

**PUBLIC SAFETY TRAINING – THE EXPERIENCE  
ONLINE TRAINING AND VIRTUAL REALITY – THE NEW  
REALITY**

**by**

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The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College Futures Project and journal article are those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the CA Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

## **PUBLIC SAFETY TRAINING – THE EXPERIENCE ONLINE TRAINING AND VIRTUAL REALITY – THE NEW REALITY**

On a crisp winter morning in mid-December 2014, Nicole, a twenty-four year-old university graduate, makes her way to the local community college. Nicole is wrought with nervousness and excited about the unknown that lies before her. She is preparing to participate in the final exams and competency demonstrations for the Public Safety Training Experience she has been participating in for the past three months. She is about to meet, for only the second time, those she has been spending countless hours with over these past months.

Nicole's participation in the California Public Safety Training Experience has been a challenge for her, despite her previous experiences in higher learning. She was part of a twenty-member cohort of distance learners in the Public Safety Training Experience and the on-line, interactive and collaborative process of training that has brought her to this final session. She will be required to appear in person for oral and physical challenges, after which she will have completed her training and received certification from the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training to work as a Peace Officer.

Members of the class have met only once before when they gathered for the mid-term assessment process. Nicole has, though, forged relationships through her virtual training environment, and she feels connected to the entire group even though all meetings, lectures, conversations, scenario assessments and general examinations have been “virtually” administered.

With the divergent generations in the workplace, emerging technologies and opportunities to consider alternate means to train our next generation of peace officers, the following questions must be asked: First, how might the learning preferences of our newest employees impact the acceptance of technology in training? Second, what technologies exist to support training in a law enforcement environment? On the pages that follow, it will become clear that the law enforcement profession will be best served to develop on-line police academies, integrating on-line curriculum and virtual technology to create and sustain a meaningful connection to the profession by those who will police our communities in the coming decades.

### **On-Line Training and Virtual Reality - The New Reality**

Our current workforce has an unprecedented overlap in the generations of workers in our ranks. With “Traditionalists”, “Baby Boomers”, “Generation X’ers” and “Millennials” all present, addressing the varying needs and motivations of these workers is a challenge. As the newest generation continues to enter to the workforce how can the profession most effectively train them?

As “Millennials” now emerge as the newest demographic in the workforce, the need for leadership responsive to their needs becomes more and more important as time passes. A critical consideration in this arena is the specific training needs of the changing workforce. The divergent learning needs and expectations of these future workers may mean a significant departure from our traditional modes of training them. The engagement of training in an on-line environment needn’t be a matter of managing cost but a matter of what is responsive to the needs of the newest generation of worker.

In a modern law enforcement environment, the division between the “Old School” and the “New Comers” has always been noticeable. An expert panel was convened to identify trends and events relating to the development of an on-line virtual training environment. Max Bosel, a panel member and police captain, noted “A gap exists between the leadership and the line in every generation, what’s different in today’s workforce is the presence and emergence of technology creating a greater divide.”<sup>1</sup> What was once acceptable and embraced in terms of effective training, may no longer prove to be the most effective in preparing the coming workforce. Another panelist, Debra Farmer, a Human Resource Manager and organizational trainer at the City of Pleasanton, noted that Millennials “...have come to the workplace with high expectations.”<sup>2</sup> This issue of expectations is further evidenced in a generational study by USA Today. Millennials have emerged in the workplace and come with high expectations for themselves. They have high expectations of their employers and tend to be very goal oriented. This ‘Gen Y’ population values on-going learning and they seek out creative challenges in gaining knowledge<sup>3</sup>.

