



# SIMAGES

NEWSLETTER FOR THE NORTH AMERICAN SIMULATION AND GAMING ASSOCIATION

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Spring 2002

## Methods, Mentors, and Memories:

Where will you be on November 6-9, 2002

Portland



Ottawa



Minneapolis



San Francisco



Bloomington



Atlanta



**NASAGA 2002  
San Diego  
For Conference Info**

[http://www.nasaga.org/  
conference2002.htm](http://www.nasaga.org/conference2002.htm)

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2002

**Annual Conference Call for Proposals**

**Visit our website at**

[http://www.nasaga.org/conference2002\\_proposals.htm](http://www.nasaga.org/conference2002_proposals.htm)





## INTERVIEWS WITH THREE FIRST-TIMERS TO NASAGA’S ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Sonia Ribaux

### My First Time

I remember with fondness my first NASAGA conference. I was so excited and stimulated by the people I met that I couldn’t sleep at night. This feeling persisted for many conferences. Now, seven years later, I’m able to sleep but only because I’m lulled by the feeling of deep gratitude and joy that my contact with other Nasagans brings me. When I go to the NASAGA conference it’s like going to a family reunion. I love it.

At the last conference in Bloomington, Indiana I met, and later interviewed three first-timers. Les Lauber from Kansas, Eva Reynolds Martony from Arizona and Glen Blair from Toronto. Here’s what they had to say about their first NASAGA conference.

**Eva Reynolds Martony** is an instructional designer and loves to teach “old dogs new tricks”. Currently she works for the State of Arizona.

**Glen Blair** is a Training Design Specialist for Continuous Learning @ TELUS Mobility in Toronto, Canada. He was delighted to be “OOUT AND ABOOUT” in Indiana for the NASAGA conference in 2001. “EH!” 😊

**Les Lauber** works and plays for the Kansas Department of Administration as a Staff Development Specialist. In his hometown of Lawrence, Kansas he haunts the bookshops looking for training resources, and game stores looking for the same thing.

**SR:** *What made you decide to attend the NASAGA Conference?*

**ERM:** I knew my co-worker had a good experience at the conference, plus I was hoping to rejuvenate my creativity and meet some new faces. Sometimes it’s easy to get into a rut and feel “burned out”, but being with others who have similar goals and challenges is essential to preserving sanity.

**GB:** NASAGA is an annual tradition for Continuous Learning @Telus Mobility! Quite a few of my colleagues have attended in years past and have spoken very highly of the experience! I looked forward to an opportunity to share ideas and be a part of a forum that really embraces high-spirited improv, gaming and most of all FUN! NASAGA definitely delivered!

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## The Games Countries Play

Lou Russell



Recently, we held a little e-experiment. Using volunteers, we held a one-month virtual game to answer the following questions:

- When does virtual help collaboration?
- When does virtual help competition?
- What can be done to improve the likelihood of successful virtual communication?

The results of our game are below. I believe that global teams will experience some of the same challenges, especially since the easiest and most cost-effective way to communicate globally is via email. In addition, more and more personal project work is managed strictly through email.

Think of the number of projects you are balancing right now, and how often the hand-offs, status and question/ answers occur without face-to-face communication.

In this article, you will read about:

- How a live simulation was converted to a global, virtual game.
- What happened as the teams competed over a 30 day period
- The game conclusions, from the participants
- Ramifications
- Resources for more research on virtual teams

### Existing live simulation, converted to virtual

The volunteers came from a request by us in our monthly e-zine "Learning Flash", which approximately 3000 people subscribe to. The volunteers were divided into 8 teams each representing a fictitious country. At the beginning, the volunteers were told that the game would run from 3/15 – 4/15, and that we estimated (wild guess) 4 hours of time invested per person. This estimate proved to be fairly accurate (see below). The winning team got gift certificates to Amazon, and everyone would get the experience of learning about virtual teams.

