

Adding Risk into Post-Secondary Learning

Miranda Davies

Medicine Hat College, Medicine Hat, Canada

Abstract

Teaching is more than just the course content; it is the development of student’s skills beyond the material. According to the Conference Board of Canada, “the Ontario employers surveyed noted that there are essential skills deficits among their current employees. Over 70 per cent said that there are gaps in critical thinking and problem-solving skills.” (2013). The author investigated whether adding risk into student coursework deepens student long-term learning. . The author aims to compare low intensity learning situations to high intensity learning situations. An analysis was conducted of student reflections post project, a survey of post-secondary faculty, and research articles to determine the results. Two examples of risk were used: the Google Ad Grants Project, and Case Competitions. Google Ad Grants provides up to \$10,000 monthly in free advertising to students who work with a real non-profit to take over their AdWords campaigns. A case competition is an academic competition in which students come together to solve a case that is presented. Students utilize their teamwork, critical thinking, analyzing, and organizational skills to deduce a recommendation that they support in a presentation in front of judges or company sponsors.

Keywords— case competitions, experiential learning, Google Ad Grant, high intensity learning

I. INTRODUCTION

The study aims to investigate whether adding risk to business student curriculum deepens student long-term learning through a comparison of low intensity learning situations to high intensity learning situations (Hoover, 1974). Hoover suggests (Figure 1) that there are three learning dimensions: cognitive, affective, and behavioural. He goes on to suggest that the “highest” type of experiential learning is high intensity experiential learning, and that it occurs when all three learning dimensions are operating simultaneously, and at a high level of arousal. Examples of high intensity experiential learning situations include job shadowing, practicums, and case competitions. Examples of low intensity experiential learning situations include business cases and writing; and outside guest speakers.

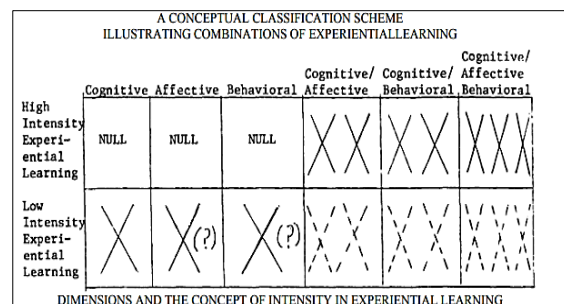


Figure 1. Combinations of experiential learning. (Hoover 1974).

Carter, Joelle & Galloway Burke, Monica & Hughey, Aaron. (2019) found that students experienced enhanced learning through complex, unstructured team-based projects, such as case study competitions, and that it had significant positive synergistic effect on two dimensions—learning about working in teams and having a valuable learning experience. Two types of team based projects were studied in this paper: Google Ad Grant project and case competitions. In the final year of their Business Administration Diploma at Medicine Hat College marketing students take MKTG 355 Creating Brand Intelligence (MKTG 355).

MKTG 355 is a culminating course in which teams of students engage in project-based learning through the Google Ad Grant Campaign. Every year, first year and second year business students are invited to participate in a voluntary case competition experience. Typically, students compete in 1-2 case competitions per academic year. Both the case competitions and the Google Ad Grant campaign are team based experiences. Learning activities and situations in this course and in the case competition would be considered experiential learning

This paper aims to answer the question, is there is a difference in student learning when students are placed in a low intensity experiential situation such as Google Ad Grants versus than a high intensity experiential situation such as case competitions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The methodology of teaching students in business programs varies between the traditional approach of theory heavy lectures “sage on the stage” to “flipping the classroom” where students gain first exposure to new material outside of class, usually via reading or lecture videos, and then use class time to do the harder work of assimilating that knowledge, perhaps through problem-solving, discussion, or debates (Brame, 2013). An evolution of this flipped approach is experiential learning, where exposure to learning is “real world” and can occur both inside and/or outside of the classroom (Boston University, 2022). Experiential learning has grown in popularity in business schools. It accounts for the complex nature of management practice, building the way managers learn naturally to work (Perusso, Blanckesteijn, and Leal, 2019).

Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning (Sugarman, 1985) described a four stage, cyclical process of effective learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Kolb’s model describes how experience is translated into concepts that can be used to guide the choice of new experiences. Kolb perceives immediate experience as the basis for

the observation and reflection from which concepts are assimilated and then actively tested. This testing gives rise to a new experience, and the whole cycle begins again.

