

Hyung-Deok Shin¹**ACTION-ORIENTED BUSINESS EDUCATION CASE**

This paper introduces an action-oriented business education case performed at a college class with business major in South Korea. The students were guided to set up their own challenging objectives to achieve through a semester and implement strategies for projects. The projects were very diverse including artistic activities, such as film making and dancing or athletic activities, such as marathon and rock climbing. The evaluation criteria were creativity, challenge and value creation. 25 out of 26 groups finished their projects, but whether they actually achieved their objective was not considered for their grade. Generally, students showed high level of satisfaction on this action-oriented project in class evaluation, but some communication issues were found to be important to successfully adopt this tool in class.

Keywords: action-oriented projects; creativity; business education.

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ПРОАКТИВНА БІЗНЕС-ОСВІТА: ОПИС КЕЙСУ

У статті описано методологію проактивної бізнес-освіти на прикладі викладання дисципліни для групи в коледжі бізнесу, Південна Корея. Студенти були проінструктовані щодо вибору умовно складної мети для проекту з тривалістю протягом усього семестру та розробки стратегії для даного проекту. Проекти в групі виявились доволі різноманітними, включаючи креативні (зйомки фільму, постановку танцю) та спортивні (марафон, підкорення вершини). Критерії для оцінювання проекту: креативність, складність виконання та формування цінності. 25 з 26 груп успішно завершили свої проекти, хоча сам факт завершення на оцінку за проект не впливав. У цілому, студенти високо оцінили даний проактивний проект, однак окремо варто описати комунікативні проблеми, що вплинули на успішність використання даного інструменту бізнес-освіти.

Ключові слова: проактивна освіта; креативність; бізнес-освіта.

Рис. 1. Табл. 1. Літ. 10.

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ПРОАКТИВНОЕ БИЗНЕС-ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ: ОПИСАНИЕ КЕЙСА

В статье описана методология проактивного бизнес-образования на примере преподавания дисциплины для группы в колледже бизнеса в Южной Корее. Студенты были проинструктированы выбрать для себя условно трудную цель проекта длительностью на весь семестр и разработать стратегию для данного проекта. Проекты в группе оказались довольно разнообразные, включая креативные (съёмки фильма, постановку танца) и спортивные (марафон, покорение горы). Критерии для оценки проекта: креативность, сложность и формирование ценности. 25 из 26 групп успешно завершили свои проекты, хотя сам факт завершения на оценку за проект не влиял. В целом, студенты высоко оценили данный проактивный проект, однако отдельно стоит описать проблемы с коммуникацией, что повлияло на успешность использования данного инструмента бизнес-образования. Ключевые слова: проактивное образование; креативность; бизнес-образование.

Introduction. The field of business has interdisciplinary characteristics among several related academic areas such as economics, politics, sociology, statistics, laws, etc., and concepts and ideas in those areas have been applied in business practices (Drucker, 2011). Thus, business education is supposed to focus on how those concepts and ideas can be correctly applied to real business activities (Peng and Shin, 2008). For example, the principles in sociology could help firms organize people

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inside a firm for good teamwork. The principles in statistics could help firms catch customers' preferences to develop right products. Based on these various principles, business education teach students to formulate and implement proper firm strategies to achieve firm's objectives. This is why many business schools have business strategy as their capstone course that students have to pass mandatory.

However, while traditional classroom environments can be effective to teach concepts and theories of strategy, students cannot experience how to implement the concepts and theories they have learned in class in real world (Adler and Milne, 1997). To overcome the limits of classroom teaching, various teaching tools have been developed. For example, Harvard Business School have developed case studies to give students a chance to analyse real business environments of a firm in the past. The assumption of the case method is that once students learn to apply concepts and theories they know to business cases, they can apply their knowledge again to real situations they will face in future (Eisenhardt, 1989). The limit of this method, however, is that students need previous knowledge enough to apply in cases. For this reason, case method can be more effective in graduate courses where students have career experiences, rather than undergraduate courses where students have little practical experiences.

Another teaching tool to overcome the limits of classroom teaching would be internship at a firm (Knouse and Fontenot, 2011). Through on-job training at a real position, a student can experience routines and procedures of specific business practices. This also does not require previous knowledge and theory bases, which is the weakness of the case method. Thus, the use of internship as a practical business teaching tool, connecting college education and real business, is growing quickly. However, internship has its own limits, such that it would be difficult to find active firm partners that accept students who lack experiences, and student evaluation can be biased after internship because practitioners may not have pedagogical capabilities to evaluate students properly. In addition, in the sense that creative and dynamic problem-solving process by students themselves would be an important component of business education, firm-directed internship may not be appropriate in some cases.