Our virtual game was based on a live simulation titled "The Currency Game", sold by HRDQ ([www.hrdq.com](http://www.hrdq.com)). The problem the teams were asked to solve was this: the countries (teams) would soon be combined, creating a common currency. Each team knew some of how the existing currencies would be exchanged (information cards), and each team had randomly assigned existing coins (coin files). Physical coins and information cards were implemented as physical, coded files. The coin files were coded to ensure that only one team could turn in each of the original coins at the end (no copies). In fact, some coins were copied, and were not counted in the final score, although the team was not eliminated.

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### Upcoming Events

- ♦ N.A.S.A.G.A. Annual Conference - San Diego, CA - November 6-9, 2002



## Interviews with Three First-Timers

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**SR:** *What about you Les?*

**LL:** Thiagi promised me there was a Japanese steakhouse in Bloomington (we share a passion for Japanese Hibachi restaurants). There wasn't, of course, but he didn't tell me that until I arrived.

**SR:** *You're joking, right?*

**LL:** OK, seriously, I came because the conference perfectly matches my professional beliefs that people learn best when they are engaged. I think simulations and games are one of the best ways to do that.

**SR:** *What were your first impressions of the conference?*

**GB:** Warm, friendly and inviting! My first experience @ NASAGA made a lasting impression!

**ERM:** When I walked up to the registration table, I loved the nametag decoration idea. Several people introduced themselves to me right away and I felt very welcome. Plus the conference site is the home of my Alma Mater, so that was a big plus! Except the Union Building seemed smaller to me (maybe I was shorter in college???).

**LL:** My first impression of the conference actually came the day before the conference. Susan Otto called me and said "You don't know us, but we heard you're here for the first time. Come join us!" There could be no warmer welcome than to be sought out and invited to become part of the group before the conference. In fact, this is the only time I can remember this happening to me!

**SR:** *How would you describe the people at the NASAGA conference?*

**GB:** Energetic, experimental, creative and dedicated to their craft! The people of NASAGA have a really down to earth, "roll-up your sleeves and get in there" energy about them.

**ERM:** Wild and crazy. Open to all sorts of new ideas and capable of putting a new twist on "oldies but goodies". Very accepting and willing to share information and materials.

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## About NASAGA

The North American Simulation and Gaming Association (NASAGA) is a growing network of professionals working on the design, implementation, and evaluation of games and simulations to improve learning results in all types of organizations. We believe in the value of learning gained through experience and feel that games and simulations, appropriately designed and conducted are an extremely useful (and underused) tool for creating this rich learning.



# Cool Stuff

## Twisted Proverbs: *An Interactive Exercise*

Sonia Ribaux

Here is a little game that is easy to put together and results in lots of laughs. I thought about using this in a training environment after I read about a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher who had asked her students to complete the second half of well-known proverbs. My favourite one from these youngsters was:  
“The pen is mightier than.... the pig”

### What to do:

Provide the students with a list of 10 proverbs. Give them only the first half of the proverb and ask them to complete the second half with information pertaining to the content of the class or workshop. Ask them to work in pairs or in groups of 3. They should work on any proverb on the list that inspires them and not necessarily in the order they are presented. Typically, they will come up with 4 or 5 from a list of 10.

After approximately 10 minutes, ask the groups to share their proverbs. Usually each group will come up with one or two that are hilarious. For each answer, the facilitator should review the content that it refers to.

### Some Proverbs:

Here are some proverbs that you can use. I've included the whole proverb for your information but you should only give them the first half. By the way, participants will ask what the original proverb is, so be prepared.

- Don't put all your eggs ....(in one basket)
- Early to bed, early to rise ....(makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise)
- Don't throw the baby out ....(with the bath water)
- The devil finds work ....(for idle hands)
- If a thing's worth doing ....(it's worth doing well)
- Sticks and stones may break my bones ....(but names will never hurt me)
- The shoemaker's children always ....( go barefoot)
- You cannot run with the hare ....(and hunt with the hounds)
- He who rides a tiger ....(is afraid to dismount)
- One picture is worth ....(ten thousand words)
- If you pay peanuts ....(you get monkeys)
- Money is the root of all ....(evil)
- He laughs best ....(who laughs last)
- You can take a horse to water ....(but you can't make him drink)
- You cannot make an omelette ....(without breaking eggs)
- From the sweetest wine ....(the tarest vinegar)
- The pen is mightier than ....(the sword)

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## The Games Countries Play

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Teams were assigned randomly, and we attempted to break up people who worked together (they would have the advantage of physical contact. All members had the emails of all other participants as well as the country they were assigned to. We asked people to avoid communicating by phone or live.

