

NEGOTIATING IN THE PSEUDO WORLD: DESIGNING ROLE-PLAY SIMULATIONS IN THE DIGITAL ERA

By Cheryl Dowie, University of Aberdeen Business School

cheryl_dowie@hotmail.com

Extended Abstract

Experiential Track

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Existing literature shows that conservative methods of teaching and assessing take precedence over the active learning methods, which emphasizes on student participation and responsibility and aims to achieve six qualitatively distinct levels of understanding i.e., knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Johnson, 2016). While online simulations and tools have evolved over the last 20 years (Russell and Shepherd, 2010), social scientists and management scholars continue to incorporate role-play simulations and accompanying readings in their curriculum, with the view to engage students in a supported learning environment before they venture into the real-world. Carrying out active-learning exercises in an online or other hybrid learning environments, can be challenging because it requires more time to set-up and structure the rules and roles, while at the same time monitor and communicate with learners in an online setting. However, with the online learning environment growing rapidly (Ibid.) especially after the covid-19 pandemic, it becomes imperative for instructors to learn the different active learning approaches that can help them provide learners with the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the course materials and examine issues from a wider range of perspectives (Youde, 2008). Facilitating learning in an e-learning environment requires skills to develop active learners, who learn that problem-solving skills cannot be taught but must be discovered (Piaget, 1936). Such cognitive maturation involves decentring, a process which requires 'shifting the focus of awareness from a limited aspect of reality to several different dimensions' (Muuss, 1982, p. 250).

In this study we use Piaget's Cognitive Learning Theory (CLT) (Piaget, 1983) as the foundation to design our role-play simulation exercises, since it considers the learner as the focus of the design process (McLeod, 2003) and corroborates with the notion that cognitive development occurs from biological maturation and the interaction with one's environment (Piaget, 1936). Unlike behaviourism that neglects mental activity, cognitive learning theory studies human thought processes (Carlile and Jordan, 2005, p. 7) and emphasizes the importance of problem-solving (Piaget, 1936). It can be applied to any discipline (Grider, 1993) and is based on the notion that "deep learning involves collecting and organizing experiences and information to make sense of stimuli from the environment" (Ibid., p. 38). This information could be based on previous knowledge, course materials, practical examples, and everyday experiences (Sloam, 2008). Through receiving, storing, and retrieving information, learners are exposed to strategies that can help them bridge the gap between pre-requisite skills to learning objectives, while benefitting from learning efficiently. In other words, there is a strong correlation between the mental components and the processed information that enable learners to accordingly understand and apply knowledge (Grider, 1993). Through organizing and re-organizing the new information experienced, learners can create more complex cognitive structures to help them navigate through their different levels of intellectual growth.

The purpose of our study is twofold:

- 1. to incorporate CLT as a guide in designing role-play negotiation simulation exercises based on real-life events, which can create the flavour of real-life negotiations for students (McGrath, 1966); and*
- 2. to provide instructors with some instructions and suggestions on how to facilitate and moderate them effectively in the digital era.*

Using role-play simulation exercises to achieve these research objectives can help both instructors and students fulfil their learning objectives (Wills, Leigh, and Ip, 2011). To explain further, learners can firstly construct their own understanding of concepts and ideas, which will provide them with a meaningful learning experience. Secondly, it will provide instructors with a robust theoretical framework to tailor their simulation exercises to match the learners' needs, while providing opportunities for them to think critically and creatively.

We corroborate with the view that creating a pseudo real learning environment that encourages collaboration and communication can increase students' interests, engaging them actively (Addison and O'Hare, 2012; Jong et. Al., 2013). Additionally, within this illusion of reality, learners can advance their understanding of the theories and strategies involved in a business negotiation setting, by exploring their own mental constructs while enhancing the perspective of management theory and practice. Providing students with opportunities to study an array of issues can hone their critical thinking, analytical, and

communication skills (Sasley, 2010; Smith and Boyer, 1996). Designing role-play simulation exercises for a pseudo real learning environment can thus provide the structure to the subject that is being taught, along with the flexibility to explore different methods to solve problems. Designing these simulation exercises based on a robust theoretical foundation can facilitate assimilating new information with previous knowledge, which can create meaningful learning that is based on a variety of experiences (Lefa, 2014). Furthermore, Piaget's constructivist view can support the cognitive development of learners in a way that helps them realize their capabilities as well as construct their own understanding of the world (Ibid.).

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