



SWP 43/91 "THE CHANGING FACE OF MARKETING"

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The Changing Face of Marketing

by

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Abstract

This paper explains why there is such a huge gap between the theory of marketing as taught in universities and colleges and what actually happens in the real world.

It provides evidence that the gap exists, then looks at some of the reasons, including: the teachers and the taught; technical problems relating to techniques; problems relating to technique interrelationships; organisational culture; marketing terminology; organisational problems; and lack of relevant information and intelligence.

The paper concludes that attitudes are slowly but surely changing towards marketing, largely as a result of the traumatic market conditions of the past two years, which have forced many well-known companies out of business. Those remaining are beginning to take a more serious, if cautious, look at marketing again.

The marketing director will begin to move centre stage during the 1990s, but he will need to change his ways drastically if marketing is ever to fulfil its promise.

This, in turn, will bring new challenges for marketing teachers, so advice is given to the teaching community on how to cope with the exciting times that lay ahead.

The Changing Face of Marketing

An Introduction to the nature of the problem

Most foundation courses in Marketing cover at least the following basic frameworks:

- The Ansoff Matrix
- Gap Analysis
- Product Life Cycle Analysis
- Product Portfolio Management
- The Diffusion of Innovation
- Marketing Research and Marketing Information Systems
- Marketing Planning

Additionally, a host of techniques revolve around the four basic elements of the marketing mix, Product, Price, Place and Promotion, whilst even a cursory glance through Phillip Kotler's standard Marketing Management text reveals a vast and complex armoury of concepts, tools and techniques that can be used by marketing practitioners to gain a sustainable competitive advantage for their products or services.

During the past four decades, each one has been the focus of numerous academic and practitioner papers, which have sought to explain their complexities and to persuade managers to adopt them as part of the process of marketing management. On the one hand, there have been several attempts to develop theories and models to explain, rationalise and justify

complex phenomena in large, industrial companies. On the other hand, there has been a continuous stream of iconoclasts, who have sought to explain the same phenomena using a more simplistic and commonsense approach.

It is observable that, for a period, each school has its devotees, many of whom denounce or drop all the earlier received wisdom, as they attempt to force their problems into the latest answer. When the latest fad fails to live up to expectations, it too begins to fade into obscurity, *except at management education establishments, where it becomes absorbed into the standard fabric of teaching.*

There are, however, a number of problems with this somewhat simplistic explanation of the product life cycle effect on each of the tools and techniques of marketing, which are not explained simply on the basis of fadism. A paper by McDonald (1990) began to explore why the gap between theory and practice is greater in marketing than in any other management discipline. It concluded that the reasons revolve firstly around methodological problems associated with the actual tools and techniques themselves, and secondly with the complexity of trying to link a number of them together.

The purpose of this paper is to build on this beginning and to explore in greater detail these and other reasons for this gap between theory and practice in the domain of marketing.

Evidence that marketing theory is not generally practised

Let us, however, briefly revisit the gap referred to above, just to be sure that the subject merits further exploration.

A study by Greenly (1987) of seven empirically-based studies into the marketing planning practices of commercial organisations, revealed that around eighty per cent virtually ignored the substantial theory surrounding marketing planning, relying instead on extrapolative techniques and financial husbandry. In very few cases was it possible to find any of the more substantive techniques taught on most marketing courses.

Nor is this just a European phenomenon. A conclusion from the MSI Expert System project, ADCAD (Rangaswany 1988), was that although American companies would actually like to make use of existing theoretical knowledge of marketing, few actually did.

The most recent study on the topic by Reid, D.M. and Hinkley, L.C. (1989) concluded:

"Respondents were asked which techniques they were familiar with. The results were skewed towards ignorance of all the techniques to which they were exposed. The majority were not at all familiar with any by name. The level of awareness of the techniques was not significantly different between Hong Kong and the UK."

The specific techniques which were the focus of the study included: BCG; Directional Policy Matrix; Ansoff Matrix; PIMS; Experience Curve.

Similar findings have also emerged from Australia. McColl-Kennedy (1989) concluded:

"The awareness and usage level of planning tools is low."

A survey conducted by the author among five hundred practising managers from a cross-section of European organisations, revealed that only ten per cent use any of the more commonly-taught techniques such as product life cycle analysis.

