Disruptors v. Defenders: Course-Length Corporate Entrepreneurship Simulation

John H. Wilson (Drexel University)

Disruptors v. Defenders is a virtual, team-based entrepreneurship immersion simulation fueled by individual work and team coordination, spanning an entire course term. This exercise is designed to simulate the competitive interplay between "Disruptor" entrepreneurs who strive to disrupt an existing industry and "Defender" entrepreneurs in established firms who strive to innovate faster, or at least try to keep up with these external disruptors. Each week, teams choose a course of action and then each participant must perform a hands-on entrepreneurial task based on the decision. Points are based on a combo of the team decision and player results.

Introduction

Constant tension exists between disruptive entrepreneurs (often startups) and the corporate entrepreneurs working in established companies/industries who are experiencing disruption. The pandemic accelerated this conflict, making adaptation, innovation and virtual collaboration necessary both for entrepreneurs of all kinds and for higher education. These factors motivated the inception of Disruptors v. Defenders, a virtual, course-long simulation competition designed to give students a taste of the ongoing battle of innovation between disruptors and corporate entrepreneurs (O'Reilly & Binns, 2019; van Rensburg, 2015).

A secondary goal of this competition is to provide a scenario in which students are accountable to one another as teammates to perform well in the game, but also complete graded individual work in order to contribute to team success. To add energy and excitement to the competition, a weekly report styled after a sports re-cap helps to connect results with course objectives and keep students engaged as the term progresses. A sample weekly recap can be viewed here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqyYVjdJWGI.

In particular, the simulation serves as an experiential exercise that can be executed online or in person. This provides a way to advance entrepreneurship education during and after the Covid-19 pandemic (Ratten, 2020) or any other situation that disrupts in-person learning.

Learning Objectives

- Understand the entrepreneurial mindset applied to both corporate entrepreneurship and disruptive ventures.
- Experience the competitive dynamics of disruptive technologies on an established industry.
- Understand the importance of establishing and promoting an entrepreneurial culture within established corporations.
- Demonstrate the role of the corporate entrepreneur as a change agent in an established company.
- Learn tactics and techniques to overcome resistance to change and innovation.
- Encourage collaboration and accountability in a team setting.

Description of the Exercise

The class is divided into two teams, with half of the class assigned to the "Disruptor" category and the other half were designated as "Defenders." Many pairs of teams can compete against one another if the class is large. The academic term was divided in half so teams can switch at the midpoint, allowing all students to experience both perspectives.

Here is how Disruptors v. Defenders works:

1. Each week, teams review a series of strategic options in the form of game cards. There are as many game cards are there are weeks of

competition, so teams make a decision about which strategy to pursue for that week. (NOTE: some of the strategic options differ for Disruptors vs. Defenders). There is an optimal card selection order based on the course curriculum; however, the impact of this optimal order is affected by the decisions of the other team.

2. Once a team selects a card, they tackle individual assignments/tasks. Each person on the team must then complete one of these tasks and turn it in as an individual assignment to receive an individual grade, while simultaneously contributing points towards the team's progress.
3. Late work does not contribute to the team score, so students have the incentive to complete work and submit it on time.
4. Weekly "Victory Points" are a zero-sum game: 10 points are available to be distributed between the competing teams based on performance. The scoring method is described later in this article.
5. The team with the most victory points at the halfway point in the term for the first round (or the end of the term in the second round) will win the game and each member of the winning team receives bonus points towards their final grade.
6. The academic term includes two sessions of the game, each with a different industry scenario to give the game a story line. In the first run of the game the focus was on the Cybersecurity industry and in the second run the focus was on disruption associated with higher education.

Gameplay: Disrupters

The Disruptor Decision Cards (images shown in the downloadable PDF above) each focus on some aspect of the entrepreneurial process. This serves to highlight the aspect of entrepreneurship that is the focus of course materials and instructor lectures. The five Disruptor Decision Cards Include:

Disruptor Decision Card #1 - Customer Love

Disruptor Decision Card #2 - Maker Space

Disruptor Decision Card #3 - Scale Fast

Disruptor Decision Card #4 - Innovator's Extravaganza

Disruptor Decision Card #5 – Sell to the Max!

The following is a detailed description of each of the Disruptor Decision Cards, including a table with the distribution of 10 strength points based on the types of tasks assigned to the card.

