



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2003

BEHAVIOURAL ASPECTS OF MARKETING

General Comments

The clear pattern is that a majority of those who sat the paper had no command whatsoever of most of the syllabus topics. 66.6% were unable to meaningfully attempt the required 5 questions. Half of those provided an answer for four or less questions and the other half though writing something on five questions, were so wide of the mark in at least one of those answers as to fail to obtain even one mark. Since a well prepared candidate with a command of the syllabus as a whole should have been able (given time) to make a reasonable attempt at all eight questions on the paper, the implication is that two thirds of the candidates arrived in the exam hall without any knowledge at all of at least half the syllabus. That in effect implies that, on average, the absolute maximum mark this group can then achieve should be 50%. Since their command of the remaining material is scant to say the least, it is hardly surprising that the failure rate is so extraordinarily high.

An analysis of the actual answers given to questions revealed that the majority had learned by rote a narrow range of material on topics and then committed this to paper whether relevant or not to the question asked. Even when relevant and correct material was furnished in response to questions asked, it was frequently there amongst a lot of other inappropriate material.

At the other end of the scale a small number of candidates demonstrated a detailed grasp of the syllabus, earning A and B grades in the process.

If any improvement is to be achieved in overall performance on this subject, students will have to be disavowed of the notion that being prepared in a small portion of the syllabus is somehow sufficient to pass. Simply preparing for a few predicted questions is a guarantee of failure. All students must appreciate that their objective is to gain a command of the syllabus as a whole.

Question 1

Passed by 52% of those answering the question. Many of those who failed wrote nothing at all relevant to explaining what an experiment involves. Those who demonstrated relevant knowledge tended to know the purpose of an experiment, and what independent and dependent variables are but were much less likely to explain how variables are controlled in an experiment, how variables are measured reliably and validly and how results are collated and interpreted.

The key to answering this question was to address each of the points, which the question had advised candidates to consider. Thus, it was essential that answers used an example of an experiment to illustrate what is an independent and a dependent variable, how other variables are eliminated as possible causes of the effect shown, how variables are measured in a reliable and valid way and how once the experiment has been conducted the results are put together and interpreted as real or chance outcomes. All of this is explained with the aid of an example on pages 39-42 of the textbook.

Question 2

Passed by 56% of those answering the question. Many candidates had no idea as to what were the perceptual principles of proximity, similarity and closure with answers being based on the everyday meaning of the terms. Even when responses were appropriate they tended to be minimalist with no attempt at elaboration using examples from ordinary life. Appropriate answers to the b) section of this question were in the main limited to a description of one or two visual illusions derived from the text book without any attempt to get across how such illusions show that perception is an active process or what that means. Quite a number of answers described dichotic listening and/or subliminal exposure experiments, neither of which are visual illusions.

The principles of proximity, similarity and closure are explained on pages 88-90 of the textbook. A brief summary of this material was essential to part (a). As regards part (b), the necessary material is covered on pages 90-91. The key issue which needed explanation was that, in a visual illusion, there is a discrepancy between what the eye detects and what the brain understands to be there. If our perceptual processes were not actively trying to interpret or construct the visual world there could be no mismatch between the eye and the brain.

Question 3

Passed by 26% of those answering the question. A high proportion of respondents simply wrote down indiscriminately whatever they happened to know about the general topic of personality without any reference whatsoever to the question asked. This resulted in answer after answer discussing irrelevancies such as Sigmund Freud's theory of personality development, the big 5 personality factors, genetic influences on personality and the difference between idiographic and nomothetic perspectives on personality.

Where material was relevant, more often than not the fact that the question was primarily about Personality and not about learning theory was ignored. Thus, operant and classical conditioning (frequently one but not the other) were explained without any reference to how they contribute to personality development. Frequently, Pavlov's conditioning of a dog to salivate at the sound of a bell or Skinner's conditioning of rats to press a lever to obtain food were described without any reference to how this information relates to personality development.

A good answer should have briefly explained the logic of the behaviourist theory of personality development, i.e. that personality is the sum of learned or habitual responses to ones environment, then gone on to explain the processes of operant and classical conditioning using examples to show how personality habits or traits might be learned or conditioned. Not one answer covered this material satisfactorily. Even the brief coverage offered in the final paragraph of page 222 and the first two paragraphs of page 223 would have constituted an ample response to the question. Better responses would have been expected to draw on the explanations of behaviourism and social learning contained in chapter 4 on Learning.

Question 4

Passed by 45% of those answering the question. The main problem here was a basic lack of knowledge as to how the attitude scales chosen are structured – how are the questions designed and responses obtained. A great deal of confusion among the various scales was in evidence.

Those who showed some clarity about scale design frequently went no further than to give an example of a scale item without any description as to how the scale is put together or how item responses are summed into an overall attitude score. Another common deficiency in answers was giving an example of a response rating scale without any example of the kind of question being responded to.

To answer this question adequately candidates needed, in respect of each of their two chosen options, to firstly, give an example showing how a questionnaire item is constructed. This requires the example to include both the question posed and the manner in which the respondent must answer. Secondly an adequate answer needed to indicate how an overall attitude score is achieved through the use of each scale. More proficient answers might be expected to include a brief reference to challenges/difficulties or risks inherent in using each scale to measure attitudes. All material required for answering this question is contained in pages 239-244 of the textbook.

