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An original in-class activity to enhance students' understanding of personal selling strategies and tactics was developed that was informed by multiple teaching and learning theories and techniques from the extant literature, including: active learning (e.g., Bonwell & Eison, 1991); social learning theory (e.g., Bandura, 1971); cooperative learning (e.g., Li & Lam, 2013); constructivism (e.g., Learning-Theories.com, 2015); social constructivism (e.g., Creswell, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978); and educational entertainment or edutainment (Rapeepisarn et al., 2006). For the activity, student groups select and analyze three scenes in movies or television shows in which characters use personal selling activities in an attempt to close a business deal.

Introduction

Instructors, course designers, and other learning professionals should leverage learning theories when creating and managing college-level courses. These theories can inform and improve design and development of various instructional and learning activities. A normative approach was utilized for this research contribution, with some actions or outcomes good, desirable, or permissible and others not.

In-Class Group Activity Background

The original in-class activity created through this project was for the undergraduate "Personal Selling" course (MKT 310) at Eastern Kentucky University. The activity was developed to enhance students' understanding of personal selling strategies and tactics. Moreover, it was informed by the multiple aforementioned teaching and learning theories and techniques from the extant literature, with students and student groups required to behave as partners in teaching and learning with the course instructor.

Student Learning Outcomes

There were three main learning outcomes for students identified for the newly created in-class group activity outlined in this contribution:

1. The ability to better identify, analyze, and remember positive, productive personal selling activities and negative, unproductive personal selling activities.

2. The ability to improve students' personal selling knowledge and abilities as a salesperson, team member of a company sales team, or their performance as a member of a company's sales management team, including their ability to properly evaluate, mentor, and motivate their company's salespeople.

3. The enhancement of students' learning experience due to the novelty, active learning, and entertainment value of the original activity.

Literature & Theory

The teaching and learning theories leveraged for this research contribution include the following:

Active Learning

Active learning includes the use of instructional activities in which students engage in various activities and think about the activities in which they are engaged (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). According to Handelsman et al. (2007), it "implies that students are engaged in their own learning" with the strategies that are utilized involving students "do(ing) something other than taking notes or following directions … they participate in activities … (to) construct new knowledge and build new scientific skills" (p. 23). Notably, it "engages students in the process of learning through activities and/or discussion in class, as opposed to passively listening to an expert" and "it emphasizes higher-order thinking and often involves group work" (Freeman et al., 2014, pp. 4-5).

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory is a theory of learning and social behavior that proposes that individuals learn by observing and emulating the behaviors of others (Bandura, 1971). It states that learning is a cognitive process that takes place in social context and can occur through observation or direct instruction, even in the absence of motor reproduction or direct reinforcement (e.g., Bandura & Walters,

1963). In addition, learning also occurs through observation of rewards and punishments, a process known as *vicarious reinforcement* (i.e., when particular behavior is rewarded regularly, it will most likely persist, & vice versa) (Renzetti et al., 2012).

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning has been defined by Li and Lam (2013) as:

> "A student-centered, instructor-facilitated instructional strategy in which a small group of students is responsible for its own learning and the learning of all group members. Students interact with each other in the same group to acquire and practice the elements of a subject matter in order to solve a problem, complete a task or achieve a goal." (p. 1)

There are five basic principles or elements that should be part of class activities based on cooperative learning, including: (1) *Positive interdependence*; (2) *Face-to-face promotive interaction*; (3) *Individual accountability*; (4) *Quality of group processing*; and (5) *Appropriate use of social, interpersonal, collaborative and small group skills* (e.g., Cheng & Walters, 2009; Johnson & Johnson, 1999; Johnson et al., 2008; Li & Lam, 2013; Tran, 2014). *Positive interdependence* "means that in cooperative learning situations, students are required to work together as a cohesive group to achieve shared learning objectives" (Tran, 2014, p. 132). *Face-to-face promotive interaction* means that some group work will need to be completed face-to-face and interactively (though some can be assigned to and completed by various individual members), with each group member providing others with input on their views, reasoning, conclusions, etc., as well as providing assistance, support, and encouragement to their fellow group members when necessary (Li & Lam, 2013). *Individual accountability* means that students request help, put forth their best effort, take their work seriously, assist other group members, and support (take care of) one another (Johnson, 2009). *Quality of group processing* means that "team members set group goals, describe what member actions are helpful or not, periodically assess what they are doing well as a team, and identify changes they will make to function more effectively in the future" (Li & Lam, 2013, p. 4). Lastly, *appropriate use of social, interpersonal, collaborative and small group skills* involves the teaching of the appropriate use of social, interpersonal, collaborative and small-group skills that helps students cooperate effectively in group and "group processing is clarifying and improving the effectiveness of the members in contributing to the joint efforts to achieve the group's goals" (Tran, 2014, p. 132). By structuring the five basic principles or

