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Utilizing Envisionary Technology in the
Business Policy Course: An Experiential Pedagogy

Walter J. Wheatley, The University of West Florida
E. Nick Maddox, Stetson University
William P. Anthony, The Florida State University

ABSTRACT

Our research efforts have demonstrated the effectiveness of utilizing envisionary technology to enhance the creative aspects of scenario development and goal-setting in the business policy course. Based upon our findings we believe that this unique training technique can be employed in the business policy course to enhance other strategic management skills that demand creativity and imagination.

To date, relatively little effort has been expended on the various applications of envisionary technologies into the area of business pedagogy. This paper addresses the issue of utilizing this experiential pedagogy in the business policy course.

INTRODUCTION

There is common agreement among most instructors of the business policy course that many aspects of the course are futuristic in nature. These aspects, which include such topics as issues management, scenario development, and trend projection, demand a futuristic orientation for the student. In a 1983 survey [7], it was reported that goal-setting tied for first place with strategic planning as items that should be included in the business policy course. Again, items that challenge students to envision images of a future state in time. To do this adequately, students must have fully developed their imaginal and creative skills.

Unfortunately this is an area where the business policy course has not fared too well for many reasons. Many business colleges have concentrated on developing analytical tools in this course which place heavy emphasis on developing financial skills aimed primarily at historical results. The short term results philosophy, which is still so paramount in our domestic business circles, has precluded the development of futuristic teaching pedagogy in the classroom. And finally, most pedagogical techniques which enhance the imaginal and creative skills of students, are experiential in nature. The age old notion that experiential exercises are nothing more than fun and games has prevented many educators from trying them in the classroom.

However, major impetus to introduce new pedagogical techniques into the business policy course that will develop and enhance the imaginal and creative skills of students is coming from many different areas. Current domestic business problems dictate that business colleges produce a new breed of business manager who has been trained to develop new and novel approaches to existing business problems. Foreign competition, with its long term

philosophies, is causing domestic businesses to begin to develop more long range goals. Finally, the attitude toward experiential methods in the business classroom is changing. Experiential methods are now being encouraged into the management curriculum [29].

In light of this, this paper will discuss why the business policy course is one prime area in which to incorporate some experiential pedagogical techniques which enhance the creative and imaginative skills of students. In addition, this paper will present a discussion on how to utilize the envisionary technology technique of guided imagery in the business policy course to develop these much needed managerial skills.

IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY IN THE BUSINESS POLICY COURSE

The underlying theme of the business policy course centers itself around future oriented behavior (See Figure 1) concerned with the dynamic and complex relationship of the organization with its environment [25]. It is a course concerned with the continuous process of formulating a long-term strategy of competition for a business enterprise which should produce an improved future state for the organization [30]. In addition to the future state of the organization, the business policy course should be concerned with the future state of entire industries [24].

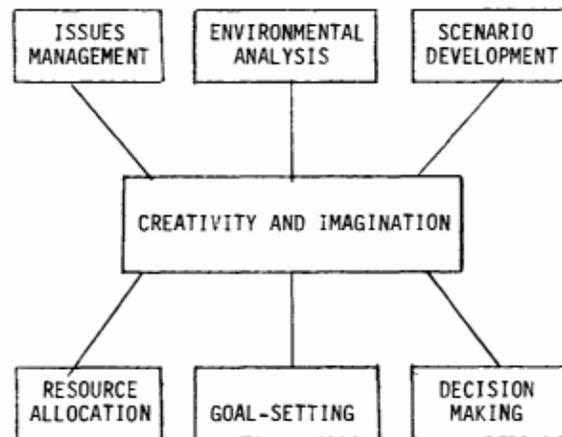


FIGURE 1
THE BUSINESS POLICY COURSE CREATIVITY MODEL

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 14, 1987

It should educate students in planning for what organizations intend to do and to become by enabling them to envision the future in order that they might be able to design a strategy that will enable firms to better deal with the future. To be more effective, business policy students must be taught to generate more radical and searching scenarios of future events in the external environment. Nanus [22] states that there is a need to create "images" of the future. Rather than just talking about the future, students should try to envision clear pictures of how that future should be [9].

