Simulations

Simulations offer participants a chance to experience in a safe environment what an encounter with individuals or groups from another culture feels like, and to analyze feelings as well as behavior after the encounter. These characterize simulations:

- **Safety**: Nobody will be ridiculed or made to look foolish. Nobody will be forced into a self-revelation that is painful.
- **An affective experience**: What it feels like to be in an intercultural interaction that illuminates cognitive information.
- **Analysis**: Helps the learner categorize the felt experience and use it to increase understanding.

Understanding that comes from experience- as opposed to learning about it- is deeper and more likely to be retained in memory. Simulations make the concepts come alive.

The following summaries are of two recommended simulations that have been successfully used:

**BARGNA: A simulation game on cultural clashes**

“Participants experience the shock of realizing that despite their good intentions and the many similarities amongst themselves, people interpret things differently from one another in profound ways, especially people from differing cultures. Players learn that they must understand and reconcile these differences if they want to function effectively in a cross-cultural group.”

The designer, Thiagi (Sivasailam Thiagarajan), called it a "flexim." He defined it as a "flexible simulation game" providing a rich learning experience in a short period of time.

Participants learn and play a simple card game, called "Five Tricks," in small groups. Conflicts arise as players move from group to group in the "tournament" play. The responses to these conflicts are identical to responses people experience when they are confronted with cultural differences. During tournament play, participants must observe strict silence. They can't talk about the differences they are encountering--as is often the case in intercultural interactions, especially when the language is unfamiliar.

This is an extremely effective simulation. Here are some of its virtues:

- It can be run with almost any number of participants, from as few as 9 to large groups.
- The entire simulation including debriefing can be run in as little as 45 minutes or can last twice that long. Either way, it offers the chance to explore many aspects of culture clashes and communication breakdowns.
- It affords opportunities for experimentation.
- *Bargna*, like any good simulation, provides an experience that can be debriefed extensively.
- Materials you need to run this simulation are easy and inexpensive to gather.
- *Bargna* is very easy to use, whether you are an experienced game facilitator or a novice.
- *Bargna* always works! It always results in rich discussion.
**How Barnga is played**

Players form small groups of 3-6 each. Try to keep the groups about the same size. Each receives a modified deck of cards (Ace-1-2-3-4-5 or Ace-1-2-3-4-5-6-7 depending on how large the groups are). Each individual receives a sheet of instructions for playing the simple game "Five Tricks" and a sheet of "Tournament Rules." They have a few minutes to learn the rules and practice the game for several hands. Then a signal indicates the start of the "tournament," and silence is strictly enforced as a "No Verbal Communication" rule. This means no written notes or even finger-writing in the air, and no spoken communication. At this point, the facilitator collects the rules and game instruction sheets. **Actually, every group has been given different rules, and the facilitator must ensure the players don’t realize that fact until after they have engaged in the card play. This simple strategy is the basis for this highly effective simulation.**

In one set, Ace is high; in another Ace is low. Spades are trump for one group; diamonds for another; one group has no trump. These simple differences are the only things that are not identical for all groups, but of course they are significant differences. Everything *seems* to be the same, but because of the differences the result is bewilderment, misunderstanding, and misjudgments.

After another signal, some players move: those who have scored the most tricks move "up" and those with the fewest move "down" to new groups. They sit down at their new table, look around, and begin at once playing “Five Tricks.” Facial expressions register surprise, disbelief, even outrage.

Participants experience being an outsider—if they have moved groups—or being a "native" with outsiders coming in and insisting on doing things differently. Some participants try adaptation techniques, while others try to have their rules dominate. Many who move experience a desire to go "home." Some are sure things would have been better if they had been able to talk, while others think more communication would have led to argument instead of play.

There is no "tournament" for its own sake; no player is identified as the winner (although you can designate the winner and make a small award in order to maintain the authenticity of the tournament). The object of the simulation game is to have everyone experience the shocks and feelings that come from interaction with members of other cultures whose rules are not known completely. Even when players perceive the differences, they have great difficulty working out a way to bridge them. The game is rich in metaphors of real life.

**Debriefing Barnga**

Debriefing: After playing a number of rounds- either use a set time limit, or allow the number of rotations according to the number of tables in play (6 rounds for 6 tables)- students should be aware that they were playing by different rules, and the following questions should be discussed. Students can stay in the last group they were in, or return to their home groups at the teacher’s discretion.

**Questions:**

- If you could describe the game in one word, what would it be?
- What did you expect at the beginning of the game?
- When did you realize that something was wrong?
- How did you deal with it?
- How did not being able to speak contribute to what you were feeling?
As with any simulation, the debriefing is the most important part. It should be allotted about half the total time of the game. It begins with an "instant replay" that invites players to think back to what they were thinking and feeling when they began reading the rules, began play, experienced the first move of players in the tournament, etc. Then thoughts and feelings that changed during play are explored. During the debriefing allegations of "cheating" often arise. Other players think some of the participants were rather slow-witted about learning the rules. Some think they themselves must not have learned the game correctly.

The facilitator will usually be asked if some players may have had a different game and the issue of different rules can be discussed generally (ask how many considered that point, and of those who aren't sure or hadn't thought of it, ask what else might have been going on). Eventually the truth about different rules is revealed; after discussion, they will see it was necessary to the simulation.

The debriefing can ask what real-life experiences produced the same feelings and thoughts as the simulation. Another question can be about past experiences of rule differences. Participants often have other-culture experiences to relate. A list of "what if?" questions useful: What if you had been able to talk? What if the play had lasted longer? What if you had been able to go "home" to your original group again with the original players?

Here is a link to access free copies of the rules for each group:
http://www.acphd.org/media/271383/barnga_instructions.pdf. Of course, you can modify, edit, and add on to the debrief and simulation activity / lesson on intercultural communication.

THE COCKTAIL PARTY: A Simulation Game that involves cultural interaction with business contacts

Daphne Jameson, Ph.D., Cornell University:

Background

Three corporations--a commercial bank, a construction firm, and a hotel management company--are planning a joint venture to build a new hotel and retail shopping complex in Perth, Australia. They come from three different cultures: Blue, Green and Red. Each has specific cultural values, traits, customs, and practices. Teams representing the three cultures/corporations attend the opening cocktail party of the 3-day meeting during which the three companies will negotiate the details of the partnership and at the end, if all goes well, will sign an agreement. Each management team includes a Vice-President and a number of other managers.

Each team receives a one-page briefing about its culture's values and behaviors. The interaction of the teams is facilitated by the presence of actual food--cheese and crackers, chips, finger food such as cherry tomatoes, small carrots, and beverages (supplied by the facilitator, along with napkins, cups and plates). The exercise gives participants a chance to experience the feelings often reported by those who encounter unfamiliar cultures.

This effective simulation has these characteristics:

- Its quasi-business scenario makes business students easily relate to it
- The entire simulation takes about 2 1/2 hours to run
- It works well with 15 - 30 people
- It offers excellent opportunities to explore issues of diversity and cooperation
How The Cocktail Party is played

Players are put into three teams of managers, representing the construction company (Red), the bank (Green) and the hotel management firm (Blue). Players wear name tags in red, green and blue to show affiliation. After receiving a one-page description of their culture, members of each team practice the behaviors that are part of each culture. For example, the Blue culture - who are the hosts of the cocktail party - demonstrate behavior that is hearty, friendly and congenial... the types who greet the others with a hearty "Howdy!" and favor close distances for speaking along with physical contact. The Green culture is a conservative religious sect who eat only after putting napkins under their chins and who often stop conversation to pray. The Reds eat no uncooked foods, and are task-oriented people with a sense of urgency about not wasting time.

The groups freely interact, while maintaining their cultural identities and behaviors. Usually one team will withdraw eventually, signaling the end of the cocktail party. The learning of the culture and the interaction at the Cocktail Party together last about 45 minutes.

During the interaction, one team may withdraw to reaffirm its behaviors and goals (usually Greens, but sometimes Reds). Let the play go on long enough for them to return and re-enter the play.

Debriefing The Cocktail Party

The first question to ask is, "Can you work with the other two on this project?" It is helpful to draw three columns on the board and ask all participants to comment on the two other teams before allowing teams to explain their behavior. Once the reactions to the other two teams are displayed, the discussion can turn to what participants were feeling in the simulation. Their usual responses include "discomfort" and "distrust" and perhaps "anger." As with other simulations, these responses can be related to real experiences participants have had and can lead to discussion of strategies to deal with intercultural interactions in the future.

A debriefing discussion after the event reinforces the following key themes:

- Cultural values are relative, not absolute.
- Intercultural communication involves emotional as well as rational responses.
- Invisible cultural differences, such as values, attitudes, and beliefs, are more difficult to handle than visible differences, such as manners, customs, and rituals.
- Deciding who adapts to whom-and how-is the greatest challenge in intercultural interactions.
- Cultural identity is multidimensional, involving far more than nationality alone.

Here is a link to access free copies of the parameters for each group: [http://www.ufic.ufl.edu/pd/downloads/ici-Activities/UncocktailParty.pdf](http://www.ufic.ufl.edu/pd/downloads/ici-Activities/UncocktailParty.pdf). Of course, you can modify, edit, and add on to the ‘debrief’ and simulation activity / lesson on intercultural communication.