

Convert a Traditional Training Workshop to Simulation-Enhanced Learning

In most situations, simulations will give you an increase in learner engagement, retention, and motivation over traditional training methods. You can achieve a time savings over traditional lecture-plus-discussion workshops by using simulations, as well. Here is an example of how to convert a traditional half-day workshop into a simulation-enhanced workshop.

Ethical Decision Making as the Example

For this example, I'll use an instructor-led, half-day ethical decision making course. This is a very common, reasonable, and potentially effective design. While this example shows the instructor-led delivery mode, the same general principles you will see in this example also apply to converting e-learning courses from traditional to simulation-enhanced designs.

Assumptions

Let's assume that there are good reasons for delivering this course and that the match with the audience is good, and so on. We will also keep the constraints around training—participants, expectations, outcomes, time and resources available, etc.—the same for both versions of the course.

Two Course Versions

First, take a look at the course agenda, below. Then, look at the revised course agenda that follows. **Changes are highlighted in blue on the second version.**

COURSE ONE – ETHICAL DECISION MAKING, TRADITIONAL

Topic: Ethical Decision Making

Method: Classroom, Instructor-led Training, Traditional

Time: 4 hours

Course Agenda

Time	Activity/Notes	Resources
20 min	Icebreaker – Focused on an ethical dilemma	Icebreaker instruction cards
10 min	Introduction & Welcomes	
30 min	Topic Introduction – Ethical Decision Making <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why this is important to the business and WIIFM• Case study of failure of ethical decision making• Post-case discussion of pressures and pitfalls	Case study
60 min	Company Ethics Guidelines <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Company standards – Walk-through of the details about what employees can and cannot do, duties, obligations, and fiduciary responsibilities.• Process for reporting potential violations• Whistleblower definitions, protections, policies	Ethics Guidelines handouts Policy handouts

60 min	Application Case Studies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice with a set of fictional cases that could happen in this company. Options: Each table group does one of the set, or the whole group can do the same one, or each group can do more than one, if time permits. Large group debrief, looking for key points. 	Set of Case Studies
30 min	Transfer & Application <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the situation in your own job with the highest risk of ethical pressure. Work out a personal action plan for how to ensure compliance with the ethical guidelines and resist the pressure. Share and discuss. 	Action Plan worksheets
15 min	Testing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge test—multiple choice, pass-fail for compliance training purposes. 	Objective Test
15 min	Conclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summary and key take-away points Next steps Closing 	

COURSE TWO – ETHICAL DECISION MAKING, SIMULATION-ENHANCED

Topic: Ethical Decision Making

Method: Classroom, Instructor-led Training, Simulation-Enhanced

Time: 4 hours

Course Agenda

Time	Activity/Notes	Resources
20 min	Icebreaker – Focused on an ethical dilemma	Icebreaker instruction cards
10 min	Introduction & Welcomes	
15 min	Topic Introduction – Ethical Decision Making <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why this is important to the business and WIIFM Competing Stories: One failure and one success to illustrate the point and some “close to home” details. 	2 brief stories
15 min	Company Ethics Guidelines <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Orient learners to the standards <i>without teaching the standards or procedures. Make sure they know where to find what they will need to know.</i> 	Ethics Guidelines handouts Policy handouts
45 min	Ethical Decision Making Simulation #1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present learners with Simulation #1. Set up the story, the challenge, and the instructions. Put them in the action role, with the company guidelines as resources. Work through the five steps of the simulation. 	Simulation material for facilitator, learner, and partner or role-player

45 min	Ethical Decision Making Simulation #2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present another simulation, rotate roles, and repeat the simulation process. • Work through the five steps of the simulation. 	Simulation material for facilitator, learner, and partner or role-player
30 min	Testing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present the testing items as scenarios or challenges, explain each, and have the learners work through the knowledge test individually. (Note: Real-life ethics challenges are often faced alone, so group testing would probably not be appropriate.) • Allow the learners to call on resources to help them address the challenges, as they might be able to do on the job. 	Realistic resources
15 min	Transfer & Application <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work out a set of triggers and responses, based on the resources and lessons learned from the simulation, to ensure compliance and resist the pressure to violate ethics guidelines. • Share and discuss. 	Trigger-Response worksheets
15 min	Conclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary and key take-away points • Next steps • Closing 	

The Design Concepts behind the Second Version

Here are the design concepts I used to modify the traditional course:

- Minimize lecture; embed the learning, instead
- Use simulations to make the learning “First Person,” instead of “Third Person”
- Have learners teach themselves the details; make them use the details inside the simulation
- Make testing part of the reality-based learning process
- Strive for rules, rather than action plans, as transfer outputs

What Changed about the Learning Method?

The key changes in the second version are that lecture and hypothetical case studies are replaced with two simulations. Instead of walking the learners through the details of the company ethical guidelines and procedures, the trainer orients them to where they can find the information when they need it. Then, the simulation allows the learners to look up and use that information to deal with the scenarios. This puts the obligation to learn and use the resources on the learner. It also changes the tone of the practice from a “What would you do in this situation?” response with a third-person case study to an active, real-time “What do you do now?” practice situation.

What Changed about the Testing and Transfer Method?

The testing and transfer methods change in the second version, as well. Instead of putting the objective test at the end, the test comes before the final transfer segment. Learners have to address the same items as before, but they have the option of calling on realistic resources to help them. This further stresses the very real skill of recognizing when to call for help that is missing from the traditional testing method. The transfer assignment is not to create an action plan for a single situation, but to create a small set of rules for dealing with general situations. The triggers tell the learner when to apply a rule, and the

rules help the learner to act in accordance with the ethical guidelines. This makes the transfer both more robust and more generalizable to real-world issues than the single action plan.

How did Timing Change?

Both courses are four hours in length. In the first version, 90 minutes was devoted to the content lecture and 90 minutes to practice. In the second version, 30 minutes was devoted to content and 135 minutes to stronger, more realistic practice.

What are the Design Implications?

Overall, the design effort is probably a wash. Time spent on finding and developing material for the lecture, discussion, and case study portions of the traditional version would be spent developing the simulation details and materials in the second version. Some designers might feel that writing the creative scenarios and details for the simulations is harder than assembling the lecture material. Others will feel the opposite is true. **Caveat:** The more complex the simulation will be, the more work the designer will have to do. For this example, I am assuming that a fairly simple, *5-Step Simulation™* approach to simulation design is being used.

What are the Delivery Implications?

The second version requires a little more facilitation skill but is less dependent on platform skills or subject matter expertise. The second version is likely to require more preparation time for the trainer, at least the first time or two. The benefit for the trainer is seeing more engagement and individual “Aha!” moments expressed throughout the workshop, and seeing the broader range of different ideas and tactics that the learners develop and try out. This can give them more stories and suggestions to share with other learners over time.

Summary

Both versions of this example course take roughly the same amount of resources to design and deliver. The amount of time devoted to learner practice, and the amount of learner engagement with the material is at least 50% higher in the simulation-enhanced version of the course. To the extent that this is a practical solution for the audience, you can expect correspondingly higher rates of achievement and learning outcomes. Overall, simulations offer higher engagement, transfer, and satisfaction than traditional courses. Putting the learner “in the driver’s seat” doesn’t have to be hard, and can be very rewarding for both the training team and the learners.

Take a look at your own workshops, and see how you might apply the concepts shown here to work simulations into your training!