WHEN THE TEXTBOOK JUST ISN'T ENOUGH: APPLYING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PEDAGOGIES TO PERSONAL SELLING AND SALES MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

As marketing educators seek creative methods to make their classes relevant and more interesting for students, there has been a drift away from exclusive emphasis on the traditional lecture/exam format toward integration of more interactive approaches. This trend is particularly observable in the area of personal selling and sales management.

Experiential learning is an umbrella term used to refer to a broad range of non-traditional educational tools in which students take on the role of instructing themselves through carefully crafted settings. The origin of the trend to incorporate non-lecture based teaching methods in business classes can be linked to the Harvard Business School's whole-hearted endorsement of the case study method decades ago. The popularity of the case method has opened the door to other creative approaches to classroom interaction such as simulated competition, role-playing, guest lecturers, observations, and field projects. It is widely accepted that experiential learning is gaining in popularity among marketing educators. The attraction stems from the technique's inherent ability to involve students in the process of material delivery and its ability to provide superior realism over traditional lecture techniques.

Perhaps more than any other area of marketing, the systematic study of personal selling and sales management lends itself to experiential teaching methods. Personal selling and sales management skills cannot be developed solely through lecture and reading. To learn how to sell, one must experience it.

To assist marketing educators, we present a framework to illustrate how the various experiential learning approaches can be used in the personal selling and sales management classes. The two dimensions of our framework for classifying experiential learning approaches are (1) realism of the selling/sales management context and (2) student interaction. By combining the two dimensions of realism and interaction, we can position pedagogical approaches and techniques.

At this stage we are not claiming that the framework is complete. Our purpose is to initiate a process of identifying and categorizing various teaching approaches that might be useful in guiding marketing educators. Personal selling and sales management instructors seeking to improve the learning experience, the relevance, and the affect may be well advised to consider adding an experiential learning component to their syllabi. There appears to be sufficient evidence that the approaches can provide benefits not available to students via a lecture/exam format. Experiential learning carries the potential to make students co-producers of the learning process and the ability to provide superior realism over traditional lecture techniques.