





SCENARIO DESIGN

BUILDING BLOCKS OF OPERATIONAL SUCCESS

By Richard Kay

An instructor's obligation is to prepare officers for that aspect of their job that has the potential to put them at risk. Preparing officers to survive confrontational situations has several factors: physical skills to control situations and ensure safety, knowledge to make decisions within lawful parameters and emotional resilience for post-incident management, expressed as safety, survivability and consequence. To prepare officers any less is to fail to prepare them at all. A critical aspect of fulfilling this obligation lies with assessing competence in all aspects required for effective operational duty.

Effective reality-based training involves experiential training, where participants use core skills and knowledge to solve realistic workplace situations and learn from both success and failure; scenarios and participant behaviours are carefully planned and implemented to achieve these results. Experimental training does not have programmed outcomes, but uses a wait-and-see approach, hoping that there will be interesting training points for discussion at the conclusion of the scenario.

Scenario Design

The scenario design process begins with research into problem areas that would benefit from reality-based training. Include as many sources of reference as possible at this stage to form a scenario development committee – instructors, subject-matter experts, legal advisory and command staff.

The first question to ask is, “*What recurring operational problems are happening?*” It might be that there have been incidents where officers and subjects were hurt due to physical confrontations. Studies may indicate that injuries for officers and subjects are reduced in instances where a chemical agent is used prior to physical skills, and a review of the tactical response model confirms that chemical agent is used before physical skills, with a sampling of officers illustrating this understanding.

Next, develop low-level scenarios where correct participant responses to role player actions are simple 1-1 drills that teach specific responses to specific threats (experience fragments). After specific threat responses are practised, they are tested in context using high-level scenarios.

Scenario design begins with establishing

performance objectives, that starts by asking, “*At the conclusion of this scenario, what will participants have demonstrated?*” It provides a concrete set of behaviours and skills to be tested and includes:

- **Conditions:** describe the circumstances under which the behaviour is performed, such as scenarios using a live role player, or scenarios on a video simulator.
- **Behaviour:** describes observable participant behaviours and indicates the behaviours that instructors will be looking for and the type of response expected.
- **Criteria:** specify how well the student must perform the behaviour and set the policy standard by which performance is judged.

An example of a completed performance objective might be: *In a scenario using a live role player, the participant will demonstrate approved communication skills, deployment of chemical agent, and physical skills against a verbally resistive subject who becomes physically resistive after being sprayed, in order to gain physical control of the subject in a manner consistent with the approved tactical response model.*

To meet the performance objective, participants must demonstrate performance activities, the ‘must dos’ required to successfully complete the exercise. Any activity sufficiently important to be listed as an official performance activity must be completed, either during the first attempt at the scenario or during remediation that follows the debriefing. Subject-matter experts define the optimal participant responses. During the scenario, the participant is required to demonstrate those responses in accordance with the approved response model, and also to justify such actions during a debriefing.

Complexity is the bane of reality-based training and is caused by two main factors:

- **Over-complicated scenarios** have no defined end point. They are caused by lack of proper planning, preparation and execution, and are attributed to having too broad a performance objective or too many performance activities. The core of well-structured scenarios is simplicity, which requires thought, time, effort and revision.
- **Over-simplification of role player guidelines** ensures that there is too much improvisation and role players will likely change the scenario every time they get bored. Properly structured

scenarios avoid the hazards associated with the unknown.

Writing scenarios is an inclusive process. After the committee has accepted the array of officer responses, approval is obtained from legal and command staff to confirm that the responses comply with policies and procedures. Once approved, the committee can flesh out the rest of the scenario and develop a set of role player behaviours that predictably trigger the correct responses from participants. Completion of this process creates the scenario framework. A story line, ideally taken from actual events to make it valid, creates context for the proposed action and makes it experiential. This process puts the scenario design into a useable format. It is time consuming but, once completed, the scenario can be used repeatedly and the agency will benefit from training commonality.

Scenario Development

The scenario overview provides a template to develop a scenario and includes:

- The **performance objective** is the scenario mission statement (a clear statement of what participants demonstrate) and gives a clear indication to when the scenario is complete. Scenarios continuing past completion of the performance objective not only waste training time, but are often when injuries occur.
- The **synopsis** is a brief narrative description of what the scenario is about and what is supposed to happen.
- The **site description** provides a statement on the requirement, type, quality, size, layout and so on of the training venue. The site should be chosen to best approximate the most realistic setting for the situation that will be depicted by the scenario so that the highest level of state-dependent learning will be facilitated.
- **Notes** are used for any additional notes that might be necessary in order to set up the scene.