In the context of law enforcement training and the needs of the changing workforce in policing, there is a gap between the learning style of the future generation of law enforcement recruits and the method of training delivery that currently exists in policing. Newer workers entering the law enforcement world today, along with generations that will follow, who will enter the job market with a strong reliance or

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<sup>1</sup> NGT Panel (Nominal Group Technique): September 4th, 2008 – Pleasanton Ca

<sup>2</sup> NGT Panel (Nominal Group Technique): September 4th, 2008 – Pleasanton Ca

<sup>3</sup> USA Today.com Generation Y – They’ve arrived at work with a new attitude. [http://www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2005-11-06-gen-y\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/workplace/2005-11-06-gen-y_x.htm) (Accessed June 5, 2009)

dependence on technology. This orientation is a result of a generation raised on emerging technologies that have become more and more affordable, and virtually in the hands of everyone growing up in these past decades. A generation of “web-surfers”, “gamers” and “texters” has created an environment for not only the acceptance, but the need for such technology. As much discomfort as novel training approaches may have for administrators, Millennials are seamlessly proficient with technology and are well prepared and able to keep up with its advances<sup>4</sup>.

What once was new and cutting edge has become an indispensable means in contemporary education, scholastic research and communication with others. For example, the use of the Internet as a tool to provide educational support and resources to learners was once at the leading edge; it is now an indispensable part of mainstream education. As emerging technologies continue to develop, becoming more affordable, more available and more mainstream, this gap in the learning style to that of the method of training delivery widens creating challenge for the law enforcement profession. Among the negative effects of this break between the learning style of a changing workforce and the delivery method of the training curriculum, the issue of connecting with new law enforcement recruits and providing challenge to deepen their respective understanding of the job is critical. A technology oriented workforce will struggle in the traditional brick and mortar classroom and will require technological innovations and collaborative learning opportunities.

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<sup>4</sup> NAS Insights – Generation Y: The Millennials – Ready or Not, Here They Come (© NAS 2006)

“Truly, a new student has emerged in both temperament and expectations. That student is operating in a new world. Higher education institutions often slow to change, are confronting the realities of students who are technologically advanced, are likely to be in the workforce and who do not follow traditional educational paths. The same institutions that face this student face a rapidly changing world.”<sup>5</sup> As evidenced in the preceding for higher education, the same holds true for professional training and education in law enforcement. As new recruits are prepared for to the profession through the requisite curriculum, tactical preparation and physical conditioning, law enforcement leaders and managers need to take responsibility for addressing the needs of the changing worker.

Looking at the make up of the newer generation of workers, modification to the delivery method of such training is important to meet the needs and learning styles of the newer generation of workers. Consider the norms for this emerging generation of worker in law enforcement. In his writing, “Gamers, Millennials and Generation Next – Implications for Policing”<sup>6</sup>, retired Police Chief and Law Enforcement Futurist, Bob Harrison offers perspectives and observations of this group in the workforce:

- Almost ninety percent use the Internet
- More than half text message daily
- Fifty-four percent use social networking sites, and almost half have created a profile
- Seven in ten say technology helps them make new friends

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<sup>5</sup> Building the 21 Century Campus – A leadership Survey on Challenges Facing North American Higher Education (BlackBoard) <http://www.blackboard.com/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=cd63f2d7-7339-4c9c-a097-bfce93ff5781> (Accessed May 2009)

<sup>6</sup> Harrison, Bob “Gamers, Millennials and Generation Next – Implications for Policing”. California Police Chief Association – 2007 [http://www.californiapolicechiefs.org/nav\\_files/research/pdfs\\_misc/Gamers\\_8\\_8\\_07.pdf](http://www.californiapolicechiefs.org/nav_files/research/pdfs_misc/Gamers_8_8_07.pdf) (Accessed June 5, 2009)

- Almost ninety percent believe e-mail and other electronic means of communications helps workers

Such evidence suggests that this technology reliant group within the workforce will require tools and training opportunities to create challenge and connection. This can be realized through the development and integration on on-line training and virtual technology to deliver basic training in law enforcement. This group of workers, the millennials are fastest growing segment of the workforce and will serve to become the dominant demographic in the coming decade.

