



# Using Simulation-Based Assessment for Event Management Students

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June 2024

## Keywords

Graduate Attributes, Simulation Based Assessments, Work Based Learning, Employability, Industry-specific Ethical Codes, Ethics in Assessment

## Abstract

This research project explores the effectiveness of simulation-based assessments (SBAs) as an alternative to practical assessments for event management (EM) students, considering the 2020 global pandemic's impact on higher education. SBAs mimic real-world scenarios, enabling innovative and authentic ways for assessors to determine how well candidates can put their knowledge, skills, and talents to use. For example, they give students an opportunity to instil and reinforce ethical principles and values essential for success in the workplace. The study aims to investigate the relationship between SBAs and graduate attributes, via a qualitative approach, to investigate and analyse students' lived experiences. Ten final-year EM students were selected purposively, with inclusion criteria. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an original set of selected questions, and thematic analysis was used for data analysis. The study's findings suggest that if used correctly, SBAs can be an effective tool for developing students' graduate attributes, preparing them for employment. The article concludes on how to maximise the value of SBAs in preparing students for the workforce, especially when practical assessments are not feasible.

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# 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the landscape of higher education, particularly in fields that rely heavily on practical assessments (Filho et al. 2022). There is a pressing need to re-evaluate the pedagogical approaches and assessment strategies currently used in higher education, as students in these fields with a practical focus will transition to blended learning and possibly remote work (Souleles/Laghos/Savva 2020). An example is found in the case of event management (EM) students as the pandemic presented a unique challenge considering that practical assessments were limited due to never experienced regulations and restrictions on hosting commercial and special events (Maralack/Jurgens/Woodruff 2022).

As a result, educators have had to find alternative ways to prepare their students for the world of work, in an industry that was transformed in the process (Kwiatkowski et al. 2021). For example, the pandemic has accelerated the use of technology in the EM industry, from event registration and ticketing to digital marketing and audience engagement, and the growth of hybrid events (Estanyol/Fernández-Souto/Vázquez-Gestal 2023).

Against this background simulation-based assessments (SBAs) have been deemed suitable since they are designed to mimic situations that individuals would experience in their professional environments, enabling the assessors to determine how well the candidates can put their knowledge, skills, and talents to use in a real-world situation (Cant/Cooper 2017). By understanding the benefits and drawbacks of SBAs and learning how to improve their effectiveness, we may enhance our ability to evaluate students' efforts to operate in real-world scenarios (Krishnan/Keloth/Ubedulla 2017) and improve the quality of evaluations and training used in a range of industries (Cant/Cooper 2017). Tabatabai (2020) advocates that lecturers can use SBAs to prepare their students for the world of work, even when practical assessments are not possible.

In addition to this, SBAs have been found effective in helping students develop ethical reasoning and decision-making skills (Caulfield/Lee 2022). They provide a meaningful and consistent assessment process, leading to

increased student satisfaction and success rates (Perry/Robichaud 2020). Realistic simulations with standardised clients have been particularly successful in helping students apply ethical concepts to real-world scenarios (Nash/Etheridge 2023). This is crucially important, given that ethical behaviour is the cornerstone of professional integrity, and SBAs provide a safe platform for students to engage in ethical decision-making within a controlled environment (Webster et al. 2020).

Even though SBAs are widely used, it is important to delve deeper into how simulation relates to graduate qualities. We need to explore whether using SBAs enhances these qualities, like the knowledge, skills, and behaviours graduates should show after completing their studies. (Passow/Passow 2017). For example, it would be valuable to investigate if simulating real-life situations with ethical dilemmas helps students learn to think about the ethical aspects of their actions. This way, they can make decisions in line with ethical standards and professional codes of conduct, crucial for their future careers (Tassiopoulos/Nicolaidis 2017).

This article explores the effectiveness of SBAs as an alternative to practical assessments for EM students, as an example. It examines the suitability of these assessments in developing graduate attributes and linked to those an understanding of ethical principles within the specific industry they are about to enter. This paper is paramount for lecturers in higher education who are looking for creative ways to prepare their students for the workforce, especially when practical assessments are not feasible. Through the analysis, the benefits and limitations of SBAs are explored, and insights are shared on how to maximise their value in preparing students for employment. This article proposes that if used correctly, SBAs can be an effective tool in developing students' graduate attributes, including ethical behaviour.

