



Experiences with SimuLearn's Virtual Leader

Quotes from Participants

Alice Stewart, PhD, Associate Professor of Strategic Management, North Carolina A&T State University

"What makes the Virtual Leader different from many leadership simulations is not only the advanced graphics, but the fact that the underlying algorithm of the program is based on an inductive theory of leadership. The inductive theory is consistent with other widely accepted academic theories. The Virtual Leader algorithm utilizes the impact of power and influence, the value of knowledge sharing and participative management, and the strategic utilization of conflict as three factors that impact leader effectiveness in a managerial context. A student playing the Virtual Leader has the opportunity to examine the interrelationship and impact of each of these factors as the game becomes progressively more difficult. **This experiential component has the potential to dramatically enhance student learning regarding the difficulty of using these management tools outside the classroom.**"

John Dunning, PhD, Chair, Department of Public Administration, Troy University (recorded presentation available on request)

"Three to one is the preferred leadership theory by students in my Organizational Development Class. This is one of the only simulators that works on and reinforces interpersonal skills.

The opportunity for experiential learning actually involves 14 different OB concepts I look at it as going well beyond leadership... (other managerial simulations and programs) are great but leadership and organizational behavior is all about interpersonal skills, where can you get that?

Surprisingly enough... **14 out of the 15 said they thought this was the future of learning...**

All these other models are inadequate because the other models are from supervisor to subordinate...this isn't the way it is any more...it's an organizational communication model and an interaction model...

Anything that was emphasized by the model seemed to have a much better retention..."

Dr. Jana Minifie, Texas State University - San Marcos
Teaching advantage:

1. It's more than a case study. Case studies don't give the students enough "noise" to have to go through in making a decision. Usually, the information in the case is all that is needed to make a decision. Students need the opportunity to make the decision as to what information is important and then base the answer on that decision.
2. It's hands on. Students may conceptualize a concept, but until they practice a concept, they don't truly understand the concept. Virtual Leader allows students to test different management skills in a safe environment.
3. For me, the best part of Virtual Leader was watching the students go through the change process. At first, students resist this new technique. They drag their feet, complain it's too hard, not real enough, etc. As a teacher you can't give in. As the students go through the various modules, there is a wonderful change/transition that occurs. Students go from resistance to acceptance. When the "light bulb" goes off, there is such a satisfaction that learning has really occurred. Students then talk about how they are using the concepts at work, in student group projects, and other areas. It truly makes a change in how they approach people.

Students:

1. Students learn communication skills. Students must learn to watch the body language and type of language that others at the meeting are displaying. Also, students must learn how to communicate with different personality types and the relationship of different people at the meeting.
2. Students learn to prepare for meetings, to take initiative. It seems too often that students will ask a question first rather than try to find an answer on their own first. Virtual Leader requires students to show initiative. Students learn to look at tasks/agenda items and determine which are the most important to the organization.
3. Students learn that a very structured meeting is not conducive to participative management. So many times, in student reports, they end their research projects with the conclusion that top management needs to empower employees, listen to employees, or integrating employees into the organization. By learning how to get other employees to have input to a meeting teaches students these important skills. Yes, we talk about it in our textbooks and in our research, but Virtual Leader shows them how to do it.

Alison Murphy, Johnson & Johnson

“The software was better than role-playing because it was much less intimidating if we wanted to step outside our typical personality and try new leadership techniques.”

“I found this software extremely helpful for analyzing meeting dynamics. I was pleasantly surprised at its realistic representation of how ideas, tension, business objectives and personal influence all contribute to the success, or failure, of a meeting. After completing the various simulations and participating in our weekly meetings, I’ve started to see the Virtual Leader concepts appear in “real world” meetings.”

Civil Service Supervisor

“Towards the end of Scenario Five, I noticed while sitting in meetings that I began to think and respond as if I were in the simulation. For example, I have recently been assigned to a new position with supervisory duties and responsibilities. When I was a supervisor several years ago, I never felt I was truly an effective leader. Therefore, it was with some hesitation that I accepted this new assignment. During my preparations for the first meeting with the staff, I found myself preparing strategies to lower tension levels amongst the staff in order to encourage their participation as well as uncover any hidden ideas they might otherwise be hesitant to introduce.

