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Advanced Marketing Class - Intervention 3

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February to March 2011

Title: Peer assessment of CRM coursework

Introduction

This was the simplest of my three interventions and aimed to help students learn from each other and giving written feedback to their peers for coursework. Although the intervention was used by third year undergraduates, in hindsight it may have been better for second year students to engage in this as they have another year to go at Aberystwyth and so may reap more benefits from the intervention.

According to Somervell (1993) peer assessment engages students in making judgements about the work or performance of other students. At one end of the spectrum, it could involve them in giving feedback of a qualitative nature or, at the other, it might involve them in marking. My students were more at the qualitative feedback end of the spectrum.

The module was Advanced Marketing, a core subject for third year single, major and joint honours marketing undergraduate students. This module looks at a variety of marketing theories in depth, based on the research interests of the marketing lecturers. It therefore can vary year to year.

The students are a mix of UK nationals, Europeans and Chinese, all with a fair to good standard of English (spoken and written).

Background and Rationale

The students who were involved in this intervention were in their third year and used to the 'usual' way of being assessed for their coursework. I felt that it was important to get them thinking more deeply about issues in readiness for their future careers where depth of thought and problem resolution are areas that sort out the 'wheat from the chaff in the eyes of management.
It was my first module with the students and it was very theory based and again, I felt that making the assessment process a little different would help the engagement with the theory. As the coursework used in the intervention was on a theoretical area that was almost entirely new to them, it seemed a good way of getting them to engage more if they thought that one of their colleagues would be critiquing their work.

The fact that the module was designed to think more deeply about areas and research different authors and academic knowledge sources in order to learn made it ideal for this intervention. Students could interpret the framework in different ways and use different authors for their justification. Therefore when they came to read one of their peers' work and give feedback, they would also be learning another point of view on the subject. This hopefully, would encourage them to think of new ways to approach things and widen research bases in the future.

The Intervention

This was developed after attending an induction session at Gregynog for the PGCTHE. The trainers discussed the value of peer assessment as students often asked for more assessment and feedback than they felt that they received.

Therefore I developed coursework that was a critical assessment of a theoretical framework using published works to justify their thoughts - a form of literature review. I believed that it was important that they were all reviewing the same framework as this would give them knowledge of the area and more confidence in giving feedback.

When building the assessment I made sure that there was a fairly detailed mark scheme to help the students give feedback. The students were all made aware from the outset that they would be performing this task — this made a few of them nervous as they were in their third year and all marks count!

I therefore ensured that I was the first marker (and there was an academic second marker too) and they would give feedback but no actual marks. Therefore they were comfortable that they would be getting the 'correct' marks and extra feedback to help them too.
The Intervention Process

The students were given a lecture on the subject of the coursework and then given the brief along with a marking scheme (see appendix 1). I also gave out a handout on the framework so that they all had the same base knowledge. There were opportunities in the following lectures to discuss the work with me and they also worked in groups to present on the subject to their peers during one of the lecture sessions as part of the overall assessment process. All of this gave them opportunities to build up their detailed knowledge of the framework. (Especially as they are third year students on an advanced marketing module).

They had to hand in their work unbound and stapled in the top left corner. There was to be no identifying name, email id, etc only a student number and they had to give in with 2 cover sheets. They had to use the same font and size as to ensure their ease they were marking their peer's work anonymously. Each student marked one assessment.

Once they had handed in their own literature review I marked it with comments on one of the cover sheets which was then removed (once I had checked that student number was on both sheets for re-attachment later). The students then did their group presentations and the following week marked a fellow student's work as second marker.

I ensured that they were not marking their own work as I checked the student numbers as I gave out the work. They also had a copy of the mark scheme and a feedback sheet for them to complete to give me written feedback on the experience. They were given 30 minutes to mark the work and were not asked to give an actual mark but to give constructive feedback instead - although I did ask them to complete the tick boxes on the cover sheet so that I understood the level of marks they would have given.

