Assessing Participant Learning in a Business Simulation

Richard D. Teach
Vishal Patel

Abstract

Why do we assign grades to students who participate in a business simulation or game? Is it because grading has been the only way to have students commit the necessary time needed to effectively participate in the simulation? Is the grade supposed to represent a how well the student's product or firm performed (either by profits or by some combination of factors called firm performance)? Or is the grade supposed to relate to the amount of learning that went on while the student was participating in the game? This paper questions the assessment procedures used in most games. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that there are serious flaws in assessing students based upon their product/firm performance. Perhaps using standard business practices (rewarding the winning team) may not be appropriate in learning environments. For rational participant assessment based upon learning, game designers and users must define what the participants are expected to learn and what knowledge they are expected to acquire by playing a business game. This implies that different simulations may or will teach different lessons.