## 2. Literature Review

### SBAs in Higher Education

SBAs have become attractive learning environments with many opportunities, in different educational settings, like vocational education,

higher education, and professional training across various disciplines. SBAs can be used early or later in educational programs, as it works well for novice and advanced learners, even though the activities will have to be at different levels (Chernikova et al. 2020). When exposed to active, experiential, reflective, and contextual learning approaches such as simulated environments – which could be offline or online – students can see the direct relevance of their educational experience to their future practice (Tortorelli et al. 2021). Hence, it is felt that the “gap” between academia and industry can be narrowed (Bryant et al. 2020).

Some industries lend themselves specifically well to SBAs. Suitable examples come from engineering (Nagadi 2018) and healthcare (Toale/Morris/Kavanagh 2023). In addition, business simulations, for example in accounting (Sathe/ Yu 2021) or general business (Nagel et al. 2018) are also frequently used. In this context, examples of event management in the literature are more scarce and not as current (Arcodia 2002).

SBAs are also a great form of authentic assessment (Yan et al. 2023). These assessments can encourage a safe and controlled setting as learners can make errors while learning, without severe practical consequences (Duchatelet/ Jossberger/Rausch 2022). Most importantly, these assessments are an effective approach to developing complex skills that are valued in the workplace (Chernikova et al. 2020). Lastly, SBAs can help develop skills required for work-based learning (WBL) placements. Those skills include communication, professionalism and ethics, leadership, teamwork, analytical, problem-solving, critical thinking, assertiveness, time management, willingness to learn, attention to detail, diversity, and accountability (Iipinge/Batholmeus/Pop 2020).

Even though SBAs are recognised as a tool to prepare students for the world of work, the quality and authenticity of SBAs vary greatly for different industries, and hence different models should be researched further (Australian Government 2014). Other factors as to why SBAs might still be underused in higher education could be a lack of professional support at the government level and a lack of sustainability of existing technologies, as well

as financial and compliance constraints. In addition, it has been shown that educators overestimate the effect of technology in the short term but underestimate the effect in the long term (Ledger 2019). Educators might expect immediate improvements in learning outcomes, engagement, or efficiency when integrating technology into their teaching practices. However, underestimating the long-term effects implies a failure to recognize the full transformative potential of technology in education.

While SBAs come with a set of challenges, they also offer a wealth of opportunities, especially in the new world of work. For more than a decade, industry professionals have questioned whether traditional systems of assessment (for example Multiple Choice Questions and Closed Book Exams) can fairly distinguish between a graduate that has the adequate skills to perform a job, versus one with inadequate skills, unable to survive in the workplace (Cropley/Knapper 2021).

With the onset of artificial intelligence, and its effect on the future work environment, as well as knowledge being freely available and easy to access, a graduate’s skills and attributes are becoming more important (Avolio/Benzaquen/Pretell 2019). Together then, relevant, and current knowledge, skills, and attributes, make a sought-after graduate. A suitable simulated learning activity will influence not only a few selected but a range of areas relevant to the workplace. It can produce a rounded, confident graduate (Richmond/Richards/Britt 2015) since it includes extra-curricular activities as well (Nagel et al. 2018).

### Graduate Attributes for Employability

Using SBAs is one way of helping students develop their graduate attributes, especially in business and management programmes. For example, covering topics like leadership, ethics, global citizenship, multidisciplinary thinking, organisational processes, strategic vision, corporate social responsibility, and sustainability could influence students’ graduate attributes, especially when using experiential and action learning in the form of multidisciplinary integrative projects (Avolio/Benzaquen/Pretell 2019). Exposing students to an experiential

learning environment helps them develop an application of knowledge, various organisational behaviours, knowledge of the profession, personal qualities, communication skills, leadership, and research skills (Wiewiora/Kowalkiewicz 2019). Interestingly, these types of learning and assessment environments can also foster students' passion for their future profession (Schreck/Weilbach/Reitsma 2020).

It is hence recommended that higher education institutions continue to integrate graduate attributes into the curriculum (McCabe et al. 2021). It is also suggested that the students are aware of the desired graduate attributes to guide their own development and engage with the assessments that develop these attributes (Jorre de St Jorre/Oliver 2017). Higher education institutions are part of a bigger community of creating graduates who are prepared for the workplace (Cook 2018). Furthermore, the focus should shift from creating only job-ready graduates to teaching students to be self-reflective, life-long learners, to add new skills, and improve on existing skills on an ongoing basis (Osmani et al. 2019).

