Beyond Case Study Analysis?: Three Enhanced Approaches to Teaching Business Strategy

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INTRODUCTION

While diligent educators are always pondering new teaching and learning techniques throughout the curriculum, the need for best practices is amplified in a business strategy course where the next stop for students is often full-time management employment. It is impossible to avoid the study of success and failure in a business strategy course, and this focus on “winning” is not limited to the competitive advantage of a business. The student is evaluating their own readiness for the marketplace and the professor has a heightened desire to ensure that key business concepts are absorbed before graduation day. This intersection with the real word is certainly one reason that business case analysis has been used for years to effectively teach strategic management concepts. Yet there remains a desire to enhance the student learning experience beyond case studies, and this paper seeks to further this discussion by examining the different pedagogical approaches of three professors at a private AACSB accredited University where strategic management is taught at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Specifically, the integrated “Blue Ocean Strategy” approach conceived by W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne in 2005 and the use of the simulation marketed as the “Business Strategy Game (BSG®)” are introduced and the professors discuss the implementation of these methods in their courses. These pedagogies are contrasted to the third professor who uses an approach coined “Case Analysis Maximization” for the purpose of this paper. In addition to an
explanation of each method, some data, student feedback, and each professor’s learning curve notes are presented with a conclusion about overall lessons for improving the teaching of a business strategy course.

BACKGROUND

Strategy is an integrated field of study, which requires a student to synthesize the fundamental principles of business management into a working knowledge of competitive advantage in the marketplace. Most courses draw upon three main theories; Industrial Organization Theory, Resource Based View and the Stakeholder View. Industrial Organizational theory posits that performance rests to a large degree on the manner in which a firm positions itself in its chosen industry (Porter, 1980; Porter, 1985). Performance is strongly related to industry selection, broad environmental factors, and firm differentiation choices. The Resource based view focuses on a firm’s resources and processes as the drivers of competitive advantage. The objective is to outperform competitors utilizing resources that are unique, difficult or expensive to copy, yet are valuable to customers. (Add Grant/Barney cite here). The Stakeholder View suggests that firm strategy is shaped by its relationships with external and internal stakeholders such as employees, unions, governments, customers, suppliers, alliance partners, and even community and environmental groups traditionally hostile to business. ups (cite from Strategic Handbook).

By the time a student enters a strategy capstone course, requisite courses in finance, marketing, human resources, organizational development, accounting, marketing, and operations should have been completed. These all serve as the building blocks of a firm’s value chain, but the challenge in teaching strategy lies not simply in reviewing functional areas or in discussing strategy theory, but in demonstrating how all “pieces fit together.” Fitting pieces together is also a good way to recognize that students are also trying to combine different learning approaches as presented by Kolb (1984 and 2005). Kolb outlines four learning modes which make up the experiential learning cycle. Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and
Active Experimentation are seen as different stages of learning that are processed and assimilated together. (Kolb, 1984). The theory is based on the premise that different people have different learning styles, and thus different teaching approaches are required to successfully reach a group of students. McCarthy (2010) has an excellent summary of Experiential Learning Theory and student learning preferences as she conducted a literature review of research that analyzed the learning styles of business accounting students. Summarizing this comprehensive research very briefly, the studies of accounting students showed that most traditional undergraduate students were “Assimilators, who approach knowledge through abstract conceptualization and process it through reflective observation.” Meanwhile, practicing accountants who would be more likely to be taking graduate courses were found to be “Convergers”, who also appreciate abstract conceptualization but process it using active experimentation. “Divergers and Accommodators,” can be described as people who approach learning through concrete experience and hands-on challenges respectively were in the minority of accounting students. Nevertheless, authors such as Webb (2006) advocate active learning styles to complement abstract ideas and complement the learning process. The suggested techniques include case studies, practical exercises and role playing. If active learning strategies are advocated for accounting, then it is clear that professors of business strategy should also be looking for creative ways to trigger success in students with various learning styles.

