Application of a Simulation Exercise in Hospitality and Tourism Curriculum: A Case Study at Taylor’s College, School of Hospitality and Tourism (TCHT)

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The Management Game is a simulation exercise designed to allow the Higher Diploma students at Taylor’s College, School of Hospitality and Tourism (TCHT) the opportunity to put into practice the knowledge learned throughout the first 4 terms of their 6 terms study (2 years). This simulation exercise is based on the challenge of developing and marketing a chosen tourist’s site. The objectives of Management Game are to assess students on various areas and skills namely team building, management, language and communication, all within the context of hospitality and tourism studies. In addition, the Management Game trains students in research and fact finding, embarking on feasibility studies, analyzing and synthesizing, effective communication and presentations as well as acquiring the art and discipline of project management. This paper will discuss the scope of Management Game and the essence of conducting such simulation exercise in an academic institution, namely Taylor’s College, School of Hospitality and Tourism (TCHT). The paper will also highlight the outcome of running simulation exercises by lecturers involved as well as head of departments and feedback obtained from formal conversation with students of Management Game.

Key words: simulation, management challenge, management oriented subjects, learning outcome

Introduction

Tourism industry is an important economic driver for Malaysia. The industry has grown to be a major revenue generator and employment provider over the years. A significant rise can be viewed in the tourist arrivals and tourism receipts as shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Arrivals</th>
<th>Receipts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>10.22 million</td>
<td>17,335.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>12.78 million</td>
<td>24,221.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>13.29 million</td>
<td>25,781.1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>10.58 million</td>
<td>21,291.1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>15.70 million</td>
<td>29,651.4 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tourism Malaysia, 2005

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Statistic from Tourism Malaysia indicates that tourist arrivals to Malaysia in 2004 rose nearly 50 per cent to 15.7 million compared with 2003. This is largely due to surge in visitors from nearby Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and Brunei. The success of the tourism industry has prompted the government to intensify its marketing strategies to further develop the industry. The Ministry of Tourism, Malaysia plans to spend RM130 million to develop and promote Malaysia as a top tourist destination in nine major segments, namely South, North, East and West Asia, Asean, Europe, the US, Oceania as well as domestically.

Mid term review of Eighth Malaysian Plan reveals that year 2000 saw an increase in the employment in the services sector by an average rate of 4 percent per annum. By the year 2005, the share of the services sector to total employment is expected to account up to 49.8 percent.

The growth in the industry will therefore spur the need for higher number of workforce. With the increasing emphasis on knowledge based economy, there is a stronger need for workforce who is able to meet the challenges of a knowledge-based economy. As outlined in the Third Outline Perspective Plan (2001 – 2010) the country is preparing for a labour force equipped with tacit knowledge and high level of critical thinking. Equally important is the inculcation of positive values such as sense of belonging, drive for excellence, loyalty, discipline, integrity, dedication and other positive attributes. Quality education and training are thus necessary to complement the government’s effort and at the same time develop the country as a centre of education.

The hospitality and tourism industry are looking for graduates who have the following traits, namely good reasoning, good communication skill, independent, highly motivated; highly committed and with good interpersonal and leadership skills. Educational institutions may be the ground for these graduates to develop such traits highly demanded by the industry. Thus, the approach taken in educating students have to be given special emphasis in order to create student centred learning environment.

Learning and mastering of management concepts and principles have always been a challenge among undergraduates. Educators face the challenge of delivering these concepts and principles in the most entertaining yet effective ways. Effective pedagogies must be taken into consideration to allow students the ability to put the concepts learned into practice.

In Higher Learning Institutions (HLI) that offer hospitality and tourism programmes, technical subjects are always given the priority by students, while management oriented subjects are commonly regarded as ‘less important’ and ‘dry’. Institutions that prioritize education should take the responsibility to change the perception of students. Students must be aware that the management subject learned is the foundation needed to prepare them to assume lower, middle or top management positions in future, once these students have entered the workforce. The mindset of students should be changed, and thus the importance of business administration as well as strategic planning and implementation of business units must be informed to these students at academic institutions itself. In a competitive business environment today, innovation, marketing and organizational management are among the essential tools of a firms’ survival.

Simulation exercises are useful pedagogy that ought to be applied by academic institutions as these exercises provide the much essential opportunity for students to enhance the application of theory and principles of management and technical skills in a practical environment.

At Taylor’s College, School of Hospitality and Tourism (TCHT), the simulation exercise is called Management Game. Management Game is designed to enhance the learning process of students, thus allowing them to diagnose situation and put the principles learned into practice.
Since the assignment was introduced at TCHT as a compulsory subject in the curriculum of Higher Diploma programme, the Management Game has grown to become a competitive event among students of different teams. The three weeks simulation assignment is a great academic and learning exposure for students who interact and work closely to prepare their proposal.

