

Hirshorn, Jessica, *Rocket: A Simulation on Intercultural Teamwork: Lessons from the International Space Station Program*

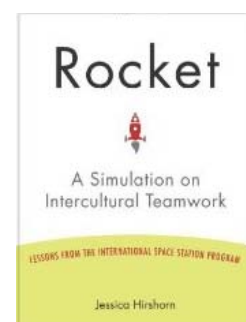
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Reviewed by Dr. George Simons at www.diversophy.com

Rocket is a one to two-hour simulation game for intercultural team training, designed for 13 to 25 participants working in four teams who represent four national or regional space agencies. Space debris has destroyed communications with the space station. It is the task of the four agencies to collaborate in constructing a communications rocket bearing a reassuring message to the astronauts now isolated in the space station, using recyclable materials under the pressure of a time provided by a countdown to launch.

Each team is given culture specific (Russian, Japanese, USA and EU) information about communication, relationship building, work styles and creating agreement. Larger groups may assign observers to observe and comment on the action and the outcomes of the exercise. There is a schedule and plan offered for both a one-hour and a two-hour version of the exercise.

Hirshorn provides excellent, clear objectives and instructions, taking into account the wide range of audiences who may participate in the simulation from public and private sectors, as well as from education and volunteer groups. Materials are provided and each team is given its characteristic set of behavioral rules as well as cards describing each person's role on their team. Name tags identify each team as well as its members. Constraints appear not only as cultural behaviors, but economic and political challenges are seeded into the role play as well.



Debriefing is the essential learning component of such simulations. To debrief, the players share the cultural specific rules including explicit biases about the other groups they are working with as they attempt to operate during the simulation. A rich set of debriefing issues is provided. In addition to a general debriefing question list, the author provides debriefing questions specific to the various audiences for whom objectives were mentioned earlier. One would be concerned that such a scenario using "real" but "broad brush" cultural values and behaviors, unlike the masked or imaginary ones found in *Bafa-Bafa* and other intercultural simulations, would reinforce stereotypes. Therefore the debriefing must be adequate in length and depth to explore these tendencies and confirm the positive nature of various values and behaviors of the different cultures.

While the first half of the book is designed around planning, executing and debriefing the activity, it is the second half that most readers and users of the simulation will find most interesting. It consists of reports of actual interviews conducted with the national groups involved in the International Space Station Program that shed light on the cultural challenges of collaboration. Hirshorn suggests that it can be offered to participants either in preparation for or after the debriefing of the experience.

The inquiry reported here is focused on ethnic culture rather than corporate culture and personality variations and explores the real life cultural areas of difference. These reports of actual experience were used subsequently to design the culture specific roles for the teams during the simulation. It is very much US-centric, no doubt due to the focus of the interviews themselves as well as the dominant role of NASA in the partnership that in fact created the space station. The contrasts drawn in reporting the interviews are largely between the USA (NASA) and the other three participating agencies with little being said about the cultural relationship of the other three to each other. This makes it a bit hard to imagine the simulation being done with a non-US participant or multicultural group or, at least, done effectively within the time frame proposed.

Bottom line: A rich, well thought out and well instructed simulation; highly dependent on very effective preparation and facilitation and, in the end, skillful debriefing of the participants; some feeling of historical *déjà-vu* given the shifting relationship of the international partners in today's economic and political environment.