This paper introduces an action-oriented business education tool to complement the weaknesses of case methods and internship, specifically focusing on creativity, self-orientation and implementation. Since action itself does not carry academic expertise which should be a part of formal business education, concepts and theories in business strategy are also discussed in class through semester.

Class operation.

1. Preparation for the project. Before the class began, the number of teams was estimated from the number of the students who registered for class. There were two sections, 60 students each, so about 20 teams were expected. After the first week of orientation, 110 students remained who were supposed to understand the purpose of projects and be ready to participate in them.

In the orientation, some examples of projects that students might choose were presented. They include:

- Performing arts including play, instrumental performance, film making etc.
- Athletic activities including marathon, swimming etc.
- TED (technology, entertainment, design)-type presentation.

- Normal business strategy presentation of a well-known firm.

The last option (traditional business strategy presentation) was prepared for the students who might be reluctant to take this radically innovative project. As a result, 3 teams chose to make "normal" presentations and the other 23 teams chose to set up their own projects, which showed high level interests of students in this new format.

2. Objective setup for each project. Students were required to set up their own objectives to achieve for each. There were two concerns on this process. First, students might misunderstand that they could choose whatever they wanted to do. If so, their projects might not have clear objectives to achieve even through tremendous efforts and hardships. Second, students might choose projects of trying to change others rather than to change themselves. If so, their projects might be a campaign type. When each team's project plan was collected in the third week, the problems described above were found in several plans. For example, one team, supposedly composed of the existing student dance group members, wanted to do a dance performance. Another team wanted to do a simple choir, which seems to take about 2 hours to practice. Several other teams planned campaign-type projects. For example, one team made an energy-saving campaign plan. Another team planned to do a study-hard-campaign for 10 weeks.

Thus, the purpose of this project in detail was posted again on the class board on the web. Below is the posting.

To the class of strategic management:

As declared in class, the grading criteria of the final project include creativity, challenge and value creation. Making your own project objective must not be easy if you are not familiar with this kind of project. Here I would like to make some brief comments to your projects you submitted so far.

First, the large number of teammates does not make creative objectives and better outputs. On the contrary, when there are too many people in a team, self-oriented creativity could be very hard to achieve. Creativity can emerge when everybody can speak their own ideas. Number doesn't matter.

Second, think more about challenge. Challenge requires efforts to achieve something. If you just consider fun or your personal tastes, you are misunderstanding this project. You need to desperately pursue to get the final result.

Third, related to the second point, value creation comes not from your words, but your actions. You can change some wrong or irrational routines around you by showing your own actions. If you just point out they are wrong, it does not enough to change them.

I want to give you chances to think about creativity, challenge and value creation through the projects you designed yourselves, as well as experience them. This is what I define leadership and creativity that our school has as key values. I hope you all follow this virtue.

On the 4th week, a schedule for teams that wanted to make a meeting with an instructor was made to discuss the projects. Some teams were advised to change their projects, or reduce the number of teammates, if considered to be inappropriate. As a result, all the projects were finalized on the 5th week (Table 1).

3. Developing the performance evaluation criteria. Each project was evaluated by the criteria of creativity, challenge, and value creation. Creativity was to see how unseen problems and solutions were properly found. Challenge was to see if team

members sincerely did their best in the process of problem solving. Lastly, value creation was to see if the result of their activities actually added value to the participating individuals and the society as a whole.

Table 1. Topics and contents of the projects

Order	Themes	Number of people	Activities
1	Wall painting	5	Painting on the walls close to the campus
2	Korean traditional instruments performance	7	Learning Korean “4-object-play” first time and doing performance
3	Juggling performance	3	Learning 4 kinds of techniques of juggling and doing performance
4	Strings performance	6	Learning strings and doing performance of a game theme music
5	A cappella performance	7	Making three songs and doing street performance
6	Going up the stairs	5	Going up 63 floors for 25 minutes in the “63-building”
7	Rock climbing	4	Achieving intermediate level of rock climbing and making records
8	Piano trio	3	Learning playing piano and doing trio performance
9	Dancing	4	Learning Korean music group Miss A’s dancing and doing performance
10	Relay swimming	4	Achieving intermediate level of swimming and making records
11	Bodybuilding	3	Achieving target body fat level by diet and bodybuilding
12	Music album producing	5	Learning playing guitar for the first time and producing an album
13	Book publishing	5	Writing novels and essays and publishing a book
14	Picture album producing	2	Taking pictures of objects from different sides and publishing
15	Service for people with disabilities	4	Launching a new program to serve the disabled
16	Educational mentoring	4	Developing a new type of mentoring program for high school students
17	Marathon (5 teams)	19	Practicing 5 km marathon and participating in a competition
18	Short film producing (2 teams)	6	Producing 10 min movie
19	Strategy presentation (3 teams)	12	Making a presentation on an existing firm’s strategy recommendation
Total	26 teams		

One of the most difficult tasks was evaluating on the second criterion, challenge. To see if the members did their best to achieve a certain level of performance, it was necessary to see if they had any previous expertise to perform the project. For example, the students doing juggling or rock climbing could easily achieve a high level performance if they had good knowledge of experience of doing so. Thus, the students were noticed that they would not be evaluated by the final level of project, but the

process itself. To show the process, students were asked to submit one-page report that explains what kinds of obstacles they faces and how they treated the obstacles during the implementation of the project.

Another difficulty was that it would be hard for an instructor to guide and evaluate students in some of the projects. For example, short film producing or book publishing would require special expertise to evaluate the quality of movies or essays. Thus, professors in the related majors were invited and asked mentoring for the students. Those professors had careers in film making, book publishing and Korean traditional 4-object-play performance. With their help, students in these projects were guided by mentors. Also, instructors or trainers of piano, body building and rock climbing, directly or indirectly involved to the students' activities, were asked to evaluate how much the students made efforts during the projects. Their evaluations were considered for the students' grades.

4. Supplementary classroom work. Business education is supposed to focus on how the concepts and ideas in business can be correctly applied to real business activities. Therefore, if concepts and ideas are not correctly taught, action-oriented business education alone would be misleading. This is why classroom lectures are important to supplement action-oriented education in business.

First, a textbook was used to cover theories and concepts in the field of strategic management. Using Barney and Hesterly (2011)'s textbook, important concepts that may help students plan and implement their projects were discussed. Second, some academic papers that supplement the theories in the textbook were also used. Students participated in the classroom discussions on Drucker (1994), Barney (1991) and Coase (1937)'s papers. Third, a guest speaker who was a manager of a hospital network for seniors was invited. He lectured on a business model to catch opportunities in the aging society.

Students took 3 quizzes and one midterm exam on in-class lectures and assigned 60 points to them out of the total 100 points. Also, the students were asked to volunteer to make a presentation on the strategic issues of the hospital network in front of the manager by giving them the name of the network one week before the class. Out of 8 students submitted slides, 4 of them made presentations. The best student was highly evaluated by the manager, and got an opportunity to show her idea to other managers of the hospital network later.

5. Evaluation process. The evaluation process consisted of 3 phases. First, students were asked to make 10 minutes video clips to record all the steps they actually took to implement the projects. The results or performance should be at the end of the video, or if they were physical ones such as book or music album, students were required to submit them separately. If the results were live performance such as juggling, string performance or dancing, or traditional strategy presentation on firms, they were supposed to do it on the evaluation day. Second, on the last day of the semester, all the students watched what they did throughout the semester in forms of video, physical results (books and live performances). The students were asked to evaluate other teams' performance. Third, students were required to submit one-page report where they could describe what kinds of problems they faced and how they solved the problems. This was a personal assignment, and it included peer evaluation within the teams.

Among 26 teams, only one team gave up their project and could not submit the final video. Even though the purpose of this course was not the achievement itself but implementing and reporting whatever they planned and achieved, even including failure, they refused to finish the project and got F on the project evaluation. Some other teams, who did relay swimming and bodybuilding, could not achieve what they aimed at the beginning, but in the video clips they recorded all the efforts they made and explained why they failed to achieve the target, so they did not lower grades. Another team, who did service for the disabled, just suggested how to launch a service model without any actions, and they did not explain why they failed to actually launch the project, so they got lower grades.

3 teams found their original plans unrealistic in the middle of the process and changed the ways to implement them. "Wall painting" team could not find a proper place to paint, but they found a shelter for homeless and got a permission to decorate the walls of the facility from the building manager. So, they did wall painting inside that building. "Going up the stairs" team contacted "63-building" located in Seoul, but the building manager did not allow using the 63-floor stairs for safety reasons. So the students had to use the stairs in the university campus building that has only 16 floors and adjusted the target time limit. Lastly, the "piano trio" practiced piano individually for each part, but at the end of the project they realized they could not find a place where 3 pianos could get together. So, they had to record each person's part separately and later edited 3 videos into one. The rest of the teams implemented what they originally planned and evaluated by the criteria of creativity, challenge, and value creation.

6. Course evaluation. After the semester end, the school allowed instructors to see the course evaluation by the students. Below are the course evaluations they made on the projects.

