

WHY SIMULATIONS SHOULD BE A CRITICAL PART OF YOUR NEXT TRAINING PROGRAM

To acquire behavior, the student must engage in behavior.

B. F. Skinner



Discovery Learning Inc.

Often the most interesting take-away shared by participants at the conclusion of a business simulation is that the key lessons they learned during the experience are things that they already knew. A well-executed business simulation is designed to create “aha” moments where concepts become behavior changes.



So if participants already have the knowledge they need, why aren't they acting on it? If they were, it's doubtful their organizations would continue investing time and money in training and development. Why waste valuable resources teaching people what they already know? There are a number of reasons that experiential learning through the use of simulations helps to address the knowledge/performance gap and provides the best ROI for your training dollars, as well as the time invested by your leaders.

1 What We Know Doesn't Always Translate into What We Do

How many times have you reacted to a situation only to kick yourself around the block a couple of times for your inappropriate behavior? I know the appropriate response but have trouble translating that knowledge into action in the moment. A key reason that simulations result in learning that produces real behavior change may stem from the theories of learning guru, Chris Argyris. He suggests that what we know (our espoused theories) does not always translate into what we do (our theories-in-use). This is especially true when situations are ambiguous, stressful or emotionally charged, as they often are in today's fast-paced, high-stakes business environment.

Simulated learning can help leaders identify and understand this gap between what they say and what they do; especially under pressure. A good simulation moves the learning from the head to the gut and that's when behavior starts to change. Leaders learn to be more mindful of the gaps between their intentions and their actions. This only happens through analysis of real events.

2 Realtime Feedback About Our Behavior



We all know that our behavior affects our relationships with others. Common sense and research both indicate that the ability to build and maintain good relationships is critical to leadership effectiveness. As a result, this is often where our greatest learning and development challenges and opportunities can be found - in the quality of our relationships.

Effective leaders know this. A study conducted by Discovery Learning revealed that when 3,000 mid-level managers participating in a leadership development program at either the Center for Creative Leadership or Discovery Learning were asked to set personal development goals, 37% selected goals related to being a better manager or administrator, while 67% selected goals related to building better relationships.

Effective leaders realize that when actions are taken without considering the people affected, we often weaken our relationship with the very people on whom we must depend to accomplish our objective. This is common sense. Yet under pressure, we don't always act on what we know - and often we are blind to this discrepancy.

Good simulations offer immediate opportunities for feedback and reflection in a way that traditional classroom or online training can't. This feedback provides immediate insights into our behavior and the impact it has on those with whom we work and depend upon for outcomes.

3 Shorten the “Learning Horizon”



Simulations can bridge the gap between what we know and what we do by allowing us to collapse the “learning horizon.” The learning horizon, as described by Peter Senge, is the time required to engage in behavior and then see and understand the consequences of our actions and behaviors. When we are dealing with complex problems in an environment with a lot of noise the learning horizon may be so long that connection between behavior and consequence can be blurred if not lost.

Simulations compress the learning horizon and provide opportunities for reflection on current behaviors and experimentation with new ones, in a compact, safe and non-judgmental environment. During a simulation, leaders can step outside their comfort zone, try on new ideas and behaviors, and make mistakes – all without risk to careers or the organization.

4 Integrated Learning



Evidence for the power of learning through hands on experience can be found in Bloom’s theory of “overlapping domains.” This includes the Cognitive domain, which encompasses our intellectual capability and ability to think, i.e. our Knowledge; the Affective domain, which includes our feelings and emotions, i.e. our Attitude; and the Psychomotor domain, which includes our ability to physically perform what we’ve been taught, i.e. our Skills.

Bloom suggests that to be effective, especially in the work setting where development efforts are intended to create behavior change, the learning experience must call on all three domains. First published in 1956, Bloom’s theories are

still widely used today in the development of effective training and development interventions, particularly in simulations, which can include all three domains.

In a simulation, head, heart and hands are challenged. The best simulations engage and challenge the whole person just as real work does..

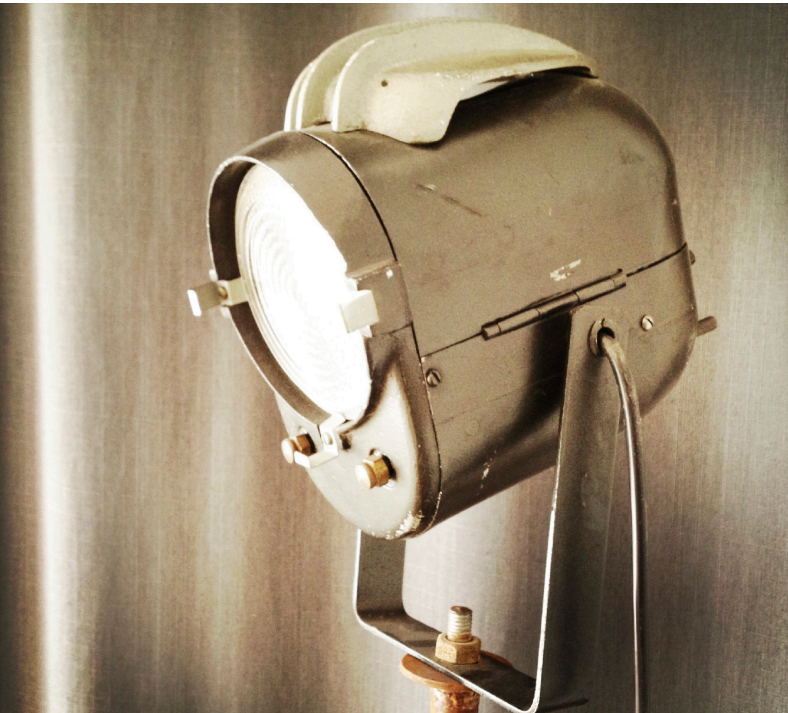
5 Adults are Problem Solvers

People learn the deepest lessons of leadership when they're having fun - or at least experiencing some kind of emotion, even if it's frustration. According to Malcolm Knowles, the grandfather of adult learning, adults learn best when they can apply their past skill and experience. Adult learners are first and foremost problem solvers. To really feed that desire, one has to provide a structured forum for developing the most important foundation of leadership - experience. Knowles identified four essential factors for effective learning with adults:

- ▶ *Adults need to know why they are being asked to learn something*
- ▶ *Adults need to learn by doing*
- ▶ *Adults approach learning as problem solving*
- ▶ *Adults learn best when the topic is of immediate value.*

A well designed and executed simulation directly addresses all four of these effective learning factors. In short, simulations are arguably the most effective medium for adult learning.

6 An Engaging Simulation Reflects Truths About Organizational Culture



A well design simulation can be the most effective intervention when learning objectives include a change in awareness and a change in behavior. Common examples of these types of changes in the workplace include:

- ▶ *Enhancing self-awareness of leaders*
- ▶ *Helping under performing teams*
- ▶ *Improving a group's communication processes and ability to handle constructive conflict*
- ▶ *Preparing a department to undergo significant change*
- ▶ *Assisting in rethinking outdated work processes.*

Simulations work in these scenarios because they can draw out behaviors and relationship dynamics that exist in the workplace that do not manifest in one-on-one coaching. This takes traditional training one step further by actually having the participant transfer knowledge into action in an environment that more accurately represents their workplace.



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