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USING THE INTEGRATIVE INTERNATIONAL SIMULATION INTOPIA MARK 2000
IN A CONCENTRATED MBA CURRICULUM

Ronald S. Barden, Georgia State University

ABSTRACT

This paper chronicles the development, conduct, and initial evaluation of a course, which used the play of the formidable integrative international simulation INTOPIA Mark 2000 as its primary learning tool. This case study provides concrete examples what worked, what did not, and the inevitable "surprises" which arise when using business simulations and experiential learning.

INTRODUCTION

This is a never-ending story of the quest for creating meaningful learning. Like many other examples, it is a tale of discovering something magical on the way to do something else. This is a case study describes the initial curricular use and evaluation of the results of students' and the professor's experiences with the integrative international simulation INTOPIA Mark 2000 (Thorelli, Graves and Lopez 1995a 1995b). The simulation was a key component of a special Concentrated Master of Business Administration (CMBA) Program. This learning environment may be different from yours. However, discussion of the factors which make it different can be useful.

BACKGROUND

The Concentrated MBA Program provides the opportunity for a select group of superior students with at least two years of business experience to challenge an intense collection of integrative classes on a full-time basis. Students are able to receive their MBA degree in one calendar year.

The CMBA Program involves a complete set of new and integrated courses with team teaching and combinations of disciplines not normally joined. Some of the specific combinations include marketing and microeconomics, finance and macroeconomics.

Legal/ethical and human resource management, organizational behavior and communications,

strategy and operations management, and information systems and decision sciences. For these courses and a special combined financial accounting and management control course, the content within individual disciplines had to be cut by roughly one-third to one-half. These changes were necessary in order for students to be able to complete the program within a year and to have enough electives to complete a concentration or major

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The integrative International Business Simulation course is designed so that upon completion of the course the student will have practiced, refined, and enhanced all of the abilities and desirable personal characteristics which were goals of the MBA program. The course provides students repeated opportunities to practice and integrate the functional skills learned in prior core and elective courses and to see the results of their decisions in managing a simulated global enterprise. Student teams develop business plans for manufacturing and selling microcomputer chips and/or personal computers in the United States, the European Union, and/or Brazil. The reader is directed to a review of INTOPIA by Palij (1995) for a reasonably detailed description of the simulation.

KEY ISSUES

Key issues in managing a complex simulation include selection of the right simulation, preparation for administration, assignment of teams, play of the simulation, evaluation of results, and plans for improvement. Each of these are discussed in the full paper and will be covered in the presentation.

**WHAT WORKED. WHAT DID NOT WORK.
AND THE “SURPRISES”**

In the limited space of a condensed paper I can provide only a few examples of what worked, what did not work and the “surprises” Personally. I believe a description of one or two of the “surprises” presents the best chance to whet the reader’s interest to encourage attendance at the presentation.

One specific example of an unexpected event in the 1996 simulation follows. One team which was a personal computer (PC) technology follower became fearful of failing too far behind in terms of technology. It entered into a contract with the PC technology leader to purchase an unrestricted license for a generation-behind PC patent stating explicitly that it would not engage in research and development activities for the next two periods. They had hoped to establish a long-term relationship with the technology leader, but the technology leader wanted to license PC future patents on a royalty basis only. Thus, in the period following the original agreement, the PC technology follower entered into a contract with its chip supplier that they (the PC technology follower) would reimburse their supplier for the “chip supplier’s research into PCs plus 10% interest. The chip supplier agreed to spend a minimum of 500,000 Swiss Francs until it achieved the PC patent desired by the PC technology follower and agreed to issue them an unrestricted license for 1 Swiss Franc.

Were there any ethical issues involved here? The PC technology leader sued in the World Trade Court both the PC technology follower and the chip supplier, which by the way, was also the PC technology leader’s chip supplier. We had a trial with the judge in his Ph. D. robe AND LEARNING OCCURRED. This learning experience along with others will be modeled for future classes in order for students to (1) identify the skills they thought they knew and to practice what they have learned; (2) identify those things they thought they knew, but need more practice; and (3) to identify those things that they did not even know they did not know and to strengthen their competence.

ONE MORE EXAMPLE

Alas. I must admit that there *was* one more “surprise” which really soured my teaching evaluations. There was to be an award for the most outstanding company. There were three companies, which had a real chance to win it. The leading company during its last few quarters began to get greedy and was not treating its trading partners very well. One of its Board members wrote that he would hold the stock for three more quarters and then sell it all. This insightful analysis lead to a second company receiving the award. However, I made the mistake of reporting the overall averages of stock purchased by class members with their “pension assets.” This allocation clearly showed the company I selected as the winner, but the third company in the running for the award was tied for last. One person from that third company was terribly angry and stated that there was no way that they were the worst company. I countered that the rankings were all very close and my determination of the best company was independent of their allocations. But then a representative from the initially first place company which in the end finished second announced that his team had allocated their pension assets to the companies they thought were the losers, so as to make their position look that much better. What’s a fella to do?

REFERENCES

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