

What's Expected of Marketing Graduates?

Cathi McMullen, Charles Sturt University
Ian Braithwaite, University of Western Sydney

Abstract

Universities are increasingly being required to make explicit the desired educational outcomes of their graduates. Currently many universities are developing graduate capability statements to address this expectation. In this paper, we explore desirable capabilities for marketing graduates and present a schema outlining discipline knowledge and a range of generic capabilities that are necessary to make use of marketing knowledge. In doing this we draw on the concepts of expertise and tacit knowledge and present them in a marketing context. Some broad recommendations are made how these capabilities can be developed.

Background

In an era of diminishing levels of public funding for the higher education sector, Australian universities have needed to demonstrate to all stakeholders - state and federal governments, employers, current and future students - the desired educational outcomes of their graduates. One of the challenges universities have to face is how to provide an education that is deemed to be relevant to the needs of employers and equip graduates with skills that allow them to adapt to a future that is largely unknowable.

Development of knowledge and changes in professional practice occur at such a rapid rate that it has been argued that students need to learn current disciplinary knowledge in a way and with a purpose that develops their capabilities to deal with situations they have not previously encountered (Bowden and Marton, 1998).

Since 1998 Australian universities have been required to specify graduates attributes in the 'Quality Assurance and Improvement Plans' submitted to DETYA as part of the annual Universities' Profiles process (DETYA, 2001). Currently many universities are in the process of developing public statements that articulate the quality outcomes their students are expected to achieve as a result of their studies. The focus on graduate qualities is part of a wider movement within universities in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia.

A range of different terms is used by Australian universities to describe student outcomes. These include 'graduate qualities', 'graduate outcomes', 'graduate attributes' and 'graduate capabilities'. Graduate attributes as defined by universities are qualities, skills and understandings a student is expected to develop throughout the course of their degree. They can be broken down into disciplinary knowledge and generic capabilities. Generic capabilities include: critical thinking, information literacy, communication skills (oral and written), team skills, problem solving, a cross-cultural perspective, acting ethically and the capacity for lifelong learning.

Generic skills will help graduates adapt to a range of different situations and develop the ability to transform their knowledge to meet a range of contexts. It is believed that specifying graduate attributes helps to inform students, the community and employers of the skills and values they can expect from the graduates of each university (DETYA, 2001).

While graduate attributes are initially being developed at the overall university level, it is within the context of the discipline that they become more meaningful. “Most universities when describing the generic capabilities they wish graduates to develop use fairly limited forms of description... These are often very general and not very meaningful in themselves. It is at the level of the discipline that the meaning of the capability can be found as the capability is elaborated in relation to the characteristics of the field” (UTS CLT, n.d.). In the following section we look at what graduate capabilities would look like in the marketing discipline.

Desirable Capabilities for Marketing Graduates

As marketing educators we need address the following questions:

- What is it that we want our students to be? – graduate attributes
- How do we help them to get to this place? – teaching and learning strategies
- How will we know if students have developed these capabilities - assessment

When they leave university we want our students to not only have learnt about marketing but to have learnt how to learn about marketing. This way they can transform and reinvent their knowledge so that it is relevant to the variety of situations they will encounter.

So what attributes do we want to develop in our graduates? Why are they important? How do we go about developing them? To answer these questions we will draw not only on the marketing literature, but also the literature from psychology, education and management on expertise and tacit knowledge.

Desirable graduate attributes include both disciplinary knowledge and generic skills such as critical thinking and communication skills. We would like to highlight that we believe these generic skills are best developed in a disciplinary context. This makes them both relevant to students and more likely to engage them. Figure 1 sets out our view of desired capabilities for marketing students.

