ABSTRACT

THREE HOURS AND EITHT FISCAL YEARS LATER: THE USE OF A SIMULATION AS A REVIEW OF MARKETING MANAGEMENT

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Students enrolled in advanced graduate marketing courses often need to review basic marketing concepts and their relationships with each other. Such a review of the principles can assume several forms: lecture and discussion of the most important concepts appropriate and necessary for the new course; review quizzes; and individual student review. A novel option for accomplishing the review function is the use of a marketing management simulation. Simulation games facilitate both the learning experience and student involvement with marketing education (Moutinho 1988).

A graduate course for MBA students in new product marketing met once a week for three hours. On the first day of class, the students were briefed on the nature of the course, and the simulation and its review function. Class members developed their own teams and students were instructed to review appropriate topical areas in marketing on their own time. Each team was to prepare a strategy to implement during the simulation session. The marketing management simulation itself was accomplished during one three-hour class session.

For this review The Marketing Game! (Mason and Perreault 1987) was chosen for four important reasons: (1) it is primarily marketing management oriented, (2) it is easy to administer because it runs on a microcomputer instead of a mainframe computer, (3) it is quite straightforward from a participant's standpoint, and (4) the instructor was familiar with its use, having used it for several semesters in a more conventional setting. Although there are several marketing management simulations on the market, (for example, Compete (Faria, Nulsen and Roussos 1984), Markstrat 2 (Larreche and Gatignon 1990), and Marketeer (Smith and Golden 1987)) most are fairly comprehensive and beyond the scope of being used in one long session.

Nine computers were on hand in the classroom: one was allocated for the simulation program, the other eight were distributed among the teams. The results from each decision cycle were written to diskettes to facilitate the rapid dissemination of the results.

Eight decisions were simulated in the three hour time period, averaging one decision cycle every 20-25 minutes. Each team outlined its strategy and what was learned during its implementation at the next class meeting. There was significant depth of understanding shown and the class was heavily involved in this discussion, comparing notes and trying to comprehend why some tactics were more effective than others.

A week after this debriefing and review, the students were surveyed with a satisfaction scale suggested by Westbrook (1980) and a slightly reduced version of Zaichkowsky's (1985) involvement scale. Westbrook's satisfaction measure indicated high levels of satisfaction with the simulation: 16% were delighted, 36% were pleased, 30% were mostly satisfied and 18% were mixed. Reliability for the involvement scale was very high (coefficient alpha equal to 0.93) and the class mean on the index indicated overall high involvement with the simulation.

Analysis of variance tested hypotheses that group involvement and satisfaction were related to profitability, the main performance measure. Profitability was found to be positively related to group satisfaction although a high group mean for satisfaction was still evident for even the least profitable team. The effect of profitability on involvement was not statistically significant.

The simulation review also served as a great way for the class to interact intensely with each other and with the instructor early in the semester.

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