

## 2015 OBTC Teaching Conference for Management Educators

### 1) Title of Proposal:

Motivating Learning through Teams and Technology: The HRManagement Simulation Project

### 2) Abstract:

In this session, participants discover how to increase students' motivation to learn and learning retention with web-based simulations and play and integrate a simulation into their courses. Authors share best practices, student feedback, and assignments. Participants will discuss the challenges of engaging students in real work experiences and review the effectiveness of web-based management simulations. For a large portion of the session participants will work in teams playing a simulation and making decisions related to HRM including a video case about harassment. Attendees will have access to laptops provided onsite or they can use their own laptop/tablet or iPad.

### 3) Keywords:

Simulation-based Training, Social Learning Theory, Experiential Learning, Critical Thinking, Human Resource Management, Strategic Decision Making

### 4) Format

- Activity or exercise
- Discussion roundtable (60 minute only)
- General discussion session

### 5) Time Requested:

- 30 Minutes
- 60 Minutes (*Roundtables must select 60 minutes*)
- 90 Minutes

### 6) Planning Details:

We have spoken to Dr. Kathy Duncan, the Onsite Coordinator for OBTC this year who assured us of the availability of laptops for participants. If students prefer, they will be able to use their own laptop/tablet or iPad to play the simulation.

We would also like to request a room with movable tables and chairs. We would like to avoid theatre-style classrooms with fixed chairs, if possible, as participants will work in teams and move around in the classroom.

### 7) Learning Objectives or Goals for the Session:

The specific participant learning outcomes include:

1. Gaining a personal awareness of how web-based simulations increase students' motivation to learn and learning retention by participating in a "hands on" demo of HRManagement Simulation (Smith, Golden, & Deighan, 2009).

2. Understanding how to play the HRManagement Simulation and manage the participation of multiple student teams by receiving lessons learned from the authors who use web-based simulations in undergraduate OB and HRM classes.
3. Learning how to incorporate the HRManagement Simulation into courses by receiving and discussing relevant teaching materials from the authors.

## **8) Management or Teaching Topics:**

We combine the literatures of simulation-based training (e.g., Bedwell and Salas, 2010; Bell, Kanar, and Kozlowski, 2008; Gosen and Washbush, 2004; Johnson and Rubin, 2011; Salas, Wildman, and Piccolo, 2009; Sitzmann, 2011; Sitzmann, Kraiger, Stewart, and Wisher, 2006) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) to create best practices for using web-based management simulations in our undergraduate, mostly millennium student classrooms. We also incorporate research on critical thinking skills development as we contend that simulations are a useful way of increasing this skill. This focus on critical thinking is particularly important because this skill is essential in the workplace and students entering organizations often lack expertise in this area. Our research is further motivated by Fink's (2013) work on creating significant learning experiences, such that we aim to actively address learning in six areas through the use of web-based management simulations: increases in foundational knowledge, motivation for learning, application, integration of concepts, caring, and a human dimension.

### **Background:**

Giving management students exposure to a broad array of real-world management situations with their inherent problems to solve has always been a goal of management education. Making learning relevant, engaging, and ability enhancing is especially important for students wanting to pursue the practice of management. However, instructors have generally been limited to case studies such as those from Harvard Business School or Ivy to learn from the mistakes and right moves of managers, role plays to engage students in hypothetical situations, and pretending the classroom is an actual organization to give students some sense of responsibility for the running of the classroom and the learning that takes. The foregoing are referred to as human-based activities.

In contrast, web-based management simulations are online learning environments that offer the real-world exposure students keenly seek but are often removed from, which is especially relevant to undergraduate students given their relative lack of management experience and general newness to the work world. With web-based management simulations, students are immediately given numerous strategic and tactical decisions to make in the context of a virtual organization that they run. Through our experiences using simulations, we have found that student engagement is increased and learning is enhanced because students can see the real-time outcomes of their decisions. Moreover, team-based simulations offer students the opportunity to discuss different points of view, which expands and broadens their awareness and experience in realistic problem solving.

### **Theory Background:**

Simulation-based training is an effective instructional method (e.g., Bedwell and Salas, 2010; Bell, et al., 2008; Gosen and Washbush, 2004; Johnson and Rubin, 2011;

Salas, et al., 2009; Sitzmann, 2011; Sitzmann, et al., 2006). Gosen and Washbush's (2004) review found that simulations possess both internal validity (e.g., simulation did what was intended) and external validity (e.g., positive transfer to the job). For example, in follow-up studies, performance in management simulations was positively related to future workplace salaries and promotions, assessed five years later in one case (Gosen and Washbush, 2004). Feedback from our students indicates that participation in simulations help them to identify problems and better understand how to solve them, increases their awareness of connections and interrelationships, and increases their retention of course-related materials. This relates to Fink's (2013) discussion of designing learning experiences so that students learn through gaining foundational knowledge, applying this knowledge, and understanding how concepts and applications are integrated.

