

# Building a Leadership Development Legacy

## Celemi Tango™ Team-Building Tools Help Rising Talent Contribute More to Financial Performance

Top talent seeks, and grows along with, companies committed to developing leaders. At Thales, a best practices program focused on building business acumen seems to be growing the bottom line as well.

For the last five years, nearly 1,000 of the company's fast-track leaders have participated in Celemi Tango, a fast-paced, immersive simulation that builds business acumen while stressing the importance of employee development and human capital as a source of competitive advantage.

The Thales Group designs and builds electrical systems, and provides critical information and cybersecurity services for aerospace, defense, transportation, and security markets. When the overall financial performance started surpassing objectives, David Butler, head of the Leadership and Diversity Practice for the Thales Learning Hub, started making connections.

"Thales operates much like the pharmaceutical industry," says Butler. "A very high percentage of employees are engineers. We do a lot of research and relatively little production. It is a challenge to get people to understand the importance of cash and how their roles impact cash. During Celemi Tango sessions, we talk about earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT) and cash management. The experience is tactile. Participants see cash circulate throughout the organization. It starts making sense and corresponds well with our workflow."

### Telling the Thales Story

Close to 65,000 Thales employees in 56 markets represent a broad portfolio of offerings that make the French-based, multinational company hard to define. Celemi Tango helps with that too.

Butler and his team, who run Thales leadership development programs around the world, added a competitive component to practice storytelling, branding, and pitching. After managing all aspects of their fictional companies for a day and a half, each team must then pitch their business to investors. The prize goes to the one that distinguishes itself from the rest.



### Participant Comments

*"Tango is a very immersive, fast-forward learning game. It helps me learn to fail and recover quickly."*

*"In our roles at Thales, many of us focus on one or two areas. We rarely have to think about cash flow, recruitment, training, resourcing, and customers at the same time. But this is what Thales is all about, so it's great to learn about what's important in each of these areas and how they all fit together to drive business success. Tango was fun too!"*

*"Tango is a surprisingly realistic, powerful game that allows us to understand, within a few hours, the complexity and stakes of strategic decisions and how they impact the whole company."*

"We're so complex it's hard to explain what we do," says Butler. "We need to be able to convey what we're all about in two minutes or less—our purpose, our portfolio, our culture, and our market position. Pitching and storytelling are skills you can learn and improve. It takes practice. It doesn't happen automatically."

### Strength in Team Performance

Thales continues to find ways to customize and incorporate new leadership models into the Celemi Tango experience, which is an integral component of the company's "Leading for Results" program.

For example, the team performance structure of the simulation encourages leaders to seek out and build on one another's strengths instead of relying on individual performance.



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“When teams work on pitches there is a real buzz,” says Butler. “After working very intensely with four to six people for 12 hours, managers see how the collective performance of their team affects their individual impact. They talk about what they’ve been able to accomplish together. They assess what went well and what didn’t. We encourage them to continue working this way back on the job.”

### Achieving Frontline Results

Butler, a former assistant dean of a business school, has worked with many business simulations. The Thales Learning Hub, which has 12 campuses around the world, designs and delivers much of its own programming. This discriminating team incorporates Celemi Tango into its targeted curriculum because of its content, format, flexibility, and dual emphasis on business acumen and talent management—a combination they haven’t found anywhere else.

“It’s a double whammy,” says Butler. “The business acumen addresses a gap in our development-centric business model, and the financial value of engaging and developing teams is tangible. The simulation actually monetizes the cost of developing people, which drives home the importance of hiring the right talent and investing in top performers. It gets managers thinking about how investing in their teams influences financial results.”

Thales generally runs three European sessions and an Asian Pacific session every year, and an American session every two years. There are approximately 36 participants per session. Lively teams of four to six people must leverage employees, satisfy clients, and deliver results while competing to earn short-term profits and build long-term value for their fictional companies.

Managers chosen to participate in the “Leading for Results” program must also take part in a four-month project. “Over time, I can see how these leaders are becoming more business savvy,” attests Butler. “They’re more marketing savvy. Their projects are becoming more sophisticated and more pertinent. They show more business acumen.”

“These leaders are on the front line,” says Butler. “They’re out there getting their hands dirty. We let them know how critical their roles are for getting the job done and reaching our objectives. We also discuss the potential for taking on more strategic roles in the future. Celemi Tango is an important part of the development process.”

### Maintaining Tactile Learning

Celemi Facilitator and Simulation Leader Paul Mangotich and Veronique Rouanne, a former Thales financial expert, work closely with Thales to keep Celemi Tango messages and content in line with the company’s evolving needs.

Butler and his team continue turning to Celemi Tango to support best practices in talent management because it is fun and far-reaching and gets results:

1. The interactive format delivers business acumen quickly and effectively.
2. Participants gain confidence engaging with and developing teams.
3. The realistic, relevant business simulation supports a new corporate emphasis on collective performance and decision-making, where leaders are urged to collaborate more and tell each other what works and what doesn’t work.
4. Celemi Tango helps create a common financial language for employees who operate in major markets around the world.
5. Introverts, extroverts, and people from different cultures with diverse learning and leadership styles learn how to work together to overcome conflict and achieve common goals.

“A lot of business simulations are computer based,” says Butler. “Celemi’s board games simplify complex concepts. There’s something about touching things and moving them around a board. It’s an important part of the learning experience. Feedback is always excellent. No one ever questions why they are there. No one says it takes too much time.”

“Thales is deeply committed to educating leaders and helping them thrive amidst cultural change,” says Butler. “Tango fits very well within our journey.”

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### About Thales

The combined expertise of 65,000 employees working in 56 countries makes Thales a key player in keeping the public safe and secure, guarding vital infrastructures, and protecting the national security interests of countries around the globe. Key sectors include aerospace, space, ground transportation, defense, and security.

