How gaming beat training

Releasing frightened organisations through gaming simulation

Rens Kortman, games researcher, Delft University of Technology
Leonie de Vree, director, Dorfl Leadership development

Why do so many organisations seem to be unable to take tough decisions? Many organisations are drenched in collective -unconscious- decision anxiety: they typically avoid getting to action by discussing and studying their problems over and over again. This corresponds to the notion of *frightened* organisations.

We asked employees of one of our clients how they perceived their leaders' behaviour and how they would like their ideal leader to behave. Over 700 responders indicated that their superiors' leadership style fell short of 'courage' and 'authenticity', resulting in the collective pattern described above.

Discussing collective patterns in organisations is notoriously problematic. People are usually not conscious of their pattern and will defend and rationalise their actions - or the lack of it. This defensiveness often makes training programmes for frightened organisations an ineffective chore. We chose a different approach and developed a gaming simulation for this organisation's management. During game play, avoiding decisions resulted in an evident lack of result. This confrontation helped them to see their collective decision-anxiety pattern for what it is. Once players became aware of their pattern, it was congenital for them to experiment with new, effective problem solving behaviour. Several weeks after each game performance, we conducted another survey among subordinates of our game players. From their responses it appeared that their leaders acted significantly more courageously and more authentically.

We concluded -after analysing the game and our eight game sessions with over 150 players- that these results outperform the results of many traditional training sessions. We will elaborate upon this in our presentation.