The scenario outline is a simple sketch of the scenario general idea. The scenario is written backwards from a natural conclusion to a logical beginning, which forces a progression of the scenario scripting actions and dialogue that move the scenario toward the desired conclusion. The scenario outline interacts directly with the role player guidelines, which helps organise specific

role player actions in response to possible participant actions.

Prior to running scenarios, a test phase is recommended, which helps discover possible unanticipated participant responses. The test phase can debug many possibilities never anticipated when the scenario was written. Of course, there will always be situations where certain participants cause resistance to avoid facing what is waiting for them in the scenario. This is more a trust than a tactical issue, due to the belief the scenario is designed to make them lose or look foolish.

The scenario evaluation is used to evaluate, debrief and remediate participants. It is critical to any reality-based training program to document participant performance, so instructors must complete this for every participant going through a scenario. During the scenario presentation, the evaluation should be with the instructor, who records performance activities as they occur, since these are the specific actions necessary to fulfil the performance objective. The evaluation components include:

- The *identification block* gives the name of agency, participants and instructors, and the time and date of training; it begins the recording process necessary to support the training activity.
- The *equipment check* ensures a safe training environment; safety officers ensure participants have all necessary equipment for the scenario, instructors confirm the equipment is present, in place, and participants are marked with safety indicators prior to scenario commencement. Conducting a scenario without the proper protective equipment is negligent.
- The *final preparation* occurs prior to commencing a scenario; a briefing addresses any final safety concerns, answers questions participants might have and confirms with the training site that instructors are ready to receive participants and they know the scenario is going live.
- The *situation explanation* sets the scene for the participants; it tells them what they already know, describes events that preceded their arrival in reality and gives them a logical start point. Without this, they might do things which might be correct in a real situation, but wastes time while they get to the point where the scenario actually begins. Communication with participants while

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in character should be done through the radio to force them to manage that equipment, except during an administrative pause or while in direct contact with other officers. If the participant is not being dispatched, verbally explain the situation to set up the scene.

- *Performance activities* are clearly observable, objective actions; avoid using indistinct statements when writing a scenario by asking someone with an understanding of tactical responses if he can pick up the scenario evaluation and check off specific actions as observed. If he reasonably asks, 'what specifically does that mean?' about a performance activity, then it is too subjective or vague. Each performance activity is recorded as complete or incomplete by scenario end. Elective points are techniques helpful in solving scenario problems or make operational sense; they are not mandatory for participants to demonstrate that behaviour, but should be recorded on the evaluation to show superior procedure.
- The *signature* authorises scenario completion as proof to document training; participants and instructors sign the evaluation, which is placed inside a participant's training file.

During the debrief, instructors use the evaluation to review scenario performance. The participant takes the instructor through the scenario as if describing events to an investigation team. When an incomplete performance activity is reached, ask the participant if he knows what he was supposed to have done. He may remember he neglected to do something, he may believe he did it when he did not, and he will not know what was missed because he was never taught a certain procedure. Either way, the participant must demonstrate incomplete performance activities during the remediation upon completion of the debriefing. If the participant does not know

what is required to solve the problem, he should receive supplementary training outside the scenario environment prior to repeating it. If failure resulted from forgetting or neglecting, and it is demonstrated during remediation, indicate that the participant performed correctly during remediation and completed all performance activities.

A 100 percent compliance evaluation system is preferable to a score-based system, as it demonstrates complete participant compliance with policy and law. Legal authorities cannot review compliance evaluation and state that a participant was only performing at 80 percent capacity. If the evaluation system is compliance-based, participants with the necessary knowledge and skill to complete the performance objective pass; if they do not, they require additional training, after which they are re-tested. Using this system helps instructors determine participant deficiency so that sub-standard performance is corrected before it becomes a real-world issue.

Reality-based training is complicated. Purchasing equipment and sketching out scenarios is how most agencies begin and why poor training occurs. Paying attention to detail is the first step in developing training that makes a difference to officers specifically, agencies in general, and the community as a whole. Build in safeguards that ensure effective training, with the focus always on operational safety.

It takes time to get a comprehensive reality-based training program going. Instructors should secure time on a regular basis for scenario development. Set a goal to write three good scenarios each year. Research what three main problem areas are and write scenarios around them. Three good scenarios should take about three weeks to write, debug and get approved. Three scenarios per year equals 15 in five years. It might not seem like much, but the cumulative effects of small movements forward can be astounding.

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