

Scenario-Based Training at the F.B.I.

By Chris Whitcomb

It's 6:30 pm on a Friday evening. F.B.I. Special Agent Brock Ramirez stands in the shadow of a dumpster near a Hogan's Alley, Virginia townhouse and slowly levels the front sight of his Remington shotgun.

"Freeze!" he yells.

An Arkansas man named Phil DeVries whirls toward him, looking for an escape route.

"This is the F.B.I. Put your hands over your head," shouts Ramirez.

Ramirez's partner, Jackie Dougher, moves out of the shadow and carefully steps up behind DeVries with a set of handcuffs. The handle of a blue steel .45 protrudes from DeVries's belt, and his shoulder starts to twitch like she's getting ready to try his luck.

"Don't even think about it," says Dougher, with the authority of a seasoned veteran. Four other members of the arrest team dash from positions of cover and join in. They move quickly and decisively,

Training complete with bad guys and good guys at the F.B.I. Academy honed agents' skills so they were ready to hit the street running.

The key was integrating courses into one realistic scenario.

knowing that DeVries is a dangerous explosives expert wanted for two armed bank robberies. He's also the leader of a local paramilitary group called the American Revolutionary Movement and the chief conspirator in a plot to blow up the Washington Monument. Just 10 feet away, his van waits at idle, bulging with 400 pounds of Tovex high explosives.

Before DeVries can react, Dougher and the other agents prone him out on the ground, secure his pistol, and cuff his hands behind his

back. The arrest is over before DeVries knows what hit him.

"OK, people," says a man in a shirt marked *Instructor*. "Let's cut it right there."

Phil DeVries shrugs off his bad-guy persona, and the tension abates. "Help me out with these cuffs, will ya? I've got another class in 10 minutes."

Despite the drama and presence of professional

actors, this is no movie production. It's a Practical Applications Unit training scenario at the F.B.I. Academy in Quantico, Virginia. New Agents, Class of 1998, just passed their final exam.

Becoming fully investigative

Since 1972, every agent hired by the F.B.I. has learned his or her trade during a rigorous training course at a rambling 480-acre campus in rural Northern Virginia. The F.B.I. Academy trains several hundred new agents each year in the rudiments of federal law enforcement. The Academy offers a 16-week curriculum that includes a range of topics from rules of evidence to defensive tactics. Its graduates have worked some of the most important investigations in American history. Every new agent leaves with a first-rate education in handcuffing, constitutional law, and interview techniques. But until recently, not one of them showed up at their first assignment with a clear understanding of how to conduct a full investigation from start to finish.

In fall 1996, soon after becoming assistant director in charge of the F.B.I. Academy, Joseph R. Wolfinger realized that he had a problem. As a former top-level field manager, he knew that new agents graduated with all of the individual skills they needed to do their jobs but had a poor understanding of how to bring those skills together and work a case from initial complaint to prosecution. If the Academy were truly going to lead the way in law-enforcement training, it had to function more like a service provider and match training objectives with the expectations of its clients, F.B.I. field managers. They needed fully functional investigators who were ready to hit the street running. That's what we at Quantico had to deliver.

Wolfinger began by looking for specific training deficiencies and identifying the best ways to leverage change. He initiated one of the most ex-

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tensive curriculum reviews in the Academy's history and asked the agent training

section chief, John Loudon, to reorganize instructional priorities, expand computer-based training, and integrate core skills into a more comprehensive program. Loudon formed a focus group that spent six months on the road observing and examining other training institutions and programs. The group returned with one simple recommendation: integration. The F.B.I. Academy needed to teach more than individual skills; it needed to bring them together in a logical way. If new agents were going to work investigations, they needed to understand more than just the elements of their job; they needed to understand how those elements contribute to a long-term effort.

Enter the Integrated Case Scenario

Scenario-based training is nothing new to training. In fact, the F.B.I. Academy has long used professional role players and scripted situations to engage trainees with the subject matter more effectively. The Academy recognizes that practical application injects realism and adds a decision-making process that reinforces classroom lecture. Unfortunately, the scenarios the Academy had been using were often limited to the specific objectives of one course. There

was no assimilation of core training elements into a larger integrative model.