McCarthy & McCarthy (2006) studied the underpinning of experiential learning and described how psychologist Bandura (1977) wrote about self-efficacy. Their research indicated that people tend to avoid tasks and situations that they believe exceed their capabilities, preferring take on tasks and activities that they believe they can handle. This behaviour can have a dramatic influence on personal development. When self-efficacy is high, individuals will engage in tasks that foster the development of their skills and capabilities. According to Bandura (1991), there are several factors influencing self-efficacy: personal experience, observing others succeed or fail, and verbal encouragement.

Xu and Yang (2010) wrote about the importance of team psychological safety and how instructors teaching students through experiential methods need to provide students with systematic guidance in order to foster a psychologically safe group environment.

Raja and Najmonnisa (2018) compared experiential learning methods with traditional learning methods and demonstrated that there was “significant difference between the results of each group” They clearly proved that the experiential learning method improves business undergraduate’s communication skills better.

Perusso, Blanckesteijn, and Leal (2020) document the importance of embedding reflection into the curriculum in three ways: reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and critical reflection. They studied how reflective learning contributed to experiential learning. Their results showed that a majority of students consider reflective learning to be a highly relevant or extremely relevant mechanism to support competence development from experiential learning.

Carter, Galloway, & Hughey. (2019) conducted a study on the benefits of case competitions. They discovered themes that included (a) enhanced communication skills

(communication, teamwork, conflict resolution, managing expectations); (b) critical thinking and analytical skills; (c) diversity as a benefit (gender and cultural); and (d) increased understanding of the business discipline, including specific areas such as consulting.

In summary, experiential learning is extremely important for student learners. Students must be able to react to complex business situations upon graduating and theory heavy lectures do not adequately prepare them to respond to complex situations.

III.METHODOLOGY

Case Competitions

The students of the business school are offered to voluntarily participate in several case competitions throughout the year. Participating in a case competition is not a part of the required curriculum, it is simply something we offer to students who want to participate. Faculty are given workload release to coach students as they learn how to compete in these competitions. Approximately 3 months before competing, coaches and students will begin training approximately 4 hours a week. There are several types of case competitions: online or face to face, and internal versus multi-institutional.

The analysis of the intensity of the various types of case competitions is through a survey of previous year’s student case teams, a survey of the faculty of the case teams, and reflections from past student case teams. The survey used checkbox grids and a 5-point Likert-type scale. A quantitative approach was taken with a cross-tabulation to better understand the data.

Google Ad Grant Campaign

The students who participate in the Google Ad Grant Campaign are students who register for MKTG 355 Creating Brand Intelligence. These students would be marketing majors or management majors as an elective. The campaign is a graded project worth 20% of their final grade. Students are required to actively participate in the campaign, maintain a 5% click-through-rate (CTR) and complete a post campaign reflection.

The analysis of the intensity for students from participating in the Google Ad Grant Campaign is through reflections from past students, as well as a survey to the professors who use the Google Ad Grant campaign in their classes. The survey used checkbox grids and a 5-point Likert-type scale. A quantitative approach was taken with a cross-tabulation to better understand the data.

Risk

Alkhazaleh states that “perception and definition of an academic failure relate directly to individual fear of failure (FoF), which emerges not only from an individual’s self-evaluation but also from the evaluation of the opinion of others as a result of the failure”.(2016). Alkhazaleh continues to define the five reasons for people to avoid failure:” First is the expectation of feeling ashamed due to failure. Second, some people feel that failure creates a self-critical condition of mind where their intelligence and talent are assessed negatively. Third, people’s future career could be negatively impacted. Fourth, some believe that success is the most important criteria for their parents, teachers, or peers and that failure will result in the loss of their esteem. The last reason is the fear that failure may not only cause the loss of regard of people important to them but also distress them.” (2016). The definition of risk for this study with respect to students is their perception of failure, getting it wrong, personal embarrassment, reputational embarrassment, and its impact. The instructor perception of risk is students not representing them to the standard that they feel they should be, i.e. reputational embarrassment.

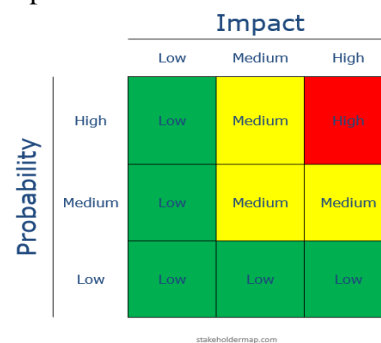


Figure 2. Risk Assessment Matrix. (Stakeholder map 2022).

