INTELLIGENCE

A crisis or disaster can strike at any time. New technologies are preparing workers to handle the aftermath.

Can Sims Save Your Life?

Healthcare organizations implement hi-tech training to prepare for the bird flu and other natural disasters.

By Josephine Rossi

ARE YOU RAGING against rude cell phone users, zoned-out iPod listeners, and other bad behaviors in our increasingly hi-tech world? Don't be too quick to judge. The woman with the laptop taking up two seats on the train could be learning to save your life.

This month, the University of Illinois at Chicago School of Public Health's Center for the Advancement of Distance Education (CADE) will introduce two roles within a computer-based video game simulation designed to train public health workers and emergency responders for emergencies.

Designed to mimic a live crisis scenario in a major metropolitan area, the video game is the first in a series of simulations to address bioterrorism, pandemic flu, smallpox, and other disasters that require the dispensing of large amounts of drugs and vaccines.

"It is a race against the clock," says Colleen Monahan, director of CADE. "Participants need to mobilize citizens, transport the drugs to the dispensing center, and then evaluate and treat the patients—all within 48 hours."

Until recently, public health workers and emergency responders were trained using role-playing exercises and disaster drills, which are costly and time-intensive when preparing thousands of people for catastrophic scenarios.

"In light of the disastrous response to Hurricane Katrina, it is clear that preparedness training needs to go a lot further," said Lars Ullberg, executive producer of the project at CADE. "Simulations are the only efficient and cost-effective way to bridge the gap between theory and practice and prepare our emergency workers for both the expected and unexpected."

But Monahan points out that these games will not totally replace traditional training. "We provide didactic training first, and then the simulations reinforce what was taught, which helps fine-tune the learning process," she says. The simulations capture individual and collective performance information so that organization managers can track participants and their progress.

In addition, the simulations can help healthcare officials foster teamwork among colleagues via multiplayer capabilities. Participants must work together not only to evaluate and treat patients, but to deal with possible special situations such as hysterical or disabled patients, drug interactions, and the need for translators.

The simulation project was developed in only three months for the Chicago Public Health Department and was unveiled at the U.S. Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention's Annual Distance Learning Summit in September. In addition to the two roles introduced this month, 21 more are planned to be implemented by the end of the year. CADE is working to seek additional funding to make a generic version available to the public.

"The response from both the CDC and the professional community has been overwhelmingly positive," says Monahan. "We believe this is the first serious game focused on preparing the public health workforce, and it will revolutionize emergency preparedness training."

MORE/http://www.publichealthgames.com/

The Little Projector That Could

Trainers, your days of lugging around ultra heavy projectors are over. Technology giant, Canon USA, has developed the world's smallest and most lightweight liquid crystal on silicon multimedia projector.

About the size of a cigar box, the Canon Realis SX50 weighs a mere 8.6 pounds. It provides such seamless imagery, enhanced motion-image performance, and clear projection of the smallest details that it's already being used in training simulations by Marine Safety International.

"Seven Canon Realis projectors go to seven screens covering 225 degrees, where students carry out individual skill training for critical tasks like docking or giving orders on how to steer the ship," explains Captain Brian Boyce, director of MSI in Norfolk, Virginia.

The Realis SX50 projector features a myriad of display options and an optical zoom lens that can project a 100-inch image on a screen from 9.8 feet away. It also includes multiple input jacks and connectors, and can accept a wide variety of digital and analog computer-display formats. All connectors attach from the side of the projector housing.

MORE/Canon USA/www.canonprojectors.com

Got ID Theft Training?

Identity theft is the fastest growing crime in the United States. During 2004 alone, Consumer Sentinel, the complaint database developed and maintained by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission, received more than 635,000 consumer fraud and identity theft complaints, many of which occurred in the workplace.

To battle this trend, states such as New Jersey, Illinois, and California, as well as federal officials, are drafting tough identity theft laws. But business leaders need to be aware that as these laws are enacted, they become responsible for developing employee awareness and prevention programs.

