**Building Student Critical Thinking, Writing and Presentation Skills:**

**A “Request for Proposal” Experiential Exercise**

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**Abstract**

Effective writing and presentation skills are critical for management students’ transition to industry and their continued organizational success. Underlying these essential communication skills is critical thinking whereby students assess situations, test assumptions and make compelling fact supported arguments that address important business conflicts, problems and opportunities. Unfortunately, many students lack these skills and management curricula often don’t provide adequate opportunities for skill development. The experiential exercise reported in this paper was developed to help students build the skills required to become more competent in the business environment. The students must respond to an organization’s formal request for a proposal (RFP). The organization’s request is provided to students, who then form small groups, and compete for the contract with oral presentations and written proposals. The winning proposal is selected using a grading rubric that is made available to students at the start of the exercise. The rubric contains behavioral anchored rating scales for written presentation and critical thinking skills. Specific directions and a teaching guide for the exercise are offered.

Key words: critical thinking, writing, presentation skills.

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**Introduction**

Effective writing and presentation skills are critical for management students’ transition into business and their continued organizational success (Flores, Matkin, Burbach, Quinn, & Harding, 2012; Braun, 2004; Giroux, 2002). Anderson and Anderson (2010) stated that presentation skills are important for students to acquire during their management education, but that professors often don’t model effective presentation skills. Compounding this skill deficiency, many management students, particularly accounting students, have oral presentation apprehension (Siriwardane, Low & Blietz, 2015; Kerby & Romine, 2010; Faris, Golen, & Lynch, 1999). Oral communication skills involve presenting, conversing and listening components, and some business school curricula do not adequately address these essential skills resulting in a misalignment between business education and the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business goals for students (Brink & Costigan, 2015).

Critical thinking skills underlie written and oral presentation skills (Palomino & Paula, 2011). Critical thinking involves “uncovering the assumptions that lie behind ideas and action and then assessing those assumptions for their appropriateness” (Errington & Bubna-Litic, 2015, 775; Brookfield, 2012). Critical thinking also includes making fact based and compelling arguments. Students must make compelling fact supported arguments that address important business conflicts, problems and opportunities. Critical thinking has long been a goal of management education (Lovelace, Eggers & Dyck, 2016; Rousseau & McCarthy, 2007). Palomino and Paula (2011) proposed that student written and oral presentation skills are often deficient, and that management students with inadequate critical thinking skills also have poor written skills that must be improved to become effective leaders. Prandini, Petronella, & Barthelmess (2012) propose that management education offer more opportunities to develop such skills using case studies and class projects (e.g., developing business plans for startup companies and developing market entry strategies).

This paper offers an experiential exercise that requires students to respond to an organization’s “request for proposal” (RFP); that is, a formal bidding solicitation whereby an organization invites proposals that address specific issue(s), proposal requirements, and evaluation criteria that will be used to select the winning bid. The RFP contains a description of the organization’s problem and students work in small groups and write and present proposals (bids). Each group competes for the contract, and the winning proposal is selected by the instructor using a grading rubric that is made available to students at the beginning of the exercise. The rubric contains behavioral anchored rating scales for writing, presentation and critical thinking skills. As all students need written, oral presentation and critical thinking skills, the exercise is applicable for all management disciplines; however, discipline specific variations are noted when applicable below. Specific exercise directions and a teaching guide is offered below and in the appendix.

**“Request for Proposal” (RFP) Exercise Overview**

The RFP is a semester long group project that challenges students to demonstrate oral, written, critical thinking and teamwork skills. This exercise accounts for a substantial percentage of the course grade (e.g., 30-50%) in the undergraduate or graduate level management course. Students are expected to take a systemic approach to the issues in the organization and propose solutions that incorporate multiple stakeholder perspectives. The specific learning goals of the RFP exercise are for students to demonstrate creativity, effective critical thinking, oral presentation, and writing skills.

The RFP exercise contains five steps: 1) exercise introduction and expectations, 2) group formation, 3) group work, 4) group presentations and feedback, 5) written proposal submissions and feedback. Each step is explained below with teaching notes and suggested time allotments (parentheses).

**How is the RFP exercise different from other exercises?**

The RFP exercise differs from many experiential exercises in that it occurs over an entire semester or quarter. It is the author’s experience that students do not diligently work on the project until the midterm exam is completed (much like many semester long projects such as term papers). Even given this observation, the exercise remains longer in duration than many single class experiences. On the other hand, this longer duration offers more opportunities for students to demonstrate and improve critical thinking, research, presentation, and teamwork skills. As each group is in competition for the “contract”, students must creatively differentiate their approach from other groups, maximize teamwork to achieve synergy, and demonstrate critical thinking as they provide support of arguments made in their proposals.

