

EPIGRAMMATIC SALES SCENARIOS AND EVALUATIONS: INCORPORATING THE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING APPROACH TO RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT, AND GRADING OF SALES PRESENTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Scenario development can be a challenge as actual situations have to be developed while incorporating an opportunity for the students to practice the concepts taught in the classroom. This paper presents sales scenarios utilizing the experiential learning approach where students are exposed to real-world scenarios, which prepare them to graduate with a skill set of business-ready practitioners, while still being in a “protected environment.” Professors have the opportunity to develop social capital among the community as well. The paper also presents an evaluation sheet that serves as a standardized template for each presentation thus supporting assessment quality and consistency.

INTRODUCTION

In a recent editorial, Peltier, Scovotti, and Pointer (2008) highlighted the importance of emphasizing curriculum and experiential learning as part of the academic experience. This creates an environment where students will be better prepared and have a stronger background in their career paths. Experiential learning might find its origins in the reality that business students face: they are expected to graduate with a mind set of business-ready practitioners. Such a demand for experiential learning has led to new approaches in the classroom where; team exercises, group projects, service-learning projects (McCarthy and McCarthy 2006), case analysis, business simulations (Forman 2006) and sales presentations are now actively incorporated.

Developing teaching materials that support and further experiential learning can be challenging to find or create for various reasons: class preparation time, on-going research projects, and service initiatives have to be carefully balanced. Nevertheless, instructors are faced with a student population that requires stimulating educational experiences to be able to maintain their interest, concentration, and motivation. Pedagogical techniques such as exercises, that are based on active learning allow for maintaining such interest while encouraging them to actualize classroom concepts in real world circumstances (Peltier, Scovotti and Pointer 2008). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to present a series of innovative sales scenarios which employ the experiential learning approach. Furthermore, a grade evaluation rubric that ensures a systematic and consistent process for providing feedback in the development and delivery of sales presentations is included.

THE SALES SCENARIOS AND THEIR INSTRUCTIONS

These exercises were conceived to utilize the experiential learning approach. This is an educational approach in which learning takes place by engaging the student in an experience or practice session that advances the concepts covered in class. Incorporating experiential learning has already been reported to yield satisfactory results for its participants (Peltier, Scovotti, and Pointer 2008).

Overall, students at the end of these exercises are appreciative because they “feel they have greater knowledge and know how in the area of sales,” as reported by previous participants who already experienced this exercise. Participants also derive a feeling of empowerment at the conclusion of the exercises. The instructor should make available the sales scenarios well in advance so that students have enough time to research their scenario, develop the presentation and practice. The actual scenarios can be found in Table 1.

Below are the instructions provided to the students:

“Attached to this document, there is a list of eight for-profit and three not-for profit scenarios to create a professional presentation. Please select one of the scenarios provided and develop an eight to ten minutes sales presentation. If you are interested in another topic, please talk to me first so I can approve the topic. Follow the FEBA approach (Feature, Evidence, Benefit, and Agreement) to build your presentation.”

“I am interested in helping you develop confidence in public speaking and presenting. Be creative in your presentation and using a PowerPoint presentation is suggested. Yes, you can ‘borrow’ material

TABLE 1
SALES SCENARIOS

For Profit Presentations

1. You represent Walt Disney World Resorts. Please present why “we” as consumers should choose to stay at a Disney Hotel. The presentation is for families thinking about visiting Disney World for Christmas. You may choose to (a) do a general presentation of all the types of hotels that Disney offers or (b) choose one hotel category and maybe talk about one or two hotels within that category as examples.
Website: <http://disneyworld.disney.go.com>. Once there, position the mouse on the “resorts” tab: a mini-window will appear with options such as all resorts, guest benefits, resort comparison, and prices.
2. You work for the Sales and Catering Department of a hotel. The hotel is interested in expanding its revenue by using their ballroom for social events. Pick a hotel of your choice and develop a sales presentation of the ballroom. The hotel can be a local hotel or a hotel that you might have found online in another city. Be creative as to what services this ballroom can offer, are there any packages they could offer? Choose your audience: are you presenting to business owners (e.g., As part of a presentation at the local Chamber of Commerce) or to engaged couples (e.g., In a bridal fair)?
3. As a sales agent for a make-up company, you will be presenting your line of products to the Store Manager and the Buyers for Dillard’s or Macy’s. Why should these stores include your line as part of their offering? If you are a female, you can choose brands such as Clinique, Lancôme, Mac, etc. If you are a male, you can choose the “male lines” of these brands. For example, Clinique’s line is simply called Men’s and includes several products. You can also choose an acne treatment or a sun-protection line.
4. Choose a bank and create a sales presentation for small business owners. What service does your bank offer that is attractive to these people? Why should they bank with this “Wonderful Bank” of yours? You can visit local/national banks and/or their web pages to build your presentation.
5. Choose a bank and create a sales presentation for students. Why should students bank with you? What are their motives and needs? Are there any long-term benefits to them? You can visit local/national banks and/or their web pages to build your presentation.
6. Choose a bank and create a sales presentation for the general public about your bank’s checking account and the services the bank provides. Why should they bank with this “Wonderful Bank” of yours? You can visit local/national banks or their webpage to build your presentation.
7. The “X” gym just opened and you will be making a sales presentation to potential customers. Why should I sign up with this gym? What are the benefits, packages, and extras available? For example, moms tend to look for a gym with a child care area. Men tend to look for good weight-training areas. Choose your audience: are you presenting for a mixed audience? Or to a female or male only audience?
8. You work for an insurance/financial services agency. As part of your activities, you will be making a sales presentation to women in the local country club. What is it that would make these women sign up with your agency? What are the concerns that women have? Do they differ than those of a man? Not all of them are single; do they need the husband to make such an important decision? How would you handle the husband factor? Some services are: car, home, unemployment, disability insurance, and management of retirement systems.

