

# Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 13, 1986

## AN APPROACH TO MEETING THE AACSB GUIDELINES FOR INTRODUCING SKILLS AND PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS (SAPCs) USING AN INTERCLASS SIMULATION AND ROLE-PLAY PEDAGOGY

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### ABSTRACT

The AACSB has suggested that Skills and Personal Characteristics (formerly referred to as non-cognitive skills) are an important component of business education. This article suggests an innovative way of teaching some of these Skills and Personal Characteristics to business students. The method involved the use of two different courses, Course A (MSc 280), Small Business Management, and Course B (MSc 397), a course using a business simulation as the major opus operandi, were the courses chosen for the experiment. Students in Course A assumed the role of a Board of Directors for students in Course B. The students in B class played a typical business simulation (DECIDE), but had the added dimension or responsibility of being accountable to the Board of Directors, viz., the students in A class. Both classes were given introductory lectures on their respective topics, as well as additional information on how to conduct themselves in their various roles. Students in both classes had to prepare resumes, be interviewed for various managerial positions, prepare weekly, as well as ad hoc reports, explain their operating decisions to the Board of Directors, etc. The major Skills and Personal Characteristics emphasized were role-playing, making decisions under stress, self-assessment, public speaking (both informal, and extemporaneous, as well as formal). The process was monitored and evaluated using video taping and opinion surveys, as well as a small sample of post experiential interviews. The authors believe that this pedagogy can readily be adopted by many business schools without the addition of new faculty, new courses, retraining of faculty or by radically changing the content of existing courses.

### INTRODUCTION

Recently, interest in both Skills and Personal Characteristics (SAPCs) and experiential exercises has been a major thrust of two organizations, ABSEL and the AACSB. For example, a major purpose of ABSEL since its inception, has been to develop and foster experiential exercises to serve as major pedagogical tool for management education. While many experiential exercises serve the purpose of reinforcing or enhancing cognitive skills, much of their purpose is to promote the development of non-cognitive skills. For example, Mitton and Lilligren-Mitton (1981) suggest that it is important for experiential exercises to help develop managerial qualities such as confidence, self-esteem, assertiveness, spontaneity and adaptability, and the ability to see the "big picture". In another study, Meyers (1982) lists some experiential exercises which should help students learn or learn about creativity. The Kline Panel (1982) make non-cognitive skills a major area of business school education and suggests a list of non-cognitive skills similar to the AACSB list. Other scholars, such as Madden, Robertson and Brenenstuhl (1983) indicate the importance of using various types of feedback mechanisms to evaluate non-cognitive

skills, such as video-taping, while Faltot and Ogilvie (1983) talk about using video-technology to tape role playing and then teaching students a variety of skills based on this. In general, the teaching of non-cognitive skills or SAPCs has been a popular theme of ABSEL writers (Cameron and Whetton, 1984; Calás, 1984; Kline and Warrick, 1984 and Couch and Graf, 1984), since its inception in 1974.

A similar, albeit more recent interest in non-cognitive learning (now referred to as Personal Skills and Characteristics or SAPCs), has been expressed by the AACSB. AACSB's interest in SAPCs began in 1976 when the organization embarked on a project to examine its accreditation process, a project which they believe would lead to better overall business education. The project was partly a normative one and partly a descriptive one. The normative part consisted of determining what cognitive as well as non-cognitive aspects of learning were the appropriate areas of pedagogy in business schools and the descriptive part consisted in defining and describing what it was business schools were, in fact, doing. The AACSB believed that the Accreditation Research Project would help business schools derive more realistic evaluations of their curricula by focusing on output. Presently, the only way the AACSB Accreditation Committee is able to determine quality education is by assessing inputs (i.e., library resources, quality of faculty, student-faculty ratios, etc.). What the Committee hoped to do was to be able and to determine the quality of business education by measuring outputs, that is, what did the student learn while at the institution. The AACSB thus embarked on a long-term research project to measure and assess the degree to which cognitive, as well as non-cognitive learning took place in business schools. At the time of this writing, the project is in its final phase and a final report should be out sometime in 1986-7.

