

Introduction to HEX

Problem Area

Two of the most common challenges faced by organizations of any size are successful communication between individuals and the efficient allocation of resources. The larger and more complex an organization becomes the greater these challenges become. It is imperative, therefore, that organizations focus on these issues and develop effective strategies.

Communication is all pervasive; it is the foundation for essential management tasks such as the delegation of work, allocation of resources, negotiation, conflict resolution, the establishment of goals and dissemination of information. Communication does not always occur naturally or effectively – it often requires prior thought and planning. For example, management needs to consider how well they communicate problems to employees: do they give enough information? do they give too much? is the information useful? is the information timely? Does communication flow only in one direction or can employees discuss issues with management?

The allocation of resources is also a fundamental task within most organizations. It is critical that people, equipment, supplies, and facilities are managed efficiently to achieve the organization's objectives. Employees, volunteers, and managers can all become frustrated and discouraged when they do not have sufficient resources to complete a task. Yet, time after time, organizational resources become unbalanced, one group has plenty while another group is in need. When resource imbalances are severe or are maintained over a long duration there can be serious results, i.e. plants may close, customers may go elsewhere, and people may be laid off.

The HEX Game was created to simulate the challenge of communication within groups and between different organizational levels. In addition, it focuses directly on the dilemma of allocating resources efficiently among and between different groups. The HEX Game was originally developed for UNESCO in 1975 as a tool for developing governments learning to allocate resources. HEX is still used extensively throughout the world in many different settings and with many different groups and organizations where issues of resource allocation and communication are being examined.

Scenario

The game represents several years in the development of a contemporary developing country. The game is played in cycles, each cycle representing one year. During each cycle, local settlements produce one type of good or service, e. g. food, infrastructure, commodities, services, or housing. The purpose of the game is to develop the country and provide food, goods, and services for the people. This is achieved by all three levels working together to provide one unit each of goods and services for each unit of population.

Activities

Each role performs different activities and has different responsibilities. In general, however, each role will begin each cycle (year) by receiving an Event Card. These events represent "real life" happenings and they must be responded to immediately.

Rules

- There should be no interruptions to the simulation sequence (e.g. no coffee breaks, no phone messages, visitors, observers, etc.)
- Everyone must respond to their Event Cards immediately. Remember participants' losses can never exceed their existing resources.
- Local settlements may only exchange goods directly with players in their own region. To exchange items with other regions or on the international market, participants must fill out a Request Form for their Regional Administrator's help.
- Local Settlements may only produce once each cycle.
- The international exchange rate is posted by the game Facilitator and changed according to National Event Cards; this rate is enforced for trades and exchanges at the bank.

Symbols

In the HEX Game there are seven symbols used on the boards. The initial value of these symbols is the same. For example, one unit of food is equal to a single unit of housing. During the game, participants may trade units among themselves for any exchange rate agreed to. When an exchange is international, the value is governed by the International Exchange Rate which is determined and posted by the Facilitator.

The symbols are as follows:

- **Population:** Population is symbolized by Lego pieces. Population represents all components of the nation's population, including all ages, sexes, and origins.
- **Cash:** Cash is symbolized by bingo chips. Cash represents any type of internal currency. Cash is not normally used on the local level; the local level has a barter economy.
- **Commodities:** Commodities are symbolized by small metal clips. Commodities represent items produced for sale in the market place. This would include such items as clothing, radios, bicycles, etc.
- **Food:** Food is symbolized by beans. Food represents any food crop produced for domestic consumption.
- **Housing:** Housing is symbolized by small pasta "wagon wheels." Housing represents all housing forms.
- **Infrastructure:** Infrastructure is symbolized by small rocks. Infrastructure represents the built environment (e.g. water systems, sewage systems, roads, communications) the physical means of production (e.g. factories, mines, harbours), plus energy that is used in all production operations.
- **Services:** Services are symbolized by paper clips. Services represent all non- physical forms of assistance, including health services, pest control, all government aid, education, police and fire protection, and national security forces.