

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 15, 1988

A TALE OF TWO SHEPHERDS OR USING SIMULATION IN A CLASS WITHOUT WALLS

Peggy A. Golden, University of Louisville
Jerald R. Smith, University of Louisville
Peter Holland, Massey University

ABSTRACT

Decreasing enrollments, non-traditional students, and recent innovations in continuing education have forced administrators and educators to consider innovative pedagogical methods. Two options have traditionally been ordered: courses by correspondence and educational television auspices of public universities. Both of these methods have had limitations due to the one-way method of communicating course material; in addition, these methods tend to be content rather than process oriented focusing on written or verbal lectures with written responses. Proponents of experiential education methods balk at the lack of process involved in the learning process.

The problem is more than just pedagogical; it has a competitive connotation. Continuing education in management is being supported by the American Management Association, AACSB, and some States in which traditional classroom technology is economically or practically infeasible. The ho-hum technology of television lecture or printed material has already been replaced by satellite supported interactive teleconferencing and electronic mail. However, weaknesses still exist in the area of decision processing. A solution has been proposed by management faculty in a "down under" country that is largely rural with isolated sheep carriers as the primary students of management.

MANAGEMENT SIMULATIONS IN DISTANCE LEARNING

Far out in the South Pacific, in New Zealand, Massey University in Palmerston North has pioneered the use of management simulations in distance education in undergraduate management courses. New Zealand, with a land mass of some 100,000 square miles, about three-quarters the size of Pennsylvania, has a population of only three million people, although it sports 85 million sheep! The population, outside a few major cities, is dispersed into small urban and rural communities in the North and South Islands. To serve these communities Massey University, under a special Extramural Statute, offers distance education undergraduate courses.

Each course covers the same content as the equivalent full-time internal course but is taught in a different mode. Students unable to attend full- or part-time undergraduate courses at Massey or other universities in New Zealand, owing to work or other commitments, may enroll for these courses. The courses, when taught in the distance mode, are referred to as extramural courses. Usually the same Course Controller is in charge of both the internal (face-to-face) and the extramural course. This helps to ensure comparable course content.

As a result of a visit to the States in 1985 by a senior academic from the Department of Management and Administration at Massey University, management simulation exercises were introduced into both internal and extramural second and third year management courses in

1986. Since the courses had traditionally followed the same content regardless of the mode of teaching, it was decided to introduce management simulations into both internal and extramural courses. The introduction into internal courses followed the conventional pattern used in many universities in the States.

The introduction into extramural courses, however, soon proved to be more experimental. No immediate precedents were found to guide the interaction. The students taking extramural management courses have an average age of about 29 years and many have at least five years work experience. While students vary on both extremes of that age range, the name of the game is very definitely Andragogy rather than Pedagogy. Great variation in the level of professional experience and normal school education exists among the students. Many students will not have received secondary education beyond 10th Grade. Such adult students are, if over the age of twenty-one, admitted on a provisional basis and are allowed the opportunity to prove their academic ability.

The simulation chosen for trial in the basic management course was Manager-A Simulation (Smith, 1984). It was chosen since it was:

- * readily available from the States;
- * comparatively simple to operate requiring only eleven decisions to be made by students ~or each exercise;
- * offering, in addition, a range of incidents requiring ethical and socially responsible decisions from students;
- * designed for processing on an IBM PC, which was readily available;
- * not so culturally based on the States that the conditions used in the exercises could not be applied to New Zealand business;
- * complete with well documented student and instructor manuals.

To undertake the simulations students were required to form company management teams of three persons. The students enroll with the University by mail some months before the beginning of the course. The Course Controller in charge of the course requires that each student registered in the course must form a team. A team mate may be a spruce, a farmhand or the manager of the local grain cooperative (or a duly registered student, but this is less common). The team process is a requirement of the course but the selection of a simulation teammate is up to the individual participant. Students are required to send a completed decision form with each set of lessons and are provided a printout prior to the next decision period. Student-faculty contact takes place only at a beginning of semester briefing and an end of semester debriefing. Favorable student response

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has resulted in increased enrollments, increased student performance (on exams) and increased student satisfaction as evidenced by retention.

GENERALIZABILITY

The Massey University extramural program is a lock-step diploma program that requires courses in entrepreneurship and business policy. These applied topics present similar pedagogical demands to those presented by a management principles course. As of Summer, 1987 (Winter term south of the equator) simulation games were being introduced into both of these courses. It was anticipated that some of the teams that were formed for the first simulation experience would remain in tact for the subsequent courses.

As the demands on continuing education extend to the for-credit course domain, universities are going to be called upon to innovate in the non-traditional classroom. One of the benefits that is sacrificed in this environment is the process dimension of classroom. Use of a simulation game requires group membership; this is a significant dimension of university education and can offset the education isolation frequency experienced by television and other "media" courses as well as programs without walls. In the domain of management education, it provides skill building activities as well as an emulation of marketplace competition.

The use of 2 simulation game in a remote area also generates some potential research questions. It will be important to gain a greater understanding of the impact on decision-making by pre- and post-simulation assessment. Another area of interest is the comparative satisfaction with the course between simulation classes and other classes. A third area of exploration is the potential for using the class without walls concept in teach principles of management using the liberal arts large lecture/lab section; such an approach would extend resources for many colleges and universities.