

Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 22, 1995

STUDENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF A MANAGEMENT SIMULATION COURSE

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers some instructor thoughts and student perceptions of *CORPORATION: A GLOBAL BUSINESS SIMULATION* by Gerald R. Smith and Peggy A. Golden. These perceptions favorably depict *CORPORATION* as a useful cognitive and affective pedagogical tool. Students appear to favor a simulation approach to learning. Recommendations are made for improving the simulation approach to learning.

INTRODUCTION

Team business simulations such as *CORPORATION: A GLOBAL BUSINESS SIMULATION* by Smith and Golden (1994), potentially allow for collaborative learning and development of interpersonal skills. At Robert Morris College, *CORPORATION*, a simulation of the information systems industry, has been employed for five semesters in the final management course, Management Simulation.

An anonymous thirty-three-question survey (Appendix) was administered at the conclusion of three classes of Management Simulation to gauge both cognitive and affective outcomes of learning. A continuum was employed and means and modes were calculated for each question.

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND LEARNING

One informal objective of the course was to create enjoyment. Overwhelmingly, students enjoyed a simulation approach to learning and they agreed that they would like to use a simulation again. Students strongly perceived *CORPORATION* as a "learning experience" and not as "too much of a game" as well as a reasonable simulation of the real world.

A variety of perceived outcomes were measured to assess learning. Students believed they learned as much in the simulation course as in other courses and they were strongly motivated to do their best for their teams. With regard to specific course objectives, students perceived an integration of knowledge and skills acquired in other courses, learned more about the business environment, and better understood strategic planning, financial management, the functions of planning and organizing and the concerns of upper level

managers. Similarly, three-fourths of the students gained insights on group dynamics.

INSTRUCTOR THOUGHTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Team Selection

Teams, comprised of 4-6 persons, are gender balanced and include at least one person with strong financial skills and one with extensive computer experience. Students are asked if there is anyone with whom they would prefer not to work and students do not choose their own teams. Perhaps the most important criterion in team selection is to form teams on the assumption that a heterogeneous group with regard to personality and problem solving abilities is more suitable than a homogeneous group when performing complex tasks. To this end a personality instrument such as the Personal concept instrument, Mohler and Associates (1981), appears to be appropriate.

Number Crunching

While Smith and Golden provide many forms to assist in the number crunching, our teams construct computer spreadsheets to efficiently test their decisions and predict results, as time is a critical element.

Peer Evaluation

To encourage equitable and accurate ratings, an informal peer review should be conducted at the midpoint of the simulation and shared with coworkers, giving each person an opportunity to improve. In a similar vein, we employ a *role-negotiations technique*, where students privately and in writing, direct comments to each teammate about his contribution.

Incentives

To stimulate competition throughout the simulation, we reveal aggregate performance points (calculated by the computer program). To prevent teams from only focusing on performance points and to enhance the management decision-making experience, each firm is required to present a "project" at the annual stakeholders meeting.

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Difficulties

Another problem, albeit one that occurs in many courses, is the occasional student who is “turned off” by the learning approach. A clear explanation of the course’s procedure and requirements, a persuasive discussion of the potential benefits of a simulation and continuous encouragement clear the path for a more effective learning experience.

CONCLUSION

CORPORATION: A GLOBAL BUSINESS SIMULATION has proven to be a valuable management tool from both the perspectives of students and the instructor.

APPENDIX

SA = strongly agree = 5 points

A = agree = 4 points

U = uncertain = 3 points

D = disagree = 2 points

SD = strongly disagree = 1 point

Mode/Mean

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|---------|-----|---|
| SA 4.28 | 1. | I enjoyed the simulation approach to learning. |
| A 4.28 | 2. | I thought the <i>CORPORATION</i> simulation was interesting. |
| D 2.02 | 3. | I thought the <i>CORPORATION</i> simulation was too complex. |
| A 3.98 | 4. | I prefer a simulation approach to learning to a lecture approach. |
| A 3.74 | 5. | I prefer a simulation approach to a case study approach (e.g. as in Business Policy). |
| A 4.08 | 6. | I feel that I learned as much in this course as I typically do in other courses. |
| A 3.56 | 7. | I enjoyed working in a group. |
| AD 3.04 | 8. | I would prefer less group work. |
| D 2.28 | 9. | The amount of reading in the course should be increased. |
| D 2.12 | 10. | I would have preferred more learning activities (e.g. exercises, cases, lectures) in this course. |
| A 4.06 | 11. | The “critical incidents” made the course more interesting. |
| A 3.92 | 12. | I learned from the “critical incidents.” |
| D 2.72 | 13. | There was too much “number crunching” in the simulation. |
| SA 4.52 | 14. | I tried to do my best for my team. |
| D 2.36 | 15. | It was difficult to learn how to use |

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| | | | the <i>CORPORATION</i> simulation. |
| D 2.42 | 16. | I would have preferred more assignments involving the computer. | |
| A 3.36 | 17. | The course required too much out of class group time. | |
| A 4.14 | 18. | The course helped to familiarize me with the business environment. | |
| A 4.08 | 19. | The course helped me to understand the concerns of upper level managers. | |
| A 4.28 | 20. | The course required me to integrate knowledge and skills learned in other courses. | |
| A 3.16 | 21. | It was too difficult to predict the outcomes of decisions in the <i>CORPORATION</i> simulation. | |
| A 3.98 | 22. | I better understand strategic planning as a result of this course. | |
| A 3.9 | 23. | I better understand financial management as a result of this course. | |
| A 3.76 | 24. | I gained insight into how to function effectively within a group setting. | |
| A 3.38 | 25. | I feel more comfortable speaking to a large audience as a result of this course. | |
| A 3.68 | 26. | The “group project” was a positive learning experience. | |
| A 3.62 | 27. | I thought the amount of teacher interaction with the groups was just right. | |
| D 2.86 | 28. | I would have preferred more teacher interaction with my group. | |
| A 3.98 | 29. | I more fully understand the functions of planning and organizing as a result of this course. | |
| A 3.76 | 30. | I would like to use a simulation approach again. | |
| D 2.08 | 31. | The simulation was too much of a “games and not enough of a learning experience. | |
| A 3.56 | 32. | The <i>CORPORATION</i> program is a reasonable simulation of the real world. | |
| D 3.56 | 33. | I would have liked more in-class group time. | |

REFERENCES

- Mohler, J. (1981) *THE NAME OF THE GAME IS YOU!: HOW TO ZERO IN ON YOURSELF AND OTHERS: THE IMPORTANCE OF VALUES AND BEHAVIOR* Garwood, NJ: Jack Mohler and Associates.
- Smith, J.R. and Golden, P.A. (1994) *CORPORATION: A GLOBAL BUSINESS SIMULATION*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.