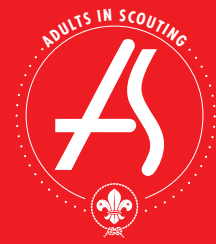


INFORMATION EXCHANGE

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LEARNING BY EXPERIENCE

Picture a technology that would help you assess the current competency levels and training needs of Adults in Scouting and groups of Adults within your Association.

Picture a technology that would let you deliver training when and where it is needed: flexibly, quickly and easily, to large numbers of Leaders who may be spread out geographically, or just to one or two Leaders to fill a particular need.

Picture a technology that would give Leaders, new in their role or task, the practise they need to perform it like an expert, and that would provide them with an expert to show them the core skills. Imagine using a technology that users describe as *the best educational tool available today and excellent, realistic and enjoyable*.

Welcome to the future. It is here and it is not competency-based training or even self-directed learning, which provide you with some information and then test your understanding of it. Often people describe this learning process as rather bland and dull and therefore possibly ineffective. The future is interactive simulation.

Developed from the technology used for flight simulators to train pilots, interactive simulation-based training is the current leading edge technology for delivering training and measuring effectiveness. The training can be subject specific (management of adult resources) or generic (for example communication skills) or anything in between.

Simulation-based learning is a powerful way to train, to help people retain what they have learned and to assess their learning. Learning from simulation appeals to, and will soon

be demanded by, our ever more sophisticated learning audience.

Moreover, with time and people at a premium in most Associations, we often can't get all Leaders to attend lengthy training sessions/courses. We need to deliver training at times and in locations that suit them, because each one of our human resources is valuable and needed on the job.

Financial pressures often mean we need to clearly identify training needs and meet them quickly. We need to be able to measure the impact of learning that occurs with confidence. We need to get real value for every training dollar we spend.

Simulation-based training can help us do all of this. It can help us manage the training function in three ways:

- By identifying training needs - the way Leaders handle a simulation will help pinpoint their training needs.
- By reinforcing training - simulations help people retain what they have learned because they can practise and strengthen new skills in realistic but safe environments.
- By assessing competencies - after training we can measure how well leaders have learned and how well they apply what they have learned.

Using interactive CD-ROM simulations can train both large and small numbers of Leaders, including new recruits and old hands. It can help to quickly infuse specific job skills or provide generic competency development. It is flexible training, delivered as when required to one, two or 20 carefully targeted learners. Simulations are a way to easily administer and quickly distribute training in a consistent way.

Here is an example of an interactive simulation-based training program in action. Take a generic skills program for leading teams. A well-designed interactive simulation will create a realistic working environment that

participants can relate to. Embedded in the program will be a hundred or so scenarios typical of those a team leader might face any day in Scouting. As each situation occurs, it calls for action or decision. Just as in real life, these will have consequences. Another action or decision will then need to be taken, with its own consequences.

Some programs are able to assess the learners' actions and decisions against a set of competencies. At any time, learners can click a button to find out their cumulative score for each competency. Based on this feedback, they can try to improve their choices. At the end of the simulation, a full competency report can be produced with suggestions for further development. It's action-based learning at its technological best.

Keep your eyes open for a simulation that is sophisticated enough to run different situations at random. These are the best ones as they allow the same learner to go through the simulation any number of times, each responding to different situations. This makes learning realistic and fun, without being repetitious. Some training simulations can also provide random outcomes.

Back in the Training Department, we can compare scores between learners for evaluation and benchmarking purposes and monitor each learner's progress. We can use simulation for pre- and post-testing of competencies as part of a larger training and developing initiative. Since they closely replicate the real thing we can even use simulations to help with Leader selection decisions.

Many simulation-based training programs also have a theoretical learning component in the form of advice usually presented as general principles by an expert. If learners want to access this advice, they click a button that is a good way to be reminded of best practice principles.

(continue overleaf)

As you would expect, training and assessing competencies with interactive simulations is easily administered. Consistent content and quality is provided equally to large numbers of learners simultaneously. It can be used to provide a similar *experience* base to Leaders in a short time. It can also be used over a long period of time to establish a culture and common knowledge base, for example *how to lead a team*.