Therefore, the objective of this paper is to study the effectiveness of Management Games in hospitality and tourism curriculum in areas such as enhancing teamwork, research ability, critical thinking and instilling professionalism among participants. The paper also aims to study the learning outcomes of Management Games based on the perception of lecturers, students and administrator of the college on the relevancy of such exercise to their curricula and future embarking.

**Traditional Learning**

Traditional teaching, involving delivery of content materials by lecturers, is a common mode of teaching. This approach is an efficient way of disseminating information where the lecturer acts as the source of information. It is an economical approach as it can involve a large number of students at one time. In universities, a lecture may involve up to hundreds of students at a time. The approach is thus less personalized with the increasing number of recipients. Moreover, should sufficient materials are not provided, students may fail to cope with the lessons. This is especially true taking into account the note-taking abilities and attention spans differ from one individual to another. Another pointed weakness is the tendency of students to become passive recipients (Biggs, 1999).

In today’s education system, traditional educational activities are strongly supported, enhanced or even substituted by Internet learning. Hybrid educational activities have become increasingly predominant. Hybrid educational activities are a mixture of traditional and Internet learning activities (see Table 2 and 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Educational Activity</th>
<th>Internet Educational Activity</th>
<th>Hybrid Educational Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course plus textbook</td>
<td>Web course</td>
<td>Course plus web textbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulation</td>
<td>Video conference lecture</td>
<td>plus slides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>Video conference case study</td>
<td>Web course plus textbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Video conference simulation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional Educational Material</th>
<th>Internet Educational Material</th>
<th>Hybrid Educational Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Textbook</td>
<td>Web online tutorial</td>
<td>Textbook + web exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulation</td>
<td>Web exercise</td>
<td>Textbook + recorded lectures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case studies</td>
<td>Recorded lectures</td>
<td>Textbook + Video conference + web exercise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The development in technology constitutes largely to both the Internet educational and hybrid educational activities. The presence of simulation exercises are clearly recommended in all three educational activities.

In another approach, Bloom (1964), led a committee of higher education examiners to develop a system that could define and assess whether students learned what they were
taught. This effort resulted in the development of a system known as Bloom’s taxonomy. This system provides a guideline to develop test questions at levels of increasing competency (Kaw and Eison, 2003). Figure 1 indicates the level of increasing competency.

![Figure 1 Stages of the Management Games](image)

Bloom, identified three domains (or categories) of educational activities. The three domains are cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Cognitive is for mental skills (Knowledge), affective is for growth in feelings or emotional areas (Attitude), while psychomotor is for manual or physical skills (Skills). These three domains are often referred to by trainers as KSA (Knowledge, Attitude, and Skills) and are widely used for effective training.

**Simulation Exercise**

Feinstein and Mann (1998) took a broad view of simulations and defined them as basically any system that duplicates the features, appearance and characteristics of a real business or management system. Kludge (1996) considered computerized case studies and simulations, in particular, and defined them as an instructional method that attempts to create real world experiences to provide and stimulate experience-based learning.

Simulation exercise requires students to be ‘gatherer’, allowing him or her to collect the pieces and apply them holistically. Students are generally required to see their whole field of study, assemble and analyze diverse elements of information, and use judgment in making applications.

Problem based learning (PBL), with a history of over 30 years in university education, is an approach through which many students have been enabled to understand their own situations and frameworks so that they are able to perceive how they learn, and how they see themselves as future professionals (Savin-Baden, 2000). The starting point is the problem, a query or a puzzle for the learner to solve. The core characteristic is the student-centeredness of the approach (Boud, 1985). PBL encourages the development of skills such as communication, report writing, teamwork, problem solving and self-directed learning (Boud, 1985).

In the field of hotel administration, the first management game exercise was undertaken in 1966 by Robert Chase. The simulation game resulted in the Cornell Hotel Administration Simulation Exercise (CHASE) programme. Its success further spurred the development of the Cornell Restaurant Administration Simulation Exercise (CRASE). The Cornell Hotel Administration Simulation Exercise (CHASE) is a well known workshop used in executive training programmes at Cornell University’s Hotel School in Ithaca, New York. CHASE is an exciting interactive and competitive management-training programme that includes elements of real-life situation that challenges the management approach and decision making abilities of hotel managers. CHASE provides simulations of the marketing operations, finance and management aspects of a hotel operation in a dynamic economic environment.