All of this seems to confirm research carried out by the British Chartered Institute of Marketing (McBurnie 1989) which concluded:

"Some two thirds of British companies did not have clearly defined market strategies and did not use basic marketing disciplines."

There is, then, a substantial gap between what is taught and written about so profusely, and what actually happens in the world of business. So serious is this gap, however, that any reasonable person would begin to question the very relevance of marketing itself. At the very least, however, it should cause academics to question what they are doing and why.

The remainder of this paper explores some of the reasons why marketing isn't practised the way it is taught. In particular, after a brief discussion of teaching, it progresses into a consideration of other factors which contribute to the gap.

The Teachers and the Taught

A common theme running through the substantial literature on the growing concern about the appropriateness of the positivistic science paradigm for understanding the process of management, is that much of management deals with judgement, diagnosis and interpretation of events, which requires a different kind of knowing from logic and rationality (Hughes 1988). Indeed, Donald Schon (1984) argues that much of what passes for scientific management is irrelevant, because business problems do not come well formed. Certainly, most marketing problems are messy and indeterminate and successful practitioners make judgements using criteria which are difficult to define. Schon's thesis that many academics decry this lack of rigour, and in so doing, exclude as non-rigorous much of what successful practitioners actually do, deserves more serious consideration.

Most people would acknowledge that in virtually any walk of life, the true expert has built up his expertise largely from experience and an intuitive grasp of problem-solving in

the real world. Indeed, many of the world's leading business people acknowledge that they owe their success not to formal business education and text books, but to their own experience, flair and intuitive good judgement.

This does not mean, however, that the teaching of marketing theory is pointless, and few would agree with the conclusion reached by John Hughes (op cit), in his wide-ranging review of the teaching of management education:

"The mistake we have made in teaching during the past 40 years, has been to follow the logic approach to the physical sciences in teaching theory first, followed by an assumed application in practice ... The bridge from theory to practice is too hard to cross without some prior experience of the 'other side'."

This view is much too simplistic. On the one hand, few would disagree with Hughes that learning by doing and feedback on performance, can be more valuable than theoretical knowledge on its own. On the other hand, neither would many disagree with the view that theory and knowledge have a valuable part to play in helping managers to interpret, illuminate and illustrate their experience, and there can, of course, be value in teaching marketing at school and at undergraduate level and to those who lack any kind of commercial experience. This is because, in structuring problems, the ability to think conceptually as a precursor to action, is acknowledged as a key attribute in successful management. Indeed, it is the concepts,

have been developed as a result of the observation of successful practice, that form the basis of most of what is taught on marketing courses around the world, so no harm can come from teaching these concepts, irrespective of the level of experience of the "student". For a more in depth treatment of this topic, see McDonald (1991).

There is, however, a serious caveat to this, which this paper will deal with next.

Technical reasons militating against the practice of marketing theory

Another key influence on the application of marketing theory is the problem of understanding at a purely technical level how a particular tool or technique can be operationalised. Indeed, if we take a look at some of the more important marketing structures, we will observe a number of problems of varying degrees of complexity.

The product life cycle is a case in point. There is clearly a difference between a product life cycle and a brand life cycle (Doyle 1989). It is also pointless for a firm to draw a product life cycle of one of its own products without also drawing a life cycle at least of the product class to which it belongs. But the question of how to define the product class (market) to which it belongs is fraught with difficulties. Furthermore, the linkage between the product

life cycle and the diffusion of innovation curve needs to be properly understood.

Failure to understand basic points such as these and others has destined p.l.c. analysis to be a topic of interest solely to interested academics. In the world of business, it lies largely dormant.

Another well known, under-utilised and misunderstood tool taught by marketing academics is the directional policy matrix (McDonald 1989). For example, the criteria for the vertical axis (market attractiveness) can only be determined once the population of "markets" has been specified. Once determined, those criteria cannot be changed during the exercise. Another common mistake is to misunderstand that unless the exercise is carried out twice - once for t_0 and once for $t+3$, - the circles cannot move vertically. Also, the criteria have to change for every "market" assessed on the horizontal axis each time a company's strength in market is assessed. Some way has also to be found of quantifying the horizontal axis to prevent every market appearing in the left hand box of the matrix. If we add to this just some of the further complexities involved, such as the need to take the square root of the volume or value to determine circle size, the need to understand that the term "attractiveness" has more to do with future potential than with any externally derived criteria, and so on, we begin to understand why practising managers rarely use the device. Indeed, one cannot help wondering whether academics

themselves have sufficient understanding of the technique to be able to teach it competently.

Even Michael Porter's apparently more easily-assimilated matrix describing the relationship between relative costs and degree of marketing differentiation has become the latest victim of misunderstanding and abuse through ignorance (Speed 1989).

The main problem, however, is not just that virtually every tool and technique of marketing is open to serious misunderstanding and abuse, but that no one method by itself can deliver the kind of benefits demanded by practising managers. Most academics would readily acknowledge the singular contribution to diagnosis that can be made by each device, irrespective of whether it is from the iconoclastic school or the more rigorous academic school. For example, whilst it is easy (and tempting) to dismiss most of what Tom Peters says (largely because of its lack of rigour), few would deny his contribution to marketing by dint of the attention he focussed on the need to service the needs of our customers effectively. Likewise, anyone who tries to run their company just on the basis of what Michael Porter says, soon discovers the inherent inadequacies of the *nostra*, just as those did who worshipped at the alter of Bruce Henderson and the Boston Consulting Group in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Yet few would deny the abiding relevance to business in the 1990s of what all these great writers, researchers and teachers had to offer.

To summarise, not only are most of the tools and techniques themselves inherently complex (and therefore misunderstood and misused), but no one tool on its own is adequate in dealing with the complexity of marketing.

Problems of Technique Interrelationships

There is, then clearly a need to be able to use a number of these tools and techniques in problem-solving, especially when a process as complex as strategic marketing planning is concerned. This raises an additional dimension of complexity for both academics and practising managers, for it then becomes necessary to understand not only the techniques themselves, but the nature of the interrelationships between them, how inputs for one model can also be used for another and how outputs from some models can also be used as inputs to others.

The problem is that the human mind just isn't capable of dealing adequately with such complexity. This view has gradually emerged as a result of working on a computer-based Expert System for Strategic Marketing Planning (McDonald 1989) and is confirmed by a number of researchers, including most recently Lock and Hughes. (1989)

McDonald's paper (op cit) outlined how these marketing techniques can be linked together to become more powerful and made reference to the likely development of expert systems during the 1990s to help marketers cope with these interrelationships.

Apart from these, however, there are a number of other, mainly contextual, factors which mitigate against marketing theory being used in practice.

How organisational culture can also prevent marketing theory from working in practice.

Leppard, J (1987) concluded that a number of organisational barriers exist which prevent marketing as taught in educational establishments being implemented. Cultural and Behavioural factors were found to be key influences on marketing practice.

Definitions of corporate culture vary and depend on the researcher's own views. So, for example, culture can be "observable behaviour regularities", "language", "a philosophy", "rules of the game for getting accepted", "physical layout", "ways by which the organisation relates to outsiders", and so on. A definition by Schein (1985) has been chosen here: *"A pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaption and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and,*

therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to these problems."

This definition underlines the complexity and breadth of the concept of corporate culture. Also, it suggests that cultures are by and large backward looking and conservative, in the sense that they are based in successful coping strategies which worked in the past.

Whilst is it not the purpose of this paper to review the awesome body of research into corporate culture, there are, nonetheless, some important landmarks which throw some light on the question of how corporate culture affects the application of marketing in practice. It is worth mentioning briefly that many researchers, such as Lievegoed (1973), Greiner (1972) and Normann (1977), observe that, as a company grows and learns to cope with new problems associated with its increased size and success, it also changes its character. Much of this work criticized the earlier thinking of the organisational structuralists and eventually led to the incrementalism school of thought, with its notion of strategic drift. Here, the argument is that not all organisations manage to respond to environmental changes and make only incremental adjustments to their strategy. For such companies, the incrementally adjusted strategic changes have not kept pace with changes in the market, and the phenomenon of "strategic drift" sets in.