As employability has become a performance metric for higher education institutions, there have been increased efforts to impact graduate attributes through formal courses and transcripts of additional skills and extra-curricular activities (Jung 2022). While these could include theoretical ethical constructs, exposing students to ethical dilemmas in a simulated environment might produce better results (Lewis et al. 2016).

Graduate attributes are not only important in the context of a possible workplace after graduation but also for WBL. Positive effects such as fulfilment, success, reaffirming professional and ethical decisions, and the development of character traits like self-control, initiative, and effective communication may be attained (Martin/Rees 2019). Students can develop a knowledge of the benefits of a community of practice, according to Martin and Rees (2019).

At the same time, it is dangerous to only develop generic skills. Skills need to be placed in the context of the profession the student will move into (Kuzminov/Sorokin/Froumin 2019). In the event management

industry, the body of knowledge (Event Management Body of Knowledge or EMBOK) prescribes to a set of core values, namely continuous improvement, creativity, ethics, strategic thinking, and sustainability (Rutherford Silvers 2013). Ethical guidelines can be used to navigate ethical dilemmas in such a way that the event can be conducted in an appropriate manner and become successful.

### An ethical lens for assessors and students alike

SBAs are ideal to simulate environments for learning so that students can be exposed to real situations before they arise. This holds particularly true for ethics, given its paramount importance in Event Management (Rutherford Silvers 2013). Firstly, within this industry, accountability is everything, in that customers rely on and trust that obligations will be met as agreed. Secondly, effective, and honest communication in real-time is crucial in Event Management, as unforeseen circumstances may arise that jeopardize the entire event. Thirdly, exhibiting fairness in all dealings with clients and team members is expected since preferential treatment or access are unethical and unacceptable. Lastly, every event team member should have access to a standard of conduct, to support their knowledge and skills around ethical behaviour.

SBAs can also help cultivate a culture of integrity and accountability by emphasizing the importance of transparency, honesty, and ethical responsibility in all aspects of work. By incorporating ethical considerations into simulation scenarios and assessment criteria, educators can reinforce the message that ethical conduct is not only expected but essential for success in the workplace, especially (Mallen/Adams 2017). Assessors carry several ethical responsibilities to ensure fairness, transparency, and the well-being of learners in an SBA environment, some of which are ensuring authenticity, maintaining confidentiality, providing clear guidelines, support and resources, avoiding bias and continuously evaluating and improving (Devine/McGaghie/Issenberg 2019). In addition to this, through so-called instructor modelling, assessors need to lead by example by demonstrating own ethical behaviour and decision-making throughout the SBA process (Urbina/Monks 2020).

Lastly, SBAs can incorporate a process by which engaging with peers fosters empathy and perspective-taking as students consider the perspectives and interests of others. By understanding the motivations and concerns of their peers in ethical dilemmas, students develop a deeper appreciation for ethical decision-making and its impact on individuals and communities. (Klafehn et al. 2018).

### Work-based Learning as Academic Practice

There is a growing body of research on WBL in higher education. WBL provides hands-on learning experiences in real-world settings, and industries such as healthcare (Attenborough et al., 2019) and hospitality (Ramgoolam-Atchiamith et al. 2022) have shown a strong commitment to integrating WBL into their workforce development strategies. Previous studies have focused on the benefits and challenges of WBL (Doherty/Stephens 2020), and how it can be effectively integrated into academic programs (Valencia-Forrester 2020). Other studies have examined the impact of WBL on students' academic performance (McCann/Hewitt 2023) and employability (Stephen/Festus 2022).

WBL is an educational approach that provides students with the opportunity to apply their academic learning to real-world situations (Fergusson et al. 2022). Students can also apply their theoretical knowledge to practical situations, which can enhance their understanding of course material and improve their academic performance (Stephen/Festus 2022). This approach helps students to develop essential attributes that are required for their future careers, such as communication (Konstantinou/Miller 2021), teamwork (Stephen/Festus 2022; Konstantinou/Miller 2021), and problem-solving (Fergusson et al. 2022; Stephen/Festus 2022). However, developing these attributes should be balanced in students' coursework and the workplace (Spaulding/Hecker/Bramhall 2020).

One of the main challenges is ensuring that the workplace experience is relevant to students' academic studies. It can be difficult to find suitable placements that align with students' learning objectives (Ajjawi et al. 2020). Medvide (2021) confirms that there is a risk that the students may not gain



the necessary skills or knowledge required for their future careers. It is difficult to practically prepare undergraduate students for WBL if they lack prior experience with real-world situations in their respective industries (Meeder/Pawlowski 2020).

One way to further improve WBL is to increase the focus on reflection. Konstantinou and Miller (2021) share that when students reflect on their experiences during WBL, they can better understand the skills and knowledge they have gained and how these can be applied in future work settings. This could be especially useful for ethical skills, in that guided reflection and debriefings could assist students to critically evaluate their own ethical reasoning and behaviour, fostering a deeper understanding of ethical principles and their application in professional practice (Devine/McGaghie/Issenberg 2019).

### 3. Methodology

The research methodology for this study benefited from a qualitative approach (Gehman et al. 2018). In line with Sohn et al. (2017), it was suitable to use a phenomenological technique to investigate and analyse the students' lived experiences. The study aimed to explore the opinions and experiences of final-year EM students regarding the suitability and efficacy of SBAs in preparing them for the workplace. Ten final-year EM students who had completed two SBAs during their undergraduate education made up the purposively selected sample in this study (Etikan/Musa/Alkassim 2016). Inclusion criteria stipulated that respondents had to have participated in the SBAs during their course work and must have completed work-based learning placements. This would ensure that they could reflect on how well these assessments had prepared them for the workplace.

The semi-structured interviews (Adams 2015) conducted in November 2021 used an original set of three questions. The first questioned the suitability of the simulations the students were exposed to in preparing them for the world of work. The second question involved the students selecting their top three and bottom three graduate attributes to measure their world of work preparedness, based on the simulations they had gone through. The third

question focused on the characteristics that simulations should include to prepare students for the world of work.

The questions were consistently asked of each participant by a skilled interviewer, demonstrating the validity of the measurement instrument. The interviewer, who was an expert on the topic, offered pertinent prompts and probing questions to get detailed information about the respondents' experiences. As the questions were created using the study's research aims and the current literature on SBAs and graduate attributes, the validity of the measuring instrument was established. Interviews were recorded via Microsoft Teams with the respondents' permission and automatically transcribed and checked before analysis.

Thematic analysis was used for data analysis (Castleberry/Nolen, 2018). Two researchers separately carried out the inductive analysis (Azungah 2018), and inter-coder reliability was verified through discussion and agreement (O'Connor/Joffe 2020). All participants gave their informed consent before participating, and the responses' confidentiality and anonymity were upheld to meet ethical concerns. The institution's ethical committee approved the study (REF #: 2021 IRP 004).

## 4. Results and Discussion

In this thematic analysis, we explore how the types and sequence of simulations contributed to the students' readiness for the world of work. The analysis revealed three main themes, including the effectiveness of SBAs, recognised graduate attributes, and improving SBAs for workplace readiness. The discussion provides insights into whether SBAs prepared students for their work placements, and how SBAs can be optimised to better prepare students for the diverse challenges of the modern workplace.

### Theme 1: Effectiveness of SBAs in preparing for the world of work

The first of the main themes describe how well-suited the SBAs were in preparing students for the challenges they may face in the workplace. The interviews revealed three subthemes: increased confidence and skills with

simulated event management, transferable skills such as communication and leadership, and limitations of SBAs.

— Increased Confidence and Skills with Simulated Event Management

Simulated-Based Activities (SBAs) have proven to be a powerful catalyst for the development of increased confidence and the cultivation of essential professional EM skills, including ethical behaviour as per the EMBOK. The effectiveness of SBAs in this regard is underscored by the resounding endorsement of respondents who have experienced the practical and hands-on nature of these simulations. These experiences equip individuals with the confidence and expertise required to tackle real-world challenges in event management, aligning with the findings of Richmond, Richards and Britt (2015) who emphasise how SBAs instil self-trust and enhance skill sets in students.

A notable surge in confidence pertaining to event planning skills was reported by several respondents (1, 2, 4, and 5) as a direct result of their active engagement with these simulations. The development of practical skills, as mentioned by respondents, is another significant outcome: SBAs equip students with hands-on experience in event planning, mirroring real-world scenarios. This aligns with the findings of previous research emphasising the role of SBAs in building practical skill sets. For instance, the ability to plan and execute events, as highlighted by Respondent 4, is vital for EM professionals:

“The simulations helped me develop my thinking on how I see an event, how I would plan an event, and how to execute it.”

(Summary\_Respondent 4:1) †

Similarly, Respondent 5 emphasised the mirroring effect of being a program manager in a simulation to their actual workplace responsibilities, solidifying theoretical foundations into practical management and teamwork prowess. Respondents 6 and 8 resonated with these sentiments, highlighting the

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† (Summary\_Respondent 4:1)

remarkable congruence between the skills honed through simulations and the demands of their professional roles in the event management field.

Beyond enhancing confidence and skill sets, SBAs also proved instrumental in preparing respondents for work-based learning experiences. Respondents 1 and 2 attested to the comprehensive coverage of event management processes offered by simulations, from conceptualisation to execution, thereby providing a holistic foundation for their subsequent work-based learning journeys. Respondent 8 found the golf day simulation offered to their cohort of students at the time to be a valuable precursor to work-based learning, as it facilitated the acquisition of knowledge and experience that eased their transition into the workplace. Familiarity with site inspections, expectations, and the intricacies of event management and its specific processes laid out in EMBOK garnered through simulations ultimately translated into improved performance during work-based learning experiences.

The theme confirms that SBAs can effectively bridge the gap between theory and practice, boosting students' confidence and practical skills. This aligns with the broader goals of higher education, which aims to prepare students for the real-world challenges they will encounter in their careers. As such, SBAs serve as a valuable pedagogical tool in EM education, enhancing students' readiness for the workforce.

#### — Transferable Skills such as Communication and Leadership

The responses provided by participants suggest that SBAs can play a pivotal role in nurturing transferable soft skills, which hold significance across diverse industries, extending beyond the realm of event management. Werner, Junek, and Wang (2022) reinforce the contemporary relevance of such skills in the field of event management. The ability to communicate effectively and ethically, as emphasised by Respondent 7, is essential in event management, where professionals interact with clients, suppliers, and team members. Leadership skills, as mentioned by Respondent 3, are valuable for guiding teams and making critical decisions.

These skills are not confined to the event management field and can be applied in diverse work settings:

“Simulations instilled confidence in me as a leader and equipped me with practical communication skills.”  
(Summary\_Respondent 3:1)<sup>‡</sup>

Respondent 5 concurred, attributing their success in handling practical tasks during work-based learning to the skills developed in simulations. Respondent 10 also attested to the acquisition of valuable skills in hospitality and risk management during simulations, which they could directly apply in the workplace. The theme underscores the broader applicability of SBAs in nurturing transferable skills that are highly sought after by employers across industries. This aligns with the evolving demands of the job market, where soft skills are increasingly valued. SBAs can contribute to producing well-rounded graduates equipped with skills that enhance their employability.

#### — Limitations of Simulations

Although SBAs serve as a valuable tool for equipping event management (EM) students with both technical and soft skills, the findings underscore that they may not comprehensively prepare individuals for all facets of their work placements. This echoes previous research, including the study by Doherty and Stephens (2020), who have also identified similar limitations in the effectiveness of SBAs.

The results distinctly indicate the constraints of SBAs for EM students, particularly in two critical areas: interacting with actual suppliers and vendors and comprehending event timelines. Respondent 1, for instance, emphasised that the absence of interactions with real suppliers and vendors during SBAs was challenging. Respondent 4 concurred and noted that,

“ ... [event] timelines were a key aspect, and I think maybe I didn't fully grasp the concept during the two years of simulations because, in my simulation, I didn't put

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<sup>‡</sup> (Summary\_Respondent 3:1)

enough information into my timelines. (Summary\_Respondent 4:1)<sup>§</sup>

On the other hand, Respondent 9 provided a nuanced perspective:

“ The simulations were helpful to some extent, but not as much as I expected because we didn't have a chance to practice the real events [in the simulations]. However, it did give me some sense of what to expect. My tasks in the simulation projects were quite different from what I did in the workplace. (Summary\_Respondent 9:1)\*\*

This limitation may impact students' ability to navigate real-world stakeholder relationships effectively. Similarly, challenges in comprehending event timelines suggest that SBAs may not fully replicate the complexity of real event management scenarios. Therefore, there is need for a balanced approach in EM education that combines the strengths of SBAs with real-world experiences. A comprehensive educational approach should integrate insights from industry experts and incorporate real-world experiences to prepare students for the multifaceted challenges they will face in their future careers, including more complex ethical dilemmas.