THE LACK OF IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY IN THE BUSINESS POLICY COURSE

As discussed above, the futuristic orientation of the business policy course dictates that students be trained in imaginal and creative techniques. Unfortunately, for the most part, business schools have traditionally emphasized technical skills which focus on cold, hard facts. From this orientation students are taught to develop strategic plans on an almost literally "surprise-free" future [32]. Warren Bennis [6] states that while we are asleep about the future, we continue to plan making hypotheses continually about the future. Strategic planning exercises for many students, is a matter of extrapolating the present facts. However history is witness to many myopic blunders committed by those who were convinced that a simple projection of the status quo was sufficient to predict the future [19].

To help alleviate this dilemma, the selection and training of business policy students in imagination and creativity methods and frameworks [7; 26] should become a business school imperative. A training technique which has been proven successful in enhancing imagination and creativity in the classroom is guided imagery. Discussion of guided imagery and how it can be used in the classroom is presented next.

ENVISIONARY TECHNOLOGY AS A BUSINESS PEDAGOGY

Envisionary technology includes such cognitive expansion techniques such as guided imagery, visualization, and fantasy. These are techniques which increase the utilization of the intuitive and creative activities of the mind [4;5;21]. These processes enhance one's imagination by combining individual private experiences and relaxation procedures with specific stimuli [8;20;33].

This specific stimuli consists of external guidance, script, or suggestion [14;27] which facilitates a sharp focusing of attention and a bridging of the gap between rational and emotional awareness [15;18;28]. By linking the rational and emotional cognitive processes, full utilization of the mind is obtained. It is this full utilization of the mind that produces the synergy yielding greater thinking [2; 10; 12]

The use of envisionary technology as an education and training methodology is not a new phenomenon. This body of literature abounds with studies that attest to the effectiveness of using envisionary techniques. Abbs [1] and Currant [11] have demonstrated the value of imagery to enhance creativity and to promote skill-based learning in educational settings. Other studies have found imagery useful in training counselors [13], in career development [15] and in behavior modification [16]. In the business policy classroom [31] guided imagery was found to be

effective in increasing scenario building and goal-setting productivity.

Thus there are many areas in education and training that already employ envisionary techniques for the promotion of individual and group learning, aware-ness, creativity and development skills [3]. Based upon our findings to date, it is the opinion of the authors that these unique training techniques should be utilized in the business policy course to enhance strategic management skills. A discussion of how to do this is presented next.

UTILIZING ENVISIONARY TECHNOLOGY IN THE BUSINESS POLICY COURSE

The envisionary technique that seems to be the most well adapted to the business policy course is guided imagery. The guided imagery process involves having the instructor vocally deliver a script to the students which has been designed to conjure up images for the topic at hand - products of tomorrow, changes in customer demographics or any other business related area. During this delivery the students relax and try to envision images induced by the script. The value of guided imagery lies in the images conjured up in the minds of the students.

The formal steps in the guided imagery process are presented in the appendix under the section entitled The Specific Steps in Envisionary Management Training. The main point in this process is to allow the students to become comfortable with the relaxation process which is vital for the generation of vivid images. Some students will be uncomfortable with the process in the beginning. But given adequate explanation of the process and what it is to accomplish, accompanied with practice, the overwhelming majority of students find it to be a very exciting and effective method of learning.

In addition to the relaxation process, a good script is vital if the guided imagery experience is to be a successful learning tool. Scripts are really relatively easy to prepare. Each script should begin with a relaxation scene, should include specific suggestions that will invoke images of the topic at hand, and should not include any terms that contain strong emotional content that might disrupt the state of relaxation. An example of such a script appears in the appendix entitled Envisionary Training Script For Scenario Development. This script has been used quite successfully to develop scenario building skills in the business policy course [31].

Guided imagery and other envisionary techniques are not teaching and training methods that are to be employed to the exclusion of other major pedagogies such as lectures, cases and simulations. They should be utilized in conjunction with existing teaching methods to enhance the creative and imaginative skills of the student. Guided imagery is a cognitive expansion procedure which is quite useful in enhancing divergent thinking and can be used quite appropriately to reinforce such things as lectures on new market strategies, alternative product uses, etc. Role playing techniques which are employed to develop strategic management skills can be greatly augmented by allowing students to vicariously practice these skills in their minds. The use of guided imagery in the classroom is limited only by the imagination of the instructor.

