

Competency Model-Based Improvement of Marketing Training Process Design

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Abstract—Based on competency theory, this paper sets out to analyze the general characteristics of the types of competency which students majoring in marketing should possess. It then puts forward suggestions for improving the four aspects of training arrangement, hardware and software configuration, training format, and training process control and assessment of market training process design, with a view to better enhancing students' competency.

Keywords—marketing; training; competency

I. INTRODUCTION

Competency is an important concept in human resource management. With the introduction and development of the competency concept, many enterprises have incorporated competency models into their human resource management work, which involves recruitment, promotion, performance appraisal and other aspects. According to competency theory, competency can be improved through training and drills. It is clear that understanding enterprises' competency requirements for different professions and offering targeted training to students will be conducive to their future employment and career development. Marketing is a highly practical profession, and practical training courses are vitally important for it. This paper sets out to seek ways to improve marketing training process design so as to enhance the competency of students majoring in marketing and boost their competitiveness in the workplace.

II. COMPETENCY THEORY AND MODELS

A. Competency and its Characteristics

The concept of competency was put forward by David McClelland in 1973. Over time, different researchers have made different definitions of competency. Despite their different ways of expression, these definitions do have something in common in that they generally consider competency as a kind of ability for the job or work post. Such ability has its own characteristics, known as qualities, which are essentially about personal characteristics related to the job or work post. These characteristics include knowledge, skills, thinking mode, behavioral pattern and so on. Individuals who possess such characteristics can perform better on their job.

B. Competency Models

The classical models of competency include the iceberg model and the onion model. The iceberg model was proposed by David McClelland. Then, American scholar Richard Boyatzis put forward the quality onion model on the basis of McClelland's iceberg model. The two models have different perspectives, but express similar ideas.

The iceberg model compares competency characteristics to an iceberg floating on the sea, and divides them into two parts: an "above-the-sea-surface" part, and a "below-the-sea-surface" part. Among them, the "above-the-sea-surface" part includes basic knowledge and skills, while the "below-the-sea-surface" part consists of social roles, self-image, traits and motivation. The onion model figuratively compares competency characteristics to a structure enclosed by layers, with motivation being the innermost layer, while the outward layers are respectively personality, self-image and values, social roles, attitude, knowledge, and skills.

The core views of the iceberg model and the onion model are as follows: 1. competency characteristics can be divided into a visible part and an invisible part. The visible part is one of the external expression of competency characteristics, such as the "above-the-sea-surface" part of the iceberg model and the outer layer of the onion model, while the invisible part is the internal characteristics part, such as the "below-the-sea-surface" part of the iceberg model and the inner layers of the onion model; 2. the more visible the aspects of a visible part are, the easier it is to observe, understand, measure, cultivate and improve them. On the other hand, the more invisible the aspects of a part are, the more difficult it will be to understand, measure, influence and acquire them; and 3. the external part usually consists of the basic requirements for one to adapt to the work post, while the internal part is about personal behavior, which is more critical for work performance.

III. GENERAL COMPETENCY WHICH MARKETING STUDENTS SHOULD POSSESS

Competency models emphasize the essential characteristics which are required for specific situations and positions. In other words, there are different indicators of the competency characteristics suitable for different enterprises and positions. Moreover, as the environment changes, competency characteristics also change. Given that most undergraduate training is not corporate-sponsored training, it is not possible to

train students for specific posts or specific enterprises. This paper will only examine the general competency characteristics which marketing professionals should possess under the conditions of the modern environment.

Based on existing research literature and with reference to enterprises' marketing personnel recruitment requirements, the authors believe that students majoring in marketing should have the following types of general competency: 1. professional knowledge and skills, including professional knowledge and skills related to marketing, application abilities related to computer and modern information technologies, etc.; 2. abilities of communication and expression, including abilities of both written and oral communication; 3. team collaboration, team awareness, and ability to work in a team to achieve set goals; 4. abilities of innovative learning, including abilities of learning, analysis, thinking and imagination; and 5. personal traits, including personality characteristics, attitude towards work, way of conduct, etc. Training on these five aspects in turn goes from visible and easy to invisible and difficult.