The risk assessment matrix has been used to look at the probability of student failure and the impact. (Stakeholder map, 2022). When we consider case competitions, we will consider *internal case competitions versus multi-institutional*, and *in-person versus online*. The Google Ad Grant Project was assessed through the survey of faculty and reflections from students.

IV. FINDINGS FOR CASE COMPETITIONS

There are several types of case competitions: online or in-person, and internal versus multi-institutional. During the pandemic, case competitions which had traditionally been face to face moved to an online format. This provided a different context to take into consideration. The author was curious to see if the skills learned and perception of value or positive impact were the same as when the students were physically present. The same question rose between hosting an internal case competition where fellow classmates were your competition and your instructors were the judges.

Reflections from students for an *online* competition were that 75% did not see as much benefit to participating as there was no travelling and you would not be able to properly interact with other student groups. When they were working on the case, they felt isolated and stressed out as communication was a challenge. Students were pleased with their output but felt they had no connection to the other teams or the ability to benchmark where they placed as no one was able to see the other teams present their case.

Reflections from students for an *internal* competition were that there was not enough fear in *internal* case competitions compared to multi-institutional competitions as they “knew” the level of the other teams and it was “just” their instructor grading them. Students were pleased with their output but felt their quality would have increased with outside competition. The internal case competition has lower risk assessment impact than a multi-institutional from both the instructor and student view-point.

The instructor has a low probability of failure since only his/her colleagues would see compared to a multi-institutional event when 15 other universities/colleges would observe the students. Students also have a lower probability of failure as the number of teams is generally smaller and students have already identified a pecking order in the classroom. Also, no parent or outside person of importance would be there to observe the student.

Reflections from students leaving the *in-person multi-institutional* competitions were that their preparation time needed to have them placed in more high intensity situations. They were not prepared for the intensity of the scenario they faced. Prior to entering the case room, the case teams were experiencing high levels of excitement and stress simply from seeing other teams arriving, the opening gala, and introductions. Students reflected that their output increased in both quantity and quality; students also reflected that they had grown cognitively by the experience.

With respect to in-person versus online: the online case competition has lower risk assessment impact than in-person since no one outside of the judges observe the students pitching and there is low connection to output and reward.

A survey was developed to assess the difference in risk between the various types of case competitions. There were 6 questions in the survey, the first catalogued whether the respondent was a professor or a student. At the time of this writing, 50% of respondents were students and 50% were faculty coaches. The second question asked the amount of case competitions the respondent had experienced. The results were that 40% had only experienced 1 case competition and 60% had 2-6 case experiences.

The third question listed seven skills asking respondents to respond on a five-point leikherth scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree whether those who participate in any sort of case competition saw an improvement in those skills. The skills were: problem solving, integrative learning, critical thinking,

teamwork, communication, time management, and strategic thinking. The results were that 90% strongly agreed and agreed that skill level improved in all noted areas, with the exception of critical thinking which received 1 neutral and 1 strongly disagree.

The fourth question asked respondents if they felt there was a greater perceived risk for the student in face-to-face competitions rather than virtual online competitions. The perceived risk was defined as failing, being wrong, reputational, and/or embarrassment. The results were interesting. Faculty strongly agreed that it made a difference in risk for students, while students were neutral. This could be explained by the fact that 40% of the respondents had not experienced both a virtual and a face-to-face competition. The strongly agree portion all had more than 2-4 case competition experience.

The fifth question asked if there was more perceived risk to students in multi-institutional case competitions vs. internal case competitions. The results were that once again students did not see more risk in multi-institutional than internal, they picked neutral, while faculty was mixed 30% strongly agreed to agreed there was a difference, and 30% disagreed. Further survey and work would need to be done to clarify this question.

The sixth and final question asked was if they perceived that risk enhances students' ability to achieve their highest potential. 80% strongly agreed and agreed that this was true.

Unfortunately, the response rate of professors was low, thus nullifying the statistical relevance of the survey. Future research is needed to get a greater response ratio as the reflections responses from students were somewhat different than the survey responses.