Laws such as the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act require businesses to not only implement document disposal programs but also employee education and training covering privacy and handling sensitive employee and customer information. And those who fail to comply risk severe penalties.

So where does a company start if it has no formal program in place? There are a number of organizations that provide workshops and seminars, as well as some consultants who are experts in the field. In addition, ID Theft E-Learning.com just launched an online course this winter called ID Theft Awareness and Prevention Education. The course is 2.5 hours long and requires as little as five- to 15-minute blocks of time. Participants learn about the federal and state laws and their penalties, and employers are able to add custom modules with testing on privacy, security, and confidential policies to ensure regulation compliance. Reports can also be generated to provide managers with reading and test results, and the program's supplier documents in the event of a breach or legal issue.

/E-NEWS/

E-Learning Winter Showcase and Learning Symposium Highlights Best Practices and Innovative Approaches

By Linda K. Galloway

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT faces some of today's toughest training challenges—a diverse and dispersed employee workforce, a "brain drain" as aging workers opt for retirement, decentralized organizational structures, periodic reorganizations, and mission-critical objectives that require high levels of training support.

Therefore, it shouldn't be a surprise that federal agencies are among the learning innovators. Some federal learning organizations, such as Defense Acquisition University, outperform their commercial counterparts. One of the 24 presidential E-Government initiatives is E-Training, with the lofty mission of migrating the online training services of more than 40 agencies into one, while supporting areas of competency in achieving human capital goals.

During "The 21st Century Challenges of Learning in the Federal Government," a public discussion held in December, panelists highlighted best practices and innovative approaches that could serve as models for other agencies, as well as corporations and not-for-profits.

The Department of Energy's Claudia Cross, recognized as one of the government's leading experts in human capital management, spoke of the need to move away from what she called "boxology." "Almost nothing fits discretely into any given organizational box. People solve real problems by working together, not in isolation," she says.

Cross was instrumental in forming the Department of Energy's human capital coalition, a group comprised of training directors, diversity directors, and human capital officers from across the enterprise charged with developing aligned human capital and learning strategies.

Often, learning successes were the direct result of cross-organizational, collaborative initiatives. Organizational barriers are among the biggest impediments to learning efficiencies and effectiveness in any enterprise. Federal agencies, perceived by most to be highly bureaucratic and constrained by rigid hierarchies, are solving problems and realizing significant cost savings by creating special teams, recruiting participation from outside training organizations in decision-making processes, and sharing services and resources among multiple units.

The Department of Agriculture has a diverse employee population, with workers in wide-ranging functional areas such as research, forestry, inspection, disaster relief, loans and grants, and new market development. Chris Niedermayer spoke of the collaborative approach the agency took to selecting and implementing an enterprise-wide learning platform. "We focused on finding what keeps HR and HC directors up at night—which turned out to be tracking and better managing of learning," he says. "We then brought in representatives from various groups to discuss options, costs, and functional requirements." The department worked through GoLearn, one of the government's e-training service providers, to implement Plateau's learning management system.

General Frank Anderson has helped the Department of Defense broaden its available learning resources, promote just-in-time learning, share content resources and services, and implement an enterprise-wide performance learning architecture.

"One of the ways we've been able to put our budget to better use is by consolidating, purchasing, and identifying common learning needs. If large organizations continue to make purchases in localized environments, duplications will abound," he says.

Charged with leading the transformation of the federal government's human resources infrastructure and operations, Jeff Pon, from the Office of Personnel Management, is also passionate about the need to capitalize on shared services. "We've got to simplify and unify our approach to learning. Business processes such as HR, finance, and performance management are largely the same in any agency," he says.

Pon also spoke of the need to leverage SCORM to ensure content interoperability within and across agencies. This need was echoed by Robert Wisher, who oversees four Advanced Distributed Learning laboratories and two ADL technology centers. "Our attention should be more on content and its conformance to standards," he says. "LMSs tend to consume about 8 percent of training budgets, but content averages about 30 percent."

