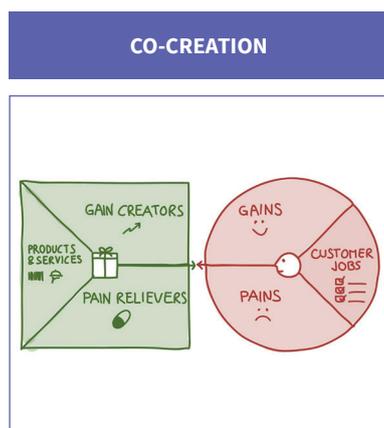


Nanocapsule applications in dermo-cosmetics

Market research as part of the academic course "Strategy Fieldwork"



This case study is the course work of a group of four students done as part of a course called "Strategy Fieldwork" at Aalto University, Department of Industrial Engineering and Management. During the course the group did the project in collaboration with a Nordic consulting company to validate nano-capsules as a skin care product in the current Finnish market. The group conducted a market research in the form of a survey to potential customers and produced a report as well as presented it at the end of the course. In the reports, they summarised the results of the market research and provided recommendations and future considerations for their client company. The case fits the Co-creation scheme as it combines the efforts of University, students and Industry to work on new projects. Strategy-orientated projects emphasise the assessment of market potential in relative established settings, while entrepreneurship-orientated projects emphasise identification of customer value with novel products and in new settings.

Contact

AALTO University

Jingwei Liu, Researcher
jingwei.liu@aalto.fi

www.aalto.fi

Main actors

- Students
- University staff
- Client Company

Process Main Stages

STAGE 1 – COURSE STARTS

The course states its learning outcomes are for the course students will develop skills in the following areas: problem solving, working in groups, writing a business solution report for a company, and presenting ideas and findings in a clear way.

The course starts with lectures to have students informed on the practicalities and expectations of the course. The course instructors also introduce the concepts of qualitative and quantitative interview methods with the expectation that students will use at least one of them. The goal of the course is to conduct a practical project in a group of 3 or 4 students. There were in total four lectures during the first four weeks of the course. The whole course lasts one semester (roughly four months).

STAGE 2 – FORMING GROUPS, FINDING CLIENT

The students were encouraged even before the course started to form groups and start searching for potential client companies. During this stage groups find a company and start communicating to each other their respective expectations on the project in general as well as drafting a project plan. The course instructors also provided guidance sessions at this stage to help the group.

STAGE 3 – WORKING ON THE PROJECT

The group is assigned an opponent group to critically review the assignments (project plan, reports, presentations etc.) they return to the course. The group gets all necessary information from the client company to start mostly working independently on the project. They conduct their work by first reviewing relevant literature in the field of nanocapsule appliances in dermo-cosmetics. Then they decided to conduct preliminary interviews for directional purposes before launching the mass questionnaire to collect both quantitative and qualitative data (232 answers).

STAGE 4 – FINALISING

The group assess their collected data and start working on the report. This is done largely by identifying its different parts and delegating each team member to work on. The different parts include: introduction and background, literature review, the used analytical frameworks, the research strategy, the results

from the surveys and conclusions and recommendations. Then combining these together to make a coherent written report. The group also prepares a final presentation to deliver at the end of the course before presenting to their client company.

Touchpoints & Bottlenecks

TOUCHPOINT 1 – ONLINE INTERACTIONS

The first touchpoint is the online workspace website for all university courses at Aalto University (mycourses.aalto.fi) This platform is used to inform all attendees of a course regarding news and where all of the course materials can be found. The website is fairly easy to use and students are highly familiar with it. However, personal guidance for the group is not done very effectively through merely the website. The group also maintained communication through digital means by using Whatsapp, Google Drive as well as Google Hangouts. Whatsapp and Google Hangouts were used for direct internal communication through text and audio. A Google Drive was set up to document and manage all the work that was done. The group regularly communicated with their client company via e-mail and phone calls.

TOUCHPOINT 2 – PHYSICAL INTERACTIONS

Physical interactions with the course included four lectures, multiple guidance sessions (minimum of three per group over the duration of the course) and one mandatory seminar attendance for each group. Lectures held by course instructors worked as a way to inform in a direct manner regarding what the course demands as well as teach aspects of conducting market research to all course students. Lectures did not require mandatory attendance and students were not motivated enough to attend all lectures. This prompts the question whether the lectures were necessary at all. Guidance sessions were highly effective with groups receiving direct feedback for their work by the course instructors in a one-on-one setting. During seminars groups delivered their final presentations to the rest of the students and received feedback from a chosen opponent group.

The group held weekly meetings to review their own work and define the next steps in their project. The frequent meetings were largely helpful, however due to different time schedules they were difficult to plan. The group set up physical meetings with their contact person from the client company to discuss issues regarding the project at the company office. The group also maintained communication through digital means by using Whatsapp, Google Drive as well as Google Hangouts. Whatsapp and Google Hangouts were used for direct internal communication through text and audio. A Google Drive was set up to document and manage all the work that was done. The group regularly communicated with their client company via e-mail and phone calls.

Success Factors / Barriers

The success factors for this case study were the availability of both course staff and contact person at the client company to assist students

out with needs at the beginning of the project. Their help was crucial in the making of the final report and having results that were actually impactful. The group of four students already knew each other from the same major programme at the university. This proved to be beneficial as they were used to working with each other. Getting over 200 survey answers was quite high for the relative scarce resources they were working with.

The group noted that information regarding the project from the company sometimes came slow. This was due to confidentiality issues that had to be solved beforehand. These could have dragged on and affected the project results negatively, as the group was trying to meet course deadlines before getting the necessary background information from the company. At first finding the client company, for whom they conducted a practical project for, was rather difficult. They could have started working a project sooner had they found one before the eventual one.

Conclusion

These kind of projects should be done in a group of three to five. That way the team stays well glued together while having the benefits of being able to exchange opinions. On another hand, working with a real company on a concrete issue is very helpful for learning actual applicable skills stated in the course's learning outcomes. Letting students find a client themselves is a very good way to practice communication in the business world. This can be a quite valuable learning experience. Personal guidance sessions are very effective in setting direction when students have relative little experience working in a similar environment. Also, set deadlines help guide the work forward. This means having a project plan ready then a first and second draft of the project report and finally the final report delivered.

On the contrary, for the success of these type of project, the university should not give lectures too frequently, the idea is to do something practical, by giving lectures valuable time is taken from students to focus on the actual work.

The client company provided feedback from their side in the form of a signed statement. However, more thorough follow-up on the implementation of the students' recommendations was not conducted. Thus the actual effectiveness of the project is actually difficult to track.

DO

- Arrange student groups of 3-5 members
- Arrange personal guiding sessions
- Set deadlines and have a project plan in advance
- Let students find a client themselves.

DON'T

- Give lectures too frequently

