

USE OF PECHA KUCHA IN MARKETING STUDENTS' PRESENTATIONS

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This paper discusses the use of a presentation format known as “Pecha Kucha” (which means “chitchat” in Japanese). The objective of the Pecha Kucha assignment is to facilitate student communication of an argument, including stating and supporting a thesis. Throughout the semester, students become comfortable with the format via multiple individual presentations and a final group presentation, leading to a deeper understanding of course content. While the Pecha Kucha assignment discussed was a course component for three terms of an MBA marketing course, the assignment can be tailored for undergraduate courses.

As employers seek potential employees with good presentation skills, many instructors from business-focused disciplines include a presentation as one component of course assignments. Presentation assignments may be found in a variety of settings and contexts from short, elevator-type speeches that last a minute or two and are prepared by individual students to more involved presentations prepared by a small group of students lasting significantly longer. Regardless of format, the overall instructional goal remains the same: facilitating good student presentation and speaking skills, as employers recruit and value employees who can effectively communicate an argument (Barr and McNeilly 2010; Schlee and Harich 2010).

When students are assigned group presentations, several problems could arise. First, the “free-rider” effect becomes an issue, as not all students in the group participate equally in the presentation preparation or delivery. Second, script preparation could be problematic when certain parts of the presentation receive too much attention while other parts receive too little attention. Third, and related to the script issue, students report a summary instead of making and supporting an argument. Fourth, the application of theory to explain the argument contained in the presentation can be lacking, especially if students are not accustomed to thinking about, or presenting, theoretically grounded arguments. Fifth, students often appear nervous when talking in front of a group. This list is not intended to be

exhaustive but, rather, a small sample of the challenges that faculty confront.

MBA MARKETING COURSE AND INSTITUTIONAL OBJECTIVES

In some MBA programs, faculty could be expected to facilitate student learning by accomplishing a number of objectives, such as (1) introducing and applying a discipline-specific theory, (2) stressing oral and written communication skills, (3) providing an opportunity for experiential learning, and (4) encouraging student-driven research. This paper focuses on an MBA marketing course that is part of an MBA core curriculum and must accomplish specific institutional goals related to the above list of course objectives. In 2010, a simulation was introduced to the MBA marketing course. The small-group simulation met institutionally mandated course objective 3, and, in part, course objectives 1, 2, and 4. Therefore, another assignment was needed to fulfill the remainder of course objectives (1, 2, and 4). In considering alternatives, the faculty also sought to help students overcome the specific aforementioned problems associated with group presentations.

While striving to meet the institutional objectives for MBA courses listed above, the faculty introduced a presentation format known as “Pecha Kucha” to the MBA marketing course. Pecha Kucha (which means “chitchat” in Japanese) uses a slide deck (PowerPoint or similar) consisting of 20 slides with the program timer set to display each slide for 20 seconds (Klentzin et al. 2010). The presenter has only 20 seconds to discuss each slide before the next slide appears; therefore, the presentation lasts exactly 6 minutes and 40 seconds. The Pecha Kucha format has gained prominence among artists, architects, and in other creative areas as a means of discussing and displaying art, building designs, and other

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Table 1
Sample Assignment Topics

Due	Topic	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
January 24	Company	European nameplates	Asian nameplates	American nameplates
February 7	Customers	American nameplates	European nameplates	Asian nameplates
February 21	Context	Asian nameplates	American nameplates	European nameplates
March 7	Collaborators	Student choice	Student choice	Student choice

creative concepts. The marketing discipline has borrowed pedagogy from art disciplines with success (Celly 2009; Mills 2010). The Pecha Kucha format is rigid in terms of structure, yet flexible in terms of content, and therefore could be used for individual or group presentations.

As structured for the MBA marketing course, the overarching goal of the Pecha Kucha assignment was to teach students how to communicate an argument with a clearly stated thesis. Furthermore, support for the thesis incorporated the results of secondary research and needed to be consistent with a particular theory. In this fashion, the Pecha Kucha assignment appears similar to written research assignments (Gries and Brooke 2010).

In addition to meeting overarching course and curriculum goals, other objectives for Pecha Kucha assignments include (1) selecting and applying a relevant theory; (2) developing a thesis that reflects the theory; (3) finding and presenting secondary data that supports the thesis; (4) creating a 20-slide presentation that communicates the theory, thesis, and support; and (5) effectively delivering a presentation in the 6-minute, 40-second, time limit. Exemplars from the MBA marketing course Pecha Kucha presentations include Wolseley Motors and Hyundai.

