The Phoenix Project
A story about a business' digital turnaround

'Simulations are amazing team learning and organisational change catalysts. A 'DevOps' sim helps to build real partnerships between IT Development & Operations AND across the whole organisation, digital-savvy business people and enterprise-savvy technical specialists. DevOps is a business philosophy for all.'
Darren Goldsby, CDO, Hearst (UK)

This story may sound familiar …

Parts Unlimited, a car parts manufacturing company, is falling behind its competitors and the financial markets have started to notice. The competitors' knowledge of their customers and the way they customise their digital marketing, supply and delivery is light years ahead, and their market share is growing.

The leadership team initiated the Phoenix Project to save the company. Unfortunately it is now 2 years late and £10m over budget. The IT department is being blamed for this and everyone is panicking. Plus, years of underinvestment in IT are hindering change.

Can you turn this company around? Can you get the Phoenix Project finished, rebuild morale and the reputation of the IT department, connect up IT Dev and Ops internally, and with all the other business functions: HR, Marketing, Finance, Security … to create one, successful company with everyone collaborating to achieve the same goal?

* This simulation designed by GamingWorks, is based on the excellent novel by Gene Kim, Kevin Behr and George Spafford, thought leaders in DevOps and digital business transformation, with exclusive rights.

Why use simulations?

Simulations are truly inspirational learning activities where, instead of talking about the principles of complex process and behaviour change, participants are 'hands-on', in a situation that feels completely authentic, learning and actually practising the techniques because

Best practice requires … well … practice!

Why are these changes so hard to make?

Because they are cultural and systemic, and have no quick fix solution. Everyone has to rethink roles, relationships, accountabilities, power bases … something we humans always struggle with, plus we are too busy to step back from working 'in' our part of the business to work 'on' our whole business, together.

The Phoenix Project immerses people in a situation with clear parallels to their real work. They can experiment safely, experience the consequences and benefits of different approaches and transfer these to their real work.

- Stand in the shoes of IT, Marketing, Finance, Security, HR, …
- Juggle complex workloads in a complex and volatile environment
- Learn to solve problems earlier and faster
- Make better decisions
- Give each other constructive feedback
- Get fired up again after setbacks
- Use processes to improve clarity and efficiency, rather than slowing things down
- Go from 'do-do-do-do' to 'plan-do-check-act'

What happens during the simulation?

The simulation is played is 4 rounds. In each round you will have time to plan, action your plan, then stop and reflect on performance and improvements for the next round.

You are given the roles of IT Support, IT Development, CIO, QA, Security, CFO, Retail Operations, Head of HR, Change … and the shock news about the company performance and the Phoenix Project. You are then given a variety of activities to work on, problems to solve, decisions to make and relationships to build.

You learn to get your workload and flow under control, improve collaboration across all the business functions, stop the 'us' and 'them', silo thinking and move towards a more open, collaborative organisational culture, where new customer demands can quickly be met with quality products and services, launched ahead of your competitors.

You also learn to handle the politics of organisational life. How would you prioritise a major security compliance issue, to avoid the company hitting the headlines? A serious HR system problem with Union implications. A potential fraud issue? AND get the Phoenix Project back on track?

In each round you refine your approach, using a range of tried-and-tested Lean process improvement techniques and robust organisational change leadership practices – and immediately see your impact on sales targets and stock market ratings!

Keen to know more?

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How can the Phoenix Project simulation be used?

Team building or executive learning event

A dynamic, supportive event for a new or established team to work and learn together. The outputs include practical ideas for cross-team working, more systemic thinking, work flow and service improvement and/or wider organisational changes, plus the shared confidence and drive to actually turn those ideas into reality.

A kick-off event for a change initiative

A fresh and unexpected way to launch a programme of change, to get senior stakeholders on board, create an environment that enables open discussion on how best to lead and manage the initiative together.

There are different simulations available which focus on different team skills and business or project goals.

Based on the inspiring NASA Apollo 13 1970s mission, you are the ground control team supporting those three astronauts on that iconic mission. Can your team build powerful collaborative relationships, creative thinking and slick service delivery processes and bring them back alive?

Challenge of Egypt

Projects! Are you doing Agile, product development, or needing to re-invigorate a process that has become tired and clunky? Get creative, build high-performing teams, juggle complexity, work with multiple stakeholders with strong personalities, plan and track collaboratively and roll with the changes that come at you. Because they will!

A story with a twist that will inspire everyone. All about leading behaviour and attitude change, knowledge sharing and organisational awareness. And nowhere is this more significant for organisations than in the area of cyber-security. The biggest risk AND the most powerful protection you have? Your people!

Team coaching

To sustain the momentum, light-touch follow-on team coaching sessions can be provided. An experienced facilitator will help the team to apply the lessons learned and make the agreed changes.

The groups select their own topics and take responsibility for their own learning, project delivery and business impact. The facilitator provides working processes and 'nuggets' of best practice.

Our facilitators

The Open Limits team is led by Philippa Hale, who is also on the Associate Faculty at Henley Business School. The team each have at least 20 years in Organisation Development, learning and change leadership and ensure a valuable, memorable experience.

Our clients include