



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Australasian Marketing Journal

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ausmj

Using intuitive awakening for business students to enhance strategic thinking skills

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 April 2018

Revised 5 May 2018

Accepted 6 May 2018

Available online xxx

“The only real valuable thing is intuition” Albert Einstein

Introduction

A continuing problem in business education is the gap between degree programs that prepare students for business careers and the development of competencies that are of value in an employment context. The balancing of intuition and rational aspects managerial decision making is a prime example of this gap (Brown et al., 2015). While business students may become knowledgeable with the general domain of managerial decision making, knowledge of specialized domains applicable to diverse industry settings is far more tenuous. It is in these specialized areas that students can profit by increasing their focus on intuition or non-rational thinking.

The objective of this paper is to provide practical guidance about the implementation of the Intuitive Awakening Elicitation (IAE) method. This method focuses on developing and enhancing students' intuitive skills for marketing decision-making. IAE is designed to upgrade the effectiveness of intuition, by minimizing its biases and maximizing its expert blend with steel-trapped logic and conceptual marketing knowledge. Additionally, IAE aims to improve students' self-confidence and trust in making marketing decisions by using intuitive thinking.

The significance of this work lies in the fact that business school graduates as prospective employees will be a better fit to their future organizations when they are fully capable of meeting requirements for effective use of intuition skills. In the ensuing sections of this paper we present a unique system of concrete

ways to facilitate transmission of these important skills into the marketing curriculum and teaching practice. In sum, the recommended approach for awakening marketing students' intuition will lead to essential advancement of the quality of future marketing managers.

Among the instructional techniques for improving intuition modes among business students are: (a) active reflection, (b) self-checking mechanisms, (c) multiple metaphors and (d) response failures of fatigue and memory (Burke and Sadler-Smith, 2006). Students may be advised to speculate about assumptions that key players in business are making when they arrive at their decisions. Student intuition may further be stimulated by teaching them to generate ample alternatives to a preferred business problem solution, and to assess the merits of the varied options. In so doing, they can re-visit the facts of the case, so as to test their earlier conceptualization of best business strategies (Hogarth, 2001).

A program aimed at enhancement of intuition skills among MBA students is reported in the literature. This program taught the use of several general principles and provided reinforcement exercises. These included: (a) use of passive volition, (b) meditation, (c) mindfulness, (d) somatic awareness, (e) insight, (f) spontaneity, (g) visual imagery, and (h) relaxation. Participants kept a log while under instruction, by which they evaluated changes in their workplace experiences, owing to program learning. Based on participants' self-reports, the program succeeded in making them aware of concepts that develop intuition skills (Sadler-Smith and Skefy, 2007). Beyond intuition-building efforts, there are no studies that address the use of intuition in standard pedagogical approaches, such as individual business case analyses. In a typical evidence-based case study, students are expected to practice, test, confirm, extend or refute formal knowledge (Erez and Grant, 2014). Such pedagogically oriented cases are extensive,

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and include abundant complex data tables, requiring analytical skills and conceptual interpretation. This does little to stimulate intuition thinking, as the primary objective is to bring student critical thinking to a higher level of rationality (Rebeiz, 2011). In this effort, we do not use or replicate Sadler-Smith and Skedy's (2007) as program intuition training processes do not fit in with the standard curriculum classroom schedule (e.g. taking time from other learning activities, lack of student interest, etc.). Other skills that are cultivated for marketing students include written and oral communication, creativity, and computer usage. With the immersion of intuitive case work, we seek a balance between a variety of skill enhancement routines. Additionally, we want to use the natural thinking processes that individuals have as their own. Some people are more intuitive and some more rational in their general thinking processes. If the thinking style is primarily intuitive, individuals nevertheless can use rational decision making, and *vice versa*. Additionally, other intuition training processes do not fit in with the classroom (e.g. taking time from other learning activities, lack of student interest, etc.).

The present study breaks new ground by demonstrating ways of exposing students to new business to business case materials and priming them in ways that constrain them to use intuition problem solving. Consequently, the present paper contributes insights to this under-researched business education phenomenon.

Theoretical foundation: the nature of intuition thinking

Intuition may be distinguished from other fast thinking processes that appear to be similar. These other processes need not be based on prior knowledge without awareness, are not physiological responses, and may involve sequential processing (Betsch, 2008).

"Intuition is a process of thinking. The input to this process is mostly provided by knowledge stored in long-term memory that has primarily been acquired by associative learning. The input is processed automatically and without conscious awareness. The output of the process is a feeling that can serve as a basis for judgments and decisions" (2008: 4).