With interactive simulation-based training, you know exactly what you will get. You don't have to hope the trainer will do a good job or read between the lines. You will know because you can try it out for yourself first.

Interactive simulation-based training can be self-directed. Like all good self-directed learners, they can use it at home, at work or in a plane, in their own time, at Scouting. Learners can review it as much as they like. They can adapt it to suit their needs, for example. With an interactive simulation on a Unit Leader, they may decide to see the effects of taking actions that will lower morale of the team, and then see how long it takes to build it back up again. Or they may go through the simulation following the *expert advice* and seeing if theories really do work in practise.

This technology is for you if:

- You want your Leaders to learn by performing on the job and be tutored by world class experts.
- Your Association is geographically dispersed, making training delivery logistically difficult and expensive.
- You have Leaders who need a cost-effective refresher or up-to-date training or training in a new skill area.
- You need to find an impartial and reliable way to assess skill levels of leaders for training and development planning or succession planning.
- You want to provide just-in-time training on a specific skill or skill set.
- You want to pre-test and post-test competencies as part of a large training and development effort.
- You want to show prospective leaders what the job is really like or what the task involves.

ANALYSING TRAINING NEEDS

Some people may claim that Training Needs Analysis is the most important step in the training process. We disagree! Each step is equally important! We do agree, however, that a Training Needs Analysis is critical. Its position near the beginning of the training process means that errors at this stage put all subsequent stages off target, with an accompanying waste of resources. Conversely, an accurate Training Needs Analysis reduces the possibility of errors at later stages.

The objective of a Training Needs Analysis is to collect and evaluate information in order to find out:

- What is being done now
- What should be done (either now or in the future)

If we find a gap between the two, we can decide whether training is likely to close it. If training can close the gap, then our collected data become the basis for deciding:

- The method and content of training
- Which people need the training
- The time constraints that apply
- How we can measure the training outcomes.

We have found it useful to describe Training Needs Analysis as a three-stage procedure of:

- Surveillance
- Investigation
- Analysis

Surveillance

You should regularly review the vital data of your Association, as you need an up-to-date picture of what is happening to the total Association, and you can begin to look for areas of performance, problems and training opportunities. Make an effort to maintain informal contacts with individuals throughout the Association. Regularly assess the attitudes and feeling of members, even if your assessment is subjective.

Keep informed about all-current policies and procedures relating to the performance of an Adult in Scouting in your Association.

Investigation

Undertake an investigation if you suspect that you have discovered a performance gap, or if management seems to think that a training need may be present. The purpose of your

investigation is to gather more specific and detailed data in the pertinent area. There are many data-gathering techniques that you could use, such as:

1. Observation - personal, filmed
2. Interviews - individual, group
3. Questionnaires - checklists, rating scales
4. Diaries (record of activities)
5. Program samples etc.
6. Performance appraisals
7. Organisation and methods studies
8. Psychological tests

Analysis

Analysis, because it is an intellectual skill, is difficult to describe. We can say it involves examination of the data in order to eliminate invalid information, and the preparation of a communication (report). These skills can be sharpened by practice and may be assisted by modern techniques of statistical analysis and electronic data processing.

We analyse data under three headings:

- *Organisational analysis* - this includes a statement of objectives and policies at Association level, as well as analysis of the human resources available.
- *Job Analysis* - from here we can specify the skills or competencies, knowledge and attitudes that a person requires to meet the set standard.
- *Person analysis* - We now look at the occupant of the role. We measure current level of performance and diagnose requirements (if any) to bring performance to standard.

We have thus defined the training need, the training objectives, the training content and the target population, which puts us well on the way to developing training activities appropriate to the need.

The surveillance, investigation and analysis model of Training Needs Analysis is systematic, structures and insists on examining the whole Association. It provides data to define the training needs, the training objectives, the target populations and the training content. This enhances the chances of developing training activities that are effective learning experiences and are effective uses of scarce organisational resources.