Technology-supported workplace simulation – an integrated approach to prepare university students for work

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CDTL TEG Talks 2015
Thursday, 19 Nov 2015 @ CDTL Dewey Room
The Course
Professional Communication Course for Real Estate Undergraduates
Over 100 students; 4-5 instructors
Written and oral professional communication
Isolated context-based assignments

Issues
Time
Consistency
Student Motivation
Relevance
Course evaluation

Actions
Flipped Classroom
Workplace simulation
Simulation defined

“something that is made to look, feel, or behave like something else especially so that it can be studied or used to train people”

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

“a model of a set of problems or events that can be used to teach someone how to do something”

Cambridge Dictionaries Online
Theoretical framework

• Simulations may yield a number of pedagogical benefits including, cognitive, affective and kinesthetic engagement (Crookall & Thorngate, 2009; Hunt, 2003; Kolb & Kolb, 2009, Russ, 2011a, 2011b)

• Simulations can provide students with the opportunity to explore how they might manage different organizational communication problems and allow students to make mistakes without having to live with any real-world consequences (Drury-Rogan & Russ, 2013)

• Workplace simulations can create situations where the gap between knowledge and action can be bridged (Thatcher, 1990)
Theoretical framework

• Context learning would require a strong student centred (Craft & Mack 2000, Doolittle & Camp, 1999; Freeman, Field, & Dyrenfurht, 2001) and constructivist approach to knowledge building.

• The rich learning experience that a workplace simulation creates addresses the importance that Bandura places on social cognitive perspectives (Bandura, 1997 in Grez et al, 2009, & Schunk, 2001a) where the environment, behaviour and person are said to affect human functioning.

• As greater accountability in higher education grows, authentic learning has found a prominent place in the education agenda. (Herrington, A., & Herrington, J. (Eds.) (2006).
Outline

• How was the workplace simulation implemented?
• What was the impact?
Workplace Simulation

Company Creation

Role Creation

Task Design
Creating the virtual company

Company Description

DRE Holdings
where creative ideas translate into innovative functional spaces for living, working and playing, enhancing lives for all

DRE Holdings is a private property developer in Singapore with a growing reputation for building aesthetically appealing, innovative and effective spaces to enhance not only the built environment but also living experiences and quality of life. It also takes pride in being an environmentally responsible developer. Since its establishment in 1969, DRE Holdings has been contributing to the transformation of Singapore’s urban landscape. It has built more than 400 developments across the full spectrum of real estate in the residential, hospitality, commercial, and industrial sectors in Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam. Many of its projects have won accolades at both the regional and international levels.

DRE Holdings’ commercial and retail portfolio comprises 25 wholly-owned establishments with over 1,800 units totalling 1.2 million square feet net lettable area. It includes a number of projects with innovative concepts such as Central along the Singapore River, located at a landmark site above the Clarke Quay MRT Station, integrating SOHO (Small Office Home Office) units, offices and lifestyle retail, and Square 2 a mixed-use development above the Novena MRT Station comprising a shopping mall and four levels of modern purpose-built medical suites.

Its most recent projects include:

**Vida Moderna – Winner of FIABCI Prix d’Excellence Award 2012 – Specialised Project Category**

*Vida Moderna* is Spanish for “Modern Living”. Located in the Clarke Quay area, it is a mixed-use development comprising:

- A single 25-storey Small Office Home Office (SOHO) tower with 100 duplex units and penthouses with high ceilings
- A single 15-storey office tower
- 4-storey retail / F&B complex with a focus on specialty goods
Creating the virtual company

Organization Chart

[Diagram of organization structure with roles and titles]
Creating the virtual company

Dress Code

Dress Code
At DRE Holdings, it is important for our employees to be properly attired to project a professional image while enjoying the comforts of more casual and relaxed clothing.

Smart casual attire are appropriate on most days but more formal attire should be worn when meeting clients, visitors or other external parties like government officials, attending formal company meetings or interviews and giving formal presentations.

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**DO:**

- Blazer
- Button down
- Cardigan
- Sweater
- Pintuck

**DON’T:**

- Tank top
- Tshirt
- Sleeveless blouse
- Sheer blouse

**Business Casual - Top (Women)**

**DO:**

- Polo shirt
- Button down
- Short sleeve button down
- Lightly patterned button down
- Casual blazer
- Sweater

**DON’T:**

- Tshirt
- Track jacket
- Hoodie

**Business Casual - Top (Men)**
Creating the virtual company

Careers – Positions Available

Careers

DRE Holdings offers opportunities for challenging and rewarding careers where employees are able to continuously learn and grow. Every year, we invest S$2.5 million for the training and development of our people. We believe in empowering our employees through strategic and integrated learning and development programmes of the highest quality.