Hogarth (2010) elaborates on this by adding that intuition responses require little apparent effort, involve little or no conscious deliberation, may have cognitive or emotional origins stemming from pattern recognition and are experienced in a holistic manner. Further, the knowledge associated with intuition cannot be made explicit. According to Hogarth (2008: 91, 92), intuitions from observed stimuli may involve insights and inferences about predictions, postdictions, and preferences. Such insights and preferences may give rise to the illusion of validity. Beyond cognitive thought, feelings may be experiential and motivational factors in intuition decision making (Zeelenberg and Pieters, 2007).

Intuition-based strategies involve processing of high levels of well-consolidated information. Consistent with this definition, Epstein has developed cognitive-experiential self-theory which locates intuition within an experiential system and elaborates the role of involuntary feelings, independent of recall, which require sparse cognitive resources and employ pattern recognition. Knowledge may be experiential or intellectual (Epstein, 1985; 2008).

Experiential system thinking taps into a reservoir of unconscious information, acquired through automatic learning. Beliefs are acquired by means of classical conditioning, instrumental conditioning, and observational learning. Beliefs derive from the aggregation of emotionally significant experiences. Especially under extreme cognitive limitations which gives rise to intuition, it differs from other modes of thinking that derive from a rational system of verbal reasoning. In comparison with rational conceptual systems intuition is: linked more closely with affective experience, more action-oriented, more loosely integrated with

personal systems, more holistic and generalized, and tends to be passively experienced (Epstein, 1985).

Intuition thinking, in general, can outperform analytical styles under certain conditions. Intuition thinking may have an edge when problems are exceedingly complex or structured by multiple variables with indeterminate weights so as to make analysis impossible (Epstein, 2008: 32–33). The two systems may interact, either sequentially or in the same temporal time-frame. Either system may dictate to the other.

Individuals may differ in psychological dispositions depending on the thinking systems that are prioritized. Individual differences in intuition intelligence have been measured by Epstein and Pacini (1999). The instrument is called the Constructive Thinking Inventory (CTI). Concepts that it measures are emotional coping, behavioral coping, categorical thinking, esoteric thinking, personal superstitious thinking, and naive optimism.

Experiential thinking is positively associated with creativity and aesthetic judgment. On the other hand, rational thinking is positively associated with favorable adjustment traits, such as high self-esteem or conscientiousness (Epstein, 2008: 28). Intuition often produces different results, depending on the primary thought system involved. Intuition and analytic thinking observe different rules.

Cognitive-experiential self-theory posits that the accuracy of intuition judgments and decisions depends on the appropriateness of stored experience, its situational familiarity and its relationship to the situation involved. Intuition is functional i.e., it is adaptive.

The learning of intuitions through experiences and their associated consequences have been addressed by Hogarth (2008). High level operations that result from conscious and controlled thinking may also be accomplished by means of implicit learning. Further, what originates as activity from explicit learning may become intuition with repeated tasks. However, opportunities to learn or environmental predictability affects the quality of intuition thinking, including judgments and decisions (Newell, 2016).

Individuals differ in preferences between intuition and analytical thinking. Approaches to the measurement of such preferences are found in Briggs and Myers (1976) and Epstein et al. (1996). All things being equal, variability between people in their intuition behaviors reflects experiential differences with respect to domains involved. People with more experience in a domain are classified as experts and those lacking experience are branded as novices. Experts have a distinctive thought process with respect to intuition. Their rich and greater exposure situations are coded by expected patterns, pattern recognition and more of these are available in memory for diagnosis (Hogarth, 2008: 94; Klein, 1993). Experts, themselves, differ in the character of intuition behaviors. Differences among experts are attributable to predictability of the environment, feedback for adequate learning, and experience in the professional environment (Newell, 2016).

Intuition may be viewed as a stock of knowledge or cultural capital at the ready for making inferences (Hogarth, 2010). Intuition has special advantages beyond its immediacy and effortlessness. These advantages are salient under the following conditions: (a) people possess knowledge gained from prior relevant experience, (b) implicit and explicit knowledge are disassociated, and (c) implicit knowledge is useful to solve a task (Plessner and Czenna, 2008, 257–258). In general, the intuition thinking mode is better handled when intuition-inducing and intuition tasks, such as time pressured challenges, are undertaken. Further, benefits of intuition thinking increase with exposure to learning environments with representative, appropriate and accurate feedback. Intuition is especially beneficial when implicit knowledge exceeds that of explicit knowledge for a specified task (Plessner and Czenna, 2008, 260–262).

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