



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Believe It or Not

All about pretend learning

Key Learnings

- Training experts believe that pretend training makes instructions more effective as knowledge is put to practical use
- The two popular pretend training methods are gaming and computer-based simulations

The more trained the employee, the better the performance and the smaller the chance of the employee jumping ship. A few years ago, one could easily find a bunch of protestors who would argue that this is not necessarily true. However, today training gets almost unanimous support.

Encouraged by this pro-training environment, every once in a while there is a new buzzword - from e-learning to blended learning to mobile learning, the list seems endless. While each has its benefits, something that has attracted universal attention is pretend learning.

The Power of the Artificial

Creating a make-believe world with the help of simulations and computer games to put learners through a 'pretend experience' is a current trend. "*In corporate training, pretend experience is better than no experience at all,*" says a training expert.

Experts also believe that pretend training makes instructions more effective as knowledge is put to practical use. According to an Accenture study, those who learn by doing retain up to 75 percent of instructions taught, compared to a dismal 5 percent from those who attend lectures and 10 percent from learn by reading. High retention rates aside, the greatest advantage of putting employees in an artificial setup is that they can fail, even repeatedly, without facing any real-life setbacks.

The two popular pretend training methods are gaming and computer-based simulations. Their popularity is attributed to the fact that they make training more enjoyable and meaningful. They come with recommendations from training experts who consider them the best ways to infuse life into dull training sessions.

A Game or Two

The thought of promoting workplace games may not go down with most employers, but when trainers recommend gaming they are not talking about solitaire or sudoku. While games enliven a boring session, they ensure that employees walk out of training sessions with the skills and knowledge their employers pay for.

First Timers



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Organizations could initiate the concept of gaming with courses that have a modest mix of work and games. Easily available off-the-shelf, such blended courses are the best way to introduce the 'training through gaming' concept. Larger organizations can opt for the 'do-it-yourself' approach. Some organizations even create their own course mix by blending sophisticated technology and high quality video to remove the boredom from training.

One such course is a certification program that authorizes employees and outsiders as networking professionals in shared storage devices. This course uses an internally developed game called SAN (Storage Area Network) Rover to teach learners the basics of building high-speed shared storage devices networks. It requires participants to gather and correctly piece together a network of hard drives, switches and other components in the shortest time possible without colliding or crashing into asteroids! Besides spicing up training, such games are highly effective when previously taught skills need reinforcing.

Simple, off-the-shelf games can also be used for testing and reviewing employees.

Case Study

At one organization, management swapped its PowerPoint laden e-learning program for an online program that incorporates simple games to test sales force knowledge. Based on popular games such as hangman and tic-tac-toe, each member of the sales staff gets to answer a series of questions through nine games interspersed with classroom sessions. Those who score at least 80 percent correct get to enter a drawing for five Apple iPods.

At the end is a comprehensive 100-question test where the top scorer with the shortest completion time receives \$3000. Even though the games are not very sophisticated, they include the essential element of competition - an element that motivates highly competitive sales people. The organization displays the scores of all preliminary tests to foster this competitiveness.

Evidence strongly suggests that adults learn better when training programs incorporate gaming elements such as difficult player levels and competitive scoring.

As Close to Life

While gaming motivates learners to complete courses, training simulations are equally effective. Allowing a learner to gain real-life experience using sophisticated computer-based simulations is "*probably the best way to gain a high degree of proficiency,*" says Chris Draper, an **Accenture** partner.

Training simulations need no introduction. For years, astronauts and fighter pilots have practiced on flight simulators. The medical profession too depends heavily on simulations that help surgeons and general practitioners to perfect their techniques. Large organizations use simple simulations to familiarize employees with new computer applications. What is new is the growing popularity of role-playing simulations in soft skills training.



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An increasing number of organizations are using simulations to teach their employees to make sales calls, handle difficult customers and answer queries over the phone in a call center. *"When you have a dissatisfied customer on the phone there is no time to look up stuff. It has to be ingrained in how you work,"* adds Draper.

Thanks to multi-media advancements, training simulations can use sound, video and animation to create three-dimensional make-believe environments. Most simulations, however, are like simple computer games where learners go through different situations while answering a series of questions. Animation or photographs represent the characters in these situations.

Behavioral Benefits

Some trainers believe simulations improve employees' work behavior. Plagued with poor performance of their district sales directors, one company decided to replace its instructor-led training program with simulation-based training. Twelve teams with six district directors were asked to run a make-believe sales division, which each district director organized himself.

The objective of giving them familiar roles was to make them aware of shortcomings in their day to day work. As part of the simulation, each team was given a set of profit and revenue goals. Each director had to strategize and make decisions on how best to achieve these goals. "If you maintained you old behavior, you would not be successful in the simulation," says the company's director of employee development. It was therefore important for the director to restructure his or her district and improve decision-making.

Learners are often complaining that training gets boring. Gaming and role-play simulations address this complaint effectively while still teaching.