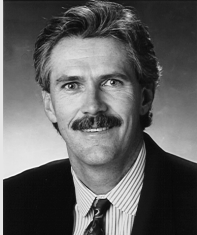


*"Nothing is so well learned as that which is discovered." - Socrates*

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Article by Randell Jones



**W**e know that most adults learn through doing, especially when the desired outcomes are about improving effectiveness through increasing

interpersonal and team interactions.

Achieving this goal is a key reason that business simulations have become so popular over the past two decades.

Having discussed the use of simulations with hundreds of trainers over the past 15 years, I've uncovered two trends. One is that some people shy away from simulations because they are intimidated by them or are at least anxious about the demands put on their facilitation skills. The second trend is that people often view simulations as generic tools to be plugged into a design anywhere so long as it fits their time slot and accommodates the right number of participants.

In reflection, I thought it would be beneficial to have a systematic way to discuss simulations as useful learning tools with both designers and trainers. The intended system should increase the user's comfort level, their basic understanding of the demands of simulations on trainers, and their probability of succeeding in front of their clients.

This issue of *Excursions* introduces our new simulation classification system. I trust you find it helpful. Because it is new, I hope you will offer suggestions; and, if you want to apply it to your favorite simulation, whether a Discovery Learning simulation or not, please share your efforts with us. We plan to display the classification of many simulations on our website.

Chris Musselwhite, President

## Simulation Stimulation

*Discovery Learning, Inc. creates a system for classifying simulations to help consultants use them more appropriately and more effectively in their organizational development work.*

**A**ny job is easier with the right tools. Every "Mr. Fix-it" knows that aphorism to be true whether he or she is a carpenter, a surgeon or an organizational development consultant. That's why Discovery Learning, Inc. has developed the Simulation Classification System to help trainers, consultants and facilitators determine what level of simulation is appropriate for them and for their client situation. With an improved ability to choose simulations wisely, consultants can use them more powerfully in their organizational development work. (See sidebar for another consultant's perspective on the use of simulations in developing organizational effectiveness.)

"I see designers and trainers who, in their desire to leverage the benefits of experiential learning, decide to use a simulation," says Chris Musselwhite. "Often their main criteria for selecting a simulation is the time required to run it. Sometimes they view a simulation as a generic experience altered only by time and number of participants. However, there is a great deal of variety in simulations, determined by the content and the level of interaction.

"For example, simulations come in a variety of complexities. Rank order-type simulations such as *Lost at Sea*, *Lost in the Amazon*, *Earthquake*, and *The Acquisition* are easy to administer and typically don't cause a lot of emotional reaction. They focus on revealing one simple lesson. At the other end of the spectrum are simulations such as *Looking Glass* and *PressTime*. These simulations require quite a bit of time to prepare and to use. They also

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- Chris Musselwhite

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stimulate a broader range of issues, some of which can be quite emotionally charged.

“Moreover,” continues Musselwhite, “I see trainers and facilitators get themselves into trouble attempting to run simulations they really aren’t qualified to use or ones that take the group in directions that aren’t intended.

“The purpose of experiential learning is to help people discover insights and learning for themselves through interacting with each other. A good facilitator is someone who can manage that process of discovery; someone who can be clear about what he or she is observing and who can develop hypotheses about what is observed.

“In the end, successful experiential learning is about a facilitator being able to manage the discovery process among the participants. That takes an appropriate simulation that can elicit critical issues and a competent

facilitator skilled in observation and capable of consulting through a Socratic process.

“What the profession has needed,” concludes Musselwhite, “is some way to differentiate one simulation from another, helping consultants choose the one that is most appropriate for their skills and experience and for their client situation.”

**Building a Better Tool**

Seeing the need for a better way to assist consultants, trainers and facilitators in selecting appropriate simulations as part of an experiential learning experience, Discovery Learning has spent five years evaluating simulations and developing a Simulation Classification System. (See Table 1.) The system classifies simulations into four levels of increasing complexity in terms of their demands on participants as well as facilitators.

**Four Levels**

Discovery Learning identified a

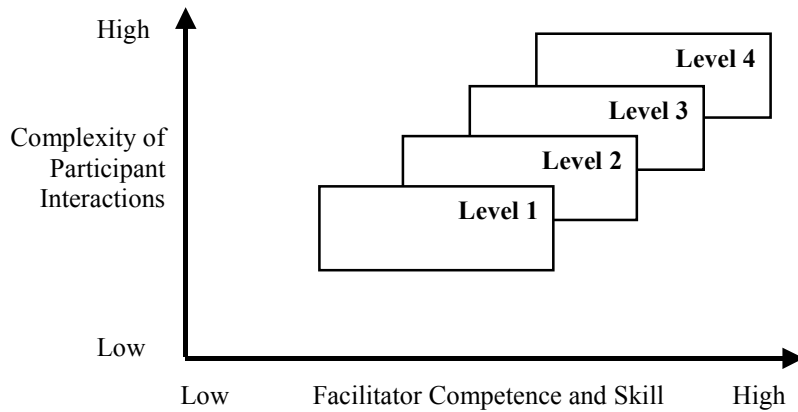
number of criteria on which to evaluate simulations, but reduced it to seven principal ones. These seven criteria fall into two broader categories. The first category includes criteria affecting the type and intensity of interactions participants have in the course of engaging in the simulation. The second category includes criteria defined by the facilitator’s skill level and experience. Using these seven criteria for classifying simulations, Discovery Learning created a matrix to define four levels of increasingly sophisticated simulations. (See Figure 1.)

With Level 1 simulations, participants typically work through a clearly defined problem in a limited timeframe and then talk about the experience. The outcomes for Level 1 simulations are highly predictable. As a consequence, Level 1 simulations have been popular with many consultants. Level 1 simulations are used widely because they do not require a great deal of time but still provide the group with

**Table 1: Simulation Level Classification Criteria**

Criteria	Participant Interactions			Facilitator Competence and Skill			
	Participant Interactions	Predictability of Outcomes	Emotional Arousal/ Conflict Potential	Ease of Administration	Individual Behavioral Assessment & Feedback	Team Assessment & Feedback	Observation, Facilitation, Debrief Skills
<b>Level 1</b>	Interactive	High	Unlikely but Possible	Little Complexity	No	Possible	Entry Level
<b>Level 2</b>	Highly Interactive	Intermediate	Somewhat Likely	Some Complexity	Minimal	Likely	Intermediate
<b>Level 3</b>	Complex	Low	Very Likely	Moderate Complexity	Possible	Yes	Good
<b>Level 4</b>	Complex	Low	Expected	Complex	Expected	Yes	Very Good

**Figure 1: Simulation Levels in Relationship to Participant Interaction and Facilitator Skill**



a focused, common experience to evaluate and to discuss.

At the other end of the spectrum, Level 4 simulations provide a laboratory in which outcomes and learnings can vary considerably from group to group depending on the unique combination of individual personalities and organizational culture that are brought to the simulation. These simulations are elaborate and complex, offering many opportunities for participants to replicate their usual behaviors and learn about leadership and teamwork. Level 4 simulations can go in multiple directions depending upon decisions made and actions taken by participants. The facilitator must be able to deal with a variety of outcomes. The debriefing sessions can be long and intense and can lead to powerful and meaningful insights and learnings.

Level 2 and Level 3 simulations represent increasing complexity between Levels 1 and 4. Each level represents an evolving degree of complexity and competence for both participant interactions and demands on the facilitator.

**The Category Matrix**

Table 1 shows the seven criteria grouped in the two categories: Participant Interactions and Facilitator Competence and Skill. The degree of difficulty and required expertise becomes increasingly demanding as described by the criteria for the four levels.

**Participant Interaction Issues**

Participant interaction issues include three important criteria which affect how simulations are classified.

**Degree of interaction:** Simulations vary by the complexity of interactions among participants. Level 1 simulations involve interactions among individuals in small groups typically focused on one central challenge. Level 4 simulations can involve cross-functional interactions among a large number of participants dealing with a broad range of issues. This creates the potential for complex and challenging relationships.

**Predictability of outcome:** With Level 1 simulations, the facilitator knows in advance what outcome the simulation will most likely produce regardless of the group’s makeup; the results are highly predictable. With

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**Simulations Then and Now**

by Dr. Joseph Fisher

*With three decade’s perspective on the use of simulations in building effective organizations, Dr. Joseph Fisher, president of Orion International, LLC, sees their continuing value.*

“During the 70’s and 80’s, simulations were very popular for use in leadership programs. The good ones are still popular because they work well. *Earthquake* is a good example. It’s simple to run and the outcome always leads to the discovery by participants that decisions by a group are better than decisions by an individual. That high predictability of outcome makes it attractive to consultants.”

