SIMULATION DEBRIEFING PROCEDURES

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ABSTRACT

Debriefing has been an assumed part of the simulation process, but there has been little discussion of debriefing in simulation circles. Most discussions on debriefing have focused on experiential exercises and games (Markulis & Strang, 2002). Simulation debriefing discussions have generally been limited to statements that debriefing is important and/or suggestions on techniques, e.g., student presentations to the class or to a boards of directors. The objective of this panel is to foster discussion and hopefully research on the debriefing aspect of simulation games. It will begin with the objectives of debriefing followed by the timing of debriefing, the structure used to debrief and the processes available for debriefing.

OBJECTIVES

There are numerous rationale for debriefing the simulation experience. They include:
- To answer student questions.
- To sort out and clarify student thinking.
- To reinforce specific teaching points.
- To link the simulation to "real life."
- To release emotional tension that has been built during the exercise.

TIMING

Debriefing generally occurs after the simulation has been completed. However during the simulation exercise there may be times when a short debriefing session would enhance the learning experience. It may be done with the class as a whole but often may work better on a team by team basis so as not to give proprietary information to competitors. Thus there may be a series of debriefings in a single competition.

STRUCTURE

Debriefing can be accomplished using one or more of the following structures:
- Class discussion
- Class presentations
- Team discussions
- Written assignments

PROCESS

The process used to debrief a simulation game may take many forms including a discussion of personal reactions, simulation events, simulation problems, learning outcomes and links to the business world. Suggested topics for each of these forms are shown below:

1. *Personal Reactions* – **Nancy Leonard**
   a. What did you enjoy most about the simulation?
   b. What did you enjoy least about the simulation?
   c. How did you feel about participating in the simulation? about your interaction with your team members? etc.?
   d. Why was (not) this a worthwhile activity in terms of learning? enjoyment?
   e. Why do you think the instructor had you work as members of groups in the simulation? What did you learn from this?
   f. What personal long-term effects do you think you may have gained from this experience?
   g. What emotions did you experience as you participated in the simulation?
2. *Discussion of Events* – **Phil Anderson**
   a. What were the main events of the simulation?
   b. What decisions were you asked to make?
   c. What were the differences between short-term and long-term effects (consequences) of your decisions in the simulation?

   d.   What do you predict they would be in real life?
   e.   What kinds of trade-offs or compromises did you make during the simulation?
   f.   What trade-offs do you think would be necessary in real life?

3.   **Discussion of Problems – Dave Fritzsche**
   a.   What problems did you encounter in making decisions or as a result of your previous decisions?
   b.   What caused those problems?
   c.   Do the events, decisions and problems occur in real life?
   d.   Are the causes of the problems similar in real life?
   e.   What could you do to avoid these types of problems in real life?

4.   *Intended Learning Outcomes* **– Marian Boscia**
   a.   What did you learn that was new to you during this simulation? (Consider what you learned about working together in a group, course objectives, the real world.)
   b.   What things that you already knew took on new meaning?
   c.   From what aspect of the simulation did you learn the most? What did you learn?
   d.   What kind of connections among things you already knew did the simulation create?
   e.   What is it about the simulation that caused this to take place?

5.   *Links to the Real World*
   a.   Describe this simulation's connections to (is it part of) a much larger situation (company, industry, country, world).
   b.   In what ways did your decisions during the simulation affect the whole simulation environment? How did that make you feel?
   c.   What are some decisions you made that have not been tried in the real world? Why do you think that is so?

THE FUTURE

It is hoped that this panel discussion will stimulate interest in the debriefing aspect of simulations and lead to the development of guidelines for effective debriefing as well as a stream of debriefing research.

REFERENCES

Markulis, P. M. & D. R. Strang. (2003) "A Brief on Debriefing: What It Is and What It Isn't." *Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning*, 30, 177-184.

AUTHORS

Dave Fritzsche is Professor of Management and Organization, Penn State Great Valley, Malvern, PA. He began using simulations in 1968, modifying simulations in 1977 and co-authoring simulations in 1985. He is co-author of *The Business Policy Game* and *Modern Business Decisions* published by Prentice Hall. The former is now distributed via the Internet. Dave has numerous presentations and publications focusing upon the use and effectiveness of simulations, and he is a founding member of ABSEL. He has run the International Collegiate Business Strategy Competition for the past six years.

Nancy Leonard is Assistant Professor of Management at West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV. She currently teaches management and organizational behavior courses for the Department of Management/IR. Her publications have appeared in textbooks and numerous professional journals and conference proceedings including *Human Relations*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior,* and *Business Case Journal*, the proceedings of the National Academy of Management, and the Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning. She has also worked closely with student teams participating in the International Collegiate Business Strategy Competition. Nancy is a past president of ABSEL.

Marian W. Boscia is Associate Professor of Accounting at King's College, Wilkes-Barre, PA. She currently teaches cost and intermediate accounting courses. Her current research interests include moral development, Internet accessibility, and employee stock ownership tax regulation. Her most recent publications appear in *Teaching Business Ethics* and conference proceedings of the Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning and the Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education. Marian currently serves as the Simulation Track Chair of ABSEL.

Phil Anderson is Professor and Chair, Management Department, University of St Thomas, St Paul, MN. He has over 25 years experience developing and using business simulation games. He co-developed the *Threshold Competitor* and *Threshold Entrepreneur* simulations for Prentice Hall, and *Merlin* (a marketing simulation to be released in January, 2004) for McGraw-Hill/Irwin. Phil has published over 30 articles on simulation games and their effectiveness and has been an active member of ABSEL for over 25 years.