While no practical marketing training process can cover everything of these five aspects, general abilities of all the five aspects above are nevertheless involved. For example, students must apply specialized knowledge to complete their training assignments. Their professional abilities can be strengthened through theoretical knowledge enhancement and practice. Practical training assignments, presentations and demos can improve students' abilities of oral and written expression, while also requiring their ability of computer use. Some practical training needs to be done in groups, and the process of intra-group cooperation will involve team abilities and skills, such as abilities of team cooperation, organization and coordination, as well as skills in communication. Reviewing theoretical knowledge and reflecting on the practice process can stimulate students' ability to innovate. The whole process of practical operations and the quality of completed training assignments can reflect students' sense of responsibility, work attitude and other personal traits. It can be seen that the training process runs throughout the training of competency characteristics. Therefore, the overall arrangement, format, supporting hardware and software configuration, process control and assessment of the training process are all very important.

IV. COMPETENCY MODEL-BASED IMPROVEMENT OF MARKETING TRAINING PROCESS DESIGN

Though the practical training process involves all competency characteristics above, many factors nevertheless often make competency training lost as a mere formality and unable to result in substantive competency improvement. To address this situation, the authors put forward the following improvement measures in order to cultivate students' competency characteristics.

A. *Making rational arrangements for the training process*

Training content is the core part of the training process. Training content and process arrangement both directly affect the improvement of students' professional abilities. At present, training arrangements for the marketing major are far from

rational. For example, most training contents are virtual ones, which are far from enterprises' real situations. Some training courses have overlapping contents, making students lose interest in them. In some cases, the same assignment is done twice and thus fails to produce the desired training effect. In some situations, one teacher trains dozens of students at the same time, making it difficult to ensure good training effects. Irrational training arrangements will not only affect the improvement of students' professional abilities, but also lead students to develop a mentality of opportunism.

To make rational training arrangements, one may start with the following aspects so as to consolidate students' professional knowledge and skills and improve their learning attitude. Firstly, it is necessary to properly handle the overlapping and interrelationship between multiple training courses. This problem should be well dealt with in the process of designing professional training programs and formulating course outlines. Secondly, attention needs to be paid to the combination of theory and practice in making specific training content arrangements. On the one hand, importance must be attached to consolidating students' professional theoretical knowledge. On the other hand, training contents must be made close to the real-world situation. Thirdly, the effect of teacher guidance must be ensured. On the one hand, it is necessary to specify training requirements and assessment criteria and formulate a rational training process. Fourthly, two or more instructors should be assigned to work on one training course. This will help process control.

B. *Fully providing training software and hardware*

According to competency theory, the specific indicators of competency characteristics vary with the specific situation. An environment which is close to the real-world situation is therefore more conducive to the improvement of competency.

The configuration of hardware and software training facilities will affect how close students' practice process is to the real-world situation. The farther away the hardware and software configuration is from the real-world situation, the worse the training effect will be. This article will mainly conduct its analysis from the three aspects of training software, training instructors and practice base construction. Firstly, the provision of training software. Currently, marketing simulation software from UFIDA, YNTSOFT and other companies is commonly used in marketing training. Such software is usually suitable for general practice, but does not cover comprehensive contents. Besides, there are also defects in the software. Secondly, the allocation of teachers. Most teachers directly teach students right after their graduation from college. They lack practical experience and can hardly ensure good training and guidance effects. Thirdly, the construction of practice bases. A practice base should be the best and the most real training environment. But, many schools' practice bases are merely nominal entities with quite limited roles. Often, practice bases have different requirements for students from those for their own staff, thus compromising the training effect.

