

ACCELERATING COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT WITH SERIOUS GAMES



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I. INTRODUCTION

We've all been there, stuck in room with your colleagues listening to a presenter discussing a subject that you might well find interesting.

Increasing amounts of information are transferred to you as your notebook swiftly fills up as you frantically try to capture these little nuggets of information. You may even be sufficiently energised to want to transfer the knowledge across into your day job or even to become an evangelist about the subject.

This lasts right up until you arrive back in your office and try to put everything you learned in the course, all the theory and examples, into practice. Suddenly the gaps in knowledge start to surface as you battle to implement the concepts and find, to your frustration, that you have to reinvent the wheel, as it were, with nobody to help you.

Wouldn't it have been oh so much easier to practice what you were being taught whilst the instructor was there to help you? In fact, wouldn't you have remembered so much more if you could have turned the theory into practical experience whilst on the course?

At best, trying to move up the experience curve on your own is time-consuming and frustrating but you do it. At worst, you simply give up and the money spent on sending you to the course is wasted.

This is a very real concern for all involved in commissioning, developing and implementing learning & development programmes in the pharmaceutical industry and is the reason why training courses around business games are much more impactful on the learning process.



II. SAME WAY OF LEARNING?

HOLD ON, DOESN'T EVERYONE PREFER TO LEARN IN THE SAME WAY?

The quick answer is no. There are **three broad categories** into which learners can be grouped based on their primary preferences for the way material is presented to them. These groups are referred to as being **visual, auditory or kinaesthetic learners**.

1 Visual



Visual learners rely on **visual stimuli**, preferring colourful material that is filled with pictures, diagrams and other visual elements to support the narrative being presented by the trainer. In order to meet the needs of this group the training programme must include **printed or online materials combining text and images**. It is also preferable to ensure that printed slides are available for use during any **face-to-face training**.

2 Auditory

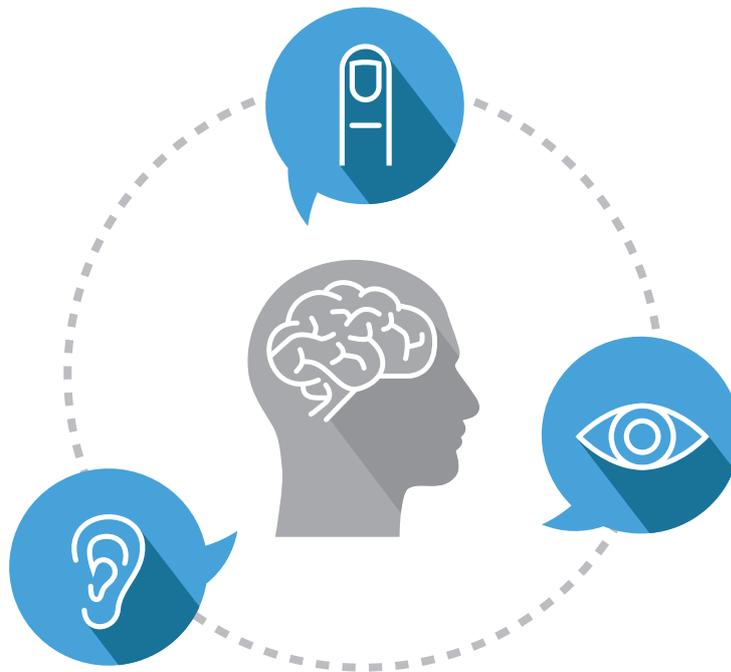


Auditory learners have a clear preference for **verbal communication**, preferring to listen to presentations and explanations, using discussion with other delegates to process the concepts that they have learned. These learners prefer **face-to-face training** where material is presented **verbally within a group environment**. It is also essential that training courses have plenty of time for discussion and interaction to allow auditory learners to process the information they are receiving.

3 Kinaesthetic



The final group are referred to as **kinaesthetic, tactile or movement learners**, people who prefer to learn through hands-on activity or simulation. This group **learn by doing, using movement** to reinforce the points that have been presented. It is therefore critical that, for the training course to be effective, some form of simulation or practice is included within the course structure.