My strategy contained several key elements practiced, learned and re-enforced through this tasking, Virtual Leader and the many personal surveys taken in class. Specifically through meeting preparations, I knew the topics I wanted to introduce and where I was willing to make trade-offs in power and ideas in order to accomplish the meeting objectives, the right work. My strategy included using a mixture of all three leadership styles with predominate use of the participative leadership style.

Unlike my previous supervisory tenure, I intended to make a sincere effort seek out the other participants objectives while all also striving to learn, understand and consider the meaning of what was being said and as well as what was left unsaid. In short, my managerial style of the past was more directing with all final decisions resting with me and not enough attention focused on the impact of my actions, ideas and decisions on others.

Interestingly two members of my new staff were also members of my previous staff. One afternoon after our meeting, one of them asked if he could join me on a quick walk. During this walk, this individual provided some valuable feedback that let me know I could achieve the personal goal that I had set for myself when accepting this position. I want to be an effective leader. I want to be respected not only for my individual efforts, but also respected and valued through the successful efforts of my team. While accomplishing the organizational goals, I also want the morale of the team to be productive.

At another meeting that I attended several days afterwards where my role was that of a participant, I noted the leader was having great difficulty in introducing new ideas and keeping the meeting productively focused. The participants, including myself were interjecting and steering the meeting into several other topic areas. Recognizing what was being unsaid by this individual through his facial expressions and body language, I decided to build a faction with him to assist in bring the meeting to order, to introduce the new ideas, and to effectively accomplish the meeting agenda. He seemed pleasantly surprised and thankful for the assist.”

Experiences with SimuLearn's Virtual Leader

Data Entry Technician

"While I am not a leader in the sense of management or someone with authority in my place of work, I recently used some lessons I learned from Virtual Leader in a department meeting. My department is managed by a powerless supervisor, who maintains little control in the actual organization, and tends to micro-manage the department that she manages. She is very much so a directive leader. Our meetings follow an agenda and little discussion is made about any topic. The meetings rarely produce any results, instead regurgitating previous topics and telling about upcoming events. Meetings wane between too relaxed or extremely tense and no work is accomplished.

In the recent meeting, a recruiter was reporting about the high level of job vacancies in the organization. The manager wanted to know why there was such a high vacancy, but did so in a very accusatory way. The recruiter was taken a back, became very tense, as did others in the room. I was internally clicking on the red zone of the manager, but instead decided to literally click on the green zone of the recruiter. I complimented her on her ability to fill positions with qualified candidates in the past. I asked her what her approaches had been that made her successful, what the previous year's vacancy rate was. The recruiter relaxed a little, and she discussed what she had done in the past, we found that the previous year's vacancy at this time last year was also high. It was also discovered that with the new fiscal year and the approval of new budgets that the department had more FTE's this time of year and because the organization was successful financially the previous year, even more FTE's had been submitted and approved than anticipated.

As the entire group talked about the issue the tension level leveled off into the productive range, and we began to discuss recruitment strategies and ways we could assist the recruiter. This is something that has never been discussed in a department meeting, only between the recruiter and manager.

By the end of the meeting the group had come up with some great ideas, we all felt like we had all been a part of a successful meeting. Because my participative leadership style is very different from the manager's directive leadership style, under normal circumstances I may not have stepped out of my comfort zone and taken this approach, but decided this was the moment to put the lessons learned to use. I feel that it actually worked towards my advantage to gain the group's opinion and to personally influence the manager showing her that I do have the capability she thought I was lacking to be successful in the department.

In the future, I will continue with my participative leadership style. However, I believe that if the situation arises and that I need to leave my comfort zone, I can now be a delegating or directing leader as well."

Executive Education Participant [recorded, available]

"You can learn it in a book but Virtual Leader puts a completely different twist on it, and I felt there was a lot of value in that...it put us in a different world... it's a good place to experiment...we went from a group to a team."