The reasons for strategic drift are put down to a number of factors, which include the following:

1. The sensing of external changes is muted because the operational "paradigm" of the organisation (ie, the way it sees itself and believes it relates to, and controls, its environment), does not give them due importance;
2. Managers believe they are adapting to change, whereas in fact they are only adjusting to those signals that give confirmation to the existing paradigm.
3. There is political pressure to resist deviant information from outside if it threatens the "sense" of the existing paradigm;
4. Strategic drift will not easily be discussed by the managers, since they will prefer to talk about temporary aberrations in the environment, which they assume will pass;
5. Some strategic adjustment, however small, may be enough to satisfy the stakeholders, and there is a good change that it will lead to some short term improvement.

The important conclusions to be drawn from this and from a number of other academic references to organisational change and corporate culture are:

1. A company's history has a significant impact on its culture and so influences many of the decisions which are made;
2. A company's learning is inextricably tied up with its history, as a result of things that have worked, or problems that have been overcome in the past;
3. Senior executives are the "culture carriers" and as such can either reinforce or work to change the existing culture;
4. Organisational myths and heroes sustain the culture and with it the existing political power structure;
5. Culture only has to be "sensible" to those who operate within the company. It doesn't necessarily have to be rational or congruent with the current business environment;
6. The more deeply a culture is embedded, the more difficult it is to change.

Thus, corporate cultures can, at their worst, be anti-developmental, since they are backward-looking and seek to preserve political power structures. The point is that in many of these cultural climates, it is highly unlikely that marketing departments will have any significant marketing

"clout". Many of such departments are unlikely to have much influence on organisational life in general, will tend to have fairly low profile people, and the result will tend to be largely ineffective in its operational impact. Even in cases, however, where higher profile and more skilful marketers are recruited to the marketing department, where the cultural context is anti-marketing, the rational behaviour of the marketers is likely to be rejected by the power brokers, who will inevitably see such rationality as conflicting with the organisation's learned behaviour, or culture.

So, how does this work in practice? Salaman (1990), gives some useful clues in this respect. Let us take the example of the company that suddenly decides that it would be helpful if its managers were more creative in their thinking and more innovative in their behaviour. To help make the change, a marketing course is arranged on the subject, and senior managers are taken from their busy jobs and set in a training environment. From this point on, there is clearly a serious disjuncture between the course content and their strictly hierarchical organisational structure, deliberately designed to minimise lower level initiative, its bureaucratic over-instance on procedures and a reward system which positively encourages compliance and subservience. Since the whole excitement of marketing creativity and the associated tools and techniques designed to be used for this purpose are in stark contrast to such organisational norms and values, the course participants would clearly be foolish

to take on board a mode of behaviour which is not rewarded and valued, and indeed they don't.

Likewise, as organisations are essentially political structures, in which groups of people acquire, wield and aggressively defend power in highly specialised groups, or departments, it is unlikely that another, probably newer, marketing department, would have much influence or sway over the company's strategy. Accountants are unlikely to publicise the irrelevancy of much of the information produced by their systems. IT Departments are unlikely to admit that they have contributed absolutely nothing to the customer's or to the company's prosperity. Personnel are hardly likely to admit to failing to respond effectively to the company's changed environment. Nor are production people likely to admit that their pre-occupation with MRP 2, Right-first-Time, Just-in-Time programmes, and the like, often have little to do with anything that is of relevance to the customer.

The result of all this is that organisations build up a resistance to the marketing concept by dint of their sectionalisation. "Marketing" becomes a political process, which is rejected by sectional interests striving to retain their power bases. Hence, new procedures, structures and frameworks introduced by marketers designed to deliver greater customer satisfaction, are viewed as political processes which are likely to weaken sectional interests and power bases and are, therefore, rejected.

An example of this is the introduction of marketing planning procedures involving the formalisation of data and information initiated by managers in a central marketing department. Resistance has got very little to do with rationality. Resistance is based on the subsidiary's conviction that such procedures hand power and control to the marketing department. The marketing department is perceived as having their own agenda, their own power-seeking goals, and their own values, all of which is to do with spreading marketing influence and power and reducing their own priorities and values. The result is that such procedures are rejected as being irrelevant, and a "battle" starts, in which sectional interests are preserved, priorities protected, departmental culture defended, goals justified and budgets and priorities fought for, all of this being related much more closely to departmental objectives than to the interests of the customer. All new initiatives, therefore, and especially marketing initiatives, are viewed as a weakening of the traditional power base.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the pristine concepts, tools and techniques of marketing taught on marketing courses and written about so profusely in books, take a back seat in such an organisational milieu and are rarely used.

