

# Development In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 21, 1994

## MANAGERIAL MOTIVATION MID REALISM AMONG MBA STUDENTS AS VIEWED THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS, INC. SIMULATION

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### ABSTRACT

**Beginning** MBA students and executives participated in The Looking Glass, Inc. simulation while observers evaluated their behavior on a motivation to manage scale. Other data were collected from the student and executive participants. The research investigated 1) the students' change in motivation to manage, 2) the correlation of self and observer ratings of motivation to manage, 3) executives' prior perceptions of MBA students' realism about the work environment, and 4) changes in the executives' perceptions.

A significant change in motivation to manage was not discovered nor were significant correlations obtained between self and observer ratings. Further result; indicated that executives did not believe that new MBAs view the work environment realistically prior to the simulation. Executives did, however, indicate a significant change in their perceptions after participating in the simulation with MBA students.

### INTRODUCTION

Managers at upper levels of organizations are responsible for increasingly complex environments in more competitive national and international arenas. Higher level management positions, therefore, are more demanding than they were even 20 years ago. Not only is there a need for managers with excellent skills and abilities, it is also important for managers to be motivated and to enjoy demanding, if not high pressure, management tasks and roles. The problem is that many people accept management positions (and obtain MBA degrees as prerequisites to management positions) without directly considering their desire to perform managerial functions. They particularly lack an understanding of their motivation to manage in relationship to the demands of the managerial role.

In addition, some executives have voiced opinions that new MBA students are not realistic about the world of work, and particularly the entry positions available to them. The problem is whether this is actually true or whether it is false and prevents the executives from making good hiring decisions concerning MBAs, who are trained to increase organizational productivity and competitiveness.

Managers and leaders are different (Zaleznik, 1977). Managers deal with behavioral as well as nonbehavioral issues. They must rationally assess a situation, systematically select goals and purposes, develop strategies to achieve these goals, allocate the required resources, and organize structures and people (Levitt, 1976). Leadership theory concentrates on processes designed to influence persuade and direct others to reach mutually agreed upon goals. Stogdill, 1948, concludes leaders are likely to excel in the following respects:

intelligence, scholarship, responsibility, activity

and social participation and to come from middle to higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Cronin, 1989, describes leaders as: self—confident, intelligent, possessing integrity, risk—taking, visionary, having stamina, able to communicate, and with world mindedness. Morgan McCall, 1989, takes an opposite view and describes leaders as crafty, grouchy, dangerous, feisty, contrary, inconsistent, prejudiced, and spineless. Deal and Kennedy, 1982, describe individuals managers as heroes. While there is a continuing interest in individual characteristics as related to leadership and management potential, there are many different views as to which internal characteristics and outward behaviors consistently enable good management and leadership.

One important characteristic related to managerial success is motivation to manage. John B. Miner (1965) investigated motivation to manage as a predictor of upward mobility and managerial performance in bureaucratic organizations. His first efforts were concerned with the prediction of success among business managers. He asserts that certain role requirements can be associated with managerial success in his managerial role motivation theory and that certain motives are consistently associated with success in large hierarchic organizations (Miner, 1978; Holland, Black, and Miner, 1987). Miner developed six dimensions of motivation to manage, which are as follows (Miner, 1965; Miner and Smith, 1982):

1. Positive attitude toward those holding positions of authority (especially superiors),
2. Desire to engage in competitive endeavors (especially with peers),
3. Desire to behave in accordance with the requirements of an assertive role,
4. Desire to exercise power over others (especially subordinates),
5. Desire to assume a differentiated role relative to others in the work situation — to stand out,
6. Desire to accept and carry out routine administrative responsibilities.

Miner's research found that managerial motivation significantly correlated with managerial success. Further research including undergraduate and graduate business school students also indicted significant correlations between students aspiring to management positions and their managerial motivation. Those students who aspired to become managers achieved scores at least equal to practicing managers (Miner, 1968; Miner and Smith, 1969).

A more recent longitudinal study using Miner's Sentence Completion Scale (MSCS) of the relationships of motivation to manage on MBA program completion found no significant results; that is, motivation to manage did not predict program completion (Bartol and Martin, 1987). There are possibilities however that short specialized training plans can positively affect program completion (Bowin, 1973; Singleton, 1977). When students attend business schools for an MBA their purpose may be to attain managerial status; it appears that additional research is needed

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focusing on students' motivation to perform managerial roles attributed

real world managers.

## METHODOLOGY

Beginning MBA students and executives participated in the management simulation The Looking Glass Inc. This treatment exposed the students to a realistic complex work environment as well as exposed them to the actions and outlooks of current executives. For further information about The Looking Glass, Inc. see Dunbar and Strumpf, 1989 and Kaplan, 1986.