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 14, 1987

CONCLUSION

The education and training literature strongly suggests the efficacy of envisionary technology as a means of improving the imaginative and creative skills in students. However, to date little effort has been expended to introduce this unique training pedagogy into the classroom. This paper was intended to be a first step in that direction.

The business policy course, because of its futuristic orientation, is a natural environment to introduce students to such cognitive expansion techniques such as guided imagery. This paper has presented the guidelines on how to accomplish this and hopefully, will encourage other instructors to enhance their business policy course through the utilization of envisionary technology.

THE SPECIFIC STEPS IN ENVISIONARY EDUCATION TRAINING

1. Tone setting and Centering - The trainer orients participants to the training by explaining the basic format of learning and by asking that they take a few moments to center their thoughts and emotions in the moment.
2. Self-Induced Relaxation - The trainer directs the participants in a relaxation technique to induce a state of calm and restfulness. A ten minute period of relaxation induction is sufficient with most participants.
3. Free Imagery Practice - After centering and relaxation have been achieved, the trainer presents an open script to enable the participants to experience how to evoke clear and vivid images in their minds.
4. Specific Script Presentation - At this time the trainer presents the specific script to the participants in a clear and balanced manner. Participants are instructed to visualize as vividly as possible the details of the script and to involve themselves cognitively and effectively in the process of guided imagery.
5. Free Imagery Practice - Following presentation of the specific script, a second free imagery session is used to reinforce learnings and perceptions gained from the script. A short relaxation period combined with some initial suggestion on focus by the trainer may help participants to actively use this new information in their imaging.
6. Retrieval and Recentering - Upon completion of the imaginal process, the trainer gently and slowly asks the participants to re-focus their attention back into the moment and into the training environment. Imagery techniques create considerable relaxation and internal focus and it is important to recenter all participants prior to ending the session.
7. Processing and Debriefing - At the completion of the training sequence, an opportunity for reflection and discussion should be provided so that participants can review the training experience, their feelings about the experience, and any unusual or positive aspects of the training. At this point, the trainer can relate feedback to different components of the process and can give

closure to the participants' experience for the training session.

ENVISIONARY TRAINING SCRIPT FOR SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT

Imagine yourself resting against a large oak tree beside a large beautiful meadow. The sky above is a brilliant blue with small marshmallow clouds lazily gliding their way along. The meadow has a very sweet fragrance and in the distance you can hear the gentle sound of small animals as they play. Ever so slowly you become a part of nature very much at peace with yourself. (pause).

At this time I want you to keep your attention on the sound of my voice and on what I say. We are going to experience a guided imagery script that will enhance your ability to create better plans in your job. (pause).

I am going to give you suggestions and instructions. As much as possible, visualize what you hear in a clear, vivid, and detailed way. Try to put yourself within the scene that is described as completely as you are able. (pause).

Imagine yourself in the future. You are the general manager of a very successful company. (pause).

You are in a planning meeting with your staff. Things have been good for your company for the past several years and are expected to remain good for at least the next few years. However, you know you cannot just relax and rest on your past accomplishments. In order to begin preparing plans for your firm, you and your staff must first determine what the future might have in store for your company. (pause).

Your sales manager says he sees a change in your customers. They will be demanding different colors. The products must be more efficient, they rust last longer, and use less energy. He also sees more safety requirements demanded by the Government. You ask him about foreign competition. Will there be products that will make yours obsolete? (pause).

Your manager of manufacturing sees a whole new technology in the way your firm will make the products -- higher speeds, fewer workers, and a much more educated work force with much more sophisticated demands. (pause).

Personnel informs you that employees are wanting to work to an older age, and she says there are going to be increasing demands for more company paid education. (pause).

The manager of finance has great concerns about the economy. He sees higher interest rates, more government programs, local increases in community taxes. How will all of this affect our borrowing power? The borrowing power of our customers? Will our stockholders demand greater returns? (pause).

Your quality manager sees greater quality requirements in your products and greater participation in your employee quality circles. Pollution controls will be much tighter. (pause).

You and your staff all discuss major changes in foreign countries, major government changes, society

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 14, 1987

changes, and even the weather. What could possibly happen that could affect your business? (pause).

As your meeting adjourns, you ponder the opportunities and problems the future has in store for you. You also reflect upon how important it is to anticipate and prepare for the future if your business is to survive and to grow. (pause).

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