

Analysis and Feedback

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One of the things that dismays people unfamiliar with Modeling and Simulation or M&S is that we have no perfect solution. Instead, we ask copious questions to get as close as possible to the objectives sought. Analysis supporting ill-defined requirements can be equally disastrous for the same reasons. Like M&S, the raison d'être of analysis is built upon knowing what you want to capture and pre-determining a methodology to gauge whether you are getting it or not. Developing a simulation and exercise collection plan therefore means two things where the training audience is concerned: the simulation plan is unseen but the presence of a collection plan is mildly evident.

The dilemmas with collection plans begin at their initial inception. If physical observation is necessary, then there must be a focus since a prolonged presence interferes with a staff interacting within their habitat. This requires research. Unfortunately when an officer receives a task for this mission, a senior personage or mentor has not even been appointed much less identified. This impacts critical planning and time management assuming that no professional organisation is dedicated for this purpose. Using an American figure of speech, having something 'fall in your lap' means that this is given to you whether you were expecting it or not. Assuming this is you, my recommendation is to look at the following critical areas: identify those receiving the initial taskings; look at the training objectives; look at the doctrine in relation to these objectives.

What proves insightful is to compare what is being attempted with the overall training strategy of the exercising unit. Is this headquarters being asked to do something that it never prepared for? Further, by taking a look at the order from higher and comparing it with the headquarters order, there will be instances where the continuation of actions are not complete nor nuances from the senior command fully embraced. Before the appointment of a senior mentor, it is perfectly acceptable to record any potential discrepancies for future consumption. There is nothing wrong with looking at the time-sequence of certain events during the exercise and creating a draft prioritising the events to be observed. It is also acceptable to stake an early claim over observer space and configuration as well as stating requirements for the set-up of an After Action Review or facility. Ideally this results from a physical reconnaissance of the exercise facilities in advance.

Aside from the physical room requirements of the team, there are budgetary issues that must be addressed. Team members will need to travel to the event and return home but what happens while they are there? If observer controllers are treated as an afterthought, they will have to travel farther if all the good rooms in

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town are taken. In many cases, an observer needs to travel from the headquarters to the exercise facility to look at both sides of a communication or capture a critical event from a screen to accentuate a key point during an AAR. There is also a need to discuss the navigation of trails and roads with the installation so that highly travelled areas such as tank trails are avoided, affording another quicker alternative route between the two points. While these observers are collecting, there must be communications whether it is mobile voice or via network to send briefings and files.

There are many forces at work to compose the observer team while you are taking your initial steps. A Senior Mentor is usually hand picked by the Commanding General or his Deputy. Assuming that you are the Senior Observer Controller, there is a phasing out of future duties so it does not conflict with the training event. Further, there are functional experts that must be equally tasked so that many of the headquarters core competencies can be observed and noted for a more holistic analysis.

So how will you get there? It varies. In some cases, behaviour must be observed or qualitative answering subjectively how well something was done. For others, there are quantitative metrics that implies effectiveness answering how far, how fast or how many. Some events have an elaborate collection scheme where nothing is concealed such as the National Training Center in California's Mojave Desert where observation is conducted both by satellite and physical observation. There is also a functional scheme where rotary flight in an artificial environment is the only thing observed. Some of the training objectives will require a combination of the above – underscoring the need to get started in preparatory analysis from the moment you are tasked.

By the time a senior mentor is appointed, having the physical layout of the facility with observer controller spaces, an overlay with the communications structure, a unit training schedule and exercise order is a good start. Using a 'draft' collection plan, a senior mentor will be hard pressed to alter much of what you've prepared since you have addressed meetings, observation templates and critical observation tasks based on the materials you've obtained. If a senior mentor makes any adjustment at all, it is the technique in which the observations are made. Nonetheless, once the senior mentor has made those adjustments, a collection plan is ready to publish within your team.

Other adjustments will have to be made closer to the event because the plan changes. A General Officer may dictate a unit going right instead of left or incorporate 'innovations' such as the exercising headquarters physically relocating simultaneous to a mission. This means that more than one observation technique must be used, requiring someone to maintain equipment such as video and digital cameras ready at all times.

After Action Reviews or AARs are reinforced when the training audience see themselves in relation to what they were trying to accomplish. This places the focal point of the AAR off of your team and on them. If AARs are interim it occurs between missions and therefore must be respectful of the tight schedule placed on the training audience. An informal AAR giving cursory feedback on how they did is normally sufficient. In all cases, the end of exercise requires a formal AAR. This is because the concentration of all exercise participants is directed on what you have done from beginning to end. Despite the fact that many people are thinking of returning home, there are two categories of attendees that will really care what you have to say: those that are Generals and those that hope to be.

To leave a lasting impression, a Take Home Package or THP takes all written matter, photography, screenshots and statistical tables and indexes the points learned during the training event. Coupled with the AAR videotape, this THP represents a crisp, professional effort befitting years of future study. By keeping a copy of your own product, you will see the stark difference between your efforts and all else that follows.