

## **Using Simulations; Is it right for your client's objectives? By Atieno Fisher, MA, CP**

This article is for anyone who wants to improve their training and consulting by using live simulations. It will not prepare you to expertly facilitate every type of simulation, but, through descriptions and case examples, it will give you a sense of the scope of what is possible and perhaps some ideas for small ways to take a fresh approach in situations where simulation could optimize learning. What is simulation and when is it an appropriate choice? What are the advantages and pitfalls? What are the types of simulations? Finally, how does one go about creating and using them?

### **Criteria for Applicability**

Using simulations is essentially giving your clients or personnel a safe laboratory to experiment with creating new roles to improve individual performance and group functioning, and, with sophisticated implementation, even to envision and execute entirely new collective and individual futures. Simulations prepare learners to perform adequately in situations requiring decision-making and spontaneous responses. Learning objectives well-suited to simulation methodologies are those that are difficult to develop through reading or to test with paper and pen methods. Deciding whether simulation is an ideal method depends on knowing what needs to be learned – knowledge or skills?

Skills, behaviors, perspectives and attitudes are almost always virtually unchanged simply by adding new information, unless that information is in the form of a story. When you hear a story, as when you watch a play or movie, you learn by watching, onstage or in your mind's eye, and identifying with someone else as they struggle in the theater of life. When you enter a simulation, you step onto that stage.

### **Advantages of Learning through Simulations**

At a deeper level than the conscious knowledge “this is just pretend,” our bodies and minds do not make a distinction between the theater of real life and the theater of simulated real life. This is why the much-vaunted phrase “experiential learning” is more than a passing fad (although to be effective, it must be more than “experiential” – exercises for exercises' sake – there must also be something significant there to learn!) Consultant and Psychodrama trainer Barry Spodak conceptualizes this type of learning as building capacity or enhancing emotional intelligence through sensitive adjustments in the simulated situation.

I've come to believe that what we are doing at the most fundamental level is enhancing trainees' capacity for emotional intelligence in critical situations. The simulation should always be customized to meet each participant at the edge of their intellectual and emotional competency. The customization needs to be evaluated and adjusted from moment to moment in order to help the student break out of ingrained default behaviors.

Breaking out of default behaviors requires some experimentation and risk. In life, though, mistakes may have unpleasant consequences. Simulation cultivates the confidence of trial-and-error learning without those consequences; it “reality-tests” responses.

Michael Rohd, who uses experiential learning with community groups to facilitate dialogue and train activists (see his excellent book, *Hope is Vital*), once had a group of college students, who wanted to establish a scholarship to diversify their campus’ ethnic mix, do a reality-test of their strategies by building a “machine” that represented the administration. Each part of the machine, played by a student, had a line and motion characteristic of the administration, which it would deliver when the students approached with their ideas and requests.

The students would fall back, regroup, and approach again, with a different tactic or solution, until they perfected the responses that the machine could not repel. They also gleaned insights about the motives of the administration from playing the roles in the machine. Later, in the theater of real life, the diversity fund was established.

Expanding role repertoire for its own sake is not the point of action methods like simulation. The aim is always to increase the capacity for more adequate functioning in the world. For example, Peter Gardiner Harding’s company, Focus Management Group, does evaluation work with investigative and forensic accountants who do quantification on compliance.

They need to know how to crunch numbers, but also how to get information from people, and how to present themselves in court. So we create simulations that are designed to test them in their competencies in a bunch of areas.

Another advantage of simulation is that it makes it possible to discuss sensitive topics. Someone at a government agency that trains local leaders in building civil society told me that ethics comes up in every simulation in her workshops, as people debate the possibility of behaving corruptly or unethically. “Those topics are not easy to discuss, but, through simulation, cultural differences are allowed to be broached in a non-threatening environment.” As Oscar Wilde once wrote, “Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth.”

