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ABSEL'S HISTORICAL RESEARCH INTERESTS

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ABSTRACT

A review of 25 years of ABSEL *Proceedings* was conducted to determine the association's major research interests. Six major themes or research tracks were discerned. Those tracks were the sources of participants' high game performance, the effectiveness of games in strategic management and marketing courses, the validity of the mathematical models used in published games and the questions regarding what games teach and how to measure what is being taught via business games.

INTRODUCTION

Since its inception in 1975 a wide variety of research themes have occurred. Much of what has been presented at ABSEL's conferences has been anecdotal and demonstration-like in nature. When viewing those themes that have been consistently and rigorously pursued, six major themes have ebbed and flowed over the years. Those themes have involved the sources or correlates of high game performance by game participants, the effectiveness of games in strategic management courses, the effectiveness of games in marketing courses, the theoretical and practical validity of the mathematical models employed in various business games, the question of what do games teach and how learning can and should be measured in experiential learning environments.

ABSEL's Major Research Themes

During ABSEL's earliest years much interest was devoted in a *post-hoc* fashion to what factors seemed to be associated with high game performance. A shift occurred in the late-1970s and early-1980s in this type of research where the focus turned to these factors as predictors of high game performance. Research on the validity of business games in strategic management courses by ABSEL's members has basically been a continuation of a field of interest begun in gaming's earliest years. Their effectiveness was reviewed by Keys in 1976 with the greatest number of ABSEL-generated research on the topic occurring in the 1980s.

Games for teaching marketing subjects has been their second-most common application after their use in strategic management courses. Accordingly a large number of research studies on their validity in marketing courses has occurred. Much of this has been associated with what has become known as the "Windsor Group" with its first paper appearing by one of its members in 1974. Their work flowered in the early-1990s.

Another research theme that has had a long-term focus lies in the realm of the validity of the various models used in the games that have been played and created. Most of these discussions have been theoretical in nature with the first paper in this regard presented by Goosen in 1981. This tradition has been continued by those such as Thavikulwat, Carvalho and Gold and Pray since the 1980s.

The last major research themes pursued by ABSEL's members dealt initially in a descriptive fashion regarding what games seemed to teach. This was followed by more-rigorous research in recent years by how to measure what they are teaching. ABSEL's earliest conferences, as was true for the business gaming field in general, were replete with descriptions of what games seemed to accomplish in all manner of courses and topics. That type of "research" has diminished and has been replaced by attempts to measure, in an objective and standardized fashion, the type of knowledge that is gained from playing a business game. Notable work in this regard has been performed by Anderson, Lawton and Gosen.

CONCLUSION

This review has covered, in a very general fashion, what research themes ABSEL's members have emphasized without considering what *should* have been researched, the rationality of the order the research themes have followed, or why a more cumulative research literature has not been produced given the enormous amount of scholarly activity involved. These topics are worthy of both current and future speculation.