

Objective

Organizations are conducting more and more table-top exercises in an attempt to train more people for a reasonable cost. There should be no better way to explore a wide range of disaster scenarios, to teach appropriate responses and decision-making and to prove and improve the plan documentation. Table-top exercises are also the perfect vehicle to engage all team members at once, in a manageable timeframe.

Issues

Unfortunately, most tabletop exercises share common failings that ultimately limit their usefulness.

The first failing is that tabletop exercises require extensive scripting to a specific scenario to ensure that the participants follow the same path through the plan that the instructor is prepared to illustrate. However, too often scripted exercises are synonymous with stifled exercises.

Secondly, to produce a realistic exercise that is more than a moderator droning over a PowerPoint slideshow requires a cast of “actors” that significantly increases complexity of preparation and execution...and significantly increases the cost of the exercise.

Next, scripted exercises, that by definition follow a more or less predefined, linear path through the plan, cannot accommodate session variables (such as location, audience, time of impact, different loss scenarios, etc.). Nor can they allow the participants complete flexibility in their responses. Unfortunately, free-form exercises that attempt to accommodate such flexibility sacrifice control, predictability and repeatability.

Finally, tabletop exercises are far too difficult to prepare. Each exercise can take weeks or even months of prep time. The result is that fewer exercises are conducted or the same exercise is used over and over with only slight variations. Audiences become bored, learning is sub-optimal, actual recovery skills are less than they should be and future participation is threatened.

Solution

WTG eliminates these failings with our NextGen TableTop Console™. The Console is a unique, automated tool that helps organizations eliminate all of the historical challenges associated with developing and executing tabletop exercises. The Console enables one person to deliver literally over 1,000,000 unique exercises in real-time without any advanced preparation. An endless number of different scenarios can be explored quickly, easily and cost-effectively. In a matter of hours, your team’s practical experience

can be increased dramatically and the breadth of their experience can be extended over a large number of possible disaster variants.

The Console also simplifies logistics so that one person can moderate the entire exercise. Up to four monitors are supported so that the moderator can concurrently view the Console, the plan document, the automated script, or any other document or tool. The Console can also be run via web conference so that if desired, additional “actors” or multiple locations can participate in the role playing. With this approach, the actors watch the Console on their notebooks and are automatically prompted with their roles so that absolute minimum rehearsal is required.

Participants are free to take any path through the plan and to make their own decisions—good or bad. The Console automatically responds to those decisions and dynamically adjusts the exercise flow accordingly. If the decision results in a “recovery problem”, the exercise can be rolled-back, a different decision made, and a new path modeled to explore a new outcome...all in uninterrupted real time.

Since the Console allows exercises to follow any path through the plan, it also needs to support the reverse process. Say that the participants are exercising the damage assessment process for a power outage. The Console injects (details of the scenario) that the utility company said that power would be restored in two hours. The team decides not to declare a disaster based on that two-hour commitment. The Console’s “Replay” function allows the exercise to rewind, inject an eight-hour estimate for restoration of power, and see how the damage assessment proceeds given the new situation. “Replay” is a powerful way to learn how different factors and perspectives can change a response.

The Console was designed to allow any number of teams to interact simultaneously during the exercise. In addition to tracking the activities of actively participating teams, the Console also allows the moderator to “jump out” of a specific location in the plan and go to literally any other location to focus on a completely different team. When that new task is done, or that path is finished, the moderator can press a button and go right back to the place where the original team left off. As the exercise continues, deliverables and task progress from each team are tracked automatically (by the flow of the plan) but the moderator can override any scripted team action if needed during the exercise.

Every step in the exercise can be graded in real-time by the moderator and notes can be taken on areas where the teams need

improvement, plan documents need updates, or any other follow-up activity. At the conclusion of the exercise, a complete log of the exercise is emailed, by the Console, to the moderator and any desired participants. The log details: which steps were executed, which were skipped, notes and grades for each step, and any other items that the moderator chose to include. An aggregate "score" (based on all grades) is also included so the participants know exactly how well they did.

The Console enhances the participant's experience with audio, video, real-time email (messages automatically sent live to participants as dynamically required by the exercise), non-linear PowerPoint slides (selective slides automatically displayed based on the dynamics of the exercise), multiple projectors, live RSS feeds, ad hoc and pre-defined SMS text and more to immerse the participants in a realistic, albeit simulated, disaster environment.



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When it comes to highly-resilient, highly-available and highly-recoverable solutions for systems, data and people, WTG are the experts of choice. We design, implement and maintain cost-effective, leading-edge solutions within the framework of our holistic NextGen 360° ABC™ methodology so you can respond to any incident-any time. Our 360° NextGen ABC methodology can improve recovery and continuity planning results for "new players" or "old pros" alike and our continuity architectures are specifically designed to provide proportionate solutions that cost less.

Scope

The strategies and techniques described in this solution are equally applicable to all levels of implementation from one-hour, single team exercises to multi-day, all team exercises and for a single site or the entire enterprise.

Proven Results

WTG has employed the techniques and tools described in this solution to help our clients conduct the most realistic table-top exercises possible in less time and for less cost. The resulting learning is measurable and repeatable and participant involvement is enhanced due to the realism of the exercise and the ability to let the participants follow their own path through the plan.

