

Case Method Teaching in the Course “E-marketing”

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Abstract

This paper summarizes the foreign and domestic research status, introduces and the implementation of the case method teaching in the course “E-marketing”, which includes “Case Selection”, “Case Application” and “Case Feedback”. The paper innovatively analyzes the inner logic between “Case Selection”, “Case Application” and “Case Feedback”, especially deconstructs “Case Application” by the model “Theory-Practice-Experience-Skill” and the process of the situation creation.

Keywords

Case Method Teaching; E-marketing; Case Feedback.

1. Introduction

“E-Marketing” is a professional course for the major “E-commerce” in colleges and universities, and is an important course of the professional curriculum. It aims to train undergraduates to carry out marketing in the Internet. It is related to the course “Marketing”, but completely they are two different courses. Based on the long-term teaching experience, in consideration of the students’ feedback and the practitioners’ suggestions in the industry of E-commerce, the paper reviews and summarizes the implementation of the case method teaching in the course “E-Marketing”. On the basis of various teaching materials, lesson plans and handouts, the paper provides countermeasures to meet the urgent demand for high-quality e-commerce talents in the industry of E-commerce.

2. Overview of Research Status

2.1. Foreign Research Status

In 1870, Christopher Langdell, Dean of Harvard Law School, first introduced the case method teaching into the law teaching. The case method teaching became a research hot spot. In May 2010, Professor Catherine Wells of Boston College Law School published a paper “Langdell and the Invention of Legal Doctrine” in Buffalo Law Review. This paper reviewed Langdell’s practice of introducing the case method teaching into the law teaching comprehensively. Due to the success of the case method teaching at Harvard Law School, in 1910, Wallace Donham, the dean of Harvard Business School, decided to introduce the case method teaching into the business school to explain the complex problems in the business. Today, the case method teaching has been implemented for nearly 150 years, it becomes the main teaching approach at Harvard Business School. The 25% of Harvard Business School’s cases are designed by scholars based on the global economic hot spots, and the 80% of the cases compiled by the Harvard Business School are purchased and used by business schools, governments and enterprises in various countries around the world. In the two-year MBA program at Harvard Business School, students need to study about 500 cases, and the case method teaching has become the synonymous with Harvard Business School. With the development of the case method teaching, a large number of cases have been compiled and collected into the case database. Harvard Business School, Stanford University Business School, and INSEAD keep on upgrading case database, and E-commerce has become an important direction, such as Amazon, GAP, Nike and

other typical cases. Meanwhile, it is necessary to pay attention to the voice against the case method teaching. In 2007, at Harvard Law School, in the birthplace of case method teaching, Dean Martha Minow and Professor Todd Rakoff argued that Langdell's approach to teaching students using appellate cases does not do enough to prepare law students for real-world problems [1].

2.2. Domestic Research Status

In China colleges and universities pay great attention to the case method teaching, and have produced some research results from various perspectives, but only Guanghua School of Management of Peking University carries systematic research and implementation of the case method teaching. As the top business school in China, Guanghua School of Management is committed to learning from the best business schools in the world, and insists that the case method teaching is the most important teaching approach for students. From 2002 to 2012, Guanghua School of Management has sent more than 30 teachers to participate in the case method teaching development project of Harvard Business School. As a result, Guanghua School of Management began to design and compile the cases of Chinese enterprises, tried to localize the cases, and achieved good teaching performance. Subsequently, Management Case Research Center was established in Peking University. The Case Competition has been held successfully by Management Case Research Center for 9 sessions as well, the theme of the 5th competition is "Internet + Finance". Each competition focuses on China's economic hot spots. By searching the latest cases in the case database of Guanghua School of Management, it is not difficult to find out that the number of cases related to E-marketing is increasing. In recent years, with the rapid development of the Internet economy, the demand for E-commerce talents is booming, lots of colleges and universities set up the major "E-commerce". Conversely, there are only few studies on the teaching methods of the major "E-commerce". The specific case database of the Course "E-marketing" has not been established yet in Chinese colleges and universities. By searching the related academic literature in the CNKI, there are few papers which study the implementation of the case method teaching in the Course "E-marketing". Xu Qiu and Liping Xiao (2009) provided the relevant measures of the teaching improvement by analyzing the problems of the case method teaching in the course "E-marketing" [2]. Huansen Zhang and Liyuan Jiang (2017) combined the case method teaching and flipped classroom, also discussed the above-mentioned teaching methods in the course "E-marketing" [3]. Fajie Chen, Chunguang Zhou, and Run Wang (2017) classified the case database of the course "E-marketing", and provided suggestions for developing "course-oriented case database", "interactive discussion case database" and "student self-developed case database" [4].

