



WAYS TO USE DiBL | WHITEPAPER 5 OF 6

# Simulations

*How live, facilitated simulations let teams practise real decisions in safe environments, and build lasting capability.*

dibl.eu | Serious Games Interactive | 2026

## Executive Summary

There is a significant gap between knowing what to do and being able to do it under pressure. Leadership training can teach the principles of good decision-making. A nursing course can explain best practice in clinical ethics. A business school can describe the factors in a sound financial decision. But without practice, without the experience of actually making a consequential choice and seeing what happens, knowledge remains theoretical.

DiBL Simulations close this gap. By placing participants inside realistic, branching scenarios where decisions unfold over time and have trackable consequences, Simulations create a safe practice environment for the kinds of complex, high-stakes decisions that are difficult or impossible to rehearse any other way.

This whitepaper explores the research on simulation-based learning, explains how DiBL Simulations differ from self-paced tools like Articulate Storyline, Twine, and Rise, and provides practical guidance for designing and facilitating your first simulation session.

## The Challenge: The Theory-Practice Gap

In almost every professional domain, the most important skills are the hardest to teach directly. Leadership, ethical judgement, strategic thinking, clinical decision-making, financial management: these are competencies that develop through experience, feedback, and reflection. They cannot be taught by telling.

Yet most professional development relies precisely on telling: lectures, e-learning modules, case studies, and policy briefings. The assumption is that once someone knows the right thing to do, they will do it. But decades of research in cognitive psychology and professional training disagree. Knowledge and performance are different capabilities, and developing performance requires practice in conditions that resemble the real thing (Ericsson, 2008).

Traditional role play attempts to bridge this gap, but unevenly. Quality depends on participant willingness to commit. Feedback is often vague. The format is difficult to scale or standardise. E-learning simulations offer consistency but sacrifice the social dimension: the experience of seeing how your peers reason differently, which is often where the richest learning occurs.

DiBL Simulations offer a third path: structured, interactive, branching scenarios that are run live with groups, giving every participant the experience of decision-making under realistic conditions while the facilitator guides reflection in real time.

### Experiential Learning and Deliberate Practice

---

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle identifies four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation. Simulations activate all four in a single session: participants have an experience (making a decision), observe consequences and compare with peers, develop new frameworks for understanding the situation, and then face the next choice with different thinking.

Ericsson's (2008) research on deliberate practice identifies the conditions under which practice produces expertise: immediate feedback, appropriate challenge level, focused repetition, and expert guidance. DiBL Simulations are designed around these conditions. Facilitators can shape challenge level, consequences provide immediate feedback, and the session structure ensures focused attention on the key decision points.

### Scenario-Based Learning in Professional Contexts

---

Research on scenario-based learning (Clark, 2009; Jonassen, 2011) consistently shows that contextualised, decision-focused learning produces stronger transfer to real-world performance than abstract instruction. The key is realism: scenarios that mirror the conditions participants actually face, including the ambiguity, competing priorities, and time pressure of real decisions, activate the same cognitive processes as the real thing.

Egenfeldt-Nielsen's (2026) work on facilitated educational games identifies variables as a distinctive and powerful design element: when participant decisions affect numeric scores representing priorities like "safety", "cost", "patient welfare", or "team morale", the consequences become concrete and comparative. Seeing how a decision shifts the balance of competing values is far more powerful than reading about the trade-offs.

### Social Learning in Simulation

---

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory demonstrates that observational learning, watching others make decisions and experiencing the consequences vicariously, is a

powerful complement to direct experience. In a DiBL Simulation, every participant observes the group's collective choices in real time. The differences between how participants reason about the same decision are, in practice, some of the richest facilitation material in any session.

## What DiBL Simulations Is

DiBL Simulations is a live, facilitated branching scenario tool that places groups inside realistic decision-making environments where choices have consequences that unfold over time. Participants vote on decisions from their own devices. The simulation advances based on collective or individual choices. The facilitator guides reflection between stages.

Simulations in DiBL can include variables: numeric scores representing competing priorities that shift as participants make decisions, making the consequences of choices concrete and visible. They can run as a single narrative arc or as a multi-stage experience across several sessions.

### Key Capabilities

- **Interactive decision paths** Scenarios branch based on choices, letting learners see how decisions play out over time.
- **Real-time engagement** Participants interact through their own device, keeping everyone involved and accountable.
- **Variables and consequence tracking** Decisions shift numeric scores representing competing priorities, making trade-offs concrete and visible.
- **Facilitator control** Guides can shape the flow or let participants drive outcomes, enabling both structured and emergent learning.
- **Insight and export** Capture decision data in real time and export for deeper reflection, reporting, or analysis.

## How DiBL Compares

DiBL Simulations occupy a distinctive space between self-paced e-learning tools and live facilitated training. Here is how they compare to the most common alternatives.