### **Cautions**

Knowing how this principle works should make you careful about how you use it. Make sure you are prepared to contain and help process whatever emotions emerge, as simulations with emotional content tend to bring unresolved issues to the surface. Most simulations, if they are structured to promote mastery in future performance, do

not run this risk. Those structured to bring resolution to past events, and thereby “unlearn” maladaptive roles, are more likely to.<sup>1</sup>

I learned this the hard way, with actual consequences. A man in one of my playback theater workshops, in which participants performed others’ important personal stories, played a role for someone else’s story in which he received news by telephone of the death of a relative. In his own real life, this man had been on the phone with his family while they were being murdered. He was, naturally, profoundly disturbed by being in the role and told me he could not sleep at all that night. I myself have also been unpleasantly triggered, while playing the role of a representative of a failed aid agency, as my angry classmates, in the role of betrayed villagers, shouted insults at me.

In addition to being as aware as possible of participants’ experiences, the best way to avoid bringing up issues that cannot be processed in the setting is to let participants know that they can excuse themselves if they see that a situation might restimulate them. Another good rule of thumb is to treat simulations as the real experiences they are. If a situation would be stressful as a real experience, provide the same kind of support you would provide in real life. Marsha Stein, who trains police to deal appropriately with the mentally ill, says

If a role play is intense and the person doesn’t have a chance to debrief, it’s not fair. It can add to their fight-flight arousal. You need to let them come down from that or you’re just adding to their trauma from the work. You can’t put someone in a real life situation and then act as if you haven’t. Many people warm up strongly to roles. You can never do a half job here. You need to attend to the group sociometrically as well and see if there have been changes [in group dynamics] as a result of someone taking a role. That can have negative impacts on individuals and the group.

Simulation should be used responsibly. As Marsha puts it, “You can’t just dump an experience and then leave.”

Also, allow participants to opt in or out. Set norms about being able to move around and leave. As Peter Gardiner-Harding of Focus Management Group says it; “No one

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Gardiner-Harding of Focus Management Group gave me a good example of this retrospective form. “We did a show with a young troupe called Up With People that was visiting Toronto. I was playing in a story for a big footbally Midwesterner who carried himself with great assurance. He told the story of how his close friend had assaulted his sister, but the real story was that he had rejected his sister because he couldn’t believe his friend would do that. God, when I think about this story I start to cry sometimes, I get so emotional. He missed her terribly, but he didn’t have the capacity to approach her. She was now living in another state. He was crying. He began the story looking like the world was on his shoulders, and when he left he was so much lighter. The play and the process helped him reveal to himself that he had choices, He discovered that he had the ability to find her and apologize, because he got the chance to see himself making those choices. By that time he was convinced that the actor playing him was him. Watching him watching himself, I just thought I needed to find a way to bring this into business.”

is looked at sideways if they need to ‘go to the bathroom.’ If people are reluctant, I let them be reluctant.” As a consequence, he claims never to have had a problem with using simulations. “We’ve had people say ‘Hey, I didn’t like this,’ but never someone who was damaged. When you are playing people’s real life stories, they will let out as much as they are prepared to anyway, not more.” Another consequence is wider latitude for dipping into controversial territory.

I encourage my people [the actors] to show up big. Because people can engage and disengage as they want to, we have the freedom to keep pushing that learning line. As long as it’s in service of a common learning goal, most people appreciate that intention.

### **Effectiveness**

Despite the need for heightened awareness, simulated situations can be better for those involved than addressing real life head-on. Such is the case in current work by the Wilson Center in Burundi, with former combatants. The simulation employed here does not involve reliving the violent past, but with living a nonviolent one that could have occurred, and hence building capacity to create a better future.

