

SALES EDUCATION BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: BUILDING PARTICIPATIVE LEARNING
EXPERIENCES IN SALES MANAGEMENT THROUGH THE CMGS METHOD
(CASE METHOD WITH GUEST SPEAKERS)

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Abstract

The overarching goal of working through the CMGS Method (Case Method with Guest Speakers) in Sales Management courses is to provide Business and marketing learners with practical knowledge about how a sales manager can deal with a wide variety of possible professional scenarios. Even when the case method itself is an excellent way to equip students for their prospective employment, the potential of this method can be enhanced with innovative pedagogical tools such as information and communication technologies. Firstly, eight sales managers were invited to the Sales Management Course as guest speakers. Students were required to prepare for these sessions using information and communication technologies, gathering information about the speaker's sector and identifying areas of special interest. Each speaker shared their hands-on experience and offered an overview of their field in a workshop, while answering the students' questions. These sessions increased the interaction of students with sales professionals, who presented their insights into a career in sales management. The learning experiences built through these workshops were narrated by the students in the course blog. Secondly, students were asked to present a scientific paper with the aim of bridging the gap between higher education and cutting-edge research. This article portrays the reasoning behind the course as well as the different steps followed during the process. The course finished with encouraging results, suggesting the desirability of incorporating PL (participative learning) experiences into any marketing course.

Keywords – Teaching-learning, Information and communication technologies, Higher education, Innovative teaching, Participative learning, Case method, Sales education.

1 INTRODUCTION

Higher education has traditionally been very dependent on lecturing (Barnes, Christensen & Hansen, 1994) and both users (students) and producers (teachers) are demanding a greater use of active, student-involved teaching methods (Astiv, 1985). The idea that students have to be responsible for their own learning construction is becoming more accepted everyday (Bretón, 1999; Ruiz-Gallardo, Castaño, Gómez-Alday & Valdés, 2011).

It is clear that the demand for Sales professionals is immense and consequently, high quality Sales education will be essential to enhance the employability of Sales students, as well as to create a great advantage for companies. In this regard, higher education institutions can play an important role and using case study as a

teaching method has proven to be exceptionally effective (Kreber, 2001). Advantages of case study include student and faculty greater interest and interactivity, vicarious learning, and increased reflection (Mark & Mary, 1996).

In real life most of the time it is not necessary to only recall certain information. As a matter of fact, knowledge has to be applied and executed in order to find creative solutions (Vaziri, 2010). In that sense, experience is a crucial element in all types of learning, but especially in an applied science such as Marketing. In practice, marketing decisions routinely require the application, analysis, evaluation, synthesis, and creation of information, a process that is consistent with critical thinking and educational learning hierarchies (Krathwohl, 2002; Klebba & Hamilton, 2007). Most investigations have focused their attention on text based online discussion forums, whereas the uses of online discussion forums that combine text and video in the same place have received little attention (Fernández, Simó, Castillo-Merino & Sallán, 2014). A variety of studies attest to the positive impact of critical thinking methods in Sales Education. Therefore, beyond theoretical knowledge, it is important to build on professional experience in order to improve Sales education approaches. Undoubtedly learning from the expertise of others has its limitations and the complexity of practical implementation, but if this experiential learning is aligned with theoretical learning and a balance is achieved, the result can be highly satisfactory. This is precisely what we have tried to pursue with our Sales education project.

The aim of this paper is to present a pilot project which has been carried out at the University of Málaga (Spain) with undergraduate students of the discipline of Sales Management. This project contributes directly to the improvement of Sales Management education, since it provides Pedagogical Tools - such as integrating information and communication technologies in the teaching and learning process- as well as research with a Sales student Population.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Sales is the most common career entry point for marketing graduates, and a very popular choice for business, economics, international affairs and management students. In spite of this popularity, there is a shortage of talented salespeople, as companies cannot cover their need for competent sales professionals. As a consequence, higher education institutions are offering new undergraduate and graduate programs in order to attend the demand. Sales education is gradually becoming a widely spread field of study, and sales educators are examining the possibilities of innovative teaching methods to improve sales learning. Unfortunately, sales education and research are still at an embryonic stage and there is little empirical evidence of how to enrich its development (Cummins, Peltier, Erffmeyer & Whalen, 2013).

Despite being scarce, the available literature explores the potential of implementing participative learning approaches to Sales education. According to Inks and Avila (2008), experiential learning enhances students' skill development significantly over traditional approaches. In regards to the case method, it creates a unique setting to acquire real-life competences (Fletcher, Helms & Willis, 2007). As a matter of fact, learning from experience is one of the most elementary and natural ways of learning, and in the majority of cases it does not require any expensive resources. Experiential learning demands an opportunity to reflect and think, both as an individual and as a group member, and its main strength is its ability to present knowledge in an integrated, contextualized and applicable way (Beard & Wilson, 2004).