The competitive nature of bidding for a contract introduces a unique and realistic element to the RFP exercise. Undergraduate curriculums seldom afford students with opportunities to competitively bid for open contracts. Competitive bidding is itself a valuable skill as graduates may be asked to bid and justify initiatives internal as well as externally (e.g. as internal or external consultants).

A RFP timeline and step by step instructions are offered next.

**RFP Timeline: Overview**

As mentioned previously, the RFP exercise occurs over a full semester or quarter. While the instructor may vary the duration of the project, a general timeline appears below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Step** | **Time** | **Activity** |
| 1 | 1 hour | Exercise introduction and expectations |
| 2 | 20 minutes | Group formation |
| 3 | approximately 12 hours over 1 month | Group work: research, presentation and written proposal |
| 4 | 15-30 minutes each | Group presentations and feedback |
| 5 | Varies | Written proposal submissions and feedback |

**Step 1: Exercise introduction and expectations (1 hour)**

Early in the course, students are provided a RFP that presents the organization, its problems or opportunities, and specific expectations. The students are given the due date for the student class presentation and written, as well as the final written report format requirements. The RFP is preferably based on a real organization experiencing a real issue. An example RFP is offered in Appendix A. This RFP is based on the Volkswagen emissions cheating scandal and projected employee layoffs to increase productivity (Boudette, 2016; Ewing, 2016). While much of the article focuses on Volkswagen dealers, the RFP requires that students address the retention and motivation issues that are likely experienced by Volkswagen employees. This RFP was used in undergraduate and graduate organizational behavior courses in the United States and in Europe. Other management disciplines can use organizations and issues that are more subject matter appropriate. For example, Sales and Marketing can use the recent issues experienced by Wells Fargo where sales representatives committed fraud in order to meet unrealistic sales’ goals (Corkery & Cowley, 2016).

*Teaching Notes*

The Volkswagen RFP should be assigned as pre-reading for the introductory class session (step 1). The instructor should emphasize that groups, once formed, will compete for the Volkswagen contract. The faculty member needs to clarify all expectations as outlined in the RFP, including due dates, presentation and written formats, and especially the RFP grading rubric (also included in Appendix A). The instructor should explain the grading rubric in detail, as this is how “Volkswagen Management” (i.e., the instructor) will grade the proposals and select the winning bid. The presentation time limitation is, in part, determined by the class size and number of groups (see “Step 2: Group formation below). The instructor may wish to place a page limit on the written proposal in order to encourage concise and compelling business writing. The Volkswagen RFP has a six page limit, but the page limitation, if any, is at the discretion of the instructor.

Instructors should be prepared to respond to questions related to the student presentation (step 4). Students may ask “how long does the presentation have to be?” (Answer: “as long as you feel is necessary to clearly present the main findings, but no longer than the stated time limit. In business, you may have a small amount of time during meetings to make your case”). Another likely question is “do all group members need to present?” (Answer: “no, depending on which group members need practice making presentations and desire feedback. Remember that you want to win the contract but also want to develop valued skills”). Instructors should emphasize that presenters are expected to support their proposed actions with facts and supporting evidence and respond to audience questions in a direct and compelling fashion (e.g., demonstrate critical thinking).

**Step 2: Group formation (20 minutes)**

Group sizes can range from 4-6 students. More than 6 students invites “free riders” who are comfortable letting others do all the work with little effort of their own, but there is more work than less than 3 students can handle. This 4-6 group size also affords students an opportunity to practice team skills learned in other courses. Instructors can use any method of team formation they feel is appropriate, but should allow for student input and should monitor the participation of all the group members.

*Teaching Notes*

To increase teambuilding skills, the instructor should encourage students to work with individuals that they haven’t worked with in previous class assignments. Working with “the same students” project after project does not provide additional teambuilding practice nor increase the students’ network. The instructor, at his or her discretion, can provide a brief teambuilding session (e.g., how to write team charters). Excellent sources for writing team charters are abundant (e.g., Eyre, 2016).

**Step 3: Group work (approximately 12 hours over 1 month)**

Once formed, student groups should begin planning and building their proposal and presentation. To guide their efforts, the instructor should periodically remind students about the proposal requirements (e.g., format), presentation time limit, and most importantly, the grading rubrics. Appendix A contains separate rubrics for the oral presentation and the written proposal.

*Teaching Note*

The instructor can devote 30 minutes per week in class for a “process check”. During that time, the instructor can assess how well the groups are progressing on the stated objectives and the proposals. Sample questions the instructor may ask include “how are the proposals going, what issues does your group face, if any, and how would you rate your proposal on the grading rubric so far?” The instructor can then offer specific feedback and suggestions contingent on students’ responses and follow up probes. Of course, instructors can expect to meet with groups or students individually during office hours, especially when teamwork issues arise (e.g., free riders).

**Step 4: Group presentations and feedback (15-30 minutes each)**

Instructors introduce the presentation step of the exercise by setting the following ground rules: 1. Students should listen closely to each presentation as if they are the Volkswagen (or other selected organization) management team that will select the winning bid, 2. As audience members, students should ask questions, challenge assumptions, ask for supporting evidence (e.g., demonstrate critical thinking), and 3. in the interest of fairness, groups should adhere to the time limits set in advance. This brief introduction should take only about 15 minutes.

*Teaching Notes*

Group class presentations may range from 15-30 minutes, depending on class size and time available. Students may use any presentation techniques that they believe will best present their recommendations in a compelling and engaging fashion. In past presentations, students have used PowerPoint or Prezi slides, videos, handouts, and role plays. Students should be encouraged to engage the audience as much as possible.

Instructors should role model asking critical thinking questions, especially during and after the first presentation if students don’t ask questions. Instructors can test assumptions made by students during the presentation (e.g., “you recommended that all employees attend training, but do some employees already have the skills and therefore do not need to be trained?”), and ask critical thinking questions (e.g., “you proposed that compensation practices be better communicated to employees. What facts support this proposed action?”). As asking and responding to questions are valuable communication skills, the instructor must then encourage students to take responsibility for asking the presenters’ questions.

As presentation skills are important to their future organizational success, students should be prepared to receive feedback on both content and presentation effectiveness. Appendix A contains a Presentation Rubric for feedback purposes. In order to provide meaningful presentation feedback to students, instructors should take detailed notes during each presentation related to both the content and the presentation skills demonstrated. Typical presentation feedback includes the content value (relevancy and added value beyond that already addressed in class and readings), the extent that students collaborated, and the degree of organization. The instructor should also provide feedback on presenter behaviors, including eye contact with the audience, seamless transitions between group members and the use of slides that serve as supplements to the presenters rather than being the focal point (e.g., as when students display and read very detailed slides). For more detail, an oral presentation rubric is included in the RFP (Appendix A).

Immediately after the last presentation is completed, at the instructor’s discretion, a reward may be given to the group that best meets the rubric criteria (i.e., the group to which Volkswagen awards the contract). As the groups know they are competing (bidding) for the contract, the anticipated award adds a heighted sense of competition and excitement to the exercise. Past awards have included school T-shirts, hats and coffee mugs. Students have appreciated the added sense of competition and recognition provided by such rewards.

Presentations may be graded at the instructor’s discretion. Instructors may choose to not grade the presentations, and consider the presentation as a fact gathering experience whereby the content feedback may be incorporated into their written proposals.

**Step 5: Written proposal submissions and feedback**

Student groups submit their written proposals within one week following the last student presentation, or later depending on class scheduling. Instructors grade each proposal using the grading rubric contained in the RFP (Appendix A).

*Teaching Notes*

In order to provide constructive feedback, instructors should supplement the rubric point values earned with specific comments. For example, a group may have not supported their proposed actions adequately. The “Critical thinking” criteria assigned s value of 10 out of a possible 15 points, can be supplemented with the following instructor comment: “additional support for your proposed actions to increase employee retention would have made this proposal more compelling. What research suggests that valued employees voluntarily leave their organization during organizational scandals? What Volkswagen statements or newspaper articles report an exodus of valued employees? What does research suggest be done to increase retention?” Such specific qualitative feedback fosters skills’ development and is appreciated by students.

**Sample Student Proposal Content**

Superior student proposals clearly define the organizational issues and then take a multi-stakeholder perspective, including employee, management and owners. Effective problem statements identify root causes rather than symptoms (e.g., poor organizational culture and leadership rather than “valued employees are leaving”).

Organizational behavior emphasizes three levels of analysis: individual, group and organizational, and effective proposals typically address at least two levels. From an individual employee perspective, students draw upon motivation (e.g., expectancy theory), turnover, and compensation (incentives) research. On the group level, students may incorporate group dynamics research and propose ways to improve teamwork and meet needs for affiliation (Ryan & Deci, 2008; McClelland, 1988). On an organizational macro approach, students also draw upon current leadership models, including ethical leadership, regarding the role of managers and leaders in addressing the organizational issues. Organizational culture models covered in the class or in previous classes may also be employed to institute a more effective and ethical organizational culture. Effective student proposals incorporate a variety of perspectives and theories that reflect the complexity of the organizational issues.

**Skill acquisition and student RFP reactions**

The RFP has been used in undergraduate and graduate (MBA) level courses. Student skill assessment, as measured by the grading rubric, is positive. The mean scores for the grading rubric criteria of creativity, critical thinking/references and writing skills were 13.07 (standard deviation = .98), 12.38 (standard deviation = 1.14) and 14.10 (standard deviation = .65) over 150 students in four classes from 2014-2016. Undergraduates and graduate students did not significantly differ with respect to creativity, critical thinking/references or writing (*t* (149) = .30, .42 and .96, respectively). As reflected in the grading rubric (Appendix A), the majority of the scores were in the “good” and “very good” categories.

Qualitative data collected in the form of open ended student comments were also revealing. Students expressed appreciation regarding the constructive feedback they received, especially with respect to instructor comments during the weekly feedback checks and the final presentation provided along with the presentation rubric explained at the beginning of the course (Appendix A).

Many students expressed presentation apprehension and reported that the qualitative feedback helped them improve their skills and reduce their presentation related anxiety. On several occasions, feedback given by the instructor provided to the first few group of presenters benefited later presenters, as they were determined not to repeat the mistakes of previous groups. For example, fewer students read from slides after an earlier group received feedback that they had done so.

**Exercise Limitations**

The RFP exercise is intended to develop students’ skills (e.g. presentation, research and critical thinking). Students are instructed to seek help within their group to improve such skills; however, the large weight given to the project may decrease the probability of skill improvement. In order to reduce risk of poor grades and maximize the change of success, students may capitalize on already existing skills within their groups to achieve the best grade. That is, the best presenters will present, the best researchers will build the literature review, and students will superior PowerPoint skills will build the presentation slides. Instructors can enhance skill development in a number of ways. First, team charters can include specific individual member skill development commitments, including action plans to improve skills and ways to measure improvement. Second, measureable skill improvement can be included as a criterion for “winning the contract” and the point value earned by the group. Of course, doing so will also make skill improvement part of the final grade. can be part of the overall course grade.

The RFP requires students to address an issue “ripped from the headlines”. The application of organizational behavior and human resource management concepts to a current organizational problem is intended to demonstrate the timeliness and practicality of the subject matter. Appendix A contains the Volkswagen emissions scandal that was prominently in the news at the time this paper was written. Moving forward, there unfortunately appears to be no shortage of organizational issues that may be substituted for the Volkswagen case. Since this paper was written, several organizations have experienced significant ethical or other issues appropriate for the RFP exercise. Instructors may update the RFP using any number of cases, including Caterpillar’s alleged tax fraud (Drucker, 2017), Wells Fargo fraudulent fees charged for unauthorized fake accounts, Fox News organizational culture of sexual harassment, Mylan's Epipen Price Gouging Scandal (Matthews & Heimer, 2016), and Barclays alleged manipulation of an interest rate index (Bray, 2016).

**Conclusion**

This paper offered a “Request for Proposal” exercise that provides management students an opportunity to practice and receive feedback on their critical thinking, oral presentation, and written communication skills. These skills are important for business success and are included in many Schools of Business and AACSB learning objectives. It therefore recommended that instructors consider using the RFP or similar exercises in their classes so students can develop and master the required skills.

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**Appendix A: Sample Request for Proposal (RFP)**



**Volkswagen®**

**Request for Proposal**

Questions may be emailed at any time to (instructor name) and will be answered within one business day via email.

**Introduction**

Volkswagen, Inc. invites proposals that address ***employee*** concerns regarding its organizational scandal (see article contained in this RFP). To make matters worse, Volkswagen plans laying off 30.000 employees worldwide to improve productivity (see “Volkswagen to Cut 23,000 German Jobs in Bid to Lift Profit”, November 16, 2016 at http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/19/business/volkswagen-cuts-23000-jobs.html).

As it seeks to recover from an emissions cheating scandal, Volkswagen said it would cut about 30,000 jobs worldwide, including 23,000 in Germany, as part of a deal with its powerful labor representatives to improve low profitability at its largest unit. This scandal is significant and layoffs may be required.

Volkswagen wishes retain key talent and maintain/increase employee morale. Based on previous work and reputation, your group has been selected to submit a proposal (i.e., bid on the contract). No work is to be sub-contracted.

**Bidders Meeting**

At the group’s request, there will be an opportunity to meet with (instructor) for a Question and Answer session. The purpose of this meeting is to give bidders the opportunity to ask questions about the project.

**Submission Procedure**

Proposals that conform to the requirements set out below must be received by (Instructor Name) no later than the deadline (insert date). Any bid received after that time will not be considered.

All RFP submittals must be hard copies. Modifications to proposals already submitted will be allowed if submitted prior to the deadline. Volkswagen reserves the right to waive irregularities, reject any or all bids, and to negotiate with the selected bidder in the event that the price exceeds available funds.

**Submission Format**

Proposals are limited to 6 *pages* (double spaced 12 font), and must contain the following:

* 1. Executive summary: brief overview.
  2. Project objective(s): specific expected results and measures are specified. Proposed methods, techniques and/or rationale regarding how each objective will be achieved.
  3. Background and problem diagnosis.
  4. Activities, responsibilities, and timeline.
  5. Summary budget.
  6. References: articles that support proposed action, methods, and/or techniques are cited. References should in American Psychological Association format ([http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/).](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/))
  7. Group member signatures.

**Proposal Selection Criteria**

Submissions will be judged on the following criteria (see evaluation rubric for more detail):

1. *Creativity:* the proposal should include, but not be limited to, compensation.
2. *References:* the proposal should include current research that supports the any recommendations. Current research refers to articles published in journals within the past 10 years.
3. *Professionalism:* the presentation to Volkswagen Management (Instructor Name) should be brief, concise, and well presented. The document should be well written and adhere to the required format outlined above.

Additional background appears in the articles that follow.

http://nyti.ms/2bKb02w



**BUSINESS DAY**

**VW to Pay $1.2 Billion to U.S. Dealers**

**Hurt by Diesel Scandal**



By NEAL E. BOUDETTE AUG. 25, 2016

Not that long ago, Volkswagen dealerships were among the hottest properties in the retail auto business.

The German brand was growing rapidly, and an ambitious goal of tripling sales in the United States to more than 800,000 cars a year seemed within reach, helped by increasingly popular diesel models and a new plant in Chattanooga, Tenn. With the future looking bright, buyers as recently as 2014 typically paid premiums of $3 million to $4 million to acquire Volkswagen franchises in the United States.

But the diesel scandal that erupted almost a year ago, setting off a plunge in Volkswagen sales, changed all that. Some dealers who tried to sell their franchises in the last year found their dealerships were worth little more than the value of the land they stood on and their inventory of cars and spare parts, according to brokers prepared to pay as much as $1.2 billion to offset the declining value of the Volkswagen franchises.

That figure, on top of whatever Volkswagen will end up spending to buy back unsold and unfixable diesels from the dealers, would work out to an average of $1.85 million per dealer- although the amounts will vary, depending on the size of the dealership and other factors.

“We believe this agreement in principle with Volkswagen dealers is a very important step in our commitment to making things right for all our stakeholders in the United States,” Hinrich J. Woebcken, chief executive of Volkswagen’s North American operations, said in [a](http://media.vw.com/release/1243/) statement.

The agreement with dealers was described in general terms in court in San Francisco on Thursday before the federal judge, Charles R. Breyer, who is overseeing the cases against Volkswagen by the government, car owners and the dealers.

‘‘They have cars on their lots they can’t sell,’’ Steve W. Berman, the lawyer for the dealers, told Judge Breyer. “Their franchise value has gone down. And they have invested millions in these Volkswagen franchises. So we are pleased that the settlement will address the financial harm that they’ve incurred.’’

Volkswagen fell into turmoil last September after admitting it had equipped nearly 600,000 diesel models sold in the United States with “defeat device” software that allowed the cars to cheat on emissions tests and spew far more pollutants than allowed in regular driving.

In June the company, government and lawyers for car owners reached a settlement covering some 500,000 cars equipped with 2.0­liter diesel engines. Under that accord, the company will spend as much as $10.03 billion to buy back affected cars at their prescandal values and pay additional cash compensation to owners. Models include the Volkswagen Jetta and Passat.

Lawyers for the company and the government who were in the courtroom on Thursday told Judge Breyer that they were still working on how to fix or otherwise resolve the status of about 80,000 Volkswagen Audi and Porsche models with 3.0­ liter diesel engines that were equipped with emissions cheating software. The dealer settlement announced on Thursday stems from a lawsuit filed in April by the owner of three Volkswagen franchises, seeking compensation for the economic damage to the dealerships.