In a traditional Pecha Kucha, each slide contains a graphic and perhaps no text at all. For the MBA student presentations, each slide contained a picture, a table, a figure, or text. In a discussion facilitated by the instructor, the students contemplated issues such as how much text to incorporate in a slide, the look of the text, and whether to include an entire quotation, relevant words from a quotation, or highlighting specific portions of a quotation, among other “text”-related issues. This discussion allowed the instructor to review the rubric while providing the students an opportunity to share lessons learned about presentations from work or other courses.

IMPLEMENTATION OF PECHA KUCHA

The major MBA marketing course project was a simulation conducted as a small-group effort with teams of three or

four students. The context of the simulation was the automotive industry, with the students assuming the role of vice president of marketing for their automotive nameplate. Therefore, many of the assignments in the course related to the automotive industry. The final major deliverable was an “end of the simulation” group Pecha Kucha.

Setting the Tone

To familiarize and prepare the students for their first Pecha Kucha delivery, two previously recorded Pecha Kucha presentations were shown in class. The first Pecha Kucha video was on the degree of empathy of signage (e.g., stay off grass, line moves quickly). After the video, an instructor-led discussion ensued and focused on (1) the thesis used, (2) support provided, and (3) communication by the narration. The second Pecha Kucha video was produced by a former student. The students completed the grading rubric while watching the Pecha Kucha. The instructor-led discussion concentrated on the perceived performance of the second Pecha Kucha, as well as the delivery of the thesis and supporting arguments, while emphasizing the importance of the argument.

Practice

To prepare for the “end of the simulation” Pecha Kucha, the students created and executed four individual Pecha Kucha presentations during the term, drawing upon examples and topics from the automobile industry. These topics followed the assigned course readings and were arranged to minimize Pecha Kucha presentations on the same nameplate (see Table 1 for topics).

Evaluation and Debrief

For each Pecha Kucha delivery, the students were scored using a grading rubric (contact the authors for an example). After each Pecha Kucha presentation session, a structured debrief was conducted so the students could talk about what they liked and areas for improvement. The students

offered insight into how they put together their Pecha Kucha and reflected on how they would prepare for the next assignment.

The Final Presentation

For the “end of the simulation” Pecha Kucha, each member of a three-person group delivered a Pecha Kucha presentation on one of the following topics: (1) context and consumers, (2) the group’s marketing strategy plan and implementation, or (3) the group’s ongoing marketing tactics. For a four-person group, the fourth member presented on market segments that the group chose not to target. Hence, a three-person group presented for 20 minutes, while a four-person group presented for 26 minutes, 40 seconds. Each individual student’s Pecha Kucha was a self-contained 6 minute, 40 second presentation. By the end of the third (or fourth) Pecha Kucha, the audience should understand how the group did or did not achieve its goals and objectives associated with the simulation.

PECHA KUCHA’S SUCCESS

The individual Pecha Kucha assignments are designed so students hone their argument skills and learn how to construct a balanced and well-paced presentation. The Pecha Kucha structure forces students to create a narrower-focused presentation without over- or underemphasizing certain sections. Finally, experience has demonstrated that the final Pecha Kucha, with content drawn completely from the simulation, remained the best and most relaxed presentation of the entire term.

Roughly half of the students who have participated in this assignment over the past three years report a better understanding of a particular theory and how the theory applies to marketing situations. One student wrote that there was a sense of understanding of the theory following an instructor-led lecture and discussion, albeit a much deeper understanding of the particular theory was gained through the Pecha Kucha.

ASSESSMENT OF PECHA KUCHA

Objective Assessment

All 13 students enrolled in the MBA marketing course during the winter 2011 term completed a survey related to their degree of innovativeness (i.e., willing to accept new ideas, methods, or processes) and motivations (i.e., intrinsic,

extrinsic). Using median splits, a 2×2 cross-tabulation was created with students’ performance representing the cells. The results of chi-square test indicated there was no association between the cells, or groups. In other words, students who were higher in innovativeness and motivations did not perform differently than students who reported some other combination of innovativeness and motivations (low/low, low/high, and high/low).

From the same survey, when asked to rank the MBA marketing course’s six assignments, every student ranked the Pecha Kucha as the top assignment. The Pecha Kucha appears to fit well with different students regardless of their likelihood to accept new ideas, methods, or processes, and their degree of motivation toward the task. A caveat to the results and interpretation should be considered because of the small sample size. The analyses were performed for exploratory purposes only. More consideration should be given to the top ranking given by students to the Pecha Kucha assignment.