The case analysis method has long been advocated as an effective teaching style in Strategy (Desiraju and Gopinath, 2001). However, there is also recognition that it can be complemented and improved upon. Greenhalgh (2007) advocates a broader metaphoric approach to the more disciplined qualitative problem solving approach typically associated with case analysis. Others, such as Patricia and Henry McCarthy (2006), argue for more experiential learning activities, suggesting that, “case studies cannot substitute for learning that occurs through experiential learning activities.” (p. 201). The point of this brief literature review has been to establish that there remains a need to investigate, use, and
discuss alternate methods of teaching business strategy in addition to case study analysis.

**The Blue Ocean Strategy Pedagogy**

The use of the book *Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make the Competition Irrelevant* by W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne (Kim and Mauborgne), is perhaps the type of pedagogical innovation that can take advantage of the abstract thinking “assimilators” and “convergers” that are common learning types in a business school. Published in 2005 by Harvard Business Press, it has become well established as a best seller in the management and marketing book category and has sold over two million copies. Blue Ocean strategy (BOS) is much more than a reading supplement to the standard strategy text; it is an integrated set of pedagogical materials that include the book, case studies, interactive exercises, a computer simulation, and supporting videos and teaching notes. A complete description of these materials can be found at http://www.blueoceanstrategy.com. The professor adopting the BOS approach decided to develop a syllabi that included a traditional textbook along with the Blue Ocean Strategy book, the computer simulation, case studies, and supporting videos.

**Blue Ocean Strategy Concepts**

According to Kim and Mauborgne, a blue ocean is an area of uncontested market space created by the firm. A blue ocean stands in contrast to a “red” ocean in which there is intense competitive rivalry. Kim and Mauborgne argue that although there will always be red oceans, successful firms also create blue oceans for continued success. Kim and Mauborgne believe that traditional strategy focuses too much on red oceans. Kim and Mauborgne argue that traditional concepts (e.g. Porter’s Five Forces Framework), are overly “structuralistic” in their environmental focus. In contrast, Kim and Mauborgne state that the Blue Ocean Strategy is “deconstructuralistic” because the creation of the market space is proactively driven by the firm regardless of environmental forces.
The cornerstone of Blue Ocean Strategy is Value Innovation. Value Innovation means that the firm increases value by reducing and eliminating product/service attributes while simultaneously increasing innovation by raising and creating new areas of product/service excellence. In short, Value Innovation represents a breakthrough: instead of competing on a cost/quality tradeoff curve or even moving the cost/quality curve outward, the Blue Ocean firm creates an entirely new uncontested market space. For example, one of the many case studies detailed by the authors is Cirque de Soleil. Cirque de Soleil reinvented the circus by eliminating animals, reducing the number of famous performers, creating new dramatic stories and theatre, and raising the quality (and prices) of the events.

Kim and Mauborgne provide an impressive toolbox for conceiving and implementing Blue Ocean Strategy. For implementation, Kim and Mauborgne provide the Strategy Canvas, the Four Actions Framework, and the E-R-R-C Grid. The Strategy Canvas can be a starting point for formulating Blue Ocean Strategy by providing a graphical representation of the industry using the attributes that the industry competes on (horizontal axis) with the levels offered by the major competitors. In the case of wine, the Strategy Canvas may show, for example, price, aging quality, marketing, wine complexity, vineyard prestige, wine range, etc. The Four Actions Framework challenges the manager to consider: (1) Reduce: What factors should be reduced well below the industry’s standard?, (2) Eliminate: Which of the factors that the industry takes for granted should be eliminated? (3) Raise: Which factors should be raised well above the industry’s standard? (4) Create: which factors should be created that the industry has never offered? Answers to these questions can result in an entirely new Strategy Canvas that may allow the firm to take the first steps toward developing a Blue Ocean.

