



Resource Guide in:

GROUP GAMING AND SIMULATION IN HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT: A USER'S GUIDE

Group work combined with gaming and simulation: are they just current pedagogical fashion statements? If not how can we really make them add value to our students learning?

Pedagogic folklore suggests that group activity is good for students and that gaming and simulation exercises are excellent vehicles for developing a whole range of professional and transferable skills. Consequently most of our courses incorporate group learning activities and some use management games to develop, or more cynically to evidence that we are developing professional and transferable skills. This tactic has been used effectively in subject review to satisfy questions on professional and transferable skills.

I have been a hospitality and tourism educator since 1976 and over the past 20 years I have taken great interest in group work and more recently in combining this with gaming and simulation with a view to enhancing the student learning experience. There have been a number of research activities over this time into the impact and efficacy of group work, and gaming and simulation. For example, Alexander (1986), Curland (2001), Fawcett (1986, 1987, 2000, 2001), Laverty (1987), Lockwood (2000), Roberts (2000) and Russell (1996) demonstrate that group activity and laterally computer based, group simulation and gaming exercises are effective in enhancing professional and transferable skills for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. It appears that there is considerable value to be added through this exciting area of learning and teaching. There is however considerable opportunity for further work in exploring these claims in greater detail and depth.

SOME OF THE BENEFITS PERCEIVED AND SUPPORTED BY RESEARCH

DEEP LEARNING

Gaming and simulation properly used can assist the students to move towards deep learning as there are clear benefits to the students to research and practice new techniques in order to improve their performance in the game. Where there are clear and directly meaningful benefits to learning this usually brings about deeper learning.

CROSS MODULAR THINKING AND INTEGRATIVE DECISION MAKING

The segregation of academic disciplines into modules does not assist students in the transition to industry where managers rarely classify their decisions and problems by academic discipline. Demands upon a manager's time and awareness always involve balance, thus decisions 'on the floor' are intuitively interdisciplinary and are frequently made under time and other pressures. Group gaming and simulations have proven to be effective in encouraging cross modular thinking and in developing decision-making skills.

COMFORT AND COMPETENCE IN ACCOUNTING

Accountancy skills and comprehension can be significantly enhanced through a combination of two key factors. The first factor is the clear linkage between cause (the student decisions) and effect (the operational or accounting output) this gives a tangible reality to instruments such as operational reports, the Profit and Loss Account and the Balance Sheet. The second factor is that the students are usually highly motivated to win and will use any tool, even the dreaded accounting tools, to win.

GROUP SKILLS

Group working skills can be developed and enhanced through appropriately managed group activity. In gaming the group activity is usually focussed on achieving group goals that reflect corporate goals found in industry rather than purely academic goals. This focus makes the activity more meaningful to the students as they are using the group to achieve industry relevant goals rather than sterile academic outcomes. Consequently the identification of group types, formality of group meetings and record keeping are taken more seriously.

THE LEARNING CYCLE

The nature of most of the games noted below is cyclical. i.e. the participants make decisions and take actions, they then see the result of their actions, upon which they reflect and draw conclusions and make new decisions. This process closely follows the Action Learning suggested by Kolb. In gaming the cycle can be closely controlled by the facilitator and enhanced by the input of concepts, ideas, tools and analytical techniques to enhance the reflective, conclusive and planning stages.

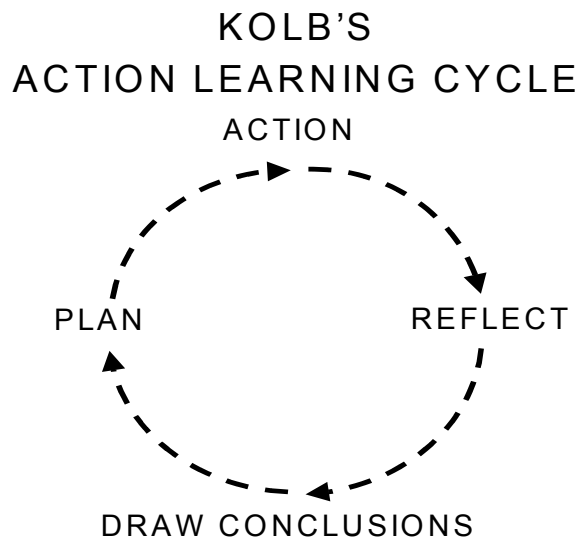


FIGURE 1

WHERE DOES GAMING AND SIMULATION FIT IN THE CURRICULUM?

The easy answer to this is wherever you want it to fit in your curriculum. Group gaming and simulation can be used in a number of ways, as for example:

- An introduction to the dynamics of the hotel business or an exercise in menu planning or costing for level 1 students.
- A pre-session course for level 2 students to build an appreciation of business dynamics for a management module and to provide realistic numbers for an accountancy module.

