

Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 20, 1993

SHARED CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES: AN EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE UTILIZING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO GLOBALIZE THE CLASSROOM

David Blanchette, Rhode Island College
Nancy Brown, Rhode Island College

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines procedures for a classroom role-play experiential exercise emphasizing international student participation. The primary goal of the exercise is to develop multicultural awareness and sensitivity among classroom participants. In the role-play simulation described herein, international students act as representatives of foreign firms and solicit proposals from U.S. students' firms for the purchase of a product or service. The pedagogical objective is to stimulate cross-cultural interactivities to increase global awareness. Although initially tested in a marketing classroom, the procedure is generalizable to a wide variety of applications.

INTRODUCTION

The challenge to globalize business school curricula takes on renewed relevance as free market economic systems develop in Eastern Europe and among the former Soviet republics, and as The North American Free Trade Agreement progresses. Futurists Alvin and Heidi Toffler (1988) foresee the opening up of markets and encouraging international trade as part of the "grand designs" of Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the People's Republic of China and Japan. Many business educators agree upon the need to globalize the curriculum (Peters 1984), and corporate executives have expressed preferences as to the content of International Marketing (McDaniel and Smith 1987) and other courses to prepare the exporting entrepreneur (Graham and Meloan 1986). The issue of how to implement the global approach remains.

Triandis (1983) identified multicultural competencies necessary for globalized instruction as involving substantial transformation of one's life and personality. At a minimum, according to Triandis, it requires fluency in the culture's native language in addition to internalization of the norms, roles, attitudes, values and expectations shared by members of that culture. By such standards, few educators are capable of being truly "multicultural." A 1983 survey of American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) schools disclosed that few faculty have had the formal training to adequately teach the international dimension of their disciplines (Nehrt 1987). If that remains true, educators need to draw upon human and methodological resources to compensate for the lack of formal preparation.

In "Cross Cultural Marketing: A Classroom Simulation," Stull and Baird (1980) proposed attending to components of culture including language, religion, attitudes, social organization, technology, education, politics and law. LaPlaca (1981) suggested integrating cases and outside readings to internationalize the required MBA courses. Gentry (1991) used role playing to sharpen participant awareness of critical differences between American and Japanese interaction patterns in "Negame: A Cross-Cultural Role Play to Introduce Students to the Familiarization Stage of Negotiations." One of the several suggestions forwarded by Schoell (1991) includes role-playing exercises to foster the development of cultural sensitivity.

Learning Goals of the Experiential Exercise

One may regard interactive learning as a wide range of activities in which participants in an event interact with each other for the purposes of education and training. The events include discussions, exercises, role-play simulations and games. "The teacher.. either abandons or greatly reduces the amount of direct instruction, and takes on the role of facilitator...and allows participants to make their own decisions." (Jones 1988 p. 7.) The interactive learning proposed in this experiential exercise crosses over all

three domains of learning objectives specified by Bloom (1959), but seems most relevant to objectives pertaining to attitude change (Affective Domain) as students experience the need for cultural objectivity and assimilate values and practices required by their intercultural interactions.

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- A. Cognitive Domain (Transferring Knowledge)
 - 1. Basic Knowledge
 - 2. Comprehension
 - 3. Application
 - 4. Analysis
 - 5. Synthesis
 - 6. Evaluation
- B. Affective Domain (Attitude Change)
 - 1. Receiving
 - 2. Responding
 - 3. Valuing
 - 4. Organization of values
 - 5. Accepting general set of values
- C. Psychomotor Domain (Skill Acquisition)

International students, who are present in most classrooms across the United States, frequently possess the multicultural perspective many professors' lack. The experiential exercise outlined in this paper draws upon the international student's experience and perspective in globalizing the marketing curriculum by means of structured role play. Role-play traces its beginnings to "Psychodrama," a form of therapy for mental illness as conceived by Moreno (1953). In role play, participants assume prescribed roles in particular situations for the underlying purpose of gaining insight or understanding of the roles and relationships involved, as well as a better awareness of their own activities.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The experiential exercise involves a role play simulation between U.S. and international students in a university marketing course. Although the particular simulation described herein is most appropriate for marketing principles, strategy, sales and international marketing courses, the exercise may be adapted for nearly any undergraduate or graduate business course. The purpose of the role-play is for each of the participants to gain insight into the intercultural interactions and processes inherent in global marketing. Consistent with the objectives implied by Bloom (1959), the participants may become increasingly sensitive to the perspectives and practices of international marketers and consumers, their own beliefs and biases towards those parties, as well as the relative efficacies of marketing strategies and tactics in the global arena.