The reason for not asking them to give an actual mark was because they were already daunted by the exercise and it just seemed a step too far if I wanted them all to engage properly. Judging by their verbal comments during the session (before actually marking) I feel that if attendance had not been mandatory then many would not have been there to take part.

Many of the students really struggled to complete the task within the time allowed as they didn't know where to start. Even once I had explained in more detail what was wanted and why they were doing this it was obvious that they didn't see the value of it. One girl commented 'I am a third year and my mark is really important to me. I want a lecturer to give me marks and comments not another student'. (This was after they had been told that I had already marked the work to give them their 'real' mark) This is in contrast to Fry's (1990) assertion that peer
assessment has been described as a natural process used from childhood onwards to make critical judgement of peers. Asking them to do it in a controlled environment obviously was outside their comfort zone.

Once the reviews had all been marked by the students they were collected in along with the completed feedback sheets. There was a short discussion on the exercise where they all felt that it was a difficult exercise and hard to know where to start. This was despite having a mark scheme and all having a basic understanding not only of the academic subject involved but also the level expected through having been a student in the business school for almost three years. As Black and William (2001) found, pupils will avoid difficult tasks and many are reluctant to ask questions out of fear of failure. This was certainly something I was conscious of and tried to ensure that they had the information required.

The original cover sheets were re-attached before handing the work into the undergraduate office for academic second marking and external marking as appropriate. The students were given both cover sheets as feedback.

**Evaluation Methods**

This was a mainly qualitative exercise although there were some basic quantitative aspects. The whole class was part of the exercise although unfortunately two of the students were absent for the marking of the coursework (so a second lecturer gave feedback on two assignments to ensure that all students got feedback apart from mine).

The main evaluation method was the feedback forms that were distributed although there were many anecdotal comments made in passing by individuals over the next week or two. Class discussion and observation of the students during the exercise also gave valuable insights as did comparisons of their comments and mine on the mark sheets themselves. Observation enabled me to compare 'public' contributions to those made privately (feedback). (Gill & Johnson 2002)

The feedback forms were simple and consisted of 5 questions that could be answered yes, no or some along with a 'why' area for comments and final comments at the end. (See appendix 2) The questions covered both the marking and the presentations. The latter were not actually marked by the students but they were in the audience and so could be learning from them and so were covered as an aside. Each area was split into theory and practice to make up the 4 main questions on the feedback form. The final question asked if the
exercise was worth repeating for others. Finally they had room for further comment.

The questions were:

1. Did you learn more about the Value Chain from marking someone else’s work?
2. Did you learn anything from the practical aspect of marking other people’s work?
3. Did you learn more about the Value Chain from watching other teams present?
4. Did you pick up any practical tips on presenting from watching others present?
5. Is this exercise worth repeating for other students?

Outcomes

Nineteen out of 21 students completed the exercise and handed in the feedback forms. The majority had made at least some comments and a few of these were extensive. The comments appear on the excel spreadsheets in appendix 3.

The feedback forms were analysed (see appendix 3) and the results were surprising. Given the comments from the students they were overall very positive on their feedback. Looking at individual students across the sheets as a whole, there were surprisingly few ‘no’ answers. Nine students did not answer ‘no’ at all and of the other 10 responses, 6 students had 1 ‘no’ out of the 5 questions and 4 had 2 ‘no’ answers.

There was a fairly even spread of ‘yes’ answers from 5 down to 1, so every student had at least one ‘yes’ answer. The ‘some’ answers were more polarised with 5 students with zero and 8 students with 1 ‘some’ answer. There were 3 students with 2 and another 3 with 3 ‘some’ answers. Looking at these overall, it was a very positive outcome.

Overall comments included:

- "Useful - challenges your knowledge"
- "Presentation was a very good practical"
- "More beneficial to first/second year students maybe? Can help to improve writing style and technique of individual for future work"
When looking at individual questions things were a little different as can be seen.

