

Pedagogical Innovations - Experiential and Participant Centered Learning

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ABSTRACT

Today's aspiring MBA students have very little patience to sit in a class and listen to what the professor has to speak and even less to read the textbooks prescribed by the faculty. Innovative ways of delivery and learning is the only way the facilitator can make the class engrossing for the students. Book reading are useful in enriching a course and reinforcing classroom teaching. This case describes a methodology of teaching developed by the author for Retail management course of an MBA program. The book reading offers a business context for reinforcing classroom learning by intertwining roll plays and the participants can be evaluated on their performance. Participant's feedback that such a methodology enhances their practical understanding of the topic and develops the right skills to make them industry ready. This can be adopted for other business courses taught at the post-graduate level. Participants can be given two weeks to study the book, followed by 2 hours of role play, 1 hour of open book exam and 1 hour of debriefing time.

Keywords: *Book Reading, Goal, Retail Management, Open Book Exam*

INTRODUCTION

I was teaching the participants a topic, 'Logistics and supply chain management in retail', during my retail management course. While teaching I realized that it was very difficult for the participants to visualize a store and how it functions. How actually inventory is ordered and managed. How does the store ensure that sufficient stocks are maintained so that there is no shortage and at the same time excesses are within reasonable limits? Some of these questions were systematically explained in this book through a story that helps in connecting the dots and developing a

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much more detailed understanding in terms of how to run a retail store.

BRIEFLY ABOUT THE BOOK

The book talks about a retailer who has a chain of stores. The stores are supplied inventory from the regional warehouses. The stores maintain 4 months of inventory. One particular store had its warehouse in the basement of the building where there was a water leakage. Some stocks got destroyed and the rest were shifted to their regional warehouse. The store manager was worried as they could not maintain enough inventories at the store till the leakage problem was sorted out. To solve the current crisis, the store manager maintained 20 days of stock of each SKU. Everyday a list was sent to the regional warehouse about the amount of stock consumed and the regional warehouse replenished it within one day. The total stock at the store reduced considerably and at the same time the inventory system moved from push to pull system. Products consumed by customers were only ordered and therefore the maximum stock of a particular SKU never exceeded 20 days of inventory. The store displays suddenly had a lot of vacant space and therefore the departmental heads started ordering SKUs which were not available at all. These were the SKUs which were high in demand and had the potential to generate higher sales. Over a period of time the store manager realized that their performance started improving and they started introspecting, the new method of doing business. They further improved the system by color coding their SKUs. All SKUs where the stock has reached $1/3^{\text{rd}}$ of the total stock was marked red which are the fast moving goods, where the stock has reached between $2/3^{\text{rd}}$ to $1/3^{\text{rd}}$ were marked yellow which are neither fast nor slow moving goods and where the stock was more than $2/3^{\text{rd}}$ were marked as green which were the slow moving goods. The total stock to be maintained for the red SKUs can be enhanced by $1/3^{\text{rd}}$ if these SKUs remain in red for more than 2 weeks. The stocks of green SKUs can be reduced by $1/3^{\text{rd}}$ if they remain in green category for more than a week. The yellow SKUs can be maintained at their current level. Such a system was implemented at this store and thereby the stocks which are in demand are maintained in higher quantity as compared to stocks which are not in so much demand.

The current system was implemented in one store and if the same system had to be maintained at all the stores in the region, there would be scarcity of fast moving goods and therefore there is a need to change the

procurement process as well to align it with the requirement of the stores. Instead of ordering products 4 to 6 months in advance, the procurement manager insisted for weekly delivery from the suppliers which enabled the warehouse manager to supply inventory on a daily basis to the stores based on the consumption instead of forecast.

PEDAGOGY

A classroom session on supply chain and logistics in retail was conducted. “Theory of constraints in retail”, as a means to manage the supply chain and logistics was introduced and elaborated. Though the participants nodded that they understood all the concepts taught in the class, as a facilitator I was concerned whether they could apply the concepts in real life situations that is whether they had a clear idea as to how a new retail store can be started from scratch and how the supply chain and new product introduction managed in such a way which facilitates high profitability for the firm. In my search to make my course and this particular topic in particular more practical oriented, I started looking at various options available. I started reading books on retail, read articles on retail published in various magazines, newspaper and content published by various associations of retail in India. While I was referring content on the internet, I got my hand over a book, ‘Goal’, by Eliyahu Goldratt. It was a book on application of ‘Theory of constraints’, in Retail. The book was engrossing and it was difficult to keep the book down. I was awake all night to complete the book in one go. Suddenly an idea struck me. All my participants should read this book.

Faculty members at MBA schools find it extremely difficult to engage students in the class. Typically students are attentive for the first 30 to 45 minutes and then they switch off or ask for break. Over the periods business schools have improved instructional methodology and evolved various forms of exercises, computer simulations, games and roll plays. As pedagogical tool, management fiction book reading has still not gained popularity except for the textbooks that are prescribed to the students which are very difficult to read and remember. Students end up reading one chapter at a time as the writing style is in such a way that the chapters do not build a story and very soon the readers gets disinterested. My personal experience is that teaching through management fiction book gives superior results as compared to normal classroom based teaching methodology.

