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MyStrategyExperience

Regent's University London

Developing key skills and practices through
experiential learning



About the resource

MyStrategyExperience is an online, game-play style simulation which provides students with a valuable, experiential learning opportunity. The students work in teams, becoming the board of directors for their own fictitious company. Each team progresses through stages of the simulation, making strategic decisions which affect, both short- and long-term, the profitability of their company. Students compete against each other in teams within class groups. There is a leader board, which updates after each decision stage, showing how each team's company is ranked by share price value.

Key findings – why simulations?

Experiential learning is the process of better understanding a subject through direct experience. Our online simulations enable students to step outside their role as a learner and inhabit another role in order to learn.

Research shows that experiential learning can support a range of outcomes, which our study has evidenced.

1) It allows students to put the theory they have learned into practice, in a safe real-world environment, cementing their understanding.

Dr Chan observed that the simulation positively impacted on his students' behaviour: for example, they started to engage more readily with theory and more effectively apply that theory to a practical situation. Dr Chan found that his students are fully cognisant of this effect: *"They said it's very good for them to bring in the theory and practice it and apply it and see the outcome."*

2) Students can develop a range of personal and social capabilities or skills including team-working, communication, critical thinking, decision-making and presenting to a group.

Dr Chan witnessed his students developing these skills while using the simulation. However, and crucially, the positive impact went beyond the use of the simulation. Following the experiential learning weekend, Dr Chan found students were more likely to think critically and creatively when assessing and solving a problem in class: *"they talk about it in class, of how the experience of the simulation helped them to think in a different way."*

3) Increase student engagement through the integration of digital simulation into a course.

Our survey responses indicated that, through the simulation, students overall felt more motivated and specifically were more engaged in the theoretical part of the course.

- **100%** would recommend MyStrategyExperience to the next group of students.
- **85%** said it helped them feel more motivated on the course.
- **71%** believed the simulation reinforced their theoretical understanding.
- Nearly **60%** felt more engaged with their learning.



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Introduction

Regent's University London is a private institution located in the heart of London. The university provides practical, industry-led degrees designed to enable a student "to flourish as an individual, a professional and a global citizen". With over 140 nationalities on campus, many students have entrepreneurial career plans or are already part of a family business looking to expand into new markets.

Dr Eric Chan, Principal Lecturer at the university, added: *"A growing number of our students have an enterprising outlook. They want to open businesses and feel that Regent's University London is the place for them to [learn how to] do this."*

Dr Chan is a Chartered Fellow and Principal Lecturer in the Faculty of Business and Management. Dr Chan joined Regent's University London as a visiting lecturer at in 2001 and from 2009 – 2016 he was Programme Director for the MA Global Management. In July 2017 he took on the role of Centre Manager in the Chartered Management Institute for dual accreditation PG programmes.

In this study, Dr Chan has shared his experience of effectively integrating the online simulation MyStrategyExperience into his teaching.

Key findings

Greater motivation, participation and engagement with theory

Dr Chan observed that the simulation positively impacted on his students' behaviour. After some initial hesitation, his students became more motivated; they participated fully and responded well to MyStrategyExperience. They engaged more readily with theory and more effectively applied that theory to a practical situation. Dr Chan added: *"I used [this simulation] because I felt that it gave students a better understanding of how they apply what they've learned in theory into practice. And this has proved to be the truth."*

It was clear to students how the simulation allowed them to try real-life application of theory. One student said: *"I felt that all the exercises and decisions we had to make were exactly like the ones we will have to make in the real world,"* also reflecting that *"I grew more confident in my ability to make the right decisions. [Using] My knowledge from class in the weeks leading up to the exercise and previous work experience, combined with my gut instincts."*

Another described how they *"felt empowered ... because it was an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge"*.