Classroom instruction enhances learning when it provides meaningful experiences for students. The methodology (CMGS) that we are developing fits with the concept of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) and integrates the different elements of the social theory of learning. This is why Sales education should carefully select its pedagogical tools, taking into consideration their capability to support student learning while bridging the gap between academic education and the professional world through a variety of tasks (Li, Greenberg & Nicholls, 2007). When using the experiential learning approach, Sales students are not only expected to build knowledge, but also encouraged to apply that knowledge and to analyze and create meaning from the knowledge they are acquiring (Chavan, 2011).

In addition to this, the support of information and communication technologies must be at the core of any course according to recent studies (Livingstone, 2012). A more profound use of information and communication technologies is needed to improve the effectiveness of learning and to create a learning system adapted to our current society (Canaleta, Vernet, Vicent & Montero, 2014). For undergraduate students, the two most time-consuming tasks of their daily lives are studying and media use. According to Erstad (2012), research tends to

contemplate these two elements as separate worlds, but if we manage to interconnect them we will be situating education closer to what this author calls the 'learning lives approach', in which studying and using media are part of the same integrated context.

3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The first objective of this study is to share with the academic community an experience of educational innovation through participatory learning and interaction with business professionals. It was carried out in the subject of Sales Management for undergraduate students in their third year of the Bachelor of Marketing and Market Research, at the University of Malaga (Spain). To develop this first goal, the pedagogical objectives, planning and development of the experience are detailed below.

The second objective is to empirically analyze the impact of this method on student learning. For this purpose, a survey was conducted and its results were analyzed.

The third objective is to evaluate the outcome of the activity from the point of view of guest speakers. In this regard, guest speakers completed a questionnaire and its outcomes are shown.

The fourth objective is to analyze the result of this experience from the point of view of the lecturer. The lecturer was interviewed and his impressions were later examined.

As fifth objective is to make improvement proposals for future action.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Pilot project: collaborative learning through case studies and scientific articles with guest speakers

A pilot project with undergraduate students from the University of Malaga (Spain) was implemented during the academic year 2012-2013. This project has been conceived to have an important component of information and communication technologies (video resources, LMS, etc.) and also the use of blogs and social media such as Twitter. The third-year students were divided into four groups. Group D was chosen because it was the smallest (52 students), while the other groups had around 80 students each. A special feature of group D was that its classes were delivered in the afternoon shift. This configuration of the group had two advantages: firstly, being smaller; secondly, experience shows that in afternoon groups the student average age is often higher than in morning shift groups, and students are usually professionals or have some professional experience and generally show a more responsible attitude towards their studies. It was considered that these two factors made group D the most appropriate to conduct a pilot project. If the project was to be implemented in one of the morning groups, unfairness to the other groups could have been created, and it was not feasible to implement the project in all groups at once because of time and space constraints.

The project academic objectives are shown in the table 1.

| Academic Objectives | Activity | Implementation | Results |
|---|--|---|---|
| <i>Objective 1: Encourage students to read scientific articles</i> | <i>Scientific papers were made available in the virtual campus (LMS – Learning Management System) and volunteers were sought to present them in class. It was suggested that everyone else read the paper before the class presentation.</i> | <i>A total of 10 scientific papers were presented. Each presentation lasted for 15 minutes. Then the papers were discussed in plenary for about 15 minutes. After that, the lecturer continued with the normal routine of the sessions.</i> | <i>Five papers were presented in English and five in Spanish. Three of them were presented individually and the rest in teams. The presentation of all items produced a lively discussion and basic learning points were extracted.</i> |
| <i>Objective 2: Develop in students scientific article oral presentation skills.</i> | <i>The same than for objective 1.</i> | <i>The same than for objective 1.</i> | <i>The same than for objective 1.</i> |
| <i>Objective 3: Encourage students to prepare in advance topics discussed in class</i> | <i>Ten forum threads were created in the virtual campus (LMS).</i> | <i>These forums dealt with the qualities of a sales manager, with non-scientific article topics and with some other issues suggested by the lecturer</i> | <i>All forums were highly participative and some of them were mentioned in class</i> |
| <i>Objective 4: To provide a practical approach and a real and close view of business reality</i> | <i>Sessions with guest speakers and use of the case method</i> | <i>Eight professionals from various sectors were invited as guest speakers. The day before the session, students prepared questions for the speakers, also leaving much room for spontaneity during the session.</i> | <i>Three of the speakers intervened by video conference and the rest were present in the class. The sessions were very participatory</i> |
| <i>Objective 5: Develop the ability to write about sales management related topics</i> | <i>A public blog was created entitled “To be always closing”</i> | <i>Every time a topic of interest arouse in class, a volunteer or a rapporteur assigned by the lecturer wrote a blogpost.</i> | <i>The blog “To be always closing” had 24 posts and 2,264 visits in total.</i> |

Table 1. Academic objectives of the pilot project

4.2 The case method in higher education

Since the introduction of the case method at Harvard University Law School and its adoption by the Harvard Business School and other training centers, it is commonly used in future professionals training (Berné, Lozono & Marzo, 2011). This pedagogical tool is of special interest in the fields which require theoretical-practical training of the students in question (Pedraza, Bravo & Amante, 2012).

