

Business Education: Does it need a Game Changer?

A brief on how Business Simulation Games when integrated into the business education can make a major difference in building a new breed of management professionals for the most dynamic 21st Century business world.

The prevailing global economic crisis has persuaded most business schools across the world to re-introspect on their design and delivery of the business education curriculum. Management education is very much about experiencing. There are little cook-book off the shelf recipes and decisions are highly context related. Business simulations provide a learning process whereby participants get the opportunity to experiment a wide variety of situations, learn through the trial and error in a very safe environment and above all manage a competitive situation where results depends not only on their decisions but also on their competitions.

A business simulation game is an interactive structured training activity with specially created conditions, which aim to reproduce those of a working situation in a successful business.

Management simulations are an extension of the case based learning methodology. In a case study, participants are expected to put themselves in the shoes of a protagonist, analyze the situation from his/her viewpoint and then make decisions in response to a business problem faced by the protagonist. This business problem usually pertains to the learning objective of the case discussion.

In a management simulation, every participant is a protagonist faced with a business situation which he/she has to assess and make decisions pertaining to a business problem. However, a simulation makes the business environment come alive by showing participants the outcomes of their decisions and thus provides a forum for discussion based on decisions and outcomes, rather than just decisions.

A business has also to remain competitive, so business games are usually competitive in character with compressed time periods, allowing the result of decisions and policies to be seen.

WHAT SKILLS ARE INVOLVED IN A BUSINESS SIMULATION GAME?

It would be wrong to suggest that one business management game can cover all the personal and management skills involved, but different games target different skills. For example one activity might concentrate on communication, feedback, leadership and team skills whilst another will cover problem solving, decision making, managing resources and budgets.

Participants learn more than theory by practical experience, they learn about themselves and others. Team roles and skills are key components in a business management game therefore team building development is enhanced and the practical value of group dynamics is demonstrated.

It enables participants to hone their understanding of a management concept through repeated application in a virtual environment, very similar to the way pilots are taught aircraft dynamics and handling through simulator training.

WHAT LEVELS OF KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE CAN A BUSINESS STRATEGY GAME COVER?

There are different activities for all levels. With most games the trainer can make the game more or less demanding by supplying different amount of information; reducing the number of input variables and decisions required; varying the time allowed or targeting specific issues.

Business strategy games enable participants to practice management skills often developed in isolation from other elements of the system.

IS THE TRAINING TRANSFERABLE TO THE WORKPLACE?

An important part of any training activity is the debrief. Here the process and analysis of results also gives participants good learning experience of organisation and group working skills. All that requires is the facilitation by trainers who are familiar with the processes involved. Effective links can then be made between the learning and work applications appropriate to the group and the individuals within it.

We believe that training should be:

- Active;
- Challenging;
- Interesting;
- enjoyable;
- Focused on key issues; and
- Memorable.

These ingredients stimulate a high-level of motivation in participants in developing skills to improve their individual and team performance. These, with continued support, are transferred to the workplace.

In Business simulations participants not only have to define their strategy to resolve a given problem but also have to adapt it to the competitive situation, when to react, when to stay put is the classical dilemma executives have to manage.

The Business Simulation games are challenging and enjoyable; developing skills to improve individual and team performance in the workplace.

By experiencing rather than discussing a model, participants gain in knowledge, competence and confidence.

“I hear I forget, I see I remember, I do I understand.” – Confucius

As a result, management simulations are emerging as an effective experiential learning aid in management courses among B-schools and corporates alike.

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About Author: Is a chief mentor of an Initiative named Campus Levers started by an alumni group of Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta (IIMC). The initiative is aimed at supporting academic institutes and the student community to understand the real business world with aid of systems and tools that impart business learning in a practical way.