



Management Simulations

by Dr. Mark Frein, Managing Director - The Refinery Leadership Partners Inc.

Play and learning go hand and hand. Competing in games or sports, interacting with friends and enemies, and just playing to have fun were simple activities that defined childhood with experience and emotions that enabled us to learn, develop, and change.

As adults in organizations, we often forget that learning can be fun given that so many of our formal learning experiences do not engage us. The Refinery designs management and leadership simulations that aim to re-awaken a sense of serious play in learners. We design our learning so that participants experience firsthand, in semi-realistic circumstances, the ongoing structural, emotional, and functional challenges that they face in organizations. Simulations shake things up, and when you shake things up you get a good look at all the loose bits that land on the ground.

How we build simulations:

We consider simulation design a delicate craft; one that demands artistry, creativity, and a knack for designing activities and games. We have considerable experience and tremendous passion for creating unique experiences for clients of all possible sizes and all possible industries.

The art of simulation design stems from the ability to create an experience which models actual challenges faced on the job but in a lower risk environment. The ideal simulation creates some degree of stress on the participants such that they have the opportunity to explore real behaviours while simultaneously engaging participants in an active and fun learning experience. Successful simulations serve as plentiful behavioural data for thought-provoking discussions.

“The art of simulation design is a delicate craft.”



At The Refinery, our simulation offer is a custom design offer. Our method for designing a simulation begins with a conversation with our client – what are the typical business and leadership challenges faced by the client? What constraints exist? What is the state of the industry? We want to understand and appreciate the business environment and the performance drivers of the business. Without such an understanding, simulations tend to be generic and much less practical for clients. From a deep appreciation of the client reality, we create the simulation to focus on these challenges and to model them in an interactive format.

What will a simulation accomplish?

The learning impact of a simulation is dependent not only on the quality of the simulation or activity, but on the ability of the facilitation team to frame the activity to participants and lead a reflective debrief of the impact. The simulation activity itself is typically “sandwiched” between discussion of the purpose of the activity before the activity starts, and a facilitated discussion after the activity to draw lessons learned. Over the years, we’ve led countless simulations, and every time we witness developing leaders make the kind of resounding connection between theory and personal behaviour that inspires true transformation.

