Characteristics of an Effective Computer-Based Business Simulation.

Characteristics include:

- **Adults learn by doing**. Users learn hands-on how to implement the behaviour. A simulation places the users in a realistic business environment, where they are asked to complete tasks and take decisions in line with the business goals.

- **Discovery**. Users have usually received background information on the simulation storyline in advance, and a description of issues currently facing the simulated company, which they are to try to resolve.

- **Application of experience**. Users are able to apply the experience of their day-to-day work to the simulation experience, providing the link to the real world.

- **Scenarios**. Simulations contain scenarios that immerse users in a storyline and challenge them to reach desired outcomes. There may be several paths to these goals, depending on the decisions taken.

- **Feedback**. Users receive written feedback at the end of each round on various performance criteria. This is critical information for them to assess how well (or not so well) they are performing in relation to the challenge, and is measured by what is considered 'best practice' in the field. Most importantly it provides users with learning to take back to the workplace.

- **Highly Interactive**. Simulation is designed so that users have an experience that is highly interactive, captivating, emotional, satisfying and fun. This is achieved through the use of graphics, audio, recognisable environments, emails, telephone calls, meetings, reference documents, etc. To foster the greatest collaboration and engagement users are often grouped into teams.

- **Performance Measures**. Measures of performance in the simulation will link to measures of performance in the real world. One way this can be done is through the use of a simulation Balanced Scorecard, mirroring that of the organisation. Another way is to build the financial models in the simulation using actual company figures and models.

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- **User driven**. The simulation experience is mainly in the control of the users. The users take decisions based on their knowledge and experience, which will then take them along certain decision-trees. This provides a great deal of flexibility and learning.

Designing a simulation

The design process of a new simulation must be managed as a project with clear milestones. The design project team may be entirely customer driven, or just supported by our experts acting as coaches, advisors, technical support and 'simulation-handlers'. The various project phases – design, text-writing, testing and modification – can be prototyped and executed in parallel, saving on time and costly reviews.

How a simulation is run

- A simulation may be run with two to four rounds, with many scenarios illustrating the storyline. Each round has a time limit, varying between 45 and 60 minutes.

- Users are usually divided into groups of 3-5 people, who perform the simulation as one manager/supervisor. The benefit is that users automatically experience working in a team, and the challenges that arise when dealing with different personalities and cultures.

- At the end of each round, each simulation user team debriefs their experience and learning as a team.

- Large group discussions with the facilitator ensue to share the learning and application to the real world of their jobs.

- When all users have completed all the simulation rounds, each team makes a presentation to the other teams and the facilitator, on their performance, learning and how they will apply this experience in their workplace.

Characteristics of an Effective Computer-Based Business Simulation.

Why computer-based simulation is an effective approach to learning

Well-designed computer-based simulation offers the ability to:

- speed up the time to value of corporate initiatives

- anchor an initiative or a new business process throughout the workforce in a way that is fast, consistent, and compelling

- structure the experience to a user profile, eg by industry, initiative, role, function, team, previous knowledge, etc.

- give users access to information on the intranet or internet

- integrate local and global communities (via chat rooms, threaded discussion, email groups), to enable collaboration, interaction, feedback and support from peers, experts, and coaches

- access other online performance support, eg action plans, assessment tools, etc

- evaluate user reactions and suggest additional opportunities and practise options

- monitor simulation performance to gauge how well a team, unit, or organisation is adhering to a new initiative or process

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