During the first days of the workshop, “virtually no reference is made to real-world Burundi or to current ‘political’ issues,” because this would invite participants to relate to one another as adversaries. Instead, they are given the task, in imaginary regions with different resources and populations, of operating in the region’s interest, without sacrificing the well-being of the country as a whole. The simulated societies often fail, but in their debriefing afterward, participants find plenty of useful parallels with real life. A journalist who witnessed this simulation wrote;

The application of such techniques to Burundi’s devastating conflict can seem, at times, absurd. A leader of the famously intimidating Gendarmerie scurried between the red region and green region, begging for food tickets so he and his region-mates [could] survive. Fiercely proud military-types try to use active-listening phrases, (“So what you’re telling me is ...”), mustering all their patience to resist the urge to launch into their own arguments. But by the end of the workshops, participants seem quite moved by the experience. One former general claimed that with these tools, he could have averted one of the first battles of Burundi’s Civil War.

Again, improved performance and the application of new roles and skills in the theater of life is the ultimate goal of using any action method.

Testing performance is in fact another use or advantage of simulation. It can be used as an assessment tool, because it measures capacity. One US Institute of Peace workshop for women took place in Kabul. On the first day, the women were subdued, presenting a sea of blank faces that daunted the facilitators, who found that

some of the workshop's topics were more culturally foreign than they had expected. For example, the women were hesitant to focus on interests as opposed to positions.

On the last day we had a final simulation that was the most complex, with lots of background material. But the participants came in that day and you would never have known that it was the same group of women. The "leader of an NGO" was negotiating with "the mayor" and the mayor refused to meet with her. So she pulled together a protest and formed an alliance among roles with common interests. I have this amazing video of these women holding signs and marching toward the mayor's office demanding a meeting. The transformation was so rewarding to see and be a part of. We know that the women in that workshop will never forget the experience of doing that. Not just that they will remember the difference between positions and interests, but the memory of learning and growing together like that.

The body does not distinguish between the exhilaration of confronting a pretend mayor to win rights and concessions and the exhilaration of confronting a real one.

This emotional engagement of simulation learning is perhaps its key advantage - lessons "stick." Peter Gardiner-Harding's consulting firm (see [playsthatwork.com](http://playsthatwork.com)) presents short, rich plays, followed by interaction between the actors and the participants to rectify problems that emerge from the story. Peter told me,

This is important because we have trouble getting people to own the problem. For example: 'there is a racism problem in this department or company, but not with me.' We create a show that catches people doing things that they wouldn't otherwise realize they do. While they are emotionally engaged in that moment and their buttons are being pushed, that's when we offer them choice about what else they might do. When people are emotionally triggered they go to their default program regarding the choices they make in certain situations. If they learn a new attitude during that state, there's much more hope that they can access it later when they're triggered in the same way. I know that significant learning in my life happened when I was emotionally engaged; they are inextricably linked.

Peter has experienced the effectiveness of simulation learning through his company's bottom line. Much of his work involves a large amount of preparatory work on the part of actors and employees, and a skilled facilitation of the debrief, which is where the valuable learning solidifies. One cohort of participants was tracked by management over the subsequent six months and compared with peers who received training without the action component. "These people came out 4 and 5 times higher," Peter told me. "Repeatedly people kept emphasizing, 'It was stuff I learned at this training. If you roll it out and keep anything, keep the actors.' The learning professionals were trying very hard not to bring us in again," Peter added, "because of cost and logistics. But they couldn't deny the results they were getting."

As we see here, in the laboratory of a simulation, performance can be quickly transformed through reflection, coaching or modeling, and replay. This happens through playing oneself, watching others play roles, and taking on unfamiliar roles, all of which together provide the pathway to a new understanding or attitude. A facilitator at the US Institute of Peace told me;

We use simulation because it forces people to see things from a different perspective than their own. So, for example, we'll often take a man who may have a strong personality with military background and put him in the role of a nonprofit agency staffer. And vice versa; give wallflowers the chance to come out. Someone who is not comfortable being competitive or assertive can play that, whereas that may be uncomfortable for them in real life.

### **Types of Simulations**

So far I have been offering examples to demonstrate the advantages of using simulations, without distinguishing the different forms they can take. There are essentially six types I work with:

- Role Plays;
- Preparedness Drills;
- Role Training;
- Role Reversal;
- Future Projection, and
- Action Dialogue.