## Theme 2: Recognised Graduate Attributes

This theme delves into the development of recognised graduate attributes, shedding light on how students cultivate these attributes through simulations and work-based learning, ultimately preparing them for future work challenges. Karunanayaka and Naidu (2021) agree that authentic assessment activities, such as SBAs, provide learners with opportunities to apply the skills acquired through these activities in their professional workplaces effectively. Through the acquisition of these graduate attributes, students are better equipped to navigate the complexities of the contemporary job

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<sup>§</sup> (Summary\_Respondent 4:1)

\*\* (Summary\_Respondent 9:1)

landscape, emphasising the importance of a well-rounded education that prepares them for the dynamic demands of their future careers.

— Creativity and Judgement

Creativity emerged as a pivotal attribute in the narratives of respondents, who described how SBAs provided opportunities to exercise their creativity through mood boards, concept proposals, or innovative problem-solving. This aligns with the notion that SBAs develop creativity among higher education students (Abrandt et al. 2016).

Respondent 1 shared their enjoyment of demonstrating creativity by crafting mood boards and concept proposals during work-based learning. Similarly, Respondent 2 described himself as someone who likes to “create stuff, be creative, and play with ideas.” Creativity was also mentioned as a desirable quality for event planning, with Respondent 2 stating that the simulations they did for the golf day and the first-year camp as an example of one of the simulation-based events given to this cohort of students, helped them gain skills and knowledge that were applicable in real-life situations.

Respondent 7’s creativity, as a wedding coordinator, was developed and they benefited from this skill in the workplace:

“We also had to be creative in our approach to each wedding we worked on, so that each one looked different.”  
(Summary\_Respondent 7:2)<sup>††</sup>

However, the theme also highlights the importance of sound judgment and decision-making, which often go together with creativity (Proctor 2018). Making informed judgments is vital, especially when dealing with sensitive, sometimes ethical matters in event management. This suggests that recognised graduate attributes encompass a balance between creative thinking and making well-reasoned decisions. Respondent 4 underscored the importance of sound judgment and decision-making, reflecting on their

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<sup>††</sup> (Summary\_Respondent 7:2)

experiences of making critical choices during simulations. Meanwhile, Respondent 5 shared:

“I had to be empathetic towards individuals and make correct judgments to the best of my ability [during the simulation].”  
(Summary\_Respondent 5:2)<sup>‡‡</sup>

Respondent 8 also mentioned creativity, specifically in the marketing domain where they came up with an idea that they “didn't even know they had in them”. As such, SBAs can contribute to students' ability to navigate the complexities of the modern workforce by fostering a combination of creative thinking and sound and ethical decision-making.

#### — Resilience and Adaptability

Resilience and adaptability emerged as critical attributes in the narratives. Respondents recounted instances where they had to overcome challenges and rapidly adapt to new situations during SBAs (Preedy et al. 2014). This resilience and adaptability are essential in the ever-changing landscape of event management, where unexpected issues can arise. Respondent 1 detailed how they overcame challenges as a risk manager, citing their ability to adapt rapidly to new situations as a direct result of these experiences. Respondent 2 attributed their success in the workplace, to the insights gained from these simulations. The ability to adjust was pivotal, as illustrated by Respondent 5's candid admission of early struggles adapting to COVID-19 regulations and the eventual transition.

Respondent 7 mentioned the need to adapt and think of new ways to work due to the pandemic and ‘shut down’, which demonstrates adaptability. Respondent 10 highlighted these skills as important attributes for success in their industry, and a way to adapt to different environments:

“ I am a very shy person, and this [the SBAs] has really helped me to get out of my skin a little bit and start

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<sup>‡‡</sup> (Summary\_Respondent 5:2)



speaking more, and being more open with what I’m doing...  
(Summary\_Respondent 10:1)<sup>§§</sup>

The ability to adjust to unforeseen circumstances is highlighted as pivotal, especially in the context of evolving workplace environments. Respondents' experiences with simulations and work-based learning contribute to their capacity to navigate diverse and dynamic situations. SBAs and work-based learning not only prepare students for their specific professional field but also equip them with these soft skills that are valuable in an increasingly unpredictable job market.

— Leadership, Communication, Teamwork, and Social/Cultural Awareness

Leadership emerged as a central attribute, particularly in event planning. Event management often requires effective leadership, as events involve coordination and teamwork. Respondents' experiences illustrate how they developed leadership skills through practical experiences, such as taking on roles during simulations. For instance, Respondent 3 expressed:

“ So, I think I was a good leader. Everyone helped each other with their tasks, [and] I made sure that the colleagues knew I was there. I felt like I was going doing a good job in leadership. (Summary\_Respondent 3:1)<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

Respondent 4's experience showcased how personal growth in leadership skills occurred through their role as a chairperson during simulations, highlighting how leadership attributes are cultivated through practical experiences, especially in event planning, where effective leadership, assertiveness, and teamwork were integral. As such, SBAs and work-based learning play a crucial role in fostering leadership skills, which are essential for success in the field.

