

RATINGS

Simulation

Manager's Mindset

Reviewed by Dawn Williams for *Training Media Review*

Manager's Mindset is a blended learning solution designed to change the mindset of managers and improve their people management skills. It introduces a set of management principles and guidelines and then uses a variety of formats to present, practice, and provide feedback about the new skills. I had access to the participant materials, online tutorials, and scenario simulations. In addition, participants may attend a two-day classroom workshop and participate in online mentoring and coaching. The training is offered in three formats: classroom, online, or a classroom-online blend.

The Online Experience

Participants begin with a 360-degree assessment. They evaluate themselves and then solicit feedback from their manager, peers, and direct reports. The first online module describes a 360-degree assessment and how it can be used to improve performance. The self-assessment is administered online, and an action plan for getting others to submit feedback is described. The reference guide has an online option for collecting feedback that is a great alternative to the traditional paper-based method. It was confusing, however, that the online tutorial didn't discuss that option.

The next online module covers analyzing the assessment results. It presents a model for processing feedback and provides explanations and illustrations of managers receiving and accepting feedback. The model is simple to understand and potentially powerful in its implementation. The program instructs learners to focus on moderate strengths and areas of weakness based on scores received on the assessment. However, it doesn't (at least online) give users a range of scores. They can look at the scores relative to one another, but I would want to know what is considered a high or low score.

Following the 360-degree assessment are online tutorials introducing the learner to the Manager's Mindset concepts. The tutorials use text, graphics, and audio to present the principles and skills that Manager's Mindset expects users to adopt in order to manage employees effectively. The online modules also provide some reflective questions about the material, which learners can answer and then view a correct response.

The strength of the tutorials resides in their examples of typical managers grappling with the concepts in a business setting. The program does a good job of creating generic and realistic situations. The presentation is straightforward, but not especially exciting. As introductory or reference material, it's good, but I wonder how engaged employees would be without the classroom component.

A major element of the online learning is the simulations. Four simulations allow learners to practice their mobilizing skills. Overall, they provide adequate practice and are more valuable and interesting than the multiple-choice questions typically found in

online training. Real-time feedback is provided about the choices made in the simulation through the use of indicator bars that monitor the learner's performance, as well as the attitudes of each major character. Learners also receive feedback (referred to as "reflections"), at the end of the simula-

The screenshots illustrate the online learning interface. The top screenshot shows a module titled "Mobilizing Skills in action" with a "Mobilizing Skills Summary" section. This summary includes four key areas: "Ask for Input" (ask for others' ideas, use open-ended questions, use silence creatively), "Focus on Specifics" (describe behavior, describe consequences, define expectations, cite previous achievements), "Listen for Understanding" (acknowledge, paraphrase, listen for feelings, respond with action), and "Reinforce Effective Effort" (rewards, consequences, ignoring, refocusing). The bottom-left screenshot shows a simulation scenario with a photo of a woman and text describing a problem. The bottom-right screenshot shows a "Self-Assessment Questionnaire" with a rating scale from 5 (Always) to 1 (Never) and seven questions with indicator bars.

tion, about how they performed. It outlines what a learner did well, as well as what he or she can improve.

The feedback would be more helpful if it were tied to the specific action to which it refers. A learner can produce a transcript of the interactions and compare that to the reflections, but that's awkward and time-consuming. I wonder how many people will take the time to do that.

The simulations are generally realistic and follow an interesting story line, but, at one point, one wrong answer meant I was done. It felt abrupt, but at least I was engaged. It would have been helpful to have more detailed information about my actions at the major decision points—for example, what I did versus what I should have done.

The course tracking isn't as sophisticated as I have come to expect in online learning. A learner knows only the percent completion of an entire course, not an individual module. The tracking data for the course simulation was off because it listed the simulation launch and completion dates and times as the same. It's also clunky that in order to retake the summary test, you have to start the course over, and then you don't have access to your previous scores. The menu structure is primitive; the only way to move between modules is through the course description. Additionally, I experienced a couple of computer crashes and hang-ups. All of these complaints are minor but worth noting.

The training offers a solid and practical framework that, if practiced over time, could result in performance improvement. It's useful because it introduces a limited number of effective frameworks. In the online component, it would be helpful to explain how the model is derived. Is it based on research, documented best practice, or one guru's best guess or opinion?

Print Materials

Because Manager's Mindset is designed to be a blended learning solution, it includes print materials. I was furnished the participant materials, and they will make a good foundation for classroom instruction, especially if they're used in concert with the online content and resources. The materials are marketed as appropriate for self-study, but I'm not convinced that they are well suited for that use.

Recommendation

Manager's Mindset online learning combined with a classroom component is a powerful and well-organized learning model. It has a great deal of feedback and practice built into the design that can lead to positive results. The Mindset

Manager's Mindset online product rating

★★★	Holds user interest
★★	Production quality
★★	Ease of navigation
★★★★1/2	Interactivity
★★★★	Value of content
★★★★	Instructional value
★★★★	Value for the money
★★★★	Overall rating

Manager's Mindset classroom materials rating

★★★★1/2	Holds reader interest
★★★★	Instructional value
★★1/2	Self-study value
★★★★	Value of content
★★★★	Value for the money
★★★★	Overall rating

principles are simple and straightforward to implement. If organizations are willing to commit the money, people, and time, I would expect that they'd see improved performance from their managers. With that said, true change can come only from committed organizations that are sincere and diligent in their efforts.


Course Details

Manager's Mindset, online and classroom, 2003, Novations Group, 888.776.8268; www.novations.com. Purchase: US\$9500 for 100 users for one year. Classroom materials are available.

Dawn Williams is an associate with Booz Allen Hamilton in the learning systems services team. She is an instructional designer specializing in training design and e-learning strategy for corporate and government clients; williams_dawn@bah.com.

Product evaluations are provided by Training Media Review and do not imply endorsement by T+D or ASTD. For more information, contact TMR at 877.532.1838; www.tmreview.com.



 WWW.LEARNINGCIRCUITS.ORG to access TMRs reviews of e-learning materials, including e-courses, authoring software, learning management systems, and more.