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AN EXPLORATION INTO THE NON-USE OF BUSINESS SIMULATIONS

LT Snyder, The University of West Florida

ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted to assess instructor reasons for the non-use of simulations in the classroom in schools of business. Results gleaned from 224 returned surveys indicated that non-use stemmed from lack of time in their schedules for faculty members to learn and integrate a business simulation into their classrooms, lack of awareness of relevant simulations, and failure in using past simulations.

INTRODUCTION

The business simulation research community has more than 30 year's worth of data profiling the usage levels of simulations in schools of business. Most recently, Faria and Nulsen (1996) found that"

business simulation game usage in academia and in industry has continued to grow over the past ten years with expectations of further growth" (1996, p.22). These expectations for future growth appeal to be valid, and the veracities of such claims are backed up by rigorous research. However, what is lacking in this data collection and reporting is data providing the reasoning behind faculty non-use of business simulations. The purpose of this paper is to gain insight into why instructors of schools of business in U.S. schools fail to use business simulations. By reporting only on the usage levels of business simulations we tend to form a mutual-appreciation community. Since simulation researchers are proponents of the values of simulations, there has been a tendency in data collection to seek out examples of use to justify continued research on simulations.

History and Usage of Instrument Designs

Dale & Klasson (1962) provided one of the first studies of simulation usage. Subsequent researchers have, consistently reported usage levels above 90% for AACSB member schools of business. While the size and scope of Faria & Nulsen's (1996) study was impressive, their study provided re-affirmation for views already held. This affirmation consisted of 1- usage levels are still high and 2- users rate simulations high in learning benefits. While studies need to be periodically conducted to assess usage levels, emphasis should also be placed on areas where data is lacking.

STUDY

In all, 3820 total surveys were mailed for AACSB member schools in the same population as the Faria study. A sample of 224 was received, which although small in comparison, was still adequate to provide power in extrapolating to the larger sample size. Ninety of the 382 targeted schools of business were represented. The remaining number of surveys completed indicated that multiple surveys were completed per institution.

The survey design was open-ended. Respondents were asked to list their reasons for why they were not currently using business simulations. The word "simulation" was defined for respondents to provide a common context. The survey also asked if respondents had ever used simulations, and asked previous users a follow-on question of why they no longer used simulations in the classroom.

TABLE 1
NON-USE of SIMULATIONS AT AACSB MEMBER SCHOOLS

Reason for non-use	# of Instances	% of Total Responses
1. Lack of awareness of appropriate simulations	90	31.6
2. Lack of perceived time	82	28.8
3. Fear over complexity of simulations	54	18.9
4. Past experience with simulations were unsatisfactory	35	12.3
5. Other	24	8.4
TOTAL	285	100

The summary table above is a compilation of responses. In total, 285 responses were catalogued from the 224 collected surveys and organized into the above categories (therefore some surveys listed

multiple reasons for non-use). Three expert reviewers were used to categorize responses. Table I indicates that a lack of awareness of appropriate simulations and a perceived lack of time to learn and integrate the simulation were the top reasons for non-use of simulations. The #3 reason, fear over the complexity of simulations, is related to the #2 response - lack of perceived time. However, the response occurred so often by itself that it warranted it's own categorization. Only 12.3% of responses sited a bad experience with simulations as cause for non-use.

TABLE 2
BAD EXPERIENCE CATEGORIZATIONS

Reason for discontinuing use of simulations	# of Instances	% of Total Responses
1. Too much time required	13	37.1
2. Negative comments on teacher evaluations	8	22.8
3. Lack of student interest	7	20.0
4. Lack of vendor support	4	11.4
5. Other	3	8.6
Total	35	100

Although the number of responses for those who had bad experiences with simulations was small, it is the first known attempt to categorize those disaffected instructors who no longer use simulations. The #1 reason for non-use was a perception that too much time was required in a previous attempt at using a simulation. Student disfavor, measured in terms of lack of interest and negative comments on teacher evaluations was also a significant response amongst this pool of respondents.

A follow-on question asked respondents who had bad experiences with simulations whether they planned on using simulations in the future. Only 7 of the 35 respondents in this category (20%) indicated that they would use simulations again in the future. This low expected future use indicates that those who discontinue to use simulations become disaffected and will not use them in the future as a pedagogical tool.

IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

One important implication of the results of the survey is the fact that simulation developers may not be creating enough visibility for their simulations. The frequency of responses of those who were unaware of relevant simulations indicates that the "bright future" that Faria alluded to may indeed hold promise. However, potential users may be unaware of the availability of appropriate disciplinary simulations. In addition, respondents may have been unaware of adequate simulations because they do not actively seek out new pedagogical tools. Even though simulations are varied by content, market coverage, and complexity, the simulation community has a small following (measured in terms of attendance at national and international conferences of simulations). Wolfe's assertion that we have reached a "point of relative saturation in various American business course applications" (1993, p. 446) does not imply that saturation exists across all business disciplines and sub-fields. For example, total enterprise simulations and related strategy simulations abound. However, simulations for other sub-field, such as organizational development, are less visible. Indeed, Faria and Nulsen's 1996 study found that simulation usage for accounting was only 15.7%, while business policy enjoyed a 65.7% usage level. This visibility is due, in part, to a smaller target market.

The small sample size for the sub-population of those that had bad experiences with simulations warrants further study, in addition, since the study took a unique angle on current data gathered about users of simulations, repeat studies are needed to confirm or refute findings.

A natural extension of this research would be data collection that would rigorously assess the total percentage of faculty members in AACSB member school's that actively use simulations. The cost of such a study would be very expensive however.

References Available on Request