Looking to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Harvard Business School, and the Central Intelligence Agency as models, Loudon's focus group formulated an innovative new program. The group suggested that each of the Academy's seven training units rewrite their curriculums to fit within a single, comprehensive scenario. This scenario would take the form of an F.B.I. investigation or case and incorporate all aspects of new-agent training. Instead of addressing core competencies in segmented instructional blocks, the new scenario would offer training as an integrated simulation of the actual job of an F.B.I. agent. The project's name seemed to flow from the concept—the Integrated Case Scenario.

Wolfinger assigned one supervisor to oversee the curriculum overhaul and another to script a 14-week scenario that would give trainees the sense that they were working an actual investigation. Loudon's focus group met weekly to evaluate progress and serve as a sounding board on which the tenor of integration could be tested.

By the end of July, the team had crafted an innovative curriculum that started with a concerned citizen's telephone call and ended 14 weeks later with a simulated trial. In between lay all of the stuff of a genuine investigation, including a healthy sampling of what can go wrong in an actual criminal inquiry.

The benefits of an Integrated Case Scenario aren't limited to law-enforcement training. Corporate management programs can be more effective in teaching such subjects as cultural awareness, computer skills, and time management by offering a holistic overview of the related competencies in an office setting. This integrated approach to case-method training identifies a need among trainees for particular skills, offers the skills as a solution, and provides opportunities to practice the

skills. An Integrated Case Scenario addresses training as a gestalt and interrelates diverse skills to produce a graduate who is more than the sum of his or her individual competencies.

Getting started

Getting started on building an Integrated Case Scenario takes three steps.

Step 1: The steering committee. The steering committee should be composed of instructional and administrative staff. The committee should be diverse enough to reflect disparate training interests and broad enough to address all core competencies. Even though some of the training units may think that they have no role in the proposed Integrated Case Scenario, they can bring unique perspectives to the committee and play an important role in developing a common sense of mission. Consequently, all training units should be represented on the committee and asked for input during case construction.

The steering committee should include a project coordinator selected from the instructional staff. The project coordinator should have the authority to enforce changes to the curriculum and should have the appropriate diplomacy skills to foster cooperation when problems arise. The project coordinator needs to understand fully the training objectives and the overall mission so that he or she can answer the hard questions in detail and explain the reasons for making difficult changes. The project coordinator is the lynchpin of an Integrated Case Scenario approach.

Step 2: The theme or matrix. The second step in an Integrated Case Scenario process is to select a theme or matrix through which all of the training objectives will be reordered. This matrix is more than a plot line. It represents the essence of the training objectives, incorporates all core competencies, and reflects the committee's sense of mission. It should mirror closely the real-life job challenges that new agents will encounter once they have completed training. The F.B.I. Academy selected a domestic terrorism matrix, believing that that particular criminal violation would be broad enough to incorporate all aspects of an agent's job description.

However, a corporate management program might select a matrix involving franchise development, personnel management, or purchasing skills. The possibilities are limitless.

Step 3: The plot line. Last, the committee must find a scriptwriter to craft a plot line and turn the matrix into a workable scenario. The scriptwriter need not be hired from outside the organization. Most training institutions have creative people who are quite capable of writing a story line and developing characters. The scenarios don't have to have all of the plot twists and colorful characters of a John Grisham novel. And the scenarios don't require the special effects of a James Cameron film. The best training scenarios are relatively straightforward and come from the collective experience of the

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training staff.

The scriptwriter will become intimately involved in all aspects of the Integrated Case Scenario and may find it difficult to juggle the project with his or her regular responsibilities. In that instance, it makes sense to assign the project as a full-time position.

Writing the scenario

Once the plot line has been ironed out, the scriptwriter can assemble existing scenarios from the various training units. These seed scenarios will serve as a starter package of names, roles, characters, and time sequences. In many instances, the existing scenarios can be revised and patched together, making a complete overhaul unnecessary. That process, called *linking*, can simplify

the Integrated Case Scenario approach.

The linking process can be high-tech or low-tech. You can use 3-by-5-inch cards for each existing scenario from the different training units and arrange or link them together on a tabletop. Or you can link them in graphic boxes in a word-processing program.

The linking process helps the scriptwriter organize the training units and order them in a linear course schedule. That will help the steering committee create a flowchart, which it can revise and edit to balance training priorities as needed throughout the process.

