In Practice

NYU Launches Graduate "Teleprogram"

Twenty students at New York University are enrolled in a 16-credit graduate program offered entirely through an interactive computer network.

University officials say the "teleprogram" is the first of its kind in higher education.

The program relies on Lotus Notes for Video, which enables instructors to incorporate graphics, animation, and video as well as text into their on-line curricula.

Students will not attend any regular classes. Instead, they will use their personal computers to gain 24-hour-a-day access to all course materials. Registration, grading, and other administrative functions also will take place entirely on-line.

Eventually, the university expects to incorporate live audio and video communications among faculty and students.

The university offers the teleprogram through its Information Technologies Institute. NYNEX, New York City's main telecommunications company, links students' personal computers to a group of NYU computer servers through high-speed telephone lines that can transmit multimedia files.

NYU received an 18-month, $380,000 grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to support the project.

Most of the students are midlevel professionals, and for most of them, their employers will pick up the $8,000 tab for tuition. A few of the students live as far away as Denver, Colorado, but most live in the New York City area.

Robert L. Jacobson reported on the program in the January issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education.*

Wayne Vincent

Team Players

"Organizations have disavowed loyalty to employees, but they want it *from* them," asserts Marilyn Moats-Kennedy in the March 1995 issue of *Kennedy's Career Strategist.*

She says organizations use workplace teams to rationalize the demands that companies place on employees.

"Managers are telling employees who try to cut back hours, effort, and emotional involvement, 'You can't let the *team* down,'" Moats-Kennedy writes.

According to Moats-Kennedy, "companies will punish non-team players while remaining free to rearrange the teams, lay them off, or do whatever they think is best for the organization."

Her advice?

"You won't survive the nineties unless you can fake a strong interest in teamwork.... Be a team booster in meetings, in private conversations, and in the grapevine—unless you're prepared to leave."

Tune in, turn on, earn a degree.

Identifying Priorities

You can use the following classifications to categorize your "to-do" list and set priorities.

"A" tasks are
urgent
immediate
important
highly valuable
critical
nonnegotiable
usually needed right away.

"B" tasks are
self-initiated
important over the long run
often hard or difficult
time-consuming
complex.

"C" tasks are
initiated by others
urgent
easy
fast
clear and simple.

Managing Priorities

Work used to provide predictability in our lives, but it doesn't any longer, says Odette Pollar, director of Time Management Systems in Oakland, California.

"We all face continual change, and we're bombarded with decisions to make and options to choose among," Pollar observes. "Many of us struggle to do the work of two people in our downsized departments, to accommodate the needs of both work and family, and to cope when workplace challenges seem to change almost daily."

The only way to do more when you already do everything is to focus on doing more of what's important and less of what is not, Pollar asserts. "You must distinguish between important tasks and urgent tasks."

According to Pollar, all tasks fall into one of three categories: "A" tasks are both important and urgent; "B" tasks are important but not urgent; and "C" tasks are urgent but not particularly important. (See the box, "Identifying Priorities.")

Along with doing A tasks—for example, meeting a deadline—we tend to spend time on C tasks that are easy and fast to complete, such as answering the telephone, Pollar says.

That's why most of us never get around to our important "B" tasks. B tasks, such as conducting market research and training employees, add value to people or processes.

"B tasks are the ones we would love to do if we had the time—which we don't," Pollar says. Why not? Pollar cites Gresham's Law of time management: "The urgent drives out the important."

"Given a choice in the 20 minutes before a meeting, what would you do: answer a fax, or start rewriting a procedural manual?" Pollar asks.

You can integrate important, long-term, B tasks into your daily schedule without overtime and without a magical transformation in your workplace, Pollar says. She suggests the following steps:

▸ Put your project plans in writing. A written plan is more useful than a vague idea.
▸ Break B projects into small steps. Make the steps as quick and easy to do as any C task. In general, steps should take 20 minutes or less to do.
▸ Add one 20-minute B task to your "to do" list every day.
▸ Give yourself interim deadlines. Writing a task on your calendar helps give it the sense of urgency that you need to complete it.
▸ Set aside quiet time. Some tasks, such as writing and learning new software, require more than 20 minutes. Block out time on your calendar, close your door, and forward your telephone calls. If necessary, put a "Do Not Disturb" sign on your door or cubicle.
▸ Involve others. When appropriate, delegate work to others or ask for their help.

Along with taking steps toward accomplishing B tasks, find ways to eliminate or reduce your C tasks, Pollar adds. For every C task, ask yourself the following questions:

▸ Why am I doing it?
▸ Is the task important? Does it contribute to achieving my goals or the goals of my team?
▸ Does the task have to be done? What would happen if it did not get done?
▸ Can someone else do it?

"Remember, it is the job of C tasks to reproduce," Pollar warns. "Do not get caught in the activity trap. Activity alone does not equal productivity."

Start an Employee Wellness Program

By Barbara Epes, director of employee and community affairs, John Alden Financial Corporation, 7300 Corporate Center Drive, Miami, FL 33126; 305/715-2861.