“Unfortunately, success attracts competition and today the field is flooded with many offerings, especially simulations at what Chris calls Level 1. Consultants have too many choices to consider; and, some of the offerings are poorly conceived. Consultants must be careful they do not pick one that is just hokey. A really good simulation has a credible base to it. But, another factor comes into play here. Consultants like familiarity. They prefer something simple that they know how to run. If it’s predictable, if it’s comfortable and if the plot line is interesting, it will be popular. That’s what we see in the marketplace. The simple ones are still the best sellers.”

“But the simple ones are not the only ones. Among higher level managers, there is a need and a desire for more complication and more direct

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business relevance in the simulation. People today want more business reality in the simulations than they did 20 years ago. They want the simulations to tie in with bottom-line performance.”

“I think that’s why *Paper Planes, Inc.* is so well accepted. It’s fun, but it’s a business case that forces a team to deal with financial, inventory, labor and other costs. This simulation is more of a slice of reality. It is a bite into the world of business. The fact is, if you don’t build a paper plane that will fly, you’re going to lose out. That is a pretty strong tie in to how people think about business.”

“In a similar way, *Turnaround*, a simulation that I wrote several years ago at the University of Michigan is pretty challenging. It involves a whole series of individual and consensus decisions made to turn around a business that is failing. It is a true business case that deals with strategic objectives, team issues, and personnel issues. Participants learn not only about consensus decision-making, but they are also learning about business processes. That type of content on two levels makes the more involved and complex simulations more valuable to the client.”

“Simulations are best used in a well-designed program with an overall strategy for growth and development. Simulations are tools, that’s all they are. What makes a good simulation exercise powerful is tying it into a learning model where it provides a teaching point that is relevant to the overall theme.” ●

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Level 4 simulations, the participants’ own interactions determine the direction the simulations will take and the outcomes the group will create. Specific outcomes for Level 4 simulations are hard to predict.

**Potential for conflict and emotion:**

The arousal of emotion and the creation of conflict can be useful in some cases depending on the learning that needs to

take place; but, using a simulation that creates undesirable conflict can sidetrack the learning experience. Level 1 simulations typically do not create much anger or frustration among participants; however, higher level simulations can foster and accommodate increased frustration and disagreement within the participant group. Level 4 simulations, in part because of their high variability and low predictability, may actually result in participants directing their frustration toward the facilitator or the simulation. The facilitator must know how to redirect that frustration back to the group for processing.

**Facilitator Competence Issues**

Four criteria related to the facilitator’s expertise and skill level as well as to the logistics of conducting the simulation affect the classification of simulations.

**Ease of Administration:** The requirements for setting up and running a simulation can impact the

simulations viability. Level 1 simulations can typically be set-up within a few minutes in any meeting room; they can be conducted and debriefed within an hour or so. Level 4 simulations may require the pre-reading of roles by participants, the arrangement of separate breakout

rooms, and the briefing of several skilled facilitators to help observe the different groups. Conducting the

“. . . a good simulation exercise . . . provides a teaching point that is relevant to the overall theme.”

- Dr. Joseph Fisher

simulation may take all day or longer. Adequately debriefing Level 4 simulations can involve hours.

**Observation, Facilitation and Debrief Skills:**

Not every facilitator has the skill set to conduct every simulation. Higher level simulations require facilitators to observe objectively the behaviors of participants, to interpret those behaviors by forming a hypothesis and to feed back information to individuals and teams. Higher level simulations require facilitators to lead groups through by asking questions and managing the group interactions especially when assessing themselves or giving feedback to individual members of their group. The skill set needed to effectively facilitate and debrief a Level 1 simulation is less complex and demanding.

**Team Assessment and Feedback:**

Adequate feedback on a team’s performance is essential to its learning. Level 4 simulations offer more opportunities to explore group dynamics and how teams perform

together than do Level 1 simulations. Level 1 simulations typically deal with a single outcome which the team has performed adequately or not. At Level 4, effective facilitators can help groups dissect and evaluate their ineffectiveness while acknowledging what they do well. The more complex simulations require the facilitator to engage and manage the group's self-critique of its behavior and to discover for itself the key learnings.

**Individual Behavioral Assessment and Feedback:** Unlike the lower levels, Level 3 & Level 4 simulations offer opportunities for feedback to individuals regarding the impact of

their actions and behaviors. The facilitator may give this feedback directly or may facilitate other members of the group giving feedback to individuals. Managing this type of feedback requires the highest level of skill due to the complexities of engaging individual personalities, managing multiple perceptions and creating a safe and positive learning environment.

**Using the Simulation Classification System**

For selected Discovery Learning simulations, Table 2 presents the application of the criteria from

Table 1. This level of examination and evaluation by a consultant or facilitator can help in selecting the appropriate simulation. The criteria apply to all simulations, not just those created by Discovery Learning. The criteria are universal as is the need by consultants to choose the right simulations for themselves and for their clients.

“This matrix presents a common language that can be used to contrast and compare simulations created by anyone,” says Musselwhite. “The Simulation Classification System is a helpful tool—the right tool—intended simply to make that job easier.” •

**Table 2: Applying the Simulations Classification System**

Criteria	Participant Interactions			Facilitator Competence and Skill			
	Participant Interactions	Predictability of Outcomes	Emotional Arousal/ Conflict Potential	Ease of Administration	Individual Behavioral Assessment & Feedback	Team Assessment & Feedback	Observation, Facilitation, Debrief Skills
<b>Level 1: The Acquisition</b>	Interactive individual small group relationships	High	Unlikely but possible	No facilitator input after simulation starts until debrief	No	Team interactions and participant inclusion	Can be run with no prior experience
<b>Level 2: Paper Planes, Inc.</b>	Highly interactive individual and team relationships	Some variability of outcomes within a highly structured process	Occasionally with ample opportunity to intervene	Some complexity in set-up and considerable movement of participants	Typically only to the supervisor role and this is minimal	The group assesses its overall effectiveness in their debrief	Good questioning and crowd management skills
<b>Level 3: EdgeWork</b>	Complex team, cross-functional and cross-organization relationships	Participants define the outcome	Frustration and disagreement are likely	Moderate complexity in set-up, multiple rooms required, some need for facilitator to interact with participants	Optional	Opportunity for teams to give each other feedback on their perceptions of each other	Good facilitation skills critical to the success of the simulation
<b>Level 4: PressTime</b>	Complex cross-functional inter-team relationships	Participants completely define the outcome and there can be considerable variation	Frustration and disagreement can be strong at times. Intervention may be necessary	Complex to administer, unique space requirements, multiple trainers required for groups over 8	Opportunity for each participant to receive peer and facilitator feedback	Team self assessment along with facilitator assessment of team effectiveness	Excellent facilitation skills critical to the success of the simulation

## What's happening at DLI?

**New Products:** We have developed a new exercise to add to our simulation mix. "The Acquisition" is an exercise in group problem solving and decision-making. Participants are asked to individually rank order 15 steps for accomplishing a task, then the team is asked to share individual results and reach a team consensus on the proper rank order of the same steps. The exercise takes 1 ½ - 2 hours and can accommodate multiple teams of 3-5. To learn more about the exercise visit [www.discoverylearning.com](http://www.discoverylearning.com)

**New Research:** Discovery Learning has released 3 new Research Summaries: "Change Style Indicator and MBTI – Is there a connection?", "High Performance Teams, Can Team-based Learning Be Defined?" and "Development of a Simulation Classification System." Read and download the research from the News & Information section of our website.

**New Trainer Service:** Starting in August of 2003 Trainers who own a Discovery Learning Facilitator's Guide will be able to download updates and even

complete revisions for their guide at no cost. Owners will be notified via email when updates are available and will be given instructions on how to access the guides using their email address as their password. The "Facilitator Guide Update" page is located in the Resource section of our website.

**New Book to be published:** *Dangerous Opportunities: Making Change Work* by Chris Musselwhite and Randell Jones will be available in October of 2003. Based on 15 years of research involving over 10,000 managers, *Dangerous Opportunity: Making Change Work* offers managers new insights into the different ways in which people react to change—their Change Styles—so they can lead major business transitions more effectively. For more information, call or email our office.

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