Marketing students should acquire practical knowledge about how a sales manager can deal with a wide variety of possible professional scenarios. In that sense, case studies can evaluate the application of concepts to real life situations, building analytic skills which can distinguish high priority from low priority elements (Ruggiero, 2002).

Even when the case method itself is an excellent way to equip students for their prospective employment, the potential of this method can be enhanced with innovative pedagogical tools.

According to Barnes et al. (1994), one of the missions of Business Schools is training students not only to know, but to act. Business education is known for its commitment to an active, discussion-oriented learning mode, disciplined by case problems drawn from complexity or real life (Barnes et al., 1994); a commitment to linking knowledge and application. The case method enables students to discover and develop their own unique framework for approaching, understanding, and dealing with business problems (Pearson, 1951). They deal with real-life business problems confronting business managers and researchers at a particular situation.

Management teaching using an experiential educational approach is extremely important and effective. When educational objectives focus on mind qualities (curiosity, judgment, wisdom), personal qualities (character, sensitivity, integrity, responsibility), and the ability to apply general concepts and knowledge to specific situations, discussion pedagogy may well be very effective (Barnes et al., 1994).

This project has used the case method as the primary teaching tool, but with the peculiarity that the cases have been elaborated with the participation of students. On the one hand, abundant information about sectors and companies under review was provided; on the other hand, students worked on a number of issues raised by the sales managers of these companies, both individually – in advance - and then in plenary in the presence of a guest speaker and under the chairing of the lecturer. Subsequently, a new updated version of the case with the result of the discussion was built. This approach can be called the CMGS Method (Case Method with Guest Speakers).

4.3 Presentation of scientific papers by students

In order to meet the academic objectives 1 and 2 (encourage students to read scientific papers in class and present them), a total of 10 scientific articles were provided. Most of them were written in English and the rest in Spanish.

Volunteers were asked to present them in class. Whenever possible, these papers were coordinated with the syllabus development, although this was not always the case. However this did not constitute a pedagogical drawback.

These students, once ready, informed the lecturer to arrange a date for presentation of the paper in class. The rest of the students were encouraged to read the paper before the presentation day, with the purpose of getting the most out of the class discussion.

Students' presentations would last for about 15 minutes. A plenary discussion with the rest of the class followed the presentation, emphasizing the learning points that could be extracted from the article and its presentation. Finally key learning aspects were related to the theoretical content of the subject syllabus.

It is important to consider the emulation factor. When the first students presented papers in class, many others publicly acknowledged that they felt more motivated to present papers as well.

This part of the project also contributed to the academic objective 3 (prior preparation to class sessions).

The presentation of papers in class by students was not assessed, i.e., it was not taken into consideration for the final grades. This was a volunteering activity within the framework of participatory learning, in order to contribute selflessly to raise the academic level of the sessions.

4.4 Creation of an external blog and internal discussion forums

From the beginning of the pilot project design, it was clear that the use of communication and information technologies had to play an important role in the learning experience. So, with the aim of contributing to the academic objective 5 (develop the ability to write about sales management related topics), an external blog was created with students. The blog was called "To always be closing" – available online at <http://tobealwaysclosing.blogspot.com.es/>, so that it could also be visited by a broad number of people even from outside the university environment.

This blog holds a total of 24 posts and 2,264 views. The procedure used to be this: when an interesting issue requiring further explanation but not directly related to the lesson topic was raised, the lecturer asked for a volunteer to investigate on their own and write a blogpost about it.

Several goals were covered at the same time:

- the lesson was not interrupted;
- thought-provoking topics were addressed, avoiding the risk of forgetting to deal with them in the future;
- ensuring that students worked on some areas independently;
- sharing the information with all students to facilitate reading and reflection;
- all blogposts were public on the web, allowing for the opportunity to interact with the global community and to receive feedback from people outside the classroom;
- ICT literacy skills were developed, since students learnt how to manage a weblog.

Internal discussion forums within the virtual campus (LMS) of the University of Málaga (Spain) were also created. Students were strongly encouraged to participate and discussion threads were varied. A very popular forum, open during the entire course, was entitled 'What do you think are the qualities a good sales manager should have?' This question triggered numerous reactions and all guest speakers were asked this same interrogation.

Together with other parts of the project, this element also contributed to the academic objective number 3 (encourage students to prepare in advance topics discussed in class).

4.5 Role of guest speakers

The key element of the academic goal number 4 (to provide a practical approach and a real and close view of business reality) was to bring guest speakers from the business world and particularly sales managers.

The main requirement was that sales managers were professionally active at that time and therefore could speak not only from past experience, but also provide his insight into current issues, challenges and opportunities of the sales market. Eight guests speakers from various sectors participated in the course.

