



Authentik Case Study:

Tabletop Training to help navigate crisis at a public institution.

At a Glance

- **Client:** Large Canadian post-secondary
- **Engagement:** 1-day gamified tabletop + debrief + after-action plan
- **Participants:** 3 teams / 14 people
- **Focus:** Protest-based disruption + crisis coordination
- **Deliverables:** Scenario, facilitation, debrief findings, improvement plan

The Situation

A large Canadian post-secondary institution with a national profile had recently experienced a prolonged, highly visible protest encampment on campus. The situation placed sustained pressure on staff, leadership, and operational systems, while drawing significant public and media attention.

Like many institutions across the country, leadership was grappling with a difficult balance: upholding commitments to free expression and lawful protest while protecting the learning environment, staff wellbeing, and institutional operations. The experience surfaced a clear need — not just for policies, but for practiced decision-making under real-world conditions.

Rather than waiting for the next incident, a student-facing operational unit sought to proactively strengthen its ability to respond to future disruptions involving protest, occupation, or encampment-style activity.

The Challenge

The core challenge was not a lack of commitment or expertise. It was fragmentation.

Different functional teams (ranging from front-line services, residential life, operations, finance, and mid-level leadership) were highly skilled within their own domains but had limited opportunity to practice working together during a fast-moving, politically sensitive crisis.

Additional factors complicated the situation:

- Staff were passionate about a range of politically affiliated protest movements, and could benefit from practicing balance between personal passion with professional responsibilities to the organization.
- Some leaders were confident but inexperienced in high-stakes crisis coordination; others had strong judgment but hesitated to step forward because of a lack of practice.

- Previous responses had revealed reliance on senior leadership that might not always be immediately available during an emerging incident.
- Traditional training formats risked being either too abstract or too cautious to surface real decision-making dynamics.

A poorly designed exercise could have reinforced silos, heightened defensiveness of participants, or created friction due to conflicting views. The institution needed something that was robust but cautious in navigating these dynamics.

Our Approach

We were engaged as an external facilitator with full responsibility for designing and running the exercise.

Our approach was grounded in three principles:

1. **Stress the system, not the individuals:** The scenario was designed to broadly challenge roles, assumptions, and coordination; we don't set out to validate or target any personal belief, identity, or position.
2. **Force real decisions, safely:** Participants needed to experience uncertainty, failure, and consequence in a controlled environment; these conditions are rarely achieved through lectures or conventional tabletop exercises but our gamified approach does this exceptionally well by reminding participants that even a highly skilled operator needs to pivot from their first-choice plan from time to time due to bad luck or circumstance.
3. **Create space for leadership to emerge:** The design intentionally disrupted comfort zones, allowing under-utilized strengths to surface while tempering over-reliance on a few confident voices.

We paid close attention to what not to do: no caricatures, no partisan political subtext, and no scenarios that could reasonably be read as singling out a group or perspective. The exercise needed to be inclusive for a wide variety of perspectives and ideas.

What We Did

We designed and facilitated one of our highly interactive, scenario-based tabletop exercise using a gamified format.

Key elements included:

- A custom-built crisis scenario modelled on real-world protest dynamics, without replicating any identifiable incident.
- Role-based characters created as composites both within the protest movement and within institutional governance.
- A structured game system using skill assessments, dice rolls to introduce uncertainty, resource constraints, and unintended consequences.
- Realistic “injects” such as media pressure, historical incidents, operational setbacks, staff unavailability, and escalating complexity.
- Facilitated pauses to surface differing perspectives and decision rationales across teams.

As the exercise unfolded, participants were required to adapt in real time—revising plans when strategies failed, asking for help across functional lines, and stepping into leadership roles when circumstances changed.

As facilitator, we actively managed pacing, tension, and participation. When dominance or hesitation emerged, we adjusted the scenario to rebalance the room and keep the focus on collective problem-solving.

The Outcome

By the end of the exercise, observable shifts had occurred:

- Teams were actively reaching across functional boundaries to coordinate decisions.
- Participants demonstrated increased comfort voicing uncertainty and asking for support.
- Leadership capacity broadened beyond formal titles, with mid-level staff stepping forward effectively.
- The group articulated that they developed a shared language around risk, values, and institutional responsibility.

Post-exercise feedback reflected strong engagement and confidence in the approach. Participants described the experience as realistic, challenging, and unusually effective at revealing how the organization actually functions under pressure. Several participants later requested one-on-one feedback and coaching from Authentik consultants, signalling trust in the process, and a new awareness of gaps that was self-driven as opposed to leadership driven. This means they were motivated to improve their own abilities because they wanted to, not because a boss told them they had to.

What This Demonstrates

This case demonstrates our ability to help complex institutions prepare for disruptive, values-laden crises by:

- Translating real-world risk into safe but demanding practice environments.
- Designing scenarios that respect political and social complexity without avoiding it.
- Building organizational resilience through experience, not theory.
- Developing leadership judgment across levels, not just at the top.

This work is particularly well-suited for organizations that have experienced a near miss—or want to avoid one—and recognize that confidence, coordination, and credibility are built before the next crisis unfolds.

What we do at Authentik:



Authentik Academy & In-Person Training

The Authentik Academy offers high-quality, self-directed online courses designed for leaders navigating disruption, including our flagship Restorative Behaviour Management for Leaders program. Each course comes with 1:1 support, engaging materials grounded in research and practice, and a digital credential to validate achievement. For those who learn best together, we also deliver in-person training with interactive workshops, large-scale events, and tabletop simulations where concepts are brought to life in engaging, evidence-based ways. Whether online or in the room, our programs provide tools leaders can apply immediately to build resilience, strengthen teams, and thrive through disruption.



Leadership & Organizational Support:

Leadership today means more than managing teams. It means staying prepared for complex, fast-moving disruptors. Our support is designed to bring out the best in you and your organization by clarifying your values and translating them into everyday practices that inspire trust and action. Grounded in research on psychological safety and organizational effectiveness, we blend the human side of leadership with the practical tools of operations — from process mapping and business continuity planning to the smart use of technology. We also help leaders stay ahead of emerging challenges, offering insights into disruptive forces like



Strategic Briefings & Resource Library

Every leader deserves access to ideas that make a difference. For state-level stakeholders, we offer high quality briefings on upcoming disruptors so leaders can gain deep understanding for quality, fast decisions. We also offer a resource library of briefing notes, white papers, and more. Each Strategic Resource we create is grounded in real-world research, evidence from the field, and lessons drawn from complex organizational challenges, offering insights and tools you can put into practice immediately.



Speaking and Events

The Authentik team has developed a reputation for delivering engaging keynotes and facilitated sessions that bring complex ideas to life. With a mix of storytelling, research, and practical tools, our talks inspire leaders to see disruption differently — and leave with strategies and motivation to change the way they work for the better.



Crisis Tabletop Simulations

Crisis doesn't wait for perfect plans. Authentik Tabletops are interactive, scenario-driven simulations that help teams practice decision-making, offering real pressure without real-world consequences. We build a custom scenario based on your context, facilitate an engaging session with realistic injects, and use gamification to mirror real-world uncertainty. You'll see how your team works together when stakes are high and fill gaps before it matters. Clients get readiness at a systems level, not just for one event.



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