Disruptor Decision Card #1 - Customer Love

1. Survey Says! – Create a customer survey using a free survey service (i.e. SurveyMonkey) with at least 10 questions designed to collect quantitative data about customer needs, problems, etc. Submit a link to the survey instrument.
2. Interview – Schedule an interview with a friend or colleague who has a business or is responsible for a business, and who can provide perspective about their concerns or needs related to the industry. Submit a list of the questions you planned to ask them and a summary of their responses and/or the themes you discovered during the interview.
3. Observation – Ask a friend or colleague for permission to observe them during an activity related to your business or product for 30 minutes. Take notes on your observations, particularly as it relates to problems or pain points that your solution could address.
4. Persona – Create an avatar that represents your ideal customer. This should include a name, photo, description of their role, aspirations, experiences and priorities.
5. Customer Event – Design a unique customer event: something that establishes affinity, brings people together, and helps customers to feel like something bigger. Include desired outcomes/benefits of the event – for customers and for your venture.

Category	Points*
Ideation	2
Customer Discovery	4
Product Development	1
Sales & Mkt	2

Operations & Infrastructure 1

Business Model   0

*Card points are determined based on the content of the tasks such that the point value identifies the portion (out of 10) of the tasks relate to the associated topic.

Disruptor Decision Card #2 - Maker Space

1. Napkin Sketch – On a cocktail napkin, or piece of paper that is 6" x 6" to simulate a cocktail napkin, draw a simple product concept sketch that illustrates how the product or service will work. Submit a brief video talking through the sketch, describing it as if you are telling a friend or colleague about it over drinks.
2. Value Prop Mad-lib – Follow the value proposition mad lib template to describe a product in terms of WHO (customer segment), FOR (problem the product addresses), and WILL (benefit/outcome statement when a customer uses the product or service). Include a brief video explaining the mad lib.
3. MVP Design Spec – Identify three features of your minimum viable product (MVP) and explain them in detail as if they were instructions for an engineer or programmer to create a prototype product. Also include a "falsifiable hypothesis" statement about one "Leap-of-Faith Assumption" (LOFA) about product marketability that is associated with each of these features.
4. Thought Leadership Media – Create some kind of value artifact to establish your credibility in the industry. This can be a white paper, an explainer video, an educational infographic.
5. Product Flow Chart or Wire Frame – Use a simple flow chart in Power Point, Visio, whiteboard drawing, etc; or a "wireframe" using a free, no-code app builder (i.e. Adalo). Show how a product will work from a user's perspective. This simple user experience process should only include 3-5 steps. **(2 Bonus Points for Product Development)**

Category	Points	Bonus**
Ideation	1	
Customer Discovery	2	
Product Development	5	2
Sales & Mkt	1	
Operations & Infrastructure	1	
Business Model	0	

**Bonus points are associated with tasks that are expected to be more complex or time-consuming.

Disruptor Decision Card #3 - Scale Fast

1. Infrastructure Build - Identify 3 key categories of investment needed to scale the business. Provide a brief description of each in terms of what you would gain from the investment, what it would cost, and how it would constrain business growth/scale if you lack this capability.
2. Financial Projection – Create a simple spreadsheet with monthly projected revenues (# units X average revenue per unit) and projected costs (fixed and variable) for a 3-6-month period to demonstrate how you believe that the company will grow and produce a return for potential investors.
3. Key Partners – Do a simple market scan and identify at least 10 potential partners who could help promote your product, distribute your product, influence potential customers, or enhance your ability to reach customers. Include a 1-sentence explanation for how each partner could achieve one of these ends, or other similar benefit.
4. Metered Funding Map –Create a 5-stage map for scale that shows (a) the funding/investment needed at each stage to achieve scale and (b) the revenue target that would prove you are ready for the next stage. Include a brief description of how you would use the funds in a way that gets you to the next stage.
5. Structured to Win – Based on research of best practices, create an org chart for the startup/new venture that will facilitate growth and scale. Include key roles needed to ensure that the company is ready for rapid growth. Include a brief video explaining the org chart and the rationale for your choices.

Category	Points
Ideation	0
Customer Discovery	0
Product Development	1
Sales & Mkt	0
Operations & Infrastructure	6
Business Model	3

Disruptor Decision Card #4 - Innovator's Extravaganza

1. Name that Venture – Come up with a name for your venture that reflects the vision or identity that you have for the business. Don't forget to get input from your teammates, since this will be the identity for your team and for your startup/new venture. Write up a back-story explaining how the name came to be and what it means about who you are and how you want to bring unique value to the world.
2. 25 Ideas With Good Potential – Come up with a list of 25 distinctly different ideas for a product, service or other way to establish a presence in the industry that could potentially be developed into a business concept, brand or offering that would bring value to potential customers.
3. 25 Terrrible Ideas -- Come up with a list of terrible ideas: those that would never work, would be impossible to deliver, or just downright silly. The idea needs to connect with the industry or vision, but should be the opposite of an idea you would try to actually implement.
4. Party Crasher – You have just heard that your primary competitor in your target industry is having a cocktail party at a public venue (therefore, not presenting any ethical or legal impediments for you to crash the party). In attendance will be some of your competitor's key subject matter experts, strategic partners and prominent customers. Come up with your party-crasher plan: What are your goals for the evening? Whom will you try to talk with? What will you try to learn? What kinds of questions would you ask? How else will you try to take advantage of this opportunity to fuel your venture?
5. Landing Page – Using a free website builder (such as Caard.com, Wix, Squarespace, etc), create a simple landing page website for your new venture. You'll need a name for the startup/new venture (coordinate with your teammate who is creating the team name), a simple logo (created with a free resource like Canva.com), a tagline, and a contact info collector as a call to action. **(2 Bonus points in the Sales & Marketing category)**

Category	Points	Bonus
Ideation	4	
Customer Discovery	2	
Product Development	1	
Sales & Mkt	0	2
Operations Infrastructure	&0	
Business Model	3	

Disruptor Decision Card #5 – Sell to the Max!

1. Product Brochure – Create a tri-fold brochure using a free/no-code resource (i.e. Canva) that highlights the features and benefits of your product and brand. It should have aesthetic appeal and draw attention in a way that motivates prospective customers to seek out more information.
2. Hire a Sales Rep - Write up a job description for a salesperson who can generate revenue. List the kind of experience you are looking for and your hiring criteria. Remember that you have very little money for salary and benefits, so include details about how you will incentivize and compensate this individual.
3. Pay-Per-Click Advertising – Run the *Entreprenerd PPC simulator* at least 4 times to serve as market testing, then identify which

scenario you would use to invest your limited advertising dollars. Write up a brief report showing your ad, the projected results based on the simulation, and your expected results in terms of revenue generated.
4. Announce a Webinar – Create a thumbnail (using a free, no-code resource such as Canva) promoting an upcoming webinar with guest speakers or a panel discussing a hot topic related to the industry. The single image should speak for itself and be ready to post across social media channels to get registrations and attention.
5. Enter a Pitch-Contest – You've just signed up for a pitch contest with a regional accelerator to attract attention to your company and brand as well as seek out additional funding to help keep the lights on. Create a business model canvas (BMC) that describes your business model.

Category	Points
Ideation	1
Customer Discovery	1
Product Development	0
Sales & Mkt	6
Operations & Infrastructure	0
Business Model	2

GAME PLAY: DEFENDERS

Similar to the Disruptor Decision Cards, the Defender Decision Cards each highlight some aspect of the entrepreneurial process, but also have to factor for internal corporate politics, resistance to change, and brand obligations that corporate entrepreneurs often deal with. The 5 Defender Decision Cards Include:

Defender Decision Card #1 - "Corporate" Political Science

Defender Decision Card #2 - Rinse & Repeat

Defender Decision Card #3 - Customer Love

Defender Decision Card #4 - The Backstory

Defender Decision Card #5 - Rockstar PM (Product Manager)

The following is a detailed description of each of the Defender Decision Cards including a table with the distribution of 10 strength points based on the types of tasks assigned to the card.

Defender Decision Card #1 - "Corporate" Political Science

1. Types of Influence – Based on the assigned readings about types and tactics of influence, write a blog post describing the approaches described in the articles and how an intrapreneur (change agent) might employ some of these methods to advance an innovative product idea.
2. Coalition-Building – Identify 3-5 key people in the company who are either decision-makers or powerful stakeholders. Brainstorm a short list for each role/person indicating what tactics or approaches you might employ to gain their support for an innovative product or business idea.
3. Prepare an Executive Pitch – In order to gain access to financial and other resources to create a new product innovation, you need to build a business case and pitch it to an executive steering committee. Create a business case that includes (a) a summary of the target customer segment, (b) business problem the product will solve, (c) market opportunity (TAM/SAM/SOM), (d) a 3-year cost-benefit analysis (simple spreadsheet projecting revenues vs. costs), and (e) the potential risks to existing products and/or the company brand. [This should be a slide deck with no more than 12 slides, but can also have an appendix and supporting spreadsheets]. **(2 Bonus Points in the Business Model category)**
4. Innovation Funnel/Stage Gates – Create a 5-stage map for scaling a new product that shows (a) the internal funding process for product innovations, (b) how you would create and enforce "stage gates" to ensure that the Build, Test, Learn cycle was incorporated into the funding process, and (c) the key performance metrics and thresholds you would employ that would prove when a product is ready for the next stage (or to be shut down).

5. Structured to win – Based on the course text and your research of best practices, create an org structure/chart that would best facilitate innovation/entrepreneurial activity within an established company. Include steps you would take to ensure intrapreneurs would be successful in spite of conflicting priorities with other leaders in the org.

Category	Points	Bonus
Product Management	0	
Customer Discovery	0	
Revenue Stream Protection	2	
Sales & Mkt	0	
Internal Politics	6	
Business Model	2	2

Defender Decision Card #2 - Rinse & Repeat

1. Launch a "Thought Leadership Blog" – Create a thumbnail (using a free, no-code resource such as Canva) promoting new blog for expert commentary on hot industry topics, with insights from key employees. Include a bulleted list of 5 potential blog topics (you don't have to write the actual blog posts).
2. Product Brochure – Create a tri-fold brochure using a free/no-code resource (i.e. Canva) that highlights the features and benefits of your product and brand. It should have aesthetic appeal and draw attention in a way that motivates prospective customers to seek out more information.
3. Financial Projection – Imagine you part of a team building a business case for an innovative new product. Create a simple spreadsheet with monthly projected revenues (# units X average revenue per unit) and projected costs (fixed and variable) for a 36-month period to demonstrate how you believe this new offering will produce a

return on investment for the company.
4. Hire More SalesReps - Write up a job description for a salesperson who can generate revenue. List the kind of experience you are looking for and your hiring criteria. Include a simple compensation plan you will use to attract top sales talent, keeping overhead low yet motivating top performance.
5. Pay-Per-Click Advertising – Run the *Entreprenerd PPC simulator* at least 4 times to serve as market testing, then identify which scenario you would use for to invest your limited advertising dollars. Write up a brief report including screen shots showing your ad, the projected results based on the simulation, and your expected results in terms of revenue generated.

Category	Points
Product Management	0
Customer Discovery	0
Revenue Stream Protection	0
Sales & Mkt	7
Internal Politics	1
Business Model	2

Defender Decision Card #3 - Customer Love

1. Survey Says! – Create a customer survey using a free survey service (i.e. SurveyMonkey) with at least 10 questions designed to collect quantitative date about customer needs, problems, jobs-to-be-done, etc. Submit a link to the survey instrument.
2. Interview – Schedule a time to interview a friend or colleague who has a business or is responsible for a business who can provide perspective about their concerns or needs related to the industry. Submit a list of the questions you planned to ask them and a summary of their responses and/or the themes you discovered during the interview. (Max: 3 pages, including the list of questions)

3. User Tips and Tricks Infographic – Create a 1-page infographic using a free, no-code tool (i.e. Canva) that includes 5-7 helpful hints that help users to get the most out of one of your company's products, or to help customers get the most out of the product that they already own.
4. Persona – Create an avatar that represents your ideal customer. This should include a name, photo, description of their role, aspirations, experiences and priorities.
5. Customer Award – Design an annual award that customers can apply for or be nominated for. Include a set of evaluation criteria, description of what the winners will receive, and how the winners will be publicly acknowledged.

Category	Points
Product Management	1
Customer Discovery	4
Revenue Stream Protection	4
Sales & Mkt	1
Internal Politics	0
Business Model	0

Defender Decision Card #4 - The Backstory

1. Brief History – Using SEC filings and other sources, provide a brief history of your company in terms of products, mergers/acquisitions, organizational structure, and publicly stated strategic direction.
2. Brand Profile – Identify the core message of your company's brand promise. Include observations about the company logo, product naming convention, reputation, and positioning. Also list 2-3 "crisis" scenarios that could harm the Splunk brand promise.
3. Tomorrow (TMRO) – Identify uncertainties in the current market using the TMRO (Tomorrow) framework to consider potential risks/changes that could threaten the Splunk value proposition in the market in terms of Technical, Market,

Resource, and Organizational (Neck, Brush, & Greene, 2021). Identify 2-3 potential uncertainties and map them to the framework. Then list 3+ activities that you could initiate to address some of these uncertainties.
4. 25 Ideas for New Product Features - Come up with a list of 25 distinctly different ideas for product features that would expand or enhance a current offering.
5. Explainer – Using a free video capture app (such as Zoom, iMovie, animoto.com, etc), create a simple video that explains what your company does and how your products work, targeting an audience that does not have any experience with cybersecurity, but in a position to make a decision about spending on technology like yours.