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Is Your Sexual Harassment Training Reaching the Most Vulnerable?

By William E. Hauck
and Catherine Amoroso Leslie

IS A RESTAURANT SUPERVISOR committing sexual harassment when he tells a server she could increase sales and tips if she wore revealing clothing? How about a retail employee who repeatedly asks another salesperson "for a date"?

While you may know the answer to both is yes, your teenaged or college-aged co-worker might not.

Sexual harassment is defined as any form of unwanted sexual attention. And some experts estimate that 50 percent of women will experience it during their working careers, especially if they are young and single.

Sexual harassment of teens in the workplace is on the rise. In 2004, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission filed a record 20 sexual harassment lawsuits involving teens, which is approximately four times the number filed in 2001. Most of the lawsuits originated in service-oriented establishments, such as retailers and restaurants, where inexperienced young employees have difficulty differentiating between immature peer behavior at school and sexual harassment at work.

Recently, 392 female college students participated in a survey about sexual harassment in the workplace. Eighty-six percent reported experiencing at least one incident, ranging from sexist comments to rape. Of those students, 56 percent received sexual harassment awareness training, and nearly 70 percent believed they were able to better recognize sexually harassing behaviors. But when asked to identify such behaviors, less than half of those trained students recognized that they had been sexually harassed.

How would your young workers fare? Here are some guidelines to help reach the most vulnerable.

Ensure the training reaches part-time and seasonal employees. Schedule training sessions during evening and weekend hours. Pay attention to when there is increased part-time or seasonal hiring.

Make it interactive. Giving student workers a booklet to read or video to watch on their own may not be enough. Ask participants to relate discussions to what they experienced at school and work.

Talk _their_ talk. Expose yourself to popular culture and media, which offer examples to connect with young workers. Pay attention to behavior and terminology.

Check for understanding. Young workers may be uncomfortable speaking openly about sexual harassment and often signal understanding when they don't (nodding heads, answering "yes," etc.). Ask participants to repeat what they know about sexual harassment in their own words, and use quizzes, games, or group activities to help make them comfortable.

Communicate channels for reporting sexual harassment. Teens and college-aged workers are often reluctant to report sexual harassment because of embarrassment or fear of retaliation. Clearly outline the steps for dealing with sexual harassment in your organization, and foster an atmosphere of trust for young workers to report sexually harassing behaviors.

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Humanity in a Merger

By Margareta Barchan

THE MOST DIFFICULT PART of leading a company through a merger or acquisition is managing the human side of the business. In fact, it's so difficult that many executives seek to avoid it altogether—opting to focus on the more visible and unemotional tasks such as adapting systems and processes. Sure, everyone will applaud a smooth technical transition, but in the end, it's the people who will be responsible for the success or failure of the new entity.

During times of such monumental uncertainty, exactly how do business leaders keep key talent and valued employees from walking out, or part amicably with those who are no longer the right fit?

Here are a set of best practices and examples to get you through.

Know your culture and capabilities. Audit your company's leadership style and culture as well as those of the other organization. Should there be a mismatch, it is best to address issues early on.

A domestic European bank, poised to communicate new operational changes to its workforce during a merger, was surprised to learn that middle management felt unprepared and lacked the skills to effectively share critical information in an effective way. The bank needed to retain certain professionals and reduce other staffers. Faced with the prospect of driving out the wrong people, officials were forced to delay operational changes while they conducted leadership training for middle management. The merger activity later resumed and was ultimately successful, though the company lost valuable time and money.

Understand the nature of the change. Generally speaking, it is possible to drive through a strategic or organizational change from the top-down, but never a cultural change.

A retail store may, for example, successfully change hours of operation with little effort to create global understanding among the workforce. But if this same business engages in a merger or acquisition requiring a cultural change, such as moving from a closely supervised atmosphere to a less supervised one, it must be prepared to invest in intensive employee training and development initiatives. Such initiatives must foster two-way communication and create universal understanding for cultural change to take hold.