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| <p><i>Speaker: Mr. ARC. General Director.</i> <i>Session title: How to conduct an extensive sales network within a vast territory and great proximity to retailers.</i> <i>Affiliation: Industrias Kolmer (Paint)</i> <i>Date: October 2nd, 2012</i> <i>Session format: Workshop and practical case discussion (video-conference)</i></p> |
| <p><i>Speaker: Mr. OA.</i> <i>Session title: Sales techniques in automotion. Special focus on multi-brand showrooms.</i> <i>Affiliation: Grupo Avolo Motor (Jaén).</i> <i>Date: October 15th, 2012</i> <i>Session format: Workshop and practical case discussion (video-conference)</i> http://tobealwaysclosing.blogspot.com.es/2012/10/blog-post.html</p> |
| <p><i>Speaker: Mr.F.R. Sales and Marketing Director.</i> <i>Session title: Merging USP and Quirón Hospitals: effects on the sales structure. Analysis of the various business lines of the Group from a commercial point of view.</i> <i>Affiliation: Group USP-Quirón Hospitals</i> <i>Date: November 12th, 2012</i> <i>Session format: Workshop and practical case discussion</i></p> |
| <p><i>Speaker: Mr. RUR</i> <i>Session title: International teams management: USA and Japan.</i> <i>Affiliation: Castillo de Tabernas (Olive oil).</i> <i>Date: November, 13th, 2012</i> <i>Session format: Workshop and practical case discussion</i> http://tobealwaysclosing.blogspot.com.es/2012/11/aceites-castillo-de-tabernas.html</p> |

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| <p><i>Speaker: Mr. IPO. Sales and Marketing Director.</i> <i>Session title: Analysis of the pharmaceutical sector from the perspective of pharmaceutical cooperatives and drugstores sales.</i> <i>Affiliation: Farmanova</i> <i>Date: November 27th, 2012</i> <i>Session format: Workshop and practical case discussion</i> http://tobealwaysclosing.blogspot.com.es/2012/11/farmanova.html</p> |
| <p><i>Speaker: Mr. JM. General Director.</i> <i>Session title: How to implement a CRM (Customer Relationship Management) strategy in companies.</i> <i>Affiliation: OMEGA CRM Consulting</i> <i>Date: December 10th, 2012</i> <i>Session format: Workshop and practical case discussion</i> http://tobealwaysclosing.blogspot.com.es/2012/12/omega-crm-consulting.html</p> |
| <p><i>Speaker: Mrs. PV. Sales and Marketing Director.</i> <i>Session title: How to design a strategic business plan in a hotel chain and how to position a boutique-hotel within an all-inclusive resort.</i> <i>Affiliation: Holiday World Hotels Group</i> <i>Date: December 11th, 2012</i> <i>Session format: Workshop and practical case discussion</i> http://tobealwaysclosing.blogspot.com.es/2012/12/holiday-world-resort-y-hoteles-todo.html</p> |
| <p><i>Speaker: Mr. AA. Senior Sales, Marketing & Retail Manager.</i> <i>Session title: Recruitment process of Sales and Managements Directors in Spain.</i> <i>Affiliation: Michael Page</i> <i>Date: December 18th, 2012</i> <i>Session format: Workshop and practical case discussion</i> http://tobealwaysclosing.blogspot.com.es/2012/12/michael-page-seleccion-de-directivos.html</p> |

Table 2. List of guest speakers

The course of action was:

- Sales managers were contacted and invited to participate as guest speakers
- They were asked information about their company and sector
- Two or three key points were identified, based on their real agendas at that time (a problem, challenge or decision to make).
- The information about the company concerned, sector reports and the two or three key points were made available to students well in advance.
- Students worked individually on that material and discussed it in a forum that was created for this purpose in the virtual campus (LMS).
- The day before the session with the guest speaker, the lecturer helped students prepare a minimum of 10 questions they could ask the sales manager. The questions were built on the basis of the sector or company data, as well as on the key points.
- During the session, the lecturer chaired and when needed interrupted the speaker to make some remarks, give the floor to a student or connect the discussion with the theoretical content of the subject.
- At the beginning of the session the lecturer selected one student to be the rapporteur, who would have to elaborate the session minutes.
- The lecturer checked the student report, completed it and made it available for all students in the virtual campus (LMS).
- To close the session, in the following class 10 minutes were dedicated to commenting on the session with the guest speaker, highlighting the learning points which had been covered. Guest speakers were asked what they had learned from the students during the session, and their feedback was also commented. This acted as a motivation factor for students.