Category	Points
Product Management	2
Customer Discovery	0
Revenue Stream Protection	2
Sales & Mkt	0
Internal Politics	3
Business Model	3

Defender Decision Card #5 - Rockstar PM (Product Manager)

1. Napkin Sketch – On a cocktail napkin or piece of paper that is 6" x 6" to simulate a cocktail napkin, draw a simple product concept sketch the illustrates a new product concept - how the product or service will work, etc. Include a brief video (<2 minutes) talking through the sketch, describing it as if you are telling a friend or colleague about the concept over drinks.
2. Observation – Ask a friend or colleague if you can observe them performing an activity related to your business or product for 30 minutes. Take notes on your observations, particularly as it relates to problems or pain points they encounter.
3. Value Prop Mad-lib – Follow the value

proposition mad lib template to describe a product in terms of WHO (customer segment), FOR (problem the product addresses), and WILL (benefit/outcome statement when a customer uses the prod/svc). Include a brief video explaining the mad lib.

4. Product Feature Spec – Identify a new feature that could be added to an existing product. Identify how the product will generate new revenue or protect existing revenues. Also identify how the new feature could compete with other existing products and/or cause market confusion.

5. Create a mock-up for an app user interface – This can be a pencil sketch, whiteboard drawing, illustrator software; or for BONUS POINTS: create a "wireframe" using a free, no-code app builder (i.e. Adalo, MockFlow, Justinmind, etc). A simple view of one user screen is sufficient. **(2 Bonus Points in the Product Management category)**

Category	Points	Bonus
Product Management	5	2
Customer Discovery	4	
Revenue Stream Protection	0	
Sales & Mkt	0	
Internal Politics	0	
Business Model	1	

Scoring

Each week the score is computed based on several factors including:

1. Participation of each team member completing their selected individual task.
2. The sequence in which the team selects to play their Decision Cards. There is a pre-determined optimal order based on the entrepreneurial process. The closer the team selections are to the optimal sequence, the higher their score for that week in this category.

3. The "Face-Off" against the Decision Card of the opposing team is based on a predetermined relative value for each combination, such that the advantage can go to one team or the other based on the combination. Or, the result can be neutral in cases when the plays are determined to offset. For instance, the Disruptors could play the optimal first round card, the "Innovator's Extravaganza" Card, drawing the highest sequence score, but Defenders could win the Face-off by leading with the "Rockstar PM" (Product Manager)' Card.

4. Market Timing/Unforeseen circumstances – A random number generator is run each week to add an element of unpredictability to the scoring model. This can go in the favor of either team of produce a neutral value. This is connected into the game story as events that favor one of the teams (or neither team) each week.

5. Scores are reported as a split of the 10 available victory points each week and then contribute to the standings throughout the term.

Conclusion

This course-long simulation is very well received by students, as it provides a wide range of different types of assignments as well as a strategically challenging and spirited competitive experience. While this article is based only on the first run of this simulation, the engagement level among students was higher than other coursework during the terms. Further, the individual task component significantly reduced the "free-loader" problem that often occurs in team assignments when some don't carry their weight and others become frustrated picking up their slack and still sharing the same grade. Disruptors v. Defenders includes individual accountability since students are required to hand in work separately, and also accountability to the group to follow through in order to have the best chance of victory.

References

Neck, H. M., Brush, C. G.. & Greene, P. G. (2021). Teaching Entrepreneurship (Volume 2). Edward Elgar Publishing, inc. Northampton.

O'Reilly, C. & Binns, J. M. (2019). The three stages of disruptive innovation: Idea generation, incubation, and scaling. *California Management Review, 61*(3), 49-71.

doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy2.library.drexel.edu/10.1177/0008125619841878

van Rensburg, D.,J. (2015). In-sourcing disruptive brands as a corporate entrepreneurship strategy. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal, 11*(4), 769-792. doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy2.library.drexel.edu/10.1007/s11365-014-0309-4

Ratten, V. (2020). Coronavirus (covid-19) and the entrepreneurship education community. *Journal of Enterprising Communities, 14*(5), 753-764. doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy2.library.drexel.edu/10.1108/JEC-06-2020-0121

Keywords: Disruption, Entrepreneurship, Corporate Entrepreneurship, Intrapreneurship, Innovation, Team Competition, Immersive Learning, Simulation, COVID-19 Response