When Nancy Judge participated in an on-the-job weight-loss program, her weight dropped by 30 pounds and her productivity rose.

"When you feel better about yourself, it's reflected in your work," says Judge, director of legal administration at John Alden Financial Corporation, an insurance-holding company in Miami, Florida.

Joanne Elder started exercising regularly for the first time when John Alden Financial started a running club for employees. She also participated in the firm's health fair, blood drive, and other events.

"I found myself feeling healthier and losing weight when I started running," Elder says. "The company program really helped to motivate me."

John Alden Financial has found that corporate wellness programs boost productivity, lower health-care costs, and help firms attract and retain top-quality workers. Wellness programs also save lives: Two John Alden Financial employees survived breast cancer because their illnesses were detected during an early stage, thanks to an on-site screening program.

John Alden Financial launched its wellness program in 1986. Today, the program, called HealthWorks, has a budget of $75,000 and involves more than 100 employees on 10 committees.

Activities include a health fair, an employee-published cookbook of nu-

tritious recipes, numerous sports clubs, substance-abuse prevention campaigns, an in-house fitness center, and many health-related seminars and workshops.

Here are tips for firms that want to launch wellness programs, based on the experience of John Alden Financial and other corporate members of the South Florida Wellness Council.

‣ Start small. Don't break ground for a corporate fitness center as your first step. Launch simple programs such as blood-pressure and cholesterol screening. Or distribute information about nutrition to employees.

‣ Delegate responsibility. To minimize costs and foster ownership, let employees plan and implement activities. Conduct a survey to assess employees' health and recreation interests. Based on employees' responses, your firm might sponsor a softball team, a ski club, or even a sailing event.

‣ Schedule activities around the workday. Don't let activities take employees away from their regular duties. Schedule events before work, during lunch, or after work.

‣ Learn from other companies. Before setting up a program, find out what other firms in your area or industry have done and learn from their experiences.

‣ Take advantage of community services. Many local health agencies and nonprofit organizations provide health screenings for free.

College Credit for Training

Corporate employees in the United States now can earn college credits for training offered by Zenger-Miller, an international consulting, training, and education firm.

The American Council on Education, through its Program on Non-Collegiate Sponsored Instruction (PONSI), has accredited Zenger-Miller courses that cover such skills as strategic-process management, interpersonal interactions, team leadership, and quality management.

More than 1,200 colleges and universities offer credit through ACE/ PONSI. Trainees can apply credit from Zenger-Miller courses toward degrees in such fields as industrial operations,

organizational development, and human resource development.

An employee should check with her or his college or university before training starts, to ensure that the institution will award credit for the particular training program. For more information, call Carol Santos, 408/452-1244, ext. 249.

Developing Leaders

Six out of 10 companies consider leadership development a high priority, reports a new survey from the American Society for Training and Development.

The National HRD Executive Survey mailed surveys to 405 HRD executives at *Fortune* 500 and other large, private firms. Among the 126 respondents to the survey, only 12 percent consider leadership a low or nonexistent priority at their firms.

More than three-quarters of the companies represented in the survey currently sponsor leadership-development programs. Of the respondents whose companies do, 79 percent report that leadership development is gaining in importance in their companies. Only 2 percent said that it is declining in importance.

Respondents indicate that their firms are more likely to target leadership development at middle managers than at other groups. Among responding firms that offer leadership development, 28 percent offer it to middle managers. Twenty-three percent offer it to supervisors, 22 percent to top managers, and 11 percent to nonsupervisors.

What types of leadership-development programs do firms offer? Survey respondents offer a snapshot: 22 percent said their firms provide leadership development related to quality, 21 percent offer programs in managing change, 18 percent in building a high-performance workplace, 12 per-

What Kinds of Leadership-Development Programs Does Your Firm Offer?
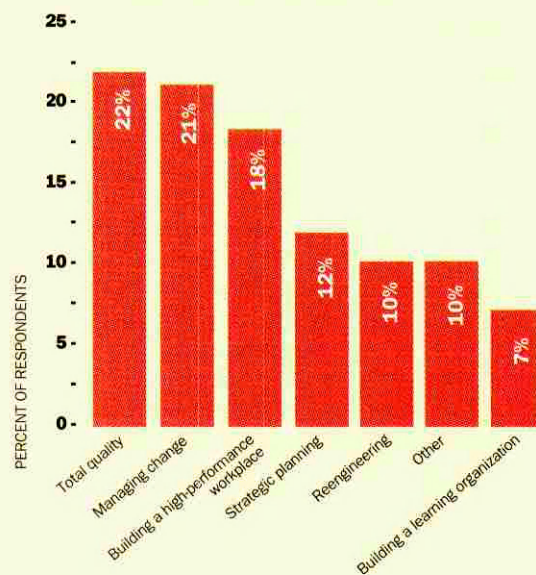
Source: The American Society for Training and Development. Based on 345 responses.

cent in strategic planning, 10 percent in reengineering, and 7 percent in building a learning organization.

