

# A Case Study Part I: Implementing the Idea of Gift Economy in the University Business Class

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## Abstract

Since the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, many people have begun to consider different approaches to the social and economic aspects of their lives. One such new idea is the concept of the "Gift Economy" (Saito, 2015), which is the opposite to that of a money economy. This case study discusses how the idea of "Gift Economy" was implemented in an elective English class intended to develop students' presentation skills.

## Course Description

General Business English, which is one of the elective practical English courses in the university in the central Tokyo area, is designed to have the students develop basic communication techniques in business situations. The purpose is to facilitate their success in future business endeavors and to enlarge their knowledge of the business world. Since the class is convened only once a week, discussion forums using Moodle are employed to maximize the student's learning outside the class. The course also implements cross-cultural aspects designed to be useful in business situations. The students develop the four principal skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening through business topics. The course includes technical business writing, telephoning, and negotiating, discussion skills and presentation skills.

As Kushida (2017) argues, in general, Japanese people spend too much time for the presentation without mentioning their strategy in business while western countries mention in the first 5min., the

strategy in the first few minutes in business presentation is important. Thus the instructor tried to secure sufficient time and emphasize presentation skills in the course so that the students can learn and think of the strategy for their presentations.

## Participants

Out of twenty-one students at the beginning of the course, sixteen students completed all required tasks. The class meeting is once a week. This class uses a textbook, *Market Leader Pre-Intermediate 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition* (Cotton et. al., 2012). The level of the class is high-intermediate and comprised four seniors, three juniors, five sophomores and four freshmen. These students were from different departments, such as Global Studies, Economics, Law, Literature, and Foreign Language. (Most students hold a score about 780 ~ 880 in the TOEIC TEST). Some students had experienced or planned to take a study-abroad program of from several months to one year in either Europe, North America, or Africa during their university studying. Since this is a practical elective course, all of the students were highly motivated.

## Procedures

The principal component of this course focuses on basic Business English skills following the textbook. In the fifteen lessons, one class was spent to teach the concept of *gift economy* and about business presentation skills, one for a rehearsal for the presentation and debriefing session with the video and one class for a final group presentation session. All

of the preparations were undertaken outside of the class. Since the students were from different departments, it was difficult to adjust the schedule outside the class. Therefore, three weeks were given to prepare for the group presentation to give the students enough time to discuss outside the class. For this semester, the goal for the group presentation was to present a new business model based on the idea of the *gift economy*. This goal was adopted because the opportunity to learn economical system besides the money economy is important for the students before they enter the business world. The topic for the presentation was chosen by the students. Prior to their presentation group work, the students had one class to learn how to make presentations in business and to understand the concept of gift economy.

Being a new notion for the students, the concept of *gift economy* was explained with several examples. Although the concept of *gift economy* itself originated from anthropological research during World War I, in economics it is defined as a mode of exchange in which valuables are not traded or sold as in a money economy (Cheal, 1988). It is an economy based on giving, instead of monetary gain, and prioritizes less tangible rewards such as honor or a sense of contribution to the community.

To help the students become familiar with the idea of *gift economy*, the following comparison chart (Saito, 2015) (see Table 1) was used. Saito (2015) shows the comparison between the economy before the Great East Japan Earthquake and after the earthquake, based on the idea of *gift economy* as in the following chart (Table 1). As one of the examples of a business, a YouTube video by Kopernik, a non-profit organization (NPO) running a business based on the idea of *gift economy*, was shown to the students.

Table 1 *Before and After the Great East Japan Earthquake*

Before the Great Earthquake 2011	After the Great Earthquake 2011
Money Economy	Gift Economy
Divided community relations	Strong community relations
Taker	Giver
Fear, Anxiety	Love, Trust
Must	Want
Zero-Sum	Win-Win
Proper	Creative
Short-term perspective	Long-term perspective
Stereotyped	Wide variety
Organization is important	Purpose is important
Orderly Society	Chaos
Inorganic	Organic

(Saito, 2015, p.12)

In order to have the students brainstorm the concept of *gift economy*, besides introducing Kopernik as one of the organizations with the concept of *gift economy*, we discussed Japanese companies that seem to have the same concept. One such company raised by the students was the Yamato Corporation. This company has the system called "Hitomono Bus", which cooperates with a local bus company and carries cargo and people at the same time. Yamato can deliver the cargo, but at the same time the bus company can maintain their bus routes even in rural areas and carry people in the community. This leads to a win-win situation for both the company and the community.

Another company the students raised for discussion was Greensticks. This company sells pieces of paper named "Seed Paper", in which it places flower seeds and sells them as postcards, business cards, fliers etc. Instead of these items becoming trash, the cards can be planted so that they will grow as flowers and plants. As can be seen here, "Seed Paper" can also be said to be a *gift economy* business model because not only will the company and the customers benefit but there is also merit for the environment.