Book reading are useful in enriching a course and reinforce classroom learning. This article describes a book selected by the author for Retail Management course, an elective in the MBA curriculum. The unique aspect of this pedagogy is that the students get a chance to understand how a retail store can be set up right from scratch. The book learning offers a business context for reinforcing class room learning. The participants can also be evaluated on their performance by conducting an open book exam. The book can be adopted for other post-graduate courses related to supply chain management and logistics as well as under-graduate management courses.

This article describes a management fiction book reading that I have initiated in the Retail management class to supplement the theoretical understanding of the students on the said topic. The unique aspect of this book reading exercise is that students are put together in groups and they need to role play the story by representing different characters in the book. The book reading exercise is conducted during the later part of the semester so that to ensure that students have gone through all the relevant theoretical concepts related to the subject matter. It employs an inductive approach to learning where participants get an opportunity to apply concepts and devise appropriate strategies. Participants are evaluated at two level; at the first level the student present a roll play which provides the facilitator with an understanding whether participants have understood the concepts or not. Roll play presentations are conducted where various other marketing faculty members are also called for comments and suggestions. Apart from the faculty members, the group's classmates also make suggestions to the presenting team. At the second level, an open book exam is conducted and participants were asked to answer short and long question while referring to the book. This enabled them to remember the sequence of events and connect the dots to describe their answers.

A de-briefing was done post the roll play and open book exam to enable learning and bridging the gaps in understanding if any. The feedback received from the students helped us evolve it to its present stage.

DEBRIEFING

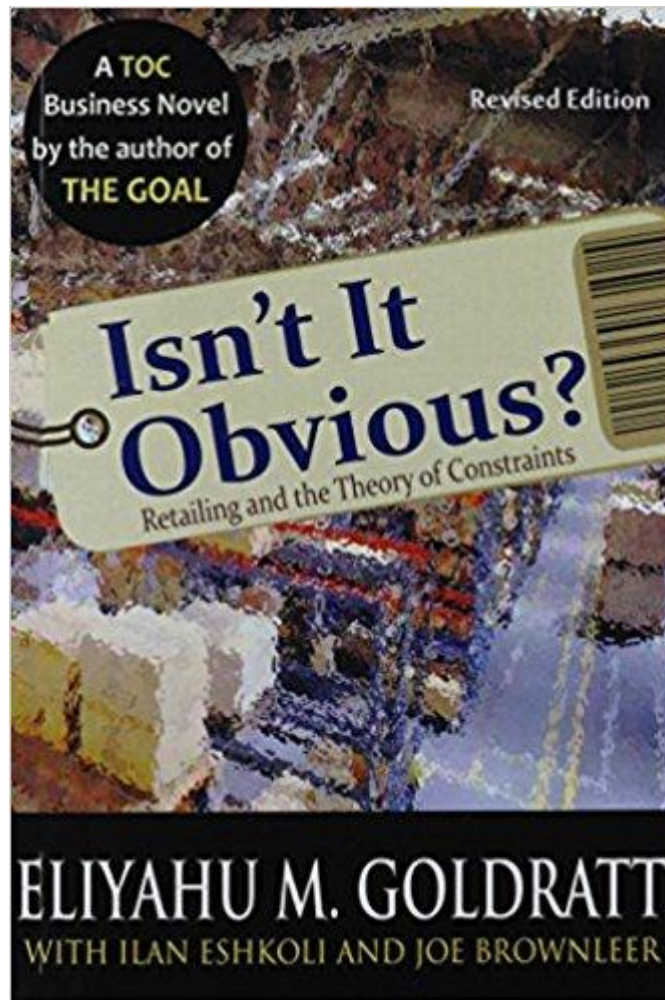
This is an important part of the activity and the instructor can spend at least an hour on debriefing. The sessions may be opened by allowing roll play teams to suggest improvements to each other's work. The other marketing faculty members also commented on each of the roll plays.

If there are instances of inappropriate application of concepts these are brought up next for discussion. The concluding part of the debriefing was that each group had to think of a retail store that they will be interested to put up in Pune. They had to devise a complete strategy in terms of how they can manage the supply chain of retail store using ‘Theory of Constraints’. After deliberation they presented their model to the batch as well as the marketing professors. The feedback was taken and accordingly the participant got innovative ideas and deeper understanding of the application of concepts in real life situation.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE PEDAGOGY

The experiment of introducing a new pedagogy of teaching the most critical topic in retail, supply chain management, was a great success. Participant’s concepts in this area got reinforced couple of times. Firstly, the theoretical concepts were taught through a lecture in the class. Secondly, when the participants read the book and performed role play and finally when the participants attempted an open book exam where they had to remember the story and narrate it. Participants shared that they understood the book much more after they rehearsed and performed the roll play. They shared that they were confident to open a small retail store and run it successfully. Some of the participants shared that when they went to a retail store for shopping, they could identify the health of the store in terms of whether the store is maintaining the stock of all its fast moving goods, did the store maintain enough freshness and newness in its stock, whether the employees were involved and genuinely interested to help and go out of the way for the customer. They also observed whether the salesman at the store had enough product knowledge. They felt enlightened in terms of their understanding of how a retail business is run.

