

# **Infusing the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) into Marketing Curriculum©**

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*The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) program is a demonstrated vehicle for companies to evaluate their planning and business, including marketing, strategy. However, little has been written about the use of this tool to enhance marketing students' development of planning and strategy competencies. This exploratory analysis describes the use of Malcolm Baldrige companies as focus points for entry-level marketing students' completion of their first marketing plan project. The categories of the MBNQA can enhance students' preparation for their futures.*

## **INTRODUCTION AND PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATION**

Marketing educators search for the most effective approaches to undergraduate marketing education. Experiential learning has proven to be a valuable tool. However, marketing education must also be relevant to students' future career positions. Since marketing graduates find career positions in B2B endeavors (Brennan, Skaates, 2005; Novar, 2010), and in the service sector, information to enhance that preparation is essential. Marketing is an endeavor that considers inter-firm actions as well as external market considerations (Brennan, Skaates, 2005).

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) program is a demonstrated vehicle for companies to evaluate their planning and business, including marketing, strategy. However, little has been written about the use of this tool to enhance marketing students' development of planning and strategy competencies. This paper focuses upon introduction of MBNQA companies into an entry-level marketing course.

This exploratory analysis describes the use of Malcolm Baldrige companies as focus points for marketing students' completion of their first marketing plan project. Little academic work has been done in this area. This pedagogic innovation strove to enhance students' academic and career-preparatory experiences by blending completion of marketing plans with MBNQA companies as the analysis source for the plans. Since marketing educators generally agree that marketing education should prepare students for marketing careers (Novar, 2010), various segments of the MBNQA can enhance students' preparation for their futures.

## **MALCOLM BALDRIGE PROCESS AND RELEVANCE TO MARKETING EDUCATION**

The MBNQA business competencies, first established in 1987, were the foundation of this study. The 2013-2014 MBNQA business criteria include Leadership, Strategic Planning, Customer Focus, Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management, Workforce Focus, Operations Focus, and Results.

When companies utilize the MBNQA process, they channel business activities in consistent directions to enhance customer value and overall business success (*2006 Criteria for Performance Excellence*; Calhoun, 2002). The criteria are noted as a framework for organizational improvement. It has been found that MBNQA winners generate significant shareholder value (Balasubramanian, Mathur, Thakur, 2005).

The leadership criterion (Category 1) and customer focus (Category 3) are fundamental to marketing's achievement of organizational goals. For example, the "customer and market knowledge" sub-category evaluates market segments, customers, and tailored marketing strategies. Later in this category, product offerings, customer groups, and market segments are studied. Category 4, Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management, analyzes a company's performance, including market share changes. The Results (Category 7) element of the criteria evaluates results of various variables, including customer-focused results and market performance. Clearly, marketing endeavors are essential to an organization's successful attainment of the MBNQA.

Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award competencies of "Leadership" and of "Customer Focus" are priorities for business professionals. Customer Focus criteria directly relate to marketing jobs. MBNQA winners demonstrate that they anticipate and respond to customers, their requirements, and have proven "customer-driven excellence in a variety of business sectors". Additionally, measurement and analysis are crucial to gauging marketing's impact upon corporate performance. Attention to suppliers and members of the organization's supply chain are considered within the Organizational Description aspect of the MBNQA document. By utilizing the MBNQA metrics to contribute to their marketing plans, students learned first-hand the significance and relevance of these metrics and dashboards. In addition to these categories, other considerations of the award apply to marketing concepts, including the Marketing Mix "P's". (Please see Table 1 below.)

Hence, this manuscript demonstrates that a case exists for pedagogic change in marketing curriculum and the use of the MBNQA to enhance students' views of the broader business influence upon marketing, including a customer focus. For marketing to succeed, its actions must be aligned with the overall organizational strategic plans and goals. For the MBNQA, this alignment, "refers to consistency of plans, processes, information, resource decisions, results, analysis, and individual learning to support key organization-wide goals. Effective alignment requires the use of complementary measure" (Hall, Lawson, 2003, p.37). The most recent award criteria feature a renewed focus on social media. The new attention to this aspect connects closely with marketing's increased attention to, and use of social media as marketing tools.

