

Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 22, 1995

CONSISTENCY IN INTENT: LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT THE 1994 INTERCOLLEGIATE BUSINESS POLICY COMPETITION

Stephen J. Snyder, The University of West Florida
Wayne Label, The University of Nevada–Las Vegas

ABSTRACT

The degree of correlation between learning objectives for three different groups involved in a business simulation is explored. Preliminary analysis found that players, faculty advisors and judges of a simulation had the same basic learning objectives. These results and others gleaned from a survey given at the 30th annual International Collegiate Business Policy Competition are explored.

INTRODUCTION

Springtime is a time of blooming flowers, sprouting trees, love, romance, and the International Collegiate Business Policy Competition (ICBPC). For 30 years, teams from around the world have converged on a host site for head-to-head competition in what was one of the three intercollegiate simulation games being used in the U.S.¹ Teams of four to six students (graduate and undergraduate) send their first 10 weekly decisions via modem to Dick Cotter at the University of Oregon, and download the results. The on-site phase of the competition is the conclusion to the semester-long effort. *1994* saw 34 teams competing for honors in their respective industries for the trophies given at the awards ceremony.² Student's teams were responsible for designing a product, company name, logo and strategy before the first two weeks of the semester were completed. During the on-site phase, in the midst of making their quarterly decisions, student teams were also responsible for developing business plans and annual reports and then presenting their plans and results to judges³. The experience is an eye-opener for students, judges, and the faculty advisor's (who serve as coaches/facilitators for their teams). The question arose during the *1994* competition: Do the faculty advisors and judges think have different mindsets compared to students on the issue of student learning objectives. Teach (*1990*) outlined the need to consider research agendas from the faculty

and developers perspectives. Yet, the player's perspective also holds a key to matching research agendas with learning objectives. The remainder of this paper will explore this question and present data on this topic along with game-related issues.

METHOD

The issue of learning objectives in simulations usually arises during the developmental phase on the particular simulation. Questions are asked --- What is the focus of the game, where should emphasis be placed (variable emphasis), and what is the best way to provide understanding? Yet another question also arises: Do the learning objectives of those running the simulation mesh with those playing the game? The ICBPC provided a unique outlet for testing such a question.

The use of business policy students or other students in courses would have had an inherent bias. Most simulation players in courses do not play on a voluntary basis. They must compete as part of the course requirements. This fact makes it more difficult to match up learning objectives, since when students are asked their reasons for competing in a simulation, their usual response is they had to pass the class.

Three different surveys were designed, one for the judges of the competition, one for faculty advisors, and one for the players. Questionnaires were filled out during the awards ceremony phase of the competition to obtain information while the game was still fresh in the minds of the three categories of participants (14 Judges⁴, 30 faculty advisors and 157 student players responded to the surveys).

Hypothesis

Since the three categories of respondents were thought to have had different motives for participating in the game, it was expected that learning objectives for the players would be different. The null hypothesis then developed:

H0: The three categories of respondents will have the same learning objectives from the ICBPC.

¹ The ICBPC stands today as the only remaining U.S.-based strategy simulation game. 1994's teams included representatives from the U.S., Canada, Mexico, France and Australia. Host sites have included. The University of Nevada: Reno and UNLV. 1995 will see the passing of the torch to the new host --Sari Jose State University.

² 2 Teams are divided into 6-company industries to parcel the Competition. Awards are given to the (01) two finishers in each industry.

³ A pre-release version of The Business Policy Game by Cotter & Fritsehe (1995) was used for the 1994 competition.

⁴ Judges are typically corporate executive of horn have attended the competition on a regular basis.

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Summary statistics ranked the reasons why students participated/should participate in the ICBPC. Table 1 outlines the summary statistics for this question.

DISCUSSION

Table 1 indicates that learning objectives for the competition did not differ. Surveys asked the judges and advisors why they thought

TABLE 1
Response to Question - Learning Objectives

Response Items		Questionnaire Type		
		J	S	F
		Ranking of student learning objectives		
1.	Integrate all business disciplines into the simulation.	1	1	2
2.	Experience near realism in competitive environments.	2	2	1
3.	Gain experience in using simulations.	3	3	3
4.	Interact with students/colleagues	4	4	4
5.	Increase visibility for school.	5	6	5
6.	Something to put on a resume	6	5	6
7.	Get to travel to Las Vegas.	7	7	7

J=Judges S=Student F=Faculty Advisor

students should compete in the ICBPC. Students were asked why they competed in the ICBPC. An assumption is made in the findings -that the intent or basis for competing is synonymous with learning objectives. While it is intuitive that the two are synonymous, rigor in methodology necessitates that a conjecture refutation approach be taken. However, the above finding, if further corroborated, has several implications. First, there may be a melding of the minds between player's and developer's as to what the learning objectives of simulations are. In other words, those who seek to learn from simulations may be on the same wavelength as developers (a truly scary thought²). Second, so that the degree of consistency in the ICBPC is reached, future simulation developers should poll their intended audience to determine any differences in learning objectives. Finally, since the three categories had similar learning objectives in mind, faculties may best serve their students by paying less attention to handholding students/players through the process and instead facilitate and focus efforts.

Other Findings

Students spent less than 20 hours per week involved in the IBPC (89% of respondents), while 70% of faculty advisors polled spent less than 10 hours per week on IBPC-related activities. Students, faculty advisors and judges agreed that the faculty advisors should have a moderate degree of involvement (51% faculty advisors, 85% judges, and 53% students) in the games.

Table 2 summarizes responses to the question on skills enhancement. The question had an open-ended response option as well. Other skills that received mention were public speaking/presentation, dealing with stress/uncertainty, as well as writing abilities.

TABLE 2
Skills that are Enhanced Through of the Competition

Response Items		Questionnaire Type		
		J	S	F
		% agreeing that skill was enhanced		
1.	Team-Building Skills	100	100	100
2.	Strategy Making Skills	94	100	100
3.	Strategy Implementation Skills	96	100	100
4.	Computer Skills	75	98	100
5.	Time Management	92	96	100

J=Judges S=Student F=Faculty Advisor

Students received credit for the competition at their home schools in various ways, either in a capstone business policy course (33%), as an elective (45%) or in other classes (17%). Three schools did not give students any credit for participating. Only 33% of the faculty advisor's received course release time for the competition, indicating the degree of commitment from faculty (28% received other incentives). Faculty advisor's were not solely from management or business administration (48%), but also from economics, accounting, marketing, MIS, and finance. Only four of the competing schools received donations to fund the competition, while 21 received school support. Seven schools also had a sponsor contribute to team expenses, which included registration fees, binding costs, t-shirt and other promotional items, airfare, and accommodations at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas.

63% of the participating schools indicated their intent to compete in the next year's competition, while 18% were undecided. The questionnaire summary provided above also included open-ended questions on recommendations regarding changes in the game, how schools recruit students, and testimonials. What came through from results of the surveys was the almost unanimous agreement on the need for the game to survive and grow. It serves as the pillar of more than 30 years of total enterprise gaming.

REFERENCES

Available on request