Any change in motivation to manage was measured by the surrogate of the students' stated probability of completing their MBA since the degree is perceived as a key to obtaining a management position. The researchers employed this surrogate because they felt a direct, short—time—coupled *pre-test/post-test* using the same motivation to manage Instrument would bias the subjects answers on the post—test. A direct motivation to management instrument was administered before the simulation; these results were compared with observers' reports of the students' motivation to manage as evidenced by participant's actions in the simulation. The purpose was to provide feedback to students to verify or question the student's self-perceptions of their motivation to manage and to investigate self and observer correlations.

In addition, the experiment sought to determine if participating executives would change their opinion on the realism with which new MBAs view the work environment. That is, does working directly with MBA students in the simulation environment give executives accurate data to improve their opinion of new MBA's? For this experiment the executives were pretested by obtaining data about their perception of new MBA's realism of the world of work prior to operation of the simulation. Again the researchers believed that a request for identical data after the short time period of the simulation would lead to a biased second response. That is, the executives would remember their first response accurately, ignore their new data from participation in the simulation, and simply provide a second response identical to the first one. To avoid this bias the researchers developed a post simulation question focusing on the executives perceptions of the work realism of the specific experimental group of MBA students — this group, rather than MBA graduates in general.

## Hypotheses

Four hypothesis were developed for the purposes just discussed.

- Hs1: MBA students will report a higher probability of completing their MBA program after participating in the management simulation.
- Hs2: MBA students' motivation to manage will correlate to their respective observer motivation to manage rating.
- He1: Executives will report that new MBAs view the world of work realistically.
- He2: Executives will perceive MBA students as more realistic about the work environment after the simulation than before the simulation.

## Sample

Nine executives and nine MBA students participated in The Looking Glass, Inc., a complex management simulation. The students who played roles in t

simulation were enrolled in the beginning graduate management course in the MBA program at a medium sized southern university. Their average age was approximately 28 and they were about evenly divided between men and women. Their undergraduate backgrounds included business, engineering, and arts and sciences. All students were employed. Executives were middle to upper level managers in large, hierarchical organizations including a power company, city government and several large industrial companies. Two undergraduate business students, playing the role of controllers (or file guardians) also participated. Observers were other students who were carefully selected based on the researchers' prior knowledge of their observational skills. They were thoroughly briefed about observing the simulation participants and giving appropriate feedback at the debriefing.

## Experimental Measures

The first assessment of student motivation related to their motivation to complete the MBA program prior to the simulation. An instrument was designed to collect students' self—reported probability of completing the MBA program. The instrument also requested their qualitative assessment of their motivation level. The second assessment, also completed prior to the simulation was a motivation to manage instrument completed by the MBA students. They were asked to qualitatively and quantitatively assess their desire to behave in ways that successful managers do, according to Miner's six motivational precepts previously listed. Students were asked to write a paper discussing six questions keyed to Miner's precepts and also to complete a Likert type rating sheet for numerical self reporting of their motivation to manage.

The third assessment was an observer rating sheet (the same as the student/participant self rating sheet). During the simulation MBA students were assessed according to the six factor-rating sheets as viewed by their respective observer. The fourth assessment was an instrument submitted to the executives prior to the simulation day, before they met the student participants. The instrument, a Liken scale, asked for the executives' view about how realistically new MBA graduates view the world of work. Executives were further asked to expand their quantitative input by qualitative remarks.

The fifth assessment gathered data about the executives' post simulation belief of how realistically the experimental group of students viewed the world of work. Again the data were collected on a Liken type scale and qualitative remarks were requested.

## THE SIMULATION/EXPERIMENT

The Looking Glass, Inc. simulation recreates a day in the lives of the top twenty managers of a mid—sized manufacturing corporation. There are three divisions in Looking Glass, each of which has a unique external environment. For further information about the simulation see Lombardo, McCall, and Devries, 1983.

The simulation took place within a six-hour period on a Saturday in management department offices at the university. The setting provided a realistic work environment including many forms of communication, such as memos, phone communications, corporate files, lunch and a president's report at the end of

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the day prior to the simulation debriefing. The executives were assigned both higher and lower positions in the organization, as were the students. The observers were thoroughly briefed about their duties and assigned specific managers for observation during the simulation. The simulation experience included lunch on the premises so that executives and students could mingle in an informal way. The debriefing, individual and group continued for more than two hours at the participants' request. Part of the debrief included the observers making one on one confidential remarks to each executive and student concerning their managerial behaviors as exhibited in the simulation. The observers and investigators noted very high quality managerial efforts by the executives who, therefore, provided excellent modelling opportunities for the students.

