How to facilitate a simulation game

The purpose of this manual is to give facilitators of the "Gaming for Peace" project basic knowledge about the method of simulation gaming and its benefits for learning processes. "Gaming for Peace" is supported by the project "Youth for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence in Mindanao" (short YOUCAP), which is implemented by "Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit" (GIZ) and commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

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1. Foreword

"Simulation games depend on the active participation of all actors; ensuring this active participation is the main task of the facilitator of a simulation game "

We would like to emphasize the fact that simulation games are a very powerful method by which you can achieve several learning goals. The way of learning is experienced-based, meaning that the participants construct new knowledge themselves by combining what they already know (theory, soft-skills, etc.) with new experiments in communication and interaction. Thus the gained knowledge within a simulation game is highly sustainable.

BUT it is just a method. It is a method to achieve one or several learning goals. If the simulation game works well, meaning all participants are actively involved and have the impression to have learnt a lot, this is a success. But it is not the end of the story. Now it is up to the facilitators to channel the new experiences and new ideas from the participants and to evaluate them regarding the overall goal. If this step is not made, the participants will only have a diffuse idea of what they have learnt and will have missed a great opportunity. In conclusion, the evaluation of the simulation is crucial for using the maximum potential of the method.

It should be noted that depending on the duration of the simulation game and the number of actors included, as well as the general complexity of the scenario, it may take you a significant amount of time to finalize all the needed documents. It can become difficult to keep the coherence between the different actors. Therefore, we highly recommend that you work in groups in order to share the overall workload and not to lose track of the coherence.

2. Introduction: Simulation Games

2.1. What is a simulation game?

A simulation is a model of reality and thus one of the most complex methods of non-formal education. A simulation game reflects a detail of reality, transformed into a certain setting, which allows the emergence of particular dynamics created by the players themselves. This setting includes a conflict-prone relationship between the different actors and groups and/or a topical conflict. During a simulation game, individual actors or groups slip into roles and interact with each other within a predefined framework. Players can plan, execute and optimize action strategies and are not hampered in committing errors; rather these procedural errors are used to draw conclusions. The simulation game is structured in different phases, whilst the mutual reactions between the actions of the participants (actors) and the environment of the simulation game create permanently new situations.

In general, simulation games train the capabilities of the players to make decisions and offer possibilities to test communication and organizational skills in a risk-free environment. They convey the understanding of complex interdependencies and enable players to reflect on their behavior and position. There are no winners or losers in a game, the focus is on understanding one's role in the complex dynamics and yielding learnings from interaction.

2.2. Structure of a simulation game?

The simulation game itself can be divided into four phases: preparation, introduction, playing and de-briefing.

The participants do not need prior knowledge of simulation gaming in order to take part. During the preparation phase they acquire all necessary knowledge to participate actively in the simulation game. This means they are aware of significant factors relevant for the overall subject of the simulation game and have enough information about the actor they are supposed to simulate during the game. Depending on the target group and the complexity of the problem of the simulation game, the preparation phase can last days, or weeks/months. But in most of the cases you will only have some hours.

After reading the scenario, rules and procedures, their role profile and any additional documents, the participants are guided through a symbolic procedure to start the game. Each game is divided into phases during which the players engage in activities like coordination, negotiations, conferences and plenum discussions. Players interact with one another to gain information, form alliances, plan activities and otherwise move their cause forward. Most simulation games require large amounts of cooperation among players, but there are often numerous challenges to these interactions. The players work to the best of their abilities to achieve the goals outlined in their role profiles.

After the simulation game is over, the players must step out of their roles. Here it is crucial to use a method or symbolic procedure to clearly clarify that the game is over and the reflection phase starts. The phase after the simulation game we call de-briefing-phase and is the part in which general and universally valid conclusions are made, additionally to the personal ones made by the players during the game. The de-briefing phase is probably the most important part of the simulation game, but often times disregarded. That is why there is a full chapter dedicated to it.

3. Facilitator's Role

As the basic idea of the method of simulation gaming is learning by playing, the main tasks of the facilitator are to provide the necessary framework and to make sure each participant gets into his/her actor's role and thus into the game.

During the simulation game, it is up to the players themselves to make their own experiences and to create new knowledge; here the facilitator interferes only if and when major problems occur, which hinder the players in continuing the simulation. In general, all problems should be solved by the players themselves. Thus the role of the facilitator is more comparable to the one of a navigator.

The facilitator keeps track of time and briefly reminds the players of the purpose of the upcoming phase. If the game has a press component, the facilitator(s) are also responsible creating a news show from the contributions of the players assigned as journalists.

The facilitator should intervene as little as possible while the game is happening, but should make sure the dynamics of the games does not get lost for any reason. However, there are moments requiring an intervention on behalf of the facilitator, e.g. players get confused about rules or other players cheat. If the facilitator notices some players are not in the game, as they are sitting aside and are not active at all, they should approach the players and ask them what they are thinking, what would be effects of the actions he/she is thinking about to undertake or to what extent these correspond with the goals of the actor. In essence, the facilitator urges the player to get back in the game by stimulating their thinking rather than giving them an order.

The facilitator is counseling the process of learning, but NOT guiding. They support and accept alternative problem solving ideas, instead of pushing their own. Their role is similar to the one of a coach, who is assisting in carrying out a gymnastic exercise (Ripsas, S. 1997, p.266). Hence the facilitator is less focused on transmitting content and more on ensuring the participants are enabled to define the problem and develop specific problem-solving strategies.