**TABLE 1**  
**CORRELATION POINTS BETWEEN MALCOLM**  
**BALDRIGE AND MARKETING CONCEPTS**

Preface: Organizational Profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketplace differentiation</li> <li>• Supply chain requirements (part of marketing mix, as well as Operations)</li> <li>• Competitive environment scan, including expanding or declining markets, and new or substitute products</li> <li>• Social media</li> </ul>
Category 1, Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer engagement culture, including knowing who are key customers and commitment to anticipating and addressing their needs</li> <li>• Consideration of workforce/staff (“P” of people) as crucial element of performance success</li> <li>• Legal and regulatory requirements</li> </ul>
Category 2, Strategic Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer-driven excellence</li> <li>• Maturity of markets</li> </ul>
Category 3, Customer Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target market</li> <li>• Probe, market research and action, possibly including focus groups</li> <li>• Strategic marketing considerations and analysis</li> <li>• Product/service offerings</li> </ul>
Category 4, Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitoring, tracking, and documenting research about organizational success based upon numerous variables, including market share changes</li> </ul>
Category 5, Workforce Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer contact training</li> </ul>
Category 6, Operations Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of key products, with goal to add value for customers</li> <li>• Public relations</li> </ul>
Category 7, Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target market and market segmentation</li> <li>• Dashboards and metrics regarding product success and pricing strategies</li> </ul>

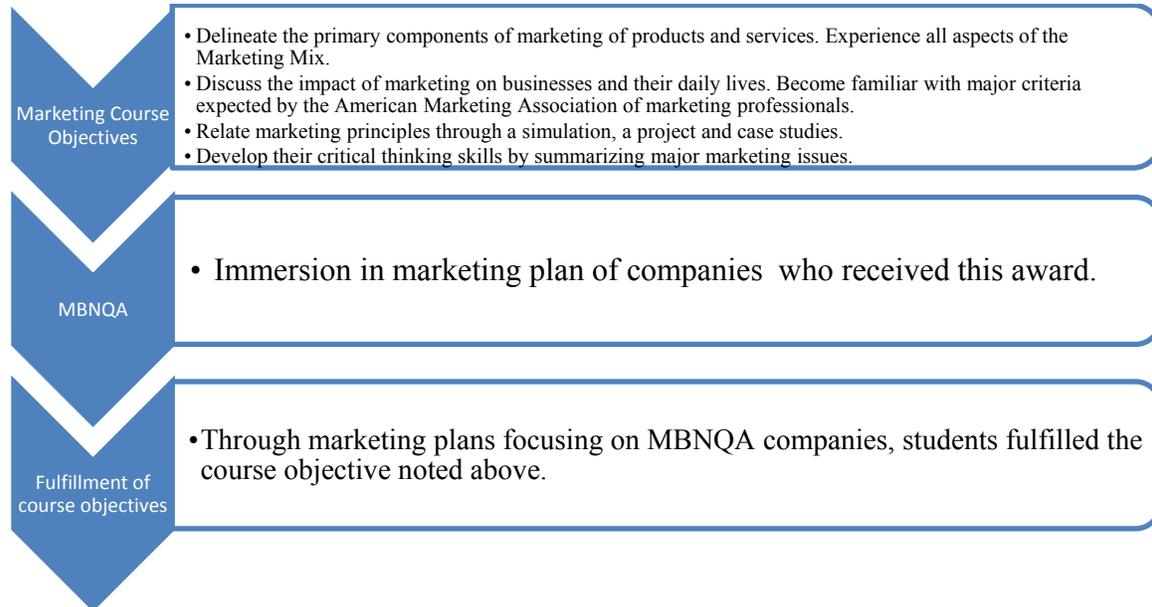
**CONTEXT AND SETTING: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING via MBNQA**

The curricular change discussed in this paper occurred in two parts. First, students were given a pre-test about the MBNQA, the marketing mix, and a SWOT analysis. In conjunction with that quiz, students were assigned different marketing plan teams. The second phase of the change was accomplished when student teams were assigned different MBNQA winners. There were five organizations chosen, based upon the following criteria: current (last 5 years) awardees; ability of students to research the companies’ business sector; the students’ ability to research the company, beyond the published MBNQA Executive Summaries; and the lack of marketing plan availability through research tools . (For the later criteria, before the semester began, the professor conducted research about each organization to ensure the lack of accessible marketing plans.)