The participants in the experiential exercise are the course administrator(s), the U.S. students in the course, and the international students in the course. Figure 1 presents a generalized task model, sequenced both within and between participants, for the utilization and integration of international student experience and perspective in globalizing the classroom. These tasks are designed to promote interaction between U.S. and international students, capitalizing on the wealth of knowledge and experiences of the students themselves (in particular, those from other countries), rather than being solely dependent upon the intercultural competence of the instructor.

Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 20, 1993

The premise of the role-play simulation is that a foreign firm solicits proposals from a number of U.S. firms for the purchase of a product or service. Each international student is the representative (purchasing agent, V.P. of marketing, etc.) of a foreign firm from his/her native country. Thus, the number of foreign firms, and number of countries represented, are dependent upon the number and diversity of international students in attendance. The U.S. student's represent competing U.S. companies. In classes where there are many international students, i.e., the international to U.S. student ratio is relatively high, each U.S. student is the sole representative of his/her company. Conversely, in classes where there are few international students, i. e., the international to U.S. student ratio is relatively low, U.S. students may be grouped into teams. In either case, a number of U.S. firms compete against each other for a foreign account and each classroom may have multiple accounts/markets. The instructor, as facilitator, may represent an information resource such as a U.S. Commerce Dept. import/export office, an international market consultant, a foreign embassy representative, etc.

To illustrate, assume that there are 32 students in a class composed of two international students (one from India, the other from Iceland) and 30 U.S. students. Fifteen of the U.S. students could be organized into U.S. companies to compete for the Indian account, and the other 15 to compete for the Icelandic account. The 15 students could, for example, be organized into 5 companies (3 students each), 3 companies (5 students each) or some other configuration. In a class of 32 students where there are 8 international students and 24 U.S. students, each U.S. student could represent a U.S. company, with 3 U.S. companies competing for one (or more, if desired) international account. In cases where one foreign country is represented by more than one international student, each student may represent firms in different (non-competing) or the same (competing) industry.

The object of the game, from the student's perspective, is for a foreign firm to select the "best" supplier(s) and for a U.S. firm to win all or part of the account. From a pedagogical point of view, the objective is to stimulate cross-cultural interactions for the purpose of increasing global awareness. The instructor is to monitor, facilitate, adjudicate, etc., the process, but the learning comes experientially, from the negotiation, research, and interaction of and between the students themselves.

Preparation and Role Specification

In setting up for the game, the administrator should coordinate and integrate course content with the experiential exercise, assess the student resources present in the class, allocate and plan appropriate class time, prepare aids to facilitate play, and introduce students to the role play simulation.

To realize the full richness of the experiential process, it is important that the role-play participants be properly primed for play by having an adequate conceptual base established. This entails the timely presentation of course topics relevant to the role play process. Discussions of culture, salesmanship, strategy formation, research techniques, international markets, distribution systems, consumer behavior, and a myriad of other topics, as deemed appropriate by the nature of the course, may be presented prior to or concurrent with the simulation to develop a solid cognitive and affective (and occasionally, behavioral) foundation for play. Beyond providing for competent role-play, such concepts may aid in crystallizing the "before" condition, i.e., establishing a baseline of the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor attributes of the role-play participants. These initial beliefs, attitudes, etc., may then be compared to those existing at the conclusion of the exercise.

The administrator must also accurately assess the attributes of the students in the course. Different levels of motivation and maturation, different types of experience and attitude, and a host of other variables needs to be considered for the administrator to properly execute his/her tasks (see Figure 1). In particular, the international students need to be identified and approached with special care taken to prepare them for their pivotal role(s) in the simulation.

