

Simulations, Games and Experiential Learning Techniques:, Volume 1, 1974

SUMMARY COMMENTS GROWING EMPHASIS ON IMPLEMENTATION

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One of the most notable aspects of this conference was the degree of involvement of the participants. At almost every session there was a lot of discussion by people who were not only interested in the subject matter of the presentations but were knowledgeable about the topics being presented as the result of similar activities of their own. The result was an extremely valuable professional interchange on the development and use of business simulations and other approaches to experiential learning.

The discussions which interested me the most were the ones devoted to the implementation of simulations and related teaching methods. Most of these discussions indicated that even among designers of business games emphasis is shifting from the problems of design to the problems of implementation. The following topics received considerable attention in the sessions I attended: (1) the need to generate and maintain student involvement; (2) the need for instructor involvement; (3) the desireability of augmenting the business game with related projects; (4) the problem of evaluation; and (5) strategies for handling increased complexity in simulation games. Discussions of each of these will be very briefly summarized.

Much of the discussion on student involvement focused on the need to establish for the student the role of the simulation in the course and to phase in play gradually to avoid the possibility that students might be overwhelmed by the complexity of the game. The requirement of written rationales, the use of related projects, and the provision of consulting services (at a fee) were among the methods suggested. A warning note was suggested by Geoffrey Churchill and others that over-involvement might be a problem, possibly leading to "throwing the course out of the course."

It was also pointed out by several participants that student involvement is unlikely to achieve a desirable level unless the instructor is highly involved in the game. It was agreed that the best game in the world is very likely to flop unless the instructor is highly knowledgeable about the game and is excited by it himself. The lack of involvement on the part of the instructor is more likely in the absence of a supportive environment and the need for internal public relations by game enthusiasts was noted.

Many users reported improved results when they augment the game by projects which are closely related to the game. One example was the requirement that each team prepare and produce a videotaped commercial for their product. It was noted that augmentation is especially important when the entire course is built around a game.

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The problem of evaluating the performance of teams in business games was discussed at considerable length. Most users appeared to feel that achievement in the game as measured by cumulative earnings should be the most important criterion but that other factors such as the development of rational procedures and careful record keeping and analysis should also be given substantial weight. A number of different views were expressed about specific ways to measure performance but most participants felt that careful and fair evaluation is essential to maintain student motivation.

There was a considerable amount of discussion on appropriate ways to achieve the desired level of complexity in the student's business game experience. This was considered both from the point of view of the individual course and the perspective of the business school curriculum. It was pointed out that flexibility with respect to the degree of complexity is built into many games. The 3rd edition of Marketing in Action, for example, can be played with one, two, or three products and the game is usually started with only a single product. After the teams have gained experience, they are allowed to add one or both of the additional products if they wish. Also, it is possible to begin the MIA game and some others with only one or two decision variables operative and phase in additional ones as experience is gained. At the curriculum level, it was suggested that the use of relatively simple functional area games in the basic courses would improve the effectiveness of more complex games in advanced functional area courses which in turn would prepare students for play of highly complex total firm games in the capstone course of the business program.

To me the concern expressed at this conference with the need to improve the ways in which we use business games is an indication of the growing maturity of the business simulation game as a pedagogical device. The period in which the business game was a fad has passed.