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AN EXPERIMENTAL ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STUDENT ROLE-PLAYING IN SALES TRAINING

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ABSTRACT

The following study investigated the effectiveness of role-playing as a learning device in Personal Selling classes. A comparison of students' two role-playing efforts revealed somewhat mixed results. Although the teacher failed to recognize significant improvement in student performance, student peers and two outside marketing professors noted more effective sales presentations in the second round. Consequently, the evidence suggests that role-playing enhances the students' learning experience.

INTRODUCTION

Education and training in various professions and vocations have used role-playing as a method of improving student's knowledge, and performance. One area of business that has made heavy use of role-playing as an educational technique is selling. While research has noted the popularity and success of this technique among company sales training programs, little information is known regarding its effectiveness in a classroom setting. The purpose of this study is to provide such information.

METHODOLOGY

In order to assess the effectiveness of role-playing in a classroom situation, a comparison of student's role-playing performances were assessed. The study was performed in the summer of 1989 in a personal selling class with fifteen students. Each student was required to select a product to sell in a role-playing exercise. Following the professors' approval of the product, another student was randomly selected to perform the role of the buyer.

Prior to the role-playing encounter, the professor created a list of 'suggested objections' for the buyer of each selected product. Sellers were forewarned that all objections would relate to price, quality, time requirements, need, and source issues. Each student was assigned two class-times during which he/she would engage in the two role-playing exercises. To help ensure that any changes in the students' performances would be attributable to their role-playing experience, the product sold by the student's were the same in both presentations. Both first and second session role-playing exercises were videotaped. Video-taping served three purposes: (1) it allowed the students to view and learn from their own presentations, (2) it provided the evaluators with a method for reviewing parts of the presentations, and (3) it provided a method for disguising first-time and second-time presenters for the outside evaluators.

Evaluations of role-playing performances were made by three separate evaluators, the professor, student peers, and two marketing professors. The utilization of outside

evaluators' was believed to be important due to the potential reviewer bias that might have resulted from knowledge of whether it was the student's first or second role-playing experience.

RESULTS

To determine whether role-playing exercises improved students' sales effectiveness, mean scores between the students' first and second role-playing exercises were compared. The results of the role-playing scores for both presentations are provided in Table 1.

Table 1
Role Playing Evaluations

Evaluator	Pres. 1		Pres. 2		t-Val.	p-Val.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Professor	68.2	2.5	68.5	3.3	.25	.05
Students	67.9	5.5	69.6	4.3	3.14	.002
Indep. Mkt. Prof	52.3	6.8	56.3	7.2	4.00	.038

As shown in Table 1, the professor's evaluation of student role-playing efforts were slightly higher for the second presentation. However, it should be noted that these scores were not significant at the .05 lever ($x_1 = 68.2$, $x_2 = 68.5$). Student evaluations indicated a significant perceived improvement in their peers' second presentations. Mean scores by student raters increased from 67.9 to 69.6 (p .002). As a final measure of the effectiveness of role-playing exercises in personal sales classes, the evaluations of two independent marketing professors were analyzed. Mean scores improved significantly from 52.3 to 56.3 (p .05).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study assessed the effectiveness of role-playing exercises in the classroom by comparing first and second sales performance scores. The result's were somewhat mixed, as the professor of the class found no significant differences in performances. However, both student and outside marketing professor evaluators noted significant improvement in sales performance as a result of additional role-playing experience. While further research is needed, it may be stated that role-playing activities are beneficial to the student, and consequently, should be given consideration in allocation of class 'earning tools.