V. FINDINGS FOR GOOGLE AD GRANT CAMPAIGN

Google Ad Grants Campaign provides qualified nonprofits up to \$10,000 per month in free in-kind advertising for use within Google's online ad platform. (Google, 2022). Students in a senior level marketing class participate in Google's Online Marketing Challenge. The Challenge matches student groups to real Non-

Profits in Canada. The purpose of the challenge is for students to learn a specific marketing skill, and to develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Support to students was predominantly given through the Google Challenge website and several classes. Each student group was required to demonstrate what techniques they had used to achieve the 5% CTR, a self-reflection on the challenge, and provide solutions to each challenge they encountered.

Reflections from students were that initially, students were frustrated by the lack of guidance and structure. They found the database difficult to navigate, communication between their Non-Profits was challenging which resulted in disabled keywords, and students found it hard to stick to the given budget. Students had difficulty achieving the 5% CTR and only successful when they spent considerable time on the website. This response might indicate a reluctance for students to spend the necessary time to achieve the 5% CTR, and the students perception of low value for the effort required. Post-campaign reflection from students showed the challenge was successful and problem-solving skills were advanced. Students wrote that they should have contacted their non-profit more often and asked for advice. They also noted that agendas for team members would have saved a lot of frustration. The reflective nature of the project demonstrated that they were learning problem-solving skills that they would encounter in a real-work scenario.

When the study began, the risk assessment of the Google Ad Grant campaign was first thought to be a high intensity experience, however, the survey results show clearly that instructors do not feel it is. The impact of real non-profit has low impact for instructors. More research would be needed to identify if student impact was low or medium.

The instructor survey contained four questions. The hope was that the brevity of the survey would have more participants to respond. Unfortunately, this was not true and once again the results are not statistically valid as the response rate was low. While not statistically

usable, the responses that were provided were interesting and informative.

The first question asked faculty how many times they had run the Google Ad Grants Campaign. The results were that 28% had run the campaign 6+ times, 42% of respondents had run the campaign 2-5 times, and 29% had run it once.

The second question asked what they perceived as the impact for students on the self-guided nature of the Google Ad Grant project. Seven areas of impact were provided for respondents to provide their perceptions of student impact: Digital Literacy, Anxiety, Frustration, Active Learning, Motivation, Self-confidence, and Teamwork. Respondents were asked to respond on a five-point leikert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The results were positive; professors scored 85% strongly agree to agree on Digital Literacy, Active Learning, Motivation, Self-confidence, and Teamwork. Faculty did score 71% agree that students experience frustration, however, only 42% on student anxiety. This is indicative with the previous research by Hoover in this study that shows students were not experiencing a high intensity experience where their cognitive, affective, and behavioural were activated.

The third question asked for the perceived key benefits to students completing the Google Ad Grant project. Seven skills sets were provided for respondents to provide their perceptions of student benefit: Digital Literacy, Problem-Solving, Critical Thinking, Teamwork, Communication, and Integrative Learning. Respondents were asked to respond on a five-point leikert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. There was over 86% strongly agree to agree on all benefits except for integrative learning which trended towards agree.

The fourth and final question asked whether using a real non-profit positively impacted student initiative. 86% of responses from the faculty showed a disagree to a strongly disagree that there was a positive impact from using a real non-profit.

Future research will have student responses added in to see if there is a difference between faculty's perceptions to students.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The study aimed to investigate whether adding risk to business student curriculum deepened student long-term learning through a comparison of high intensity versus low intensity situations. The results were inconclusive due to lack of survey responses. Student reflections on the case competitions lends the author to believe that case competitions are high intensity and that face-to-face multi-institutional competitions are more intense than other formats, but cannot prove that claim. Though not statistically significant, the limited faculty responses did indicate a perceived value in student engagement in this type of high intensity experiential learning activity.

The results on the Google Ad Grants, according to the literature, it is not as highly intense as was previously thought and that students are more passively learning. Comments from student reflections that they could have contacted their non-profits more frequently, created agendas, and spent more time on increase CTRs. This additional time and effort might increase the intensity of this experiential learning activity. Further research would be to partner with several faculty who use the Google Ad Grant and see if we can compete with our results/nonprofits and see if that changes the intensity of the experience for students.