The amount of time allocated, both in terms of class time devoted to the exercise and the total duration of the simulation is entirely discretionary. The role-play may occur within a single class period, or may extend for an entire semester or beyond (for course sequences, for example). Some intermediate time frame is more common, with approximately four weeks as a recommended duration. The following procedure is used to illustrate the temporal context of processes modeled in Figure 1.

Week 1

The initial week may be used by the administrator to brief students on the experiential exercise and organize the U.S. and international firms. After consulting with the administrator and completing other preparation, the international companies may extend invitations to bid to U.S. companies. The U.S. companies may then begin to formulate strategies to win the account.

Week 2

As the instructor monitors and facilitates the exercise, the U.S. companies may conduct appropriate research, with both U.S. companies and international company representatives meeting.

Week 3

In the third week, U.S. companies should be developing proposals. The negotiating companies may arrange conferences as necessary. The administrator may continue to monitor and facilitate during this time. By the end of the third week, U.S. companies may present their proposals.

Week 4

International company representatives may review the proposals, allocate resources, and justify their decisions. Finally, the administrator and participants exchange views relating to each participant's evaluation of the simulation. Evaluation should focus on students' role performances, interactions, and perceptions of HOW the simulation evolved. Debriefing continues with discussion of WHAT was accomplished by the exercise. Debriefing may include recapitulation of the initial learning objectives of the experience with participants discussing ways in which certain concepts were demonstrated. A final discussion might focus on the extent to which participants were sensitized to the perspectives and practices of international marketers and consumers and to their own cultural beliefs and biases.

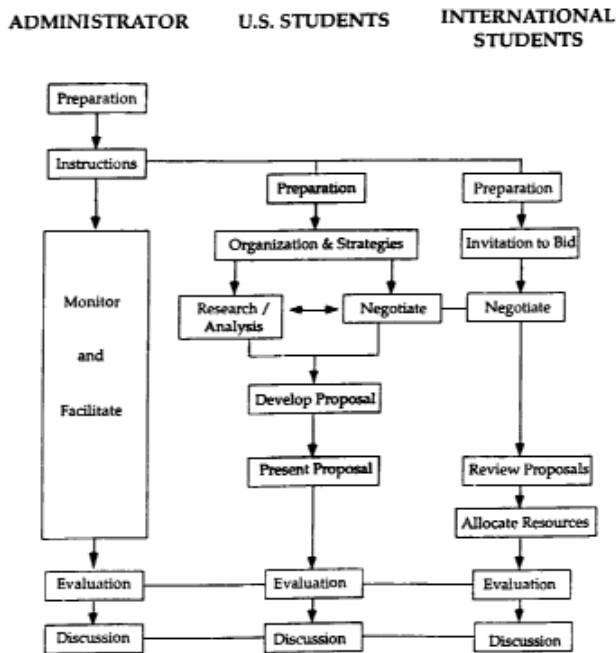


Figure 1: Generalized Participant and Task Model for the Utilization and Integration of International Student Experience and Perspective in Globalizing the Classroom.

Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 20, 1993

Aids to Facilitate Global Interactions

In addition to planning the exercise and its timetable, the administrator should prepare any aids that may facilitate play. These aids may include direction or access to relevant market research (e.g., information on the foreign countries and/or international companies, guidelines to developing a proposal) or other resources (social, technical, etc.). In particular, the administrator may wish to compile a "library" containing pertinent information about foreign and domestic markets, strategies, environmental conditions, videotapes, "research reports," etc. Advance preparation is fundamental to assure that participants understand the exercise, their respective roles, plan their time effectively, and form appropriate expectations.

PROCEDURE

The administrator initiates the role play simulation through oral, as well as written instructions. These instructions should outline the organization, objectives, tasks, mechanics, and evaluation of the exercise (See Figure 1).