Other problems hindering the application of marketing theory

There are yet more problems which often go hand-in-hand with those mentioned above in preventing the application of marketing theory. These will be briefly summarised next.

i) TERMINOLOGY

Research into the murky depths of organisational behaviour in relation to marketing has shown that confusion reigns supreme, and nowhere more than in the terminology of marketing (McDonald 1984). Even terms, such as "corporate strategies", "corporate objectives", "marketing objectives", "marketing strategies", "tactics", "market share" and the like, fail to elicit even remotely common definitions from the marketing community.

ii) THE LOCATION OF THE MARKETING DEPARTMENT

Yet another problem concerns where marketing is located within organisations. One of the most common causes of the failure of marketing planning is the belief that marketing is something that marketing people "do" in their office. The appointment of a marketing "supremo" is often a last-ditch attempt to put things right when all else has failed. The trouble is, the new person, irrespective of his knowledge and skills, soon finds that all the power is vested in others, particularly for product development (the technical people), customer service (the distribution department), and

selling (the sales director). This leaves a few inconsequential bits of the promotional mix for the new person to play around with. Hence, the new executive is powerless to influence anything of significance, and quickly fails. Line managers look on the new department with disdain, yet are quick to blame it when things continue to go wrong.

This has a lot to do with the general misunderstanding about the real meaning of marketing. Without a corporate driving force centred around a culture of customer satisfaction, arguments about where to place the marketing department are, of course, pointless. But even when it begins to dawn on the organisation that they need to take more account of customer needs in planning their future, there are still major confusions concerning organisational form. For example, how should a diversified multinational company organise itself to deal with, say, the automotive industry, or major players within that industry? There are many possible models, none of which will totally solve the problem.

For example, how should a hypothetical company operating in paints, fibres, colours, films and thermoplastics, organise itself to deal with the automotive industry? The problem is compounded when it is considered that each of these Strategic Business Units also deals with a dozen or more other industries,

each one of which requires a high degree of technological and marketing focus. No matter how one tries, the realisation finally dawns that the academic world has not even begun to research such complex issues, many of which have been brought to light by the approach of "1992".

Given structural problems of such magnitude, the role and influence of a comparatively new marketing department pales into insignificance, especially if its members have little power or influence.

Nonetheless, as a general principle, it can be stated with some confidence that marketing should be placed as close as possible to the customer. Also, that, where practicable, marketing and sales should report to the same person. Finally, company activities should be organised around customer groups, rather than around functional activities. If marketing is happening in such market-based SBUs, corporate marketing at least has a chance of succeeding.

iii) LACK OF IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

Even if we assume that most companies actually know what they want to measure, there is frequently a massive disjuncture between the objectives set in the marketing plan and what is actually measured by the system, which is usually transaction-based and set up by accountants, for accountants, particularly in

respect of the annual accounts. Variance analysis on market size growth, market share growth, price, and the like, rarely appear.

Even worse, most systems measure product profitability, when all marketers know that it is customers who actually make profit for us. For example, a customer who requires just-in-time delivery to all outlets, daily sales calls for the purpose of merchandising, promotional support and who takes one hundred days to pay his account, needs a different approach from one who takes the same quantity, but centrally delivered to a warehouse, no sales calls, no merchandising, and who pays his account in forty five days. None of these critical facts are picked up in a system that measures only product profitability, so it is not surprising that many of the marketing decisions that are made on the basis of inadequate analysis are just wrong.

The methodology for developing marketing intelligence systems has been comprehensively covered in the literature during the past twenty years, yet it is clear that, even in 1991, British industry still has a long way to go just to get the basics right.

Conclusion. The Future of Marketing

This paper has attempted to explain why there is such a huge gap between the theory of marketing as taught in universities and what actually happens in the real world.

In doing so, many criticisms were levelled at the current state of affairs, and some suggestions were put forward about how some of these barriers can be overcome.

The author has little doubt that attitudes in industry are slowly but surely changing towards marketing, largely as a result of the traumatic market conditions of the past two years, which have forced many well-known companies out of business. Those remaining are beginning to take a cautious look at marketing once again.

