

# Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 11, 1984

## ABSEL MEGATREND ROOTS

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### ABSTRACT

While ABSEL has been on the scene for barely a decade, there are obvious megatrend patterns which we have already experienced and accepted. These are our mega-trend roots. Our predecessor game players had to contend with skeptical and sometimes hostile attitudes even within our own academic departments. This negativism should be minimal in the future.

Our predecessors saw the potential in computer technology. Hopefully, we will continue this affinity. Our predecessors also had a good sense of humor and effectively utilized the fun aspects of business games. We must not subordinate this essential stimulant, particularly as we move toward maturity and academic sophistication. Oklahoma Christian College's initial experience in serious education in the "dismal science" through an amusement theme park, Enterprise Square USA, could serve as a megatrend prototype for us.

Our charge in our games, simulations and experiential learning designs is to find the proper mix: a balance of the innovative, academic, research rewarding, yet interesting and sometimes even amusing. We have excellent megatrend roots; let's cultivate bountiful educational crops.

### ABSEL ROOTS

Last year, on May 27, our perceptive past-president, Jim Schreier, wrote to some of us presenting a unique program possibility: an adaptation of John Naisbitt's best seller, *Megatrends*. Just two months later, the White House, having taken note, enlisted the aid of author Naisbitt to spot emerging issues for President Reagan to emphasize in forthcoming speeches. I commend Jim for being months ahead of the White House strategists in proposing that we introspect potential ABSEL megatrends.

For starters: ABSEL's megatrends, like those of any institution, must first be considered in terms of antecedents; then in light of the present milieu, and finally with a long look at the horizon. Considering first the antecedents, it is safe to assume that all ABSELS are direct descendants of ancient medicine men, high-priests, and soothsayers. These dabblers in prognostication, the Neanderthal decision makers, could uniquely chart courses of action by analyzing animal entrails, or by tossing sacred bones or stones and reading the future from their patterns and positions.

Somewhere, somehow, a good-humored shaman saw the potential for less-than-serious implications in this ritualistic hocus-pocus. This imaginative ABSEL ancestor put distinctive markings on stones and bones; drew lines, rectangles, circles or, perhaps, even tic-tac-toe squares on a clay floor and, thus, civilization made one of its biggest strides--dice, dominoes and related games of chance. Incidentally, this historical glance is not purely speculation. Archeological findings from Sumerian Ur, Egyptian Queen Hatasu's board games, and much more, support this inference.

In a very broad leap to the present, note that in 1955, only 29 years ago, several vice-presidents from American Management Associations had the first ABSEL-related vision of a megatrend. Not only are video arcades all around us, they have even invaded some of our gourmet eateries such as Pizza Time Theater and Showbiz Pizza.

This was accomplished while they were enjoying martinis at a cocktail bar in New York. Reflecting on World War II's gestation of operations research and military simulations, they saw the potential and even the inevitability of learning about business through business models and simulations. For those of us privileged to have participated in this period of gestation, and the subsequent rapid rearing of business game playing, those were hectic yet euphoric days. They were hectic because of the many skeptics; they were euphoric because every bit of progress was a tremendous percentage gain over a near-zero starting base.

On the hectic side, some of the early obstacles might seem preposterous at this time. It is like referring to "the good old days". One of my youthful nieces, overhearing several of us oldsters reflecting on the good old days before television, blurted, "But we always had television" Comparably, most of us ABSELS have always had computers, 256K microchips, and other fascinating gadgetry.

It was in 1960, when upon going to the University of Oregon, I tried to initiate a game routine in my production management course, and smacked into an academic stone wall. The mathematics department had a stranglehold on the university's one and only primitive computer. Before I could get my graduate students sanctioned to use the computer, the math people insisted that they take, and pass, a frightening sequence of advanced math courses. I argued that math was peripheral to computer comprehension and effective usage. I argued that the computer was a logic machine. In fact, this is how Charles Babbage, 150 years ago, viewed his Analytical Engine, the first attempt at a versatile computer. So, if computer science must be locked into any other department, it belongs in Philosophy, not in Math, or in Business. We got around that obstacle with a bootleg or unauthorized course.

### ABSEL Megatrends

Now back to megatrending: We do not need 20/20 vision to see fantastic technical possibilities for you and the next generation of ABSELS. When I consider the very limited horizons of my own McGraw-Hill hand-scored game, gestated in 1958, and computerized in 1961, I marvel at what tools are presently available. But, as is obvious, it is not entirely a matter of tools and technology. It is imperative that we continue in the adaptation process. Here we need to blend even more fun and frolic-- maybe initiate a "Sesame Street" ABSEL to accelerate the learning process and to generate dedicated gamesters.

As we all will agree, if we want to see game-playing dedication, just make a stopover in Las Vegas. On a recent rendezvous, I was struck by this young man at the Tropicana, who never seemed to budge from some weird game in one of the hallways. During my five days, while I made numerous trips carrying my winnings to my room, this young character demolished Pac Man, Galactic Gus, Frisky Frog or whatever. If we could inspire such 24-hour-day, infinite-week dedication in our associates, we would have an indomitable ABSEL.

I have stressed this fun factor as an ABSEL megatrend for obvious

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But we have an even better example of blending education and electronics. As you know, ABSEL was conceived at Oklahoma Christian College by our energetic first president, Bernie Keys. A little over a year ago, Oklahoma Christian College sponsored another tremendous break-through. Its president, J. Terry Johnson, had an idea, namely, to get average Americans to understand capitalism and to convince them it is a good system. Mr. Johnson got the support of some of our biggest corporations and philanthropic individuals, and built the \$15 million Enterprise Square USA. This is an EPCOT Center, and Opryland, pegged to business and economic concepts.

But, typical of so many of us serious academics, Johnson has put too much emphasis on the Wall Street side of economics and not enough on the Sesame Street side. On June 30, 1983, The Wall Street Journal, in a feature item, pointed to a number of flaws; paramount among which is that visitors come to the amusement park for fun, and find technical complexity and irritating propaganda.

I do not mean to sound critical; actually, I want to compliment Mr. Johnson and Oklahoma Christian College for being in the forefront. Not only did OCC provide us with Bernie Keys and a propitious birthplace, but now we have the College pioneering another great and related education-through-simulation adventure. I am sure that in the very near future Enterprise Square USA will find the proper mix of fun and frolic, electronics and education. And here is a fine megatrend parallel for us ABSELS. As we get increasingly more complex and effective technology, we need to find better means to make all this heavy stuff more palatable.

In summary, as I see some of ABSEL's megatrends:

- (1) We need to adapt to an increasingly more complex and more rewarding technology.
- (2) We also need to emulate enterprises like Pizza Time Theater and Showbiz Pizza. Our "ABSEL pizza" should not only be bigger and tastier, its solid substance should be flavored with the spice of fun.