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<sup>§§</sup> (Summary\_Respondent 10:1)

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> (Summary\_Respondent 3:1)

In addition to leadership, effective communication and teamwork emerged as equally vital attributes. These attributes are vital in event management, where professionals collaborate with diverse stakeholders. Respondent 3 acknowledged the importance of seeking assistance and clear communication during simulations. Respondent 4 highlighted the development of professional communication skills and the value of learning from communication-related mistakes.

The significance of communication extended beyond simulations. Respondent 5 shared what seemed to have been an example of an ethical dilemma:

“ As the human resources manager in my simulation, it was extremely important for dealing with students' personal lives because they were students that had shared their personal lives with me. I had to find a way to communicate their situation suddenly with the lecturers or the management team so that it wouldn't cause any harm to the students.  
(Summary\_Respondent 5:1)<sup>†††</sup>

Respondent 5 continued that they felt prepared to handle similar, delicate situations in the workplace. Respondent 8 highlighted the importance of communication, specifically in terms of making people feel at ease and building relationships with them. Respondent 9's communication skills also improved. He shared:

“ It keeps getting me out of my comfort zone. I had to come to work on an everyday basis and interact with random individuals, build relationships with them, and articulate and project my ideas at the same time. These skills have definitely improved because I talk a lot now.  
(Summary\_Respondent 9:1)<sup>†††</sup>

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<sup>†††</sup> (Summary\_Respondent 5:1)

<sup>†††</sup> (Summary\_Respondent 9:1)

Respondent 7 underscored the essential roles of communication and teamwork in the success of simulation projects, while recognising opportunities for improvement in cultural and social awareness. This suggests that while recognised graduate attributes encompass communication and teamwork, there may be opportunities to further develop social and cultural awareness in educational experiences. Furthermore, Respondent 8 shared their personal journey from initial hesitation in interpersonal communication to becoming more comfortable in communicating effectively. Finally, both Respondent 9 and Respondent 10 conveyed personal growth in communication skills and the ability to articulate ideas confidently. These testimonies collectively illustrate that SBAs and work-based learning contribute to the development such significant attributes, preparing students for the complexities of the modern workplace.

### Theme 3: Improving SBAs for Workplace Readiness

The theme underscores critical areas for enhancing the design and execution of SBAs and emphasises the significance of SBAs in getting students ready for the demands of the workforce. Buléon et al. (2022) confirm that using simulations for assessment purposes represents a significant shift in approach, with distinctive challenges such as maintaining a secure learning environment, ensuring consistency among learners, and employing valid and ethical assessment tools.

#### — Realism

Respondents have underlined the crucial need to infuse simulations with a higher degree of realism. Their recommendations, such as involving industry experts and incorporating site visits to enhance authenticity, resonate with the concept that scenarios rooted in reality facilitate productive interactions and meaningful feedback, thereby nurturing collaborative knowledge construction (Vlachopoulos/Makri 2017). As exemplified by Respondent 3, who highlighted the challenges faced by students when industry professionals lack knowledge of modern industry-standard models, the call for realism underscores the importance

of aligning simulations with real-world practices. Furthermore, Respondent 6 shared:

“ Adding practicality to the project would help us plan and win. Getting information from venues, for example, can be quite challenging, especially as a student who is still learning. (Summary\_Respondent 6:2)<sup>§§§</sup>

The significance of risk management and adherence to health and safety regulations, as underscored by Respondent 10, reinforces the need for simulations to mirror industry standards, ensuring effective preparation for the workforce. Consequently, it is advisable to integrate industry expertise and real-world scenarios into simulation design from the outset, rather than viewing them solely as assessment tools. This approach will better equip educational institutions to prepare students for the demands of the workplace.

