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COACHING THROUGHOUT THE BUSINESS SIMULATION LIFECYCLE

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Active coaching throughout business simulation events is a key driver of successful student learning and instructor teaching experiences. The following table provides best-practice advice about coaching throughout the business simulation event lifecycle.

| | Simulation Lifecycle Stage | | | |
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| | Pre-Event | Early-Event | Mid-Event | Later-Event |
| Simulation Atmosphere | Anticipation, Disbelief, and "Denial" of the Forthcoming Workload | Confusion as the Full Challenge Becomes Apparent ("Before This, I Didn't Know What I Didn't Know") | "Highs" and "Lows" as Performance Evolves Over the Simulation Event | Grinding Out Profitability in the Face of Vigilant Competitors |
| Business and Course Challenges | Getting Started | Mastering The Simulation Learning Curve | Business-Wide Strategy Crafting | Synthesis Preparation For Post-Event Learnings Reporting |
| Visible Characteristics of Superior Business Management Behavior | Efficient and Effective Initial Team Meeting (e.g., Students Have Read the Manual and Browsed Through Website Resources; Meeting Agenda Created and Followed; Initial Responsibility Assignments Made) | Initial Crafting and Use of Multiple Business Support Tools (e.g., Excel Spreadsheets) | Execution Excellence Plentiful Research Study Ordering and Insightful Analysis Learning From Customer and Competitor Analysis | Experienced-Based Strategy Updating Multi-Period Planning Explicit Resource Allocation Prioritization Sophisticated Business-Wide Analysis |
| Coaching Posture To Students | "Be Prepared" | "It's The Real Deal; You Can't Bluff Your Way Through This" | "Profitability Is Good" "Exploit Information" | Continuous Improvement; "Do Better The Next Time Than You Did This Time" |
| Coaching Advice To Students | "Read the Whole Manual ... I Really Mean It; I'm Not Kidding" | "Re-read the Manual" "Use the FAQs and the Tutorials" Encouragement ("You Can Do This") | "Selectively Study Parts of the Manual" "Exploit the FAQs" "See and Manage Your Whole Business" | "Review All Decisions, Especially Those That Haven't Changed For a While" "Long-Term Planning Is Good" |
| Explicit Coaching Behavior | Define Simulation Coaching Role ("I'm Available To Help, But You and Your Team Are Responsible For Your Firm's Performance") | Obvious and Publicized Availability of Coaching Support Conduct 30-Minute Post 2 nd -Round Private Presidential Meetings With Teams | Ask Questions About On-Going Customer and Competitive Developments, Which Require Insightful Analysis of Research Studies | Prepare Students For Reporting of Post-Event Learnings (in Your Role of Course Instructor) |

Some post-event advice, after the coaching role morphs back to the traditional course instructor role, is provided at the end of this White Paper.

Pre-Event: *"This Looks Scary"*



Early-Event: *"The Early Learning Curve"*



Mid-Event: *"Mastering the Competitive Challenge"*



Later-Event: *"Putting All of the Pieces Together"*



Just-In-Time In-Class "Spotlights"

Throughout the business simulation lifecycle, just-in-time in-class "spotlights" are useful time allocations. By allocating 10-20 in-class minutes per class-week to simulation-specific topics, instructors tie the simulation into the full course flow and provide timely emphasis to useful simulation-specific topics. For example, these "spotlights" are valuable within a business simulation lifecycle:

- Simulation Resources Accessible on the Website (e.g., FAQs and Tutorials)
- Finer Points of the Round-By-Round Simulation Inputting Process (using website demo for your simulation variant, to not reveal any competitive information about your on-going simulation industries)
- Interpretation of Particular Financial and Operating Reports (using the website demo for your simulation variant, so as to not reveal any competitive information about your on-going simulation industries)
- More Complex Research Studies or Interrelated Research Studies (using sample research output from the manual, to not reveal any competitive information about your on-going simulation industries)

- Relevant Course and Simulation Content, Even If Covered In-Class In Detail Before the LINKS Simulation Event Begins (the in-class “spotlight” is in the style of a just-in-time review)
 - Forecasting
 - Interpreting P&L Statements and Balance Sheets
 - Break-Even Analysis
 - Technical/Content Topics Relevant to the Simulation Variant (e.g., for a supply chain management simulation, topics such as “Inventory Management and Economic-Order Quantities,” “Postponed Production,” and “Distribution Network Design” might be appropriate)
 - Business Planning
 - Effective Team Meetings Strategies and Tactics

Private “Presidential Review” Meetings

The most important within-event best-practice in coaching business simulations is scheduling private “presidential review” meetings with the teams. These are private, pre-scheduled, 30-minute meetings with each team to permit the instructor (as coach) to review a team’s business and performance, to answer team members’ questions, and to sense the progress that teams are making in the simulation. This is a “one-with-a-few” style of teaching/coaching, rather than a “one-to-the-masses” lecture-hall style of instruction.