CRASE is a management simulation exercise developed to allow participants to explore the factors that influence restaurant sales and profit. The programme emulates the
real world of food and beverage operations by using an economic and marketing model. The key learning points in the programme are centred upon the operations strategy and operations synergy; control and performance measurement; measuring results, service quality, flexibility and resource utilization; business and operational planning as well as performance analysis and evaluation.

While knowledge which is reflected in a college transcript may enable graduates to secure a job, long-term career success is often related to a completely different set of standards, such as sensitivity to others, warmth, trustworthiness, humility, ethical strength, appropriate managerial style, high performance attention, ability to deal with stress and good judgment. Lack of characteristics such as these have been identified as leading causes of career failure (McCall and Lombardo, 1983)

In the common tradition of business education, courses have incorporated written cases to assist students in the area of problem identification and situational analysis as well as to propose solutions to make strategic decisions. This conceptualization has allowed the faculty and students to develop desired educational skills and learning in functional, strategic business units and corporate levels of businesses.

However, there are deficiencies with written cases. Written cases may lack a sense of realism to students, although they are based on real-world situations. It may be hard for undergraduates to role play the situation. Moreover, this approach may have a weaker form of feedback on student decisions.

An alternative or supplementary pedagogy is simulation cases. Feinstein and Mann (1998) took a broad view of simulations and defined them as basically any system that duplicates the features, appearance and characteristics of a real business or management system. Kludge (1996) considered computerized case studies and simulations, in particular, and defined them as an instructional method that attempts to create real world experiences to provide and stimulate experience-based learning.

Effectiveness within and between various forms of pedagogy, simulation cases, lectures, text and readings, written cases, or some combination is the primary learning criterion and outcome. Studies that investigate procedural issues consider how the conduct of the exercise can influence learning.

All of the above pedagogies have been practiced over the years, with most academic institutions focusing on a combination of pedagogies for effective teaching and learning process. It is undeniable that certain pedagogies lack the principle of educating students.

The Essence behind the Introduction of the Challenge at TCHT

Taylor’s College, School of Hospitality and Tourism (TCHT), is an established college offering Hospitality and Tourism Management programmes at the Diploma, Higher Diploma and Degree level. Initially the focus of the programme was much on the technical aspects of students learning as per the requirement of the industry itself. Indeed, the change in the demand of the industry has spurred the institution to stress upon administrative and marketing components as not secondary but primary subjects to be taught. This is supported by the vision of TCHT itself - to produce graduates equipped with strong technical and managerial knowledge who meet the demand of the growing hospitality and tourism industry.

The common questions and challenges of a school offering technical courses have always been the incorporation of non-technical based subjects as part of the compulsory segment of the syllabus and effectively delivering and convincing the students of the importance of management tools and knowledge in pursuing their education and career.

Some of the common questions pondered by first year students of TCHT include:
a. Why do we have to study Statistics, Business Mathematics, Marketing, Accounts, Finance, Human Resources Management and Law?

b. How is this relevant to our field of specialization?

c. Hoteliers are only involved in jobs that require strong technical ability such as to serve, cook, clean rooms and public areas and to check-in and check-out guest. Tourism students must know how to package, sell tour and conduct a tour.

Obviously the answer lies in the essence of educating students to be mobile, knowledgeable, adaptable and innovative. The initial idea is to prepare students with as much knowledge and skill as possible in order to allow them to be more diverse in pursuing their studies and career.

The next challenge encountered is the degree of understanding of students as well as the ability of students to apply the knowledge gained in dealing with situations. Case studies have been a compulsory element in classroom activity while students are also tested on their ability to diagnose situations/cases in the term examination as well as the final examination. An important consideration is definitely supplying the opportunity for students to apply the knowledge learned in an environment that allows them to think, discuss and formulate strategies and present the strategies to the lecturers.

With this in mind, Management Game was introduced in June 2000. Immediately, this simulation exercise was made a compulsory segment of the course and the management department lecturers were teamed to formulate a comprehensive project that tests the various fields of management studies.

**Defining the Game**

Management Game is an integral part of the Higher Diploma in Hospitality Management and Higher Diploma in Tourism Management courses at TCHT. Students, upon completing the 4th term of their 6 term (2 years) studies, are required to undertake the Management Game challenge that tests various aspects of their abilities.

Management Game is designed to provide students an opportunity in applying theory and principles of management and technical skills in a practical environment. This exercise provides students with an experience, which is extra curricular in nature. Consequently, learning process can be enhanced within the context of the required challenge that has to be achieved.

The objective of Management Game is to assess students on various areas and skills especially team building, management and also language and communication, but yet within the context of hospitality and tourism studies.