It is important to note that the *venia docendi* belongs to the lecturer and that guest speakers did not override the lecturer's responsibility at any time. For this reason and also for the pedagogical effectiveness the session was chaired by the lecturer - as explained in paragraph 7 -, who often intervened to emphasize some aspects or to redirect the discussion towards the academic goals, as well as to reinforce learning by supporting the inductive method based on the analysis of sales managers testimonies related to theoretical syllabus concepts. The following graphs show the steps followed throughout the course:

| Pilot project. Bachelor of Marketing and Market Research. Academic year 2012-2013 | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|--|---|
| TASK | <i>Scientific paper presentation</i> | <i>Forum discussions (LMS)</i> | <i>Class discussion</i> | <i>Sessions with guest speakers and use of the case method</i> | <i>Blog (student-generated content)</i> |
| TIME | <i>Throughout the course</i> | <i>Throughout the course</i> | <i>One day before the sessions with guest speakers</i> | <i>Throughout the course</i> | <i>Throughout the course</i> |

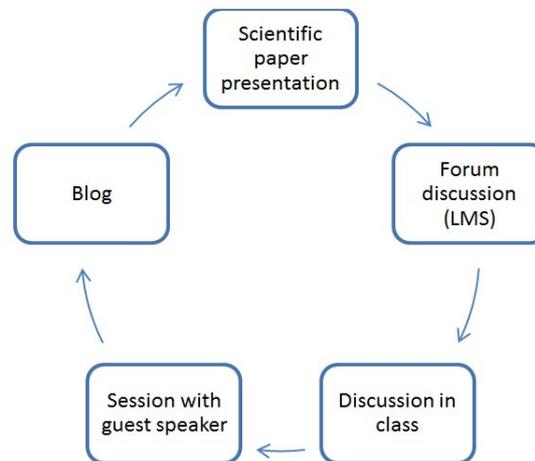


Figure 1. Steps followed throughout the course

5 RESULTS

The main result has been the learning opportunity for undergraduate Sales students to learn from the interaction with experienced professionals with a successful career in Sales Management. They presented ten scientific papers, run a blog on the subject, participated in ten forums on the virtual campus (LMS) to discuss issues related to the course and analyzed eight practical cases presented by guest speakers from the Sales world.

Apart from these results that speak for themselves, a study was conducted in order to assess the impact of this methodology on student learning and to gain insight into their experience. The project was also examined from the point of view of the guest speakers and the lecturer.

For this purpose, students were invited to complete an online survey several months after the final grades of the course were published. The questionnaire was delivered at this time to avoid any bias in this regard. Moreover, the lecturer would not be delivering any more subjects to this group, which prevented any influence on its evaluation. The online survey was completely anonymous and respondent answers were treated confidentially. The questionnaire was built with the support of seven Lecturers of the University of Málaga and it was reviewed by the eight guest speakers. Therefore, fifteen experts evaluated it and reformulated some of the questions to facilitate understanding. After that, a pilot questionnaire was filled by five students, who gave

their feedback about the questionnaire itself before it was released in its final version.

The lecturer participated in an in-depth interview, as well as the guest speakers.

The analysis of the lecturer, guest speakers and students assessment is provided below.

5.1 Lecturer's perspective

Some of the findings that can be drawn from the interview with the lecturer are:

- As for time, the lecturer estimates he spent an average of 5 extra hours per case. Being 8 cases in total, it represents about 40 extra hours devoted to the subject. That time includes: calls and e-mails to the speakers to arrange interviews and the session with students; schedule coordination with other lecturers; time spent looking for sector information; creation of discussion forums; intervention in discussion forums; case writing; identification of discussion points; revision of updated cases; etc. In addition to this, time devoted to scientific articles (about 10 hours at a rate of one hour per article) should be considered, as well as to moderating discussion forums (in total about 3 ½ hours at a rate of about 20 minutes per forum, with 10 forums in total). It is estimated that this activity has constituted between 50 and 55 additional hours for the lecturer workload. This time has not been paid by the University, nor is it recognized in his teaching load. It has been a volunteering activity, part of his extra role performance.
- In regards to his learning as a lecturer, he admits the experience has deserved the extra effort because he has been able to learn first-hand sales management practices from various sectors, which is something he could have never learned from textbooks or articles. Therefore his knowledge as a teacher has been enhanced because when teaching the subject 'sales management' in the future he will be able to base his lessons on real sales managers cases from various sectors, and share insights and details that otherwise would not have learned.
- From the point of view of his interaction with students, the lecturer acknowledges that using the CMGS method enabled a better understanding of students' knowledge, skills and attitudes. He is also convinced that the attitude of the students towards the subject has been much more positive than towards another subject that he gave them and he considers that the difference is essentially due to the methodology, since the other subject also was interesting to students and both students and the teacher were the same.
- Considering the experience with the other three groups of the same subject, the lecturer undoubtedly had to do an extra effort to prepare them, given the extra time consumption occasioned by the CMGS method. However he affirms that this methodology clearly succeed because he realized that it helped him make the other classes more dynamic since he could often refer to specific details and examples from sessions with guest speakers, facilitating student knowledge building. The lecturer highlights the relevant difference between the marks of students in the pilot Project group and the other three groups, as well as the difference in the quality of their participation in class. When asked if he would use the same methodology again, he acknowledged that in principle he would be favorable but taking into account two factors: extra workload and students' attitude. Before implementing a similar project, he suggests that the teacher in question assess in detail the extra work hours needed (about 50 approximately). Regarding the students' attitude, if they are not engaged the most advisable thing to do is using a different methodology, since most of its success lays in the involvement of students. As a matter of fact, the lecturer narrates that during the second session of this experience he realized that students had not prepared the session well in advance. He warned them he would change the methodology if they did not commit to the project, and fortunately students' reaction was very positive. The lecturer makes clear that if he had failed to secure the students' commitment, he would have stopped the project without any second thoughts.
- In conclusion, the main motivation for the lecturer was to equip students with competent sales management qualification and to take the opportunity to improve his professional development as a lecturer. The possible recognition of his work given by the University of Málaga (Spain) was not a motivation factor.

