

FIBCO



ABSTRACT:

A number of open-ended on-line role-plays have been created around the Virtual Situated Learning Environment created by **Fibco**, a globally-based Hotel and Restaurant organisation that began in France, extended to Europe and was then floated in the American stock-exchange. The organisation has outlets in Europe, America and South East Asia. It owns a transport business and several resource suppliers.

KEYWORDS:

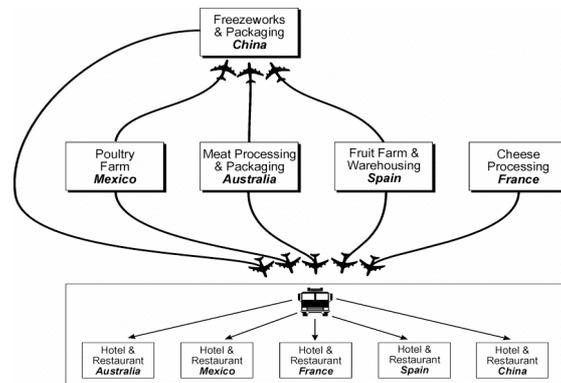
Work-related-learning; safe-fail environments; graduate capabilities and employability skills, negotiation; global business environment.

CONTACT: Assoc.Prof. Sandra Jones, RMIT sandra.jones@rmit.edu.au

DESCRIPTION

Participants become 'virtual employees' and are presented with typical scenarios they may face in their professional practice. These may include a wide range of business challenges involving development of strategic plans as well as processes and practices to implement plans.

The existence of the organisation as a global business enables participants to be globally situated and may be unknown to each other. The activities can link participants across countries and is therefore useful to have participants explore cross-cultural issues.



Where possible on-line activities are blended with face-to-face intensive session for debrief. The face-to-face debrief session is an important part of the reflective process during which significant additional learning occurs. The facilitator plays a central role in the face-to-face session assisting analysis and reflection and debriefing the participants from their role. Assessment is formative using on-line participation and reflection upon learning through a Learning Journal (both individual and group).

AUDIENCE/GROUP SIZE

Participants are assigned various roles and asked to use certain behaviours according to the theory they are being asked to practice. Participants can be either anonymous or named. The characters have a title that signifies their role in the organisation but participants can extrapolate from the outline the particular behaviours and tactics they will adopt to address the challenge.

Players can be expanded or contracted as needed, with different groups or teams established of between 6 and 10 to role-play the same issue or different (often related) issues. Roles may include:

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| Members of (American) Board of Directors | Restaurant Managers |
| Regional Managers | Managers and Employees of Transport Operations |
| Hotel Managers | Restaurant staff |
| Hotel staff | |

PROCESS

The learning design aims to:

- engage participants in real-world activities that challenge and test theory-in-practice
- encourage analysis and reflection on different responses to challenges
- encourage analysis and reflection on actions by individuals in organisations.

The role-play negotiation is conducted using asynchronous discussion in the university Learning Hub based in a Blackboard platform. Role players can be identified in one or a number of Discussion groups to ape the reality of disparate pieces of information that employees and managers bring to any work challenge.

Common information is provided in the VSLE, with individual role-play scenarios provided at the commencement of each role-play. The scenario is understood by all participants, although the different roles to be played are emailed to each individual participants separately. The role-play characters have a title and role but are able to extrapolate behaviours from the outline. Each character is asked to use a specific theory when embarking on the role-play.

Issues are open-ended. Examples of scenarios that can be enacted include the development of a global, risk management strategy, the identification of global business development opportunities, logistics mapping and change management strategies and tactics.

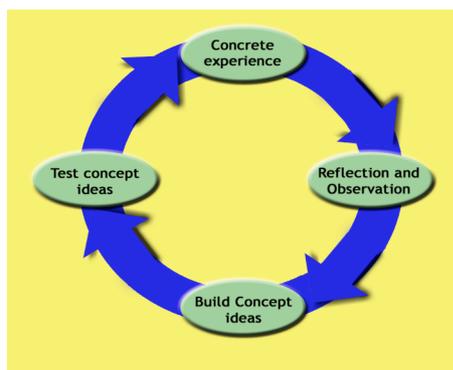
Participants are asked to post the final outcome for their group on a Group Discussion Board by a set time. The on-line negotiation is followed by a face-to-face intensive session to debrief the role-play. This forms an important part of the reflective process during which significant further learning occurs.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The VSLEs provide a learning context built on **ADULT LEARNING** principles epitomised by the Kolb Learning Cycle. Participants first engage in **concrete experience** (through role-play, simulation, scenario or problem-based challenges), then use **reflection** and **observation** to build **concepts** and **ideas** related to the experience that are then **tested** through further concrete experiences.

TIME AND SETTING

The on-line role-play activity can occur over any time period from 3 hours to a number of weeks or can be used as the basis of a semester learning activity. A number of related role-plays can be used if it is decided to use the VSLE as the basis of a semester of activity. Asynchronous discussion through Blackboard-enabled Discussion Boards, Blogs and WIKIs can occur, with the facilitator being either an active participants or observer. Blogs and Wikis provide the opportunity for more continuous discussion.



Learning Cycle based on Kolb

FACILITATOR ISSUES

The main role of the facilitator is to assist the Discussion through period checks to ensure no illegal or discriminatory postings are being made and that equity principles are being maintained. The requirement for the groups to post their final negotiated outcome reduces the burden on the facilitator of reading all postings.

The teacher-as-facilitator is a key player in the face-to-face de-brief session. Their role is two-fold:

- First, to debrief the participants from their role. This is particularly important when role-playing within a VSLE as the real-life nature of the role-play means that participants tend to adopt the persona realistically and may take interactions seriously.
- Secondly, to assist participants to analysis and reflection on learning from the role-play activity.

RESOURCES

- The Virtual Situated Learning Environment (VSLE) has been designed and produced as a distributable web media package with instructional support and a series of role-play scenarios. It is open file format, sharable on all common web platforms and thus links to a flexible suite of communication & community web environments.
- Particular scenarios facing the participants.
- Online discussion group facilities.

References and Links

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ASSESSMENT

Assessment of the participants' contribution to the role-play is two-fold.

- First, participants are assessed for how effectively they use the theory or model they are assigned to reach an outcome.
- Second, how clearly the participant is able to identify their learning from the role-play through their reflections in a learning journal. As part of this assessment participants are asked to explore and reflect on their personal style compared to that they are asked to adopt for the role-play and to observe and reflect on the reactions of others to the behaviours they adopt. E-Portfolios are useful for this assessment process.

Although it is possible to identify the number of postings made by each participant and the dates of their contribution, such numerical assessment measures are not used as it is more important to place emphasis on the quality rather than the quantity of the contribution.

REUSABILITY

The VSLE and role-play activities are adaptable for use in a variety of settings with a broad spectrum of disciplines. Scenarios and role descriptions are word files. The role-play can be used in educational settings or for company/industry specific educational purposes.