts but also that their performance affects and is affected by the performance of other teams.
 - D. Emphasis is placed on cooperation and communication between teams. Also, students assigned to the administrative committee and executive committee gain additional insight into the problems of coordination and cooperation

EXHIBIT 5.

DEBRIEFING SUMMARY	
1. Goals	It is easier to get started when goals are clearly in mind and preferably in writing.
2. Communications	It is one thing to actually solve a problem of communications and another to just say a problem exists. Recognition of the problem is just the first step. There remains a more difficult step of solving the problem.
3. Organization	A chart is helpful but does not mean that a discrete separation of effort is automatic.
4. Marketing Plan	Knowing the elements of a marketing plan is one thing. Putting a plan in writing is another.
5. Coordination	At first, some students wanted to get to work quickly while others preferred to delay work until the last minute. However, in this simulation, as in business, it was necessary for one committee to complete some work before others could start. A PERT type chart would have been helpful.
6. Segmentation	Segmentation is more than an abstract concept.
7. Advertising	Recognizing the complexity of basing ads on theory from consumer behavior.
8. Budget	Seeing the necessity of having a basis for a budget plus the problems of allocation.
9. Sales	Realizing the necessity of coordination of sales effort with ad themes and timing.
10. Research	Learning the necessity of a clearly defined problem. Many times what the class specified as desired information did not give them what they expected.
11. Data	Finding that there is value in data from secondary sources and data gathered by qualitative techniques.
12. Reports	The value of quality, attention to detail, and rehearsal.
13. Product	The difficulty of fitting segments to products after they have been designed.
14. Image	Seeing the impact of image and the difficulty of changing an image.
15. Time	Meeting deadlines is important. Time must be budgeted and acts as a constraint limiting the degree of marketing sophistication which can be achieved.
16. Winning	The joy of hearing praise for a job well done is worth the effort to win.
17. Learning	There is a lot of learning in doing. One often learns more from mistakes than from any other method. What one hopes is that mistakes will be cheap.

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3. PROBLEMS USUALLY ASSOCIATED WITH TEAM PROJECTS ARE DIRECTLY ASSESSED.
 - A. A means of determining individual input at committee meetings is used. It is often difficult to assess any one person's work done "behind the scenes." The final report in many cases is the work of one or two individuals and does not reflect the efforts of individual team members.
 - B. Extreme care is taken when assigning individuals to teams to minimize personal conflicts and maximize student interest in the committee he/she is assigned to.
 - C. The single grade for the class removes the difficulty associated with assigning grades to dissimilar term projects.
4. THE PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT IS TO GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE ELEMENTS OF A MARKETING PLAN AND HOW THESE ELEMENTS INTEGRATE WITH EACH OTHER.
 - A. Using the organizational design forces students to realize their role in some overall plan rather than looking at their assignment as a separate entity. Then working on their portion of the plan requires constantly relating to the overall goals and objectives.
 - B. The elements of a plan are placed in perspective as interrelated, albeit distinctive.
5. INTEGRATION OF PROJECT INTO COURSE MATERIALS IS ACHIEVED
 - A. Interim oral reports by committees on topics covered in the course permits the integration of the exercise into the day-to-day materials which must be covered.
 - B. Students are permitted to use the company under examination as the focus of their report, but are allowed to use other examples and thereby broaden the application of many topics.
6. TECHNIQUE CAN BE APPLIED TO A WIDE VARIETY OF PROJECTS
 - A. Whereas this particular project involved a marketing plan and a marketing department organizational structure, the concept can be used in any situation where a variety of committees are used to achieve goals and objectives. The key is the single goal which can be divided into interrelated parts requiring intercommittee cooperation.
7. REALISM IS PROJECTED THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT
 - A. Committees replace academic teams.
 - B. One grade for the entire class replaces individual evaluation. Businesses are commonly assessed as a units too.
 - C. Time is a real factor. Coordination becomes important.
 - D. Formation of budgets are required. Problems of allocation must be addressed.
 - E. Attention to detail is necessary.
 - F. Rehearsal makes the final outcome better.

REFERENCES

- [1] For some examples of organizational structures in marketing see Luck, David J. and Ferrell, O. C., Marketing Strategy and Plans, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1979), pp. 57-68, and Haas, Robert W. and Wortruba, Thomas R., Marketing Managements (Plano, Texas: Business Publications, Inc., 1983), pp. 31-79.
- [2] A description of the elements, nature, and purpose of a marketing plan can be found in Kotler, Philip, Marketing Management, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1980), ch. 10.
- [3] Duke, Richard D. and Creenblat, Cathy S., "Running Games: A Guide for Caine Operators," in their book, Gaming-Simulation: Rationale, Design, and Applications, (New York: Wiley, 1975), pp. 207-208, and Carlson, John G. and Missauk, Michael, J., Introduction to Gaming: Management and Decision Simulations, (New York: Wiley, 1972), pp. 45-4