

Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 11, 1984

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE: ABSEL'S ROLE

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ABSTRACT

What is ABSEL's role in the future? The collective efforts of ABSEL members during the first decade of the organization's existence has resulted in increasing the status and acceptance of business simulation and experiential learning among business educators. However, ABSEL has not been as successful in producing defensible general theory or rigorous research findings. A different contribution will be required in the future. The study of management competencies conducted by the American Management Association and the AACSB report on the managers of the XXI century provide specific, relevant goals for ABSEL's future activities. A modification in ABSEL's current structure is suggested to include major theoretical research projects involving many faculty from different campuses using rigorous experimental design guided by hypothesis testing. Such projects will produce findings that are both internally and externally valid and thus can be used for improving business education.

INTRODUCTION

The impact of megatrends on ABSEL can be partially mitigated by actions taken in the present in anticipation of future events. It is possible to spend considerable time and energy contemplating our future as an organization but with little or nothing happening as a result. A neutered outcome of this sort is likely because: 1) consensus among members will be difficult regarding what it is we should do, i.e., adopt long range strategic plans [10] to guide us into the future, 2) if we don't know where we are going, it will be impossible to develop specific action plans in the present, and 3) our organization is not presently structured to support long range activities beyond our yearly meetings.

From another perspective, why be concerned in the first place? We could continue for the next ten years, as we did in the first ten years, sharing our experiences with simulation and experiential teaching techniques. Nothing much has to change to maintain ourselves, as Gentry and Burns [21] have implied. And besides, the obstacles against change are many and sizeable. Perhaps Schreier [10] is right in predicting our reaching the decline stage in the life cycle sooner rather than later, but no one is directly suggesting that ABSEL is in imminent danger.

In addition to megatrends, another important reason for us to contemplate the future and our role in it is the advent of ABSEL's tenth anniversary, a notable and reflective occasion especially for such an avant-garde group of business educators.

PURPOSE

In this paper we argue for a reorganization of ABSEL's current structure to accommodate large-scale, tightly designed research projects that will better substantiate some of our pedagogical techniques and theories. This argument is based on a preliminary assessment of ABSEL research during the past six years.

Our second argument is a call for ABSEL to consider adopting as long range strategic plans some of the futuristic ideas put forth by two allies, the American Management Association (AMA) and the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). In our opinion, these ideas are operationalized refinements of several megatrends and therefore provide excellent long range plans for ABSEL.

There is some urgency for ABSEL to become more proactive if we are to retain our role as innovators and pacesetters in business education. Some critics [3, pp. 2-3; 8] are calling for revolutionary changes in business education as we know it. One author [11, p. 351] charges: "(they)...need a broader vision, a sense of history... I'd close every one of the graduate schools of business." Still another author [9, pp. 1-5] asks: "If all the business schools in the country were eliminated...would anyone notice?"

Before looking to the future, we examined ABSEL's past research efforts to determine the extent of our contributions to improving business education. If we have been extending the boundaries of current theories and producing research data of sufficient validity to substantiate what we hold to be true, then we should continue doing so into the future. If not, then certain changes need to be made.

A REVIEW OF ABSEL RESEARCH

After a decade of research effort it appears to us that far too many situation-specific studies are being reported, the impact of our educational processes remain poorly understood, and our theoretical developments are lagging far behind the needs and expectations of our rapidly changing society. In support of these gut-level criticisms, a study was made of the content of the six (1978-1983) most recent ABSEL Proceedings. At issue was whether or not we have been advancing our understanding of simulation and experiential learning. For knowledge to be advanced, both theory and substantive facts must be progressively interactive. Theoretical generalizations cannot be credibly claimed without empirical verification, and empirical results outside of a coherent theoretical system are of little value.

Articles were evaluated based on whether or not they met the scientific principles of "good" research design as described by Kerlinger [6, pp. 3-29]. Appendix A lists those few articles that met the criteria. The reader should consider the results with the awareness that no attempts were made to control for interrater or intrarater reliability.