Federal Investigator

"The Three-to-One Leadership model is a very effective model for leadership. It is simple, easy to understand and it provides flexibility. I found that it also applies to what I do as a Special Agent in conducting interviews and interrogations. Especially during interrogations depending on the person I use the different leadership style (directing, participative, and delegating). Conducting interrogations is very complex because you have to gauge the suspect and figure out what approach you want to start with, after all you are trying to get this person to confess to committing a crime for which they will be tried.

Just like in a meeting, I usually start in the participative phase until I read the suspect and determine whether he is telling the truth or trying to deceive me. Suspects must also be made to stay on task because typically when they are trying to lie they try to overload you with details that usually stray from the subject at hand. They do this to lower their tension level, and to change your opinion about them. You in turn must raise the tension by switching to a more directive style and directly accusing them and present them with reasons/evidence why they did do it (Tension). You must present them with options such as introducing your own theories on why they committed the crime, sometimes this will uncover the real reasons (hidden ideas). The goal of any interrogation is to get a confession (Right Work). Usually getting a good confession leaves the suspect feeling like he was treated fairly and relieved that he told the truth."

More Comments from Virtual Leader Corporate Participants (cont.)

Maurus Stöckli, Project Manager

"I must say that at the beginning I thought that I could browse through the program in a few hours. I was wrong. There was no browsing. :-) It has been an awesome experience for me."

Teresa Little, CheckFree

"Thank you for Virtual Leader training, I did enjoy it. I will definitely be using the simulator to practice!"

Students of Dr. Daniel Twomey, Organizational Behavior, Fairleigh Dickinson University

"The SimuLearn simulation drove home the fact that I am not always going to be the one with the ideas; I should work on fostering an environment for my associates to feel comfortable sharing their ideas. I think of myself as a collaborative leader/manager but I will use my 'influence' when necessary now to support ideas or stress the importance of 'doing the right work.' I have now adopted this concept of focusing on the 'right work' with my team. I think it is a very effective concept and requires reinforced communication to keep my associates on track. I am looking forward to kicking off the New Year armed with the tools that SimuLearn has provided. I would highly recommend that SimuLearn work with large corporations. I strongly believe that many of the managers that I work with would greatly benefit from this type of training."

Students of Dr. Michael Novak, Organizational Behavior, University of Massachusetts – Boston

"The practice that we received with the simulation helped prepare us to deal with real-life situations. The Virtual Leader scenarios helped hone our managerial styles while applying the theoretical material learned in the classroom to the different scenarios that we practiced in the lab. Making the connections has enabled us to become more aware of the magnitude of effective leadership skills."

Jeff C., Otis Elevator

"Virtual Leader is one of the most effective online simulations I've ever experienced and it is enjoyable learning."

More Comments from Virtual Leader Corporate Participants

On Practiceware

I have to say I'm always skeptical about electronic learning formats, as a self-proclaimed 'people person,' but this program has been enlightening and extremely helpful. Here's why I (and I'm sure others) believe you have created the right format : Every good leadership program needs reinforcement by doing. Most programs attempt to accomplish reinforcement through uncomfortable break-out sessions or one-on-one practice scenarios that generally lead to joking around and communal nit-picking of the program itself among the participants, rather than good faith trial and error. Virtual Leader allows a participant to make mistakes (both intentional and unintentional) and analyze those mistakes in their own time. This is a critical differentiator.

Virtual Leader was a part of valuable learning experience since I can do things that I am reluctant to do in real life. This gave me ability to see reactions and helped me realize that it is sometime necessary to build tension in your work environment for better productivity. Too much relaxing environment can lead to non-productivity. The software is a brilliant piece of architecture. Thank you!

I have been through numerous management training courses and have been a manager for many years, yet none resulted in any real improvement in my skills. Virtual Leader provides real life scenarios and most importantly immediate feedback, affording me the opportunity to understand what I did well and what needs improvement; the result is real-time learning."

Experiences with SimuLearn's Virtual Leader

On Leadership Styles

I used several styles in the same meeting (directive, participative, delegative) to get the group more productive.