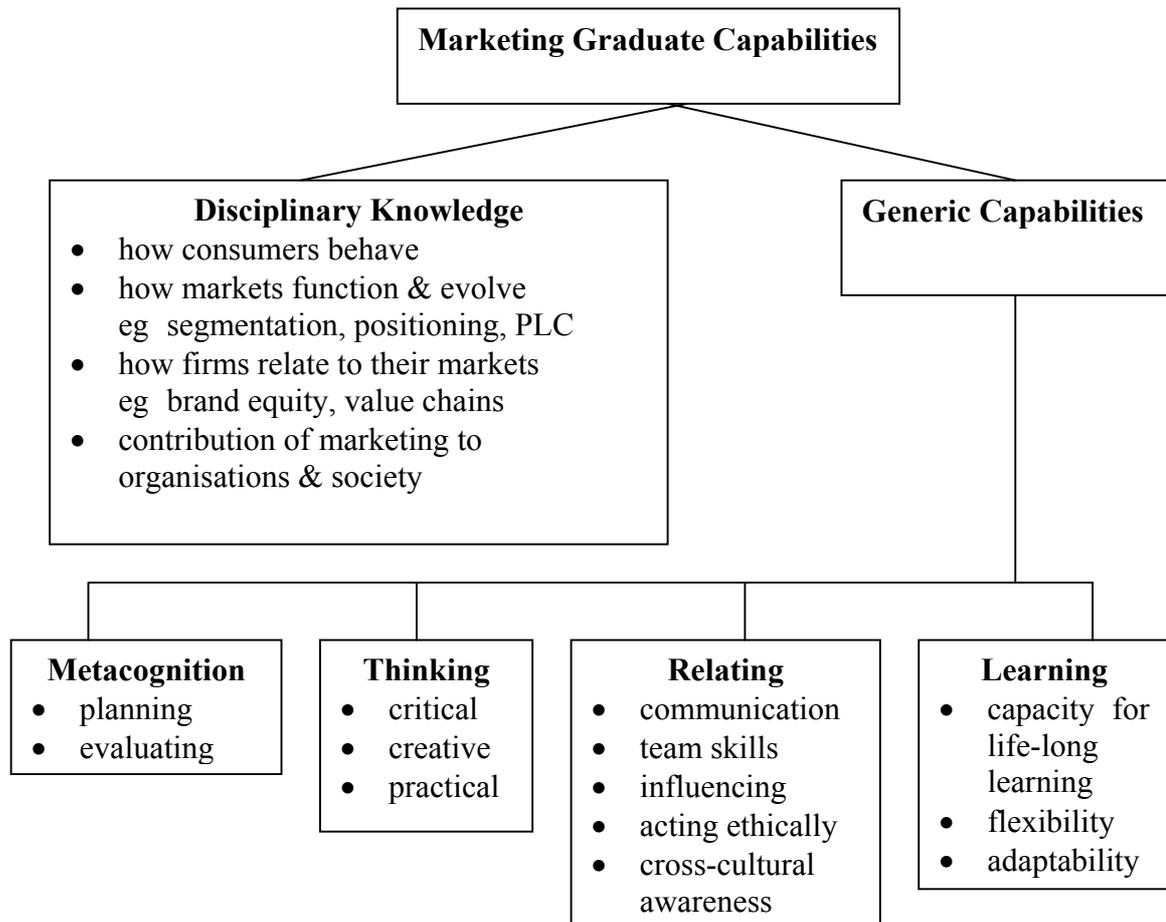
What Attributes are Important for Marketing Graduates and Why?

Disciplinary Knowledge

Traditionally, universities have focused more on the teaching of disciplinary knowledge and less on generic skills. Depicting discipline knowledge in a summarised form is a contentious task. For the purpose of this paper we have used Day and Montgomery’s (1999) discussion of the fundamental issues that identify the field of marketing and distinguish it from other disciplines. They argue that the following four questions are enduring ones that marketing is uniquely able to address:

- How do customers and consumers really behave?
- How do markets function and evolve?
- How do firms relate to their markets?
- What are the contributions of marketing to organisational performance and societal welfare.

Figure 1: Marketing Graduate Capabilities



Source: Adapted from Sternberg (1998) and Day & Montgomery (1999)

Generic Capabilities

Developing generic capabilities is a critical component of any graduate's education. It is these generic skills they will use to transform and reinvent their disciplinary knowledge over the course of their working life. Looking to satisfy the requirements of Australasian business and industry the following skills for marketing graduates have previously been identified as desirable (Walker et al., 1998):

- Basic marketing disciplinary knowledge
- Relevant cross functional/ disciplinary knowledge
- A practical/applied ability
- Analytical skills and insights
- Complex problem-solving skills
- Communication skills - oral and written
- A productive teamwork capacity
- Flexibility and adaptability to change

Examination of how practitioners operate can also provide useful indicators for the type of capabilities we should be seeking to develop in our marketing graduates. Marketing practitioners, in common with many other professionals, generally deal with unstructured and ill defined problems in a dynamic and complex environments.

There is a growing body of literature that help us understand the way practitioners operate. Issues of expertise and tacit knowledge have been addressed in psychology, education and management (Schon, 1983; Chi, Glaser and Farr (eds), 1988; Tennant and Pogson, 1995; Billet, 2001). In this literature, the term expertise is used in a variety of situations but is generally related to performance. An expert is someone recognised as displaying outstanding performance. Having the potential to perform or possessing vast knowledge is not a sufficient condition for expertise. There must be proof that this ability and knowledge has been successfully applied in practice (Kuchinke, 1996) and that superior performance has been demonstrated.

What this highlights is that having disciplinary knowledge is not enough. It is how this knowledge is used that is important for demonstrating expertise in a profession. We see how a clear distinction can be made between 'knowing about' marketing and 'knowing how' to creatively use that knowledge. "Knowing that" or "knowing about" is generally referred to as declarative knowledge or conceptual knowledge (Billett, 2001). It comprises facts, information, propositions, assertions and concepts. In contrast, "knowing how" or procedural knowledge includes techniques, skills and the strategies to achieve goals. It's related to a particular context and is generally developed through experience. Procedural knowledge includes "tacit knowledge" which is knowledge that is not usually taught or even openly expressed or stated. The ability to acquire tacit knowledge over time is an important element in continued success in a range of fields (Torff and Sternberg, 1998). Keeping pace with the world means acquiring new tacit knowledge. (The role of tacit knowledge in strategic marketing management in explored in Hackley, 1999).