5.2 Guest speakers' perspective

An in-depth interview was conducted by the lecturer with each of the guest speakers at the end of their session, following the same scheme for all of them. All the eight guest speakers were interviewed.

Regarding their general assessment of this experience using the CMGS method, their mean score was 6.5 (out of 7). In relation to whether they had learned anything from the students that would be applicable to their day-to-day business, the average score was 4 (out of 7). Yet they all acknowledged that it had been worthwhile from the point of view of learning but were aware that the quality of the findings had not been particularly significant. Nonetheless, three of them recognized that what had helped them most was to consider issues and approaches which hitherto had not considered due to their lack of time and that this activity had somehow served to "force" them to think.

In regards to the extent to which this activity improved their perception of the University, the average score was 2.5. When asked about their perception of lecturers, the average was 6 (both scores out of 7).

Another question was about the degree of student participation and to what extent it was important for the session development. For 63% of the speakers, the average level of participation was 5.5 (out of 7), which accounted for almost 79% of total excellence at their discretion. Considering the importance of student involvement in the project, 50 % judged it had an importance of 7 (out of 7).

Finally the guest speakers were asked if they would repeat an experience like this and 90% responded favorably.

5.3 Students' perspective

In order to assess the students' experience, they were subjected to a voluntary and anonymous survey several months after finishing the course. The total number of students was 52. Valid responses were 35, representing a response rate of 67.30 %.

The survey items can be seen in Table 3, as well as a link to the original online questionnaire used - in Spanish (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1mOk4SfguxYJuT3EXoa5yjFokXRLc4Fbdbl_06RIaRhA/viewform)

Indicate your gender:

I have had a similar experience in another subject: (yes / no)

LIKERT SCALE FROM 1 TO 7 (1=STRONGLY DISAGREE; 7=STRONGLY AGREE)

| | |
|---|--|
| <i>I think this approach has been useful for the subject learning</i> | |
| <i>This methodology has helped me to better understand the business reality</i> | |
| <i>This methodology has helped me to be more participative in class</i> | |
| <i>This method will help me to better retain learning in memory for my professional life</i> | |
| <i>This methodology has helped me strengthen my entrepreneurship spirit</i> | |
| <i>The fact that the lecturer chaired sessions was useful to connect them to the course content</i> | |
| <i>The fact that the lecturer chaired sessions was useful to build my knowledge</i> | |
| <i>I wish that this methodology was used in other subjects</i> | |
| <i>This methodology has made me devote more time to the subject</i> | |
| <i>This methodology has enabled me to like more the subject</i> | |
| <i>I value positively having a class blog</i> | |
| <i>This same lecturer gave me another subject and I am more satisfied with this one precisely because of its innovative methodology</i> | |
| <i>Such initiatives improve my perception of the University</i> | |
| <i>Such initiatives improve my perception of lecturers</i> | |
| <i>Thanks to this methodology I have spent more time studying this subject</i> | |
| <i>Indicate your overall satisfaction with this methodology</i> | |

The more interesting sessions for me were (indicate three):

| | |
|--|--|
| RU (Castillo de Tabernas, Olive Oil) | |
| OA (Avolo Motor, Car Showroom) | |
| AA (Michael Page) | |
| PV (Holiday World Hotels) | |
| JM (OMEGA CRM Consulting) | |
| IP (Farmanova: Pharmaceutical Cooperative Company) | |
| FR (USP-Quirón: Hospitals) | |
| ARC (Kolmer Paint) | |

Comment box (if you wish to make any comments on your CMGS experience):

Table 3. Questionnaire about innovation in sales education

A statistical analysis was carried out. Some of the findings are offered below:

- Analysis of reliability and dimensionality of measurement scale

Firstly, in order to evaluate the measurement scale, two basic aspects of the scale were analyzed - its reliability and dimensionality.