- Presidential review meetings are private meetings (i.e., instructor and one team only present) due to the business simulation’s competitive nature.
- Presidential review meetings provide a different kind of powerful teaching/learning opportunity (instructor as coach) at key points during the simulation event. They simulate business review meetings with a “boss” or senior management official.
- Re-assigned class time is recommended for presidential review meetings, with teams not meeting with the instructor using that time for their own private firm deliberations. Meeting schedules may have extend beyond class time, due to the number of teams involved in a particular instructor’s course.

In shorter events, a single round of review meetings might be scheduled, perhaps just after the second scheduled decision round. In longer events, several waves of presidential review meetings might be scheduled with the second round of review meetings occurring at or just after the event’s mid-point.

Pre-scheduled meetings permit teams to pick their own preferred meeting times from a range of available meeting times. Classroom-hours meeting times might be rotated around all teams, if multiple presidential review meetings waves are held. With a single set of presidential review meetings, assign classroom-hours meeting randomly.

Some potential coaching questions to pose during presidential review meetings include:

- What are the largest problems facing your firm?
- What’s your best and worst team decision to date? Why?
- Who is the best performing competitor in your industry? Why?
- To your customers, what differential advantage does your firm offer compared to competitors?
- What are your most/least important markets?
- How is your firm organized (e.g., by function, by region, as a committee of the whole, etc.)? Is this organization arrangement “best” for the problems and challenges facing your firm now?

The likely outcomes arising from presidential review meetings include:

- For Students: (1) Greater emphasis on research study needs going forward. (2) More attention to issue identification and prioritization. (3) More focus on the really important issues. (4) More systematic attention to within-team division of labor and responsibility assignments.
- For Instructors/coaches: (1) Deep appreciation for team and individual-student progress. (2) Ideas for in-class discussion and tutorials, based on common issues and concerns arising across teams. (3) Follow-up meeting scheduling for “lost”/“deeply troubled”/“unprepared” teams.

Some variations on private, single-team presidential review meetings can arise in special situations.

- With many industries in very large courses, schedule joint meetings with each firm “1” from all industries meeting with the instructor simultaneously. Repeat for firm “2,” etc. Only non-competing teams from different industries are jointly meeting with the instructor during these pooled presidential reviews.
- In distance-learning contexts, actively use teleconferences for presidential review meetings. Online chat sessions are certainly possible, but a free-flowing, in-depth discussion is more likely to occur within a teleconference setting.
- Schedule automatic presidential review meetings immediately with any firm with two successive rounds of losses (negative net income).

Predictable Within-Event Questions and Suggested Responses

During simulation events, students pose predictable questions in public within class sessions and in private during hallway or instructor-office conversations. Predictable questions and suggested responses follow:

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| <p><i>“What the most important thing to do to be successful in the simulation?”</i></p> | <p>Work hard. “If the day isn’t long enough, use the night.”</p> <p>Exploit your teammates’ talents and capabilities. Work hard at sharing insights and teaching your teammates what you’ve learned. “This is a team sport.”</p> <p>Think!</p> |
| <p><i>“Something is wrong with the simulation. These numbers don’t make sense.”</i></p> | <p>Verify in excruciating detail every element of such a claim. Experience demonstrates that students usually don’t “tell the whole truth” ... especially during the earlier part of the simulation event. Students often make reading and interpretation mistakes when examining their financial, operating, and research studies results. And, there’s the natural tendency to blame “others” (especially the inanimate simulation) for one’s own shortcomings.</p> |
| <p><i>“What should we do now?”</i></p> | <p>Ask lots of questions back ... rather than leading with specific recommendations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the “problem”? • How important is this “problem”? • What are this “problem’s” symptoms? What are this “problem’s” causes? What are this “problem’s” consequences? • What else is relevant to understanding the nature of this “problem”? • What else is relevant to resolving this “problem”? • What have you done so far to resolve this “problem”? • To resolve this “problem” well, what trade-offs must be balanced and weighed? • Have you looked at the FAQs about this “problem”? <p>And (1), verify all “factual” claims by students, to ensure that they haven’t misread or overlooked things in their financial, operations, and research reports.</p> <p>And (2), remind students that they are ultimately responsible for the long-run health and welfare of their business simulation firm.</p> |

Post-Event

Post-event, the coaching simulation role morphs back to the traditional instructor role since the simulation event has concluded. However, instructors normally include either a final team-based report or in-class public presentation as a simulation conclusion. Best-practice instruction in the post-event period includes specific and detailed instructions provided by the instructor about the suggested or required format of the final report or presentation. By “overdoing” formatting specifics and report/presentation structural guidelines, the best-practice instructor helps students get quickly through to the content portion of the report/presentation without over-worrying about formatting and organization.