Question 1 - the Value Chain and Marking

Six students answered no, 9 yes and 4 some. Comments included:

- "I learnt more from a different perspective and outlook"
- "I felt I had done more or wider reading on different CRM models"
- "I already knew the issues that were covered in the report"
- "Different analysis of value chain was interesting"
- "More worried about marking it right and giving effective feedback than taking in the information"
- "Individuals did add to some details already known in more depth. Seeing work from a different perspective"

So, a fairly positive set of answers and comments but there are some students who obviously did not get a great deal of value from this aspect of the exercise.

Question 2 - the practical aspect of marking

Three students answered no, 8 yes and 8 some. Comments included:

- "Negative - constantly comparing to my own work. Positive - how other students write, prepare and portray knowledge and information"
- "You have to be critical yet polite at the same time, positive criticism"
- "See different styles of writing. Can be nerve racking if you think you have missed out information"
- "Better understanding of marking scheme, helps understand how the marker is thinking and should benefit future work"
- "I learned more from the presentations"
This answer was much more positive than the theory learning aspect of marking. However there are still a great number of students who still did not get a completely positive outcome from the exercise.

Question 3 - the Value Chain and presenting

Four students answered no, 12 yes and 3 some. Comments included:

- "I learnt every team will form a presentation differently including information"
- "Different applications and examples of CRM in use"
- "It was all the same information taken from more or less the same source of information"
- "You can pick up on new areas on the topic that you yourself may not have looked into"
- "Confidence booster"
- "Feel we learnt enough from our own presentations and watching them over and over was repetitive. Looking forward to the next presentations where everyone is doing their own topics so it will be different and interesting"

This was a much more positive result. The students tended to prefer to listen to presentations on the subject rather than read about it. Although there were again a few negative comments made.

Question 4 - the practical aspect of presenting

Only one student answered no, 17 yes and 1 some. Comments included:

- "Not to read off paper. To look at your audience and project your voice"
- "Understand everyone is in the same position, helps to calm nerves"
- "It was good to see how others present, how they act and what they say. Flash cards are a must not A4 paper"
- "You don't realise how important it is to engage with the audience unless you are the audience"
• "Rehearsing before - not bringing up a script"

This was an extremely positive result and showed that they found a lot of value from presenting to each other. They seemed to take comfort from the fact that the whole class was in the same position and took away some valuable pointers for themselves in the future.

**Question 5 - should the exercise be repeated?**

No students answered no, 12 answered yes and 7 somewhat. Comments included:

• "It is useful to see someone else’s work but it does take quite a long time perhaps in 1st year"

• "It was influential but maybe the presentation should be shorter just because being taught about CRM 6 times can be tedious"

• "Probably would be more beneficial to do this in first or second year rather than the final few weeks of third year"

• "Helpful to know what should be in your work and how it can be interpreted"

• "Presentations encouraged good team working between us and gained confidence when doing ours and by watching others. Didn't enjoy marking other essays - I don't like the fact that someone is reading my essay (lack of confidence) even though it is anonymous. I'm not a lecturer so don't know what is right or wrong - didn't like the influence, and also felt worse about my own essay with worrying it is now not right"

• "Presenting in front of a class helps with confidence for jobs after graduating"

• "Learn more about subject from marking others' work"

Again some positive answers but a mix of comments. This exercise obviously pushed the boundaries for many of the students who were uneasy about it to begin with and this showed in what was fed back. The fact that all felt that it should be repeated in some form showed that value was created for them even though it may not have been a particularly enjoyable experience at the time.
Only one student was fairly negative about the whole experience but appeared worried in the main about his/her own work when measuring it against the other report he/she marked.

This takes us to the second form of evaluation - the comparison between the marks/feedback I gave on the mark sheets and those that the student markers gave.

When I compared the student feedback and tick boxes on the mark sheets to my own I found a lot of similarities and in fact they were stricter than me on the whole. Their comments lacked the detail of mine but that was to be expected, however they had picked up the main points both good and poor in the reports marked. There were obvious nerves when giving critical comments judging by the number of smiley faces drawn - no doubt in apology!