One of the potential beneficiaries, Jeff Williams, owner of Williams Auto World in Lansing, Mich., said on Thursday that he welcomed the compensation agreement but that the toll on his business had been heavy.

“In 2012, we sold 477 new Volkswagens,’’ Mr. Williams said. “So far this year, we’ve sold 86 new. That’s a big, big hit.”

But he expressed hope for 2017. Next spring, Volkswagen is expected to introduce an all new gasoline powered sport utility vehicle, which had been sorely missing from the Volkswagen lineup. “Once we get some S.U.V.s, that ought to kick­ start things,” Mr. Williams said.

In 2015, the Volkswagen brand sold nearly 350,000 cars in the United States, down from 438,134 in 2012. But most of the 2015 sales were made before the diesel cheating was disclosed. In the first seven months of this year, Volkswagen sales have slipped 13.6 percent, to 205,742 vehicles.

For dealers, that decline is compounded by the fact that many invested millions of dollars to expand their stores in expectation of rising sales.

“VW said the dealers needed bigger facilities because they were going to be a volume player,” said Alan Haig, president of Haig Partners, a dealership advisory firm in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. “So this has been a disastrous turn of events for them.”

Volkswagen has until Sept. 30 to develop a formula for determining how much compensation each franchisee will receive. The matter is being negotiated by the company, a group of dealer representatives and lawyers from Mr. Berman’s firm, Hagens Berman Sobol Shapiro, which filed the dealer suit in April.

“We’re going to get started right away, so I’m pretty confident we’ll have a formula by the middle of September,” Mr. Berman, a managing partner at Hagens Berman, said in an interview on Thursday.

A version of this article appears in print on August 26, 2016, on page B1 of the New York edition with the headline: VW Offers Dealers in U.S. $1.2 Billion.

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http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/19/business/volkswagen-cuts-23000-jobs.html



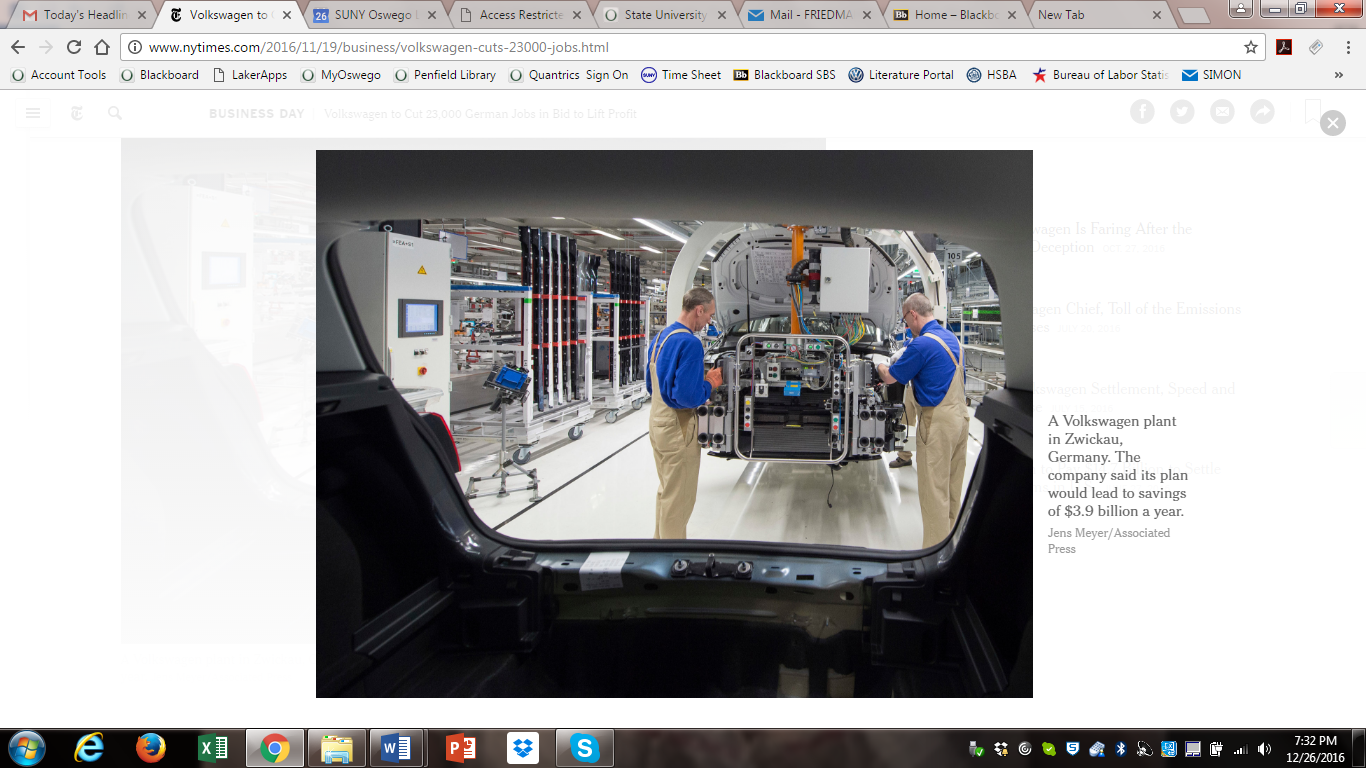
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**Business Day**