In *role plays*, the learner plays a character (not herself) in a pretend situation to learn a pre-determined set of skills or to learn how a process works. Role plays can be large - such as in the "model UN" conferences at the high school level, or they can be small. Most training for mediators, for example, uses a three-person role play, where each "conflict party" receives a written description of their character's side of the story and the trainee does her best to mediate, practicing specific skills or awarenesses. Recently, role plays have been computerized to simultaneously train learners at opposite ends of the world in the skill sets involved in complex endeavors like peacekeeping or governance. Games are also types of simulations, and can produce a deep trance.<sup>2</sup> ("Trance" here simply refers to the depth to which a person is absorbed in an activity and temporarily forgets it is not 'real life.')

Although role plays are straightforward and usually removed from emotional content, it is still important to debrief and de-role all participants as if the experience were real. Debriefing, of course, is noting and digesting the information revealed by the

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<sup>2</sup> From <http://www.afmpgame.com/>

"A Force More Powerful is the first and only game to teach the waging of conflict using nonviolent methods. Destined for use by activists and leaders of nonviolent resistance and opposition movements, the game will also educate the media and general public on the potential of nonviolent action and serve as a simulation tool for academic studies of nonviolent resistance."

action. “De-roling” is a process, usually quite simple, which marks the distinction between the character played and the person who played it. If the trance has not been very deep, a light-hearted “shake it off,” with a symbolic body wiggle, is enough. In other cases, you will want the role-players to tell everyone briefly about what makes them different from the character they were playing. It’s also a good idea to give groups a chance to establish personal identities upon first meeting before going directly into a role play, as it can be psychologically difficult to release a first impression.

In *preparedness drills*, each participant usually already knows what his is supposed to do in a pre-determined plan of action, and plays himself, often as a member of an institution, like the Army, or a company. Drills are a diagnostic designed to see what is breaking down and what is functioning adequately under various contingencies. Drills can use auxiliaries, or people who put on roles to make action demands. There is often rich learning in the debrief, as people add their piece of the experience to form a complete analysis and improve the plan of action.

In *role training*, participants play themselves in a new situation or in an old situation that needs a new response. Remember that in replays of the past, all emotional associations will become part of the present. This is a plus, because psychological aspects are what need to shift if a new response is to form. Role training can be diagnostic at first. In other words, playing through a situation shows what is missing. It’s main purpose, however, is to develop specific individual skills (diversity, leadership, hostage negotiation, policing, communication, etc.)

Role training always requires auxiliaries who make action demands. For example, when I played the role of a prostitute, to help a recovering addict about to be released from prison practice the skills needed to stay clean, the action demand was to offer drugs. When I played the role of a mentally ill woman throwing rocks at a traffic light late at night in order to train police officers to work constructively with persons with mental illness, I would behave as compliantly or defiantly as their communication skills deserved, calibrating my level of difficulty to their learning edge. (This sometimes meant ratcheting down the defiance and being more compliant than they “deserved” if their skills were very rudimentary.)

Auxiliaries need training to be able to offer optimal action demands throughout a simulation. This includes not just improving acting ability and the ability to ratchet action demands up or down, but also deep knowledge of the learner’s context, culture, and required skills. Barry Spodak, a teacher of mine who has become one of the preeminent simulation trainers in the country, says;

You want people to come out feeling empowered, not humiliated, or bored like it’s a game. You want to keep the challenge at the edge of their learning curve. You have to know the demands of the job and the perfect way to do the job,

calibrating to the individual so it's more than role-playing, it's making people better.

Do de-role auxiliaries after a simulation. Even if it seems obvious that the actor is distinct from the role, everyone in the room benefits from overt marking of the distinction. The head of a consulting firm that uses simulations regularly (Breakthrough, out of Chicago) told me a story to illustrate the lengths to which his company goes to capture the culture of a client accurately. One of his actors was asked by a manager after a simulation, "Which department do you work in?" The actor replied, "I'm an actor!" The manager chuckled. "Clearly, and you're very good. But where do you work *here*?" The troupe had represented the company's culture so well that it took the actor several more minutes to convince the man that she was only *playing* the role of an employee.

