

# Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 9, 1982

## CORPORATION EXECUTIVES' RATINGS OF POLICY LEARNING TECHNIQUES

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### ABSTRACT

The value of Policy learning techniques is rated by 72 business executives. The findings are most favorable to case analysis; less favorable data are reported for computer simulations and other experiential techniques

### INTRODUCTION

Several reports have indicated the positive aspects of games as learning methods. Raia (5) found games to be efficient for acquiring content knowledge. Robana (6) reported numerous learning results. Shim (7) reported positive student learning responses. Certainly as we meet in discussion sessions and informally in groups at ABSEL each year, we, as a professional interest group, generally endorse simulations and games as useful learning techniques.

Other investigators have recently focused attention on simulation games and experiential learning techniques in industry. Examples are the Thompson and Pitts (8) panel at the 1980 ABSEL meeting and the Hunter and Price (2) article in Newsweek.

### METHOD

The data here reported provides practitioners' ratings of methods of learning Business Policy. Two of the questionnaire items are applicable:

1. Considering the students' future application of Business Policy concepts to their career in a company, what learning method do you believe is best? (Please rate 1 thru 5) Please mark those about which you have no knowledge with a 6.
  - Lecture/discussion
  - Computer simulation game
  - Case analysis
  - Other experiential exercises
2. Which teaching methods were most helpful to your learning Business Policy? (Rate 1 thru 5) If one of the methods below was not used in your course, please mark with a 6.
  - Lecture/discussion
  - Computer simulation game
  - Case analysis
  - Other experiential exercises

Note: The respondents had been previously instructed that 1 was the most favorable or positive rating and that 5 was the least favorable or negative rating.

A sample of 280 companies was drawn according to the scheme in Table 1. Seventy-five questionnaires were returned, about 27 percent, and all were useable. Table 1 also displays the responses from each cell of the sampling matrix.

TABLE 1

	*Base Group	25	25-50	50-75	75-100
Commercial Banking	4	2	5	4	2
Life Insurance	4	2	2	0	4
Diversified Financial	4	2	1	1	2
Retailing	3	1	3	3	3
Transportation	2	2	1	1	1
Utilities	3	2	1	2	3
Industrials	3	0	0	2	0

\*Base Group = smallest for Fortune 50 or 500  
 25 - 25% of the base asset size  
 25-50 = 25% to 50% of base asset size  
 50-75 = 50% to 75% of base asset size  
 75-100 = 75% to 100% of base asset size

### FINDINGS

Of our 75 responses, 19 had completed an undergraduate course in Business Policy, 42 had completed a master's level policy course, and 3 had completed a policy course at the doctorate level. However, the frequencies obtained for Question 2 were very low (Table 2). We do not have an explanation for the lack of response to the question; other items on the same page of the questionnaire and the items on the total questionnaire were completed with practically no omissions. We just do not know why "teaching methods most helpful to your learning Business Policy" received such a low response rate. Because the response rate is so low, we are reporting the frequencies (Table 2) and not attempting any further analysis of Question 2.

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TABLE 2  
FREQUENCIES OF RATINGS  
QUESTION 2

Teaching Method	<u>Rating</u>				
	1	2	3	4	5
Lecture/Discussion	16	14	13	2	0
Computer Simulation	2	8	9	5	5
Case Analysis	25	15	2	2	2
Other Experiential Exercises	2	3	11	6	2

Question 1, the respondent's opinion of learning methods for a student's future application of Business Policy concepts, received a good rate of response (Table 3)

TABLE 3  
FREQUENCIES OF RATINGS  
QUESTION 1

Learning Method	<u>Rating</u>					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Lecture/Discussion	19	24	27	4	1	0
Computer Simulation	4	15	31	9	9	7
Case Analysis	46	21	2	0	5	1
Other Experiential Exercises	6	14	16	7	1	24

(6 = no knowledge)

Depending on one's assessment of a 3 rating, Cases and Lecture/Discussion do appear to be perceived as the most favored learning method. Table 4 results from deleting the "no knowledge" responses in Table 3 and converting the remaining frequencies to percentages. Examination of Table 3 reveals that at least 28 percent of the respondents are favorable toward each learning method. We will be further testing the data to determine if those that rate Lecture/Discussion high also rate Simulations high and so forth; we apologize for not having these tests completed by the date required for the Proceedings copy. What may be the case is that specific people lean best from a specific leaning method, and that it is most appropriate to have several learning methods available in the Policy course, as well as in other courses. e.g., the Learning Style Inventory (1) may be on the correct conceptual track even if it does have construct problems.