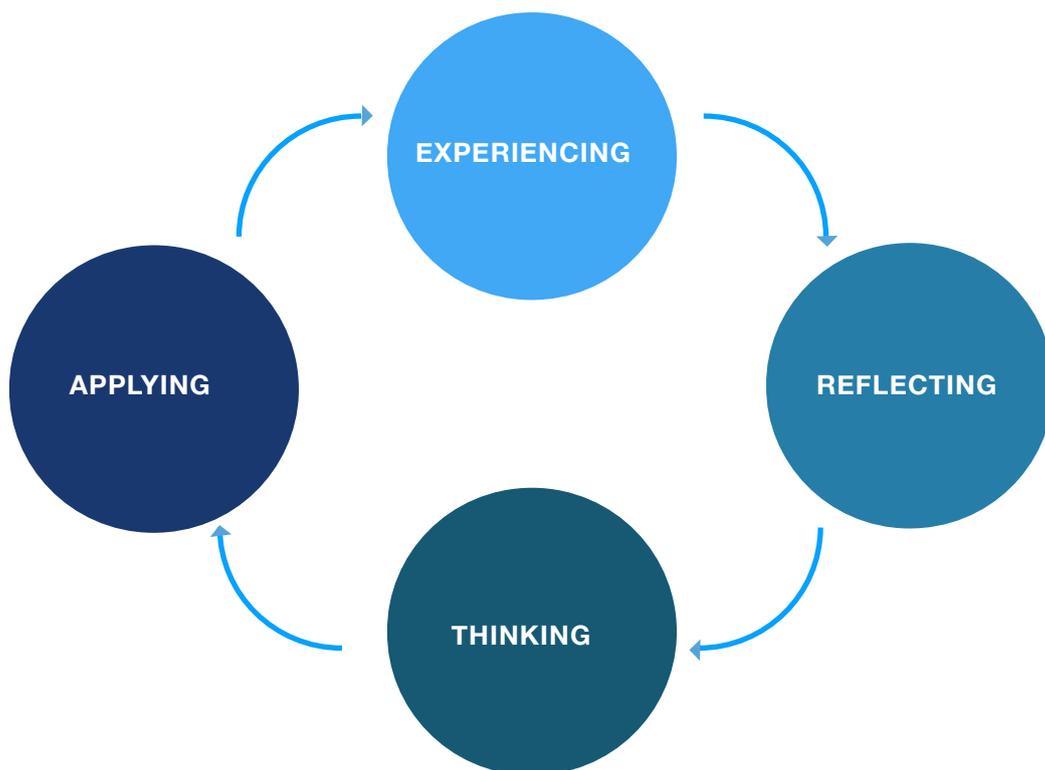


You will remember that earlier, we said that the above groups represent a primary preference for how people like to learn. What we believe, however, is that using a **combination of these approaches is particularly powerful** and delivers **exponentially superior results** to using any one single channel. Not only are you able to reach each delegate via their primary learning preference but by presenting the material in multiple ways and, critically, allowing delegates to practice what they have learned, you reinforce learning and begin to effect mind-set change.

III. STEPS - TRAINING PROGRAMME

OK, SO WHAT STEPS SHOULD A TRAINING PROGRAMME INCLUDE THEN?

In order to ensure that you maximise the effectiveness of any training initiative, the programme should always incorporate four distinct steps: **Experiencing, Reflecting, Thinking & Applying.**



1 Experiencing

Experiencing refers to the **presentation of material and examples**, followed by explanation and demonstration. In most training courses, this usually forms the very core of the training programme, either in the form of online learning or face to face in-class sessions. Trainees are typically required to absorb presented or online content, memorise it and then repeat it back after the training course in the form of a quiz or test.

For some types of learning, such as **Standard Operating Procedures** or **Compliance training**, this may be sufficient. However, as the complexity of the subject increases, so the effectiveness of simply presenting the information to the trainees decreases.