The E-R-R-C Grid (Eliminate-Reduce-Raise-Create) is another tool managers can use in formulating strategy. This Grid forces managers to simultaneously implement the Four Actions Framework. Kim and Mauborgne also state that it is diagnostic in that it can flag strategies that are “unbalanced” such as those that focus only on innovation without also reducing or eliminating other attributes to lower costs. Casella
wines, for example, launched their successful Yellowtail wine by eliminating aging qualities, above-the-line marketing and enological terminology. They reduced wine complexity, wine range, and vineyard prestige. They raised price (relative to budget wines) and created wine that was easy drinking, easy to select, fun and adventurous. This type of optimistic marketing approach is supported by six key principles which also get into implementation issues. The six key principles are: (1) reconstruct market boundaries, (2) focus on the big picture, not the numbers, (3) reach beyond existing demand, (4) get the strategic sequence right, (5) overcome organizational hurdles, and (6) build execution into strategy. The first four principles relate to formulating, while the last two principles relate to executing Blue Ocean Strategy. There is much food for thought in these chapters including an excellent discussion of “three tiers” of customer conversion, and an impactful discussion of the Blue Ocean profit model.

**Pedagogical Materials**

One of the benefits of adopting the Blue Ocean Strategy pedagogy is that it is a complete solution to teaching business strategy. In addition to the book, the pedagogy includes case studies, a variety of interactive exercises, supporting videos, and a comprehensive computer simulation. The computer simulation is distributed by Strat-X (www.stratxsimulations.com). The case materials are available directly from Blue Ocean Strategy (www.blueoceanstrategy.com) or from Harvard Business Publishing (www.hbsp.com). The supporting videos are available for download at Blue Ocean Strategy. The materials are carefully selected to be used to support mastery of analytical tools, as well as formulating and execution of strategy. The supporting teaching notes are excellent and offer welcome guidance and recommendations for the novice instructor. These also weave contrasting and competing structuralistic versus deconstructuralistic perspectives. For example in the Cirque de Soleil case package, Kim and Mauborgne recommend asking students to perform a Five Forces Analysis of the circus industry and comment on perceived attractiveness. Most students find little of value in the industry. In the follow
up case on Cirque de Soleil, students apply Blue Ocean analytical tools to the problem and reveal much greater possibilities.

The Blue Ocean Strategy simulation operates in a series of three rounds and each round has 2–3 “yearly” decisions. For each decision, students are called upon to make strategic, marketing and operational decisions for their company (a manufacturer and marketer of video games). The first round is called the Red Round. The Red Round simulates how hard competition is in the red ocean environment of intense firm rivalry. In the next round, Blue Round 1, students are challenged to develop their first Strategy Canvas map by incorporating new attributes. This round requires students to think very hard about attributes and bases of competition and conceive the beginnings of a successful Blue Ocean. The final round, Blue Round 2, opens up the competition to service and delivery attributes. Students are challenged to create a true Blue Ocean Strategy that represents value innovation by conceiving a superior and balanced Strategy Canvas. In the supporting teaching materials, the simulation provides extensive debriefing templates which professors are encouraged to use.

**The Blue Ocean Strategy Learning Curve**

In theory, the Blue Ocean Strategy Pedagogy provides an opportunity to augment a course selectively or operate an entire semester long course based on the materials. For example, in this case study, the professor employed a traditional textbook for the first six weeks, and then used Blue Ocean materials, including a simulation. There are several important lessons the professor learned using this pedagogy for the first time.

Overall, internal course evaluations showed that students found the Blue Ocean Strategy approach effective and particularly liked the book written by W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne. The challenges revolved around the implementation of the simulation.

First, the computer simulation is challenging and there should be at least two hours dedicated to debriefing between rounds. The professor in question feels that he underestimated these requirements and did not spend enough time debriefing between rounds. It appears that students
lost sight of the key concepts of value innovation despite the requirements to design strategy canvases. Some of the case studies such as Cirque de Soleil are described in detail in the book and can also be assigned to students during the course. The professor in question tried to “time” case assignments and due dates to mirror the simulation decision rounds. For example, during the Red Round, the professor assigned Cirque de Soleil; when the simulation was over, other cases were assigned to try and summarize concepts. Because of overlapping material in the book and required time invested in the simulation, this did not work well. If the professor were to teach the course again, he would cover the cases earlier and use them to illustrate key concepts prior to the simulation.

