

Leading Organisational Change: Teaching and Learning with Simulation Games

Foreword by Dr Dorottya Sallai

What are simulations games?

Teaching management and business skills through digital simulation games equips students with practical experience and prepares them for the world of work better than any other in-class activity. Generation Z students demand innovation and digitalisation not only in terms of how the content is delivered but also in how it is designed and integrated into the curriculum.

The games allow students to:

- Practice the theories they learned in their lectures by bridging the gap between theory and practice.
- Implement their knowledge in real-life business settings.
- Students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills by analysing complex situations, evaluating relationship networks, and making decisions based on real-time feedback.

Individual vs. team games

Games can be played individually and in teams and allow 'learning by doing'. When played in teams, students practice negotiating their next steps, finding solutions, and sharing their ideas.

This experiential learning technique enhances the understanding of abstract theories and prepares students for the complexities of the professional world. Below are two accounts of the use of simulation games by students in 2022-23 MG4B7 Leading

Organisational Change course.

Read about the real classroom experience from two of our students.

Settling Change Management Theory Through Simulation: A Personal Account

By Olimpia Calin, MISDI Student

Change management is a crucial component of any modern organisation that seeks to develop and remain competitive in today's fast-changing business environment. To effectively manage change projects, organisations must understand what approaches to pursue to include processes, people, and technology.

Throughout the change management module, I got the chance to learn numerous valuable change management theories and apply them to various case studies. However, conducting 'change projects' in easy-to-control environments cannot compare with how these processes would evolve in a real-life context.

Therefore, the change management simulation has been a great experience to get a better glimpse of how change projects can be influenced by or affect the people within the organisation.

I learned how to apply the theory and got to see how my decisions would alter the course of the change project.

How the game dynamics work

Initially, I participated in three simulation games individually. The first one proved to be quite challenging. I was so scared of not making a mistake that I did not even dare to make a first decision until I clearly understood what each one meant or would lead to.

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I started by understanding who the stakeholders were and the network of relationships extended between them. This is a crucial step in change projects since you need to know

who will support you, as a change manager, and who will resist you.

After better understanding the game's dynamics, I took the courage to submit my first decision into the portal. As it went well, I became more confident in my choices.

The first mistake I made brought the people's confidence down. I did not like that. I wanted people to be confident in what I was doing and, thus, be more acceptant of my project.

Without noticing, I became hooked on the game and finalised all three simulations in one go.

Overall experience

The individual sessions were beneficial in preparing me for the group simulation game. It was a lovely experience that proved much more efficient than the individual one. Having so many ideas and opinions on how to proceed with our scenario or the next decision was incredibly beneficial to our decision-making process. Debating on our experiences after the simulation's end, we all agreed that the group session was a great boost for our theory knowledge.

While discussing with my teammates, I realised I was unconsciously applying the theory learned.

Without having to look all the time at what was written in the lecture or my notes, I knew what decision to take and when.

This does not mean that in real-life, I can introduce a change project without clearly following the frameworks learned, but that the simulation game made me understand that I fixated on the theory learned throughout the module in a much more effective manner.

Reflections on Learning with Simulations Games

By Camila Aguirre Ibáñez, MISDI Student

During the course, we were asked to do a simulation during the term to put into practice some of the knowledge acquired in lectures and seminars.

Even though some students seemed nervous about it because it was a different kind of activity compared to essays, reports, and exams, I did feel excitement among my classmates.

As we moved forward to the next simulation scenarios, the enthusiasm did not fade (or at least that was what I felt), nor even in the final scenario that was done in groups. You could feel that enthusiasm during the conversations we had in which we discussed the strategies we used to get people on board, what did not work, and what was the “secret formula” for success.

Interestingly, we started to realise the different approaches, preconceptions, and beliefs people had during the decision-making process of each scenario. While some students took an approach more conversational, others chose the most extreme levers like restructuring the organisation or changing the incentive system.

This is one of the most valuable learnings that I took from these simulations (and probably very difficult to get with just theory).

It is paramount to consider diverse approaches, preconceptions, and beliefs people hold when leading a change in an organisation.

In practice, in working life, people will have a perspective different from us, will understand the world differently and will choose different pathways for the same objective. It is paramount to have that in mind when leading a change in an organisation.

For me, using these types of tools that let students put in practice and learn from practice is essential to acquire a different kind of knowledge that is beyond the scope of lectures, seminars, and readings.

Furthermore, it is extremely useful as real working life is about:

- making real decisions,
- pulling some levers,
- taking care of our personal credibility.

Probably, this is even more important nowadays, when different generative AI tools are emerging and threatening traditional education.

Using simulations like the one we used in the course could be a way to address that problem by providing students with another way to learn (and measure that learning).

Individual learning vs. collective learning

Finally, the third reflection is about individual learning and collective learning. While we were asked to do it individually in some scenarios, the final one was in a group. That dynamic allowed us to acquire different types of lessons.

- On the one hand, individual exercises triggered a willingness to understand how the simulation works, compare the effect of the different levers available and, even more important, the strategy each of us chose to manage the change.
- On the other hand, group exercises allowed us to have a collective learning process by discussing different strategies, listening to the experiences of other students, and opening to take new, improved, and leveraged strategies.

Leading Organisational Change: Simulation Game Student Podcast

In addition to the above blog, students from the MG317 Leading Organisational Change course produced a podcast to provide a deep dive into their experiences of using digital simulation games during their studies. Created by Samuel Zuyderhoff, Juliana Klek and Konrad Dabrowski, final year undergraduate students who completed the undergraduate equivalent of the Leading Organisational Change course, can be found here:

[MG317 Simulation Game Podcast](#)

Read Dr Sallai's full blog on how [simulation games can level up management education and power student success](#).