Dean H. J. Zoffer, Dean, Graduate School of Business at the University of Pittsburgh and Chairperson of the Accreditation Research Committee, in his 1980 paper summed up the task of the Accreditation Committee:

The Project raises many questions which are being explored in the Second stage of the research project. It will be necessary to determine whether it is possible to effectively measure the non-cognitive variables which have been identified. It will be necessary to explore whether it is possible to impact upon those dimensions as a result of curricular efforts. That is, can business schools improve non-cognitive dimensions such as leadership and organizational ability through the use of the curriculum or curricularly related experiences. (page 9, "The Challenge Ahead for Management Education: Some Perspectives On The AACSB Accreditation Research Project On Outcome Measurement" June 1980).

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The plea for a better way in which to teach SAPCs has remained a persistent cry in subsequent AACSB Newsletters. For example, the June 1982 issue of the AACSB NEWSLETTER quotes Professor Clarkson of the University of Toronto who spoke of several areas in business schools "which require immediate attention by those responsible for management education. Specific areas of concern include: the introduction of non-cognitive skills into the curriculum. .

### DEVELOPMENT OF A TAXONOMY OF SAPCS

Since the AACSB determined that non-cognitive skills or SAPCs were an important part of the business school curricula, most business schools have been wrestling with the problems of trying to define what a SAPC is and trying to determine what SAPCs are important for the business school curricula.

In order to arrive at a meaningful descriptions of SAPCs, the AACSB Accreditation Project carried out a long and extensive research, and has established a taxonomy of SAPCs (AACSB Bulletin, 1980). Appendix A provides a complete list and definition of SAPCs. The taxonomy can be used to both help business schools understand and attempt to implement non-cognitive skills, and also to set up a process by which such skills can be measured in a meaningful, yet cost effective manner.

### APPROACH OF SUNY-GENESE0

It seems that there are two basic strategies business schools can take in teaching SAPCs. They can establish new courses or they can attempt to integrate SAPCs into traditional courses. While the first approach has some intuitive appeal because it creates explicit emphasis, it also requires new resources (costs) and course(s) added to business schools' curricula which in most schools are already saturated with required courses for students. On the other hand, traditional courses can be redesigned to include explicit attention to SAPCs. This approach had the decided advantage of maintaining an equilibrium of courses for students, while being able to yet add an important real-world dimension, viz., the SAPC. This approach also gets faculty involved and committed and can save resources, if implemented correctly.

At the John Wiley Jones School of Business, SUNY-Geneseo, a forum in which SAPCs skills could be both taught and learned, was established by combining and inter-class role play with management simulation. The first class chosen for the experiential exercise was MSc 397 (Integrative Management) which is a one credit, half-semester course all business seniors must take. This course is a complementary course to the three credit Business Policy course, which is primarily a case course. The other class involved in the experiential exercise was MSc 280 (Small Business Management). Traditionally, this course is for students who are interested in the management of smaller businesses. The students in this class played the role of Corporate Boards for the class using the simulation. It should be noted that MSc 300 (Organizational Behavior) was also considered as a 'good' course in which the students could serve as the Board of Directors. However, because some of the students were taking both MSc 397 and MSc 300 concurrently, it was not possible to use MSc 300 students to play the role of the Board.

### DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTER-CLASS APPROACH

#### Initiation and Organization

At the beginning of the semester, the students in MSc 397 course (28 students) were told that they would be using a management simulation, (the DECIDE Management Came was used) in which they would serve in the capacity of management teams whose purpose it was to devise strategic, operational plans and make decisions in a competitive environment. However, there will be an additional feature to the simulation, namely each student team would be accountable to a Corporate Board. The Corporate Boards for each team (firm) would be made up of students from MSc 280. The students in MSc 280 (21 students) had the task of serving as Corporate Boards for each Management Team. The students in MSc 280 were given instructions concerning the DECIDE Came, as well as several lectures on the duties and responsibilities of a Corporate Board. Half-way through the semester, there was a turn-over in the MSc 397 course. At this point the incoming students to MSc 397 (about 21 students) were informed that they would have to apply for one of several positions on one of the Management Teams. Since students were pre-registered for MSc 397, letters were sent to them two weeks before the beginning of the course to inform them of the hiring/interviewing procedure and what application materials they would have to submit before the course actually started. The students in MSc 280 would be responsible for interviewing and hiring these new Management Teams. This hiring/interviewing procedure was a major part of implementing the SAPCs and is described below under the 'ad hoc' interaction section.

