

# ***Management Games - An Effective Tool for Teaching Management Education***

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

Games can be incorporated into teaching business education in many ways, and can be used at the beginning of courses as an orientation device. They can also be used more than once; perhaps before and after a particular management principle or technique has been discussed. However, for greater effectiveness, games should be used only with a clear understanding of the objectives to be attained.



## INTRODUCTION

**G**ames? Games for the management students? Seems to be kidding! But it is not at all kidding!. As a matter of fact, games are the best way to bring the students in the right frame of mind. Business is serious, while business education is also serious indeed. But games can help create an atmosphere of playfulness, collegiality, and shared values and help learn difficult business situations in an easy way. If used at just the right moment, games can be the most appropriate and effective way of bringing a student to the brink of learning.

### DEFINITION

This is a technique in which participants, grouped into teams, consider a sequence of problems and organize themselves to make decisions. It is a form of simulation, which may be defined as a sequential decision-making exercise structured around a hypothetical model of an organization's operations, in which participants assume roles in managing the simulated operations. Its most crucial aspect, an attempt to reproduce the social-psychological and economic dynamics of organizational behavior in an artificial setting.

Using a set of relationships built into a skeletal model of an organization, and the decisions taken by the participants, are processed to produce a series of hypothetical actions in the form of performance reports. The decisions and reports on their results pertain to a specific time period, which may be a day, a month, a quarter, or an year.

Most games concentrate on general management principles, such as long-range planning, decision-making, and effective utilization of time, men and materials. Other games aiming at teaching some specific skills and techniques, particularly those games that are built around the production, marketing and financial functions.

There are different management games in practice, variety of games and different ways in which they are used indicate the flexibility of exercising them as a teaching tool. Various industrial, military, educational, governmental and professional organizations have developed their own games while other organizations prefer to use existing games. The Management games are also used in colleges and universities and in various departments of the armed forces.

Games can be incorporated into teaching business education in many ways. They can be used at the beginning of courses as an orientation device and can also be used more than once; perhaps before and after a particular management principle or technique that were discussed. However, for greater effectiveness, games should be used only with a clear understanding of the objectives to be attained.

Games may be differentiated in accordance to the level of management for which decision-making is simulated. By and large, most general games also serve as top level management games, whereas functional games are more

likely to aim at middle management and the more specialized sub-functional games aim at the middle and junior management levels. In some games, each team may be given freedom to decide exactly what parts of the management structure of the organization should be included, when such discretions are in line with the purpose of the game.

### AIMS & PURPOSES IT SERVE

The purpose of management games is to increase a person's understanding of (1) specific organizational problems (marketing, production, etc.); (2) the inter-relatedness of the functions and parts of an organization and its relation to its environment; (3) the problems of organization policy and decision making; (4) the problems of working in a team.

### DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Games may be extremely simple or complex and must have considerable depth. In some cases computations are made manually, perhaps with the aid of desk calculators; in other cases the complexity of the model demands the usage-involvement of modern electronic computer equipments. Some games may be played in a few hours, others may span several weeks. Some games have only a few participants; other games can accommodate several dozen participants.

Most games, notably at the functional and sub-functional levels, are designed for each participant to represent an individual decision-making unit. In other games, group decision-making is the rule. Very often the internal organization of the group may be prescribed; even where it is not, the instruments provided to the players may assume a particular structure.

The number of teams in a game is largely predetermined by its purpose. Manual games are generally restricted to a dozen teams or less, due to the computational problems encountered with greater number of teams. The maximum number of members per team depends largely on the complexity of the game and the time available for an effective organization effort and intra-team communication in decision-making. Four to seven members are the usual size of the teams though some games have teams as large as fifteen members.

The number of decision activities in a game run, should be convenient enough to permit the teams to establish its entity in a working organization, to become involved in planning and to see the results. Presumably, the optimal number of activities tends to vary with the characteristics of both the "individual participants and the game being played.