Some students replied that the simulation did not seem to allow for a “skimming” strategy: that is, of being able to charge higher prices to capture greater value for innovation by focusing on a smaller set of “innovators” rather than the mass market. In fact, these students are correct—the simulation does not reward an attempt to skim, or simply shift strategy up or down a value/quality curve. The simulation does in fact demand (and reward) a successful value innovation strategy—the lowering of costs coupled with innovation. These and related statements suggested to the professor that there had not been enough careful debriefing and reviewing of concepts between rounds.

Students formally defended the operation of their firms at the end of the course. These presentations were excellent overall and were the highlight of the class. If possible, it would be worthwhile to have short student presentations between each of the rounds as well.

**BUSINESS SIMULATION GAME (BSG®) PEDAGOGY**

Over the last decade many simulation games have entered the market with increasing sophistication and real world applicability (Wenzler and Chartier, 1999). The goal of simulations is to appeal to student different student learner types, such as *Divergers and Accommodators* who approach learning through concrete experience and hands-on challenges respectively. The Business Strategy Game (BSG®) is an on-line business
simulation game where teams of three to five students compete against their peers in creating a manufacturing athletic footwear company. The game as played is intended to augment and strengthen student learning in the MBA capstone strategy class.

The BSG® required that the teams make all of the strategy decisions simulated in a real operating business. Students were instructed that the approach would be “strategy immersion” based on their previous course work. Decision-making was dependent upon understanding the marketing mix, production scheduling and location, tariffs, currency differentials, customer expectations, and financing the business. Prior to beginning the game, each team participated in two practice rounds. The practice rounds were intended to provide the students with an understanding of the forecasting tools and the decision making process required to compete successfully. The game was accompanied by a Player’s Guide or instruction manual. Game feedback and results were known immediately at the end of each session. Student teams were compared to their in-class peers and other teams throughout the world on a weekly basis (this is a feature embedded in the game). Scores on factors such as total game performance, return on equity, stock price, etc., were included in the comparisons. Student team performance was based on the Balanced Scorecard Method using five equally weighted factors, including financial and non-financial measures. Throughout the game, the instructor wrote an e-newsletter entitled the Strategic Cobbler, which focused on team performance, business “rumors,” and external events all with the purpose of maintaining interest and embedding learning points in a humorous context.

**BSG® Pedagogical Issues**

Overall, the students reported that they enjoyed playing the game and felt the learning experience was valuable, but a significant minority who also felt that while the game was valuable, the overall course workload prevented them from spending the time necessary to fully benefit from participating in the BSG®. Students reported that they enjoyed the competition with other schools. Student teams that scored in the Top 25 in overall
game performance were given extra credit to incentivize them to strive to improve their performance. Students also looked forward to the newsletter, which helped intensify competition and promote a fun way to convey important strategy concepts. In fact, if a newsletter did not come out when expected, several students would send the instructor an email asking when it would be issued. Some students felt that 25% of their grade based on the BSG® was too high while others felt that the BSG® was too time consuming. Some students commented that it was a challenge to work with teammates unwilling to contribute. Even though a Player Guide was provided, some students requested additional guidance on the game in terms of what was expected and the appropriate method of decision-making.

The instructor had the ability to access each account and evaluate how many times a student logged into the game and the duration of time spent working in the system. It was observed that the student teams who had spent the least amount of time in the BSG® performed the poorest. In addition, two on-line quizzes were used to evaluate student progress; one to assess whether or not students understood the game objectives outlined in the Player’s Guide and one quiz based on managerial and financial accounting. The quizzes were individual student assessments and not part of the team exercise. The team score was determined by summing each individual team member score. Finally, students completed a peer and self assessment of teamwork in a confidential manner.