elements into group learning situations, it helps guarantee cooperative efforts take place and facilitates successful implementation and use of *cooperative learning* by students and instructors.

Constructivism & Social Constructivism

Constructivism assumes learning is an active, constructive process, the learner is an information constructor, and individuals actively create their own subjective representations of objective reality, while new information is connected to previous knowledge, and mental representations are subjective (Learning Theories, 2015). It is frequently connected with pedagogic approaches that promote or encourage *active learning*, or *learning by doing* (Kirschner et al., 2009).

A specific type of *constructivism* is *social constructivism* (Vygotsky, 1978). *Social constructivism* is "a learning theory based on the ideas of (Lev Semyonovich) Vygotsky (1978) that human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others" (McKinley, 2015, p. 1). It is a helpful theoretical framework because it allows for the necessary qualitative analysis to provide insight on how people interact or connect with the world around them, with it stating that one's ideas correspond with individual experiences, which contributes to construction of identity (Creswell, 2014). Its implications for teaching includes the teacher facilitating and guiding collaborative learning, which includes use of group work and group activities (University of California-Berkeley Graduate Student Instructor Teaching & Research Center, n.d.). Moreover, research studies focused on increasing student discussion in the classroom not only support but are also grounded in social constructivism. Discussion plays a critical role in increasing the ability of students to investigate and test ideas, synthesize ideas of others, and develop deeper comprehension of what they are learning (Corden, 2001; Nystrand, 1997; Reznitskaya et al., 2007; Weber et al., 2008). Lastly, the ability of students to support their points of view, develop reasoning skills, and argue opinions both respectfully and persuasively improve when they have more opportunities to speak with one another and participate in discussions about ideas (Reznitskaya et al., 2007).

Educational Entertainment (aka Edutainment)

Educational entertainment or *Edutainment* is defined as "the act of learning heavily through any of various media such as television programs, video games, films, music, multimedia, websites and computer software" (Rapeepisarn et al., 2006, p. 29).

Relevant Class Activities

There are four general and/or specific class activities that have and can be utilized:

1. In-class lectures on various personal selling techniques, including viewing multiple real-world video examples (e.g., sales training videos, scenes from various movies & television shows, etc.) accumulated by instructor.

2. In-class activity in which student groups conduct their own research to obtain and analyze additional real-world video examples of personal selling from movies or television shows.

3. In-class discussion between and among student groups and instructor analyzing examples obtained.

4. Questions on exams and quizzes, whether true-or-false, multiple choice, or essay questions, about video examples.

The primary focus of the rest of this contribution is number two listed above, which is the main component of the relevant class activities.

In-Class Group Activity

The focus of the in-class activity is ***closing a business deal through personal selling activities*** and is to be completed by groups of three (3) to five (5) students. It can be used in any college undergraduate or graduate course in which personal selling is discussed, though the activity has most relevance to students in "Personal Selling" or "Sales" courses. The student groups select and analyze three (3) scenes in movies or television shows to complete the in-class group activity. Scenes need to depict an attempt made by character(s) with personal selling activities to close a business deal (i.e., involving selling of good/service to prospective/existing customer/client). Scenes selected and analyzed can be from any genre of movies or television shows, though it is preferred that two (2) of three (3) scenes not be comedic in nature. Each student is provided with a handout describing scenario and task (i.e., instructions), while each student group is provided with a form on which they can record all of their analyses and activities. All students are encouraged to utilize relevant content in course textbook or from other credible sources (e.g., websites) to successfully complete the activity. Student groups have a set amount of time to complete the activity (e.g., 45-60 minutes) before reporting findings, analysis, and decisions to class. Instructors can also award points to students for participating in the activity, whether as a mandatory assignment or extra credit. Sources of scenes selected in