In addition, the Management Game trains students in research and fact finding, embarking on feasibility studies, analyzing and synthesizing, effective communication and presentations as well acquiring the art and discipline of project management.

Till date, the assignment has covered numerous tourism sites in Peninsular Malaysia, such as Club Med Cherating, Taman Negara, Pemanggil Island, Pangkor Island, Pedu Lake, Summerset Rompin, Fraser’s Hill, Tekam Plantation, Trolak Country Resort and Gunung Lambak.

**The Stages**

The game is carried out in four stages. Each stage has different requirements and must be completed within a stipulated time frame (see Figure 2):
Stage 1 - Group Dynamic, Leadership and Site Visit
This stage emphasizes on team building exercise and collection of information through site visit. The site visit will provide students the opportunity to have an actual and insight look on the situation in the selected site, where more information and detailed analysis are done.

Stage 2 - Development of Concept, Feasibility and Analysis
Each team is required to discuss the concepts that should be applied by the resort as well as the general strategies that should be adopted to enhance the concept chosen. The choice of concept is left to the creativity of students as far as relevant justification could be provided.

Stage 3 - Development of Business Plan
Each team is required to propose relevant business plan for the chosen site, as this business plan ranges from different fields such as development of activities, tour packages and excursion trips, sales and marketing as well as finance.

Stage 4 - Presentation of Business Plan
This stage requires each team to present their report to a group of lecturers acting as the Board of Directors.

Figure 2 Stages of the Management Game

The Challenges

Students are divided into groups of between 9 to 11 students, with a leader appointed to take charge of each of the group. Each group consists of students from the field of Hospitality as well as Tourism studies. These students are assigned with the tasks of developing the resort, allowing the students to embark on the principles of teamwork as well as apply the knowledge and skill acquired throughout their studies.

As a simulation exercise, each team is given the role of a consultant group that specializes in the field of hospitality and tourism. Each team is also allocated a sum of money that should be used effectively in developing and marketing the site.

The exercise consists of 6 challenges, with the Challenge 1, being the ‘Concept and General Strategies’. Each team is required to carry out a study on the present concept applied by the chosen site before forwarding a proposal on the concept that they chose to propose. Proposition of general strategies in Challenge 1 is to position the resort in accordance with the concept students plan to introduce. This proposal is firmed up by each team after the site visit. The site visit also saw students involved in many fun-filled activities such as Wetland tour, tele-match, outdoor sports activities, team-building exercise, jungle trekking, canoeing, cave exploring etc. The activities differ as per the site chosen. The demanding aspect of the site visit is the collection of information by students. During the free and easy session, students would move around to study on the layout of the site as well as collecting primary and secondary information needed to complete their report successfully.

Challenge 2 requires each team to evaluate the environment of the site and propose environmental friendly measures to upkeep the site. Students are required to capture photographs during the site visit, as to ensure that they produce relevant proof to their arguments during presentation to the Board of Directors. If the chosen site is an eco-tourism site, then students will have to proceed to evaluation and rating of the site. Students are required to be critical in rating the destination as relevant justifications and evidences in the form of pictures were needed to strengthen their rating.
Challenge 3 tests the teams on conducting an analysis on the present attractions and activities offered by the resort. This analysis is used as a guideline for the proposal of new activities that will further enhance the attractiveness of the resort. Students need to do the costing for the expected expenditure of building new activities as well as maintaining them.

Challenge 4 requires each team to prepare sample of tour packages highlighting the major activities and attractions of the site. Students of Tourism Management play an important role in guiding the other team members to complete this challenge. The attractive activities are packaged and the pricing of the packages (along with the costing) is decided.

Challenge 5 is an assessment of the students Sales and Marketing and Public Relations knowledge, with emphasis given on SWOT (strength, weaknesses, opportunity and threats) analysis and development of specific sales and marketing strategies and action plans to further enhance the business positions of the site.

The last challenge requires details of financial investment and budget to convince the Board of Directors about the viability of the proposal. Students are required to present the cost allocation clearly and do a projection of revenue and costs.

Finally, the Management Game will see each team presenting their respective proposals to a group of lecturers acting as the Board of Directors. Professionalism in grooming, deportment and presentation skill are the fundamental aspects evaluated. Students are also assessed on the relevancy of their proposal as well as ability to defend their proposal. This indeed is a great learning experience for the students, requiring them to conduct a presentation in a formalized environment and the challenge of convincing the educators on the viability of the proposal.