Engage all stakeholders. Before undertaking merger or acquisition activity, seek input from those most affected by the prospective changes. Even without divulging strategic secrets, you can tap key employees, distributors, vendors, and customers to gain valuable insight on alternatives for procedures, systems, and other operational or organizational factors. In this way, they become partners in the process, rather than passive recipients of the change.

Communicate goals and visions. During a merger or acquisition, give everyone the background necessary to understand the context for the change.

One European financial institution rolled out a customized learning program several weeks prior to announcing a merger. The program presented realistic challenges and situations at all levels related to the industry and offered opportunities for employees to creatively address these issues.

By the time the merger was announced, some people realized that they were no longer a good fit for the company and left on their own. Management was able to reduce staff numbers through attrition and had the opportunity to recruit new employees whose skill sets were a better match. Equally important, key employees recognized their value to the evolving company and most decided to stay.

Deploy responsibilities. Step back and trust people to get their jobs done.

Consider the case of one telecommunications giant that acquired a business with new technology. All internal systems within the company had to be changed literally overnight to limit service disruption to millions of customers. The team of experts assigned to implement the changeover challenged management's request to be on site during the process. They successfully argued that management presence would slow them down and that management had to trust them to get the job done, which they did.

In my experience, when employees have been given the opportunity to understand and accept the reasons for change, they will always meet or exceed the expectations for carrying out their responsibilities.

Provide effective communication tools. Communication during a merger or acquisition must address not only the "whats," but the "whys" and "hows."

People at the top may have already spent months or years assessing the situation and understanding the need for this business decision. While they should not expect everyone else in the organization to come to the same level of understanding in just a few days or weeks, it is possible to do so—if you choose your communication tools with care.

When evaluating your communication and education programs, seek those who provide opportunities to share the big picture and present the business context for the change. Select programs that will help people envision the future, and contemplate how this current change will play out later. Make sure your communication and education programs allow people to brainstorm ways that they can provide support for the global initiative at their own local level.

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Growing Need for Cultivated Leaders

The biggest source of an organization's future leaders is its own employees, says Right Management Consultants.

According to the results of the company's survey, fewer businesses are hiring senior-level executives from outside their organizations. In fact, only 29 percent are wooing executives away from their competitors. Twenty-seven percent are hiring from businesses other than their competitors, and 20 percent are recruiting from completely outside their industries.

"More companies prefer to build their own future leaders from the ground up," said Debbie Schroeder-Saulnier, managing principal and lead organizational consultant for Right Management Consultants. "They are assessing their high-potential employees to identify which ones have the qualities they desire in senior-level managers, and then providing them with the necessary training, coaching, and managerial experiences to fully grow them into upper management. Therefore, companies must have a good succession management system which tracks the executive qualities, skills, and abilities that have been the most instrumental in their managers' and organization's successes."

Another reason is current managers have acquired a greater understanding of the organization's culture. "Among the major reasons why executives recruited from the outside fail in their new jobs is their lack of familiarity and compatibility or 'fit' with the company's culture," said Schroeder-Saulnier.

So what management skills are officials looking for in their future executives? Survey respondents say the ability to motivate and engage others, followed by the ability to communicate effectively, strategically, and interpersonally.

Additionally, aligning employees to the strategy of their businesses and engaging managers and senior leadership in communicating with workers, ranked as the top two employee communications challenges in an earlier survey by Right and the International Association of Business Communicators Research Foundation.

Forty-eight percent of organizations in that survey said their management has not effectively communicated their business strategies to employees and engaged them in living it in their daily jobs. As a result, only about one-third—37 percent—of organizations reported that their employees are effectively aligned to the missions and visions of their businesses.

"It's no coincidence that motivating and engaging employees and strategic employee communication are the most-desired senior management skills," said Chris Gay, Right's senior vice president and practice leader of employee engagement and communication. "Our research shows that these are the top two challenges facing businesses, and they want leaders who will help them change this."