In light of these limitations, and assuming some accuracy in judgment, only 19 of the 392 papers that appeared during these past six years contributed empirical generalizations in relation to theory. Additionally, Wolfe [12, p. 72], Kelley [4, p. 69], and Kelley & Easton [5, pp. 137-141] have all criticized ABSEL

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research as lacking in external validity, and generally violating experimental design concepts. It appears, therefore, that much of ABSEL's research has little usefulness outside of the specific situation in which studies are conducted. If a study was basically theoretical, the theory was rarely presented in the context of existing theory or in a manner that allowed for empirical verification, i.e., no hypotheses were tested.

Based on our evaluation and the evaluations of others, ABSEL needs to focus on identifying those theoretical questions that will be most pressing in a mega- trend-filled future. For example, how can we best teach some of the megatrend issues such as networking, decision-making in uncertainty, the assimilation of massive amounts of data, interpersonal "high touch" competencies, and international transactions?

Secondly, once we have identified and prioritized our future theoretical issues, then we need to design major research efforts to resolve them.

Concurrent with megatrends, two important recent events have occurred that could be of considerable use to ABSEL for developing long range plans: the American Management Association's competency program and the Managers of the Future Conference coordinated by AACSB.

THE AMERICAN MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION'S COMPETENCY MODEL

In the November, 1979 issue of Management Review, the President of the American Management Association (AMA) wrote a brief "memo" entitled "A New Look at Managerial Competence: The AMA Model of Worthy Performance." This was the first in a series of reports by the AMA which shared the results of an eight-year effort into managerial competencies. The study was undertaken because the AMA had become dissatisfied with the inability of business graduates (MBA's mainly) to perform outside of the cognitive/rational! quantitative domain.

The driving question of this project was: do successful managers exhibit competencies different from those who are not as successful? David McClelland's McBer and Company of Boston was retained and asked to identify generic competencies by analyzing over 1,800 management jobs. Bennis (1, p. 3] reported:

"[This study]...is, without question, some of the most complete, systematic research ever undertaken on the attributes of the good manager." Eighteen competencies emerged that were demonstrable by outstanding managers. These were grouped into four clusters. The clusters and their respective competencies are in Figure 1. Based on their results, the AMA has started a Master's of Management degree program and extensive management development seminars to teach to these competencies.

FIGURE 1
SKILL COMPETENCY CLUSTERS

GOAL AND ACTION MANAGEMENT CLUSTER - This cluster deals with the manager's initiative, image, problem- solving skills, and goal orientation.

Efficiency Orientation -- The ability to be concerned with doing something better using efficient methods, realistic goals and standards of excellence.

Proactivity -- The ability to want to take action to accomplish something, such as solving problems, overcoming obstacles, achieving goals.

Concern with Impact -- The ability to have a need to persuade others and to uphold the image and reputation of the organization.

Diagnostic Use of Concepts -- The ability to use existing concepts or patterns to explain or to interpret an assortment of information.

DIRECTING SUBORDINATE CLUSTER - This cluster involves a manager's freedom of expression both in terms of giving directives and orders, as well as giving feedback to help develop subordinates.

Use of Unilateral Power -- The ability to give directives and to obtain compliance.

Developing Others -- The ability to give others performance feedback to help them improve their performance.

Spontaneity -- The ability to express oneself freely and easily.

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT CLUSTER - Managers with these competencies have positive expectations about others; have realistic views of themselves; build networks or coalitions with others to accomplish tasks; and stimulate cooperation and pride in work groups.

Use of Socialized Power -- The ability to influence others through group effort.

Managing Group Processes -- The ability to stimulate others to work effectively together in group settings.

Positive Regard -- The ability to express a belief in others' ability to perform and to improve.

Perceptual Objectivity -- The ability to be relatively objective about others' views and not limited by subjectivity.

Accurate Self-Assessment -- The ability to appraise one's strengths and weaknesses realistically.

Self-Control -- The ability to subordinate one's personal needs or desires to organizational welfare.

Stamina and Adaptability -- The ability to sustain long hours of work and to be flexible in adapting to change.

LEADERSHIP CLUSTER - This cluster represents a manager's ability to discern the key issues, patterns, or objectives in an organization, and to then conduct him or herself and communicate in a strong fashion.