Fundamental skills development

As they worked in the simulation, Dr Chan observed them developing the following skills:

- Critical thinking
- Creativity
- Teamwork
- Professional relationship building
- Stimulated conversation

The positive impact went beyond the use of the simulation: following the experiential learning weekend, Dr Chan found students were more likely to think critically and creatively when assessing and solving a problem



in class. Ultimately the development and application of all these skills supports students' successful achievement of the course outcomes.

The development of the first two skills in particular, research suggests, is fundamental to students' career-readiness in general. In our 2019 white paper *Opportunities for Higher Education in the Era of The Talent Economy*¹ 'critical thinking' was identified as a key skill to support problem solving. Closely linked to this, in our Future Skills² research, which considered employment in 2030, 'originality' was one of the top 10 skills, abilities, and knowledge associated with rising occupations. Originality is defined as 'The ability to come up with unusual or clever ideas about a given topic or situation, or to develop creative ways to solve a problem.'

Increased student engagement

Our survey responses indicated that, through the simulation, students felt more motivated overall and more engaged in the theoretical part of the course in particular.

- **85%** said it helped them feel more motivated on the course.
- Nearly **60%** felt more engaged with their learning.

One student commented:

"I felt so productive after doing it because it was so real, interesting and entertaining at the same time."

Course overview

Dr Eric Chan is passionate about the value of experiential learning and the positive impact it has on his students. He has used this online simulation for many years, since it was first launched:

"I used it because I felt that it gave students a better understanding of how they apply what they've learned in theory into practice. And this has proved to be the truth because every time, after each session, the students have always commented how much they have learned from the simulation experience."

Dr Chan used MyStrategyExperience on two modules, taken by students on two Masters' Degree programmes as detailed below. The cohort sizes and demographic data were taken from the 2019/20 academic year specifically but are broadly representative of these courses year on year.

Course Details	
<p>Module: Managing Complexity Degree Course: MA Management Degree Level: Postgraduate Number of students: 60 Approximate number of nationalities: 30 Average age: 23–24 years old Gender split: 58% male, 42% female</p>	<p>Module: Strategic Management of a Luxury Business Degree Course: MA Luxury Brand Management Degree Level: Postgraduate Number of students: 85 Approximate number of nationalities: 40 Average age: 23–24 years old Gender split: 7% male, 93% female</p>



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Integration & Assessment

Students participated in the MyStrategyExperience simulation over a weekend on campus in the second half of the term. Each day ran from 10:00 – 17:00, with extra time on Sunday for a wrap-up session revealing the winners of prizes for ‘top performing team’ and ‘most valuable player’.

As a long-term user, Dr Chan has created additional activities that students do alongside the main tasks within the simulation: *“In the beginning, I ask them to come up with the company logo, ... a tagline, ...a bunch of company values. I also ask them to come up with the company vision and mission as they see it.”*

The simulation formed part of Dr Chan’s assessment. In the Managing Complexity module, it accounted for 45% of the final mark. Of that 45%: 35% was made up of observations of each individual student’s participation in the simulation and 10% on their self-reflection of what they had learned and experienced during the simulation. In the Strategic Management of a Luxury Business module, it is part of a formative assessment activity to enable students to reinforce, apply and practise their understanding of strategic thinking and teamwork and then to reflect in their learning e-portfolio. He explained further: *“We assess performance in the simulation by observing students giving short presentations in teams and looking at how they come up with their understanding of the incomplete data, their strategic thinking process and decision-making.”*

While the gamified element was shown to be a great motivating tool which drives student engagement, Dr Chan emphasised that success in this part of his module was not just about “winning” the game:

“If students were not doing well in a simulation, I still try to encourage them, by saying, ‘look, it’s not about your next decision whether you’re going to be successful or not. It’s about how you make the decision and what thinking goes behind that [decision].”

Over the years, Dr Chan has continuously improved his use of the simulation in his teaching. For example, he adapted a self-reflection template document provided within the simulation to account for a significant portion of the overall marks awarded. This template allowed students to reflect on their individual learning. By tailoring it to his course he was able to clearly assess and evidence the students’ performance at an individual level, not only as part of a team process.