The game players used Quovix collaboration software ([www.quovix.com](http://www.quovix.com)). Teams could send messages to other teams, send private messages to its own members, post messages in a general area and get help from either the Quovix support group or the 'customer' – me.

### What happened

63 participants volunteered initially by sending us an email. This number dropped dramatically as we began on 3/15. At kick-off, 31 participants signed in to Quovix to receive their game IDs and passwords from 24 companies in the US, Canada, Brazil and the Virgin Islands. These 31 were assigned to the eight countries. A couple of participants who thought they had missed the game ID sign-up window were added in the first week (after encouragement by me).

I was set up to be able to read any communication that went through the software, as did Margie Brown in my office. I had no way to track teams that called each other on the phone (they were asked to avoid doing that) or emailed each other directly. Of the teams who were using the Quovix software, by midway through the game, there were approximately 13 participants that had sent messages through the software. At the end, approximately 8 – 10 people still active.

By 4/15, some information was exchanged, mostly in the last 48 hours. No coins were ever exchanged. No countries combined their coins into a merger.

The team that won did so largely because it randomly started with the best set of coins. Still, the team that won also logged the most communication, had very strong leadership, and was one of the more actively communicating countries. Truly a global experience, this team had membership from two countries.

The dropout rate from beginning to end was stunning. Roughly 85% of the people who originally signed up to play dropped out before the end. Why so many dropouts? Here are some of the beliefs raised in the Post Project Survey and conference call Post Project Review:

- People are over committed time-wise everywhere.
- People did not want to take the time to learn new software (although the learning was trivial), so the sign-up for IDs created a lot of dropouts.
- At least 3 people were 'down-sized' or changed jobs between the initial offer and the start of the game (and finish).
- Communication was difficult, and reaching consensus with your team was difficult, so some dropped out in frustration. Here is one of the quotes from the Post Project Review: "Just because you don't play doesn't mean you're not involved"

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## Twisted Proverbs: *An Interactive Exercise—continued from Page 5*

All of the above are from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs*.

A note of caution: This activity is funnier if the participants know what the original proverbs are, or at least part of them. If you are working with a culturally diverse group, they may not know many of these. Look for proverbs that fit their culture. If you are interested, I have a list in French and in Spanish. (ribaux@sympatico.ca)

### Some examples

Here are a few examples from an Instructional Design course.

You cannot make an omelette without providing a job aid  
Sticks and stones may break my bones but objectives will never hurt me  
Early to bed, early to rise, talk to your client and analyse!  
He laughs best who plays games in class

### When to use it

- After lunch, as a transition activity as people are slowly finding their way back to class. It's a soft and fun way to get people focused on the content again (and it works even if not everyone is back from lunch yet).
- At the end of a section to review material that was covered earlier. As participants give their answers, the facilitator says a brief word about the content it refers to.
- As a team-building activity. The teams come up with a proverb that becomes their team's proverb
- As a brain stretcher to get people to think outside the box.

### Variations

- Give groups one proverb and ask them to come up with as many different answers as possible.
- Ask groups to create an entirely new proverb, based on the content of the class
- Ask groups to illustrate their proverb. Use this as the team's flag.
- Use limericks or Haiku instead of proverbs.

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## Interviews with Three First-Timers

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**LL:** Honestly, this is the most pleasant conference I've ever attended. You know how you learn what's *really* going on during breaks? I picked up three themes by listening to other people between sessions. One, let's learn from each other about what we're doing that works. Two, if there's anything I know that you can use, let's talk it through. And three, let's enjoy ourselves!

**SR:** *What was the thing you loved the most about the conference?*

**ERM:** The size of the sessions, the topics, and the diversity of the attendees' backgrounds.

**GB:** The opportunity to work and especially play with folks that share my penchant for gaming in the classroom! Not to mention the silky vocal stylings of Kat Koppett in her never to be repeated performance of "The Rose." (Despite my horrid piano accompaniment - don't ever change Kat!)