The time available for making decisions within each period of play during a game run is normally linked with the complexity of the game. In practice, one finds in use periods ranging from a few minutes to two hours or more. In order to digest voluminous data, gain an over-all perspective and acquire a sense of the inter-relationships between the whole and its parts, the average participant needs time for personal and unhurried reflection. This encourages the use of a pattern of several play periods, separated in time.



In odd hours, the games are quite deliberately played to provide too little time for participants to analyze the situation and to assess the information available to them before reaching the next decision. This can produce a situation of strain and tension between members of the group, which not only adds to the general excitement of the session, but produces what in some quarters is regarded as an approximation of the actual strain which is involved in the real world in making administrative decisions.

There are fewer objections to continuous play in quite simple games. There is no firm or specific criteria on how long the period should be between decision taking meetings. However, even in highly complex games it is probable that teams are capable of holding formal decision meetings once or twice a week without strain, provided the administrators of the game can furnish output data a day or two in advance of each session.

Post-play evaluation sessions are important and continuous review of decisions is usually a component of the game. In addition, provisions can be made for periodic review sessions involving comparisons with other teams as a part of the game. Although there are a wide variety of management games, there are certain practices, which appear to be part of the operation in most of the games.

First, the managers brief the participants about the objectives and the rules of the game. Second, the participants are grouped in teams, representing an organization. The teams are provided with starting information about the status of the organization, its competitors, and the environment. Next, the teams are required to analyze the information and to reach certain decisions within a given period of time. The decisions are recorded by the teams on special forms.

This cycle of receiving current information, making decisions and obtaining feedback about results continues for several time periods. At the end of the game, an over-all critique session is usually held, in which the teams and the game administrators discuss the performances.

#### MANAGEMENT GAME: 1

##### Ideas — Ideas — Ideas > Brainstorming revisited

**Objective:** To show the relevance of a time-tested creative exercise in its application for Total Quality Management (TQM) or any other problem-solving activity.

**Materials:** Paper, pens or pencils

**Procedure:** Although the brainstorming process has been around for a number of years, it is regaining its popularity in problem-solving meetings. Because many people have never been exposed to this novel approach, to review and describe illustriously the four basic rules of this system.

- No critical judgment is allowed.
- Quantity, not quality, is desired.
- "Free-Wheeling" is welcomed — the wider, the better!
- Combination and improvement are sought.

- To get participants in a creative mode, use some type of warm-up activity before delving into the real-world problem to be discussed.

- This could take the form of asking each group to come up with as many ideas as they can for using a paper clip. Allow the group only 60 seconds for this, and ask one person in each group to simply jot down the number of ideas (not writing down the actual ideas).

- Following this fun activity, move onto the problem at hand.

- Form groups of five to seven people for each brain-storm session.

**Learning:** This game will help participants think out of the box, creatively and address the major issues with ease.

#### MANAGEMENT GAME: 2

##### Traits of Leadership

**Objective:** To illustrate the traits and qualities that are imperative for success in dealing with today's diverse workforce.

**Materials:** Paper, pens or pencils

##### Procedure

- In discussing the areas of leadership, management, or working with teams in a diverse workplace setting, it is apparent that the skills of a manager ten years ago are compared with those of the leaders of today that are totally different.

- Ask the group to individually think of five or six people that they consider real "leaders" today that could come from business, government, religion, education, or any other sector.

- Give them a few minutes to think about and jot down their names and ask also to add a note as to why each of the names came to their minds.

- Then form groups of three or four people, and ask them to compare and contrast their lists, and, more importantly, why these names surfaced.

##### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 What are the names, most of you had in common?
- 2 Why did these names come up so often?
- 3 Tell me a name that many of us perhaps wouldn't know (a former teacher, parent, sibling, coach)? Tell us why?
- 4 How do you think your list might differ if we did this five or even ten years ago?

**Learning:** This simple game will help the participants to find out the leadership traits and also further discussion can be held on each of the traits.

##### ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTIVENESS

Despite their increased utilization there is a considerable amount of discussion and debate regarding the specific merits and shortcomings of management simulation as a training tool for managers. Since most of the support for management simulation is impressionistic, consisting primarily of intuitive judgments, based on personal



experiences, its proponents as well as its opponents are generally dissatisfied with the existing empirical evidences. Surprisingly little empirical research has been undertaken to determine the educational value of this new approach to management training. The task of testing the educational value of games is indeed difficult and there have been relatively few controlled experiments that really get to the heart of the matter.

In the absence of any further empirical evidences one can only examine the theoretical claims made for gaming and the reservations suggested by some observer-critics. A number of arguments in favor of the use of management games as a training tool have been advanced. The first is *involvement*; all trainees participate and not only motivated and or especially bright ones. And second is *practice*; the opportunity to make mistakes is afforded and, in doing so, the opportunity to lose the fear of making mistakes. And third factor is the *exchange of ideas*; games provide an opportunity to compare one's own actions with those of others, usually peers, who are faced with the similar problems and under similar circumstances. And the fourth reason is that games provide "*learning through exposition*", i.e. the manager must defend his own point of view and explain his position. This may help stimulate careful thought processes, which are vital for effective learning. And fifth factor is that of "*instant experience*" by tackling a series of situations that would normally be encountered over a longer period of time, the participant may gain greater awareness of cause-and-effect relationships. And sixth consideration is that games may provide executives, who may have become overtly concerned with their own spheres of management, with a *new perspective on over-all organizational operations* as they observe the interaction of men, money and materials. The final reason is "*decision replay*". The players can return to a previous point in the game, proceed with an entirely new set of decisions and see how the outcome is altered.

There is a little question about potential benefits of gaming in theory. A more modest assessment of practical outcomes appears to include the following:

1. General management games probably do not teach anything very specific about the business enterprise or the management of the firm. However, they may serve to demonstrate some very broad facts of organizational life such as, that all are areas of an enterprise are inter-related, or that they have to be coordinated, or that each of them is important.
2. Experienced executives probably learn little that is absolutely new to them from gaming, although the experience may affect some of their long-held attitudes. Gaming may, for example, make a functional executive more tolerant of his co-workers in other departments and more aware of their problems.
3. The emotional impact of gaming probably make it a suitable technique for changing attitudes, provided the game situation is sufficiently clear-cut to pinpoint the attitude to be changed.
4. Although gaming can hardly be said to teach organizational decision making per se, it does provide vast potentials in learning from experience, particularly in the application of statistical and analytical methods.

5. Games undoubtedly do provoke interest, which may lead the participant to additional reading and study. They may change attitudes and they do seem to give some sort of "feel" for organizational problems.

### CRITICISMS

Serious criticisms of the management game generally, kept aside from such questions as its higher cost in both money and personnel and the requirement, in some cases, of such exotic equipment as computers, focus on three issues. One is that some of the things that make gaming engrossing and exciting but they may diminish their lasting educational effectiveness. The competitive aspects of a management game, for example, may arouse motivation and may help sustain effort. But they may detract from long-term learning by leading participants to play "conservative" strategies instead of experimenting with new approaches, by teaching participants to emphasize short-term "profits" within the game context instead of building and trying to achieve long-term strategic plans, and by influencing participants to let anxieties about relative performances interfere with their efforts to learn.

Further, the involvement and excitement of the game raises a central problem inherent in all simulation processes of the tendency for participants to attempt to "win the game" by approaching the task as only a game rather than as a realistic business situation. If the model underlying the game does not include the necessary attributes of reality, the training in the simulated environment is less likely to be successfully transferred to real-life organizational behavior. Although most games are based on simplified models of reality, the degree to which they represent the actual processes of organizations varies considerably.

