ATTRIBUTES OF AN EFFECTIVE MARKETING ACADEMIC: QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS FROM AN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This paper examines the personal attributes that increase the teaching effectiveness of a marketing lecturer. Based on eight focus groups of undergraduate marketing students at an Australian university, three factors emerged that lead to students’ perceiving marketing lecturers as being effective educators. These are (1) having a dynamic style, (2) friendliness and (3) the effectiveness of their communication. A conceptual framework is developed showing how dynamism, friendlessness and communication effectiveness influences teaching effectiveness.

Introduction

Teaching effectiveness is a complex concept, and there are many aspects of an effective teacher (Marsh and Roche 1997). Given the complexity of this concept, one of the main focuses of the literature has been to identify the various attributes of an effective teacher. Broadly, these attributes can be grouped as relating either to lecturers’ personal attributes or to subject design and organisation. Personal attributes, such as communication skills, enthusiasm and friendliness, have been shown to have a major influence on teaching effectiveness (Reid and Johnston 1999, Young and Shaw 1999, Seiler and Seiler 2002). Further, empirical evidence indicates that students regard lecturers’ personal attributes as more important to their learning than issues relating to subject organisation (Kelley, Conant and Smart 1991). Consequently, this research will focus on identifying the personal characteristic of an ideal marketing lecturer, as perceived marketing students. Our objective is to develop a conceptual model showing how the personal attributes of a marketing lecturer increase teaching effectiveness.

The importance of a lecturer’s personal attributes in encouraging student learning is well documented in the existing literature. Several studies have been conducted using factor analysis or structural equation modelling (SEM) to identify the factors leading to teaching effectiveness. These studies have consistently demonstrated the importance of lecturers’ personal attributes. For instance, Clayson and Haley (1990), identified “personality” as an important construct (see Table 1). This construct related to the friendliness, concern, accessibility and sense of humour of the lecturer. Similarly, Marks (2000) identified a construct he labelled “liking/concern”. In both of these studies, this construct had a larger impact on teaching effectiveness than subject design and organisation variables. This friendliness related construct was most often identified in the studies reviewed. Reid and Johnston (1999) also report a construct which they label “approachable”, while Pozo-Munoz, Rebolloso-Pacheco and Fernandez-Ramierz (2000) named this construct “Teacher’s
Appearance”. This included physical appearance, but also involved kindness, empathy, sensitivity and trust – which is similar to the construct identified by Clayson and Haley (1990), Marks (2000) and Reid and Johnston (1999).

Other constructs related to lecturers’ personal attributes have also been identified. Reid and Johnston (1999) identified a personal construct that they labelled “clarity”. Clarity reflected the lucidity of lecturers’ presentations. The importance of communication was also identified by Pozo-Munoz et al (2000). They report a construct called “Teaching Competency” which is related to the ability to express oneself clearly and fluently, and the ability to motivate and stimulate interest. While Pozo-Munoz et al (2000) have suggested that communication and the ability to motivate are part of the same construct, other studies indicate that they may be separate factors. For instance, Seiler and Seiler (2002) identified a factor that they titled “Secondary Professor Characteristics” which is related solely to the use of humour, originality, enthusiasm and encouragement of critical thinking. Another construct identified by Pozo-Munoz et al (2000) was labelled “Teaching Qualities”, and is related to being “psychologically balanced”. It involved lecturers being quiet, calm, self-controlled and balanced. Seiler and Seiler (2002) identified a similar factor which they titled “Primary Professor Characteristics” and is related primarily to fairness, responsibility, knowledge and clear thinking. Thus in these studies four constructs were repeatedly identified: friendliness/concern, communication, the ability to stimulate/motivate students and teaching qualities.

<table>
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<th>Table 1: Constructs in the Literature Leading to Teaching Effectiveness</th>
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<td>Construct 1</td>
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<td>Clayson and Haley (1990)</td>
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A pertinent issue is the relationship between the constructs in terms of their influence on teaching effectiveness. All of the SEM studies reported above (Clayson and Haley 1990, Marks 2000, Seiler and Seiler 2002) proposed single-stage models where the designated teaching constructs directly influenced teaching effectiveness. In developing our conceptual model, we examine the appropriateness of this structure.

**Methodology**

A focus group methodology was adopted for this study as the interactions within focus groups can generate deep understanding about issues of concern (Morgan 1996). Eight focus groups were conducted with undergraduate marketing students at a regional Australian university. In total, 61 marketing students participated in the focus groups.