— Interpersonal and Cultural Competence

The subtheme of interpersonal and cultural competence surfaces as respondents stress the importance of preparing students to interact effectively in diverse cultural contexts. This involves promoting intercultural understanding and empathy among students. Foronda et al. (2018) support this perspective, emphasising that the development of cultural competence and humility should be a central focus in simulation-based learning. Respondent 5 underlined the significance of interpersonal skills and collaboration across industries:

“ Get to know each other because at the end of the day different industries need to work together. Be friends, be kind, be compassionate, be empathetic towards each other, because we are in this together. (Summary\_Respondent 5:2)<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup>

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<sup>§§§</sup> (Summary\_Respondent 6:2)

<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> (Summary\_Respondent 5:2)

Respondent 2 proposed distributing pamphlets or booklets explaining different cultures to educate students and foster intercultural understanding. This highlights the need for SBAs to proactively address intercultural awareness. Respondent 10 further suggested assigning students with poor communication skills to departments requiring teamwork, providing them with opportunities to develop essential communication and interpersonal competencies. However, it is worth critically noting that while these proposals are valuable, they should be implemented thoughtfully and in conjunction with comprehensive intercultural training to ensure meaningful and effective results in preparing students for the complexities of the modern workforce.

## 5. Conclusion

When preparing students for the contemporary workplace, SBAs remain a dynamic and invaluable tool. The thematic analysis unearthed key insights into their effectiveness, the cultivation of recognised graduate attributes, and opportunities for refinement. SBAs serve as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practical application, fostering increased confidence and equipping students with essential event management skills. Beyond their direct applicability in event management, SBAs nurture transferable skills such as communication, ethical leadership, and teamwork. These attributes extend their value across various industries, enhancing students' employability and adaptability. However, as with any educational tool, SBAs are not without limitations. They may not comprehensively prepare students for every facet of their future roles, particularly in areas such as interactions with real-world suppliers and the nuanced understanding of event timelines.

Recommendations to stakeholders include ensuring realism through collaboration with industry experts and integrating site visits to infuse SBAs with a higher degree of authenticity. Proactive strategies for fostering students' intercultural awareness and empathy should also be developed, ensuring their effective navigation of diverse cultural contexts in the workplace. Stakeholders should recognise the value of SBAs in nurturing both technical and soft skills, encouraging a holistic approach to education

that combines SBAs with real-world experiences. Future research endeavours should encompass longitudinal studies assessing the long-term impact of SBAs on students' careers. Comparisons of the effectiveness of SBAs with other pedagogical approaches could help identify their unique contributions and limitations. Additionally, exploring the applicability of SBAs in interdisciplinary contexts might shed light on how they prepare students for multifaceted workplace challenges.

Generally, this study reaffirms the instrumental role of SBAs in equipping students for the complex and dynamic modern workplace. By recognising their strengths, cultivating transferable skills, addressing limitations, and advocating for continuous improvement, SBAs can continue to enhance students' readiness for the professional world. This research underscores the significance of practical, hands-on experiences in higher education, positioning SBAs as a pivotal bridge between academic knowledge and real-world application, benefitting both students and employers in the ever-evolving job market.

Looking at the conclusion with an ethical lens, SBAs may offer a valuable way of promoting integrity and ethical behaviour among students during their educational stint, during which educators have an important role to play in empowering students to become ethical leaders and professionals committed to making ethical decisions in their personal and professional lives. Moreover, by fostering a culture of mutual respect, collaboration, and dialogue, educators and students can engage in meaningful exchanges that enhance their understanding and practice of ethical principles in both academic and professional settings. Ultimately, this will prepare both parties to uphold ethical standards and navigate complex ethical dilemmas in their respective workplaces.

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## 7. Short biography

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Olivia Wilson, a lecturer at STADIO Higher Education, specialises in tourism and event management education. With an MA in Tourism Management from North-West University, her research interests include sustainable tourism development, responsible consumer behavior, and academic integrity. Wilson is recognised for her innovative teaching methods and aims to educate students to become proficient and ethical professionals who contribute to industry growth.

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Antje Hargarter is the Head of the School of Commerce at STADIO Education. Before that she functioned as the Dean of the School of Investment and Banking at Milpark Education. She holds a PhD in Risk Management from NWU, and an MBA from the GSB at UCT. Before moving into Academia, she gained over 10 years of experience in investment management, banking, and consulting. Her research interests lie in preparing graduates for the new world of work, sustainability, as well as risk management.

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Bianca van Rensburg, a PhD graduate from North-West University, is a dedicated and award-winning researcher, lecturer, learner, music enthusiast, and avid traveller. With a focus on tourism and event marketing, her research offers a fresh perspective on event branding, that has been shared on both local and international platforms. Artist branding in a tourism and event

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marketing context is an under-researched field of study and her goal for the unforeseeable future is to change that narrative.

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