We invite you to browse through our list of available positions below and embark on the first step to an exciting career with an organisation that places a premium on your personal and professional growth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Posted on</th>
<th>Closing date for applications</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Executive (Project Marketing)</td>
<td>5 August 2014</td>
<td>15 August 2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Executive, Retail Operations</td>
<td>5 August 2014</td>
<td>15 August 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lease Administrative Executive</td>
<td>5 August 2014</td>
<td>15 August 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Executive</td>
<td>2 August 2014</td>
<td>15 August 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Manager, Leasing &amp; Tenancy Management</td>
<td>22 July 2014</td>
<td>31 July 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive, Retail Marcom</td>
<td>22 June 2014</td>
<td>31 July 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Executive, Customer Service</td>
<td>17 June 2014</td>
<td>28 June 2014</td>
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Task Design – What and How?
Task Design – Integrated and Intensive

Welcome to DRE Holdings
What Is the Impact?
Sources of Data

- Course evaluation
- Survey questionnaire
- Final reflections
- Focus group discussion

Students’

- Observations and feedback

Teachers’
Students’ Course Evaluation

AY2011-12: 3.4
AY2012-13: 3.6
AY2013-14: 4.0

Workplace Simulation Implemented
Students’ Course Evaluation

• “… very engaging and practical way of conducting lesson which simulate the work environment rather than the traditional way of lectures and tutorials basis”

• “Has a scenario whereby we are employees of a company … interesting concept”

• “Interesting elements that the simulation of the office environment has brought about, which is different from a standard tutorial/seminar”

• “The simulation was great and this module really stretched students’ potential”
Students’ Survey Questionnaire

- Workplace simulation: 109
- Online company presence: 44
- Integrated tasks and assignments
On The Workplace Simulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
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<tr>
<td>Provided a very different environment compared to the usual classroom setting and addressed real issues that are related to the actual workplace better. The workplace simulation is a creative idea which can spark students’ interest in knowing more about the course. It allowed me to learn in a fun and innovative way. The workplace simulation did help because we were constantly reminded that we are in an office setting as employees and not as students. The workplace simulation made learning enjoyable. It gives a better connection to what the students can do and learn, and mentally prepare the students better. When I did the assignment, I really put myself into the situation and think about it. It allowed us to know more about the working world. It helped me to get into the mood for professional communication. Workplace simulation is very different from the usual classroom style. It provides a more interactive peer learning which is suitable for the aim of the course. A lot have been learned during lesson time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortcomings</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>...I felt that <em>because this was just a simulation and not a real-life experience</em>, it was very easy for me to snap out of the “employee” mode and tune right back to being a student.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>... there are times when <em>it restricts questions that students may want to clarify which are not suitable for workplace scenarios.</em></td>
</tr>
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Students’ Survey Questionnaire

- Workplace simulation: 109
- Online company presence: 44
- Integrated tasks and assignments
Students’ Final Reflections

- Performance appraisal form
- Achievements and goals
- Reference to the workplace simulation
Students’ Final Reflections

• “... I appreciate this exposure to professional communication and it allows me to have a feel with what is expected to come when I enter the society”

• “I am better able to conduct myself professionally as this module gives me a glimpse of what is expected in the society in future”

• “I have also learnt how to work and interact with a team in a formal office setting. These skills are extremely useful and can definitely be applied in real-life work situations.”

• “Learnt to behave formally in a corporate environment and glad to have opportunity to practice it twice a week”
Focus Group Discussions

Students’
- Class representatives

Teachers’
- Observations and feedback
What Can We Conclude?
Conclusions and Implications

- The simulation creates a fun and engaging way of learning professional communication skills.
- Students see a direct connection between what they learn and how they can apply it.
- Exposing students to situations where they have to relate to each other as colleagues and to us as superiors create a richer environment for students as they learn to develop their professional communication skills.
- Instant sense of maturity - display of traits such as resourcefulness and initiatiiveness.
Conclusions and Implications

- Inherent contradictions between the academic and workplace activity → outline clear roles and objectives
- Not possible to create the complexities, constraints and pressures in a real workplace
- Simulation provides a bridge between the university and workplace settings
- Extend to other similar courses
- More conversations and collaborations with industry players
References

Thank You

Q & A

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