LESSONS LEARNED FROM A CUSTOMIZED MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT SIMULATION

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ABSTRACT
This paper describes the development and delivery of a customized management development training program featuring a simulated National Park Guidelines are described for others to consider in designing similar training. Lessons learned by the designers are discussed.

INTRODUCTION
The National Park Service (NPS) was established in 1916 “to promote and regulate the use of national parks, monuments, and reservations” and “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and wildlife therein” increasing pressure is being felt by the National Park Service system, however, by a widening diversity of park visitors, park employees, and the general public, all demanding a voice in Park Service planning. Added to this are the political demands of Congress and special interest groups. Of greatest concern is the growing frequency of visitation to the parks and the accompanying damage caused by people and automobiles (NPCA, 1988).

The National Park Service (NPS) is 70 years old, although Yellowstone - the world’s first national park-is 115 years old. NPS consists of 341 individual park units and is managed from the central office in Washington, DC. One of its ten regional office’s, located in Atlanta, Georgia, provided the opportunity for the project described here, which addresses the complaints among Park Service supervisors that the design of management development programs using concepts, experiences, anti illustrations from business anti industry are simply not N PS-specific enough to allow for sufficient “transference” of learning.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES
The National Park Service has utilized various management training programs in the past, but none that speaks the Park Service’s language and deals with their unique problems. A steering group was established consisting of supervisors, a superintendent, the regional associate-director and the regional training officer. In the initial discussions, an overview of NPS work, and the supervisor’s job was discussed. A plan was then developed in which (1) a representative number of parks (large, medium and small) would be chosen and supervisors at all levels would be developed in which (1) a representative number of parks (large, medium and small) would be chosen and supervisors at all levels would be interviewed; (2) one thousand questionnaires would be mailed to a representative sample of small and large parks to obtain relevant information; (3) background information on the National Park Service and background information described in item three above. Since none of the cases (which were done for SCAMP) were retyped, copied and distributed for analysis during the week, however, it was found that they took on even more realism and more immediacy of need to the participants. This action apparently caused many participants to “buy into” the simulation.

2. Designers really can’t predict what will happen when participants begin to work through the simulation. An unanticipated problem in this simulation was information overload. One afternoon session, for example, produced some 24 incidents, which were all presented at once.

3. Designers must be flexible and “up front” about the simulation. The initial plan was to acquaint participants with many more learning experiences than they could have personally experienced in the hope that these experiences would surface throughout the week as teachable moments. Participants, however, expressed frustration about the overload created when they were given answers to questions that had not yet been asked.

4. Designers must be willing to modify preplanned activities if its discovered during the simulation that participants will benefit from such changes. For instance, the designers intended for the exercise of writing one’s own case problems to be a minor part of one afternoon. When these cases (which were done for SCAMP) were retyped, copied and distributed for analysis during the week, however, it was found that they took on even more realism and more immediacy of need to the participants. This action apparently caused many participants to “buy into” the simulation.

5. More realism built into the simulation results in higher participant involvement, satisfaction and learning. An example of such realism occurred at the time of the training program when a major forest fire was raging at Yosemite National Park and a hurricane hit Fort Sumter National Park near Charleston, South Carolina.

6. The closer the simulation actually approximates reality, then the better the result will be. In the design of this simulation a thousand surveys (40% of returns were useable) were sent to N PS personnel throughout the Southeast. From these surveys were - obtained incidents real data, comparisons, critical concern 5, etc.

REFERENCES