**The BSG® Learning Curve**

The instructor has been using the strategy game for three academic school years. The formalized survey process and cataloging of student comments began with the spring 2010 group of 51 students. Going forward, the instructor expects to construct a database and profile observing how the game continues to rate with students and to use the survey results to modify the course workload and activities. Since the game is important for tracking student performance in functional areas as well as team work for a portion of our AACSB accreditation, it will remain an important activity in the capstone strategy class. Although game results are discussed in class after the decision rounds
the instructor has decided to spend additional time as well at the start of the game orienting students to the game and reinforcing how the game integrates business skills learned by all MBA students. Research has shown that BSG® performance can be enhanced through a more robust orientation phase and thorough discussion of results at the end of the game (Wenzler and Chartier, 1999).

**“Case Analysis Maximization” Pedagogy**

The traditional approach of teaching strategy theory and applying it to business cases may be ideal, especially considering that undergraduate business students may be best classified as “assimilators,”—those who approach knowledge through abstract conceptualization and process it through reflective observation (McCarthy NOTE). Dess, Lumkin and Eisner demonstrate the concept-reflection learning process by defining case analysis as, “a method of learning complex strategic management concepts such as environmental analysis, the process of decision making, and implementing strategic actions through placing students in the middle of an actual situation and challenging them to figure out what to do.” (p. 464). In another strategy text, the following statement is made in regards to the cases chosen, “The organizations discussed in the cases range from large, well known companies which students can do research to update the information, to small entrepreneurial businesses that illustrate the uncertainty and challenge of the strategic management process. (Hill and Jones, page xxi.) In attempting the maximize exposure to the case analysis process described above, the third and final pedagogical approach discussed in this paper is conducted by a professor who regularly teaches undergraduate strategy students; and the method is here described as “case Analysis Maximization” can be described as “Case Analysis Maximization.” In the professor’s opinion, the case study on Maximization approach is valuable because undergraduate students don’t typically have very much conceptual understanding of strategic management coming into the course, and the best learning method may be to take these new concepts and reflect upon multiple examples of their application in real business firms.
“Case Analysis Maximization” Approach
Using as many cases as possible has the advantage of being able to study a greater diversity of firms and also increase the probability of making a connection to “real time” developments to which students can more easily relate. The professor using the maximization approach assigns five full cases, of which any four of the student’s choosing must be written. Another three cases are required reading and tested with a quiz immediately prior to discussions. The professor also brings in many current business new stories from either Bloomberg Businessweek or The Wall Street Journal, including streaming news videos. Teaching Porter’s Value Chain model comes alive to students when they can compare the financial performance and strategies of competitors such as Dell and Apple. Porter’s five forces is no longer an abstract concept when applied to the airline industry; suddenly its consistently poor profitability is explained. The resource based view seems a powerful tool because it puts sustainability at the center of its contribution to strategic management and asks good questions about value and how easily resources can be duplicated. Suddenly the McMahon family that runs World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) are more than loud mouth ring announcers—they are critical and difficult to imitate resources that sustain the profits of this publicly traded company. Students seem to successfully reflect and learn about strategy when they are talking about real companies in real time, especially when they are already familiar with firms. The more firms that are selected for case analysis, the more likely any given student will see a personal connection and aid their understanding of strategy.

With a little good fortune, strategy cases and current business news collide into fascinating displays of concept, reflection, and viewing the results of real world “experimentation” (although admittedly not by the students themselves). It was a fascinating discussion of Jet Blue the day after the ice storm mismanagement debacle nicknamed the “Valentine’s Day Massacre” in 2007. It left Jet Blue’s differentiation strategy based on customer service in shambles. Several years back, an analysis of Yahoo.com took on added significance as the business press debated the merits of Microsoft’s takeover offer. In 2009 and 2010, classes studying the
aggressive corporate strategy acquisition tactics of Cadbury Schweppes received an important lesson when Cadbury itself was bought out by Kraft in an expensive and controversial stock buy-out. With classroom internet connections brings the ability to pull up a firm’s income statement or market capitalization on a moment’s notice and see video streamed from WSJ.com or other sources, all with the purpose of maximizing the number of applications of strategy concepts to specific firms, and hopefully amplifying the success rate of the already well accepted pedagogical technique of case study analysis.