TABLE 4  
PERCENTAGES OF RATINGS  
QUESTION 1

Learning Method	<u>Rating</u>				
	1	2	3	4	5
Lecture/Discussion	25.3	32	36	5.3	1.3
Computer Simulation	5.9	22.1	45.6	13.2	13.2
Case Analysis	62.2	28.4	2.7	-	6.8
Other Experiential Exercises	13.0	30.4	39.1	15.2	2.2

Our data collection instrument asked that the respondent indicate their organizational level and their number of years of management experience.

TABLE 5  
FREQUENCIES OF RESPONDENTS'  
LEVEL IN THEIR ORGANIZATION

<u>Level</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
1	10
2	25
3	29
4	3
5	2
6	2

TABLE 6  
FREQUENCIES OF RESPONDENTS' YEARS OF  
MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE

<u>Years of Experience</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
3	5
3-5	9
6-10	19
10-20	23
20	16

The respondents are from middle and upper management and have several years of management experience. We would like to know if one's level in organization and the amount of one's management experience influence one's responses to Question 1.

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TABLE 7  
POSITION LEVEL IN ORGANIZATION  
COMPARED TO MEAN RATING OF  
LEARNING METHOD

Learning Method	<u>Position Organization Level</u>						Overall X
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Lecture/Discussion	2.0	2.16	2.24	3.0	3.0	1.5	2.2
Computer Simulation	3.7	3.12	3.31	2.33	4.5	5.0	3.3
Case Analysis	1.2	2.28	1.41	1.33	1.0	1.5	1.68
Other Experiential Exercises	3.3	3.79	3.88	-	2.0	3.0	3.73
N=	10	25	29	3	2	2	

(Smaller value = more favorable rating)

TABLE 8  
YEARS OF MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE  
COMPARED TO MEAN RATING OF  
LEARNING METHOD

Learning Method	<u>Years of Management Experience</u>					X
	3	3-5	6-10	10-20	20	
Lecture/Discussion	2.8	2.11	2.16	2.09	2.37	2.22
Computer Simulation	2.6	2.89	3.79	3.39	3.25	3.35
Case Analysis	1.0	2.11	1.58	1.57	1.88	1.67
Other Experiential Exercises	3.5	2.43	3.11	3.73	4.94	3.65
N=	5	9	19	23	16	

(Smaller value = more favorable rating)

While the N's for levels 4 thru 6 are too small for anything but tentative observations, they do follow the general pattern or ratings within level 1 thru 3. Case analysis is the most favored learning method. (Table 7). When the ratings are considered by years of management experience (which may reasonably be a surrogate for the respondents age), case analysis is again the favored learning method (Table 8).

### DISCUSSION

One would presume that the instructors' skill in making any learning method interesting and useful would vary considerable, and given a sample such as the one selected for this research, that instructor variation would largely be self-canceling. At least for the present it is not unreasonable to accept the data as we see it in Tables 1 thru 8.

Replication of this research is needed with emphasis on lower level organization members and former Policy students two to four years out of school.

We suspect the student may rate the highest that learning technique that was most emphasized by that student's Policy

instructor. One of the major flaws in this present research was our failure to ask the respondents their policy instructor's emphasis. If our suspicions are true, the above data may represent the emphasis Policy teachers are placing on various instructional techniques. However, there is a danger that we ABSEL'ers, in our own enthusiasm for simulations and experiential techniques, excessively rationalize less than favorable findings such as those presented above.

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