The reliability of the scale was tested using the Cronbach alpha coefficient. This coefficient evaluates the consistency of the entire scale, and is the most commonly used measurement index (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 2007). The Cronbach alpha was over 0.6 as required in exploratory phases (Miquel, Bigné, Lévy, Cuenca & Miquel, 1997) for all the variables, which confirms the scale reliability. On the other hand, in this study unidimensionality was tested performing a principal components exploratory factor analysis. It was therefore observed that both the assessment methodology itself as well as acquired learning were bi-dimensional (all the items grouped in two factors).

| Students' assessment | Factors | Explained variance | Observed variables |
|---|---|---------------------------|--|
| Methodology Assessment Variance total=78,87% $\alpha= 0,736$ KMO= 0,834 Barlett sphericity $\chi^2(10)=84,95 (p= 0,000)$ | M1:Methodology assessment | 42,41% | V1: Methodology made me enjoy the subject more. V 2 :Lecturer' interventions during the sessions had an added value. V4: I welcome the creation and use of the blog. |
| | M2: Effects on the attitude towards the methodology | 36,46% | V5: The methodology has helped me to be more participative in class V3: The methodology has facilitated devoting more time to the subject |

| Students' assessment | Factors | Explained variance | Observed variables |
|---|--|---------------------------|---|
| <i>Learning assessment</i> Variance total= 84,45% $\alpha = 0,912$ KMO= 0,836 Barlett sphericity $X^2(10)=332,45 (p= 0,000)$ | A1: <i>Contribution to Learning</i> | 50,99% | V6: <i>The methodology has been useful for the subject learning</i> V 9 : <i>The lecturer's interventions have facilitated my learning</i> V 1 0 : <i>The methodology contributes to sustained learning in the long term.</i> |
| | A2: <i>Contact with business reality</i> | 33,45% | V11: <i>The methodology has enhanced my entrepreneurial spirit</i> V 1 2 : <i>The methodology has showed me business reality</i> |

Table 4. Factor and reliability analysis

- Univariate analysis

Regarding the gender of the students that composed the total sample (n=35), 61,8% were female and 38,2% were male. Furthermore, 70,6% affirm they have not had a similar experience in any other subject. On the other hand, 94% acknowledges this methodology has improved their image of the University, and 100% state their image of lecturers was clearly ameliorated.

Table 5 shows the basic descriptive major subdomains which were measured in a 7-point Likert scale (1=totally disagree, 7=totally agree).

| | Mean | Standard deviation | Median | Min. | Max. |
|---|-------------|---------------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| Methodology rating | 6,08 | 0,83 | 6 | 4,5 | 7 |
| Effects on attitude toward the subject | 5,55 | 0,81 | 5,6 | 3,33 | 7 |
| Contribution to learning | 6,27 | 0,59 | 6,3 | 4,67 | 7 |
| Contact with business reality | 6,11 | 0,65 | 6 | 4,5 | 7 |

Table 5. Descriptive analysis

There is broad agreement among students that the contribution to learning has been very significant because of this innovative methodology. Specifically, it gets a mean score of 6.27 (out of 7) for learning in general and 6.11 for practical learning. Furthermore, the methodology is highly valued, with a mean of 6.08, and the effects it has on students (5.55) such as greater involvement and dedication to the subject.

- Estimation of a regression model

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between different variables, determining the influence of independent variables on the dependent (McDaniel & Gates, 1999). In this case, the regression model used "student satisfaction after CMGS" as the dependent variable and the set of explanatory variables (methodology assessment, effects of methodology, contribution to learning and practical contribution to learning) were regressed on it.

In order to correct the problem of multicollinearity (many statistically significant correlations are observed), the factors based on the estimation of factor analysis were used as input variables in the regression (Hair et al., 2007). Thus, despite the loss of information involved, the variables are summarized in a series of orthogonal factors with lower correlation between them, resolving the basic assumption of this type of analysis.

In the case of multiple regression, and considering cross-sectional data was used, there must be both linearity

between the explanatory variables and the explained variable (graphically tests the hypothesis of linearity and homoscedasticity) and absence of multicollinearity between the explanatory variables (seen from certain coefficients as the enlargement factor of variance - FAV -, with values below 4, taking factors as variables reduces this problem). Similarly, the normality hypothesis was verified through K-S, and the hypothesis of absence of autocorrelation through D-W (1.90).

Table 6 shows the results of the regression which explains student satisfaction. It should be noted that the F statistic ($F = 20,265$) is significant for a level of $p < 0.000$. A detailed analysis of the regression reveals a high level of the adjusted R^2 (0.73). Data indicate that three variables are significant, being “CMGS contribution to the overall learning of the subject” the most important factor to explain student satisfaction.

| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation | Regression Coefficient | Standard Error | T-Student |
|---|-------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Factor 1. Methodology assessment | 0,000 | 1 | 0,39 | 0,163 | 0,242 ($p=0,811$) |
| Factor 2. Effects on the attitude toward the subject | 0,000 | 1 | 0,341 | 0,182 | 1,879 ($p=0,070$) |
| Factor 3. Contribution to learning | 0,000 | 1 | 0,488 | 0,188 | 2,597 ($p=0,014$) |
| Factor 4. Contact with business reality | 0,000 | 1 | 0,431 | 0,156 | 2,767 ($p=0,010$) |

Table 6. Regression analysis

The non-significant variable to explain student satisfaction is the assessment of the methodology itself. The reason might be that students are not fully aware of each of the phases of the CMGS developed by the project manager – i.e. the lecturer - and instead they value factors which directly affect them (contribution to learning, contact with business reality, and effect on their attitude toward the subject.)