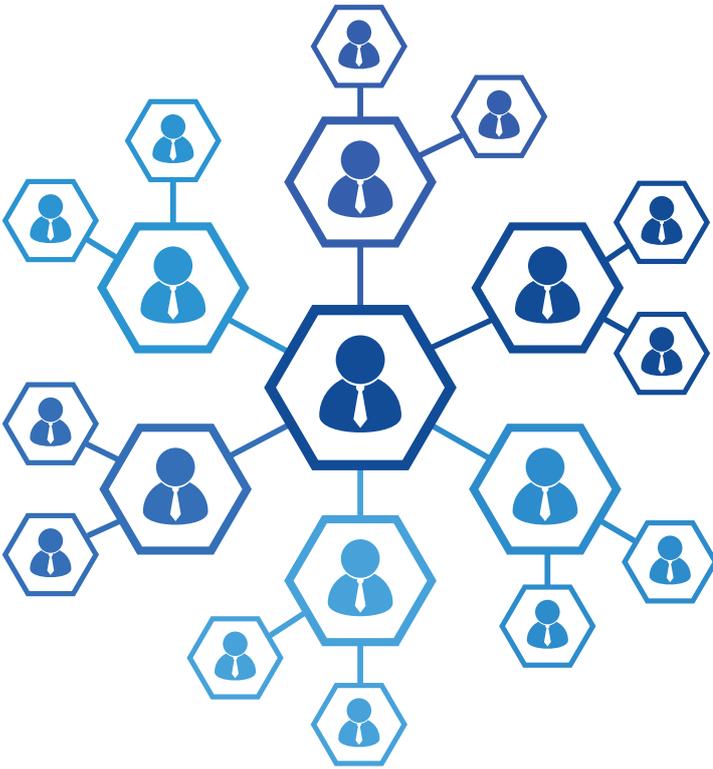
The experiencing phase is critical to any successful training programme. Material should be presented in a combination of formats, most notably online (ideally visuals with voice-over), as well as face-to-face. This allows the training programme to cater for **the needs of both auditory and visual learners**.

At Actando, we begin each learning intervention with a **development needs assessment**, which identifies **key development areas** for the delegate attending one of our courses. The delegate then undertakes a series of e-learning modules on the subjects being presented within the course itself. These **e-learning modules** have been specifically designed to convey their information in such a way as to appeal to both visual and auditory users by combining bright, attractive online materials developed by our consultant experts with detailed explanations presented by some of the top voice-over artists within the industry.

The experiencing phase, however, should not be the start and finish of the course. As mentioned earlier, for effective learning to occur, the course needs to extend beyond the simple presentation of information. We need to begin building in delegate engagement and involvement in the material itself by shifting to a two-way exchange of information.

2 Reflecting

Reflecting occurs when delegates attending the course are asked to discuss the information that has been provided during the experiencing phase. What did they observe during the previous phase? How did the theory presented compare to their current behaviour? Do they have any practical best-practice examples that they can share with the group?



Our Actando trainers use a number of different techniques and exercises to encourage this reflective process, combining **group discussions** with **flipchart exercises and group challenges**. In addition, the Actando training team vend each day with a short slot where trainees are asked to take time to reflect on what they have learned during the day. Our training teams will also begin each day with a **short feedback session** where delegates reflect and discuss what they learning and found valuable the previous day and present back to the group.

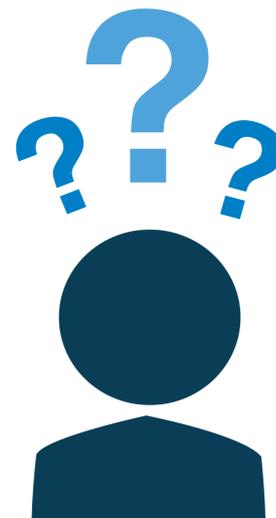
We have found that it is in these summary and reflection phase that we have a **significant degree of engagement by all delegates**, allowing for some very powerful anecdotes and insights to be shared.

The reflecting phase is **extremely important for auditory learners and any training course** that does not include adequate opportunity for discussion and reflection risks not reaching this group.

3 Thinking

In the thinking phase, trainees may be asked to think about how the skills or models being taught could be applied within their current remit. The best time, we have found, to do this is through **constant interaction during the presentation of the course itself**. Interaction and discussion should always be encouraged, with **sessions structured** to ensure that sufficient time is dedicated for the **Thinking Phase**.

Our Actando training team uses a variety of games, challenges and exercises to encourage delegates to begin to make the mental shift from theory to practical information that they can use within their business roles.