The administrator may form the U.S. and international companies him/herself or by some other means. The basic concept of the game should be outlined. The specific required student tasks, game rules, and criteria and means of evaluation also merit elaboration. The administrator may frame the selling/purchasing objectives in financial and/or non-financial terms. For example, international firms may be given some sum of money in U.S. dollars (which will require the participants' involvement in currency exchange rates), that they must allocate in purchases from competing U.S. firms. Qualitative (non-financial) selection criteria may be used to evaluate proposals and specify purchasing preferences.

Following the instructions, the administrator assumes the role of monitor and facilitator. Monitoring entails observation, a reactive role to keep participants on track and avert or remedy problems. As a facilitator, the administrator is primarily an information resource. This role may be formalized, if desired, to make the administrator a consultant, trade office, research firm, embassy, library, etc.

A possible variation here is to "charge" companies for information or access to the available resources. For international companies (typically composed of a single student, but possibly consisting of multiple students from a particular country), the initial task is to prepare an "invitation to bid."

Following consultation with the administrator (if desired), the international firm should specify the amount and characteristics of goods and/or services desired, as well as deadlines for proposal acceptance, and any criteria for the proposal (as determined in consultation with the administrator) such as length, format, etc.

Once the invitation to bid has been extended, the U.S. firms, formed by the administrator or by some other means, need to organize their structure, define the role(s) of the participants specify the company objectives, and outline the strategies (along with associated budgets, if desired) designed to achieve stated objectives. In companies composed of multiple students, tasks and roles may be allocated by the administrator or the students themselves. For example, in a company with 5 students, 4 of the students could each be responsible for one of the elements of the marketing mix strategy, while the 5th student acts as budget director, coordinator, etc.

The company objective is a straightforward one: to sell products or services to a specified international firm(s) given certain constraints as specified by the administrator (i.e., budget, time, pricing, distribution, environmental, procedural/legal, product characteristics, etc.). The administrator should, if financial objectives are included, specify product costs, distribution time/costs, product characteristics, budgets, etc. A great deal of creativity is allowed for here. The game may be quite simple, with all firms selling identical products at identical costs (making negotiation skills and cultural understandings paramount), or very complex, with many marketing variables present (simultaneously emphasizing many facets of global marketing strategies and tactics).

Companies may then begin to develop and execute their selling strategies. This may require further research and negotiation (which

generally should be strongly encouraged). Research may be independent or through the administrator/facilitator. Negotiation may be in-class and/or outside of class. It is generally preferable that the firms organize their own negotiation appointments and schedules, with U.S. company representatives directly contacting international company representatives. An interesting variation in this "communication" stage may be to allow U.S. firms to develop marketing promotions to augment the efforts of their personal selling.

The strategy development, tactical execution, research and communication processes will culminate in the development of a formal selling proposal. The nature and complexity of this proposal will naturally vary with the rules established by the administrator. In some instances, a simple two-page discourse on "Why you should buy from us" may suffice. In other situations, a fifty-page report capturing complex details of the elements of marketing strategy in a global setting, with supporting research and financial statements, may be called for. Ideally, an oral presentation of the proposal should be made to the client (in or out of class).

At this point, the international company representative must review and evaluate the proposals using the general standards of the marketing discipline but emphasizing the specific needs typical of a company in the student's native culture. They may indicate these evaluations by their purchases (allocations of funds) or by simple qualitative, non-financial selection criteria (e.g., "good--bad"). The international firm must justify its decisions, specifying in detail the reasons underlying a proposal's evaluation. This discussion of each proposal should be given to both the affected U.S. company and the administrator.

EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

In evaluating participants the administrator should obtain information from both U.S. and foreign companies. The written proposals, complete with foreign firm evaluation and justification, may be a major source of such information. The administrator may also wish to attend oral proposal presentations. Subjective factors or other evaluation criteria may be utilized. For example, students may be required to describe what they learned about cross-cultural marketing, value structures, ethnocentrism, or ways in which previously existing attitudes were changed.

Beyond the evaluation of student performance, the administrator and participants should discuss outcomes and meanings of the experiential exercise in terms of cultural awareness and its implication for global marketing. The international students, in particular, should be encouraged to discuss the experience from their own (culturally) unique perspectives. The exercise is, primarily, a learning experience to sensitize participants to these cultural factors in global marketing within a strategic context. As such, some administrators may elect to focus on the cultural learning elements of the exercise, some may focus on the global marketing simulation performance components, and others may emphasize combined facets of the role-play.