In terms of social learning theory principles of gaining attention, retention of course material, and providing opportunities for practice and feedback, we found that using web-based management simulations as a supplement to traditional modes of teaching (e.g., lecture, discussion) helps students not only learn course material but also increases their motivation to learn. Data we collected from students participating in web-based management simulations indicates that the team-based environment, competition with other teams, and the interactive nature of the simulation were evaluated as the most helpful in increasing their learning. In addition, play over several weeks aided in analytical problem solving and feedback on decision making both from the simulation and the instructor were key. In addition, we initially used management simulations to help increase attention and motivation to learn and found support for Fink's (2013) assertion that student must have caring to learn. Students used comments such as "favorite," "wonderful," and "love" to describe their simulation experience. A number of students commented that the simulation was their most memorable learning experience in college.

### **Disciplinary Application:**

Through the use of this web-based simulation, students learn not only how to manage using critical thinking skills but also what they are managing in terms of the various HRM functions. Again consistent with Fink's (2013) concept of significant learning experiences, we indeed observed increases in students' foundational knowledge evident from assignments, presentations, case analyses, etc. for the courses in which we used the simulation. The disciplinary or content knowledge component related to the HRM discipline and profession is aligned with standard HRM textbooks (such as Mondy, 2014) and SHRM's professional body of knowledge (HRCI, 2015) for which there are several categories such as workforce planning and employment, human resource development, and compensation and benefits.

By playing the HRManagement Simulation, students gained an understanding of each of the HRM functions as well as the interconnectedness among these functions. Students were able to see the direct impact of their discipline-based decisions such as the result from increasing wages on employee morale or the effect of investing in occupational safety and health training programs on workplace accidents. In each subsequent *quarter* or iteration of the simulation, students were given the opportunity to

modify their specific tactics to better align with their company’s strategic agendas and change their pattern of decisions.

Students were also able to practice setting strategies and objectives for the company which then in turn supported their individual and operational level decisions. Receiving real-time quantitative and qualitative feedback on the results of their strategic planning and the execution of their strategies allowed students to learn the importance of longer term strategic thinking. Discovering their relative competitive position in the industry became critical for students as they strived to become the “industry leader in compensation,” “safest place to work in the industry,” or “happiest company in the industry,” for example. While we are showcasing the HRManagement Simulation, we found similar outcomes related to increases in students’ motivation to learn and learning retention with web-based simulations that focus on teams and leadership, power and change management, and strategic management.

**9) Session Description and Plan:**

The 60-minute time block will be utilized as follows:

Timeline (minutes)	<sup>1</sup> Management Topic	Agenda Topic	Activity
0 – 5	Social Learning Theory & Critical Thinking	Welcome & immediate initial engagement	-Facilitated discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “How often are your students using technology and on the internet?”</li> <li>• “How many of you have students in your courses who want real world work experience relevant to the practice of management?”</li> <li>• “Do any of your students get frustrated trying to relate to the management cases they are reading?”</li> </ul>
5 - 15	Simulation Training, Social Learning Theory, & Critical Thinking	Literature support and HRManagement Simulation review & set-up	-Short Power Point presentation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlight effectiveness of web-based management simulations</li> <li>• Overview of HRManagement Simulation</li> <li>• Brief explanation of how HRManagement Simulation is included in authors’ syllabi</li> <li>• Brief share of student feedback received and sample student quotes regarding authors’ experiences with HRManagement Simulation from their courses</li> </ul> -Organize participants into teams

Timeline (minutes)	<sup>1</sup> Management Topic	Agenda Topic	Activity
~15 – 40	Simulation Training, Social Learning Theory, & Critical Thinking	Participant participation in live demo	-HRManagement Live Demo: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant teams use laptops/tablets or iPads to log into the Interpretive.com site with temporary credentials</li> <li>• Individual access to a live demo – browse website, make decisions, and see results</li> <li>• Show sample video case (75 seconds): The “Harassment versus Lying” Dilemma (See Appendix A for Synopsis)</li> <li>• Relevant share of best practices from authors’ experiences with HRManagement Simulation in their courses</li> </ul>
~40 – 55	Simulation Training, Social Learning Theory, & Critical Thinking	Debrief/Q&A/Take-Aways	-Facilitated discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “How was decision making facilitated by your team?”</li> <li>• “What impresses you about HRManagement Simulation or other web-based management simulations?”</li> <li>• “What concerns or questions do you have about using HRManagement Simulation or other web-based management simulations for your courses?”</li> <li>• Authors will summarize specific take-aways from participants</li> <li>• Authors will share their analysis of the student feedback they received from using the HRManagement Simulation in their courses</li> </ul>
55 – 60	Simulation Training	Wrap-up	-Distribute authors’ relevant teaching materials and Interpretive.com postcards

<sup>1</sup>See Section # 8 for discussion of Management Topics

### 10) For Activities and Exercises:

Section 6 explains the resources that we require. Section 9 outlines our questions and approaches to welcoming participants, setting-up the simulation for a hands-on demo, debriefing, and wrapping-up.