Finally, upon reading the literature on experiential learning and reflective learning, that faculty need to add a pre and post experience reflection. With the pre-reflection, asking students to think about what the experience will be like and what they think they will learn and then a post-reflection on what they did learn. Also having students and faculty alike, filling out three rubrics to both the Case Competitions and Google campaign from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU): Critical Thinking Values Rubric, Inquiry and Analysis rubric, and

Problem-Solving Rubric and assess students with this framework post-experience. (2022)

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results and finding discussed herein, the following recommendations are made:

- Review and improve methodology for faculty surveys so that valid statistical data can be obtained.
- Students and faculty complete pre-reflections and post-reflections on the experiential learning activities.
- Ask similar survey questions of students and faculty for a more direct comparison of student and faculty perceptions of value and impact.

Further research, partnering with several professors who use the Google Ad Grant and see if we can compete with our results/nonprofits and see if that changes the intensity of the experience for students.

REFERENCES

1. Alkhezaleh Z, Mahasneh AM. Fear of failure among a sample of Jordanian undergraduate students. *Psychol Res Behav Manag.* 2016;9:53-60 <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S96384>
2. Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) Values Rubric. (2022). <https://www.aacu.org/initiatives/value-initiative/value-rubric>. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>
3. Bandura, A. (1977). Self-Efficacy: Towards a unifying theory of Behavioural change. *Psychological Review*, 84. 191-215.
4. Bandura, A. (1991). Human agency: The rhetoric and the reality. *American Psychologist*, 46, 157-162.
5. Boston University. Centre for Teaching and Learning. Retrieved [April 2022] from Experiential Learning » Center for Teaching & Learning | Boston University (bu.edu)
6. Brame, C. (2013). Flipping the classroom. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. Retrieved [March 30th, 2022] from <http://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/flipping-the-classroom/>
7. Carter, Joelle & Galloway Burke, Monica & Hughey, Aaron. (2019). The Influence of Business Case Study Competitions on Students' Perceptions of Learning. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly.* 82. 232949061982990. 10.1177/2329490619829900.
8. Clarke, T. B., Murphy, J., Wetsch, L. R., & Boeck, H. (2018). Teaching Search Engine Marketing through the Google Ad Grants Program. *Marketing Education Review*, 28(2), 136–147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10528008.2018.1448282>
9. Conference Board of Canada. (2013). *The need to make skills work: The cost of Ontario's skills gap*. Retrieved from http://www.collegesontario.org/Need_to_Make_Skills_Work_Report_June_2013.pdf
10. Cormicle Knox, S., & Smiley, T. M. (2020). Google Us! Capital Area District Libraries Gets Noticed with Google Ads Grant. *Information Technology & Libraries*, 39(1), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.6017/ital.v39i1.12089>
11. Google Ad Grants (2022, March 30) Google Ad Grants - Free Google Ads for Nonprofits
12. Hoover, J Duane. Simulations, Games and Experiential Learning Techniques:, Volume 1, 1974 31 EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING: CONCEPTUALIZATION AND DEFINITION1 Texas Tech University. 2850-Article Text-2948-1-10-20140313.pdf
13. McCarthy, P. R., & McCarthy, H. M. (2006). When Case Studies Are Not Enough: Integrating Experiential Learning Into Business Curricula. *Journal of Education for Business*, 81(4), 201–204. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JOEB.81.4.201-204>

14. Perusso, A., Blankesteyn, M., & Leal, R. (2020). The contribution of reflective learning to experiential learning in business education. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 45(7), 1001–1015.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2019.1705963>
15. Purdue University (2022). What are Case Competitions. What are Case Competitions? - Purdue Krannert
16. Raja & Najmonnisa. (2018). Comparing Traditional & Experiential Teaching Methods. *Journal of Education and Educational Development* Vol. 5, No.2.
17. Sugarman, L. (1985). Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning: Touchstone for Trainers, Students, Counselors, and Clients. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 64(4), 264.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1985.tb01097.x>
18. Stakeholdermap.com. (2022). Risk Assessment Diagram. [Online]. Available from: <https://www.stakeholdermap.com/>
<https://www.stakeholdermap.com/risk/risk-assessment-matrix-simple-3x3.html>
[Accessed: April 6th, 2022]. Source: Permission
Queries <https://www.stakeholdermap.com/permission-queries.html#cit>
19. Xu, Y., & Yang, Y. (2010). Student Learning in Business Simulation: An Empirical Investigation. *Journal of Education for Business*, 85(4), 223–228.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08832320903449469>