

Alan L. Patz, University of Southern California

ABSTRACT

Assessing university curricula goes beyond routine performance measures, especially in total enterprise (TE) business simulations. A key, if not more important question, is whether or not TE exercises interest students in general management. Results noted here indicate that they do along with reading assignments, lecture contents, and cash flow analyses.

INTRODUCTION

A general meaning of AACSB's assessment guidelines (Bailey, 1997) is to demonstrate one way or another that a course delivers the intended learning results. This is a reasonable concern, but another one may be asked that is more important. That is, did the course interest students in the subject independent of their assessment performance? Increased interest, obviously, is an important motivator for further involvement in any topic.

The Hypothesis

Many other questions may be posed, but only one is examined in this study. The key hypothesis is:

H: A positive correlation exists between the degree to which students would recommend the use of a TE simulation in a capstone business policy course and their interest in general management.

Other *post hoc* analyses are also presented.

Method

The subjects in this study are 131 senior business school students in four sections of a capstone business policy course. Two of the four sections, $n_1=38$ and $n_2=43$, completed a seven item

questionnaire at mid-semester; the other two, $n_3=28$ and $n_4=22$ did so at end-semester. The first and third groups, n_1 and n_3 , were the first lectures of the day, and the other two were the second

Since each subject answered seven questions, the basic experimental design had three factors and $(2 \times 2 \times 7)=28$ cells. They are: A=Mid-Semester and End-Semester, B=First Lecture and Second Lecture, and C= Seven Questions (a repeated measure).

Each question was answered on a seven point scale where 1=Disagree, 4=So-So, and 7=Agree. The five questions of interest here are items:

1. Is the requirement of reading textbook chapters, a standard body of knowledge, and testing understanding of them an efficient way of adding to general management lectures?
2. Did the lectures enhance this standard body of knowledge?
4. If you had to do it again, would you recommend the usage of a simulation in this course?
5. Did you understand the reasons for the different cash flow analyses presented in this course?
6. Did this course interest you in the notion of becoming a general manager?

RESULTS

Overall, the mid-semester results are more favorable than end-semester, 5.2 and 4.8 respectively ($F=7.08$, $p=.0088$). The lecture order made no difference ($F=1.77$, $p=.1852$), nor did the semester and lecture timing interaction ($F=1.18$, $p=.2786$). As to be expected, average responses to each question differed significantly ($F=8.53$, $p<.0001$).

The interaction between mid- and end-semester answers to each question is significant ($F=2.46$, $p=.0233$); and, as to be, expected this was reflected in the triple interaction among semester timing,

Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, Volume 25, 1998

lecture timing, and question number ($F=6.31$, $p<.0001$). Lecture order had no interaction with each question ($F=1.56$, $p=.1554$)

Hypothesis H

Except for the significant difference between mid- and end- semester results, none of this is too surprising. Therefore, what does matter is the correlation between items 4 and 6. Is there a positive correlation between interest in general management and the use of TE simulations?

There is. An analysis of covariance indicates that the correlation coefficients between items 4 and 6 are the same in both the mid- and end-semester samples ($F=0.00$, $p=1.0$). Therefore, using the entire $N=131$ sample, the result is $r=.35$, $p<.01$.

Other Findings

Post hoc analyses of the data indicate three further significant correlations with item 6-items 1, 2, and 5. Respectively they are .39, .40, and .58 with $p<.01$ for each one. Last, regressing item 6 on all four yields a multiple $R=.66$ ($F=24.4$, $p<.0001$). The individual t-tests for the coefficients of items 1, 2, 4, and 5 are 1.90, 2.39, 2.78, and 5.48 with p values of .0594, .0182, .0064, and $<.0001$ respectively.

DISCUSSION

These last results are intriguing, accounting for almost 44% of the variations in the general management interest data. Variations in reading assignments, lecture contents, TE simulations, and cash flow analyses are key subjects for future theoretical considerations and empirical research.

Two Theoretical Avenues

For example, considering theoretical bases, TE simulations are immediate candidates for a theory of self-competence (White, 1972). General management may be a daunting concept until it is confronted in the relatively benign environment of a TE simulation and the all important cash flows.

Similarly, exchange theory (Secord & Backman, 1974) provides another avenue of approach to stimulating interest in general management. TE decisions, in general, and cash flow decisions, in particular are made in groups. Groups, in turn, have structures, processes, and interaction patterns that can reinforce strongly an interest in the topics at hand-the study of general management, its application in TE simulations, and its consequences in cash flows and related profitability measures.

Empirical Highways

In contrast to these brief theoretical suggestions, the empirical alternatives are virtually limitless. The number of existing and possible TE simulations, not to mention study and lecture topics, is subject only to imagination. Likewise, cash flow analyses may be done in so many ways (Patz, 1966) that almost any business student will finally understand them.

Returning to this study, the relationship between interest in general management and the use of TE simulations is there, but it is not dominant. Other factors need to be considered.

Nevertheless, as the data show, assessment is more than unidimensional. Does the course do what it is supposed to do is not the only issue. In fact, this may not be an important one. What a university course does for the long term intellectual and occupational lives of a student may be far, far more important.

SELECTED REFERENCES

- Bailey, A. R. (1997). *The future of management education: Gradual transition or paradigm reconstruction*. New Orleans: ABSEL
- Patz, A. L. (1996). Making cash flows come alive and sensible in the classroom. *Developments in Business Sim. & Experiential Exer.*, 23, 54-60.
- White, R. W. (1972). *The enterprise of living*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston