The Ludenic MBA? Games and Simulations in Management Education: Lessons learned from a comparative, school-wide computerized online multi-game perspective

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The purpose of this paper is to provide some comparative perspectives from the implementation of online games in management education. How well, if at all, do games mix with managerial and business education? While the setting of Business Schools is certainly among the most competitive, the constituents are probably among the most critical and demanding, and the atmosphere is probably one of the least laid back or forgiving. Is there room for meaningful play in the training of business decision makers?

This paper will attempt to outline lessons learned through quantitative reports and qualitative observations. Data to be reported here are based on the development process and the implementation experience of multiple class-sized iterations of over half a dozen games with the participation of over 1500 player-students in games and simulations used in business and managerial education.

What are the considerations in the development and deployment of games used in training managers? Are international, non-English speaking environments affected in any special way?

- Fun is (almost) a given. Can we document, show and/or prove actual learning?
- Should games be developed in-house or can "off-the-shelf" solutions fit the bill?
- Should games in this context be computerized, or can paper-and-pencil, (cardboard) and token games suffice?
- Should games be placed online and networked, or can stand-alone versions suffice?
- What are the pedagogical advantages or costs of computerizing and networking games?
- What are the logistical advantages or costs of computerizing and networking games?
- What are the advantages and costs of localizing (translating) games interfaces into local languages?
- What are the research advantages and costs of computerizing and networking games?

The Graduate School of Management at the University of Haifa (http://gsb.haifa.ac.il), and the Center for the Study of the Information Society (http://infosoc.haifa.ac.il) are engaged in launching and running a "Games for Management" project (http://games.yeda.info). This is a broad pedagogical effort aimed at implementing games, in particular of the computerized and online form, into the teaching curriculum for MBA, Executive MBA, and Continuing Executive Training programs. Over the past decade we have developed and deployed a series of games in a variety of subject areas, with a variety of technical specifications, didactic goals, and methodological approaches.

- Some of the games we use were produced in-house, while some were variations on commercial, off-the-shelf products.
- Some of the games are in English (the language of international business and globalization, but a second and at times third language for the participants), while some of the development thrust is toward games played in the local language (Hebrew, Arabic, Greek or Russian) spoken by the executives in question in their day-to-day transactions.
- Some of the games are individual, single-player only, while others are group-based.
- Some games are stand alone, based on pencil and paper or other "manual " tools. Other games are computerized, online and networked.
- Some of the games are synchronous, requiring all players to be be co-present (or at least co-available), while others are a-synchronous, allowing ongoing extended and delyed games.
- Some of the games are local, requiring co-presence, while others are global – fostering play at a distance.
- Some of the computerized games allow the collection of log data which is used for the purpose of longitudinal research, others leave no trace or require manual recording.

The games we use include single-issue and specific skill focused challenges, as well as broad-brush, complex scenario games. Examples of the first genre are games relating to online e-commerce and auction behavior (Noy and Rafaeli, 2005; Rafaeli and Noy, 2002 and 2005). At the other end are games such as a local variation on the theme of Mikes Bikes (http://www.smartsims.com) a McGraw Hill publication which we localized for our purposes.

Games include popular and very well explored genres vs. newly devised, as-yet untried scenarios. Examples of the tried and true oeuvre include computerized (and now online and networked) Lemonade Stand implementations, used to create the backdrop for information markets (see Rafaeli and Raban, 2003). More original and innovative simulations include the

implementation of online Prediction Markets in the course of learning and exploring the notion of Wisdom of Crowds in organizational and business settings (Geifman, Raban and Rafaeli, 2008).

We have been running a supply chain simulation game, based on a computerized implementation of the Beer Game developed at MIT's Sloan School of Management. Our version, called "Hulia", goes far beyond the original Beer Game, through extensions made possible by computerization and placing on the net (Rafaeli and Ravid, 1997, 2001, 2003; Ravid and Rafaeli, 2000) By the Spring of 2008, Hulia has been run with hundreds of MBA students in multiple universities, and by hundreds of executives in a variety of industries.

We are currently examining the implementation of another business game, currently available in manual form. Over recent months, this game has been used with executives in almost two dozen game-days. The process of computerizing this game, decisions relating to synchronicity, co-location, language, logging, research and measurement (as suggested in the list of questions above) will be illustrated with this new game as a case study.

This paper aims to assist the further maturation of efforts to classify "serious games", such as those suggested by Sawyer and Smith's taxonomy. At the same time, this is an attempt to sketch a first draft map of "meaningful play" issues in the education of management and decision makers at the graduate level.

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