Dr Chan’s advice to others when integrating MyStrategyExperience into their teaching is to understand what you want to achieve through using the resource. He makes the point that:

“It’s flexible. You could adopt and adapt the simulation the way you want it. [...] if you know how you want to use it, then it’s going to be very good.”



Effecting change in student behaviour and turning theory into practice

The core outcomes of the modules were for students to **“develop the understanding of strategy, the understanding of how to put things together and also the understanding of making decisions collectively.”** (Dr Chan)

The simulation clearly helped students develop this set of **key skills**:

- analytical thinking
- strategic understanding
- creativity
- decision-making
- collaboration
- teamwork.

In turn, the development of these skills supported student achievement of the overall module outcomes.

Dr Chan believes that, for many of his students, their previous business experience actually presented a challenge to their development of these skills: *“They think they know it, but they [need to] realise it's not just about running a business, it's about a lot of other factors that surround it.”*

It all started with changing their mindset on teamwork, as Dr Chan expanded: *“They want to be in charge of things and sometimes that leads to conflict in the teams. The challenge is to get them to really think how they could harness the talent and draw out the skills from all team members.”*

Many students have never experienced or explored teamwork in this way at university. Dr Chan watched his students develop their interpersonal and professional relationship building skills during the simulation: *“It actually helped them grow and helped them experience and learn about their team members.”* He concludes:

“The challenge is to get them to really think how they could harness the talent and draw out the skills from all team members.”

– Dr Eric Chan, Principal Lecturer | Regent's University London

“I think they enjoyed it and they've found the inclusion of the simulation experience valuable in the modules.”

Using MyStrategyExperience demonstrated to students the extent to which they needed to develop their skills. For example, it brought into sharp focus that working in a team is essential to delivering a strong business strategy in the real world.

Dr Chan reported observing the students change their behaviour as they develop these skills during the simulation weekend: *“I've observed when they were able to turn things around, it was when they pause, and they stop, and they begin to break things down. [They decide] we're going to spend more time on strategy, thinking ahead, rather than just thinking for the moment. They don't just think for the round [of the game] that they are in, they think ahead about how their decision is going to impact long term.”*

“They think ahead, rather than just thinking for the moment ... [how] their decision is going to impact long term.”

– Dr Eric Chan, Principal Lecturer | Regent's University London



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After the simulation weekend, Dr Chan noted that in class the students *“were more analytical. They were more creative in their thinking. They were pausing to think before they replied to me.”*

In summary, the simulation helped students develop skills and practices which supported their achievement in these modules, and which will be useful in their future careers.

“It gives the students a better understanding of how they apply what they’ve learned in theory into practice...it’s about how you make the decision and what thinking goes behind that.”

– Dr Eric Chan, Principal Lecturer | Regent’s University London

Supporting the student experience: an effective game changer

MyStrategyExperience helped students better understand and apply in practice the content in their modules. Students responded well to the simulation and it helped them engaged more with theory.

- Students recognised that the simulation had a positive impact on their development.
- Students valued and enjoyed the learning experience it provided.

Typically, in evaluations, these modules scored 5.4 out of 6. Dr Chan adds that in the evaluation, *“a lot of [the students] have commented about the weekend. Just that they really learn a lot from it. And they felt that they enjoyed the weekend, enjoyed the exploring strategy simulation experience, enjoyed working in teams.”**

Dr Chan described the feedback he’s received from students on the Strategic Management of a Luxury Business module in particular: *“They said it’s very good for them to bring in the theory and practice it and apply it and see the outcome.”*

Dr Chan also observed that the students reflected on the impact of the learning experience long after the weekend of the simulation had passed.

“Even after the simulation, they talked about it in class, of how the experience of the simulation had helped them to think in a different way.”

