Learning Through Simulations: Examples

Simulation Example 1:
The 'Desert Survival' Exercise (Lafferty and Pond, 1986).

Purpose: This simulation is designed to:

- illustrate group behavior
- face-to-face communications
- listening
- team-working skills.

Organization: Participants are placed in groups of six to eight.

Background: Participants are asked to imagine that they are passengers in an aircraft that has crash-landed in a desert. They are unhurt, but they are unable to contact the outside world, and due to an instrument fault, the aircraft has been flying off-course for some time and no one else knows where they are. Participants therefore have no immediate hope of rescue, although a rescue attempt will obviously be mounted once they are reported missing.

Problem: The group is told that they have a number of articles which have also survived the crash, including an aerial map of the desert, a parachute, a revolver, a bottle of vodka and a mirror. They are instructed that they must stay together as a group, and they are faced with a number of decisions. Firstly, will they stay with the aircraft, or will they move off and attempt to find their way back to civilization? They also have to rank the various articles in order of importance. Groups are given a fixed time in which to perform this task.

The Process:

- Each individual rank orders the articles in his or her preferred order before any discussion.
- Discussion then ensues within the team to decide whether or not to leave the aircraft, and to agree on a team ranking of the articles.
- The various objects have been ranked in order of usefulness by a desert survival expert.
- Thus individuals and groups have an external objective measure against which they can compare their own results.
- A simple scoring method shows the extent of agreement or disagreement with the expert solution.
- The exercise is non-interactive between teams, except that each team wants to get as close to the expert's view as possible. It is normal to compare the average individual score before discussion with the team consensus score after discussion. Usually the team score is better than the average individual score, showing the positive advantages of working in groups.

Although deceptively simple, the exercise is behaviorally a very rich one. A skilled
observer is needed to make the best use of the exercise and sensitively feed back observations to the group, ideally with the aid of a video recording of the proceedings.

A variety of similar exercises are now available including Alaskan Adventure, Sub-Arctic Survival, Jungle Escape, Caribbean Island Survival and Whitewater.

**Simulation Example 2:**

The 'Looking Glass' (Lombardo et al, 1976).

This is an exercise based on an imaginary company in the glass manufacturing industry. The simulation usually takes place over a complete day, and participants play the parts of top managers. They are given an annual report and realistic background data on the operations of the company. The detailed information contained in each participant's brief differs somewhat from position to position and from division to division, representing the varying perceptions of problems that would occur in reality.

Participants work in realistically-arranged offices, complete with telephones and an inter-office post system. They are given an in-tray containing a number of memos, each describing certain issues and problems. Typically 20 participants are involved, and they have between them over 100 problems of varying importance and urgency, many more than can be dealt with in the time available. During the simulation skilled observers watch the proceedings and record the time spent on meetings, paperwork and telephone calls.

The designers claim a high degree of correspondence between behavior observed within 'Looking Glass' and that found in real managerial jobs. They stress that in order to use the simulation to its full effect, a natural group of managers from a particular company should participate. Intensive debriefing sessions are held after the simulation to ensure that the behavior of all participants is clarified, and the consequences of the behavior are clearly discussed and understood. Time is then devoted to relating the lessons back to the real world.