On the case

The F.B.I. Academy's domestic terrorism case accommodates all aspects of new-agent training. For example, new agents must apply the interview skills learned in the communications class in order to gain information in the legal-instructions class that will lead to a search warrant. The search warrant is used to conduct a crime-scene investigation during forensic-sciences training. Evidence gathered during the forensic-sciences scenario is used to support the ultimate arrest.

By linking competencies in a logical order, the scriptwriter provides trainees with a better understanding of how their individual skills will help them work an entire investigation. The Integrated Case Scenario becomes a controlled simulation of the investigative process and an accurate indicator of what agents will encounter in the field.

The plot. As with any plot, the process called *sequencing* quickly becomes elemental to the Integrated Case Scenario. The story must start with a single event that kicks off the training and ends with a gratifying conclusion.

The F.B.I.'s Integrated Case Scenario begins with a telephone call from a concerned citizen who has overheard people making plans to pull off a terrorist bombing. The Integrated Case Scenario ends 14 weeks later with a simulated prosecution. In between are various twists and turns that, when negotiated successfully, lead to a conviction. The sequencing process coordinates the different training units and lends structure to the Integrated Case Scenario.

The characters. Characters are the next element of major concern to the scriptwriter. In order to be effective, any

Integrated Case Scenario must appear realistic. No work of fiction seems plausible without names and faces. Some characters will appear once and exit forever, while others will take the stage often and contribute significantly to the overall success of the scenario. The scriptwriter should craft each of the roles carefully to ensure realism and to ensure that uniform information is handed out during each role play.

As with most movies and novels, the F.B.I.'s Integrated Case Scenario plot line revolves around a central character. The F.B.I. considers agents to be the heroes of its story. So, the primary character of the new Integrated Case Scenario, Phil DeVries, role plays the antagonist. Other cases may be different. The characters don't have to have personality flaws or hidden agendas. Depending on the topic of the chosen matrix, the scriptwriter may model the characters on actual exemplary office staff, publicly known corporate role models, or people that the scriptwriter knows.

In crafting an Integrated Case Scenario, the scriptwriter will quickly recognize the importance of formal role-play instructions. There's little room for ad-lib performances in an Integrated Case Scenario, which builds up steam. Each character should have a fictitious date of birth and other data, as well as a brief but detailed personal history—sometimes referred to as a back story—that clarifies his or her relationship to the other characters.

Some of that information should be given out during the course of the role play. The instructor might relate other information during a pre-scenario briefing. Detailed role-play notes or actual scripts will keep the plot moving properly and ensure accuracy for the instructors.

Turning plot to purpose

Once the scriptwriter has linked the instruction blocks, crafted a plot line, and defined the characters, he or she will take the end product back to the steering committee for a comprehensive review or first read. Each of the individual training units will scrutinize its own portion of the Integrated Case Scenario for content, making sure that the scenario effectively supports classroom instruction. The scriptwriter should be prepared to

rewrite parts of the Integrated Case Scenario many times, based on constructive suggestions from the training units. That process will become a continuous, formative evaluation.

Next, the project coordinator should participate in the revision process and mediate any disputes, with the benefit of the overall project in mind. Individual training units can sometimes forget how they relate to the big picture and get entrenched over trivial issues. The project coordinator must have the administrative authority to mandate changes or compliance when necessary.

After the first read, the scriptwriter makes revisions and prepares an instructor's manual that clearly outlines each

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Integrated Case Scenario-related training session. This detailed and comprehensive manual begins with a storyline overview—also called a *compendium*—which gives instructors and trainees a clear understanding of how the plot unfolds. The compendium should detail the individual training events as they appear in the storyline and outline each character's part in the overall scenario. The compendium should stand on its own and read like a novella so that each of the instructors can pick it up and understand the entire process at a glance.

The instructor's manual should include a brief master list—the *index*—of each class meeting and a synopsis of each Integrated Case Scenario-related lesson. That will serve as a quick reference to the lesson plan, role-play notes, and specific communications taught during separate classes.

The index should reflect a uniform schedule and be clear enough for other training units to understand. Because this manual is offered to all training staff as a uniform curriculum guide, it should adhere to a common institutional language and style.