**Volkswagen to Cut 23,000 German Jobs in Bid to Lift Profit**

By Jack Ewing November 18, 2016



A Volkswagen plant in Zwickau, Germany. The company said its plan would lead to savings of $3.9 billion a year. Credit Jens Meyer/Associated Press

Volkswagen has broken a longstanding taboo on job cuts, conceding on Friday that it needs to become more profitable to survive what could be a major shift toward electric cars.

But the cuts outlined on Friday were probably not deep enough to close a chronic productivity gap with Toyota and other rivals.

As it seeks to recover from an emissions cheating scandal, Volkswagen said it would cut about 30,000 jobs worldwide, including 23,000 in Germany, as part of a deal with its powerful labor representatives to improve low profitability at its largest unit.

Volkswagen is trying to reduce the cost of manufacturing cars that carry the VW badge, many of which are made in Germany by a work force that effectively controls the company and has resisted job cuts. The plan would lead to savings of $3.9 billion a year, Volkswagen said on Friday.

The company described the plan as the most radical in its history. Herbert Diess, the Volkswagen executive in charge of VW brand cars, said the company needed to brace itself for drastic changes as the automobile industry shifted to electric vehicles.

“Volkswagen is far behind competitors,” Mr. Diess said at a news conference in Wolfsburg, Germany, where the carmaker is based. “Volkswagen has to quickly earn more money and arm itself for the change ahead.”

But the job cuts are relatively modest.

The reductions will be phased in through 2020 using early retirement and other voluntary measures. Volkswagen agreed not to make any forced layoffs until at least 2025.

The cuts will be partly offset by 9,000 new jobs related to electric car production and other new technologies. The net reduction in the German work force would be 14,000 people, or 4 percent of the total.

So the overall plan is unlikely to close Volkswagen’s productivity gap with Toyota.

Since last year, the companies have been vying for the title of the world’s largest carmaker, but Toyota has long been more profitable. Toyota has 346,000 employees worldwide compared with 624,000 at Volkswagen.

How Volkswagen Is Grappling With Its Diesel Scandal

Volkswagen has admitted that 11 million of its vehicles were equipped with software that was used to cheat on emissions tests. The company is now contending with the fallout.

“It’s good that they’re doing it,” Ferdinand Dudenhöffer, a professor at the University of Duisburg-Essen, said of the Volkswagen plan. “Whether it’s enough is another question.”

Volkswagen makes most of its money from Audi and Porsche luxury cars. The unit that makes Volkswagen brand cars, and accounts for nearly half the sales volume, had a profit margin of 1.6 percent during the first nine months of 2016. Volkswagen said on Friday that it wanted to achieve a 4 percent profit margin for Volkswagen brand cars.

The company’s cost problem, which goes back decades, stems in part from the extraordinary power that labor representatives have over company policy.

As at all large German companies, workers hold half the seats on the company’s supervisory board. But at Volkswagen, the workers have de facto control because the state of Lower Saxony owns 20 percent of the voting shares. The state’s two representatives on the 20-person supervisory board almost always vote with labor. In addition, a special law gives Volkswagen workers veto power over plant closings.

To win worker consent for the plan, the company agreed to invest in production of battery-powered cars in Germany.

Unlike some competitors, Volkswagen plans to build its own electric motors and batteries rather than to buy them from suppliers. The strategy helps to preserve jobs but is regarded by analysts as less efficient.

“Can they do it as efficiently as Panasonic or Samsung when they’ve never done it before?” Mr. Dudenhöffer said.

Volkswagen has begun promoting electric cars as it tries to rescue its reputation from the emissions scandal. The company has admitted that 11 million diesel cars, including 500,000 in the United States, were equipped with software that camouflaged emissions of poisonous and environmentally damaging nitrogen oxides that were far above legal limits.