previous semesters of MKT 310 at EKU include, in alphabetical order: B*oiler Room*; *Boogie Nights*; *Fargo*; *Glengarry Glen Ross*; *Iron Man*; *Lord of War*; *Love Actually*; *Planes, Trains and Automobiles*; *The Pursuit of Happyness*; *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*; *Taxi Driver*; *The Office*; *The Wolf of Wall Street*; and *Tommy Boy*.

The verbatim "Scenario" and "Task (Instructions)" text that was used for the "Personal Selling" course (MKT 310) at EKU (which can be slightly modified for other business courses at EKU and other schools) and is to be provided to students for the in-class group activity is included in the remainder of this section. This text will be provided on a handout distributed to all students in the course, along with a multi-page form to be completed by each group and submitted to the instructor when the activity is completed.

Scenario

"Your group is comprised of the members of an unnamed company's sales team tasked with conducting important research to inform and assist the company's sales efforts. The primary objective for your group is for the results of this research, including the collected data and analysis, to be utilized by the company and sales team for the successful formulation and implementation of strategic and tactical sales activities to enhance its overall success in the future."

Task (Instructions)

"The members of your group need to conduct the necessary primary and secondary research to complete the following task:

After reviewing Chapter 9 in the course textbook – especially the 'Six Ways To Improve Your Ability To Close The Deal' section – select and analyze three (3) scenes in movies or television shows in which an attempt was made by a character(s) with personal selling activities to close a business deal (i.e., involving the selling of a product–i.e., good or service–to a prospective or existing customer or client). The scenes selected and analyzed can be from any genre of movies or television shows, though it is preferred that most (i.e., two of the three) of the scenes are not comedic in nature. In addition, the products being sold must be legal products that are being legally sold by authorized salespeople. After identifying the sources of the scenes (i.e., movies or television shows in which they appeared) then selecting and describing the scenes in detail, the required web addresses (URLs) to videos of the scenes that are posted online (if available) should be written on the accompanying form and also e-mailed separately to the instructor. Your group will then analyze the three (3) scenes to determine how

the person (people) playing the role of salesperson (salespeople) and engaging in the personal selling activities actually performed in regards to the six (6) different ways to improve one's ability to close a deal. For each scene selected, the information that you will need to provide includes the name of the movie or television show, approximate year in which the movie or television show episode (and thus scene) was initially released to the public or aired and which of the six (6) different ways to improve one's ability to close a deal were displayed during the scene, including providing a description of how each specific way to improve one's ability to close the deal was utilized. (*NOTE: Write 'Not Applicable' or 'N/A' when that specific way to improve one's ability to close the deal was not utilized.*) Then, based on the well-reasoned views and opinions of the members of your group, you need to conduct an analysis that highlights both the good and bad parts of how the person (or people) acting in the role of the salesperson (or salespeople) performed, including an overall assessment of their personal selling performance, especially the ways in which their personal selling performance could have been improved.

Using the multi-page form provided by the instructor, your group has a total of 45-60 minutes to complete the above in-class group activity before reporting your findings, analysis, and decisions to the other members of the class. At the conclusion of the activity, your group will then submit its completed form to the instructor containing only the names of the members of your group who were in attendance and participated in the activity."

Conclusions & Discussion

Active learning and *social learning theory* provided the conceptual and theoretical support for the approach taken with the class activities, especially the in-class group activity, outlined in this contribution, with these activities able to be used by marketing faculty teaching various courses covering the topic of "personal selling." Moreover, students can reap learning benefits by utilizing the *cooperative learning* approach supported by *social constructivism* when completing the in-class group activity. Nonetheless, future contributions should try to improve the activity as well as create and implement similar activities for other sales and marketing-related concepts.

Future research could explore the effectiveness of the aforementioned approach and related activities, and highlight the value of using real-world examples in a case study technique. Additionally, future studies may solicit feedback from hiring managers on the effectiveness of this teaching approach.

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