There are some limitations with this pedagogy. We are dealing with the millennials, which spend most of their time on social media, television and playing games and therefore most of them are not very keen to read books. They prefer to google the internet and get quick answers to all their queries. In such a scenario, it is a big task to convince the participants to read a book. Therefore, this type of pedagogy can be successful if the facilitator has carefully chosen the book. The book necessarily has to be a management fiction which motivates the participants to read the book and develop concepts through the medium of story reading. Selection of the right book will to a large extent decide the success of the learning.

EXHIBIT I RETAIL MANAGEMENT BOOK**EXHIBIT II EXAMPLES OF USING THE BOOK
READING METHODOLOGY TO OTHER
COURSES:**

Marketing Management - If you are teaching a course on Marketing Management, then, 'Marketing Warfare', by Al Ries & Jack Trout's, is a fascinating read. Some of the marketing warfare strategies that this book discusses are defensive warfare, offensive warfare, flanking warfare and

guerilla warfare. The companies may use different strategies depending on their market position. To illustrate their point the authors compare marketing to a football game. If a team simply identifies the goal line and moves the ball towards it without regard to competing team, they most likely will be blocked in their effort. To win the game, the team must focus its efforts on outwitting, outflanking, or overpowering the opponent. This book can enhance and reinforce what the participants have learnt in the Marketing management course. It provides many real life examples, which enable participants to relate them with the theoretical concepts.

Production and Operations Management - If you are teaching a course on Production and Operations Management, then ‘The Goal’, by Eliyahu Goldratt is an interesting read. The business novel talks about a plant manager facing problems at work. The book addresses his problem and helps the reader to understand whether his day today decisions are helping the plant to move towards the Goal to make money. The author advocates increasing throughput and/or decreasing inventory and operational expense as a means to increase profitability. The author further reiterates that the slowest operation always determines the maximum speed at which products can be produced and therefore also the rate at which throughput can be realized. This slowest process or machine or person is called the Bottleneck or Constraint. The book very clearly talks about how bottlenecks can be managed for higher throughput, which is aligned with what the customer needs. It is an enlightening read as it explains complex plant management and supply chain related concepts in very simple language and methodology to relate.

Financial Management - If you are teaching a course on Financial Management, then ‘Rich dad, poor dad’ or ‘Cash flow quadrant’, could be prescribed to understand financial investment and planning. The book does a fantastic job teaching how to think about work and money. The fundamental point of the book is that you should try hard to save money and accumulate assets that can eventually replace the income you make from your employment. It’s also rather inspirational, as it paints a way of life that fulfills the dreams that many of us have of being financial free and independent.

Supply Chain Management - If you are teaching a course on Supply chain management, then ‘Kanban for the supply chain’, by Stephen

Cimorelli could be a nice bet. This book explains how a manufacturing company, can set up a procurement department right from scratch. The author talks about BOM list, ABC analysis, saw tooth diagram, Z score, lead time management, Kanban as an inventory management system, etc. This book provides a clear picture of establishing the inventory management system in the organization with the objective of rock bottom inventory, at the same time ensuring availability. Thus, provides rich practical insights as takeaway for the participants.

Retail Management Course - 'Made in America' by Sam Walton is a good book to understand how the best retailer in the world, WalMart made it to the number one position. The book beautifully captures how Sam focused on understanding the customer and his relentless search for better ideas. He read everything he could get his hands on, learned from his competitors by spending time in their stores, asked endless questions to experienced retailers, listened to employees at all levels of Wal-Mart and invented creative ways to foster an idea-driven culture. The book teaches a lot about running retail stores, which typical text books may not be able to capture.

TEACHING NOTES

Alternative teaching methodologies can reduce learning time and enhance the learning outcomes thus offering a risk free environment for experimentation. The approach to use this methodology is as given below:

1. Read management books in the area or subject you intend to teach.
2. Select a book which is written in a story telling style and conveys practical application of concepts taught in the class. Similarly, if one is teaching an industry specific subject like Retail Management, then autobiographies or biographies of famous personalities in that industry could enable participants to learn about that industry, its pain points and path to success.
3. Distribute an individual copy to the participants and give them 15 days to read.
4. If the book has a lot of characters, you could ask the participants to perform a role play. It will aid the participants to remember the sequence of events and will reinforce the concept.
5. A debriefing session after the role play is a must to bring more clarity to the way the participants have interpreted the concepts.

6. Evaluation is the next logical step. An open book exam can be scheduled. The facilitator can ask analytical questions, which bring out whether the participants have understood the concepts and the learning goals of the course which could be as follows:
 - Ability to identify, analyze and interpret relevant issues.
 - Ability to demonstrate skills of analysis and synthesis of relevant data.
7. A final debriefing can be executed after the correction of the papers, pointing out common mistakes and areas of improvement.