

A Pre Mid-Term Exam “Visioning” Exercise

By Don Sutherland

Ahead of this semester’s mid-term exam in my BBA 407-Strategic Management class, I had the students engage in a brief “visioning” exercise. In that exercise, they projected themselves slightly into the future and imagined exam day. This was done through a short dual-scenario document that was e-mailed to them during the weekend ahead of the exam. Embedded in one of the scenarios were practices that have empirically been linked to higher performance.

This was the first time I drew upon psychology to engage students in such an exercise. The result was sufficiently promising so that the exercise will be repeated next semester. First, based on a survey question associated with the exam, students self-reported that they had devoted more time to study than had been the case last semester. Study is one link to performance, albeit with variation from person to person.

Second, even as the class had similar knowledge to that of the preceding semester based on a pre-test at the beginning of the semester and it also scored in a statistically similar fashion on the quiz that preceded the Mid-Term exam, the average Mid-Term score was 4.4 points above the average for the prior semester. The standard deviation was also slightly lower.

The text of the short document is below:

Wednesday, March 27 was the kind of day that regularly stands out on students' diverse and sometimes winding academic journeys. In BBA 407, it was Mid-Term Day.

You now had an opportunity to demonstrate the extent of your learning. When it came to expectations and confidence, you fell into one of two groups.

You came to class brimming with confidence. You recognized that you were well-prepared. You knew what information would be covered by the exam. You had completed your homework assignments. You had focused your time on the concepts you found most difficult. You had expanded the limits of your knowledge by treating course concepts as a starting point, thought about applying them to your research paper, and even considered their relevance to management in general.

You came to class on the brink of panic. You had little idea what information would be covered by the exam. You didn't know what to study or even where to start. You had missed most, if not all, of your homework assignments. As the minutes to start of the exam wound down, you nervously flipped through the pages of the textbook desperately in search of a "holy grail" that would salvage what seemed to be an otherwise futile undertaking. You now had a single goal for the exam, not to excel, but simply to avoid doing poorly. In sports parlance, you were now on “defense.”

After the optional review session, you will know what material will be covered on the exam (but not the questions). Everything you need to know will be contained within the slides. That's a big step toward being prepared.

The homework assignments and solutions are posted on Blackboard. The solutions to the quiz and practice ratios calculations are available, too. Those are additional important foundations for success.

Beyond that, there is a larger context involved. Legendary Green Bay Packers Coach Vince Lombardi summed up that larger context quite well. He observed, "Leaders are made, they are not born. They are made by hard effort, which is the price which all of us must pay to achieve any goal that is worthwhile."

What story will you write on Wednesday? Or, more accurately, what story will you choose to write?

It is up to you.