This is only the beginning of the transference process, however. The real benefits come from the final stage: applying what they have been taught.

4 Applying

The final step involves the **learners practising their new skills** within the context of a simulation. It is this step that is most frequently omitted from marketing and sales training courses and yet it is arguably the most critical.

Not only does it allow visual and **auditory learners to consolidate the skills** they have been taught during the programme, but it also allows kinaesthetic trainees to learn in a way that best suits their learning style.



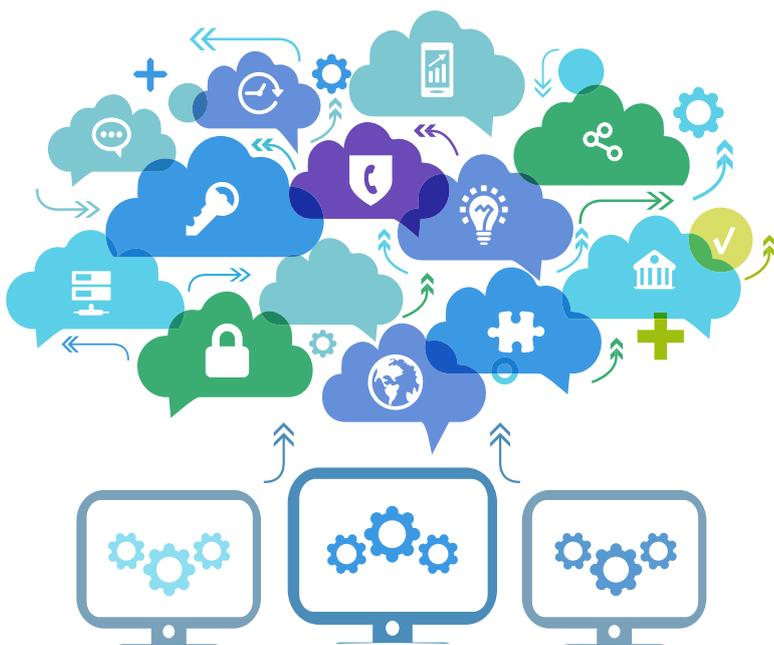
Simulations should be **complex, challenging, engaging** and, **crucially**, based on the typical reality experienced by the trainees. Simulations are therefore more impactful when they are taken from the same industry as the learners. The complexity of the case study must be such that it ensures that learners are actively challenged by the content and are forced to rely on the skills that they have been taught.

IV. SIMULATION

IS THIS WHY SIMULATIONS ARE SO CENTRAL TO THE ACTANDO APPROACH?

There are three very good reasons why the **Simpact business** games are so highly thought of by our clients. The first is that they are **visually appealing** and **very user-friendly**. This allows delegates to get to grips with their assigned tasks easily, rather than having to fight with a cumbersome system, allowing them to make the most of the time available.

The second reason centres on the **highly detailed and challenging case studies** that form the core of the simulations. In order to be as relevant as possible, all of our case studies are written specifically for pharmaceutical sales and marketing teams by our highly experienced pharmaceutical consultants and are updated regularly. This ensures that the skills practiced and reinforced are directly transferrable to course attendees' day jobs, once again reinforcing learning.