3. Implementation of the Case Method Teaching in the Course "E-marketing"

In John Locke's book "Essay Concerning Human Understanding" the theory of tabula rasa described human mind as a "blank slate" at birth. This "slate" becomes filled with each new experience, through all of these experiences, mankind form thoughts and personality traits [5]. In the course "E-marketing", the students are lack of relevant theory and practical experience, so the case method teaching is an efficient approach to train students to obtain professional skills by transforming theory to practical experience. In the course "E-marketing", the core parts of the case method teaching are "Case Selection", "Case Application" and "Case Feedback".

3.1. Case Selection

By summarizing the relevant literature of the course "E-marketing", including papers, textbooks and casebooks, it is not difficult to find out that "Case Selection" is the essential part of the case method teaching. The timeliness and origins are the critical factors to select cases.

E-marketing is the intersection of E-commerce and Marketing, so the iteration of the E-commerce industry profoundly influences in the teaching and training activities of the course “E-marketing”. Through the long-time teaching practice, we have observed that every case has its own timeliness except few classic cases. It means that the E-commerce industry changes, meanwhile the relevant E-marketing cases lose their own availability. It is irrefragable that few classic cases have the practical significance for a long while, but most of the E-marketing cases have the timeliness, as they become obsolete definitely in the changing E-commerce industry. For example, the successful cases “Sharing Bikes” have lost the meaning in the teaching activity, as the related industry has changed totally. So, the teachers have to select E-marketing cases carefully, otherwise the students can’t catch up with the fashion of the E-commerce industry, subsequently the outdated cases result in students’ invalid feedback. In “Case Selection” origins of the cases are another critical factor. In globalization the business model is an object learned from various countries. But we can’t ignore the difference in global commerce, as in different countries, the political and legal framework is different, the market is different, the infrastructure is different, the culture is different. In the past the foreign cases were popular in the case method teaching in various courses. Lost in the translation, misunderstood the background, in general the native teachers couldn’t use the foreign cases efficiently. Certainly, the teaching process and students’ feedback depend on the teachers’ comprehension of the relevant cases. So, the profession, research field and working experience of the teachers optimally agree with the origins of the relevant cases for implementing the case method teaching.

3.2. Case Application

The target of the course “E-marketing” is to teach and train students to obtain the relevant professional skills. So, in the beginning of the above-mentioned course the students are lack of professional theory and practical experience, just like the “tabula rasa”. In China, there is an idiom “innocent as a white paper”, a synonym as “tabula rasa”.

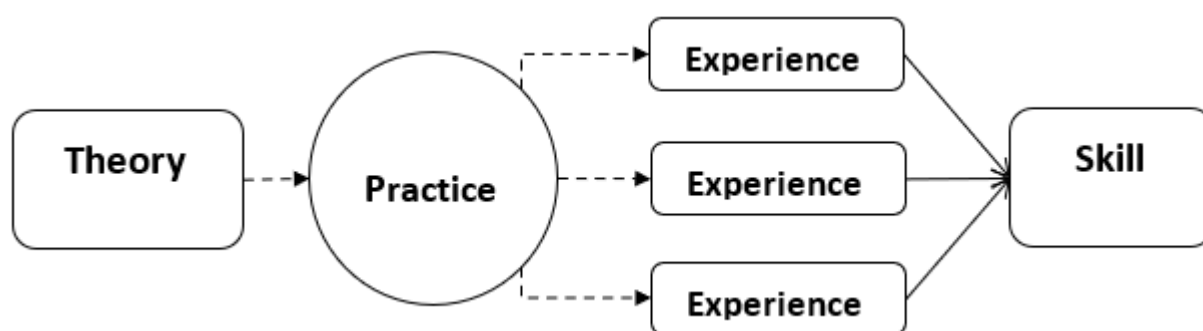


Fig 1. Model “Theory-Practice-Experience-Skill”