“Case Analysis Maximization” Learning Curve
Despite several years of educational exposure to the functional areas of business, on the first day of class in strategy many students define a successful business as “largest market share,” “high customer satisfaction,” “high stock price” or “strong brand name.” Cases that show profit variability in venerable firms such as McDonalds, Ann Taylor, Starbucks, and GM are particularly important in showing students that profits cannot be taken for granted. By studying cases and doing further up-to-date research—students learn that YES firms can lose money and go out of business—WHY did this happen? HOW can it be managed? Teaching undergraduate strategy in 2010, this idea of profit sustainability is a great challenge faced by firms—and one that the typical twenty-year old business student is blissfully ignorant of at the beginning of a strategy course. In their line of reasoning Facebook is a great success because it is a neat website and has hundreds of millions of users; Facebook as a profitable business model (still evolving) is a whole different world. The case analysis maximization method seeks to put as many income statements and business models before students as possible, until it becomes second nature for a student to look at a firm’s profit margin and market capitalization.

Using so many cases over the last several years, a few observations can be made about the best cases to use with undergraduates. First, there is an advantage using firms that are publicly traded as they have up-to-date financial information which can be easily found and incorporated into papers and discussions. To accelerate the student’s own learning
curve, a few good leading questions are provided with each case assignment. Requiring updates and forcing students to address some key specific points helps students avoid the temptation to lean on “canned” case summaries that are widely available on the internet. Grading four written cases for each student is time consuming, so it is not realistic to expect a six to ten page graduate style full case analysis. The expectation of these undergraduate case write-ups is that they integrate the strategic concepts most recently studied, and three to five pages is the required range. At least one case per semester is a technology company that is very familiar to this generation of students. Google, Apple, Microsoft, and Facebook are all good choices for cases that challenge students to look beyond web pages to business models. Another advantage of assigning a large number of cases is that a company can be assigned for a specific purpose—such as corporate governance—without forcing the class to do a complete strategic analysis; this simplifies case assignments and discussions. Perhaps the greatest advantage of using as many as eight cases a semester is that important concepts such as the value chain and profit sustainability can be taught and reviewed multiple times. Students will find the workload heavy, and it is important to have the first case due within the first two or three weeks of the semester to spread out the grading workload and provide enough time to return the written cases to students before the next one is due. A formal grading rubric is used with a “next time work on:” statement at the end to help the student improve the writing of the next case. To conclude, the strength of this “Case Analysis Maximization” is focus and repetition rather than the introducing more complexity via a simulation or additional readings.

**Overall Student Feedback**

All three of the professors discussed in this paper conduct various types of assessment in their business strategy classes, and at this point some initial observations can be shared. As we have just begun to compare and contrast our different approaches, sophisticated comparative data is not
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yet available. However, internal feedbacks from each professor’s own evaluations have yielded some meaningful conclusions and a survey of 51 MBA students was particularly valuable as these students had experienced multiple methods of teaching and learning.

For the professor using the Blue Ocean Strategy framework, the Blue Ocean Strategy book was perceived by students as the most effective tool in teaching strategy concepts. A caveat should be noted—the concepts “tested” came from this book—so the result is not too surprising. The two cases used in this course were ranked next and the simulation was the least effective of the three learning methods according to the survey of Blue Ocean Strategy students. The professor believed that the simulation would be especially useful for hands-on learning of how to implement the value-innovation strategy to increase buyer utility. However, the data shows that the simulation was regarded as relatively weak in this area.

The MBA professor teaching strategy and using the BSG® simulation had the most meaningful survey data. Students were asked to assess the effectiveness of different classroom techniques and practices, using a Likert scale with 5 being “Highly Effective.” The results appear in Table 1.