Role training can be structured as a snippet of a play, followed by audience members taking one of the roles to interact with an auxiliary<sup>3</sup>, or can be 'free-based' directly from personal story. In other words, a typical situation can be staged based on prior research into the culture of a group, or stories can be elicited in the session and auxiliaries can take the roles on the spot.

A good example of role training comes from Mitch Litrofsky of Breakthrough, a company that uses theater to train and stimulate useful conversations (see [thebreakthroughgroup.net](http://thebreakthroughgroup.net)). A retail clothing store had a problem with its sales force. In a commission-based culture with a pronounced pecking order, young managers often could not win the respect of arrogant salespeople at the top of the heap. One such enthusiastic new hire tried telling her top salesman "There is no 'I' in team!" His reply; "There's also no 'I' in 'blow me.'"

Breakthrough created a character with that level of arrogance, along with several other difficult types (the sycophant, the nice nonseller, etc.) and showed the group of managers assembled for training a vignette, followed by rotation into the role of the manager and intermittent discussion. Finally, the managers got individualized coaching and practice in breakout groups. Mitch emphasized that the action is just the catalyst for learning. But he also said,

Our excellence on a theater level means that we are not satisfied with something that isn't absolutely wow. We kill ourselves to make sure the thing knocks you back on your heels and exceeds your expectations.

Role training is very skills focused. Obviously practicing is better than being told in these cases. But what is potentially even more powerful about simulation is that

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<sup>3</sup> "Auxiliaries" are the roles that support the learner – well trained auxiliaries are crucial to many simulations. A good auxiliary has not only acting ability, but also the sensitivity to produce action demands that serve the learner as the simulation is improvised.

learners can also take the antagonist's role and gain, by being on the receiving end of their own behavior, insight about how to effectively approach their task.

Such *role reversal* has learners switch among roles to experience the behavior solutions they are producing in the laboratory of the simulation and to understand the subjective reality of the person they are dealing with. Empathy enhances the ability to produce better "behavior solutions" – to communicate effectively.

A few examples from trainings I have conducted may be appropriate. A pacifist peace activist once told me after reversing roles in a simulation with a soldier at a checkpoint that he had a totally different understanding of the motives and feelings that soldiers operate from. Human Resource Officers at the World Bank who replayed difficult workplace moments in the role of the person they found difficult invariably were surprised by the insights they gained from the exercise. "He's afraid!" one told me wonderingly, "He's not just being a jerk!"

Role reversal is effective as a simple "fact-finding mission" that does not involve going on-site. (I prefer the term "story-finding mission.") Some lawyers regularly hire a certified psychodramatist to facilitate their role reversal with clients. Through the experience of being in the role of their client they are better prepared to deliver devastatingly compelling stories to juries. Role reversal with a target customer or adversary is equally invaluable.

You can use role reversal even if you are working with just one person by using an empty chair as a place holder, but auxiliaries are useful. However, they can be drawn from client group you are working with. These are the people most familiar with the roles in question anyway. As always, de-role auxiliaries. This is especially important in a group of peers who will be interacting on a regular basis into the future. Even people who have been playing themselves should have a chance to process the experience, both to highlight what they have learned, share insights gained from temporarily reversing roles, if this has occurred, and to voice any concerns they have. Remember, "pretend" space is nonetheless very real. The body, the emotions, and the root layers of the brain do not make a distinction.

Of the simulation types presented here, *future projection* is the most complex and difficult to structure and facilitate because, at least as we experience life, the future does not exist as a shared experience. (Of course, the lack of agreement on the experience of the past can quickly lead us to conclude that it, too, only exists in our minds. But at least we can observe its effects in the present.) Future projection involves a whole group entering a deep trance to live in a future as if it is the present. The almost creepy power of this type of simulation is that fully conceiving and entering an imagined future makes it exist.