Evidence of effectiveness is indicated by sharing our student data, debrief discussion with participants, and learning about how participants currently incorporate this or other simulations into their teaching.

### **11) Implications for Teaching or for Teachers:**

The HRManagement Simulation provides a practical, hands-on, and real-world experience in an online and real-time feedback environment. Ideal for teachers looking to build student engagement with the course material, accelerate student learning, and develop critical thinkers. We show that online simulations are an effective tool to add to the methodologies participants are currently using in the classroom.

### **12) Application to Conference Theme:**

The learning in community theme is very applicable to our session proposal. In particular: “Linking learners through technology and social platforms that challenge students to learn online in ways that connect and support spirit, passion, and ideas.” We see this happening on two levels within our proposed session. One level is where student peers work in a team to learn from one another, think critically about the challenge of running an HR shop in the context of the case/simulation, plan, execute strategies, monitor results, and revise strategies based upon the results received. The second level of communal learning is to compare themselves against other student peers in the “industry” of other companies or student teams which challenges their analytical and creativity skills. Both levels operate in an online environment.

Spirit and passion are involved as students determine who they are as a company and how they want to represent the company to their employees and external stakeholders. This is important and reflective of real life scenarios as companies cannot afford to invest in everything. Student teams are faced with real-life dilemmas including several value-based decisions such as:

- Do we recruit new talent from the outside to get fresh ideas or do we support the career aspirations and development of existing employees?
- Do we lead the market in salary and/or benefits or support employee training and development?
- Do we fully fund OSH programs and activities or invest in HRIS?
- Do we aim for high level participation from women and minorities despite disgruntlement from existing employees?

In our session, participants will have the opportunity to participate in decision rounds with the demo of the HRManagement simulation and experience these examples of learning in community. We also aim to share assignments we have used and lessons learned, integrating the input from session participants.

### **13) Unique Contribution to OBTC:**

Many faculty may currently be using web-based management simulation and seek inspiration from how other faculty are using simulations (e.g., sharing different

assignments, best practices, lessons learned). Likewise, there may also be faculty who have been considering using simulations but would like to try it out and find out more about what has worked (or not worked) from other educators. We have not presented this material before at a conference. The content is loosely based on a forthcoming *Academy of Management Learning and Education* article.

#### **14) References and/or Additional Materials:**

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## APPENDIX A: Scenario Example

### The "Harassment versus Lying" Dilemma (Smith, Golden, & Deighan, 2011)

Synopsis: An employee, Chris tells you that her supervisor, Ted, propositioned her. When she refused, her work assignments changed dramatically and he gave her a below average performance review. Chris's performance is actually above average and another employee can support Chris's sexual harassment claims. Firm policy for sexual harassment says: "Any employee found guilty of sexual harassment will be subject to discipline, up to and including termination." Ted comes to your office next, claiming that Chris lied on her work application. He wants you to initiate an immediate termination of Chris' employment. What will you do?

#### Decision Selection Outcome

##### 1. Terminate Chris.

While you may be able to justify this, it's doubtful because it wasn't brought up during selection plus Chris has a fairly strong case for sexual harassment + retaliation. Initial legal fee to defend against Chris's lawsuit is \$20,000.

##### 2. Terminate Ted.

You don't have a zero-tolerance policy on sexual harassment, so other issues like policy, notification, and training may complicate matters.

##### 3. Terminate both Chris and Ted.

Action on Ted is questionable based on your weak policy. Terminating Chris is dangerous from at least two perspectives: sexual harassment + retaliation. Initial legal fee to defend against Chris's lawsuit is \$25,000.

##### 4. Written warning to Chris.

Probably a good step for Chris—but doing nothing about Ted's actions is very dangerous.

##### 5. Written warning to Ted.

Your policy is weak so this will depend on how well you've been enforcing it. Quid Pro Quo harassment can be dangerous with only one occurrence.

##### 6. Written warning to both Chris and Ted.

Based on your policy, warning may be the best you can do—there's still some danger that Chris has a solid charge; you now have to figure out how they can work together.

##### 7. Terminate Chris; written warning to Ted.

This is dangerous; you are setting yourself up for a lawsuit based on both harassment and retaliation. It's tough to justify taking action on the lying at this point. Initial legal fee to defend against Chris's lawsuit is \$20,000.

8. Terminate Ted; written warning to Chris.

This is likely the best action - plus you're letting Chris know that any future lying won't be tolerated. If firm didn't enforce policy in the past, this is sound but tougher.

#### Class Discussion

Invite an open discussion, asking students to share their incident selection and resulting message.

- What risks does an employer face in firing an employee over a sexual harassment infringement?
- What risks does an employer face in firing an employee for dishonest statements on his/her work application?
- What will a warning to both employees accomplish in a case like this? What will it fail to accomplish?
- What is the best solution in a case like this?
- What choice did you make? Why?