#### Interaction

Interaction between the Corporate Boards and Management Teams was arranged to take place in two ways: (1) on a regular basis (i.e., weekly meetings to discuss operational plans and results of decisions); and (2) on an ad hoc basis (i.e., special meetings between the Boards and Management Teams for the purpose of interviewing, and performance appraisals). Both types of interaction are discussed in detail below.

#### Weekly Operational Interaction

Board and Management Teams were instructed to hold regularly scheduled weekly meetings. Faculty observers could be present at these meetings if they wished. Minutes were to be kept of these meetings. While there were several important operational decisions to be discussed at each meeting, a primary purpose was to determine the appropriate dividend decision for the firm. The DECIDE Simulation has within it a provision for a dividend decision which can only be made in the context of all the other decisions and is very much contingent upon the projections of income into the future. As a consequence, it was decided to permit the Board members to make the dividend decision after receiving a recommendation and consulting with the management team. Thus, a format of weekly play and interaction developed and is shown below:

MONDAY--Management Teams (MSc 397 students) would meet. On reviewing the current position and plans, establish tentative decisions for the next period of play including a recommendation for the dividends to be declared.

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WEDNESDAY--Corporate Board members (MSc 280 students) review recommendations made by management teams and establish the final dividend decision.

THURSDAY--Management teams receive instructions from their Corporate Boards and input decisions.

FRIDAY--Computerized results are received by Management teams and evaluated. A report is drawn up for the Corporate Boards.

### Ad Hoc Interaction

The ad hoc exercises were aimed at developing oral and written communication skills, as well as helping the student be able to think and act "on the spot". Below is a list of five major ad hoc exercises which were used during the inter-class role play

1. **Management Briefing.** Management Teams were asked by their Boards to provide a formal "management report" on the status of their particular firm. The report was to include the following: the firm's financial position, the marketing mix, the maintenance policy, a policy on social responsibility, and the composition and training of the workforce.

During one class meeting early in the semester, the Management Teams from MSc 397 came to an evening session of the Corporate Board's (MSc 280 class) and gave oral presentations of the "management reports." These sessions were video-taped for later analysis. A written report was also submitted. Board members were required to question the Management Teams on the various aspects of the reports. This exercise was repeated at mid-semester when the new managers came into MSc 397. The new Management Teams also had the responsibility of making oral and written "management reports."

2. **Performance Appraisal.** At the end of the first half of the semester, Corporate Boards asked their managers to submit criteria upon which their (the managers) performance could be evaluated. Individual Boards then reviewed this criteria with their respective Management Teams to arrive at a consensus concerning the performance appraisal. At the end of the term, the Boards then evaluated their Management Teams according to this criteria.
3. **Recruitment.** One of the more exciting and controversial exercises was the recruitment procedure. At the mid-semester point, a new group of MSc 397 students entered the course. The now "experienced" Boards wrote five job descriptions for Management Teams, which would be used to hire the incoming Managers. The five positions were: CEO, V-P Marketing, V-P Production, Director of Finance and Director of Personnel. Meanwhile, the incoming MSc 397 students had submitted applications for these positions and were subsequently interviewed by special committees.
4. **Screening and Selection.** When all applications were received, one class period was spent by the Corporate Boards reviewing the credentials of the incoming managers. A form was devised to rate the applications. The form included the criteria of appearance of the cover letter, the appearance of

the resume, the appropriateness of the applicant's background, etc. Two applicants were selected for each job for interviewing. The initial interviews were conducted by the Board Members and were video-taped for later review and analysis. Members of the Corporate Boards were assigned the task of developing evaluation criteria and for ultimately selecting applicants for the five management positions. Interview criteria consisted of: ability to answer interviewer's questions clearly, leadership potential, overall rating, etc. Candidates were notified in writing of the position they will be filling and of the team on which they would be serving during the first week of the class.

