



# The Hidden Game in Your Organization

By Sharon Rich

**Robert is the CEO** of a mid-sized manufacturing company. When they need to make a major decision, Robert gathers the executive team to hear their thoughts. But in the end, he always goes with whatever the CFO recommends.

For Robert, the financial angle is most important. As a result, he tends to neglect other needs within the organization. His team sees this pattern. With each decision, they go through the motions of providing opinions, knowing they will inevitably be ignored. Privately, they express their frustration with the way decisions are made, even as they do nothing to change it.

**This is the hidden game** — the game your organization doesn't know it's playing. It's a game that sets up varying degrees of under performance, conflict, disengagement, and turnover.

The hidden game is made up of unspoken agreements about how the organization works. Not just how decisions are made, but how information is shared, how problems are surfaced and solved, how conflicts are dealt with, and so on. Although it may not seem like it, these are actually agreements because everyone understands and abides by them. Those who don't agree either change the way things work— or leave.

The longer these silent deals go unacknowledged, the more entrenched they become. They are the invisible ceiling that limits how high the organization can grow.

**Of course, Robert, and other leaders, don't set out to create these limiting practices.** They arise out of their prior experiences in business, in school, in their families. These hidden-in-plain-sight patterns were forged on high school sports teams, in monopoly and chess games, and in navigating the massive multi-player game we call the economy. In fact, we all have unconsciously adopted rules and habits that don't work, yet that we don't think to question and in effect agree to uphold.

**So, what's an organization to do?** How can you transform this hidden game into an open one? I have spent the last decade helping businesses answer that question.

You might have noticed that surfacing issues alone often doesn't produce change. That's because in many cases, the only thing that can rewire deeply ingrained patterns and beliefs is new experience.

**This is where experiential learning comes in.** Simulation-based learning has been proven to rewire behavior. They know this in the business of sports. It's why the vast majority of professional athletes and Olympians train using simulation. So do pilots, doctors, and others who are accountable for high performance.

You see, human brains don't know the difference between an imaginary experience and a real experience. This enables us to simulate situations in risk-free environments to game people's performance when it counts.

Games and business have a lot in common. Both are built on objectives. They have rules, challenges, and actions that cause people to move forward quickly — or not at all. There are strategies, risks and rewards, and usually some kind of currency. Generally, there are other people with whom to collaborate —or compete.

**FreshBiz is an example of a business simulation game** that is transforming thinking and behavior in companies around the world. Created by an Israeli entrepreneur who recognized that old ways of working were not a fit for the emerging shared economy, FreshBiz mimics the business world. Players figure out how to accomplish a goal with limited time and resources. They are encouraged to be creative, to work together, to look beyond what they would ordinarily do — and see the impact on their results.

The magic happens in the debrief that follows. Here, where there is little at risk, players can see how they played and where they might have blind spots that relate to their performance in their work. They can explore which rules and assumptions are real and which are negotiable. They get to embody and put into practice new mindsets and behaviors and then translate these into accelerated results in the workplace.

**FreshBiz has now been played by well over 50,000 business people in over 25 countries.** And in organizations that include Audi, IBM, HSBC, Johnson & Johnson and the United Nations.

One of FreshBiz's most important takeaways is that if you don't like the game you're playing, you can always play a new and different game. If your organization has in the past agreed to counterproductive practices, simulation might just provide the power to create new ones.

*Sharon Rich is the CEO of ThinkBusinessGrowth, Inc. and author of the upcoming book: **Your Hidden Game: Ten Invisible Agreements That Can Make or Break Your Business.** Sharon is among the first consultants to bring the FreshBiz experience to businesses in the United States. She welcomes the opportunity to explore game-based learning with other progressive HR pros. Sharon can be reached at [sharon@thinkbusinessgrowth.com](mailto:sharon@thinkbusinessgrowth.com).*