Generally, the students transform the theory into the professional skills by practice (Fig. 1). The students, who study the natural sciences, can get the necessary experiences in the laboratories and experimental workshops, and the above-mentioned experiences are the foundation to master professional skills. On the contrary how to teach and train students to obtain professional skills is always a core question for teachers of social sciences in universities. Through long time teaching practice, up to now the case method teaching is an efficient approach for teaching social sciences. Unlike the natural sciences, the case database is the laboratory for the students who study the social sciences. So how to apply cases is the critical point in the whole process of the case method teaching. Socratic method has explained the basic logic between teaching and learning of social sciences. A situation is created by questions and answers between teachers and students in the classroom. In the process of creating the

situation students obtained necessary knowledge and experiences. Just like a talk show, the audience catches the fun in the situation created by the talk show host. How much fun the audience catches depends on the understanding and comprehension of the talk show. This is the reason it is not easy to understand foreign jokes for natives, because the related situation is totally different. The effect of the case method teaching critically depends on the situations created by teachers, the situations' creation critically depends on how teachers comprehend the cases, teachers' comprehension of the cases critically depends on the professional background and work experience (Fig. 2). So, the case method teaching is not a master key for all teachers. If the teacher is lack of the professional background and work experience, then he or she is not able to comprehend the very case, consequently the creation of the situation is unsuccessful. So "Case Selection" is the necessary prerequisite. If the teacher creates a successful situation, just like the virtual reality, students enter a simulating LAB. The modern technologies are changing the traditional case method teaching. In the situation students try to manage various puzzles based on the theory and tools, consequently they gain the experience to manage the problems in the reality. In the internship students will transform the above-mentioned experience to professional skills.

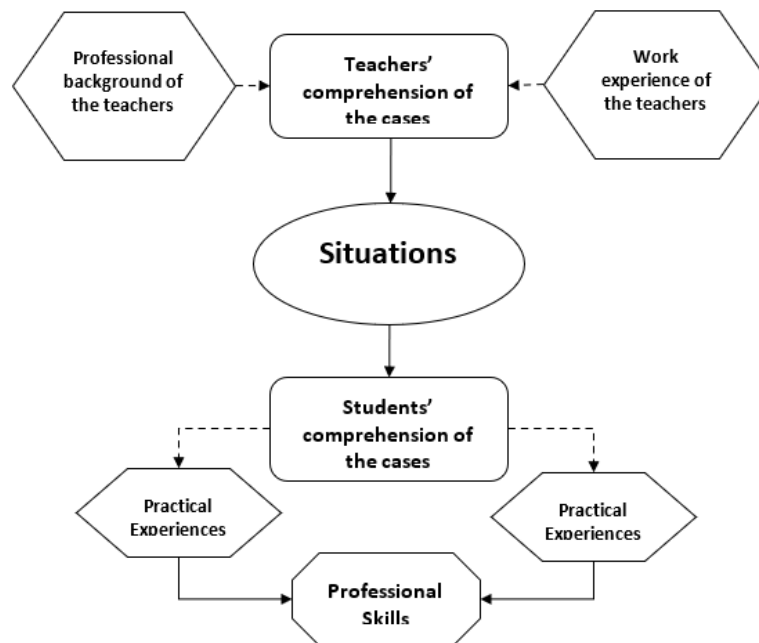


Fig 2. Process of the Situation Creation

3.3. Case Feedback

As mentioned above, the case method teaching is not a master key for all teachers, the teaching performance assessment is necessary. Usually, the technical reports and corporate plans are an efficient way to evaluate how students comprehend the cases and gain the practical experiences. Brainstorming is inalienable in the case method teaching, it is also the important way to finish the technical reports and corporate planning, meanwhile the students learn teamwork. It is able to give relevant reports and planning a score, teachers acknowledge how much experiences they gain from the cases. Whereas it is difficult to confirm every student's definite contribution in a technical report or a corporate plan. In teaching practice teachers always ignore the above-mentioned fact, an average score is marked for every student who has finished a technical report or a corporate plan. In longstanding teaching practice, we have tried to evaluate every participant student's performance precisely, we find out that a feedback form should be made for participant students. The information of the feedback forms completed by participant

students is the basis for Case Selection and Case Application in the future lessons and the case database building for teachers.

4. Summary

The case method teaching is not a brand-new teaching method, but it doesn't mean that the case method teaching is useless in the classroom, on the contrary with the modern technologies we should innovate and update the case method teaching. The paper analyzes 3 links, such as "Case Selection", "Case Application" and "Case Feedback", which most of researchers don't pay attention to. In the future research we are going to study above-mentioned links in detail, the combination of the modern technologies and the case method teaching as well.

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