

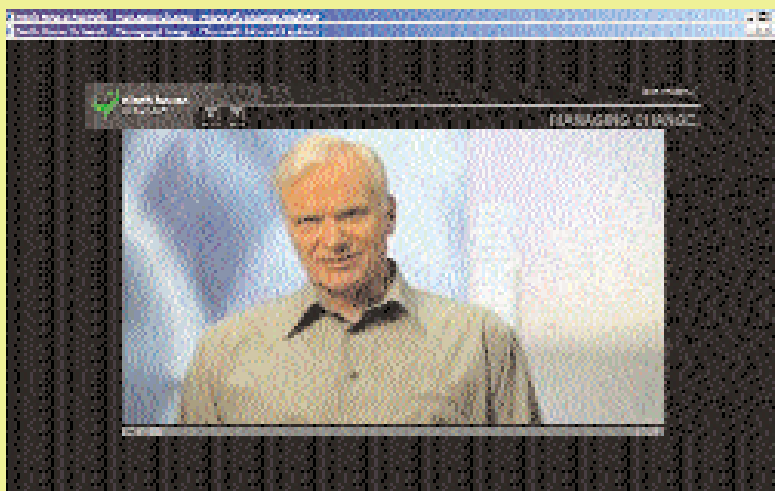
# RATINGS

## Software: A Ninth House Roundup

Partnering for Results, Reframing Change, Virtual Teams, and Innovation: WOW! Projects

Reviewed by Dawn Williams for *Training Media Review*

Ninth House continues to distinguish itself with top-notch production values and extensive use of audio and video. In addition, its use of the CD-ROM to deliver high-bandwidth media has let Ninth House courseware move beyond the current text, graphics, and low-resolution small-box video used by many (most?) online courses.



Although high-end graphics can enhance a program, it's still the underlying instruction that's most important, and the Ninth House approach is effective for illustrating key concepts. There is, however, one drawback: The extensive use of audio and video clips means less content is covered in depth. Not as much information can be conveyed by audio clips as by text. Ninth House counters by using a variety of video, text, audio, and graphics to create entertaining, as well as informative, sequences. Typically, an expert on a video clip introduces the topic; the learning points are then conveyed with graphics, audio, and some text on several screens. Between modules, a video story often underlines the key points or sets up the next topic. Sometimes, multiple-choice questions assess knowledge; the longer courses use simulations to provide practice and assessment. Questions are also asked that require the learner to consider or use job-related information.

As mentioned, Ninth House uses CD-ROM to get around the technical challenge of bandwidth and reliability for delivering video and audio to a desktop. That works well as long as someone views the training on one com-

puter. During the review, I used two different computers and had a problem remembering to carry the CD-ROM with me from one to the next. The courses require a couple of plug-ins, and I had some difficulty installing them. I was able to troubleshoot on my own (the plug-ins weren't installed properly during setup), but I did place a call to Ninth House's support center and received a call back within a couple of hours.

I reviewed four Ninth House management courses: Partnering for Results, Reframing Change, Virtual Teams, and Innovation: WOW! Projects. The strongest of the group is Innovation: WOW! Projects by Tom Peters. Whether you agree with Peters, he does cut a compelling figure, even in video clips. He puts forth a simple, easy-to-remember process for fostering an entrepreneurial mindset in employees to create projects with big impact. Much of the instruction is delivered through video clips, and there's a story about kids and a lemonade stand to illustrate the main points. The course also has the learner identify a WOW! project and asks questions throughout the course about how to develop it. Pre- and post-tests measure what you learn.

Two of the courses, Reframing Change and Virtual Teams, are short and not particularly memorable. The substantial course, in addition to Innovation: WOW! Projects, is Partnering for Results, which presents the Mindshift model for successful partnering.

To evaluate a partnership, each company's stage of development is assessed and classified into one of six stages. Each manager is then identified as one of six personality types, and finally each partner's perspective on the project is described as one of four personality types. That's a lot of personalities!

Maybe it's just me, but the busier I become, the more I need the *simple* in K.I.S.S. not to feel *stupid*. At the least, I need strong job aids as take-aways if there's to be any chance of adopting the model once I'm back on the job. Additionally, I want to know how this model was derived. Is there any data that supports its development? In other words, if I use this model, how do I know it will increase my chances for successful partnerships? Lorraine Segil created the Mindshift approach, and I think any course would have to use her book *Intelligent Business Alliances* in conjunction with the course to be effective. I haven't read that book, but I could envision the online course as a supplement to the book rather than the other way around.

The two longer courses use simulations to provide additional practice for the content. The simulations are videos that stop at key decision points and require the learner to decide what the character should do next. There is some branching based on the response chosen. During the simulation, you can receive feedback about your previous decision and get hints as to what the correct decision should be. At the end of the simulation, a review is provided for each scene in which you've made a decision. The reviews are color coded to tell you how you did in addition to what you did at each decision point. All in all, the simulations are helpful.

A discussion forum can be used with the courses, though the current postings are, for the most part, superficial. But with effective facilitation, the forum could provide discussion and context for employees taking the courses. Also, at the beginning of the course, I answered several questions about how to "optimize our network to your preferred learning style." I then chose groups of words that appealed to me and selected the gender of my mentor. The mentors are based on learning styles as determined by the Keirseley Temperament Sorter: artisan, guardian, idealist, and rational. The main place that I encountered them was during transitions in the Innovation: WOW! Projects course. It's difficult to assess whether they added any real value. I did change my mentor in the midst of a course. Though there was some change in the narrative, I don't think it was significant.

### Recommendation

For those of you looking for courses that require no additional training support, the only one in this package I can envision having any impact is Innovation: WOW! Projects. I can imagine some of the concepts being referred to and

### Partnering for Results, Reframing Change, Virtual Teams, and Innovation: WOW! Projects

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

used on the job—for example, "Where's the WOW! in your project?" Depending on the corporate culture, such questions could be asked seriously or sarcastically. It's important to make sure that concepts taught in a course are supported in the work environment and culture. If so, the course provides a common set of concepts and vocabulary; if not, it won't have an impact, and employees will discard the ideas.

All of the courses require the organization to provide additional support for learners. If the messages and strategies are ones you want, Ninth House has an interesting way to introduce them. Actually getting employees to adopt them will require ongoing work.

### Course Details

Partnering for Results, Reframing Change, Virtual Teams, and Innovation: WOW! Projects, software, 2003, Ninth House Learning Network: 800.304.4951, [www.ninthhouse.com](http://www.ninthhouse.com). Purchase: US\$50-\$349 per user per year. (Note on pricing: \$50 per year per user for access to Instant Advice only; \$349 per user per year for access to all courses).

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