Seminars in Mexico

Two consulting companies have formed an alliance to offer seminars in Mexico for corporate executives.

Michigan-based Prism Performance Systems and Master Consultoria Y Dessarrollo Ejecutivo of Mexico City, Mexico, offered their first seminar in April in Mexico City.

The seminar focused on change management, a relatively new strategy for Mexican businesses, according to the two firms.

"Mexican companies are undergoing a tremendous amount of change right now as they address the impact of the [North American] free-trade agreement and the declining value of the peso on their businesses," says Bill Matthews, Prism senior consultant.

Seminar participants learned how to plan strategically for change, communicate and implement change, and manage large-scale change efforts.

For information, call Rick Sykes at 810/851-3993 or Edmundo Ramirez at 011/525-211-1316.

In Practice

Coping With Change

By Kavita Gupta, a consultant at 28 Pilgrim Drive, Winchester, MA 01890; 617/721-6440.

Change travels under many aliases, but it remains both inevitable and problematic. So whether your firm is restructuring, reengineering, reorganizing, or just regrouping for the challenges that all organizations face, consider these tips from experts in managing the effort.

Virginia Meany, senior vice-president of Fidelity Investments in Boston, Massachusetts, led the reengineering of front-end operations for one of Fidelity's sister companies, the Institutional Services Company. Based on her experience, Meany offers the following advice:

▶ Respect the difficulty of change and set realistic expectations. Be sensitive to people's feelings about change.

▶ Take inventory of your in-house training capabilities and determine what else you'll need to develop and deliver. Outsource training, if necessary, rather than allowing your department to be caught unprepared.

▶ Don't lock employees into aggressive, mandatory training schedules that cause information overload and disrupt operations. Instead, offer training on demand, or in measured phases.

Bob LaLiberte is an organizational consultant with Stratisys in Atkinson, New Hampshire. He suggests that when companies measure the results of reengineering, they should choose measures that relate directly to critical-success factors and financial performance.

For example, if a firm focuses on customer service as a critical factor, it might measure delivery performance, product quality, and customer satisfaction. If a firm focuses on manufacturing, it might choose to measure productivity, efficiency, or cycle times.

LaLiberte also suggests that companies do the following:

▶ identify performance measures when launching a change initiative

▶ relate measures directly to the goals and vision of the overall reengineering initiative

▶ use measures to drive continuous improvement, not just to monitor performance

▶ change measures over time as needs change.

Top 20

Industry Week magazine recently posed the following question to experts on motivational techniques: "How do you motivate today's burned-out employees?"

Based on answers to the informal survey, *Industry Week* offers the following top-20 list of ways that management can motivate employees:

1. Give employees the information they need to do a good job.

2. Provide regular feedback.

3. Ask employees for their input and involve them in decisions that affect their jobs.

4. Establish easy-to-use channels of communication, both formal (such as suggestion boxes) and informal (such as an open-door policy by managers).

5. Ask individual employees what motivates them.

6. Learn what on-the-job activities employees choose to do when they have free time and create opportunities for them to do those activities regularly.

7. Personally congratulate employees for good work.

8. Be accessible to employees.

9. Write personal notes to employees about their performance.

10. Publicly recognize employees for good work.

11. Include recognition as part of morale-building meetings that celebrate group success.

12. Give employees meaningful work to do.

13. Make appropriate tools available to complete work.

14. Pay attention to employees' personal needs.

15. Use performance as the basis for promotion.

16. Establish a promote-from-within policy.

17. Demonstrate a commitment to long-term employment.

18. Foster a sense of community.

19. Pay people what they are worth.

20. Offer employees a share of the profits.

Parents Preventing Drug Abuse

The workplace works as a setting in which parents can learn how to steer their children away from substance abuse, reports the Work in America Institute of Scarsdale, New York.

With a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, during 1993 and 1994 the institute ran a nationwide pilot of the Parent Connection, a substance-abuse prevention program.

The pilot involved more than 900 employees from 12 organizations at 20 corporate sites. Companies and unions jointly sponsored the programs. Participating employees included union and non-union workers, managers, and other professionals.

The program aims to teach parents the skills they need to communicate with their children about substance abuse. Parents also practice skills for helping their children to develop the self-confidence to resist peer pressure to use drugs or alcohol.

Virtually all participants attended all five of the one-hour seminars. Nine of the 12 participating organizations continue to offer the program.

An independent evaluation of the program found that 100 percent of the participants would recommend the program to other parents. Participants also reported that they felt more confident about talking with their children, particularly about substance-abuse issues.

The Parent Connection curriculum was prepared for Work in America by Charles H. Flatter, an expert in child development and the author of *Growing Up Drug Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention*.

Work in America is exploring ways to introduce the Parent Connection at more work sites and in communities. For information, call Joel Rosow, Work in America, 914/472-9600.