

BENEFITS OF USING BUSINESS SIMULATIONS AS AN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING METHOD

*Clive Kerridge, Teaching Fellow in Strategy
Aston Business School, Birmingham (UK)*

Abstract: Based on evidence and assertions about the greater efficacy of experiential learning pedagogies over traditional didactic methods, a range of techniques and technologies have been applied in higher education courses e.g. role-plays, scenarios, games, simulations. There has also been considerable discussion in the management education literature about the relative benefits of individual vs. cooperative group-working activities and learning; the creation of stimuli for enhanced student experience. One field where these various elements coincide is in the application of simulation-based training [SBT] in management education.

The author posits that PBL and experiential learning be considered as part of a continuum within the context of blended learning pedagogies. This paper focuses on the specific case of business simulation games delivered via an online digital platform. The nature of simulation games as an experiential learning technique is discussed, along with research findings from undergraduate student responses to questionnaires (sample size $n > 500$) and interviews. The findings are reviewed in relation to published work on heuristic principles for successful application of games in higher education, and to the Salas et al (2009) seven-stage model for SBT, originally developed for medical and aviation training, applied to management education. Findings are also compared with reported outcomes and impact from student and staff responses in two UK universities where similar types of business simulation are applied.

Observations are made on benefits and applicability of simulations in undergraduate and/or postgraduate business courses in relation to: blended learning deliveries; flexibility in time and duration of simulations; incorporation into group vs. individual assessments; competitive vs. non-competitive scenarios; learning guided (or not) by tutors; technology as facilitator e.g. in provoking group challenges and dynamics; provision of opportunities for reflective learning, both during and after the simulations.

The paper concludes by proposing some guidelines for why and how to incorporate simulations into business and other university courses – with the aims of having happier, more engaged students (and tutors), as well as better educated ones!

Keywords: Experiential Learning; Blended Learning; Business Simulations; SBT [simulation based training]; Simulation Games; Heuristic Principles; Employability.