Participation in management games often tends to be a pleasant experience; thus, there is a tendency to devote too much time to play and not enough to a careful analysis and critique of the games' results. Many game administrators emphasize that games should be used in conjunction with more conventional teaching devices. Lectures, discussion sessions and other techniques can alert the game players to the artificiality of the assumptions in regard to adoption of the appropriate model to help them to avoid discrimination wisely between what can and cannot safely be applied to real-life situations.

A second major focus of criticism is on the way in which teams are often organized. Keeping groups together simply because they have worked together before, does not necessarily enhance what they learn or get from the past experience. Organizing them so that they are homogenous in ability or prior performance may also prove to have drawbacks. On the other hand, it may be detrimental to both satisfaction and performance to have teams that reflect obvious differences in potential competes competitiveness against one another.

Third, some critics point out that many management games involve only quantitative variables and ignore human elements of organization almost completely; they question how such games can truly provide a realistic training ground for management. They tend to applause, consequently, those games in which the human factor is not neglected and in which group processes and dynamics of one of the teams are considered by the other team or by the team



itself. This represents one method by which management games can be used to study inter-group and decision-making problems on the psychological dimensions.

One such human relations refinement involves the use of videotape cameras, which record both image and sound on tape for replay through ordinary television receivers. The discussions of teams can be recorded and then played back after the end of the game in order to analyze what has taken place in making their decisions. The obvious advantage of videotape is that human behavior can be captured live and presented as factual data to be observed and even measured, encouraging participants to become aware of subtleties in their interactions and reflect upon the way in which they have worked together. To sum up, games appear to be valuable training tools in emphasizing the importance of long-range planning as well as the need to operate on the basis of established policies rather than expediency.

### CONCLUSION

Games should not be substituted for courses or played in place of in-depth and carefully designed curriculum. Games should be used prudently as adjuncts to instruction. Teachers who attempt to replace an instructional system with a simple game are doomed to ridicule and disaster. Games are meant for making the tough job of learning, to work in teams just a little bit easier and maybe even more fun.

Using at the right times for the right reasons, games can set a mood for learning, fostering in the learner a receptivity for the "lesson" about to be learned. Games can stimulate the intuitive natures of otherwise too logical and stuck-in-a-rut kinds of students. Games can help people feel good about themselves. Games can encourage an awareness of one another's human characteristics and illuminate the wonderful capacities that we all have for growth as we work together.

As a teacher, one need to stop and think twice before using any management games first, because matching the right game with the right situation is necessary and gets convinced by himself / herself that a game is the best way to get students in a frame of mind for learning.

### MANAGEMENT GAMES - LEADING EXAMPLES

This range of management games can be used to achieve specific purposes or to fill a slot in a conference or workshop.

**Prisoner's dilemma:** The Prisoners' Dilemma is a well-known trust game and demonstrates the concept of win-win to bring greater understanding of the processes involved in building, maintenance, losing and regaining trust.

**Supertanker- A leadership and Planning Game:** All organizations - from small units to giant corporations - are supertankers. Once they are under way, it's very difficult to stop them, or even change their direction! The most frequently observed characteristics of a winning team is that it has a mission and well planned common objectives. However, planning and objective - setting can't be taught by talking to teams about the danger of capsizing or running around.

**Monday Meeting - A meeting Simulation Game:** The only time a team can really exercise its tameness in meetings and get-togethers. Even with a good decision

making system, meeting can be very bloody! The Monday meeting simulation has been designed to give team members an opportunity to practice some vital meeting skills.

**Westrek- A Leadership and Planning Game:** This game set in the Wild West, is designed to help groups become conscious of the steps to successful planning. It teaches the five essential steps in the planning of any project, and demonstrates the need for cooperation, sharing and synergy in a team especially during the planning of a project.

**Murphy- A Leadership and Planning Game:** The success of a team often depends on the synergy which a team leader can create from the skills and knowledge of its members. This game highlights the inter-dependence within a team, as well as allows participants to practice leadership and planning skills.

Source: [www.beiefgroup.co.uk](http://www.beiefgroup.co.uk)

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