This is really what is happening in all simulations anyway – skills or new roles that did not exist come into existence in the laboratory of a simulation and are then at

liberty in the real world as well, to shape outcomes and cause impacts. What is distinct about future projection is that whole scenarios are invented from nothing, with no limits on the wish list. Just as there are no real life consequences to mistakes in simulations, the constraints of normal life can also be temporarily ignored, as an experiment.

How does “ignoring reality” fit with that litmus I keep repeating – that real results are the point, not simulations for the fun of it? The point holds, but, oddly, “constraints” sometimes seem to have dissolved after a future projection simulation.

The body of theory and practice known as Appreciative Inquiry shares many characteristics with future projection. I will save discussion of future projection’s commonalities with AI and social constructionism for another paper, however, and focus here on possible ways to structure the action of a future projection simulation.

The most important thing to remember is to keep the action very concrete. Go into a specific scene in the future. This means a specific time of day, at a specific place. Use people or physical objects, such as scarves or other props, to represent both the physical space and the emotional tone and experience. Emphasize that the client can have whatever they dream of in this scene and encourage them to reject any limits to their highest aspirations.

Once this space is firmly established and the client has taken full measure of the somatic and ontological experience of the future projection, take the client into a different space in the room that represents present time and begin to concretize the obstacles that arise between present and future. Allow the clients own wisdom to deal with these through role reversal, although external resources may need to be brought to bear in the form of empowering auxiliaries. I often put these auxiliary roles in place at the very start, as ‘guardian angel’ figures of a sort, present on the margins throughout.

While you may be able to find ways to incorporate some of what I have described, a full future projection requires advanced training to facilitate. A much easier simulation to run, and one of the most useful, is *action dialogue*, in which clients take roles of historical characters or abstract principles and conduct a debate. For example, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X can debate each other on the subject of nonviolence. The various concepts at play in international development (empowerment, charity, fairness, and national interest, for example) could encounter one another.

I had a professor of Conflict Transformation who took four principles from a verse in the Hebrew Scriptures (truth, justice, mercy and peace) and interviewed them to illustrate the issues at stake in intractable conflicts. “Mercy, is truth a threat to you?” he might ask. Or, “Justice, are you more important than peace?” Action Dialogue can have same benefits as story-finding and role-reversal. The role serves as a mask

from behind which true feeling finds expression, and the power of role-taking may initiate the nuancing of a rigid concept. People on opposite sides of an armed conflict, for example, can have very different interpretations of “peace” or “freedom.”

The concreteness of simulation deepens what can otherwise devolve into high-flown or emotionally disengaged intellectual debate. Without reducing the passion or the differences, action dialogue validates every voice that speaks from the heart.

### **Guidelines for creating simulations**

At this point, you may be convinced that simulation is a wonderful tool with endless potential. But how can you connect your clients to it in ways that make sense with their comfort levels? Below are some brief guidelines.

- **Find the Ouch**

First, make sure you are directly addressing a strongly felt need. Simulation should be a real solution to a real problem the client has. Buy-in at entry is based on this. Make sure that simulation is the best way to catalyze the change. (See ‘criteria for applicability’ section above.) Then, communicate clearly. The exact nature of the transformational learning you are hoping to facilitate should be clear to both you and to your client. Similarly, set a contract with learners (“By the end, you will be able to...”) While you can expect unanticipated lessons to emerge through the action, don’t ever lose sight of the value you want to contribute or stray too far outside the envelope you have set with the client, unless you spell out very clearly your reasons for the midstream switch and gain agreement for it.

- **Know the Scene**

Second, research the client’s culture and issues. You can use role reversal as story-finding (“show me” instead of “tell me”) when you interview, but the point is, immerse yourself in the context so that you know it better than the management that hired you. Mitch Litrofsky of Breakthrough says

When we’re interviewing, we capture verbatim the pithy insights, look at all scenes and then have an overture of verbatims, where all the themes are woven together into one piece. The piece has to have artistic integrity; it has to be balanced, it has to build but be short enough, and it has to have the right mix of optimism and cynicism. But most importantly, it needs to reflect accurately what’s there.