In future, however, the new breed of marketing director will play a central role in steering the organisation towards the most promising fields. The role of the marketing director has gradually changed from being a dispenser of largesse to grateful consumers to that of a fighter for the consumer's attention. Somewhere along the line, however, the battles for the hearts and minds of his own financial, technical and production people in the difficult process of gaining a sustainable competitive advantage have been lost, and he has often ended up on his own - misunderstood, pilloried and eventually dismissed.

The 90s, however, will see the emergence of the marketing director to the central, starring role. But he will need to change his ways.

Gone are the days when senior company personnel could afford to confuse marketing with sales, product management, advertising, and market research. There are still a lot of these characters around, of course, but they will not get very far during the 1990s. The danger of confusing marketing with the American "Have a nice day" syndrome, will soon pass, as companies come to realise that they have to get all the elements of the offer right to succeed.

People still look incredulously towards the Japanese, even though it is obvious that all they have ever done is to provide value for money by getting all the elements of the offer right, and that everyone in the organisation understands that their success depends on customer satisfaction.

The marketing director of the 1990s, therefore, will have to be a person of both stature and intellect, with appropriate professional marketing training, not a reject from other functions.

Marketing is increasingly about focus and concentration. This means an on-going dialogue with specific groups of customers, whose needs we must understand in depth, and for whom better offers are developed than those of competitors.

A marketing man or woman should only shout when there is something to shout about.

The Marketing Director will play a central role in directing the organisation's strengths towards the most promising opportunities.

He will also have to understand the real meaning of profit, rather than the very narrow financial definition imposed on organisations by accountants. Return on sales, cash flow, net present values, return on investment, asset turnover, and the like, can be disastrous if applied equally to everything that moves in an organisation, so he will have to have a deep understanding of the significance of portfolios of products and markets and the different policies that emanate from them.

The Marketing Director will also have to understand the real meaning of intangible assets. Companies are only beginning to realise that much of what appears on their balance sheets is rubbish and that it is brand names, and relationships with customers that make profits, not factories and tangible assets.

Also the Marketing Director will have to learn to think strategically rather than being a tactical marketing technician, the preferred mode to date. He will have to learn how to use the principal marketing planning tools to

help him create a sustainable competitive advantage and to develop "global fortresses" for his main products.

He must overcome the entrenched tribal mentality endemic in organisation charts, most of which is alien to the notion of satisfying customer need. In doing so, he will have to redefine his strategic business units around customers rather than around products, functions, or geography.

The Marketing Director will also need to get a much better handle on marketing information about the principal determinants of commercial success (ie. the business environment, the market, competitors, and himself). In doing so, he will need to understand better what information technology can do for him. For example, the leaders will surely be developing Expert Marketing Systems (EMS) so that the best marketing expertise in the company can be applied by all executives anywhere in the world, rather than being hoarded inside the heads of a few gifted individuals.

He will need to think globally. This will entail developing the right skills in all executives involved in marketing, developing the systems to focus on the right issues, and being able to aggregate and synthesise what is fed into global strategies. He will then need to ensure correct priority of objectives and resource allocation. He will also need to recruit properly qualified chartered marketers (the Institute of Marketing is now Chartered).

Last, he will have to improve dramatically his communication and political skills. General Management skills will also be important, and it is unlikely that anyone not educated to at least MBA standard will succeed.

If all of this is to come to pass, it can be seen that there will be an increasingly major role to be played by marketing teachers. In the UK, we have more than our fair share of world-class educators, as well as a solid base of rising stars.

The author's advice to those who will continue to take the brunt of the marketing education workload in the future is:

- acquire a totally sound theoretical knowledge base in marketing
- try to have an even greater in-depth knowledge of certain aspects of marketing
- acquire a thorough understanding of other disciplines and where marketing "fits in"
- use and develop innovative teaching/learning methods
- get the teaching balance right between knowledge, skills, and attitudes
- don't believe the saying, "Those who can, do. Those who can't teach". Teaching is a wholly professional job requiring finely-honed skills. You don't need to be a millionaire to be a successful marketing teacher
- above all, persevere in what will increasingly be a challenging and rewarding profession.

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