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DOES INVOLVEMENT INFLUENCE LEARNING FROM SIMULATION PARTICIPATION?
SOME RELATIONSHIPS WITH HELPFULNESS AND PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

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ABSTRACT

This study concerns the relationship between participants' involvement in the simulation experience and learning related outcomes. It builds upon the findings of an earlier study that suggested that involvement might be a key to understanding how simulation impacts upon the way participants learn (Comer and Nicholls 1996). The present study seeks to replicate that research and to extend its findings by probing deeper into the way involvement relates to various learning-related variables. Thus, the thrust of the paper is on the way involvement in simulation enhances the learning experience of participants.

A survey was conducted of 75 undergraduate students enrolled in a basic marketing course in which a simulation was used in addition to lectures and a textbook. Students completed a self-administered questionnaire describing their reactions to the textbook, the lectures, and the simulation at the conclusion of the course. Completed questionnaires were matched to students' to the points students earned in (1) the simulation and (2) the rest of the course.

The results indicated that while simulation was regarded as (1) less helpful than other learning tools as an aid to content learning, and (2) no more helpful than other learning tools as an aid to process learning, it was (3) more involving than other learning tools. To the degree that students reported themselves as "involved" in the simulation, they perceived more process and content learning from the simulation. Conscious involvement had a positive relationship with simulation outcomes, while unconscious relationship had a positive relationship with course outcomes.

The two outcome measures (points earned in the course and in the simulation) were not unrelated as had been found in earlier studies (e.g., Wellington

and Faria 1991), but rather were significantly and positively correlated. This is particularly startling, since the correlation occurred even though the simulation points had been subtracted from the total course points, so that the students' course performance did not reflect their performance in the simulation in any way. One can only suppose that the better students in this group were also the better game players. Clearly simulation and course outcomes, as well as process and content learning, are interrelated concepts, not clearly distinguishable.

While further work is needed, we feel encouraged by our study. Learning that occurs in a simulation potentially aids students both in learning the material of the course and in learning the process. Involvement appears to intensify this effect. We believe that involvement in simulation is a promising concept, worthy of further study as a variable that enhances the impact of participation on the learning experience. Understanding the nature of involvement and its correlates will lead to ways increase the value received by students from simulation participation.

REFERENCES

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- Wellington, W. J. and A. I. Faria (1991), "An investigation of the relationship between simulation play, performance level, and recency of play and exam scores," in *Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises*, 18, 111-115.