– Dr Eric Chan, Principal Lecturer | Regent’s University London

It’s interesting to note that *before* they participated in the weekend simulation experience, the students were not so enthusiastic about spending a weekend ‘studying’. *“[They said] ‘why do we have to do this? Why do we have to come and do a weekend?’ [...] And funnily enough, as I remember it, most times after the weekend, they say, ‘my, we learned so much and there’s so much in it.’”* It shows that the engaging nature of the simulation soon piqued their interest and they found much to learn and enjoy.

“[Students] said it’s very good for them to bring in the theory and practice it and apply it and see the outcome.”

– Dr Eric Chan, Principal Lecturer | Regent’s University London

* Dr Chan used the simulation alongside Johnson, Scholes & Whittington 'Exploring Strategy' textbook.



Student Survey Data

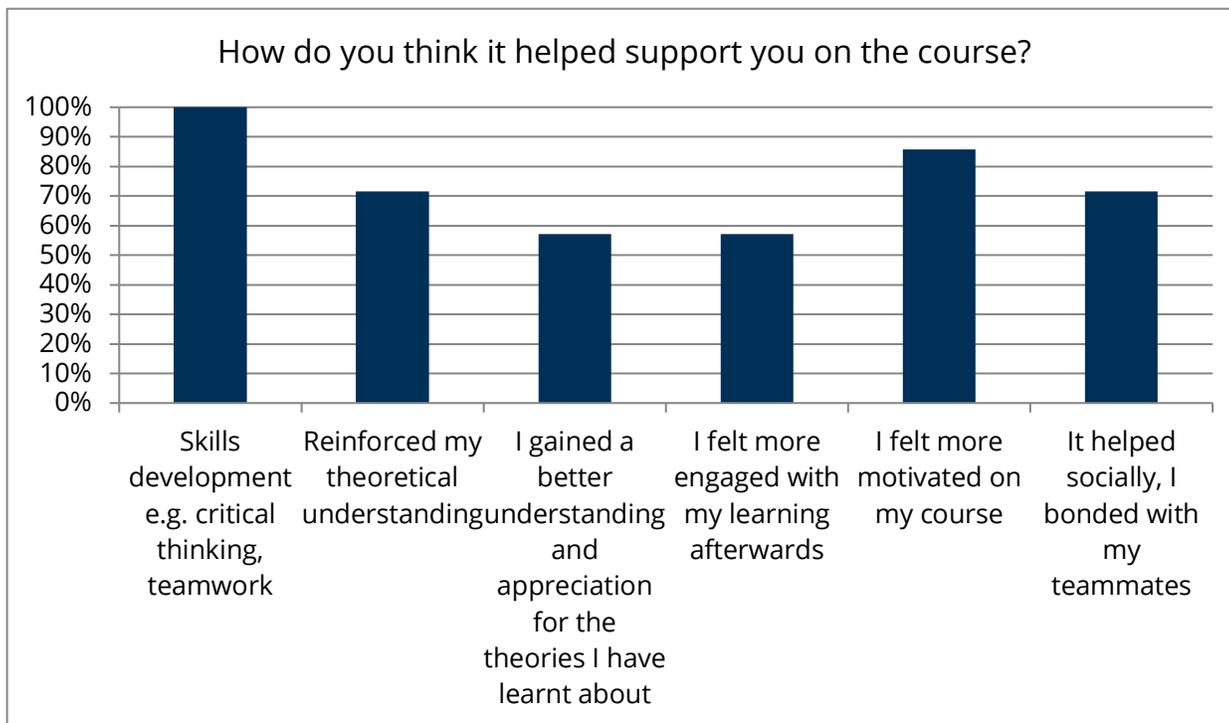
We gave the class an opportunity to share their feedback on MyStrategyExperience via a short, online survey; 7 students provided responses and, though a small sample size, their feedback appears to be quite representative when aligning it to Dr Chan’s feedback on student experience. In summary:

- 100% would recommend MyStrategyExperience to the next students taking the course.
- 100% agreed it support personal skills development.
- 85% felt more motivated on the course through use of MyStrategyExperience.