Golden rule:

Facilitators should interfere as little as possible and as much as needed.

The facilitator is not there to judge the quality of the questions asked by participants, indeed the only "bad" question is the one left unasked. However, the facilitator does not have to answer all questions. Sometimes trying to elicit the answers from the participants themselves is more effective.

If the group is larger than 20, it is a good idea to involve more facilitators. The number of team members varies according to the number of participants and occasionally to the scenario of the simulation.

4. Technical aspects of simulation game facilitation

Facilitating a simulation game includes ensuring that facilities (computers, chairs, boards, markers, etc.) are provided and in place. All information needs to be provided and clarified for the players, such as rules or procedures, scenario, end of the game, etc. If there are any forms that are provided for the participants to use, the facilitator may be asked to clarify this as well.

Moreover, the facilitator should keep records of the simulation performance for further reference. See section 7, "Follow up: Documentation".

5. Learning Management

The facilitator should be aware that the simulation game is a learning process that needs supervision. The facilitator, when necessary, may also need to provide feedback. To assess learning, they must observe the participants and analyze decisions and results. This will assist the facilitator to understand the progress of the participants and get involved if a problem occurs. If the participants are confused or discouraged at the onset of the game, the facilitator encourages them to jump in, helping them to understand that once the players interact, much of their confusion will be explained. If the participants are unable to effectively play, the facilitator must play the role of supervisor or leader by asking questions to challenge them. For example, if the participants are having a hard time reaching a decision, the facilitator may pose questions to stimulate the participants' decision making process. Again, the facilitator´s role is to help the participants to reach the decision, not to give away answers.

6. Evaluation phase: Facilitation

Most important for the facilitators of a simulation game is the evaluation phase. After the simulation game has ended, the evaluation phase starts during which the facilitator and the participants try conjointly to re-trace the processes of the simulation game and to understand what happened and why it happened.

The general sequencing of the evaluation phase is:
1. Emotional/individual level
2. Process of the simulation game
3. Transfer to reality

6.1. Evaluation Phase: Basics

Participants reflect in the de-briefing phase about what has happened in the game, why has it happened and which conclusions could be transferred to their real life.

The de-briefing phase is meant to reprocess the experiences made during the gaming phase. This phase often times is skipped, however it is crucial for the overall learning outcome. Generally, the participants have different experiences and thus draw different conclusions – a fruitful exchange of the perceptions and findings is the goal of the de-briefing phase so the participants can mutually benefit from their personal achievements.

As stated in the very beginning: simulation gaming is just a method and not an end in itself. So based on the events that took place and the process of the simulation game, conclusions for reality are drawn. Usually participants remember the positive and negative emotional moments of the simulation game quite well, meaning their experiences of success and or ineffective strategies applied during the game, which is the basis for the reflection. For the overall learning effect, reflecting upon failures through ineffective strategies or failed actions can be helpful as well, sometimes even more than if they would have worked out smoothly.

The central question in the de-briefing phase is: what have the participants learned that has a practical reference and thus can be impactful in real life. Before deciding on the de-briefing methods, it is important to understand the phases of learning within a simulation game

> Active Experimentation (actions, negotiations)
> Concrete Experience (individual, also personal conflicts)
> Reflective Observations (group behavior, outcome of the game, etc.)
> Abstract Conceptualization (evaluation, comparison game<-> reality, generalization)

6.2. Evaluation Phase: Structure

As facilitator, be aware of the emotions and personal conflicts of the participants in the game! Thus we suggest to plan the de-briefing according to the following structure and to use the guiding questions presented:

1. **Repeating:**
   What has happened? Was everybody involved? Who was leading the process/group/agenda?
2. **Reflecting:**
   What went well, what didn't?
3. **Emotions:**
   What emotions were present and how did these influence the course of the game? What has been irritating or frustrating? What felt powerful or successful? What do the different teams think about each other? How did you manage stressful situations? Has someone been personally blamed?
4. **Interpretation:**
   What do we learn out of this? What is the impact for real life?
5. **Understanding:**
   What would you do similarly in real life? What would you definitely do differently?

6.3. Evaluation Phase: Methods

Give the participants space to describe their feelings after the game to point out differences in the perception of the game and release inner tensions. These are several methods that can be used for de-briefing. Here are some examples:

> (Moderated) discussions
> Flashlight (http://wikipedia.qwika.com/de2en/Blitzlicht-Methode)
> Drawing

- Sociometry (Participants expressing their evaluation of different aspects in question, through taking a certain position in the room in relation to the measuring frame provided by the facilitator)
- Learning journals
- Questionnaires
- Group work (actors, random)
- Plenum reflection
- World Café (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_caf%C3%A9)

7. Follow-up: Documentation

After the simulation game is over and the facilitator is back in the office, any insights into the game should be documented. A clear documentation of the simulation game will help future facilitators get an idea of how the game runs, possible challenges that might arise and also some more detailed information about the rules and procedures and the game sequence than is available in the information distributed to participants. The aim is to create a "behind the scenes" look into how the game runs and what the facilitator should watch out for. The next time the game is facilitated by someone else, that person can find many of their questions already answered in the documentation. This means that face-to-face conversations between past and future facilitators can run more efficiently. After running the simulation game, the next facilitator reexamines the documentation and makes any additions they deem necessary and so the wealth of knowledge about the simulation game grows.