CONCLUSION

The world economy of today and the future demands broadened cultural perspectives. Many paths lead toward the goal of globalized business curricula. University of Rhode Island business professor, Chai Kim recently received U.S. Department of Education funding to launch a "Global Classroom" project in which URI business students will debate issues with their peers in 11 different countries through a special computer network. Beginning in the Fall of 1993, URI students will be able to take parts of their core curriculum, for example-fundamentals of accounting-- in a foreign language (German). Columbia's revamped curriculum focuses on globalization as one of four themes. A representative of the Harvard Business School observes:

"...The world of business contends with many new and powerful forces. Our students are faced each day with the realities of a global economy, volatile markets, rapid technological innovations, a greater emphasis on quality...and an increasingly diverse work force." (Phipps 1992)

Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 20, 1993

In response, the Harvard Business School is initiating "institutional renewal" to globalize their classrooms.

Large scale efforts, such as those embarked upon by URI, Columbia and Harvard will serve to restructure U.S. business education as pioneering projects serve as models for schools with fewer resources available for ground-breaking excursions into global business education. Professors at the grass-roots level, who do not have the benefit of a multicultural perspective, have students in their classrooms who can enact their own learning experience and those of their colleagues.

The human resource of international students can make a difference in changing the attitudes of business students by broadening their cultural perspective, challenging traditional, Western decision-making and sensitizing students to the competitive disadvantage that results from an ethnocentric or xenophobic perspective,

The experiential exercise described in this paper has the potential for use in a variety of business courses. It allows a wide range of variation in application for whatever level of educational objectives (Bloom 1959) is established. It is the small step, accessible to most business educators that can lead in the direction of a leap towards globalized business education.

REFERENCES

- Bloom, B.S. (ed.) (1959), A Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals, Handbook I: Cognitive Domain, New York: David McKay.
- Gentry, James W. (1991), "Negame: A Cross-Cultural Role Play to Introduce Students to the Familiarization Stage of Negotiations," in Gosenpud, Jerry and Steven Gold, eds., Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Exercises, Stillwater, OK, College of Business Administration, Vol. 18.
- Graham, John L. and Taylor W. Meloan (1986), "Preparing the Exporting Entrepreneur," Journal of Marketing Education, Spring: 11-20.
- Jones, Ken (1988), Interactive Learning Events: A Guide for Facilitators, London: Kogan Page; New York: Nichols Publishing, p. 7.
- La Placa, Peter J. (1981), internationalizing the Required MBA Marketing Course," Journal of Marketing Education, Fall: 36-40.
- McDaniel, Stephen W. and L. Murphy Smith (1987), "Industry Views on the Content of the International Marketing Course," Journal of Marketing Education, Fall: 9-14.
- Moreno, J.L. (1953), Who Shall Survive? Boston: Beacon House.
- Nehrt, Lee C. (1987), "The Internationalization of the Curriculum," Journal of International Business Studies, Spring: 83-90.
- Peters J. Irwin (1984), "Developing an International Marketing Course for the Future," Journal of Marketing Education, Spring: 14-19.
- Phipps, Peter (1992), "URI Learning that Money Talks in Many Languages," Providence Journal, October 4: F1-F2.
- Schoell, William R. (1991), "International Students: An Underutilized Resource in Internationalizing Marketing Education," Journal of Marketing Education, Summer: 31-35.
- Stull, James B. and John W. Baird (1980), "Cross-Cultural Marketing: A Classroom Simulation," Journal of Marketing Education, April: 11-17.
- Toffler, Alvin and Heidi Toffler (1988), "Avoiding Global Future Shock," World Monitor: The Christian Science Monitor Monthly, October: 48-52.
- Triandis, H. (1983), "Essentials of Studying Cultures," in D. Landis and R. Brislin (eds.), Handbook of Intercultural Training, Vol. I, New York: Pergamon Press, pp. 82-117.