**LL:** I kept a pretty specific journal about what I was doing throughout the conference. In four days, I played more than 85 games! I had played about half of those before but what amazed me was the level of new insights I gained from every one of them. I didn't play a single game where I didn't learn something new. Now *that's* cool! On a personal level, the people at the NASAGA conference have quickly become friends. And that, as the commercial says, is priceless.

**SR:** Any Final words?

**GB:** NASAGA ROCKS!

*Sonia Ribaux is a learning consultant and teaches Gaming & Simulation at Concordia University. She lives and plays in Montreal.*

### ATTENTION ANYONE INTERESTED IN eLEARNING

The NASAGA Board of Director's e-learning committee is looking for your ideas for free, quarterly e-workshops. Is there a topic that you would like to see covered? Please let us know!

Email  
dave.matte@telus.com or  
joshua@industriallogic.com

**Have questions about your  
membership, need to renew, or need  
more information?**

Email to [info@nasaga.org](mailto:info@nasaga.org),  
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**Indianapolis, IN 46278**

## The Games Countries Play

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The high dropout rate speaks to the difficulty of virtual communication. It is painless to quit a virtual experience; no one knows where you are. In a face-to-face project, you may still run into people in the halls, but others are easily avoided via email.

### Game Conclusions

Here are some of the numeric results of the Post Project Survey. 16 people took the survey, so at least 3 of the people doing the survey had not ever signed in to the software. Note that the scale ranges from 1 (low) to 5 (high) for all except the first question, which is hours:

<b>Virtual Game PPR Survey Results</b>	<b>Average</b>
How much time did you spend on the virtual game?	2.50
How important was collaborating to you?	4.07
How important was collaborating to your team?	2.73
Amount of time your team spend collaborating:	2.47
How much success did your team have collaborating?	2.43
How important was competition to you?	3.07
How important was competition to your team?	2.57
Amount of time your team spend competition:	2.15
How much success did your team have competition?	1.86
Usefulness of QUOVIX software to your team's strategy	2.92
Ease of use	3.29
Help / support	3.09
How much of your team participated on a regular basis?	2.71
How much clarity was there about the roles of your team (leader, player, etc)?	1.86

## SIMAGES 2002

PLEASE E-MAIL YOUR IDEAS, ARTICLES,  
AND TIPS TO:

[rhollands@radford.edu](mailto:rhollands@radford.edu)

We had 9 people attend the Post Project Review conference call. The most interesting side effect was how excited people were to hear the voices and 'meet' the people they had become close to on their teams. Below you will find some direct quotes. Here are some of the conclusions from the call and the comments on the survey:

- The purpose of the original Currency game, from a learning standpoint, is to help people think through their own biases toward competition and collaboration. Both are necessary and can be destructive if taken to an extreme. As one participant shared, "competition sometimes blinds people on the real objectives... collaboration was needed in order to achieve the final results." However, "I think we may have missed some trading opportunities because we wanted to make decisions together. " Whether face-to-face or global /virtual projects require both collaboration and competition.
- For virtual teams to be productive, time must be set-aside in the beginning to create clear role definitions, clear ground rules, and processes for decision making. The virtual environment demands more clarity and more detailed process. Most participants felt that connecting together in person, video-conferencing or minimally on the phone at the start would have allowed them to accelerate this process.
- A tip sheet (like the lessons learned of this experiment) would also be useful prerequisite material for anyone participating in a virtual project.

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## The Games Countries Play

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- The flexibility of playing when you want was also a downfall for participation. There would be benefit to establishing specific milestones or scheduling communication at specific times. Time has a way of slipping away:

“Our leader sent out a message with what he received. One member sent a message about what score we had. I sent a message about how the team wanted to work and that we shouldn't do anything until we set team rules. The leader never responded, the 4th person never participated and by the time the remaining two started to have a message thread the game was over.”