An inductive approach was used within the groups to allow a range of concepts to emerge without direct prompting. This involved starting the groups with broad questions about what participants considered to be the attributes of an effective lecturer, and allowing the discussion to continue with minimum moderator involvement. Significantly, many constructs
found in the literature emerged without prompting. However, issues not clearly evident in the literature were also identified.

**Data analysis and findings**

Three constructs relating to the personal attributes of a marketing lecturer that enhance teaching effectiveness emerged from the focus groups. The first construct was titled ‘Dynamism’. This construct had three main dimensions: enthusiasm, passion and humour. This is consistent with the construct labelled “Secondary Professor Characteristics” by Seiler and Seiler (2002). Thus while Pozo-Munoz et al (2000), in their construct “Teaching Qualities”, contend that the ability to motivate/stimulate students and communication is part of the same construct, our focus group findings are supportive of the position of Seiler and Seiler (2002) that dynamism is indeed a separate factor. Our second construct was titled ‘Friendliness’, and this is consistent with similar constructs identified by Clayson and Haley (1990), Reid and Johnston (1999) and Marks (2000). Our third construct was labelled “Communication Effectiveness”. This construct was also identified previously in the literature by Reid and Johnston (1999) and Pozo-Munoz et al (2000). This construct had four dimensions: clarity, style, level and experience. Given the dimension of experience identified with this construct, there is a slightly different emphasis for this factor than found in the existing literature. Interestingly we did not identify in our focus groups the construct relating to teaching qualities found by Pozo-Munoz et al (2000) and Seiler and Seiler (2002). In Figure 1 we show how these constructs were found to be related and how they affect teaching effectiveness. Both Dynamism and Friendliness influence Communication Effectiveness, which in turn impacts Teaching Effectiveness. Dynamism and Friendliness also directly influence Teaching Effectiveness. We now examine the focus group results in greater detail.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Identifying the Personal Attributes of a Marketing Lecturer that Lead to Teacher Effectiveness**

Dynamism
- Enthusiasm
- Passion
- Humour

Friendliness
- Likeability
- Respectability
- Approachability
- Empathy

Communication Effectiveness
- Clarity
- Style
- Level
- Experience

Marketing Lecturer Effectiveness

**Dynamism**

The participants in the focus groups identified what we have called, “dynamism” as one of the characteristics of an effective teacher. In defining a dynamic lecture, one participant commented that *Dynamic lecturers are ones that put there back into to it. Animated, they put a bit of energy into it* (respondents’ quotes are shown in italics). Dynamism appears to be created by three factors: lecturers’ enthusiasm, passion for the subject and use of humour. The following quote illustrates several of these factors: *I think what differentiates some
lecturers, like most lecturers have the knowledge behind them about the topic, but it’s little things on top that makes them stand out, like their enthusiasm perhaps. Or their sense of humour. Turning a dry subject into something that’s interesting!

In practice, enthusiasm relates to the lecturer’s level of energy. It is the opposite of being lacklustre, which students perceive to be boring. As one student said, *If they are enthusiastic you will tend to learn more!* Related to enthusiasm is the passion lecturer have for their subject, which also influences student learning. This is shown in the following quote: *You can tell when they are interested in what they are teaching you, and it really reflects on how much you learn.* Many of participants thought they learnt more from lecturers who were passionate about their subject matter. One student commented: *He was not just teaching the subject, he was teaching us to appreciate the subject.* A somewhat different part of being dynamic noted by participants was the use of humour. Humour put students at ease and generated interest in the subject. For example, one participant commented about a humorous lecturer that *He was great! He was such a hoot. He made a topic that I think lots of people couldn’t give two stuffs about and he made it really fun.* Furthermore, humour was seen to promote a positive learning environment, as shown in the following quote: *This is a fun class to go to; we have a joke and that. But if you’re sitting there bored, you are totally switched off. However, if you laugh and have a good time you are more likely to take things in.*

### Friendliness

A second construct leading to teaching effectiveness identified by focus group participants was friendliness. The following quote illustrates its importance in encouraging learning: *If they are friendly and enthusiastic I think you learn more. Also you’re more confident. If you are sitting in class with some intimidating lecturer and he asks you a question, you would rather say you don’t know instead of seeming stupid.* Within the participants’ responses about the importance of friendliness, four dimensions were discerned, being (1) likeable, (2) respecting students, (3) approachable and (4) showed the students empathy.

