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ENGINEERING STUDENTS TURN DISTRIBUTOR, WHOLESALER AND RETAILER IN RESTRUCTURED ‘BEER DISTRIBUTION GAME’

Famous MIT-originated Supply Chain Management game conducted in real-world Problem-Based Learning setting for the first time in Singapore

Republic Polytechnic is the first institute of higher learning to use the world-famous Beer Distribution Game in a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) environment. Originating from the renowned MIT, the Beer Game has been used in many Supply Chain Management courses targeted at business executives and aspiring entrepreneurs to illustrate the perplexities of supply logistics through a board game, with small tokens and paper calculations.

Republic Polytechnic’s School of Engineering, together with industry supporters, namely, SembCorp Logistics, Singapore MIT Alliance (SMA) and Coca-Cola, restructured the traditional Beer Game by making it both real and interactive, with actual Sprite Ice cans as a physically transacted commodity and fellow students and friends as real customers who pay real money for the thirst quencher. The game is entirely in line with the polytechnic’s non-traditional PBLearning approach which actively engages the students in the learning process. In this game, the students are challenged to deal with the real world complexities of making a purchase decision, accurately forecasting future demands and developing strategies to outperform fellow student competitors in a supportive learning environment.

Thirteen participating teams comprising 4 members each in the roles of manufacturer, distributor, wholesaler and retailer, were given 7 weeks to play the game in 2 stages. The ultimate objective was to fulfill all customer orders -- both physical and online -- and at the same time minimizing inventory holdings and backorders. Participating teams are judged by their sales and the cost they incur while holding inventory stock.

The educational side of the game is most evident in the Reflection Journals which was required of each team at the end of their business day. It is no different from the daily record of the learning issues and strategies which were keenly experienced while solving their facilitators’ problems throughout the day. In the words of 1st Year Engineering student Chen De Hua, the game taught them more than what the books could:

“I’ve learnt quite a lot from the supply chain game. At first I thought as a retailer, the main task for me is to learn how to persuade the customers to buy Sprite Ice. But after playing the game, we discovered that the main problem is actually the number of cans available for sale that day. I can now see what really happens in the market. It’s good to learn it now because what we’ve learnt can’t be learnt from books!”

The winning team was selected by representatives from SMA, SembCorp Logistics and the School of Engineering, Republic Polytechnic. The top 3 teams win a total of $600.

The prize giving ceremony will be held on 7 May 04 (Friday) 12.45 pm at The Library, Republic Polytechnic, Tanglin Campus, 1 Kay Siang Road. Members of the press are invited to attend the event.

For more information, please contact: