

Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 19, 1992

DOES PRACTICE MAKE PERFECT? OBSERVATIONS ON SIMULATION TRIAL

Nancy Brown, Rhode Island College

ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this paper is to explore a pedagogical simulation approach using pre-game trial. Suggestions for future performance will emerge from the discussion. Observations of the effects of practice or trial simulation on the dynamics of team interaction, decision making and subsequent performance are the focus of this report. Trial appears to generate good will toward the simulation and course, increase motivation and confidence and induce greater group cohesion. In practice decision periods, risk taking increased, as did experimentation. Observed limitations of announced practice include tendency to generate a predisposition towards impulsive and tactical rather than planned, deliberate strategic decision making.

INTRODUCTION

In the literature, simulation performance has been linked with academic achievement and aptitude, with problem solving styles, with various gaming behaviors such as cohesion demonstrated by cooperation, information exchange and open discussion, and structure defined by group policy making and the conduct of meetings. Interesting albeit inconclusive and sometimes contradictory results have emerged in the search for factors having (qualitatively) significant impact on simulation performance. For example, using a simple Likert Scale survey and content analysis of student semester journals, Gosenpud and Miesing (1983) identified and tested 28 variables in six categories for predictive powers in business game outcome: Academic Ability, Confidence, Motivation, Interests, Cohesion and Organization. The resulting profile of the simulation contender with the best prospects for success emerged as that of an accounting major with a high GPA, teamed up with people he/she knew prior to class. Teammates who were well-organized, engaged in formal decision making, liked each other, and who maintained a desire to play the game as it progressed also appeared to have the best chances for success in the simulation.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE EFFECTS OF "PRACTICE

Gosenpud and Miesing's (1983) findings confirm conventional wisdom regarding individual and group traits, which would be expected to predict simulation success. Another such bit of conventional wisdom relates to the axiom that "Practice makes Perfect." Is it true that students experienced with the format and operational procedure of the simulation will perform better than those who have no prior knowledge of or experience with the mechanics of the simulation?

This work explores the influence of practice as a determinant of performance in computer simulation. It is preliminary to more formal research and is exploratory. Journal entries, comments and team performance as measured by cumulative net marketing contribution of five teams who experienced a pre-simulation pedagogical approach were compared with the five teams who had no trial prior to competing in the

simulation.

RESULTS

No differences in performance were apparent to suggest the influence of trial on outcome of the simulation by those who experienced practice as compared with the class of five teams who had no trial run. A number of striking differences did emerge from the journal entries and personal comments of the two classes. It seems that trial generates good will toward the simulation and course, even though it did not have a noticeable impact on the outcome of the simulation. The class with trial pedagogy exhibited a greater degree of motivation than the group without trial. Confidence was more in evidence in the trial class. Group cohesion was clearly more apparent in the trial team's statements.

Although risk-taking predominated decisions in the trial periods, the trial groups tended to adopt more conservative approaches (similar to those employed by the non-trial teams) in post-practice simulation. Experimentation seemed to scale back to a conservative level similar to that used by non-trial groups in actual simulation play. Due to the exploratory nature of these observations, no conclusions are intended. By design, simulation involves experiential learning, which emphasizes trial and error. Pre—simulation practice sessions, e.g., "trial" before the trial and error, may simply be redundant to the experiential learning process. Based upon the observations reported herein, the axiom of "Practice Makes Perfect" might be aptly modified to conclude that "Practice Makes Motivated, Confident, Cohesive and Impulsive."

REFERENCE

Gosenpud, Jerry and Paul Miesing "Determinants of Performance in Computer Simulations," Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Exercises, 1983, pp. 53-56.