Being likeable relates to whether students perceive a lecturer to be friendly. Participants indicated that they were more willing to have discussions with friendly lecturers. As one participant commented, *with a friendly lecturer, if you get it wrong it does not matter.* However, there was a limited to the level of friendliness a marketing lecturer should show: *Good to be friendly, but not to friendly, as you are less inclined to do work, because you get away with so much more... They need to know where to draw the line.*

The second dimension of the friendliness construct involved respecting students. Participants indicated concern about being made to look inferior by lecturers. A participant noted, *I think treating you as a peer rather than a subordinate is important. I know that sounds like a small thing, but to treat you like an adult, not a child, like at school.* Similar to being likeable, participants indicated that a lack of respect shown to students would discourage class discussion and participation. This is shown in the following quote: *Lecturers talking at you like you are not a person, they try to be intimidating, conveying an attitude that “I really don’t think you can learn this, however I will try to teach you as I am payed to”. That is discouraging! Having respect for students also meant that lecturers were approachable. This dimension indicates whether lecturers are accessible to students with problems or concerns. Students also felt that approachable lecturers produced superior learning outcomes. For example, *[lecturer’s name] was a nice guy to talk to and he was approachable, so you liked to listen to him.*
Students also valued lecturers who showed empathy. Participants thought that a friendly lecturer was someone who showed understanding and had compassion for the student and their situation. Like other dimensions, being able to empathise with your [the student’s] situation was perceived as improving learning outcomes.

**Communication Effectiveness**

Communication emerged in the focus groups as a vital construct in achieving teaching effectiveness. Participants identified four aspects of effective communication: (1) clarity; (2) style; (3) level; and (4) experience. Clarity related to good English skills, clear pronunciation of words, so it is easy to understand... Just clarity of speech, how clear they make what’s expected. The second aspect was speaking style. That is, the pitch, volume and tone used. As one student said, I think you can hear it in their voice. It is really monotone. How do they expect us to get excited about it if they aren’t even excited? Participants indicated that they retained less during lectures delivered using a poor speaking style, as this comment indicates: I am looking a the lecturer and all I can hear is Homer Simpson “Blar Blar Blar Blar”. It goes in one ear and out the other. The next aspect of effective communication identified by participants was the ability to convey information at an appropriate level of difficulty. Participants wanted lecturers to communicate to the level of the student. However, participants noted that some lecturers assume you already know what’s going on, when you don’t have an idea. While the previous three aspects of communication related to the way lecturers are delivered, the final aspect relates to content. The final aspect/dimension of effective communication was the use of ‘real word’ experiences. Participants noted that real life scenarios and real world experiences help them understand the theory and place it within context.

**The Links Between Dynamism, Friendliness, Communicability and Effective Teaching**

As shown in our conceptual model presented in Figure 1, dynamism and friendliness were found to lead to effective communication, which in turn influenced teaching effectiveness. The justification for the influence of dynamism and friendliness on communication can be seen in the discussion above. Lecturers who were dynamic encouraged their students to engage with them, which in turn improved the effectiveness of their communication. Participants also felt that they could talk to their lecturers, both in and out of class which encourages communication. Friendly lecturers also encouraged their students to be involved. Thus we see the link between dynamism, friendliness and effective communication. Effective communication in turn has a direct influence on teaching effectiveness, by encouraging interest, making the subject easier to remember, and teaching students in a way that they are able to understand.

In addition to the indirect links via communication, dynamism and friendliness also have direct impacts on teaching effectiveness. As indicated in the discussion above, dynamism creates interest in a subject and a desire for students to learn, which we believe will improve teaching effectiveness. Regarding friendliness, this construct created a desire amongst students to learn and to be involved and produced an atmosphere where problems and difficulties could be overcome. All of which would be expected to produce better learning outcomes.
Conclusions and Implications

Previous research has highlighted the constructs leading to teaching effectiveness. This study builds upon this extant literature by identifying the constructs important to students using a qualitative methodology, which has not been the norm in many existing studies. A conceptual framework showing how these teaching constructs influence teaching effectiveness was developed. We have identified three main personal attributes that lead to teaching effectiveness, viz dynamism, friendliness and effectiveness of communication. For improving the practice of marketing education, we recommend the use of personal audits and surveys to identify performance in each of these areas, and implementation of strategies for improvement. However, a limitation of this study is that only personal attributes of the effective marketing lecturer were explored. Subject design elements of effective teaching were not discussed. Further, this was an exploratory qualitative study; further research is being conducted using SEM to verify our findings. Also, the sample came from a regional university. Further research would indicate the generalisability of these findings.
References


