Chapter 21
A Mental Model for Teaching Strategic Marketing Management

Homer B. Warren
Youngstown State University, USA

David J. Burns
Kennesaw State University, USA

ABSTRACT

The complex realities of the increasingly global nature of business require managers who are able to see and comprehend the multiple interrelationships of factors in the environment to optimize decision making. This paper offers a mental model used by the authors to help students better understand the heuristic thinking processes that successful strategic marketing managers use in decision making and problem solving. The authors argue that seeing the "whole" marketing system and understanding how to integrate marketing knowledge is a key ingredient in heuristic thinking. To this end, the paper details the foundation for and the construction of a mental model for a strategic marketing management course. An application is discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Colleges of business, particularly those in the U.S., are under a societal microscope. Corporate America has concerns about the function-based approach colleges of business use to teach students who will become management-level employees (Stevens, 2000). Taxpayers demand accountability through value-added analysis (Greene & Bao, 2009). The AACSB's accreditation guidelines include outcome assessments and clear competencies (Moskal, Ellis, & Keon, 2008). Seemingly, stakeholders' concerns center around whether colleges of business are going beyond content-based, rote memorization instruction to developing graduates with the cognitive skills necessary to effectively function within a dynamic business environment.

Marketing researchers and theorists have done their part in producing a large body of knowledge about marketing strategy development and the management skills needed for algorithmic tasks (the straightforward mundane situations) and heuristic tasks (problems for which managers need to find new and/or imaginative solutions). To their credit, marketing educators have regularly explored methods to bring to the classroom the created body of knowledge. In the face of these efforts, however, stakeholders' concerns remain. The graduates of colleges of business are entering an increasingly complex and interrelated global business environment, but, in the views of several, without the skills and abilities necessary to contribute to their employers and society (e.g., Bennis & O'Toole, 2005). Waddock and Lozano (2013) state "we face a world in which management education is by many assessments in crisis for too narrowly and analytically orienting future managers who will need to lead in a complex, socially and ecologically fraught world, where simple answers just do not work" (p. 265). It may very well be that marketing education needs to place increased emphasis on the cognitive processes that operate when successful marketers deal with complex decisions (Smith, 2004). To wit, cognitive processes need to be modeled to aid students in implementing the body of marketing knowledge in the "real world."

Although the need for college graduates to be able to critically and strategically think globally is widely recognized (Bok, 2006) and although such thinking skills are often prominently included in the stated objectives and goals of most colleges of business (Bigelow, 2004), the success of colleges of businesses in successfully building these abilities in students is questionable (Waddock & Lozano, 2013). If colleges of business seek to improve their students' thinking skills, there may be a need to develop new pedagogical approaches to accomplish this. Smith (2014) suggests that strategic thinking skills involve drawing on the outputs of what he calls lower-order mental activities (e.g., perception, attention, memory, affect) as inputs into higher-order mental activities (e.g., problem solving, decision making). By developing strategic thinking skills, students become able to cognitively analyze multiple inputs to arrive at appropriate solutions. Research appears to indicate that most students do not possess these abilities (e.g., Arum & Roksa, 2011). Smith (2014) suggests the problem may lie in the way that thinking skills are addressed in colleges of business today – "we allow students to get by with a superficial mental competence that will not produce rigorous, insightful thought in practical situations" (p. 401).

This paper proposes a cognitive (mental) model for a strategic marketing management course. The mental model's main objective is to help students conceptualize and visualize the thinking behavior operating when successful marketing managers undertake heuristic marketing decision making and problem solving. First, a discussion about the nature of mental models and their appropriateness to a strategic marketing management course is presented. Next, the operational features of the proposed mental model are presented and illustrated. Finally, its application is explored.

STRATEGIC MATRIX

Mental Models

The discussion of marketing systems and general theories was elevated to formal debate by a *Journal of Marketing* article titled "Towards a Theory of Marketing" (Alderson & Cox, 1948). The debate helped trigger the development of the current body of strategic marketing management literature that legitimized marketing as discipline with its own language structure, classification schemes, scientific methodology,

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