Since students were actively engaged in the development of their marketing plans at the same time that they were immersed in their organization’s MBNQA document, the process was very interactive. This assignment also incorporated active learning in which students "access information and examine issues critically" (Kellar, Jennings, Sink and Mundy, 1995, p.253). As delineated in Table 2, several of

the course's objectives were attained through the students' exposure to MBNQA organizational awardees' information.

**TABLE 2**  
**MBNQA AND MARKETING PLAN INFRASTRUCTURE**



Facilitating students' hands-on implementation of classroom principles is essential as universities prepare their students for professional lives and for graduate studies. The literature supports the efficacy of active learning for university students (Augier and March, 2007; Wingfield and Black, 2005; Young, Sinner, Ackerman, Carruthers and Young, 2007; Young, 2002). Using the major components of the marketing plan, and the instructional unit for each separate marketing concept, students learned the respective conceptual parts (i.e. ideas and concepts under the instructional unit) (Warren, 1992), through practical application. This facilitated students' conceptualization of the relatedness of the marketing system to the business as a whole. The MBNQA marketing plan assignment that this paper discusses offered experiential learning for entry-level marketing students to encounter the holistic nature of marketing. This approach provides an opportunity for students to immediately learn the depth and relevance of business information available through the MBNQA documents. For a thorough analysis, students conducted research about the industry sector of the awardees. It may be said, that aspects of this project offered more challenging research for students than previous years when the MBNQA companies were not the assigned organization. At the same time as providing a realistic marketing plan process, students had to read and filter information (provided in the MBNQA report) across more business disciplines/departments than only a marketing discipline.

### **AMA CERTIFICATION CORRELATION**

This project matches professional marketing competencies tested through the American Marketing Association's Professional Certified Marketer (PCM) exam. The exam's eight areas/domains are covered: Ethical issues affecting the marketplace; Strategic marketing; Understanding & Targeting the marketplace; Value creation; Value capture; Value delivery; Marketing communication; and Marketing Evaluation. Through the completion of the marketing plan, the students had exposure to three areas of the exam, as briefly described below.

- “Strategic marketing; Marketing planning”: The MBNQA shows the linkages between a company’s business and that firm’s marketing implementation and impact on the marketplace, and the overall business’ success. It also demonstrates how “customers, the company, competitors, and channel partners” (AMA Professional Certified Marketer Handbook, 2013) influence the marketing of an organization’s performance. The MBNQA also demonstrates to entry-level students how business-to-business (B2B) organizational models segment their markets.
- Much of the MBNQA focus is on value creation, which is one of the AMA certification exam’s domains. Part of that domain is to “describe how firms develop value propositions” as well as various ways in which product, service, and pricing decisions are made and influence business effectiveness.
- Additionally, within the “Marketing Evaluation” aspect of the AMA certification, the significance of metrics is fundamental. This correlates with the MBNQA’s attention to metrics as a requirement to earn the award. To further enhance the students’ education, a separate marketing simulation was also part of the course’s curriculum; that software monitors how the various, distinct marketing mix elements interrelate and impact profitability.

## **ANALYSIS/RECOMMENDATIONS**

In this pedagogic process, students were given an unannounced pre-test, which included a question about the Malcolm Baldrige award, as well as marketing mix, SWOT, and marketing plan questions. The first quiz was at the beginning of the term. The average score earned was 30%. No students could describe the Malcolm Baldrige Award well or sufficiently. During the last, full week of classes, an unannounced, post-quiz (with the same questions as the pre-quiz) was given. The average score was 90%. Furthermore, 65% of the students described the Malcolm Baldrige award above the required standard; another 15% described it to the required standard; 20% could describe it approaching the required standard of performance. All students had knowledge of the award. Therefore, the study’s objective, which was that students would learn about the MBNQA at the same time as gaining knowledge about marketing fundamentals, was attained.

