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Simulation Studios Free eBook Series

Business Simulations Are a Powerful Tool for Leadership Development But Proceed With Caution



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As you know, I create business simulations that are used within corporate training and for strategic alignment, execution, and acceleration. But mostly, these business training simulations are used in the leadership-development programs within large US based companies. Even though business simulations in leadership development are some of the most powerful development tools available, I just might successfully talk you out of using these tools. The focus of this article is to ensure you are successful as you explore using these wonderful teaching tools within leadership development. Let's dive in....

If you choose to use a business simulation within leadership development, it is important to use them effectively. The key phrase here is "effectively". Far too much of my work time is often focused on counseling and repairing new clients who have unsuccessfully attempted utilizing business simulations within corporate training. In most cases, the client lost "control" of the solution and the *business training simulation* wound up turning into a huge monster of a solution the client could no longer manage. In most cases, the solution no never actually aligned with the overall training goals and objectives. Worst of all, the firm they partnered with did their best to circumvent the training group and work with executive sponsors directly (we call this consultant trolling). In many cases, I'm ashamed to say, that this is usually caused by firms within my own industry going "rogue". In defense of these firms, they are not entirely at fault. As we all know, relationships take two (or more). In many cases, the projects got out of control due to a lack of clear definition, clear goals, and clear focus. It can also have a bit of inability on the buyer's part to say no.



Research by John Kenworthy and Annie Wong suggest that simulations and games are significantly more effective than traditional leadership develop. However, the key to effectively implementing these instruments is challenging, complex, and can quickly become expensive. Due to financial requirements, *leadership development simulations* have most often been used within large companies with substantial budgets. The good news is that these valuable tools are far more accessible than even a few years ago. Development costs have significantly dropped and development tools, methods, and platforms are far more accessible and easier to use. This is all fantastic news for smaller companies. Business simulations are far more accessible for companies of most any size. But be aware: As I mentioned prior, the key to utilizing business simulations within leadership development is in careful planning and implementation.

Top Five Tips to Effectively Utilize A Business Simulation Within Leadership Development Training Programs



1. Go Small

I cannot stress this enough. Start small. In most cases a large business simulation is unfocused and not needed. In general, *business simulations for leadership development* should be the minority percentage of your overall budget and training time. Experiment with something that is ready to go or requires minimal tailoring. This way, you have the option to expand the solution after you've gained additional experience and have learned where expansion is truly needed. It is important to distinguish that small also equates to a highly focused simulation program (see next tip). In my vast experience, I have yet to see a justified reason for a leadership development simulation that really requires multiple facilitators over multiple days. If it requires multiple facilitators over multiple days, it is most likely far too large. But hey, if you have budget to blow... go for it :^D.

2. Stay Very Focus

Keeping your business training simulation focused goes hand-in-hand with keeping your solution small. I often receive calls from leadership development directors with an extremely extensive list of requirements needed from the *leadership development business simulation*. I highly recommend you close your door, put on headphones with some relaxing music, and sit down and focus on 80% of the needs. From there write down the achievable goals and objectives of your leadership-development program. An effective business training simulation needs to align very closely with the program's learning objectives. Don't stray! Staying focused will enable your leadership development program participants to better align with the training goals and allow them to apply the content more effectively in their day-to-day work. Do your best to say no and avoid solution expansion or scope creep.

3. Review Multiple Modes

When people imagine business simulations for leadership development, they imagine amazing digital tools. I won't deny that digital solutions are exciting and certainly sizzle. In some cases, this is important (did you just say "buy-in"?). In reality, leadership development directors shouldn't discount the effectiveness and simplicity of paper-based solutions. In my experience, some digital business simulations actually get in the way of effective learning. Leadership development participants can get distracted by the sizzle of the digital solution. The result is losing applicability of the leadership development content and focus.

4. Be The Boss

In most cases, leadership development directors contract an outside companies that specializes in *business simulations*. Business simulations for leadership development are complicated learning instruments. These tools require specialized skills and take time to create. But please continue to remember: You are the boss! I'm ashamed to say there is quite a bit of arrogance within the business simulation industry (much of it unjustified, in my opinion). When you work with a business simulation provider, don't get influenced to move outside your comfort zone. Remember that these companies are working for you and you are the boss. Some training leaders might say, "I want to hire a company that just takes care of it." I have a great understanding of this position. No matter which company you hire, you should always feel you are in the know and are always in charge. They might drive the *leadership development business simulation*, but you are the boss and you own the project. Throughout the project, the business simulation solution should always fit your needs, not the other way around.

5. Choose a Provider You Are Comfortable Working With (aka: Don't always go name brand)

I know this is common sense, but it is surprising to me how often I have to repair business simulation solutions gone rogue because a provider was chosen because "They are well known" but in the end, the client felt a little bullied by. In most every case, this is because business training simulations are complicated and its easy to simply say, "I'll go with it since they know best." Listen to your instinct and choose a provider you are comfortable working with. Also ensure who your facilitators will be (you want consistency!) and who your direct contact will be. You need to be 100% comfortable asking anything and everything. It is also important to feel a strong sense of partnership and collaboration. You should feel confident that your provider has your best interests at all times and no matter the case.



Leadership Development Business Simulations are fantastic tools for applying your leadership development content. Thankfully, these tools are far more approachable than ever. This being said, it is critical that the solution remains manageable and align with the goals of your leadership development program. You should always feel comfortable to say "no" in order to remain in scope. No matter the case, you should always feel in control and comfortable with the solution. The *leadership development simulation* is only a portion of your entire leadership development program. The solution should not act as the teacher but as a support tool. Make the effort to ensure you're always the boss and that you are comfortable with your provider(s). Please don't forget to start small and grow as needed and as you go. Utilizing these accessible tips will help set you up for utilizing a *business simulation within a leadership development program*.



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