- The leadership role is critical, and works best if only one person is playing the role. One leader, who received the initial files told me “I saw that the rest of the team had assumed I was going to be leader because I had the files, so I decided to step up to that role.” Other people in the same situation continued to ask people how to progress, uncomfortable with falling into the leadership role. For virtual teams to work, the leadership must be clear.
- Many felt the pressure to leave the game and do ‘real work’:
- As one player shared with me “it is also important to have fun, take the time to look around once in awhile,” but that it an increasing challenge in today’s workplace. Everyone who played until the end felt it was well worth his or her investment. Time to learn is a rare commodity today.

You can build virtual community and friends. The excitement and friendship was evident as people connected by voice for the first time on the conference call at the end. As one participant said: ” You can get to know people on the web.”

This quote from our Post Project Review summarizes the experience, both the dark and light side; the connection of working with virtual friends, but also the sense of being all alone in the world:

“It was very frustrating to have so few teams participating. I felt that the last day was a lot of fun and I wish we could have had more interactions like that. I'm not sure how much of that was a function of our particular group of teams and how much was a lack of clarity about how and what to do to get things moving. I have a friend who was on another team and he felt that his team had a leader but no real 'mission' and that bogged things down. Our team was very laid back and didn't establish a leader and seemed to work reasonably well together, although I don't have any idea how our interaction compared to other teams in term of quality or quantity. Further, I'm not sure how effective we would have been if every day were like the last day. It was interesting that I assumed that two other teams' players were posting as "themselves" and not as a representative of a group. In fact I commented several times to our group that I thought that we might be the only real 'team' left. When one posted her thank-you note to her team I was really surprised.”

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## The Games Countries Play

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### Ramifications

- Many businesses are converting their entire training strategy to web-based instruction, most asynchronous (taken at any time, by yourself). Assuming that the same pressures of 'real work', new software to learn, and lack of focus exist, it is evident that learning will be difficult in this situation. In addition, removing the social aspect is devastating to most learning. Synchronous e-learning, which involves a scheduled, live instructor via a web cast, adds more interaction and requires holding time, but the experience occurs just one click away from other work on your machine.
- The overriding message of the business world today is to work faster. Learning can only occur when there is time to reflect.
- Project work managed virtually shares energy, focus and disk space with your entire inbox. It is very easy to react too quickly to email messages, or respond without the focus or thought process the issue deserves. It is also easy to forget that sometimes it takes longer, but is much more effective to just pick up the phone, or walk down the hall.
- Virtual teams need more structure. Clear roles and clear decision making processes must be agreed to up front, and stuck to. Think ahead of time what will happen if people break any of the team norms.
- Virtual teams need a strong leader who will enforce and encourage the rules, norms and create additional structure when needed.
- Use communication with more channels than email occasionally, to connect as people (teleconference, phone calls, live visits).
- Just like real projects, unclear scope and requirements are the killer, and virtual communication seems to exacerbate this problem:

"It's incredibly difficult to make decisions when the requirements aren't clear. We guessed a lot on areas of information that we didn't have."

- Communication must be short, precise and reread before you hit send. It should also be no surprise when someone says they don't remember reading that. As one participant noted, "continuous instruction is vital to good results".

If you would like to play our next round, please contact me at [lou@russellmartin.com](mailto:lou@russellmartin.com).

### Resources

For additional thoughts about virtual teams, check out:

[www.bionicteam.com](http://www.bionicteam.com) how to build collaborative, virtual teams

[www.virtualteams.com](http://www.virtualteams.com) a [website dedicated to virtual teams](#)

[www.quovix.com](http://www.quovix.com) [collaboration environment](#)

[www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol3/issue4/jarvenpaa.html](http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol3/issue4/jarvenpaa.html) [communication and trust in global teams](#)

[www.managementhelp.org/grp\\_skill/virtual/virtual.htm](http://www.managementhelp.org/grp_skill/virtual/virtual.htm) [virtual teams](#)

[www.managementscience.org/research/ab0009.asp](http://www.managementscience.org/research/ab0009.asp) [virtual teams through communities of practice](#)

[www.workteams.unt.edu/reports/Cantu.html](http://www.workteams.unt.edu/reports/Cantu.html) [how the computer has created virtual teams](#)