

CASE STUDY

Bringing Project Management to Life Through Simulation

How a major SEC university used experiential learning to help project management students move from classroom concepts to real-world judgment.

KNOWING

Project Management
Concepts

PRACTICING

Decisions &
Tradeoffs

DOING

Judgment &
Action

CASE STUDY

From Classroom Knowledge to Project Judgment

Project management students can learn the frameworks, terminology, and tools that underpin effective project management. The greater challenge is giving them an opportunity to apply those concepts when priorities compete, information is incomplete, and their decisions have consequences.

The learning gap is not simply knowing what a project manager should do. It is practicing how to decide when the answer is not obvious.

THE CHALLENGE

A professor at a major SEC university wanted to complement traditional project management instruction with an experiential component that would allow students to practice the skills they were learning in the classroom.

THE APPROACH

Management Worlds worked with the professor to integrate a Management Worlds project management simulation into the course. Through the simulation, students were placed in realistic project situations where they had to evaluate information, make decisions, manage tradeoffs, and respond to changing conditions.

WHAT STUDENTS EXPERIENCED

The simulation moves students beyond analyzing a project from a distance. They are responsible for making decisions as conditions evolve, balancing competing demands, and determining how to respond when there is no single obvious answer. Each decision creates consequences that shape what happens next.

Students practice prioritization, tradeoff management, decision-making under uncertainty, adaptability, and reflection. The emphasis is not simply on selecting a correct response, but on applying project management concepts in context and understanding the consequences of those choices.

SCOPE	TIME	RISK
Competing needs	Changing conditions	Incomplete info

DECISION CYCLE

Evaluate information → Manage tradeoffs → Respond and reflect

Rather than simply discussing what a project manager should do, students have an opportunity to make those decisions themselves and see how their choices affect project outcomes.

THE IMPACT

Practice Changes What Students Can Demonstrate

KNOWING	EXPERIENTIAL PRACTICE	DOING
Frameworks + concepts	Decisions + consequences	Judgment + action

The simulation helps bridge the gap between knowing project management and practicing project management. Students can apply classroom concepts in a controlled environment, learn from the consequences of their decisions, and reflect on how they approach complex project situations.

LEARNING THROUGH CONSEQUENCES

One advantage of simulation is that decisions are not isolated exercises. Students can see how choices influence subsequent project conditions and outcomes. A decision that appears reasonable in the moment may create an unintended consequence later, requiring students to reassess assumptions and adapt their approach.

DECIDE → EXPERIENCE → ADAPT → REFLECT

APPLY	LEARN	REFLECT
Use classroom concepts in realistic project situations.	Experience the consequences of decisions and tradeoffs.	Examine how judgment changes under complexity and uncertainty.

A DIFFERENT VIEW FOR FACULTY

For faculty, the simulation creates another lens into student learning. Rather than evaluating only whether students understand project management concepts, instructors can observe how students apply those concepts when faced with competing priorities, uncertainty, and consequences. The closeout, after-action review, and student reflections create opportunities to discuss the reasoning behind decisions and how students would approach similar situations differently.

WHY IT MATTERS

Project management is ultimately a performance discipline. Professionals are expected not only to understand methodologies and frameworks, but to exercise judgment when conditions are uncertain and competing priorities emerge.

Experiential learning gives universities an opportunity to develop that capability before students encounter those situations on an actual project.

Bring experiential project management learning to your students.

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