- A Final year undergraduate or a conversion postgraduate module to develop integrative decision making and accountancy skills.
- A Postgraduate module at masters level to develop decision-making and electronic business modelling skills.
- Tailored short courses for industry at supervisory through to senior manager level.

GAMING AND SIMULATION

There is a large population of management games and a smaller but growing number of games specific to hospitality and tourism, of which many are appropriate for group learning and assessment activities. The research articles noted at the end consider HOTS, CRASE and to a lesser extent CHASE and CHESS.

These games are, in a nutshell:

HOTS

The Hotel Operational Training Simulation (HOTS) is based on a hotel with a mix of food beverage and accommodation products. There are two versions, one larger for the US market and one smaller for the European Market. The game involves teams making a range of decisions in a competitive marketplace.

CRASE

The Cornell Restaurant Administration Simulation Exercise (CRASE) is based on a medium sized licensed restaurant. The game involves teams making a range of decisions in a competitive marketplace.

CHASE

Cornell Hotel Administration Simulation Exercise (CHASE) is based on a large hotel with the primary decision focus on rooms division management.

CHESS

Competitive Hospitality Education Simulation Series (CHESS) is based on a large hotel with the primary decision focus on yield management.

It is not the intention here to compare specific games but to suggest possible approaches, dynamics, and tricks of the trade etc that have proven to be helpful in maximising student benefit.

DYNAMICS & TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Group gaming and simulation is not a quick fix, the games noted above all require a high level of commitment from the academic team. They are learning vehicles, which we need to drive. Facilitators will require training and may need to develop material and learning incidents to make full use of the game. Time and effort is required on the part of the delivery team or individual to learn and to understand the game and its dynamics.

The following are a few pointers that may assist newcomers to the world of group gaming and simulation.

GROUPS

"Students automatically know how to form and to work effectively in groups". If you believe this don't even bother to read any more. You will need to provide guidance and input in relation to group formation and effective group management:

1. Use icebreakers to get the groups introduced and working together. Pros and Cons of favourite restaurants or hotels is useful as a '*vox pop*' to give focus to early group decisions.
2. Use Belbin or Myers Briggs. These are two useful tools to help focus on individual and group activity and dynamics
 - Belbin's Group Perceptory grid
This was developed by Dr Meredith Belbin and is a tool to describe a pattern of behaviour that characterises one person's behaviour in relationship to another in facilitating the progress of a team. These team roles are defined by Belbin as "A tendency to behave, contribute and interrelate with others in a particular way." According to Belbin the value of team-role theory lies in enabling an individual or team to benefit from self-knowledge and adjust according to the demands being made by the external situation.
 - Myers-Briggs Type Indicator classification
The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a self-report personality inventory designed to give people information about their Jungian psychological type preferences. Isabel Briggs Myers and Katherine Cook Briggs began developing the MBTI in the early 1940s to make C G Jung's theory of human personality understandable and useful in everyday life. MBTI results indicate the respondent's likely preferences on four dimensions which when combined give 16 types. This is useful in team building and in helping students to understand how they and others interact.
3. Give guidance on the simple mechanics of group management such as writing and using agendas, minute-taking and task allocation.

FUN

Games seem to work, because they are games and if used properly can be fun for students and staff. It is an important dynamic of a game that it is either fun intrinsically or that the lecturer tries to make the whole thing fun:

1. Make a show of it.
2. Don't run a class, play the role of the secretary of the local hotel, restaurateur or tourism association.
3. If the game is competitive, most are, create or reinforce the competition with prizes, or a cash pool for the winning team.
4. Running games can really be great fun for you, and if you are enjoying it, this will create an infection of fun for the students.

CLARITY OF EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

If you are just using the game because it is available or looks good for quality enhancement and you don't know what you want out of the game, you are wasting the students' time. If you don't know why you are using the game don't expect the students to second guess you and develop it in a meaningful or structured manner.

CLEAR COMMUNICATION OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

Within the very tight timetables that we are now operating it is unusual to have students involved in an activity that does not contribute marks towards progress or a final grade. Also students seem to expect reward in the currency of contributory marks for the work that they do for us. This means that in most cases we need to develop mechanisms for assessing the student activity within a management game. It is important to ensure that where you are assessing students you have a very clear guide to the students which relates to the process of the game, and to individual and group performance expectations.

IDENTIFICATION OF INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE

It is also important to devise transparent and equitable mechanisms for measuring individual performance for ranking or grading purposes. This may involve intrinsic and extrinsic policing of group activity.

ASSESSMENT MECHANISMS

Over the years I have developed and tested a number of assessment mechanisms. Some of these by nature can only assess the output of a group and others can focus on the performance of individuals. The assessment of groups is a thorny issue as the integrity of attribution of group marks to individuals is difficult. Students can hide in groups as passengers and groups of mixed ability can have positive or deleterious impacts on the marks of individuals.

