

Simulations show how to bring effectiveness and efficiency to organisational learning

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At the Forums (TLF), Dave Vance, former President of Caterpillar University, the 'CLO of the Year' in 2006, and a board member of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), shared his knowledge on making the right training decisions. Later, he conducted an interactive session where the delegates, in teams, demonstrated their management skills in playing one of Tata Interactive Systems (TIS)'s suite of business simulations - TOPSIM.

TOPSIM is a leading management simulation game that was developed over 25 years ago and is now used by over 100 companies and 400 universities worldwide. TOPSIM simulations offer the participant an in-depth understanding of functional skills - covering general management, strategic management, change management, project management, supply chain management, sales management, finance for non-finance, managing mergers and acquisitions - along with managing the business operations within an industry such as banking, insurance, retail, and pharmaceuticals.

Vance explained: 'The keys to implementing effective learning in your organisation are to align your strategy to business goals, in concert with the goals' owners and addressing all business priorities; create a Business Plan for learning which has specific, measurable goals and is approved by the CEO, and look for opportunities where sponsorship and change management is strong.

'Managing learning for efficiency - that is, executing your objectives at least cost and highest return - and effectiveness involves aligning learning to business goals and selecting the right learning solutions.

'To maximise efficiency, know your costs - including opportunity costs,' Vance added. 'Look for ways to reduce opportunity costs and use marginal net benefit and ROI concepts to select the highest return/least cost duration.'

Discovering these measures of effectiveness and efficiency were the objects of the TOPSIM exercise which Vance facilitated for the TLF delegates.

Manoj Kutty, TIS's president, simulations, commented: 'TOPSIM is about learning business by doing business.

'TOPSIM is not e-learning but blended learning, emphasising classroom-based and collaborative learning. A TOPSIM workshop is a simulation based workshop that enables participants to understand the cause-effect relationships of their decisions in a 'safe' game play environment.

'The workshop is facilitated by domain experts who mentor the teams through the discussion and sharing process that is integral to the the workshop's structure. The simulation which forms the core of the workshop telescopes a long-term horizon of three years into two-days and discussions are interspersed with the simulation, throughout the workshop.'

The TLF contained two tracks, focusing on higher education and corporate training. Keynote presentations in the corporate track came from Dave Vance, former President of Caterpillar University, the 'CLO of the Year' in 2006, and a board member of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) and fellow ASTD member, Dr Allison Rossett, of San Diego University, author of best-selling business books and also an established board member of the E-learning Guild.

While Vance shared his knowledge on making the right training decisions, Dr Rossett discussed electronic performance support systems (EPSS) and their benefits for organisations.

This year, the topics under discussion in the corporate track included: Learning that leads to performance improvement
Decision making in the learning function
Enabling and supporting performance in the workplace
Providing the right performance support, after your training or learning events

Speakers and session moderators at this year's education track of the TLF included Dr David A. Foster, Dean of DeVry University Online; Harvard CIO, Stephen Laster; Jeff Schultz, SVP of McGraw-Hill; John Ebersole, President of Excelsior College; and Colonel Stephen G Visco, Dean of Distance Learning, at the USAF Air War College.

The educational track discussed: How can technology be leveraged to enhance learner-teacher relationships?
What is the social, cultural, and organizational impact of adopting such technologies?
Can each only play a supplementary role or be the main component of instruction delivery?
How does this adoption impact the structure of curricula and instruction design in place today?
Online learning is not the missing link—making online education meaningful to the learner.
The next stage of evolution for online courses.

For further information, please visit www.tatalearningforum.com

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About TOPSIM® Simulations

TOPSIM Simulations are advanced and comprehensive models that simulate operating environments, used as innovative methods to teach business and management competencies. The simulated environments include business start-ups; a single business function; overall management of an enterprise; managing in global markets, and the macroeconomics of a country.

Typically played by teams in a workshop format over two or three days, TOPSIM participants compete with other teams in a simulated environment. While proceeding through different modules, teams plan, strategise and make decisions, taking into account the many variables that influence the operating environment. At the workshops, an instructor acts as the teams' coordinator, controller of environment variables and as educator to help teams interpret results and reports.

The large number of variables that influence decision-making is what makes TOPSIM a highly complex simulation and sets it apart from other business simulations in the market.

TOPSIM products currently cover 15 areas: TOPSIM - Manager, TOPSIM - General Management, TOPSIM - Logistics, TOPSIM - Banking, TOPSIM - Euro, TOPSIM - Marketing, TOPSIM - E-commerce, TOPSIM - Macro Economics, TOPSIM - Business Developments, TOPSIM - General Airline Management Simulation, TOPSIM - Change Management, TOPSIM - Project Management, TOPSIM - Easy Startup, TOPSIM - Global Challenge, and TOPSIM - Production Startup

TOPSIM - Simulations are used by numerous corporate enterprises, education centres, and universities (including over 200 universities in Germany alone).

Besides TOPSIM® - Simulations, TIS also offers management training sessions, from 'Introduction to Business Administration for Engineers' to 'Top-Executive Leadership Development' programs through its simulations products range SimBLs™.

For further information, please visit www.tatainteractive.com/TOPSIM

Tata Interactive Systems (TIS), a global leader in e-learning, is a part of the \$22bn Tata Group. Truly international, TIS has a presence across the US, Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand, the Middle East, Japan, India, and mainland Europe. TIS offers corporations, universities, schools, publishers, and government institutions a diversified and innovative bouquet of learning and training solutions including Simulation-based Learning Objects (SimBLs™), Story-based Learning Objects (StoBLs™), courseware and curriculum design, special-needs education, assessments, electronic performance support systems (EPSS), mobile learning, along with other corporate training and consultancy services. Our multi-disciplinary expertise and 16 years' experience across domains helps us design e-learning programmes that are unique to clients' requirements and specifically crafted to boost knowledge retention and application.

Apart from holding ISO 9001 certification, TIS is the only e-learning organisation in the world to be assessed at Level 5 in both the SEI-CMM and P-CMM frameworks. TIS's quest for excellence is reflected in numerous prestigious industry awards, including a Silver Brandon Hall Excellence in Learning Award 2005 and 2004, APEX Award of Excellence in 2005 and 2006, BETT Awards in 2004 and 2006, and two Business World-NID Design Excellence awards.

For more information log on to www.tatainteractive.com

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