

# Development In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 18, 1991

## A DEMONSTRATION ON MULTIPLE DATA COLLECTION METHODS: SEEING STRATEGIC ISSUES THROUGH THE "LOOKING GLASS" SIMULATION\*

Organized and Chaired by

Paul Miesing, The State University of New York at Albany

### ABSTRACT

While researchers have used simulations to explain environmental and organizational impacts on strategy and learning (Gordon, 1985; McCall & Lombardo, 1982), few have taken advantage of them as a multiple data source. In this session, a team of doctoral students in Organization Studies will demonstrate how an experiential exercise can be a rich source to collect data. Audiovisual media will involve the audience in various methods to collect such data. The panel will provide specific applications to strategic issues and implications about the learning process.

### THE LABORATORY SETTING

Looking Glass, Inc. (Lombardo, McCall, & DeVries, 1983) is the simulation used for the data collection. LGI is an "in-basket" exercise. It overloads students with information or overburdens them with paper, information is ambiguous or facts are missing, concrete measures of success are lacking, and there is a lot of stress and tension, largely due to time pressures (Seltzer, 1988-1989). For this demonstration, the subjects were 65 full-time and 51 part-time MBA students. They formed six color-coded groups that ranged in size from seventeen to twenty-five members. All participants read the LGI annual report ten days before the simulation. Random assignments prevented participants from knowing which team they would be in until the simulation began.

Multiple methodologies are valuable in studying group processes and performance, including issues of leadership (McCall & Lombardo 1982) and decision making. Qualitative and quantitative data for such methodologies are readily available in simulations. For research purposes, a convergence of a combination of multiple methods indicates a significant pattern of events if any single analysis is not significant.

There are two sources of qualitative measures. First, the decision-making processes and interpersonal dynamics within the six groups are videotaped and documented. A coding sheet permits rapid identification of individuals participating in any given meeting and their power base, activity patterns, reactions to observations, probable purpose of meeting, overall impression, decisions made, communication patterns, leadership style, and group dynamics. Observers must be inconspicuous and, other than clarification, cannot acknowledge participant requests. In addition to useful data, the observations provide a basis for feedback to the participants during the debriefing.

Second, each participant can submit a "memorandum" on a computer diskette. These reports discuss and describe various aspects of their experiences, including (1) the organization's atmosphere, decision making style, and leadership; (2) the external environment they faced and their response; (3) both the strategy formulation process and the content of recommended strategies and policies; and (4) what they learned. A software program is available to analyze the content of these essays. The memos capture a rich description of the insights and overall perceptions of the participants.

These qualitative measures are combined with several quantitative measures. First, each president receives a list of critical issues in alphabetical order: capital investment, corporate vision, mission, and objectives, energy policy, internal reorganization, personnel policies, product development, and a public policy stance. (The presidents were the only ones aware of this list of problems and priorities.) They are the basis for a fifteen-minute "State of the Company" address on strategic decisions made in the order of their importance. Recommendations vary in number and priority of areas mentioned, intensity of conviction, and extent of impact. For instance, some discuss specified courses of action for each area in turn while others develop visions that permeate the entire organization. These presentations are recorded and categorized to form the basis for a taxonomy of the strategy recommendations.

Second, a questionnaire is administered after the president's presentations. A Likert-type scale measures various dimensions of LGI's top management leadership, organizational climate, external environment, and support for and satisfaction of the recommended strategies.

Third, corporate ("controller's") files have limited and basic information available to participants. These files are like receiving reports from a subordinate. They include financial information, product research, market research, and issues unique to each division. The frequency of requests for the files provide insights into information search patterns.

In addition to these measures, demographic data on background and personal information determine if participants are full-time or part-time MBAs, their gender, age, undergraduate college major, career history, and learning because of the simulation. Finally, the assigned role, or formal position, provides information on the participant's functional task, level in the hierarchy, and external environment faced.

This session will present results for each group. There will also be implications about the learning process. Conclusions are drawn from comparisons of patterns within and between groups. The results will shed light on training and development aspects of gaming.

### REFERENCES

Gordon, J. (1985), "Games Managers Play," Training. Vol. 22, No. 7: 30-47.

Lombardo, M.M., McCall, M.W., Jr., and DeVries, D.L. (1983), Looking Glass: An Organizational Simulation. The University Edition, Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.

McCall, M.W., Jr. and Lombardo, M.M. (1982), "Using Simulation for Leadership and Management Research: Through the Looking Glass," Management Science Vol. 28, No. 5: 533-549.

Seltzer, J. (1988-1989), "Experiences with Looking Glass," us Organizational Behavior Teaching Review, Vol. 13, No. 1: 58-65.

---

\*This project is partially funded by a grant from the Center for Creative Leadership, Greensboro, North Carolina.