The main motivation for the construction of the Blue Cut Fashion (BCF) simulation was to explore ways of deploying the same simulation product across several institutions and their campuses, as well as, educational objectives and methods of teaching and assessment. Simulation design had to consider reusable and configurable components. Case studies, story lines, characters and the visual environment had to be pliable and open to modifications. BCF was the first in the series of such simulations.

In all variants of the BCF simulation, students had to interview three representatives of the customer organisation (a fashion store - BCF), analyse the main issues facing the management and offer suggestions as to their resolution.

Business analysis is a process of learning and discovery in some business application domain. The most important objective for future business analysts is to become effective learners.

With this in mind, BCF was designed around a constructivist learning paradigm where the learning process can be described as emergent, collaborative, creative and domain specific. The knowledge creation relies on three distinct learning behaviours, i.e. endogenous, exogenous and dialectic, which have all been incorporated into the BCF blended learning environment (see Figure).

Endogenous behaviour supports reflective and introspective analysis of objectives, tasks and processes. Exogenous behaviour focuses on seeking knowledge from external sources (research, help desk and online forum). Dialectic behaviour invokes communication, collaboration and negotiation with experts (simulated and real) and their peers.

Effective learners also need to be creative. Through the BCF project we encourage students to think outside the square, learn to relax and resolve business and technological constraints.

Two Birds with One Store

The Blue Cut Fashion (BCF) simulations provide business students with experience in dealing with common problems in information systems (IS). An important aspect of IS is the use of technology in solving business problems. Business analysis is often the starting point in the understanding of business context and its processes, as well as, determination of difficulties and inefficiencies in day-to-day business operation.

Students undertaking a business analysis project - irrespective of their year of study or their specialisation - are involved in the collection and analysis of business data, making observations, visual presentation of insights and writing recommendations to management.

BCF provides a learning framework for gaining experience in business analysis.
Simulation Treatment

Blue Cut Fashions (Store) is a simulation that supports first year students in using Excel in analysing business data and proposing a high-level business advice on the organisational change.

The first year students use the (BCF Store) e-simulation as a sophisticated help desk to ask for advice on the problem area and to decide what Excel function would be useful in completing a particular project objective.

Blue Cut Fashions (Chain) is a simulation aimed at Masters students learning professional skills in requirements elicitation, analysis, specification and validation.

Masters students treat the (BCF Chain) e-simulation as a field trip and are asked to deal with multiple views of a business problem, reconcile these views, untangle conflicting information, deal with trust, and carry out research to fill in omissions.

While the two simulations have been designed around the same case study, their role in students’ learning is quite different. BCF Store aims at simplifying an assignment task; whereas, BCF Chain provides a set of challenges that need to be overcome in students’ assignment activities. In both simulations the objective statements are minimal, which forces students to fully engage with the simulated characters, which gives them a sense of self-sufficiency and the work undertaken becomes a process of discovery.

Blended learning used in both cases, fuses reality and virtuality into a single and consistent world; first to create a sense of authenticity; and, second to provide educators with a degree of control over the simulation outcomes.

BCF sims are being tailored to distinct cohorts, and are used with groups of over 1,500 on-campus and online students.

Evaluation and Lessons Learnt

Blue Cut Fashion (Store) has been formally evaluated with an ‘Opinio’ survey taken by 439 students.

The preliminary analysis indicates students’ recognition of an important role the BCF simulation played in their learning. They also reflected on the ‘blended learning’ approach employed in the project delivery and the perceived cohesion of different learning components of their study.

The overall feedback reflects students’ positive reception of the experience gained from the BCF e-simulation incorporated in a coherent suite of teaching and learning methods.

Results of two (2) of the 38 survey questions have been presented below.

Blue Cut Fashion provided access to experiences that I may not otherwise have had in a university context.

Blue Cut Fashion is well-integrated into the unit as a whole?

reference