Usage and impact on learning

We asked the students to consider their use of MyStrategyExperience and how they felt it impacted on their learning in the course.

100% agreed it supported personal skills development and **85%** said it helped them feel more motivated on the course. **71%** thought the simulation reinforced their theoretical understanding and nearly **60%** felt more engaged with their learning.



We asked students to comment further on using MyStrategyExperience in the course and what they personally felt they had gained from the learning experience. Their comments were overwhelmingly positive and supported the Dr Chan’s observations:

- Students tended to be apprehensive about the simulation weekend beforehand.
- They participated fully and found that they enjoyed the experience by the end of the first day.
- They referenced developing their personal and social skills, in particular they talked about applying their knowledge, decision-making and teamwork.



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One student commented that they felt *“Accomplished! My team and I managed to do some impressive work under pressure. At the end of the day, in reflection of my experience, I am proud of how my team and I performed.”*

Interestingly, this suggests that the digital simulation has a real-world impact for students in feeling connected to each other and that they value the engagement with their teammates, as well as with the course. Dr Chan also observed this effect.

Student Responses

What did you expect from this kind of experiential, gamified learning on your course?

“I was a bit overwhelmed as the simulation required us to be around all day. We were told that it would be intense and that contributed to how overwhelmed I felt.”

“As I have never done a similar simulation before, I assumed that it would be a challenge to solve the tasks.”

“At first I expected it to be interesting but superficial.”

Can you explain how you felt about MyStrategyExperience once the day was finished?

“This simulation was very helpful to me as I believe it greatly helped me improve upon my decision-making skills, group collaboration and presentation skills.”

“The MyStrategyExperience been a useful tool to experience time pressure and complex challenges. [...] It helps to be prepared for situations in business. I enjoyed the experience”

“I felt that I learnt valuable experiences related to strategy and I could observe areas that I need to develop to become a good manager.”

“I felt so productive after doing it because it was so real, interesting and entertaining at the same time.”

What was the most valuable thing you learnt through using it?

“Personally, the most valuable thing I learned through the simulation experience was that as we progressed through each phase I grew more confident in my ability to make the right decisions. My knowledge from class in the weeks leading up to the exercise and previous work experience, combined with my gut instincts, I felt prepared and more self-assured about the decisions my group had to make.”

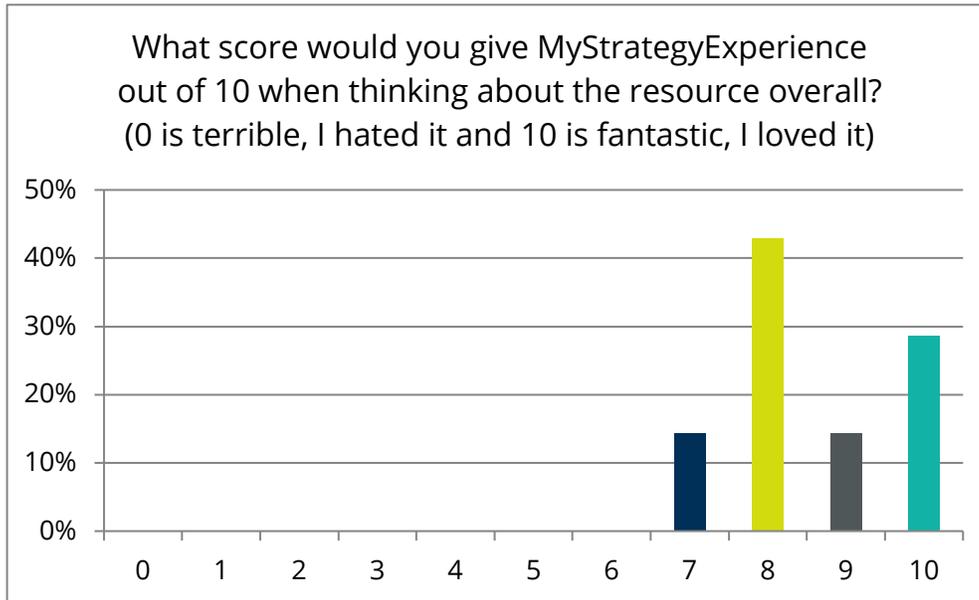
“Real life team work and having a clear aim”

“To believe in myself and my abilities as well as having a successful experience with group-work.”