Developing expertise in a field (such as marketing) can be seen as a process of development that involves the interaction of motivation, knowledge (both declarative and procedural) and metacognitive, thinking, and learning skills, (Sternberg, 1998). In developing a schema to demonstrate marketing graduate capabilities we have drawn on these three types of skills presented by Sternberg.

Sternberg identifies seven metacognitive skills: problem recognition, problem representation, strategy formulation, resource allocation, monitoring of problem solving, and evaluation of problem solving (Sternberg, 1996 in Sternberg, 1998). Three main sets of thinking skills are detailed. These are critical thinking, creative thinking and practical thinking. Critical thinking skills include analysing, critiquing, judging, evaluating, comparing, contrasting and assessing. Creative thinking skills include creating, discovering, inventing, imagining, supposing, and hypothesising. Practical thinking skills include applying, using, utilising and practicing (Sternberg, 1997a in Sternberg, 1998). They are the first steps in the translation of thought into real-world action. Given the interaction needed within and outside the organisation to implement marketing strategies we have included a group of skills which we label "relating skills". These include communication both oral and written, team skills, influencing skills, cross-cultural awareness and the ability to act in an ethical manner. Influencing skills are important because marketing practitioners in organisations often require support from other functional groups over which they have no formal authority.

In summary we present a view of desired capabilities for marketing graduates supported by both literature from marketing and other relevant disciplines. The key capabilities presented are a sound disciplinary knowledge and the generic capabilities of metacognitive skills, thinking skills, learning skills and relating skills. These skills will help graduates harness their disciplinary knowledge and transform this knowledge to meet demand of an ever changing world.

In the next section we present some suggestions of how these skills may be developed within the marketing discipline.

Strategies for Developing Graduate Capabilities

To help students develop the capabilities we have discussed we need to look at teaching and learning strategies and in particular, the assessment tasks we set for students. These will depend on one's particular aims and circumstances. However, a number of general points can be made.

- Capabilities are more likely to be achieved if they are addressed at course level rather than a subject level. Agreement could be reached to focus on particular skills in particular subjects thereby reducing the likelihood of gaps in a student's education because it is assumed that certain skills have been gained in another subject. At the University of South Australia, the Business Management Faculty have used graduate capabilities as a framework for integrating the eight core subjects making up the first year experience of students in the Bachelor of Business degree (UTS CLT, n.d.)
- Greater integration is needed within degrees so that students are forced to integrate rather than compartmentalise their learning from a range of subjects. (Walker et.al, 1998 present a strong case to support this view).
- Assessment tasks need to be critically evaluated to see whether they encourage and reward the skills we are wanting our students to develop. If we are looking for critical and creative thinking, tasks must be designed with this in mind.
- Use of simulations allow students to use their knowledge of marketing in an integrated way. They also expose students to the idea that decisions may need to be made under conditions of uncertainty and incomplete information.
- Assessment tasks can encourage students to interface with businesses and customers.
- We should be encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning and deal with the complexity and ambiguity of the workplace they will be entering.

References

- Billett, S., 2001. *Learning in the Workplace: Strategies for Effective Practice*. Sydney: Allen Unwin.
- Bowden, J., and Marton, F. 1998. *The University of Learning: Beyond Quality and Competence*, London: Kogan Page.
- Day, G.S. & Montgomery, D.B., 1999. Charting New Directions for Marketing. *Journal of Marketing*. 63, 3-13.
- DEYTA. 2001. Higher Education Report for the 2001 to 2003 Triennium. Available from http://www.detya.gov.au/highered/he_report/2001_2003/html/2_2.htm#v1, accessed 29 June 2002.
- Chi, M.T.H., Glaser, R. and Farr, M.J. (Eds.). 1988. *The Nature of Expertise*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Hackley, C.E., 1999. Tacit Knowledge and the Epistemology of Expertise in Strategic Marketing Management. *European Journal of Marketing*. 33, (7/8), 720-735.
- Kuchinke, K.P., 1996. Experts and Expertise: The Status of the Research Literature on Superior Performance. *Proceedings of Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD)*. Minneapolis:, 11-18.
- Schon, D.A., 1983. *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Sternberg, R.J., 1998. Abilities are Forms of Developing Expertise. *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 27 (3), 11-20.
- Tennant, M and Pogson, P., 1995. *Learning and Change in the Adult Years : A Developmental Perspective*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Torff, B. and Sternberg, R.L., 1998. Changing Mind, Changing World: Practical Intelligence and Tacit Knowledge in Adult Learning. in M.C. Smith and T. Pourchot (Eds.). *Adult Learning and Development: Perspectives From Educational Psychology*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 67-88.
- UTS. n.d. Generic Capabilities: A Framework for Action. Available from <http://www.clt.its.edu.au/frameworkforaction.htm#principle3>, accessed 29 June 2002.
- Walker, R., 1998. A Case for More Integrative Multi-disciplinary Marketing Education. *European Journal of Marketing*. 32, (9/10), 803-812.