Self-Confidence -- The ability to express confidence and to be decisive.

Conceptualization -- The ability to identify new concepts or to recognize new patterns in an assortment of information.

Logical Thought -- The ability to understand cause-and-effect relationships and to arrange events in a causal sequence.

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Use of Oral Presentation -- The ability to make effective verbal presentations.

Source: The AMA Competency Program, American Management Association, 135 West 50th Street, New York, New York 10020.

Much of our efforts at ABSEL are also implicitly designed to teach certain competencies. But we have yet to agree on the relative importance of any one over the others. The generic competencies that the AMA has identified could be used as well-defined and relevant focal points for ABSEL's many eclectic research talents and interests. AMA has done the hard job of identifying what competencies are needed. ABSEL can be the medium for teaching these competencies in business schools.

AACSB AND MANAGERS FOR THE XXI CENTURY

Another event that deserves ABSEL's scrutiny is a report based on an international conference in Paris in June, 1980, co-sponsored by AACSB and the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD). Kline [7, pp. 22-23] made slight reference to this conference in an earlier ABSEL paper. The conference report was titled: "Managers for the XXI Century:

Their Education and Development," and it culminated the first comprehensive effort to make management education more relevant for the future since innovative standards were put forth by the Ford Foundation and Carnegie Corporation 25 years ago.

Prior to the conference, two international colloquia were organized. The first was held at St. George's House, Windsor Castle, in February, 1979. The major theme was "The Changing Expectations of Society." The second colloquium was held at Arden House, Columbia University, in November, 1979. It focused on many megatrend-related issues, some of which were: the major constraints on managers of the future, the role and function of managers, the authority, responsibility, and legitimacy of management, the changing of the international order, changing societal values developments in science and technology on management in the future.

The results of these two colloquia provided the basis for the international conference. Findings from all three events were then summarized by the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of International Business Studies [8]. These summaries are presented in abbreviated form:

1. Management schools.. should prepare managers who can run the highly complex and changing enterprises involved in many businesses, products, services, areas, countries and cultures.
2. Management education should be much more holistic in character...to educate the "whole" manager to meet the responsibilities and challenges of the future.
3. ...management schools need to give greater emphasis to non-cognitive learning to develop key attributes such as...creativity and innovation, interpersonal skills, imagination, high motivation....More research and experimentation are required to determine more effective ways of developing non-cognitive attributes and teaching them.
4. ...management schools need to interrelate quantitative disciplines fully with the functional fields, and broaden

management, including strategic planning, business policy and organizational development.

5. Management schools, thus, should aim to develop future managers with a "portfolio of capabilities"--quantitative, computer, and other analytical skills.... Management education, particularly international business, has to be multidisciplinary, making use of a wide range of disciplines.
6. Business Schools that strive to teach all knowledge that a manager needs at the beginning of business education are trying to do the impossible and are probably doing it poorly. An essential aspect of management education should be to encourage future managers to start a process of lifelong, partially self, education.
7. ...courses in international business.. .may very well include competency in foreign languages, knowledge of other cultures through the study of history, literature, sociology,.. .in addition to periods of living, learning, and working in foreign countries.
8. Even though a number of business schools have made considerable progress in presenting an international dimension in functional courses, much more should be done.... Some team teaching can be introduced along with relevant international cases, negotiation simulations, and computer games.
9. Management schools should teach more effective environmental scanning and analysis, which is particularly important for domestic and international business.
10. ...management students need to.. .develop capabilities to deal and negotiate with governments in their home country and even more so with foreign governments.
11. Considerable dissatisfaction was expressed by many participants who stated that much of the research being undertaken by business professors has little relevance or significance for advancing management theory or improving management practices.
12. ...more theoretical and practical understanding of the dynamics of managerial decision making is required.
13. Faculties should be encouraged to blend teaching, research, scholarship, and experience in the business world to develop a "portfolio of abilities" that they can impart to their students.
14. Management schools should train their students to deal with, relate to, negotiate with, and resolve problems with all kinds of other constituencies.... The art of negotiation is an indispensable capability for managers of the future.
15. A closer partnership should be developed between educators and managers in the future.
16. ...management schools.. .should pay greater attention to career planning, including the development of more sophisticated

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techniques for human resource scanning as part of business strategy.