Not-for-Profit Presentations

1. According to the American Heart Association, heart disease continues to be the #1 killer of women in America. Unfortunately, many women do not know this issue, or even though they have heard about it, do not know what to do. Many women still think that heart disease is a “man’s disease.” The goal of this presentation is to empower women to take care of their heart and keep it in good health by teaching them the necessary steps that they need

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)
SALES SCENARIOS

to address. How would you organize this presentation? What issues should be addressed?

For information go to: www.goredforwomen.com or to www.americanheart.org (look for women, heart disease <http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=4786>).

2. According to the latest headlines, America is one of the fattest nations on the planet. About 67 million Americans are obese, and an additional 75 million are overweight, according to the 2001-04 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. Moreover, being obese or overweight are two conditions that lead to many other health problems such as: high cholesterol, diabetes, stroke, heart attack, knee or hip replacement, fatigue, etc. Your presentation is aimed at the general public. How would you educate your audience about this problem? The goal of this presentation is to empower and motivate people to take care of their weight. You will teach them general principles of what “healthy eating” is. How would you organize this presentation? What issues should be addressed?

For information go to: www.cnn.com (Fit Nation), www.americanheart.org (Under Diseases and Conditions and under Healthy lifestyle).

3. Go Green. There is a growing interest on conserving our planet. Yet, many do not know what environmental responsibility is. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the world population is expanding at a mind-boggling rate. It is estimated that the population will swell to over 9 billion by 2050. That means that if the world’s natural resources were evenly distributed, people in 2050 will only have 25% of the resources per capita that people in 1950 had (<http://gogreeninitiative.org/content/WhyGoGreen/>).

Your presentation is aimed to the general public. The goal of your presentation is to educate people about what is the “go green” movement and why it is important. You will also give ideas of things people can do to help the planet. For information go to: (<http://www.gogreeninitiative.org> or to <http://www.epa.gov/newsroom/gogreen/>).

4. Big brothers / Big sisters is an organization that “is not your typical organization. We help children realize their potential and build their futures. We nurture children and strengthen communities. And we couldn’t do any of it without you” (Big Brothers Big Sisters website). The organization offers two simple ways to help it: Donate or volunteer. The goal of your presentations is to educate people about what this organization stands for, why it is important here in the DFW area, and to try to establish a relationship by having the individuals to commit with either time or money. Remember to try to include numbers about what the DFW area needs to make your presentation stronger. For information go to: (<http://www.bbbs.org>).

that you find online from other businesses to build your presentation. If you do, include the websites used as a reference list in your presentation. If possible, call or visit a local business that might already be involved what you are trying to develop. Please invest the time necessary to make your presentation better. If you do call or visit a local business, interview them as to what information they use, how they talk to people, and obtain tips from them. Two of your sources should at least come from the Internet.”

“Your presentation should include the following sections: Introduction (Introduce yourself and the organization), Body (FEBA format), Questions/objections, Closing remarks (conclusion), and References.”

- ◆ *To make your presentation stronger:*

- ◆ *Be prepared to handle questions and objections.*
- ◆ *Sell value – Create a climate of trust to build better client relationships. Get customers involved by using questions – it’s also a way to test how much are they agreeing with you.*
- ◆ *Believe in what you are presenting.*
- ◆ *Use short, simple, uncomplicated words. Utilize words that create a visual image.*
- ◆ *Use questions to help you control the presentation.*

These sales scenarios are not canned presentations. They could be seen as the rules of engagement without sacrificing critical thinking and creativity. The scenarios indicate the product or service to be presented and the audience for which the message will be created and delivered. Subsequently, the student is responsible for

conducting research, building and presenting the presentation with a message that is relevant for the selected target audience. Involving students in research is beneficial for the student as it leads to a greater understanding of the actual research process and allows acquiring skills and experiences that could be noted in a resume (Simpson, Tanguma, and Serviere 2006). The clear specification of a target audience engages students into a critical thinking exercise as they have to identify key points to be included, clarify any unclear or misconceived ideas they perceive the target audience might have (especially critical for not-profit scenarios), prioritize the ideas presented to include those with greater persuasive power, and close with a convincing statement that calls the audience to action.