Positive evaluations:

- *Thanks to this class I got a special experience to learn "4-object-play". It was a good experience.*

- *While the project might be considered to have nothing to do with strategic management, I actually tried to use strategy for problem solving throughout the project. Also I think I experienced a new challenge which is fun.*

- *The project was totally unusual and I enjoyed it.*

- *The project was very challenging. I guess it was challenging for the professor, too. The process was so hard, but when we finished the project I was very pleased. Team members got very close to each other in the process. It was a great experience.*

- *Team project was so burdensome in the beginning, but after all it was a valuable experience.*

- *The project was fun. The activity was interesting and we became good friends throughout the process. I thank the professor for this adventure.*

- *The class was excellent because it led us to be creative and tenacious to finish the project. It was very valuable.*

Negative evaluations:

- *Final presentation lasted almost 4 hours, so at the end we got too tired to fairly evaluate other teams.*

- *When students are trying very challenging projects, more professional helpers would be needed.*

- *Since it was the first time there were confusions in terms of grading criteria. I expect more standardized evaluation criteria for the following semesters to make the class more creative.*

- *Difficulties of the projects were not properly considered during evaluation, and students may have different standards in evaluation.*

- *In the beginning of the project, we were confused.*

- *I wonder how you grade all different themes and types of projects in the same standard.*

- *It was unclear what the purpose of the project was.*

Conclusion. This paper introduces a complementary teaching method, action-oriented business education, designed to overcome the weaknesses of traditional classroom teaching, case analysis, and internship by guiding students to set up their own objective to achieve and implement a project throughout the semester. When this method properly supplements traditional theory teaching, it is expected that students may reduce a gap between "knowing" and "doing: in business practices (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000) to be a general manager. Thus, this method is basically to increase the capabilities to implement strategies rather than to formulate strategies.

From the experiences of the class, a model can be suggested to successfully launch an action-oriented approach to undergraduate classes. There are 3 steps in it.

The first step is "idea sharing" on the purpose of the approach. Since students ever had no idea about this new approach, the purpose of this method should be clearly informed. Even though it was repeatedly announced that students should actually take actions and change themselves rather than persuade others to change, some students still thought that it would be enough to just suggest others to do something. Also, some students set very easy targets because they worried about a penalty in the case they could not achieve their targets. So it should be repeatedly emphasized that the purpose of this project is not achievement itself, but learning how solve the problems they face when they implement their plans. Also, the requirements for targets which are creativity, challenge and value creation should be clearly informed. If an instructor fails to communicate with students on the purpose of the project, students may get confused and lose interests to actively participate in the project. An instructor has to lead students to voluntarily set a challenging objective and have strong motivation to achieve it by closely communicating with students.

The second step is "propelling the action" to what students plan to achieve. Even though the targets are realistic and appropriately set up, students may get lost because of various reasons. For example, one of team members may lose interest in a project and give up. Team members may have conflicts when they struggle to solve the problems they face. Unexpected obstacles in the external environment may force students to change their original plans. An instructor should make students understand that it is very natural to have these kinds of problems, and that the essence of the project is how to deal with these problems. Without this clear guideline, students may try to make "good-looking results" rather than "right processes".

The third step is "experience sharing" among teams and having proper grading criteria. In fact, grading criteria issue is not easy to handle because the diversity of projects is the very intrinsic nature of this approach. The process of actions can be partially evaluated by video clips that students show to the class at the end of the

semester. Thus, students can give grade other teams' performance and an instructor can consider the grade. In addition, an instructor may consider outside experts' opinions, if necessary. Supplementary reports, such as one-page report that students can describe whatever they experienced during the semester, may help. Indeed, multidimensional evaluations and good communications with students would be the only way to find fair evaluation criteria, Figure 1 summarizes the steps in successful implementation of this approach.

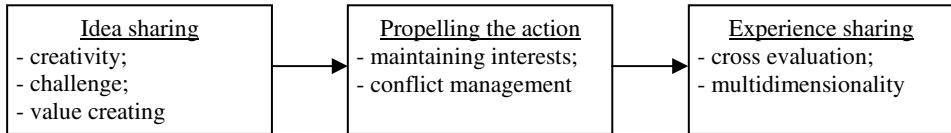


Figure 1. The model of action-oriented business education, author's

One of the concerns of the action-oriented approach is that activities can be repeated over time. It may critically harm one of the criteria, creativity. To eliminate this problem, an instructor can inform students all the projects previously chosen in the past and not allow students choose them again. Then, however, students will have more and more difficulties to find new subjects. To overcome this weakness, an instructor may allow students use previous subjects of more than two years old.

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Стаття надійшла до редакції 1.01.2015.