Virtual leader allowed me to see the different styles of leadership and then practice using them in the simulations. This was a great tool because it truly helps when in meetings and lets you adapt your style to various situations that you come across.

I would recommend this program to my manager and my coworkers. I think this tool can benefit anyone in the work environment and it really helps people see what they can do better in a meeting and how to better interact with people.

I thought everything was organized and run well, so I don't know how much can be improved. Maybe more format around the Weekly web sessions. Thanks for everything, you guys did an amazing job!

On Application of Knowledge

With enough practice, I found myself changing leadership styles in real-life meetings.

I found this software extremely helpful for analyzing meeting dynamics. I was pleasantly surprised at its realistic representation of how ideas, tension, business objectives and personal influence all contribute to the success, or failure, of a meeting. After completing the various simulations and participating in our weekly meetings, I've started to see the Virtual Leader concepts appear in "real world" meetings. (I have to admit that I even found myself prompting a silent colleague to speak by saying "Ed, it looks like you have something on your mind." I laughed to myself at how second nature the phrases of the simulations had become to me!)

One of the major lessons I learned was that tension is sometimes necessary in a meeting to keep people engaged and to bring about "hidden" ideas or opinions. I was in a meeting recently where everyone was making comments around a controversial issue, but they would not simply state the issue and put it on the table for discussion (which would definitely cause tension). I noticed that people were hesitant to bring the tension to the conversation, but eventually one woman in the group finally did mention it. She brought the topic up in a non-confrontational way - Although people were initially cautious about expressing their opinions, they eventually started talking (which raised tension!) but it allowed everyone to hear everyone else's opinions, and in the end, it was an extremely successful and productive meeting.

Another lesson I learned is that it's important to cater your leadership style to your desired meeting outcome. I am typically participative and delegative; however, I found that sometimes being directive works best in certain situations. I actually noticed this recently in meetings with my manager. My manager held two meetings with the same exact people. In one meeting, my manager effectively used the participative/delegative style in order to accomplish the "right work." In the other meeting, which was later in the day and with the same people, he used the directive leadership style in order to get the right work done. I was impressed with his understanding of how to effectively use leadership styles in order to obtain the outcome you desire, even when working with the exact same people. It was nice that the simulations offered me a place to step outside my participative/delegative comfort zone and try leading a meeting using the directive style.

Thank you for a great learning experience - The Virtual Leader simulations were definitely entertaining and educational.

I learned a number of things, but let me give you a scenario that best illustrates how I have used the software in a real world setting.

I was in a meeting with my director, manager, and two business partners (Director and Lead) from another Operating Company (Op-Co.)

More Comments from Virtual Leader Corporate Participants (cont.)

The two individuals from the other Op-Co went off on a tangent about new PDA's. It was completely off topic. I laughed to myself because I could see that topic on the "side of the screen" (PDA's) but I knew the topic was irrelevant to business results. I introduced a new topic which was based on their boss, and we quickly got back on track.

While introducing the new topic (again about their boss) I said it in a way to push back on one of the individuals, because I could tell the meeting was too relaxed. I had to raise the tension to improve the productivity. I felt like I could see the line getting too low and immediately I could sense that tension had gone back up. We were back to a productive mood.

The two items I am referring to are the following:

- It's very true that when people are too relaxed they tend to lose focus.
- Further some topics that are irrelevant to business results can help/hurt the mood of the meeting.

Please let me know if you need anything else. Again this software is fantastic, and I have really enjoyed working with it.

On Emotional Intelligence

Virtual Leader allowed me to understand how important it is during a meeting to know when to speak and when not to, who to speak to and who not to, when to offer praise, and when to be still.

This simulation has helped me determine an individual's emotion through their body language and how to deal with employees that have their own hidden agenda.