The instructor's manual should also contain a list of names and biographical sketches for everyone involved in the scenario. This *dramatis personae* serves as a quick reference for instructors who do not deal directly with certain characters in the scenario but have to answer questions in class about them from trainees.

For example, new agents may arrest someone in a practical-applications scenario, with little idea of how that character fits into another training unit's curriculum. The role-player reference eliminates confusion.

Last, the instructor's manual should be divided by week and day into individual class periods to conform to a uniform training schedule. Each tabbed division should include the role-play notes, the model communications, instructors' notes, and a synopsis of that day's schedule. This curriculum map doesn't have to include the lesson plan for a particular class, but it should serve as a reference to a master library.

The Integrated Case Scenario manual is intended to guide instructors through a complex series of classes. The talents, skills, and resources of each instructor are not easily packaged in any manual.

Once written, revised, and properly formatted, the Integrated Case Scenario manual may be placed in a three-ring binder for easy modification. An Integrated Case Scenario should be thought of as an organic educational tool that will be revised and modified fairly often during the first two or three training cycles. Many of the individual documents will be copied and distributed in class or to role players. Keeping it all in a three-ring binder makes it easier to do those functions.

Props and footlights

Successful scenario-based training requires more than carefully designed competency schemes and a well-written script. You have to hire professional role players or conscript them from the teaching staff. You have to borrow, purchase,

or find props, which can be anything from automobiles to cash registers.

You should set up a realistic training environment dedicated specifically for use in the Integrated Case Scenario.

In order to manage the behind-the-scenes logistical concerns, the project coordinator will need support staff. The F.B.I. Academy's Integrated Case Scenario includes 63 characters who appear in more than 20 formal role-play scenarios. Most of the training occurs in Hogan's Alley, a mock city that includes a bank, a motel, shops, townhouses, a trailer park, and other realistic urban settings. The list of props is huge.

Managing that broad backdrop in the face of a constantly revolving trainee population would be impossible without a logistical staff. Smaller programs will need at least one person to oversee the day-to-day operation so that instructors can focus on the subject matter.

As with any dramatic production, the Integrated Case Scenario will go through a trial run. That can be a positive learning experience for trainees who are offered a part in the process. Telling them that they will be the first class to test the new curriculum and that they will be asked for feedback helps trainees and instructors alike. Trainees feel as if they're part of an exciting new initiative; instructors gain insight from the trainees' perspective.

Introducing an Integrated Case Scenario to instructional staff can be difficult. Those trainers who are interested in offering the best possible instructional environment tend to adapt quickly. Staff members who are less amenable to change can take some time to recognize the benefits of the Integrated Case Scenario approach.

The project coordinator, scriptwriter, and focus group can present a new Integrated Case Scenario most effectively in an interactive setting. The presenters should encourage and welcome feedback from the entire training staff, while presenting the approach optimistically as a promising response to long-standing needs. All of the trainers can contribute to the project's success through their experience, innovation, and enthusiasm.

The F.B.I. Academy introduced its Integrated Case Scenario concept to new agents on October 28, 1997. The trial class included attorneys, accountants, military officers, and managers from pri-

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vate industry. The pilot participants interviewed case subjects and witnesses, conducted surveillance, filed search- and arrest-warrant affidavits, analyzed crime scenes, arrested suspects, and testified in court. Every report they filed, every bullet casing they logged into evidence, and every person they arrested contributed to the cumulative knowledge people would need as an F.B.I. field agent.

When the newly trained agents graduated on February 6, 1998, the class speaker turned to F.B.I. Director Louis Frech and told him that they had adopted the phrase *First Class* as their motto. It symbolized their role in the maiden voyage with the new Integrated Case Scenario and represented their collective impression of the training.

Without exception, the First Class of 41 new agents were positive about the effectiveness of the new training approach and the value of learning their jobs from the inside out. Most said it was the finest course of instruction they'd ever received.

Those new agents had come a long way since hearing the name Phil DeVries for the first time four months earlier. They had learned all of the skills that F.B.I. agents need to do their jobs, and they had applied those skills within a realistic scenario. Wolfinger's vision of an Integrated Case Scenario—and countless hours of hard work—had paid off. For the first time in the history of the F.B.I. Academy, each graduate left with a full investigation under his or her belt.

In effect, these new agent trainees graduated as full-fledged investigators. □

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