



Using failure to succeed faster

Lia DiBello Ph.D.; Patricia Seemann M.D. and David Lehmann Ph.D.

Posted on LinkedIn June 11 2015

What if your organization made the best decisions all the time? Who could beat you? That's a nice aspiration. But how do you adapt decision-making patterns and velocity in your organization to a competitive environment that is increasingly marked by turbulence and ambiguity?

Decisions don't change until thinking does. For thinking to change, executives, managers and others need to develop new ways of looking at their business and operating environment, learn to pay attention to new kinds of signals, develop and apply new mental models to what they are seeing and react accordingly.

Unfortunately the most effective way for people to change their thinking is by failing, preferably spectacularly – hardly an option in a fast paced, chaotic, and disruptive competitive environment.

Many tools are used to develop “sandbox” alternative futures including scenario learning, simulations, virtual worlds, role plays and war gaming. Each tool offers a safe haven in which to develop new ideas, try out new practices, fail safely, and learn fast.

These tools are effective – to a point. But most of them don’t really feel “real”. Instead they feel a bit contrived, not quite on point, scripted (because they are). So while they give a momentary space in which to try to live the future, participants usually leave with an uncomfortable sense that although this might have improved their fit-for-future somewhat, it has not really moved the needle on the problem.

Simulations, to be “real”, must replicate the unexpectedness, the speed, and the force of events that hit organizations today. This is what kicks loose old mental models, unleashes creativity and imagination, and enables learning faster than the competition. This results in higher agility in thought, better decisions and faster actions, and a sense of confidence that the firm is better able to deal with whatever gets thrown at it.

WTRI has developed “reality-analogous” simulations called Strategic Rehearsals. They have been used in major global firms from the C-suite all the way to the shop floor. The success of the methodology is founded on the following factors:

1. The expertise of successful CEOs, economists, and others, to build highly sophisticated business models tailored to the “realities” of even the most complex businesses.
2. Neuroscientists that understand the mechanisms by which humans can be spurred into changing their minds and finding solutions to problems for which there is no blueprint.
3. Software that can create within minutes new events that can be introduced into the “simulation”. This is profoundly different from the scripted plays that teams are often led (or pushed) through. Usually simulations and the like rely on elaborate scripts which can take weeks or months to develop. With this software no one in the room (not even the facilitators) knows what happens next. As a result, these simulations are realistic and highly varied events can be introduced at pretty much any cadence.
4. Live tracking. Other software allows the tracking and evaluation of every decision and behavior. Charts are automatically generated as the events unfold. The team always knows how they are doing.

Our C-suite clients credit our simulation work with their teams for significantly improving performance, finding their way out of gridlock and significantly increasing marketplace and financial performance. They also point to higher agility in thought and decisions in their teams following the simulations, in other words the acquired cognitive agility carries over to day to day work.