I plan on utilizing the information I got from VL in several ways. Of course the obvious is as the material was presented, as a tool for identifying and achieving goals in the most efficient manner, But I also have found this knowledge useful in interpreting the comments and strategies of those around me. Am I being supported or sidelined, and why? In business and in personal life there are red and green clicks and this tool will offer alternatives in my daily interactions. The appreciation of various styles and, more importantly, actual practice in dealing with those styles in multiple, repeatable example scenarios will be the major takeaway for me. And, as mentioned above, the ability to analyze and interpret incoming red and green clicks towards my own ideas will enhance my understanding of real-time events.

On Ideas

It is important to resolve distracting issues and ideas, even if they are not on the agenda.

The course has been a very worthwhile experience for me and I have learned to be a better listener and draw ideas better from other people. I would recommend this course to anyone.

I manage a lot of technical people, and we are doing design. I have been able to apply what I have learned here quite a bit, but most importantly to get buy-in on certain ideas, which is really good. Through managing the conversation I have been able to keep designers from getting territorial. We had a senior person who was adamant about something, and a junior person came up with a really great idea. I was able to get everyone to probe this new idea and gain consensus. In terms of worth to the company, I think just getting that one idea out is going to be huge. It is going to make it much easier to code, and it is going to be a higher performance application. Meetings used to be monopolized by just one or two people. Now I am making sure everyone is involved, even if I have to probe them for new ideas. Now I am getting the fresh perspectives. And I need the fresh ideas to do my job.

Experiences with SimuLearn's Virtual Leader

This simulation made me think strategically in order to get ideas passed by the group. It was very interesting as the hidden agendas surfaced. This very realistic because in real life, employees are known to have hidden agendas.

On Power

Now I listen more to others first and their ideas before introducing my opinion in meetings

I talk less (saving my personal influence/power) if the group is on the right track.

I empowered another team member by asking for their input at a critical moment.

I stepped out of my comfort zone to assert my opinion and questioned my boss's idea, only to win him over to support my idea resulting in better results.

I formed an alliance with a colleague/authority figure to gain personal influence and to get support for my idea.

On Situational Awareness

The Virtual Leader simulation requires a lot of attention to detail. It has brought me an awareness of how critical it is to be conscious of the entire surroundings. I had no idea how intense it is to consciously consider everything that goes on around you when working with a group of people.

I am better at reading body language and responding to it by increasing tension to productive levels.

I prepare better for the meeting by knowing who was attending and what their opinions or agendas might be.

Even though it appeared a little unrealistic at times, it really helped to gain awareness of the importance of the different aspects of leadership, the benefits of reading and understanding body language and an awareness of how different styles work better in different situations.

It has definitely been a very valuable learning experience! It's great to get to be able to 'frame' my meetings with some strategy around power and tension, to make the rest of the group more productive. You can be sure I'll exploit these tactics. Thanks again!

This is actually making me think more, prior to going into a meeting. Who are the attendees, what is the objective and how much tension will there or won't there be? I have several client meetings over the next three days in Chicago and I will definitely be taking more notice of moods, body language, etc. I am also having a very tense meeting first thing Thursday morning with an employee who is not working to full potential. That will be very tense and directive.

I do think that this was valuable b/c it really put it in plain language how we can gain an advantage in the work place. Especially because we are so young and new to the company, we are at a disadvantage. I felt

More Comments from Virtual Leader Corporate Participants (cont.)

that the software and discussions allowed me to analyze and understand tools to use so that I can apply it to my life right away.

I would definitely recommend it b/c I don't think that most people understand how critical it can be to be fully prepared for a meeting or how to react when a meeting isn't going how you would like it to.

I thought that the classroom session and teleconference discussions were well orchestrated. The only suggestion I have is to maybe send out a brief summary after each meeting of the points that were discussed so that we could remember them a bit better.

On the Deployment

The software was great and the workbook led one through the simulations at a good pace.

I believe the insistence of having people participate in Webex's ensured that everyone spent time using the tool. With more use of the tool, comes more learning, and hopefully more results in real-life situations. Overall, as long as people put in the time, this will be very beneficial.

It may be more beneficial if our class were able to practice in groups.

It was a great piece of software--fun to play while demonstrating various meeting techniques and behaviors.