To improve the provision of training hardware and software, work can be done from the following aspects so as to make training closer to the real-world situation and enhance students'

competency in professional skills, communication skills, work attitude and self-conduct. Firstly, work with software companies to improve training simulation software. It is necessary to fully communicate and cooperate with software companies to improve the use of technical terms, develop comprehensive contents and solve other problems so that students can consolidate their professional knowledge in the training process. Secondly, strengthen the training of teachers. It is essential to provide practice opportunities for teachers and arrange for them to get on-the-job training in enterprises. Teachers without practical experience should not be assigned to offer training courses. Teachers should be encouraged to become dual-type instructors so that they can play a substantive role in student training. Thirdly, make full use of practice bases. A practice base can be used for teachers to train students and for students to have practice. It is also possible to invite enterprise personnel to join in the training. To arrange practice work for students, it is imperative to fully communicate with enterprises, comprehensively understand students' training status and needs, and set strict requirements for them.

C. *Enriching training formats*

It is rather difficult to change the inherent characteristics of individual persons, but training process design should be made positively affect students' performance in the training process as much as possible. Experience shows that diversified training formats can stimulate students' interest and even change students' attitude to some extent.

Current training formats usually include training within theoretical courses, centralized practice training courses, graduation practice and so on. As for practical training within theoretical courses, not all theoretical courses have a practical training component. Even if practical training content is arranged, the time available may still be limited. Centralized training courses usually involve simulated training and off-campus training, with off-campus training as the main part. Graduation practice is the last step before students take up formal employment. It is usually done in the form of a graduation thesis. On the basis of these course formats, other training forms may also be considered. In addition, the arranged training courses are mostly completed in the form of small reports and big assignments, which can train students' ability of written communication and expression. But, they have a limited training effect on students' abilities of oral communication and expression.

Based on existing common formats of training, efforts should be made to combine multiple training methods to increase training opportunities and make training more interesting for students. For example, subject competitions and social practices both offer excellent opportunities and can be incorporated into the practical training process to encourage active participation from students. These competitions and social practices are very helpful to improve students' professional skills and abilities of team cooperation and innovation. At the same time, more training on oral communication abilities should be added to the existing training courses, and students should be regularly organized to report on their training situation, with teachers on hand to provide comments.

D. *Undertaking strict process control and assessment*

Process control and assessment are bound to affect both students' attitude and training effect. Problems that currently exist in the training process include: 1. students are fairly scattered, making it difficult for teachers to exercise control; 2. as practice is often done in groups, it is difficult to avoid "hitchhiking" by some students; 3. as training assessment is mostly carried out in the form of general reports, plagiarism is sometimes caused. Problems in process control also lead to problems of assessment. For example, training assessment is usually composed of two parts: regular course performance and end-of-term examination. If the process is difficult to control and teachers cannot exercise easy supervision, it will not be possible for teachers to assess students' regular course performance. All these problems will affect students' understanding of their practical training courses and the cultivation of their professional abilities and sense of responsibility.

Without strict process control and assessment, practical training is likely to become a mere formality and turn into a means for students to get easy course credits. Therefore, it is very important to establish a clear and strict process control and assessment system. Firstly, it is essential to formulate sound practical training plans so that students can clearly understand the content, requirements and assessment criteria of their training courses. Senior and junior students usually communicate with one another about the situation of each training course and the habits of each teacher. As a result, it is absolutely necessary to strictly implement the assessment criteria. Secondly, for process control, more than one teacher may be assigned to take charge of one practical training course. Otherwise, centralized training should be adopted as far as possible. If students can do practice work at a practice base, process control will become more convenient and objective, and enterprise personnel can also participate in the assessment of students' performance. Thirdly, team cooperation and personal practice may be combined to help get information on the specific situation of each student. Together with the mutual evaluation of team members, it will be possible to reduce students' "hitchhiking" to a certain extent. Strict process control and scientific and strict examinations can help students take practical training seriously and truly improve their abilities.

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