## RESULTS

The hypotheses were tested with appropriate statistics using a mainframe statistical package with the following results:

- Hs1: MBA students will report a higher probability of completing their MBA after participating in the management simulation: This hypothesis was tested using a paired *t* test and a significant change was not obtained. The average reported probability of completion changed from .90 to .95 but that difference was not significant. Thus the hypothesis is rejected.
- Hs2: MBA students' motivation to management will correlate to their respective observer motivation to manage rating: The Pearson correlation analysis found one significant correlation between the observers' rating of their subjects for the six motivation items and the subjects self report for the items. The one significant correlation coefficient was negative, that is, as the subjects rated themselves higher on a specific motivation to manage trait, the observers rated them lower. There were little range differences among the ratings, that is both self and observer ratings were rather uniformly, and perhaps unrealistically, high. Thus the hypothesis is rejected.
- He1: Executives will report that new MBAs view the world of work realistically. The executives' average Likert response was 3.8 which was below the middle (4.0) of the Likert scale toward the unrealistic end so no statistical testing against the midpoint, defined as neither realistic or unrealistic, was undertaken and the hypothesis is rejected.
- He2: Executives will perceive MBA students as more realistic about the work environment after the simulation than before the simulation: After participating in the simulation the executives completed another realism scale based upon the particular MBA students in the simulation. The executive's average rating increased from 3.8 prior to the simulation to 5.4 for the participant/students after the simulation. This difference was tested with a paired *t* test and found to be significant at the *p* 4-. 10 level. Thus the hypothesis is accepted.

## DISCUSSION

MBA students' motivation to manage is important to their future career success and life satisfaction.

Executives' opinions of MBAs realism of the work environment is important to the hiring and organizational entry process of new MBAs. Both these matters are important in the competitive productive arena facing business today. If MBA students and executives can be mixed in a realistic management simulation to improve the accuracy of their views about motivation to manage and MBA organizational realism, then both groups will be able to make better career and employment decisions.

The first test was to determine if MBA students would change their expressed (as probability of completion) interest in obtaining an MBA, after obtaining a somewhat realistic, though simulated, view of a business/organizational environment. Their reported probability of completion increased slightly but not significantly. The evening MBA students were already "at work" and were older and into their work careers. From that background they had developed a high desire for the MBA degree. This high motivation was not materially changed by participating in the simulation.

The second effort was the investigation of the coincidence of student—self and observer ratings. There may be several reasons for the lack of correlational significance. First both groups rated motivational factors very highly for the six items, with little room for variance. Second the number of subjects was quite small precluding significance for modest correlations. Third, the evaluation instrument and the lack of extensive training of the observers may have prevented accurate data collection.

The third point of the investigation concerned executives' perceptions of new MBAs' accuracy of view of the work environment. The investigators general reading and discussions with executives have allowed a hypothesis that many executives believe that MBAs expect "too much" from their entry job assignments. New MBAs expect to be involved with major company decisions immediately, rather than paying their dues with more routine work initially. The participating executives indicated this opinion in the pre—simulation data. The average score was not as low as the investigators subjective judgement led them to believe however, being at slightly below the neutral point on the seven point Likert scale. There was great variability in the individual executive responses as well, indicating that a minority of executives do believe that MBA job entrants have realistic expectations.

The fourth point of investigation concerned the executives potential change of opinion about MBA students whom they see "at work" in a realistic simulated environment. As hypothesized, the executives did rate the subject MBA students significantly higher in realism after the simulation than their pre—simulation rating of MBAs entering the work environment. This change is possibly attributable to simply observing actual MBA students and thus mitigating a stereotypical view of MBAs, which the executives may hold, it is also possibly attributable to the quality and maturity of the MBA student participants. They were all evening MBA students with full time organizational positions and thus perhaps had been seasoned" to more realistic behavior patterns than younger, inexperienced, MBAs from prestigious, national MBA programs. The executives possibly observed the participant MBA students as different, and adjusted their views of the experimental group accordingly.

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Limitations of this study to be overcome by future studies include a larger experimental size. This will require additional plays of the simulation because it will accommodate only twenty participants. Additional experiments should include younger, inexperienced MBA students to further investigate possibilities of changing self-understanding of motivation to manage and changing executive perceptions. Further, a better, more precise instrument for self-reporting of motivation to manage should be employed with observers more highly trained in the nuances of motivation to manage behaviors. Last, the simulation might be operated for time in excess of the six hours for the present study to allow more development of experimental results.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Looking Glass, Inc. is a powerful behavioral management simulation. It provides a more realistic view and gut feel of the business environment than any number of hours of classroom lecture, it may be a useful tool in allowing new MBAs to evaluate their real motivation to manage but it did not do so in this experiment, probably because of the maturity and experience level of the student participants. The investigation found only one negative correlation between participant and observer ratings of motivation to manage, which is not favorable, although both the instrument and rater skills are subject to question. The participating executives did not have a high opinion of entering MBAs work realism, but the executives significantly increased their opinion of the subject MBA students. Again, this may have been the result of the maturity of the student subjects. Further experimental work in this area would be both fruitful and useful to MBA students and executives.

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