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EVOLUTION AND FLEXIBILITY IN BUSINESS GAMING

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Two of the many aspects of business gaming brought out by this conference are:

1. The evolution of business gaming
2. The state of the art of flexibility in business games

EVOLUTION OF BUSINESS GAMING

From its early formulations and organized support in the 1950's and early 60's, business gaming appears to have evolved to professional stature for game designers and to a hard commercial market for business game materials.

Business games were originally developed to provide additional learning experiences for their players. Once a student had learned some basics of business, he could then put them into action as a business game player. This mode of game use prevailed for more than a decade. Ideal game players were students who had mastered all that texts and lectures offered on the subject of the game.

More recently, business games are finding other uses. One of these is introduction to a business function or to the entire business curriculum. Here the student is not expected to be an expert player, or even to have had any exposure to what the game might be about. He is thrown into what becomes for him confusion and frustration, as some speakers at this conference reported. Game administrators attempt to alleviate this by initially restricting play to one or a few decision variables, adding complexity step by step while giving pertinent instruction.

Here we see business games used as the organizing force around which learning occurs--no longer the mere capstone, integration, or polishing of prior subjects. Player's ask questions about how to play and must seek answers. To help provide the answers, we saw at this conference the development of mini-courses and cassette teaching technology to teach players the substantive material the games uses. At first business games supplemented courses, now courses supplement games. Hopefully, both will evolve into a healthy circular relationship.

FLEXIBILITY IN BUSINESS GAMING

Flexibility is a virtue of anything that must be developed in advance of use. Flexibility is of course a virtue in business gaming. At this conference, four ways of achieving flexibility were brought out:

1. Built into the simulation model so parameters become part of the data for the computer model. With built-in flexibility,

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the game administrator can become a creative gamer without changing the computer program

2. Generalization of what the simulation is about. This is the “widget” trick for manufacturing. For government agencies, an abstract unit of service has been used. The widget or abstract unit can then represent anything desired.
3. Player creativity. This allows expansion of what is usually a numbers game to include nuances of human behavior and details of past learning. This behavior should be tied to the game model some way (in one case with grades entering the computer model).
4. Simulations made up of many small pieces that can be included or excluded as desired.