Tool	Strengths	Where DiBL goes further
<b>Articulate Storyline</b>	Industry-standard e-learning authoring with rich branching scenario support. Strong media, SCORM output, LMS integration. Widely used for professional training.	Storyline produces asynchronous, individual experiences. There is no live participation, no group voting, no real-time collective decision-making, and no facilitator in the loop. DiBL Simulations are live social experiences: the learning happens in the group, not on a screen alone.
<b>Rise (Articulate)</b>	Rapid e-learning tool with scenario blocks. Fast to build, responsive, clean design. Good for simple branching.	Rise scenario blocks are linear and self-paced. No variables, no live group participation, and limited branching depth. DiBL Simulations support complex multi-stage branching with variables, real-time group play, and live facilitation.
<b>Twine</b>	Open-source branching narrative tool. Highly flexible. Used by educators and game designers for text-based choice scenarios.	Twine is a solo, asynchronous authoring tool: it creates self-paced individual experiences, not live group sessions. No real-time participation, no facilitator controls, no group analytics. DiBL is built for the training room.
<b>iSpring</b>	Fast e-learning tool with conversation simulation	iSpring is designed for asynchronous conversation

Tool	Strengths	Where DiBL goes further
	support and built-in scoring. Good for compliance training.	practice, not live facilitated group decision-making. DiBL Simulations support team play, collective decision-making, and facilitator-led discussion: fundamentally different use cases.

The core difference: most tools treat simulation as an individual, asynchronous experience. DiBL treats it as a live, social process with a facilitator in the room, collective decision-making, and structured reflection built in at every stage.

## In Practice: How to Run a DiBL Simulation

### Before the Session

---

Good simulations are grounded in situations that feel genuinely real to participants. Abstract scenarios engage less than scenarios drawn from participants' own professional context.

- Choose a situation that involves genuine competing priorities: safety vs. efficiency, cost vs. quality, short-term vs. long-term, where reasonable people might make different choices.
- Map the decision points: where are the moments that matter most? These are your branch points.
- Define your variables: what are the competing values or priorities you want participants to track? Keep it to 2-4 variables to maintain clarity.
- Plan your facilitation questions for each branch point: what will you ask when the group sees the consequences of their choice?

### During the Session

---

The power of a simulation is in the consequence reveal. Each decision point is an opportunity for facilitated reflection, not just an input moment.

- Set the context clearly before starting: participants need to know who they are, what they are trying to achieve, and what constraints they are operating under.
- After each decision reveal, show the consequence before advancing: "You chose X. Here is what happened, and here is how your priority scores shifted."
- Ask: "Does anyone wish they had chosen differently? Why?" This is often the richest moment in the session.
- Use the variable dashboard to show how the group's collective priorities have shifted over the course of the simulation.

### After the Session

---

- Run a structured debrief: what decisions surprised you? What would you do differently? How does this connect to your real work?

- Export the decision data as a record of the group's reasoning, valuable for team development and training documentation.
- Consider running the same simulation a second time with a different starting condition. Seeing how different constraints change decisions is powerful learning.

## The Three Simulation Templates

DiBL includes three ready-to-use simulation templates, each designed for a specific facilitation need. You can start any of them directly from the template library in the case builder. Adapt them as a starting point for your own session design.

### 20 – Simulation Co-op Simple

---

Participants weigh in on options and key variables in the simulation are influenced, leading to a final outcome. The simplest entry point into cooperative simulation: use it to introduce groups to collective decision-making and see how shared choices shape a shared result.

[Preview template:](#)

### 21 – Simulation Uncertainty

---

Choose between the safer route or the riskier option. Each choice has a likelihood of working out, and sometimes you get unlucky even with the best decisions. Builds authentic decision-making under uncertainty: participants learn to reason about risk and probability, not just pick the correct answer.

[Preview template:](#)

### 22 – Simulation Co-op Advanced

---

A simulation where participants balance different factors, shown through a security incident example. Teams manage competing priorities as a ransomware attack unfolds: financial exposure, reputational risk, and operational continuity. The most complex of the three templates, ideal for board training, leadership development, and senior professional audiences.

[Preview template:](#)

All three templates are available in the DiBL template library. Sign up free at [dibl.eu/sign-up](https://dibl.eu/sign-up), open the case builder, choose a template, write your scenario, and you are ready to run your first simulation.

Learn more: [dibl.eu/simulations](https://dibl.eu/simulations)

## Real-World Examples

### Cybersim: Security Decision-Making for Boards

---

The Cybersim simulation runs with boards of directors and executive teams at Bestyrelsesforeningen (the Danish Board Association). The facilitator takes on the role of "crisis coordinator", advancing the scenario in real time as a ransomware attack unfolds. This is the scenario behind Template 22: Simulation Co-op Advanced.