17. More imaginative use should be made of team teaching, with professors from different fields working together in a fully integrated and cooperative approach.
18. Teaching effectiveness...should be assessed more by "outcome criteria"--the achievement of graduates rather than traditional norms....Considerably more research should be directed to determining what constitutes effective teaching and discovering new criteria of teaching performance.
19. Management schools should develop programs, curriculums, and courses to a greater extent for small business and nonprofit institutions, such as government agencies, hospitals, trade unions, foundations, and charitable institutions.
20. Management schools should strive to develop experimental courses in creativity and managerial innovation. Further research is required on managerial creativity and innovation. These courses and research may involve working with psychologists, writers, painters, poets, entrepreneurs, and other particularly gifted people.
21. Management schools should explore ways of achieving greater cooperation with corporate in-house management development programs to foster more effective lifelong management education.
22. Management schools should seriously consider teaching courses in business ethics.
23. ...management schools should strive for more effective integration and greater synthesis among their curriculums and courses to start the lifelong process of education for management responsibilities.
24. ...set up an international exchange system to provide information on new developments in curriculums, experiments with courses, new teaching techniques, and significant research in management.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ABSEL'S ROLE IN THE FUTURE

Thus far, two thoughts emerge. First, ABSEL's past research energies (with few notable exceptions) have not been adequately guided by well-formulated theories, nor "tight" enough (again with few exceptions) to be used for theory building.

Yet, and this is the second thought, the demand for competent business school graduates has never been greater. ABSEL can help, but only if we are willing to make a few changes. There is value in what has been done, and there is justification for continued effort, but in a more organized fashion and with a different set of activities.

Both the AMA competency model and the Paris conference provide rich theoretical and moral guidance regarding what we could and should be doing: theoretical guidance in terms of specifying the needed managerial talents necessary for success in the future; and moral guidance in terms of having specified certain skills and experiences over others.

NEW INTERNAL DIRECTIONS

Our annual meetings are excellent opportunities to formally identify major research and theoretical linkages. Concurrent with our traditional format, those individuals interested in being part of a large research effort addressing a particular issue would be allotted official space on the ABSEL program. One might imagine a research effort in which a concerted set of studies concerning a limited, but central, set of issues is undertaken in many universities using standardized instruments and a carefully developed research design. Roughly, the following steps would occur:

1. An individual with a broad-based research design would solicit other interested persons to join in the effort.
2. These "teams" would meet to detail their design and role responsibilities.
3. "Teams" would officially report their plan to the membership in a plenary session specifically designed for that purpose. At this stage, the estimated time frame and expected outcomes would be stated. Requests for assistance from the membership would also be made.
4. Specific program slots would be given to each team for the next meeting. At that time, either progress or final reports to the entire membership would be made. One full day may be needed for this program.

The payoff of this internal restructuring could be substantial. First, the isolated bits and pieces of empirical findings and loose theories produced during our first decade could be brought together and used to formulate more coherent theories and research designs. The results would produce defensible knowledge that would help build more useful theory. As we become more adept at explaining and/or predicting educational outcomes, we can then legitimately propose educational changes.

We have the resources to carry out major research efforts if we choose to do so. Such a program would be based on sound management. The following principles emerge from this proposal.

1. Participation and Involvement - Members could voluntarily participate in the research project of their choice.
2. Recognition - Such major efforts would result in considerable peer recognition. Careful research design would contribute to the discovery, development, or refinement of research tools, techniques, or methods.
3. Task Significance - These large research projects would be more important than most previous individual efforts.
4. Accountability - Each individual member would be directly accountable to the team, and each team communicates to ABSEL through periodic reporting- out activities at ABSEL meetings.

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5. Group Cohesiveness - If the preceding events occur, ABSEL could become an even more effective and reputable organization.

NEW EXTERNAL DIRECTIONS

When major team research projects are completed, formal methods of communicating the results to other organizations should be established.

