

The Power of Learning

Global consulting company Celemi develops board-game-based simulations to help people understand vital business concepts

Even bright, motivated workers often fail to understand how their decisions about resources, employees or projects impact a company's ability to reach its goals. Fewer workers have an adequate understanding of how their actions affect the company's "balance sheet" or "cash flow."

Explaining these concepts to employees in ways they can easily understand and incorporate into their work can be difficult. But more than 25 years ago, Klas Mellander, a former school teacher, uncovered an effective method to help employees absorb these "big picture" concepts.

Mellander's methodology involved a process of interaction and personal discovery that he called "The Power of Learning." "We cannot simply absorb other people's knowledge, we must create our own," said Mellander. This remains the guiding principle for Celemi, a global consulting company founded by Mellander, two partners and a team of professional consultants 26 years ago.

Celemi, which now has offices in Sweden, China and the USA, provides its clients with business simulations to increase knowledge and bring about change at their organizations. These simulations are hands-on activities that help employees learn core concepts in a fast, effective and entertaining way using a methodology that is traditionally used with children – board games.

"They're fun. They're engaging. They're challenging," Kjell Lindqvist, the CEO of Celemi, said about the company's business simulations. "People work in teams, as they do in a company, to make decisions and compete for customers, talent, market share or the next big idea."

These simulations help employees gain a fundamental understanding of how their daily decisions impact the success of the organization as a whole. That is the key to achieving higher levels of performance, said Mr. Lindqvist. "If you understand the big picture, the company will work better."

Apples and Oranges

One of Celemi's most popular board-based business simulations, Apples and Oranges, is designed to help non-finance professionals learn the basics of running a business. It involves teams of four or five participants running a mock manufacturing, service or retail company over a three-year time frame.

As the participants move along the board, they face financial decisions, such as how to deal with productivity changes, allocate resources



and manage cash flow. At the end of each simulated year, participants produce an annual report including income statement, balance sheet and KPIs. "The game helps everyone to understand how their daily decisions impact the company strategically and financially," said Mr. Lindqvist.

Celemi runs nine other board-based simulations. One of them, Celemi Tango, is designed by Klas Mellander and Karl-Erik Sveiby, a distinguished professor in knowledge management and a proponent of experiential learning rather than lectures as means of transferring knowledge. "Celemi Tango is a great learning laboratory that had a very positive impact on our business management," said one client who had participated in the game. "We found that we could identify and manage the highly critical success factors in a knowledge company and actually quantify the results of our decisions."

"Our simulations have the capacity to translate complex business principles into realistic, visual learning experiences – everything is touchable and visible," said Barbro Andersson, President of Celemi Consulting in Shanghai. "Passive reception of information doesn't lead to good retention. You learn by experiencing and responding to new situations."

Custom tailoring

Apart from these 10 simulations, Celemi also creates tailor-made programs to meet specific client needs. "We look into every customer's needs to meet their expectations. Sometimes our consultants have to start from scratch, developing simulations, work mats or films," said Ms. Andersson.



This tailored approach and sensitivity to different cultural requirements has helped Celemi to expand its reach to 120 partners in more than 70 countries. In total, more than 3.2 million people have participated in Celemi's programs and its programs have been translated into 30 different languages.

Celemi's Shanghai office is responsible for partners in 12 different countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

"It's very important for us to provide what we call "engaging learning methods." When you go through a Celemi experience, you reach that point when you have that feeling of understanding why things work the way they do, and when you make a decision, what impact it will have on the organization," said Mr. Lindqvist.

"At Celemi, we help create that "Aha!" moment – the point at which people draw conclusions and gain new insights that make your company work better."