Conclusions

I do not feel that this was a particularly successful intervention even though the comments were favourable. This was partly due to the way it was implemented as group peer assessment may have been much more relevant to them. Therefore assessing each other during their group presentations rather than the individual reports may have been more pertinent and successful. Their comments and marks seemed to echo this when the ones for the marking were compared to the ones for the presentation - the latter were much more favourable.

It was also hard to articulate exactly what the benefits of the exercise were, particularly as all the students are concerned about at this stage of their university career are their final marks. This confirms in my mind that if I was to repeat the exercise I would concentrate on second year students doing group work - especially as comments from some of the students concur with my thinking in this respect.

One thing is confirmed and that is that certainly for this exercise, the students and tutor were on the same wavelength - which correlates well with the findings of Sluijsmans et al (1998) who said that in general there was a very high level of agreement between the marks given by peers and those given by the teacher in their study.
Reference list


Appendices

1. Marking Scheme
2. Feedback form
3. Results spreadsheet
Mark Scheme

Assignments will be assessed using the following criteria:

**Structure and Argument**
- Effective and clear introduction
- Spread of issues covered
- Closeness to answering the question
- Structure and coherence of the argument
- Usefulness of the conclusion

**Use and Application of Theoretical Material**
- Use of an appropriate theoretical framework
- Understanding of relevant theoretical material
- Application of theoretical material

**Background Reading**
- Use of supporting evidence
- Accuracy in the use of evidence
- Appropriate use of references and quotations
- Bibliography and referencing

**Style and Presentation**
- Fluency of writing
- Spelling!grammar/punctuation
- Presentation and legibility
- Degree of conformity to required word limit

Please pay particular attention to these criteria while preparing and before you submit your coursework.
Feedback Form - Marking CRM Coursework

19th March 2011

Please answer the following questions to give insight into how helpful this task was to your learning.

Did you learn more about the Value Chain from marking someone else's work?  Yes  No  Some
Why?

Did you learn anything from the practical aspect of marking other people's work?  Yes  No  Some
Why?

Did you learn more about the Value Chain from watching other teams' present?  Yes  No  Some
Why?

Did you pick up any practical tips on presenting from watching others present?  Yes  No  Some
Why?

Is this exercise worth repeating for other students? Yes  No  Somewhat
Why?

Please write any other comments.

Thank you for completing this.

Julie
Assessment

1. What were your strengths and weaknesses in this assignment?

2. What did you learn from this assignment?

3. What did you like about this assignment?

4. What did you dislike about this assignment?

5. What changes would you make to this assignment if you were to do it again?

6. What did you learn about yourself through this assignment?

7. How did this assignment help you understand the course material better?

8. How did this assignment help you understand the course objectives?

9. What was the most challenging aspect of this assignment?

10. What was the least challenging aspect of this assignment?

11. How did this assignment affect your overall understanding of the course material?

12. How did this assignment affect your motivation to learn more about the course material?

13. How did this assignment affect your ability to apply the course material to real-world situations?

14. How did this assignment affect your ability to work effectively in a team?

15. How did this assignment affect your ability to communicate effectively?

16. How did this assignment affect your ability to think critically?

17. How did this assignment affect your ability to solve problems effectively?

18. How did this assignment affect your ability to think creatively?

19. How did this assignment affect your ability to work independently?

20. How did this assignment affect your ability to work collaboratively?

21. How did this assignment affect your ability to use technology effectively?

22. How did this assignment affect your ability to use research effectively?

23. How did this assignment affect your ability to use critical thinking effectively?

24. How did this assignment affect your ability to use problem-solving skills effectively?

25. How did this assignment affect your ability to use creative thinking effectively?

26. How did this assignment affect your ability to use decision-making skills effectively?

27. How did this assignment affect your ability to use logical reasoning effectively?

28. How did this assignment affect your ability to use communication skills effectively?

29. How did this assignment affect your ability to use teamwork skills effectively?

30. How did this assignment affect your ability to use leadership skills effectively?