Subjective Assessment

Through end-of-term institutional evaluations and in student reflection writings, two general themes emerge: (1) students report apprehension for the first Pecha Kucha, but state how comfortable the exercise becomes as the term progresses because of the numerous opportunities to practice the presentation format; and (2) students like being exposed to a tool they can use in other settings. Beyond the course, some students have participated in local Pecha Kucha events. These events are sponsored by a group that is not affiliated with any university and resemble a “poetry slam” or “open mic” night. One student reported that she uses Pecha Kucha at work when giving project status updates. Her boss and colleagues have provided positive feedback about her presentations. Another student used the Pecha Kucha format as part of a job interview and subsequently received a job offer from the organization.

CHALLENGES WITH PECHA KUCHA

With any new assignment, challenges often arise. First, some students perceive they can already execute a presentation and do not need the additional “practice” intentionally provided by the assigned five Pecha Kucha (e.g., four presentations during the term and one presentation during finals). To overcome this challenge, the instructor could offer how the Pecha Kucha format helps the student become a better-rounded presenter.

Second, other students perceive a lack of relevancy to their professional endeavors. In turn, the instructor could explain how the Pecha Kucha format gives students an opportunity to improve their overall public speaking and research skills. Third, some students perceive a loss of creativity or control with the assignment. The instructor could stress the hedonism associated with Pecha Kucha by reviewing past efforts and discussing how students decide the slides' content and the focus of their individual presentation. In addition, the instructor might stress the flexibility of the format within the confines of the time constraint.

ADAPTING THE PECHA KUCHA

For Use in Courses with Large Enrollments

This Pecha Kucha innovation has been used in a course with lower enrollments (fewer than 25 students). For courses with higher enrollments, there are a number of options for adapting the assignment. The instructor could require students to complete their Pecha Kucha using recording tools built into PowerPoint or with another application such as Prezi (www.prezi.com). Prezi is a Web-based tool that captures both slide animation and voice simultaneously. The instructor could then show a select number of recorded Pecha Kucha in class. The recording option would also work for classes delivered in an online format. Peer review could be incorporated where students are required to view a certain number of recorded presentations and complete an evaluation template for their peers. The instructor could select students at random, such as by drawing lots from a hat, to present their respective Pecha Kucha live with the remainder delivered via video. Finally, fewer Pecha Kucha could be required of the students.

For Use in Undergraduate Courses

The Pecha Kucha presentation format could be extended for use in undergraduate marketing courses regardless of level or subject content. To adapt the Pecha Kucha for an undergraduate course, an instructor could use the following steps for planning and preparation. First, consider the objective of the presentation. At the end of the presentation, what should the audience know? For example, in an undergraduate retail management course with a location analysis presentation, the audience should understand: (1) the current state of that particular part of the retail industry, (2) the criteria used to select possible locations, and (3) the choice of a particular location instead of the locations that met

the criteria in part 2. Instead, if the presentation topic was a marketing plan, the audience should understand: (1) the firm's current situation analysis, (2) the firm's strategy, and (3) the firm's tactics.

Second, the objective for the presentation should be reduced to constituent elements for the presentation. In the aforementioned location analysis and marketing plan examples, parts 1, 2, and 3 serve as the constituent elements that should be addressed from the objective of why that location or how to launch a new product, respectively.

Third, determine the length needed to address the objective through constituent elements. It is possible that one Pecha Kucha, or 6 minutes and 40 seconds, is of sufficient length. However, two (13 minutes and 20 seconds) or three (20 minutes) Pecha Kucha presentations could be necessary. The multiple Pecha Kucha presentation format is used in the final simulation presentation, discussed previously in this paper.

Fourth, consider the time limits for the course. As discussed previously, in courses with large enrollments, the overall number of Pecha Kucha delivered in class could be limited. Alternatively, the number of Pecha Kucha provided by each group could be reduced. Finally, students must be given time to practice the Pecha Kucha through other assignments. Two to four Pecha Kucha presentations should be assigned ahead of the final presentation. These assignments will provide an opportunity for students to become familiar with how to put a Pecha Kucha together and how to pace the oral portion for a nearly flawless delivery.

The Pecha Kucha format challenges students to develop a slide deck and a presentation script, and execute a delivery under strict time constraints. The presentation format could be adapted to meet the requirements of courses in other subject areas, to meet other institutional goals, and to address meeting formats. By the end of the term, students have had the opportunity to develop enhanced presentation skills and have been given multiple opportunities to achieve proficiency. Students leave the course with an experience and greater confidence in presentation.

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