Participants can’t take the simulation seriously unless you give them something they recognize as true to life. A consultant who works with Law Enforcement told me,

With most training you use other class members, but they are generally not comfortable playing roles and there’s lots of joking. When we play the professionals’ roles we take it deadly seriously. If anyone jokes around there are immediate consequences: ‘you think this is funny, you’re laughing at me

mother\*\*\*\*er?’ We bring a level of realism. We don’t just walk in. We study whatever your business is, we study your culture, we use your vernacular, we address critical issues taking place inside your organization. This quickly takes on the semblance of real life. You just don’t see that anywhere else, except may be when people are preparing for presidential debates.

Another consultant who was working with stockbrokers said,

They come in and the stories begin. Either the material comes from focus groups where our script ideas were presented to participants for modification, or we would sit down with them and they’d start telling the stories and then we’d act them out. The actors will ask the person ‘what is this difficult antagonist’s motivation?’ We’ll ask others in the room for their two cents as well. As a result of these simulations we do have stockbrokers who got over the hump with a particular demographic they had previously harbored prejudices about - for example a woman who thought every guy over 50 just wanted to hit on her - and are now seeing financial returns through their improved work with those clients.

However you discover the truth of a client’s reality, you must be able to turn it back around to them so that they see themselves in the mirror. Having someone put their finger right on the heart of our experience is deeply satisfying.<sup>4</sup>

- Progressively Tier

Design the simulation to match a composite reality that is fairly simple, but can be ramped up. Tiering means adding components throughout for a progression of contingencies. Here is an example from a consultant who worked on school violence.

We start with one of the consultants being introduced as the Assistant Principal at a school. He says a teacher came to him with information from a student about a boy, Jeff, who was making threats. After a video of what the teacher said, the audience says they’d want to talk to the student’s source. So they see a video of that girl, and then they usually say ‘We’d want to talk to Jeff’s cousin who she mentioned.’ So, a video of that conversation is shown and, if they mention it, one of a conversation with Jeff’s mother. People always eventually agree they want to talk to Jeff to see if they can help him out. The live simulation begins with an actor playing an initially very surly and uncooperative Jeff. The other consultant freezes the action at three points to ask the audience how it’s going and to incorporate their ideas. The scene closes with ‘Look, you and I are going to take some steps together to see if we can resolve some of these things.’ Then he talks to the audience about whether this kid is committable, arrestable and how to handle this case. The whole thing emphasizes the importance of bringing together all players in a community ahead of time before something happens. Everyone gets to understand how to work with a kid who might be on a path to violence.

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<sup>4</sup> In Psychodrama, this is called “doubling.”

This example demonstrates how the unfolding of a progression of real-life events can be simulated in a short period of time.

- **Train Auxiliaries**

Brief auxiliaries on the culture and train them to “direct from role,” or shape the simulation without directorial intervention. The director of a simulation should follow the clockmaker model – intervening rarely, and only to freeze the action to highlight adequate performance or involve the audience in making suggestions. Finding skilled actors is not enough; good auxiliaries are able to instantly assess learners’ abilities and ratchet up or down to meet them right at their edge of learning.

### **Conclusions**

Simulation is no substitute for having something valuable to teach. But when there is something important to be learned, putting adult learners in action is the best route. Marsha Stein remarked,

It’s amazing the difference you see when people get to use concrete skills in action versus a theoretical understanding. The difference is black and white. If people feel like they develop skills relevant to what they do each day and that they can use immediately after the training, they are incredibly invested in the process.

I hope these few pointers and anecdotes will enrich your own use of action learning methods. If you would like assistance in using simulation for specific learning objectives, you can find resources, such as Quantum Leap Theater, through [www.usoni.com](http://www.usoni.com), or use the bibliography below to directly contact the professionals quoted in this article.

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