Question 5

This was not a popular question - passed by 58% of those who attempted it. Those who failed could, in the main, write something about either specialisation of roles or the existence of a hierarchy of management but showed no further grasp of the characteristics that define a bureaucracy. Where, as in this question, five characteristics were sought to be described, a description of one, no matter how adequate could achieve no more than 20% of the marks for the question and a description of two would have to be extremely accurate and thorough to achieve a pass mark.

All the material relevant to this question is included on pages 364-367 of the textbook where seven characteristics of a Bureaucracy are described. With respect to each of the 5 characteristics chosen, candidates were expected to explain in simple understandable terms what they involve – how their presence in an organisation is evidenced – and also to explain how the characteristic benefits the organisation in terms of helping it to achieve its purpose.

Question 6

Passed by 32% of those answering the question. The dominant trend throughout the responses was to provide answers to entirely different questions about groups to that which was on the paper. A great many elaborated on the various types of groups found in organisations, while many others described Tuckman & Jensen's stages of group development or Belbin's team roles but made no reference whatsoever to the question asked. Even those answers that achieved pass marks generally provided minimalist responses, often doing scarcely more than listing the characteristics of a group with little attempt at elaborating on what they mean. Scarcely anyone indicated that the 'common goal' shared by group members must be achievable only through co-operation. With respect to the existence of a communication network among the members, again only a very few candidates indicated that the members must all be *willing* to communicate with each other before they can be regarded as group members.

Though the same trend runs through responses to all questions, the rote-learning of sample passages approach to preparation was particularly evident in this question. Not infrequently when material relevant to the question was indeed present it was to be found along with lots of other irrelevant information. It seems as if many candidates had no idea which aspects of the material about groups they had committed to memory were relevant to the question asked.

This was a question targeted specifically at the section entitled 'What is a Group?', in Chapter 9, Groups and Leadership, (pp 317-319). Contrary to the manner in which most candidates approached the question it simply required them to explain the five basic prerequisites for a group – two or more members, shared communication network, shared sense of identity, shared goals and a group structure. It did not require any explanation of group types, group development processes or group roles other than their mention so as to explain the five characteristics. By this I mean, for example, that a few group roles such as 'leader' or 'peace-maker' might have been mentioned to illustrate what is meant by group structure.

Question 7

Passed by 37% of those answering the question. Again, it is abundantly clear from the answers that most candidates had learned off details about one or two of the eight theories of motivation they should have covered. The most common answer offered related to McGregor's Theory Y, followed by Reinforcement Theory, Mc Clelland's theory, Herzberg's theory and Maslow's. Not infrequently, where Equity Theory was described to some extent, so were one or two other theories as well.

Where answers were relevant, the notion of inputs and outcomes from work tended to be dealt with quite adequately but frequently little attention was given to how others are chosen for comparison purposes and to the implications of the theory for the management of employees in terms of internal and external equity of reward.

Equity theory is amply explained for the purposes of answering this question on pages 299-303 of the textbook. Answers should have indicated that the theory presupposes that employee motivation is based on how good or fair a deal the overall 'work contract' is perceived to be. Answers should have included an explanation of how this deal is evaluated through the estimation of work inputs and outcomes and the comparison of the resulting ratio with others viewed as offering similar inputs. The implications of the various possible comparison results needed to be outlined as did the implications of the theory for employers on how employees might be managed more effectively.

Question 8

Passed by 15% of those answering the question - the poorest performance on the paper. This stands in stark contrast to the May 2002 question on the same topic which was the best answered question on that paper with 72% achieving a pass mark. The contrast is not hard to explain. The vast majority of candidates this year answered last year's question. Most of the material written constituted a description, frequently quite a thorough one, of 'traditional' Irish society with an analysis of how and why this has altered to produce our contemporary 'emergent' culture.

Only a few candidates showed any appreciation of what is meant in sociological terms by an individualist culture, seeming to have ignored pages 398-401 and 428-435 of their textbook. In the main where 'individualist' characteristics of Irish culture were described they emerged

in the context of the description of modern Ireland without any evidence that the writers were aware which aspects denote 'individualism'. Scarcely any candidate attempted to actually *explain* the terms 'Society' and 'Culture' other than to offer some very brief and typically inaccurate definition. Definitions of 'Society' were entirely made up and based on the vernacular use of the term (i.e. synonym for the people or the country) which had been explicitly rejected as inadequate on page 389-90 of the textbook. It was impossible to find any evidence of those pages having been read or their contents appreciated by anyone answering the question.

Had the question that appeared on last Summer's paper been asked again this year, the vast majority of those taking the question would have obtained good marks, once again a stark revelation of how candidates have approached the syllabus.

To effectively answer this question candidates needed to firstly address the terms 'Society' and 'Culture' drawing on the material covered in pages 389-391 of the textbook. Standard definitions of society and culture, though appropriate to include, are insufficient to adequately 'explain' what the terms mean. Society should have been explained in terms of the common institutions which bind a population together into a system of interrelationships with examples of those institutions being offered. Culture required explanation in terms of shared values, beliefs and norms of behaviour, again with examples being offered.

Individualist culture should have been briefly explained with its characteristics identified as per pages 398-399 of the textbook. Then, evidence should have been offered on how Ireland has shifted in recent decades towards this model of society, taking on those cultural attributes in the context of family structure, work, pattern of social relations, decline of organised religion, undermining of traditional sources of authority and the increase in self-destructive behaviour. Many candidates seemed to be amply aware of those characteristics in modern Irish society but were largely unable to relate such relevant information as they possessed to the issue of individualism as a cultural construct – presumably because they had not studied or did not understand this concept despite its prominence in Chapter 11.