As indicated earlier, the major purpose of the inter-class experiential exercise was to help develop SAPCS. Each course instructor familiarized himself/herself with the list of SAPCS used by the AACSB at the beginning of the semester. Students were not informed that they would be learning the SAPCS ipso facto, but they were told that a major portion of their evaluation (grade) would be based on how well they were able to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the position in which they were assigned. They were also informed that the interviewing, as well as at least one Board-Team meeting would be taped and that they would review this tape with one of the course instructors before the end of the semester. This would enable the instructors to make an evaluation of interpersonal skills, as well as provide the student with some feedback on how he/she was carrying out the responsibilities of his/her role. The Table lists the various SAPCS which were addressed during the inter-class exercise. The Table also indicates how each SAPC was implemented, the frequency with which it occurred and how it was evaluated. It should be noted, however, that the SAPCs were not measured in any rigorous, or scientific manner. One of the major reasons for not measuring SAPCs in such a manner is simply that the AACSB has not as yet issued a standard illustrating how SAPCs are to be measured and evaluated.

As can be seen, many of the SAPCs suggested by the AACSB were able to be implemented using the inter-class (role-play) experiential exercise. Video-taping some of the sessions helped to assess SAPCs, as well as provide the students with feedback, which they themselves could view and comment on (hence, seeing their own strengths and weaknesses). Since the AACSB has yet to establish a formal measuring procedure (evaluation) for SAPCs, we could not "grade" the students on the SAPCs in a formal sense. However, an assessment and evaluation procedure is presently being pursued by the AACSB which is, in fact, engaged in the third and final phase of its Accreditation Project. This final phase should help provide to business schools a program for introducing, measuring and evaluating SAPCs in a rigorous fashion.

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to suggest a practical manner in which SAPCs can be used in the classroom. The paper does not claim to have presented an ideal way in which SAPCs can be taught. It is, perhaps, safe to say that no such method exists. The best that one can do is to provide a forum wherein students will have an opportunity to practice SAPCs and be given feedback. The two-class or interclass approach offers just such a forum. Since many business schools use management simulations and have

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courses in Organizational Behavior, Small Business Management or Entrepreneurship, this exercise can easily be adapted by most business colleges. Having two completely independent classes involved helps to enhance the real-world flavor of the Board and Management roles. Video-taping insures that students will try to function in their roles with seriousness. It also provides a cost-effective manner in which instructors and students can review various behaviors and attitudes as displayed during the interactions. Unfortunately, not every SAPC was able to be addressed in formal sense. However, it is probably unrealistic to suggest that one or two courses can do so without radically altering the substance of the course.

### APPENDIX A: TAXONOMY OF SKILLS & PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS (SAPCs)

#### ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS

- Organizing and Planning
- Decision-making
- Creativity

#### INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- Leadership
- Oral Communications
- Behavior Flexibility
- Personal Impact
- Social Objectivity
- Perception of Threshold Social Cues

#### INTELLECTUAL ABILITY

- Range of Interest
- General Mental Ability
- Written Communication

#### STABILITY OF PERFORMANCE

- Tolerance of Uncertainty
- Resistance to Stress

#### WORK MOTIVATION

- Primacy of Work
- Inner Work Standards
- Energy
- Social Objectivity
- Career Orientation

SOURCE: AACSB BULLETIN (vol. 15, No. 2) 1980

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TABLE: IMPLEMENTATION OF SAPOs

<u>SAPOs</u>	<u>GROUP INVOLVED</u>	<u>IMPLEMENTATION</u>	<u>FREQUENCY OF USE</u>	<u>WHO EVALUATED</u>	<u>EVALUATION MEDIUM</u>	<u>EVALUATION CRITERIA</u>
Organizing	both groups	team formation & delegation of duties	once (at beginning)	self	oral	informal
Planning	management teams	development of operational plans	weekly	both	written	informal
Planning	corporate boards	development of strategic	once (at beginning)	both	written	informal
Decision making	both	operating & strategic	weekly	both	written oral	team ranking in simulation performance
Leadership	both	leadership selection leader behavior	once (at beginning)	both groups & instructor	video-taping	informal feedback from instructor
Behavioral flexibility	both	reaction to board's	weekly	both groups & instructor	oral	informal
Personal impact	both	job interviews resume evaluation	once (at beginning)	both	oral, written, & taping	informal feedback from instructor
Perception of threshold cues	both	during team/ board meetings	weekly	both	oral, taping	informal feedback from instructor
Tolerance of uncertainty	both	of competitors of simulation itself	weekly	both	oral, written, & instructor	feedback of instructor
General Mental	both	game performance	termination	instructor	written	game performance ability
Self-objectivity	both	interaction with team members	weekly	instructor	oral	informal feedback from instructors