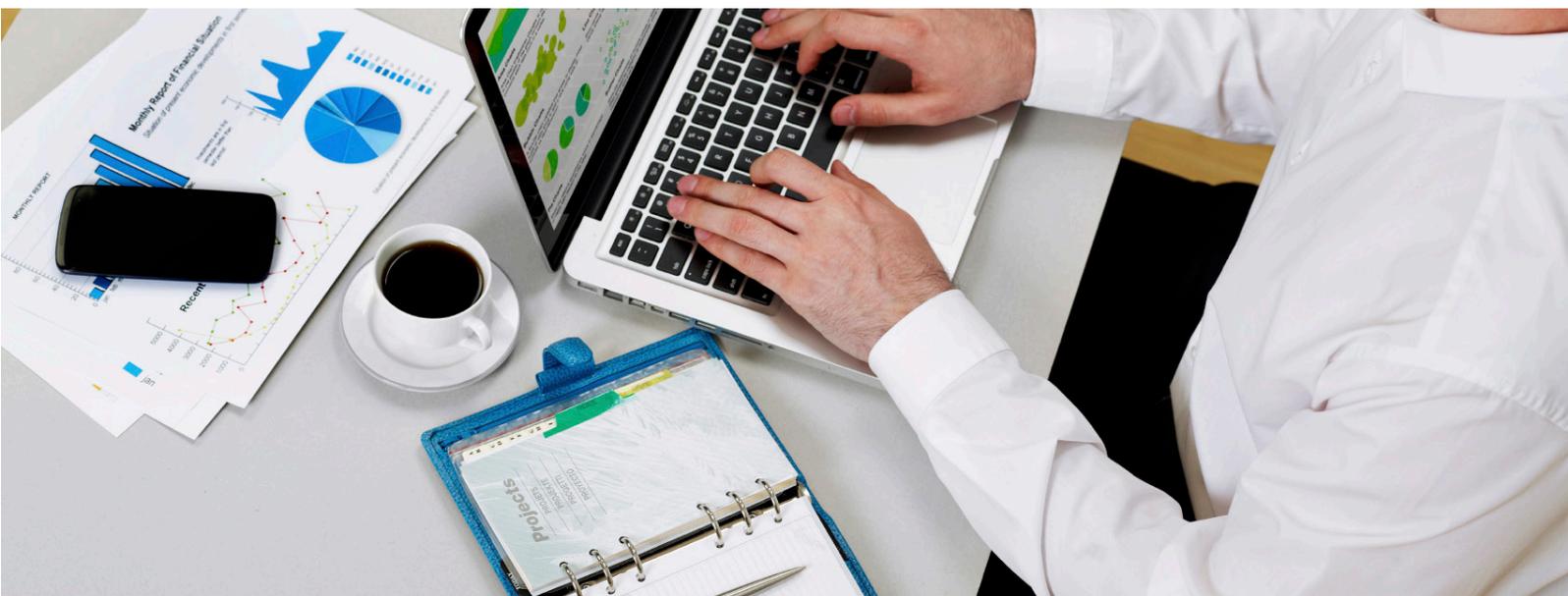
The final reason is the most important: **our simulations work**. There is plenty of evidence to prove that simulation-based training is the most effective at changing behaviours and mind-sets and this reinforced by our own experiences. Our simulations meld all of the theory, discussions and reflection into a **powerful learning experience** that offers the highest potential for behaviour change and learning internalisation.

V. PRACTICE

TIME IS LIMITED, WHY NOT JUST PRESENT THE MATERIAL AND LET THEM PRACTICE ON THE JOB?

Once again, for the simple reason that this would not deliver the best possible learning result and would certainly limit the shift in mind-set that we are seeking. By not allowing people to practice what they are being taught, we do our kinaesthetic **learners a disservice** but, **crucially**, we would not be embedding the learning material.

By allowing time in-class for delegates to practice their skills, they **have the benefit of our experienced training team guiding them through the process**. Equally importantly, by trying to practice on the job, they may have misunderstood a key point and may be practicing the wrong thing. Each of our simulation sessions ends with a very **detailed debriefing** exercise where all decisions made by the course delegates are **critically assessed by our training team and feedback is given to the entire group**. This allows each team to learn from the others and ensures that everybody understands what they did correctly and where improvements could be made.



In addition, using the **Simpact business games**, we are able to compress years of decision-making and market evolution into days. This allows us to speed up time and ensure that we cover all relevant critical decision points

Finally, the training environment is a **safe environment**. Delegates are able to safely make decisions that might have had dire consequences for the company in real life. Major strategic decisions such as **field force sizing** can be made and tested in a way that provides immediate feedback without any risk to company profitability. This reinforces learning with exposing the brand or company to potential risks.

VI. CONCLUSION

For any training to be truly successful, it needs to not only cater for all three learning preferences but also to offer a **synergistic combination of plenary sessions, discussion, reflection and practice**. Furthermore, it is the ability to practice the theory in a challenging yet safe environment that moves training from successful to fantastic and this is where Actando excels.

There is a very good reason why our business games sit at the centre of what we do – they boost engagement, interaction and, critically, learning retention and, importantly, mind-set change.



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