Even without the scandal, Volkswagen faces other challenges including plunging sales in Brazil and Russia. Volkswagen would also suffer if Donald J. Trump followed through on plans to raise trade barriers with Mexico. In September, Audi inaugurated a new factory in San José Chiapa, in the Mexican state of Puebla, to serve the American market.

“Volkswagen is in a difficult situation,” said Bernd Osterloh, the chairman of the Volkswagen workers council. “All the colleagues know that.”

A version of this article appears in print on November 19, 2016, on Page B5 of the New York edition with the headline: Volkswagen Plans Sharp Job Cuts as It Tries to Keep Up with Toyota.

**Group Oral Presentation RFP: Evaluation Rubric**

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|  | **Level** | | | |
| **Criteria** | **Very Poor** | **Poor** | **Good** | **Very Good** |
| ***Content*:**  Valuable material beyond that assigned or discussed in class was presented. Presenters responded to audience questions using relevant subject manner. | Presentation repeated content already covered in class lectures or in assigned readings. | Presentation contained some new material, but most of the content was already covered in class lectures or in assigned readings. | Presentation had new material that benefited the class. Responses to questions were relevant, often using new content. | A considerable amount of new material was presented. Questions responses were very relevant, mostly using new content. |
| ***Collaboration:***  The workload was fairly distributed among group members. Group members knew the content and worked together well. | One or two students carried most of the workload of planning and delivering the presentation, while other students didn’t know the content. | A few students carried most of the workload, but others did not contribute and did not know the content. | All group members contributed, but a few people did more than their fair share. | The students built on each other’s ideas, worked well together and the work was fairly distributed among the group. |
| ***Organization:***  Clear with logical sequence of ideas. Transitions from one student to another was seamless. Presentation aids (if used) were clear and easy to follow. | There was little evidence of preparation and the presentation was disorganized. Transitions were absent, not well planned or awkward. | The presentation was somewhat clear at times. But disorganized and unclear at other times. | The presentation was clear and logical, transitions were smooth but could have been much stronger with better organization. | The presentation was clear and logical. Transitions were seamless and helped the flow. |
| ***Presenter Behaviors:***  The presenters maintained audience engagement using eye contact, clear speaking, and presentation aids that supplemented rather than drew attention away from the presenters. Avoided distracting techniques such as reading slides or note cards verbatim. | Presenters maintained little eye contact, read from slides, handouts or note cards, and were difficult to hear or understand. Presentation aids were complex and hard to follow. | Presenters maintained some eye contact, at times read from slides, handouts or note cards, and were sometimes difficult to hear or understand. Aids were somewhat complex and hard to follow. | Presenters maintained good eye contact, faced the audience with overly referring to notes or slides, and were easy to understand. Presentation aids were appropriate and easy to follow. | Presenters maintained consistent eye contact with all audience members, and spoke clearly and enthusiastically. Presentation aids were exciting, easy to follow and engaging. |

Adapted from *Group Presentation Rubric PBL 101*. Retrieved December 23, 2016 at http://pbl101.weebly.com/uploads/3/1/3/1/31318861/group\_presentation\_rubric.pdf.

**Written RFP: Evaluation Rubric**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Poor  (8-9) | Satisfactory  (10-1l) | Good  (12-13) | Very Good  (14-15) |
| 1. **Creativity:** the proposal should include innovative approaches and diverse solutions (15 points). | One or no coherent approach offered. | Few approaches offered. | Few but one or two creative approaches offered. | Fresh, multifaceted and original approaches offered. |
| 2. **Critical thinking and use of references**: each recommendation is justified and supported using classwork, theories, models, readings and current research (15 points). | Recommendations not well supported. Few supporting facts, references, or models offered that justify recommendation. | Mostly non-scholarly articles such as newspapers and blogs, a few scholarly articles. | A few scholarly references used to justify recommendations. | Recommendation compelling and justified using several scholarly articles and facts. |
| 3. **Writing skills**: the proposal is succinct, concise, and well written. The proposal adhered to the required RFP format (15 points). | Proposal verbose, sometimes rambling, at times vague, and/or contained several grammatical errors. The proposal did not adhere to the required RFP format. | Proposal mostly clear, sometimes convincing but often vague. Some grammatical errors noted. The proposal mostly adhered to the required RFP format. | Proposal concise, clear, well organized and mostly compelling. The proposal adhered to the required RFP format. | Proposal concise, clear, well organized and very compelling. The proposal adhered to the required RFP format. |