Students were asked to name the three guest speakers whose sessions had been more interesting for them, in order to consider their prospective participation in future editions of the project. Their names are not cited here in order to protect their privacy. Moreover, at the end of the survey students could fill a comment box. Out of the 35 respondents, 14 left a comment (40%) and almost all of them indicated their appreciation of the CMGS method and suggested implementing it in other subjects. Only one person stated that they would have preferred a methodology based solely on the textbook contents and very focused on exam questions and not so much on learning. This respondent was the one only who scored 1 for all survey items and their answers were not considered for the statistical analysis for being an obvious outlier. Yet this case is mentioned here with the aim of highlighting that there may always be students who prefer a more traditional approach.

6. LIMITATIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

This study aims to present an innovative educational experience through participatory learning in the subject of Sales Management. The main objective was to improve the mastery of general competencies assigned to the subject and for that the methodology is an adaptation of the Case Method, where information and communication technologies acquire a fundamental role.

The development of a new technology was not the objective of this project, but the sinergical use of several

technologies that could facilitate a mutual enrichment in the learning experience for the different kind of participants: students, lecturer and guest speakers. The articles presented by students in class were all posted on the blog and shared on the official Twitter account of the project and retweeted from the personal Twitter accounts of students, where related questions and answers generated an intense debate. In the LMS of the University, frequent forums were opened with information about the industries to be analysed and the companies that would come to the classroom. The Skype conference call system was also used in two different sessions: one with the session with two top managers of Michael Page that were in Madrid at that time and another session with guest speaker from Jaén.

It can be concluded that regardless of whether this may have some sort of monetary compensation or recognition for the lecturer workload, the methodology itself can bring the satisfaction of contributing to the quality improvement of Sales education. Furthermore, interacting with Sales managers allows for an interesting dialogue about issues, challenges and opportunities for sales professionals in various sectors that are linked with the day to day activity of decision making. This contributes to the lecturer's professional development and is considered an asset.

The director of this project has been able to observe a remarkable difference in the marks obtained by the students of this project compared with others that did not participate in the project and above all, the higher quality of their interventions during the sessions has been outstanding. The lecturer, who was also the director of the project, has been teaching this subject for several years and with this perspective he could confirm the positive impact on the participants of this project.

Another conclusion is that for this project to be effective, a high level of student participation is required. As reflected in the results, both the lecturer – project manager - and four - out of the eight - speakers emphasized this aspect in their interviews. In this sense, the required student motivation is essential for learning and skill development to be optimal (Berné et al., 2011). Therefore, for the proper application of the CMGS, a high level of involvement of both students and teachers is indispensable.

Regarding the guest speakers, it should be highlighted how satisfied they were after the experience. This pilot Project proves then how the professional world – specifically Sales Managers - and higher education can get closer.

On a different note, it can be concluded that students recognize that the new methodology has helped them to understand the subject better and to have more contact with the business world. The proposed construction of the EHEA aims to bring students closer to the business world, to involve them more actively in their own learning process and to provide a favourable environment for the acquisition of various competences (Martín-Peña, Díaz-Garrido & Del Barrio, 2012). Thus, the used methodology is more than appropriate for the new curricula adapted to the Guidelines of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

According to Salas-Morera, Arauzo-Azofra and García-Hernández (2012) quizzes have the added advantage of guiding students through the learning process with moderate and continual effort. This advantage would probably be lost if the quizzes had greater weight in the final mark. So we propose the incorporation of quizzes to the CMGS for reinforcing the learning experience.

Finally, all sessions intended to discuss ethical considerations involved when working with the CMGS method. It is significant to highlight the great interest aroused in the students towards these issues that do not often appear in academic syllabus.

This research suggests the desirability of implementing the CMGS method in several groups and in a wider range of subjects. We are convinced that it can help facilitate the acquisition of scientific knowledge and its diffusion among lecturers. Since Sales management is an applied and continuously changing science, a close contact with the business world and sales management is required to observe how theory and experience will enrich each other with support of academia. For this purpose, it would be convenient to build a database of guest speakers who could intervene at the request of several teachers and disciplines within Sales and Marketing Education. It is also proposed to videotape some sessions in the event that some of the speakers are unable to participate in the future.

This study has been carried out with only one group of students – out of a total of 4 groups of the same subject. This can be considered a limitation, but precisely because it is a pilot project, the research project was intentionally designed this way. Another limitation is that as the subject was Sales Management, it has been very focused on this area.

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