At each decision point: pay the ransom? Shut down systems? Handle communication internally or externally? The facilitator pauses to debrief: "What were you weighing? What did you prioritise: financial loss or reputational risk?"

The power of the simulation lies in seeing how experienced professionals disagree about the right course of action. In one session, the same board split 60-40 on whether to pay a ransom, and the subsequent discussion revealed fundamentally different risk frameworks that had never been surfaced in a regular board meeting. The facilitator's role is to make these differences visible and productive. Duration: 1-2 hours.

### Prosper: Cooperative Sustainability Simulation

---

Prosper is a sustainability simulation designed for secondary school students, centred on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Five teams with different roles work through eight consecutive rounds, each introducing a real-world sustainability challenge. At each round, teams vote on solution options, a randomised outcome mechanic modified by their choices determines the result, and the facilitator leads reflection on decisions.

Fully cooperative: all teams work toward shared SDG goals rather than competing against each other. World Events injected at intervals create unpredictability and force adaptation. Prosper demonstrates that simulations do not need competition to create engagement. Shared consequences, seeing how your team's choices affect others' domains, create natural tension and investment. Duration: approximately 90 minutes.

## **Roskilde Kommune: Early Intervention for Children at Risk**

---

Facilitators lead groups of teachers and pedagogues through scenarios about early intervention for children at risk. Professionals work through realistic situations where they must balance a child's welfare against family privacy, professional judgement against institutional procedures, and early signals against the risk of overreaction.

The key facilitation moment comes when professionals with different experience levels disagree about when and how to intervene: the simulation makes these implicit professional judgements explicit and discussable. Each scenario takes 8-12 minutes. The holistic approach builds on practitioners' existing expertise, using branching dilemmas to sharpen professional judgement rather than prescribe correct answers.

# Getting Started with DiBL Simulations

Start with a situation you know well: a decision challenge that comes up repeatedly in your organisation or training context. Map out two decision points with two or three options each. Add one or two variables. That is enough to create a meaningful experience.

## 1. Map the scenario

---

Choose a real decision challenge, identify 2-3 key branch points, and define 1-2 variables to track.

## 2. Build in DiBL

---

Open the case builder, choose one of the three simulation templates, and map your scenario: pages, choices, consequences, and variable changes.

## 3. Run and debrief

---

Facilitate live, reveal consequences deliberately, and build in structured debrief time after each decision point.

Learn more: [dibl.eu/simulations](https://dibl.eu/simulations)

## Key Takeaways

### Summary

- The theory–practice gap is real: knowing what to do is not the same as being able to do it under pressure. Simulations bridge the gap by creating safe environments for practising real decisions.
- DiBL Simulations are designed for live, facilitated group learning, not self-paced individual experiences like Articulate Storyline, Rise, Twine, or iSpring.
- Variables: scores that shift based on decisions, make the consequences of choices concrete and comparative, activating deeper reflection than narrative outcomes alone.
- The richest learning in a simulation often comes from seeing how peers reasoned differently about the same decision.
- Three ready-to-use templates (20: Co-op Simple, 21: Uncertainty, 22: Co-op Advanced) cover the full range from introductory group play to complex board-level scenario training.
- Deliberate practice principles (Ericsson, 2008): immediate feedback, appropriate challenge, focused repetition, are built into the DiBL Simulation format.

## Continue Reading

### Build It Yourself

---

Ready to build a simulation in DiBL? Our builder guide walks you through Flow view, variables, the Action Builder, and multi-round structures step by step.

- Whitepaper 11: Building Simulations - How to Build with DiBL Series

### More in the Ways to Use DiBL Series

---

- Whitepaper 1: Brainstorms - Facilitated brainstorming with simultaneous digital input
- Whitepaper 2: Dilemmas - Facilitated decision-making through branching scenarios
- Whitepaper 3: Presentations - Interactive, facilitator-led content delivery
- Whitepaper 4: Quiz & Mini-Games - Knowledge checks with scoring and gamification
- Whitepaper 6: Survey & Polls - Real-time data collection and evaluation

---

### References

**Bandura, A. (1977).** *Social Learning Theory*. Prentice Hall.

**Clark, R. C. (2009).** *Scenario-based e-Learning: Evidence-Based Guidelines for Online Workforce Learning*. Pfeiffer.

**Ericsson, K. A. (2008).** *Deliberate practice and acquisition of expert performance: A general overview*. *Academic Emergency Medicine*, 15(11), 988-994.

**Jonassen, D. H. (2011).** *Learning to Solve Problems: A Handbook for Designing Problem-Solving Learning Environments*. Routledge.

**Kolb, D. A. (1984).** *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Prentice Hall.