The sales scenarios are a strong tool because they allow for comments and objections from the potential buyers, roll played by the class members and instructor. The presenter is expected to answer the questions and objections raised and if appropriate to adapt accordingly. This notion is supported by Carroll (2006), who pointed out that “good sales presentations will show a level of improvisation/ adaptiveness due to an objection being raised” (p.10). Moreover, an actual sales process is dynamic allowing for communication to flow from both ends. Students are therefore exposed to a realistic sales presentation while still being in a “protected environment.”

The instructions ask the student to follow the FEBA format (Feature, Evidence, Benefits, and Agreement) when developing the presentation. Other sales formats could be adopted as preferred by the instructor. Furthermore, the exercises could incorporate the use of free federally-collected and web-published information and statistics to enhance the exercise. An international component could be added as well. Incorporating these aspects can help to “develop more global awareness and intercultural competencies” (Arleen and Taylor 2006, p. 30) in business students. The exercise could also be seen as a way to extend the college’s ties to the community and develop social capital because the students are encouraged to contact local businesses to research and develop the presentations. To create and extend social capital, instructors could ask for the contact person that the students employed and invite them to be present on the day of the presentation. A follow-up e-mail thanking the business contacts for the opportunity and guidance should also be considered. In this way, a relationship that could lead to find potential donors, scholarships, and internship agreements starts being nurtured.

THE EVALUATION INSTRUMENT

This evaluation sheet has been developed to support both: the instructor, in his or her grading role, and the students and their experience, as it provides feedback and assessment quality. An evaluation sheet for each student

is filled out by the instructor during the presentation. A marker can be used to highlight the parts that the student needs to work on eliminating the need for hand-written comments. However, at the bottom of the sheet, and on the back, the instructor has space for additional comments. This “extra” effort allows for a more personalized student experience which is usually reflected in positive comments in the student evaluations.

The evaluation sheet serves as a standardized template for each presentation thus supporting assessment quality and consistency. Students can be provided with feedback in a systematic manner by involving peers, the instructor, and self critique as suggested by Carroll (2006). One method of providing feedback is to allow peer feedback at the end of each presentation, time permitting. Later, once all the presentations set for that class period have been concluded, the rest of the class may be dismissed to allow for a more private feedback setting. The evaluation sheets are handed out to each presenter so that students can read the comments and be informed of their grade. While students have the evaluation sheet, the instructor can meet with those that need any extra clarification while the rest engages in self-critique. Once reviewed, the students are asked to return the evaluations to the instructor. By systematically allowing students to receive feedback, students gain a better understanding of their strong presentation skills as well as of those that need improvement. Such consistency when providing feedback leads to an improvement in the quality of the assessment performed (Carroll 2006). The evaluation sheet can be found in Table 2.

CONCLUSION

A key point to stress is that instructors need to be clear and specific about the project content and evaluation methods in order to help students develop their full potential as well as to obtain better grades. A key recommendation is to introduce the scenarios and the grading criteria as soon as possible in the semester. This also helps instructors to set an adequate level of expectations which ultimately supports student success. The evaluation form allows students a greater opportunity to receive in depth feedback regarding their presentation skills. The evaluation also offers an opportunity for improvement since students can also be praised and encouraged to further develop positive aspects of skills exhibited. Overall, the evaluation can serve as a tool so that the students are aware of their strengths and weaknesses when engaging in sales presentations. It can also serve as a validation tool when the student engages in a second or third presentation, as it will hopefully show that the positive abilities have been sustained (validated) and weaknesses improved. This evaluation sheet can be adapted to other marketing courses. The instructor can choose to

TABLE 2
GRADE SHEET EVALUATION

Presentation

Student _____ **Date** _____

Scenario _____

Rubric _____ **Points** _____

Introduction

Effectively gains attention
Builds rapport

Body

FEBA Format
Feature
Evidence
Benefits
Agreement

Quality of Content

Relevant information
Clear organization
Use of valid sources

Quality of the Presentation

Speaks to the audience
Persuasive/ Enthusiasm/Confidence
Clear and professional language
Does not read from notes
Modulates voice (avoids monotony)
Objection handling

Conclusion

Uses appropriate/clear closing remarks

Total Grade:

Notes:

alter the body of the presentation and instead of requesting the FEBA format; it can be adapted to grade a marketing plan in a principles of marketing class. The grade sheet provided allows for consistent and informative feedback to students so that they can improve their understanding and performance of sales presentations. It is important to point out that this is not a survey of learning outcomes. However, based on the curriculum needs of the instructor,

the evaluation sheet is flexible enough that some educational goals can be incorporated.

These innovative sales scenarios provide students with the opportunity of experiential learning by allowing them to engage in research, development and practice of a sales presentation. Furthermore, they stimulate students to incorporate theoretical concepts with actual real world practice and can become a source of multidimensional

satisfaction as these scenarios lead to hands-on experience, interpersonal skills development and networking. The likelihood of the student being able to apply the

theoretical concepts, understand the world around them, and achieve the educational goals set then becomes a objective that is realistically attainable.

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