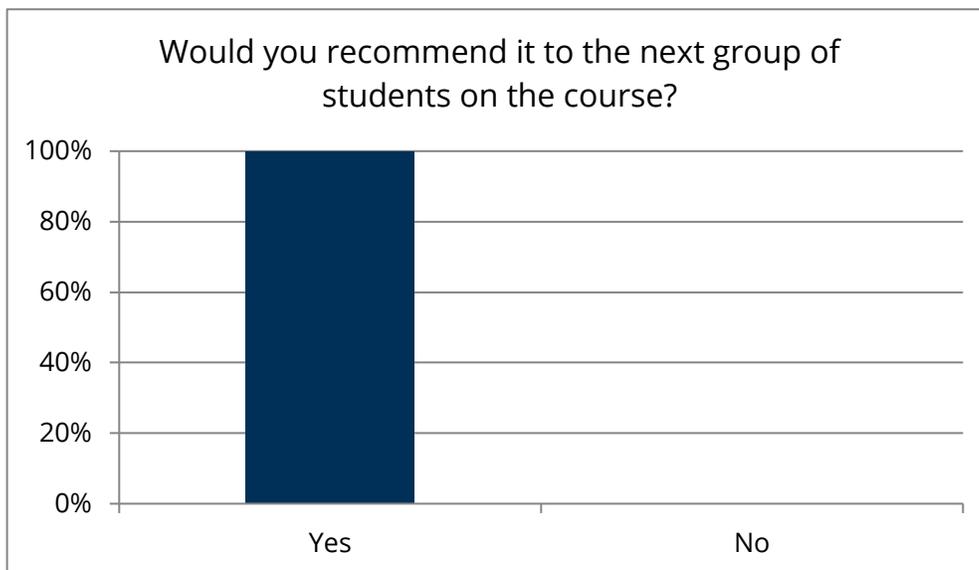


Satisfaction

100% of the students who responded to the survey stated a level of satisfaction with the experience of using MyStrategyExperience as above neutral and **85%** rated the system 8 out of 10, or higher:



When answering the question 'Would you recommend it to the next group of students on the course?', **100%** of respondents categorically agreed:





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Conclusion

Dr Chan is passionate about the value and benefit of experiential learning for his students, but also as an important tool in the way he wants to teach theory. By embedding MyStrategyExperience in his module, and over a number of years, he has observed that it:

- Positively impacts on student behaviour, such as they start to more effectively apply theory to a practical situation.
- Enhances the development of future skills, including analytical or critical thinking, creativity and teamwork.
- Supports students' achievement of course learning outcomes.
- Motivates and builds students' engagement with theory in the modules.

Consistently positive feedback from students ensures Dr Chan has secured funding from respective Head of Programmes each year to provide his students with access to MyStrategyExperience. The approach is so integral to how Dr Chan teaches that even when his modules or responsibilities change, experiential learning and gamification remains. Dubbed the 'simulation person' within Regent's University London, Dr Chan includes them in other modules. Importantly, he also supports his colleagues and educators at other institutions who are looking to integrate these motivating experiential learning tools into their own courses. In summary, Dr Chan said of MyStrategyExperience:

“I think the strength of the simulation is that it allows people to see the outcome from their decisions. I love running games. You see different behaviours. I would recommend it.”

– Dr Eric Chan

References

- 1 https://www.pearson.com/content/dam/one-dot-com/one-dot-com/global/Files/news/gls/Opportunity_for_HE_Sept2019.pdf
- 2 <https://futureskills.pearson.com/research/assets/pdfs/media-pack.pdf>