After discussing the idea of *gift economy*, the students were divided into five groups with each group consisting of three or four students, of which

the aim was to encourage teamwork skills necessary in the business world. Also, the members of each group comprised students from different faculties and grade levels in order to produce a greater likelihood of diverse ideas.

In order to have the students have a clear objective for the final presentation, formative assessment using rubrics, which will be introduced in another paper, was implemented. Since adopting formative assessment in activity creates continued student learning (Gibson & Shawn, 2010), the assessment was conducted after the rehearsal and final presentation. After obtaining informed consent from the students prior to this class, the rehearsal was videotaped and was shared at the debriefing session in order to help the students recognize their presentation styles objectively. The debriefing session was conducted because debriefing forms as a learning tool and students can enhance their learning further through the comments of their peers (Gibson & Shawn, 2010). This was also an opportunity for peer assessment. Gibson and Shawn (2010) also state that the students can contribute to their own responses and compare the differences.

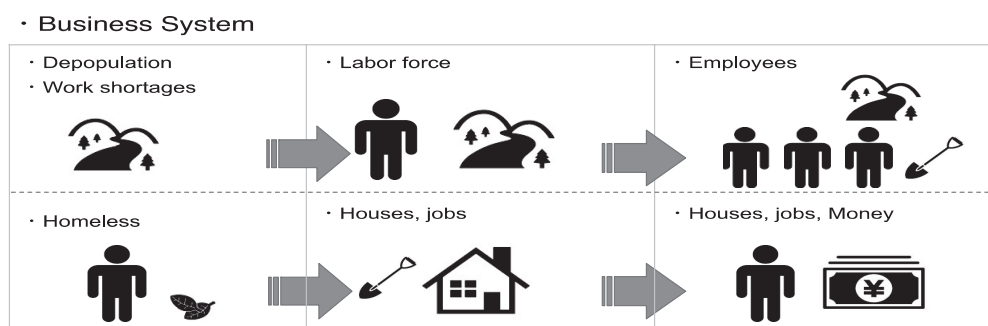
## Results

The following are one part of the students' final

slides. Figure 1 shows the business model of the group giving a presentation on how to solve the homeless people issue and the issue of depopulated areas in Japan. In this business model, the company offers housing and jobs as incentives to homeless people to live in rural areas because depopulated areas need to address the labor force issue. By offering jobs, homeless people earn money and are able to re-enter society. This system has merits for both sides; the homeless people are assisted and the low level of work force participants in depopulated areas is also addressed. This slide was shown after explaining the issues in the early part of the presentation, which ensured that this group cleared the objectives for this presentation.

The following is an example from another group. This group made a business model based on the idea of Seed Paper. They made it into an original business model by implementing the business in their university. As can be seen from Figure 2, 3 this group clearly mentioned which part of the presentation they were presenting by showing the roadmap in between the content, which ensured that the audience would clearly understand the content, which is an important aspect of presentation skills.

### In detail...



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Figure 1 Students' Presentation Slide



Figure 2 Students' Presentation Slide



Figure 3 Students' Presentation Slide

## Discussion

Although further discussions, such as cost, time schedule, and the budget for each business model are required, the integration of language skills and the introduction of the concept of *gift economy* as a business model to improve the students' presentation skills, proved successful.

By implementing formative assessment, all of the groups revised their slides as well as addressed other aspects, such as loudness of voice and posture. By adopting peer assessment, as Gibson and Shawn (2010) mention, students were encouraged to reflect on their performances, which leads to higher-order thinking as they develop skills in evaluating and making decisions. Peer assessment is also said to produce judgments almost equal to instructor assessors (as cited in Gibson & Shawn, 2010).

The unique component of this class is that it comprised a mixture of students from different areas.

In making the groups for the presentation, the instructor ensured that students from different areas, and of different ages were in each group. This enhanced the opportunity for groups to shape various ideas. By working together in a group of mixed-level students, this also fills the gap between the levels and the knowledge of the students, providing a more focused and equitable group performance.

The limitations for this class seem to be that the instructor needs to adjust the curriculum to fit into fifteen classes. Since the class is General Business English, the instructor needs to balance this component with contents other than presentation skills which need to be taught in the class. Also, when implementing such a concept as *gift economy*, the instructor needs to be careful not to focus too much on the content as this is not Economics course.

The students' creativity has proved to be impressive and in order to maximize this potential and creativity, instructors may approach this area in a pedagogical manner that moves beyond textbooks.

## Conclusion

This paper introduced how the instructor can improve students' presentation skills by implementing the idea of *gift economy*. In its goal of implementing the idea of *gift economy* and improving students' presentation skill, the class showed positive results. Since the concept of *gift economy* was new to the students, this made it challenging for the instructor to implement in teaching the presentation skill. It is much simpler to teach just the techniques of presentation skills. However, living in the world of profit-making economy, giving an opportunity to consider different types of economy is important. Despite the need for further research, the instructor believes that providing opportunities to broaden students' perspectives through being exposed to different values in the class will lead their success in future business endeavors.

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