**Outcomes of Management Game**

Observations by lecturers involved as well as head of departments and feedback obtained from formal conversation with students of Management Game reveals the following outcomes:

a. Students worked under pressure during the 3 weeks period and showed great ability to cope with the pressure. The stronger the unity among the group members, the stronger the ability to cope with the pressure. Despite the demand from the lecturers, students responded positively and were committed to the assignment given.

b. Students’ interaction allows the formation of better understanding and good relationship. As group members were selected by the lecturers, students are not given the opportunity to decide who to work with. Despite that, students manage to accommodate to different personalities and intelligence level. During the assignment, students have the pride to defend their own group and accomplishment. The team building exercise during the site visit to an extent allows the students to be closer even if they were of different groups.

c. Conflict arising among group members during the preparation of report due to difference in personality, opinion, gender and communication failure, proves to be useful experience for the students, since these students would have to cope with the situation and proceed with completing the project.

d. Students develop the sense of responsibility throughout the project. Students improve in terms of discipline and commitment towards their studies. Students portray a higher sense of maturity after the project.

e. Students’ confidence level rises, allowing them to become more outspoken in classes compared to before the assignment. The opportunity to present the report in a formal, professional yet challenging manner develops the sense of confidence in students. Some of the foreign students, with moderate command of English, have managed to excel
during the presentation session, reflecting the assignment is taken seriously by the students.

f. Students are provided with the opportunity of applying theory and principles of management skills in a practical simulated environment. The concepts learned are collectively applied in the preparation of the report. Among these subjects are Finance, Sales and Marketing, Statistic, Information Technology, Economics and Law. These subjects are complemented with tourism related subjects such as eco-tourism, tourism impacts and etc. Students have a better understanding on the concepts since they have the ability to put the concepts into practice.

g. The Management Game trains students in research and fact finding, embarking on feasibility studies, analyzing and synthesizing, as well as acquiring the art and discipline of project management. The project requires students to be able to highlight and analyze important issues surrounding the business of the chosen site before formulating the proposal.

h. The learning outcome can also be viewed in terms of written presentation of report and supplement materials such as sales kit, flyers, websites, sample of invitation/business letters, business name cards and radio jingles. With the guidance from the respective lecturers, students are able to learn the appropriate way of presenting these written documents.

i. The oral presentation session teaches the students to present their ideas in the most effective yet time saving manner. As each group is only given 40 minutes to complete the presentation, students learn to simplify the presentation by highlighting the main issues. Moreover, the question and answer session allows the students to co-operate in defending their proposal. The best groups portray significant degree of inter-dependency during the presentation. In addition, these groups portray a sense of standardization during the presentation.

Conclusion

The Management Game is an exercise that tests on knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Students are required to observe; master subject matter; understand information; translate knowledge into new context, interpret facts, compare, contrast, predict consequences, apply information, methods, concepts and theories in a new situation, solve problem, analyze, synthesize and finally evaluate by comparing and discriminating ideas, make assessment of theories, make choices and verify the value of evidences.

Besides, the assignment combines different categories of affective domain such as receiving phenomena, responding to phenomena, valuing, organization and internalizing values. The exercise among others requires students to display a sense of awareness, willingness to hear, participation in discussions, react, show ability to solve problems, demonstrate sensitivity towards individual and cultural differences, acceptance of responsibility, acceptance of professional ethical standard, effective prioritization of time, display teamwork, use objective approach in problem solving, revise judgment upon receiving new evidences and self-reliance.

Management Game also requires students to portray their skills. Perception, readiness to act, guided response, mechanism, complex overt response, adaptation and origination. The results obtained are in accordance with the expected results. Students are interested in the simulation exercise even though it takes a great deal of hard work, commitment and sacrifices in terms of time and energy. The simulation exercise provides students with the ability to
handle different situations which may prove to be useful in their future employment and undertakings.

One significant result is that students become less dependent to their lecturers in obtaining knowledge and applying thoughts and ideas, since lecturers play the role of facilitator and not teacher during the assignment. In addition, the exercise also creates a much active learning approach with a great deal of involvement from the students. This contradicts with the traditional approach of lecturing and is useful in creating a sense of identity among students who perceive that they are important especially when their ideas are accepted by the group members. Students’ self-esteem is raised when they are able to perform competently and contribute successfully towards their respective group performance.

Besides, the Management Game is also a ground for students to socialize and develop better relationship, while they are engaged in an academic assignment. Interaction increases during the three weeks period and new relationship are developed and strengthened. Socialization during the management game acts as another motivation tool for students. Students’ creativity is also portrayed through the ability of designing communication tools such as web page, sales kit and radio jingle.

In conclusion, the Management Game gives a great deal of support to the traditional lecturing approach. The benefits obtained from the exercise may far exceed the benefits of passive learning approach used in lecturing. Therefore, comprehending lessons with such an exercise is necessary in order to generate graduates of better quality.

References