Some of the mechanisms that can be used for group assessment are listed below.

- Company business performance
- Evaluation of Group Decision Making Processes
- Assessment of Group Tasks
- Reflective Group Report on:
 - Analysis of group or business performance
 - Reflection on what was gained in the process
 - Critical analysis of the learning experience (This can be an invaluable feedback tool for the academic facilitator.)

Though I do not consider it possible to attribute individual marks from a group output there are some techniques that can be used to go some way to giving fairer attribution of marks to individuals. Some examples are given below.

- Tutor assessment by walking about during group workshop activity can give an insight to the contribution of individuals. This can also act as an extrinsic policing mechanism.
- Weightings based on physical attendance at group workshops and meetings can be used as a crude aid to assessment.
- Peer assessment of individuals based on evidence of minutes of meetings and group logbooks. The students can be given guidance on areas to be considered such as contribution to group meetings and group performance, support for others, leadership, followership; and inputs to any group report.

It is essential to give prior warning to the students of the mechanism to be used and the weighting that this will have on overall marks. I have used group negotiation for Peer assessment and confidential allocation of individual marks to varying degrees of success. The most important in either method to provide a clear framework and guidance to the students and to be available to assist in any debate on negotiated allocations.

Some of the mechanisms that can be used for individual assessment are listed below.

- Individual test on the concepts and tools developed in the game.
Many of the games lend themselves to the output of material which can be used as a preparatory case study for an individual test or examination.
- Reflective individual report instead of a group report.

FEEDBACK

A quick turnaround of results on student input is needed in order to maintain interest. Many games do this automatically. However there is still a need for academic feedback and interpretation to maintain focus on the learning outcomes and to provide motivation, explanation and guidance.

- Business memos targeting key issues or giving specific guidance are a good way of feeding back to groups.
- Students are conditioned to the currency of marks and grades so require and benefit from feedback on any performance that is likely to impact on final grades.

REALITY REFERENCE

Games that are realistic and within the student's frame of reference can be more effective as academics can then spend more time on developing learning and less time interpreting the game inputs and outputs. We have found that hospitality specific games are much more effective vehicles for developing transferable and generic business and accounting skills in hospitality students. It may be useful to:

- Adapt the game being used by anglicising terminology, locations (even pseudo locations). This is not possible in all games and in some instances may only be adjusted by the manufacturer. In other cases it is a matter of buying the appropriate version.
- Develop culturally congruent learning support material, which helps to bridge the gap between student knowledge, experience and the environment of the game.
- Develop learning incidents that use examples from reality and from the game to illustrate the theory or concepts that are being developed

SIMPLICITY

The acronym KISS (Keep It Short and Simple) really works here. The simpler the game from the consumers' point of view the greater the effort and time students can put into working on what matters. As games become more and more sophisticated we must strive to keep the student/game interface simple to allow us to focus on the learning outcomes, so:

- Avoid games that are too complex for the students to encompass or to grasp the cause and effect relationships.
- Though the game may have loads of whistles and bells, only expose the complexity in stages, remember even though you know the game intimately the students are novices.

PLANNING & PREPARATION

Be prepared to invest your time in preparation and administration of the game. Many games can be operated by students with minimal input and control by the academic. Used in this way the game is a 'quick fix' which acts only as an interesting distraction. Unless you manage the learning experience through planning, preparation and on-going administration the outcomes will be uncontrolled and limited. You will only get out what you put in. However it is usually highly rewarding.

WHAT DO THE STUDENTS SAY

When asked "How was it for you?" as part of an assessed student report, the following unedited extract gives the final word to those who count.

*"If we be honest, and let's be honest, this was the first time through the entire duration of our course (and for some of us our lives) that we had to behave as managers. This does not mean that we have not worked in the hospitality industry before. Suffice to say we had not worked from this angle before. Thus this "managerial experience" was the **principal** element we gained from this experience.*

Management is usually defined as the process of getting things done through other people. It involves making decisions about objectives and means to achieve them and more frequently making decisions to solve lots of problems that will otherwise impede these objectives. Management is about planning, organising and getting things done. It is also about co-ordinating, about bringing together, reconciling, integrating various activities that all contribute to the whole task. It is also about controlling; making sure things are going according to plan, that objectives are being realised. Relations between people, communicating and maintaining commitment also play a vital role. Of all this we were aware. We had been studying the theory of management since last September. We read all the above in text books and a lot of it was common sense. But with the introduction of the game all this theory was brought into practice and reality hit us ... hard.