Since a critical approach to marketing is often advocated by professors, and that approach includes “the development within students of a broader appreciation of the macro-level ambiguities of business phenomena... [and] developing improved learning skills in students via experiential...techniques” (Tregar, Kuznesof, Brennan, 2007, p. 412, 413), this curricular change enhanced student development in undergraduate marketing education. Students fully utilized the information in the MBNQA as a springboard for writing their plans. This led to them further researching each organization’s industry trends and constraints in a more powerful way than has been seen in the past when students completed plans for small, regional, usually non-profit organizations. Whereas “Education” is a recipient area for the MBNQA, by extrapolating the criteria in the Award directly into the classroom, the curriculum “delivered ever improving value to customers” [students] (Arif, Smiley, Kulonda, 2005, p. 609). Educational institutions have been challenged to “Teach what market/employers/community demands” (Arif, Smiley, Kulonda, 2005, p. 611). The practicality and prestige of the MBNQA infused into experiential marketing education helps to teach those demands to students in a hands-on approach.

The marketing plans developed during this semester demonstrated a greater understanding of the symbiotic relationship of the macro business variables with marketing results. Furthermore, students had the opportunity to learn in a dynamic setting about business sectors that would not have been viable as sites for plans in this region. Additionally, the prevalence of initial research for the plan gave students confidence as they moved into other research that was new to their education, and so can be daunting in the early stages of the semester. There was less team strife and discord during this project than when students have completed marketing plans for regional businesses; perhaps this is advantageous in an entry-level marketing course. Furthermore, by students knowing that the MBNQA recognizes the

implementation of key marketing knowledge, the relevance of the marketing plan as a classroom endeavor was transparent.

Young (2002) states that concrete experience provides the basis for the learning process and should be designed to engage and motivate the students. According to Kolb (1984, cited in Young; Kayes, Kayes & Kolb, 2005) the concrete experience leads to reflective observation that facilitates abstract conceptualization of the concepts and principles inherent in curriculum. This then leads to concrete experiences by the students. The MBNQA marketing plan assignments fulfilled this curricular design aspect. Through this endeavor, students developed marketable skills, including "critical thinking, communication skills, leadership skills, creativity, problem-solving, task completion skills and the ability to work in teams" (Laverie, 2006). In the future, to further assess the value of this MBNQA-based approach, the classroom may be divided into two sections with one-half of students completing marketing plans for local regional businesses and one-half of the students conducting marketing plans for MBNQA organizations. The pre-and post-assessments will be continued.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The study explores the marketing knowledge development of students in their first marketing course and the MBNQA factors that may contribute to the development of an improved marketing curriculum at the introductory stage. There is a dearth of academic literature on this pedagogical topic. As this is an exploratory study, a chronological structure is implemented (Robson, 2002) to describe students' involvement in the evolution of this process of initiating use of the MBNQA into higher education marketing curriculum. There is a need for this type of study, though, since "faculty are challenged to offer marketing courses with opportunities for students to learn discipline-specific knowledge and practical skills that would be used in the workplace. Content-based active learning can be used in marketing courses to build knowledge and develop skills" (Laverie, 2006). The MBNQA information gives students exposure to an awards system for organizations.

By blending MBNQA information with an action learning marketing plan assignment, students' hands-on implementation of classroom principles was enhanced. The MBNQA marketing plan assignment that this paper discusses offered active learning for entry-level marketing students to experience the intertwining of marketing actions with other business decisions and outcomes. The MBNQA project prepares students for the demands they may face in their future careers and academic endeavors (Bowyer, Ramaswamy, 2005) while increasing their awareness of an important business award. It is believed that this assignment heightened the students' comprehension of the applicability of fundamental marketing concepts to an organization's overall, successful performance.

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