First, we need to change the perceptions and awareness levels of the centers of power in business schools, namely, the deans. As defensible empirical findings are produced, an ABSEL appointee would report the results to the deans at the annual AACSB meeting.

Second, as project results become available, publication efforts would be made in journals under the aegis of a major ABSEL research effort. Specific publication efforts should be undertaken in the journals of the Academy, ASTD, and the AMA.

SUMMARY

Our past efforts were needed to legitimize and establish non-traditional educational methods in business schools. These efforts also resulted in producing considerable, but isolated research that was often performed outside of theoretical direction. Now, however, major longitudinal and multi-variable designs are needed to make the contributions necessary for educating managers of the future.

Results of the AMA study identified competencies of the exceptional manager. The Paris Conference specified the educational needs of future managers. In conjunction, both events have clearly laid out for us our objectives for the next ten years. Can these needed competencies and skills be taught in the context of a university setting? By what methods? What methods are more effective than others? Are they effective in different settings, with different students and different teachers?

There are hundreds of important unanswered questions that must be addressed if we are to play an important role in business education throughout the coming years. To do so will take considerable effort and perhaps significant changes in the way ABSEL is currently structured.

The time to begin is now!

APPENDIX A

SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO ABSEL RESEARCH

1978

- “Programmatic Experienced-Based Learning in an MBA Program,” Douglas E. Wolfe and Eugene T. Byrne.
- “An Analysis of Performance in Simulation Games Compared to Performance on Structured Course Criteria: A Case Study,” Tom F. Badgett, Daniel C. Brenenstuhl and William J. Marshall.
- “Assessment of Sex Stereotypes Within Task Group Simulation,” Jerald R. Smith. Assessing the

Effectiveness of Learning Styles as Predictors of Performance Within Three Distinct Pedagogic Methodologies,” Daniel C. Brenenstuhl and Ralph F. Catalanello.

1979

- “A Demonstration of the Business Simulation-Came as a Curriculum Assessment Device,” Joseph A. Wolfe.
- “Trials and Tribulations in Testing Educational Innovations,” Ernest F. Cooke.
- “An Examination of the Perceived Effectiveness of Computer Simulation in a Classroom Setting as Affected by Game, Environmental and Respondent Characteristics,” Thomas A. Chisholm, Parameswar Krishnakumar and James P. Clay.
- “Research on the Effectiveness of Using a Computerized Simulation in the Basic Management Course,” James E. Estes.
- “The Teacher-Student Relationship in Experiential Classes and the Student’s Perception of Course Effectiveness,” Lane Kelley & Arthur Whatley.
- “An Exploratory Study of Student Characteristics and Educational Processes in Programmatic Experiential Learning,” Eugene T. Byrne and Douglas E. Wolfe.
- “Who Benefits Most from Participation in Business Policy Simulations: An Empirical Study of Skill Development by Functional Areas,” Eugene T. Byrne.

1980

- “Moving Toward a ‘Theory’ of the Use of Simulation Games and Experiential Exercises,” Alvin C. Burns and James W. Gentry.
- “The Effect of Group Size on Attitudes Toward the Simulation,” James W. Gentry.

1981

- “Finding an Effective Means of Teaching Managerial Behavioral Skills: Two Different Experiential Teaching Methods Compared,” Daryl G. Mitton and Betty Lilligren-Mitton.
- “Participant Type Differences in Response to Experiential Methods: An Informal Look,” John W. Trinkaus.
- “An Instrument for the Assessment of Learning Dimensions: A Progress Report of the Learning Dimension Scale (LDS),” Steven W. Lamb and Samuel C. Certo.
- “Student Perceptions of Effective Teaching Behaviors,” George E. Stevens, Sheila A. Adams and Faith W. Stevens.
- “The Effects of Different Team Sizes on Business Game Performance,” Joseph Wolfe and Thomas I. Chacko.

1983

- “Report on Programmatic Research on Perceived Learning Barriers with Simulation and Experiential Learning,” Alvin C. Burns, Steven P. Golen and James W. Gentry.

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“Student Behavioral Change Through Teacher Behavioral Change,” Ursula I. Kettlewell and John Winn.

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