Using SimVenture in Veterinary Practice

Description: This case study is based on an interview with Cathy Coates, Teaching Fellow at the University of Bristol on 25th June 2014.

Course/subject: Veterinary practice management
Type of student: Undergraduate   **Number of students**: around 25

Why use SimVenture? It began five years ago with the educator looking for a tool that could support her teaching business management (specifically veterinary practice management) to veterinary students, including veterinary nurses. An internet search for an interactive tool with both a business and a teaching and learning focus, which constituted a 'serious package' rather than a game, led her to SimVenture.

How was SimVenture used with students?

The educator has implemented SimVenture for 3-4 years with nursing undergraduate students who are studying a four-year Veterinary Nursing and Bio veterinary Science BSc course. The simulation is implemented in the third year of study, in between placements.

The students receive 3-day intensive management teaching in September, which includes 'getting started with SimVenture'. This is followed by another 3 days in January which includes a session on moving on with SimVenture.

The class is divided into two with the students working in pairs. Occasionally a group of three may occur, but ideally the educator wishes to have pairs to facilitate student engagement. This is also due to the limitations of licenses on campus. The students are given a manual each that outlines the workings of the simulation. The default settings are applied when using the game, to give the experience an organic feel and to allow the students to explore the simulation.

Impact on students: The simulation initially engaged students due to its 'game' like appearance. However, there was some resistance at the start from a few students who found the simulation was more serious than the 'game' that they had envisaged. This group of students came to realise the potential of the simulation due to the valuable business knowledge gained. The educator explained that the simulation engaged some students really well. Those with parents who ran their own business recognised the simulation as replicating real world experiences demonstrating the simulations' ability to reflect real life.

How was it assessed?

The simulation performance is not assessed at the end of the year, but the learning contributes to some aspects of a separate assignment.

Student feedback: Although the educator expected students to question why the simulation was not replicating a veterinary practice, the students did not query this. The feedback was that they can easily see the benefits of the simulation and that they are getting the underpinnings of business theory and practice. It gave them a holistic view of the building blocks of business so they can apply their knowledge to their own subject area. The type of business did not matter as the students understand that the fundamentals of business are the same across all areas.

Educator perspective: Overall, the educator felt positive about the simulation and how she implemented it with students. She thought the students having experience of the real world and being out in practice meant they understood the relevance of the simulation.

> "To some extent you can leave the students to it and they'll get on with it and this is down to how engaging the simulation is and that the students like a challenge."

On a downside, she felt the random element that you can select in the simulation is too random so that students making correct decisions are not rewarded sufficiently for learning to take place. The educator felt this risked disengaging the students; a definitive line between risk and predictability needs to be drawn.

How was using SimVenture evaluated?
There was no formal evaluation conducted. Once all the students have had an opportunity to work through the 'getting started with SimVenture' there is a debriefing session in class. The students are asked to compare their experience of using the SimVenture tool with a paper based business model generation tool.

Lessons learned:
- The number of licenses can limit student usage.
- It is recommended that students work in pairs.
- The educator does need to devote time to exploring the game and if possible undertake some training.

Future work: The educator is planning to explore the issue of the different scenarios available, particular with respect to the random effects option. She would like to run more directed activities using some of the more advanced scenarios that are available in SimVenture. She also plans to run an evaluation of student learning, measuring how they have learned from the simulation.