This exercise enabled us to explore the marketing and management of a hospitality operation in an economy without the usual risks of failure. One of the greatest challenges we faced and the one by which we learnt most (mainly from our own mistakes) was decision making. Decisions had to be made about marketing, managing and financing. Decisions also had to be made about the future even though we were unaware of what our competitors were planning for their business.

Decision-making is one of the most important functions of a manager (as we discovered to our dismay!). There were deadlines to meet, a competitive market to face and all in a constantly changing, unstable external environment.

Another important concept we learnt from this process was simply that management begins with understanding the customer. To be a successful manager one must be aware of why customers make choices. We were all aware that the guest should be the focal point of any hospitality business but what we had previously failed to consider was to see this from the customer's point of view. This involved seeing payroll costs as quality service, seeing repair and maintenance as safety and hygiene and seeing the material costs as value to the customer. As the weeks progressed it became obvious that our mode of thought moved from 'back-door thinking' where everything was seen in terms of economic costs and benefits to 'front-door thinking' where everything was seen from the customer's perspective. The running of a hospitality operation should be looked at not in the point of view of the accountant but from the guest's viewpoint. This is one of the more valuable lessons we learnt.

The essence of teamwork is something that became apparent to us all. No amount of learning or theory can prepare you for working closely with other

people. This course provided us with a valuable opportunity to work as a group. It involved listening to other opinions as well as ensuring that your own was voiced. It meant ensuring that everyone was pulling their weight and not leaving the work to the 'chosen few'. Management involves a great deal of interpersonal communication. I think that on the whole as a group we worked well together.

WHAT DO THE GAMERS SAY?

When asked why do I teach, and more so why do I expend so much energy on developing new ways of bringing about student learning; the easy answer is that I enjoy it. I have found that when the students see me making the extra the effort they are more enthused. I also find that well used simulation and simulation engages the students' interest and enhances the learner / tutor interface. My fellow gamers and game researchers share my views with enthusiasm. It is rarely that we have the opportunity to do something in education, which is fun for us, fun for the students and brings about enhanced learning outcomes and can also give sound evidence of enhancement in our teaching and learning.

SOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Belbin's Perceptory Grid and Myers Briggs

Myers Briggs <http://www.teamtechnology.co.uk/>
<http://www.humanmetrics.com/>
<http://www.knowyourtype.com/>

Belbin <http://www.belbin.com/frames.html>
<http://www.btinternet.com/~cert/index.htm>

The Games

HOTS www.hots-simulation.com
<http://www.theorangegroup.com/hots.html>

Other Sites

These are generic gaming and simulation sites which will give you a wider insight to gaming and simulation, contact with their associations and access to some simple downloadable games. They are changing regularly so it is worth surfing them from time to time.

NASAGA The North American Simulation and Gaming Association's primary mission is to facilitate the use of simulations and games and to spread the principles and procedures of interactive, experiential approaches to education, training, management, problem solving and decision making.
<http://www.nasaga.org/>

ABSEL Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning is a professional association whose purpose is to develop and promote the use of experiential techniques and simulations in the field of business education and development.
<http://www.towson.edu/absel/>

CALT INSEAD Centre for Advanced Learning Technologies is a centre supported by INSEAD a large graduate business school in Fontainebleau, with a strong interest in innovation.
<http://www.calt.insead.edu/>

SAGSET The Society for the Advancement of Games and Simulations in Education and Training is a voluntary society dedicated to improving the effectiveness and quality of active learning (including gaming) and has a comprehensive website.
<http://www.simulations.co.uk/sagset/>

CRASE Professor Robert Chase
CHESS Cornell University
CHASE Ithica
New York
USA

Or in the UK contact S Lyn Fawcett
sl.fawcett@ulster.ac.uk

Please feel free to contact me at sl.fawcett@ulster.ac.uk if you want to discuss your ideas, get e-offprints of some of the articles or e-copies of learning support or assessment material.

Publications

Belbin, M. (1981) *Management Teams. Why they Succeed or Fail*. Butterworth Heinmann.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mr S Lyn Fawcett BSc(Hons) PGDipEd FHCIMA ILT

Lyn Fawcett is a senior lecturer in the School of Hospitality, Tourism and Consumer Studies at the University of Ulster. Lyn is a graduate of Surrey and Ulster Universities, a Fellow of the Hotel Catering and International Management Association. He is also a Janus Professional of the year award winner for Education Industry links. He spent his early years working in the hospitality industry at a variety of levels before becoming a full-time educator and part-time consultant. He is a member of the ILT with twenty-seven years experience of teaching Hospitality and Tourism Management at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. His current research interests are Quality Assurance in the Agri Tourism Product and Enhancing the Student Learning Experience through innovation in the curriculum. Lyn has disseminated his research through international conference presentations and over 75 refereed publications.

He would be happy to receive any contact, suggestions or additional material from those interested in using business simulations in enhancing student learning.