

Assessment of Critical Thinking in MKT-735, Fall 2007

Learning Goal: MBA graduates will be able to apply critical thinking skills from applied theory in the business disciplines to solve problems in business.

Assessment Overview

An assignment from Jerry Goolsby's MBA New Product Development, Fall 2007, was used as the context for data gathering and assessment. Students were required to originate a new product idea for a new or existing firm, perform a market opportunity analysis, develop business goals and objectives and marketing objectives, develop 'four p' strategies and describe implementation, and develop a control and evaluation plan.

We looked for eight distinct aspects of critical thinking based on Dr. Goolsby's learning objectives for the course, which naturally focus on the use of critical thinking in marketing. We evaluated each student's work on the eight learning objectives in the chart below.

Critical Thinking Learning Objectives in New Product Development			
Learning Objective	Fails to meet standards	Meets learning standards	Exceeds standards
Use marketing as a tool for creating and enhancing marketplace offerings, so as to increase customer satisfaction while increasing organizational success	Poorly articulated in the exec summary. Fails to state market offering, how it provides customer satisfaction and ensures org. success	Exec summary includes all of the required components but the writing gets in the way	Exec summary includes all of the components and. Each component is clearly articulated
Determine customer needs through market research studies or focus groups	No research attempted or research is cursory or poorly executed	Appropriate market research is conducted and data are analyzed	Appropriate market research is conducted. Unique insights offered
Translate customer needs into product and service requirements	No attempt or cursory attempt to translate needs into requirements	Needs are clearly translated into market offering requirements.	Needs are creatively translated to reqs. Ideas are interesting and well thought out
Assess competitive offerings, identify the market fit of a firm's current offerings and isolate opportunities for improvement	No assessment, or cursory assessment only	Adequate assessment. Fit is discussed, opportunities are identified.	Clever assessment, discussion of fit, and opportunities identified. Unique insights given.
Develop and implement <i>pricing</i> strategies for implementing identified improvement	None, or cursory strategy only	Adequate strategy	Innovative strategy
Develop and implement <i>distrib.</i> strategies for implementing identified improvement	None, or cursory strategy only	Adequate strategy	Innovative strategy
Develop and implement <i>promo.</i> strategies for implementing identified improvement	None, or cursory strategy only	Adequate strategy	Innovative strategy
Be able to evaluate the success of new products or services introduced to market	None, or cursory evaluation	Adequate quantitative evaluation	Careful evaluation using quantitative measures
Apply methods for ensuring future improvements and continual progress	None, or cursory evaluation	Adequate discussion of continual improvement	Rich discussion of continual improvement plan, anticipation of potential threats and opportunities

Assessment Results

Critical Thinking Learning Objectives in New Product Development													
Learning Objective	Observation #									Fails to meet standards		Meets learning standards	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	#	%	#	%
Use marketing as a tool for creating and enhancing marketplace offerings	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0%	9	100%
Determine cust. needs w/ market research	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	7	78%	2	12%
Translate customer needs into product and service requirements.	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	5	56%	4	44%
Assess competitive offerings, identify the marketplace fit of a firm	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	5	56%	4	44%
Develop and implement pricing strategies	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	11%	8	89%
Develop and implement distrib. strategies	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	12%	7	78%
Develop and implement promo. strategies	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	0	0%	9	100%
Evaluate the success of new product, apply methods for future improvement	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	4	44%	5	56%

Assessment Implications

There was a normal distribution in quality of work, there were a few exceptional marketing plans, a few lousy plans, and some students had interesting things to say but communicated poorly. Generally, students are pretty good at discussing a new product idea. Students are strong on the four p-s. They are also good at describing controls and tools for measuring the success of product sales and of promotional tool.

MBA students are adept at listing facts and reporting environmental trends. However, students have a harder time *analyzing* the information in order to formulate an argument. The students don't develop a convincing argument that, based on evidence, their marketing plan would be successful. Instead, they state a claim (i.e., that everyone is going to love our product), throw out some data that may or may not relate to the claim, and leave it at that.

For instance, students might describe the competitors' offerings, but then they fail to enter into an analysis of the implications of the competitors' strategic positioning in relation to the students' firm (or product). Or, they might fail to *demonstrate clearly* that there is a target market that desires (or will desire) the product offering, that it has the means to purchase the offering, and is willing to forgo the purchase of other offerings from competitors.

Closing the loop

The fact that students struggled with this does not mean that our students can't think, rather, it reflects an overarching problem with our MBAs, and possibly also our undergraduates. Perhaps students do not understand what 'to analyze' means.

Critical thinking is hard to teach. Perhaps we need to spend time as a faculty - the group - to discuss ways of teaching critical thinking. Researching how to teach CT might be useful.