**TABLE 1.** Effectiveness of Strategy Teaching Methods 51 MBA students in Strategy Capstone Course, Spring 2010 5.0 = Highly Effective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank Order</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Individual Case Analyses</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Team Research Paper</td>
<td>3.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Class Discussion: “Week in Business”</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Course Lectures</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Student Presentations</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Business Simulation Game (BSG)</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Course Supplemental Materials: e-Reserves, Reading Hand-Outs</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Textbook</td>
<td>2.45</td>
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As Table 1 shows, the individual case analyses and the team research paper were the most effective forms of learning followed by weekly in-class discussions of current business events and instructor led lecture. Given the increasing popularity of on-line simulation and the technological advancement of the current student population, it was surprising that the BSG® ranked 5th along with in-class student presentations in overall learning effectiveness. The textbooks assigned for the course in conjunction with the supplemental readings were viewed as the least effective.

The third professor, whose pedagogical approach was to expose students to as many current company cases as possible, had only the standard course assessment as an evaluation tool. Students’ comments in the course may reflect the advantage of maximizing case study analysis, such as: “Opened my eyes to the real world of business,” “Very interesting and learned a lot. I have a new perspective on the business world…” “I learned so much in this class, I will take this and use it in the workplace.”

**Discussion of Results and Conclusions**

This paper began with one professor’s courageous use of the Blue Ocean Strategy framework to teach strategic management and evolved into a discussion of technique and has now matured into this paper. Our period of analysis is not yet long enough to come to hard conclusions, but enough information has been gathered to make some meaningful observations.

In an ideal world, the semester would be long enough to utilize a traditional strategy textbook, discuss a number of business cases, use a supplemental text such as Blue Ocean Strategy and conduct a multi-period business simulation. Using all these techniques would reach the greatest diversity of student learners and would help reinforce the learning of all students. However, life is full of tradeoffs, and so to complete the paper we discuss some of the issues of these pedagogical techniques and try to come to some helpful conclusions about teaching strategy.

All three professors have had experience teaching simulations, and there was an expectation going into this endeavor that these games would
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be superior pedagogical approaches. As previously mentioned, the BSG® was implemented to enhance student learning since it incorporates information students have learned throughout the MBA program; it is a significant commitment and the simulations’ mid-pack level of effectiveness is disappointing. In the Blue Ocean Strategy integrated methodology, simulation was also found to be less effective than case study analysis. There are two possible explanations. It could be that with more class time commitment and improved implementation technique, these simulations can achieve their potential. The second possibility is that students with little concrete work experience are out of their element when asked to make all the complex decisions in a business simulation game. This takes us back to the Kolb’s learning modes, and the previous research by McCarthy that shows business accounting students are mostly “Assimilators, who approach knowledge through abstract conceptualization and process it through reflective observation.” It is an interesting fact that this University’s MBA program has many 5-year accounting students. This would imply that some experiential learning techniques may be over-rated for certain groups of students studying certain topics.

By implication, the effectiveness of case study analysis came out favorably in this comparison of strategy pedagogy. Professors who are “just using case studies” should not be looked at as lacking effectiveness. In fact, good advice for a new undergraduate professor of strategy might be to “keep it simple and choose your cases carefully.” Complicated integrated techniques such as Blue Ocean Strategy may prove very effective if the Professor can put the time and energy into making it work. Techniques which brought current business news to the student and focused on connecting business trends and ideas with the student’s own experiences also appear positively.

Nothing in this paper should discourage pedagogical innovation. In fact, all three approaches demonstrate a desire to stretch the traditional case analysis model. However, it is clear that case analysis is popular for a reason, and complex enhancements to strategy pedagogy need to be accompanied by an appropriate commitment of time and energy by the students and professor.
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Business Strategy Game® is a registered trademark of GLO-BUS Software, Inc. Web site, server, and business simulation content are copyright © 2010 by GLO-BUS Software, Inc. All rights reserved. The Business Strategy Game® is marketed by McGraw-Hill Irwin, Inc.

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