Looking at this specific issue of how to effectively deliver training based on the varied learning styles of the new generation of worker, the stakeholders are not just the new recruits. Those impacted by the issue are also the trainers, the training managers, the executives and leaders in law enforcement who need to demonstrate the support to explore such potential modifications. Even the community served by the new recruits has a significant stake in the effective and meaningful training of their new police officers. Ensuring the best training for the emerging workforce in policing requires an examination of how training is best delivered with the curriculum in mind. To ensure effectiveness in the training environment, addressing the needs of the specific learner is vital. In a study on “Training Different Generations”<sup>7</sup> the Wiley Corporation on Knowledge for Generations produced specifics on what younger learners need. In response to the described environment, ideal for learning the following was included:

- “It would involve a variety of activities and move at a fairly rapid pace.”
- “It would use interactive learning and technology.”
- “Use technology to enhance learning!”
- “Make it fast-paced with lots of chances to apply what we are learning.”

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<sup>7</sup> Wiley – How to Design and Deliver Training for the New and Emerging Generations – training Different Generations, <http://media.wiley.com> (Accessed June 5 2009)

In making learners successful, the need to shift to an available on-line training environment is necessary for the law enforcement profession to remain effective.

The key area of concern for the future workforce is centered on advanced technology. Individuals who make up the “Y Generation” or the “Millennials” take for granted the pervasiveness of technology in daily life. Professionals in this age group may not recall a time without personal computers, cable television, the Internet, cell phones and instant messaging.<sup>8</sup> With this clear orientation and reliance on technology, shifting the paradigm of law enforcement training is necessary to respond to those entering the law enforcement arena.

Learning, as a process, can be broken into segments of “attention” leading to “reception of information”, “processed together with prior knowledge”, arriving at “conclusions or understandings” then “testing for confirmation”.<sup>9</sup> From the perspective of law enforcement training, the processes of learning can be applied to the routine and more critical areas of knowledge in the profession. From case law, codification of law, policy, procedure or performance based learning domains, the segmented process of learning can certainly be enhanced by use and application of technology.

With an individual learner’s preference to rely on technology, the result can likely be more successful. In a study on the challenges facing higher education, “Students have been relying on a variety of personal technologies, and campuses are always catching up. Administrations need to make it clear to faculty and staff that communicating, interacting

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<sup>8</sup> Generation Y – What Millennial Workers Want / Robert Half Intl, <http://www.rhi.com> (Accessed February, 2008)

<sup>9</sup> Global Development Research Ctr. – How People Learn, <http://www.gdrc.org/kmgmt> (Accessed October 16, 2008)

with, and providing services to students are cultural variables critical to faculty success.”<sup>10</sup> While this study was primarily centered on higher education, the connection to learning in a collegiate environment is parallel to learning in a law enforcement environment. Greater success will be realized in law enforcement training through a dependency of on-line and virtual technologies.

Recognizing the diversity in the law enforcement profession, the diversity of thought and the diversity of representation, transitioning to the alternate method of training delivery, need not totally eliminate a traditional environment. In some cases, the traditional training environment may continue to serve a given demographic, populous or even a particular organization that seeks to maintain a traditional training environment to preserve culture. Similarly to the “academies” of yesterday, the newer formats of an extended, “weekend” or “evening” type of academy serves different needs of those coming to the work in today’s world. To this end, achieving the desired state of transitioning training to a contemporary, technology oriented program will prove to serve as an addition to what “was”, toward what “could be” in law enforcement.

This transition will be realized through a successful melding of on-line academic curriculum, virtual technologies and a more traditional physical demonstration of competencies. An on-line format of learning domains will empower the law enforcement learner without the confines of time, space or physical location. While the cost of infrastructure and set up can be argued as cost prohibitive, it proves to be to the contrary. As outlined in a student lab test on low cost virtual reality, “The educational benefits of

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<sup>10</sup> [Building the 21 Century Campus](http://www.blackboard.com/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=cd63f2d7-7339-4c9c-a097-bfce93ff5781) – A leadership Survey on Challenges Facing North American Higher Education (BlackBoard)  
<http://www.blackboard.com/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=cd63f2d7-7339-4c9c-a097-bfce93ff5781> (Accessed May 2009)

Virtual Reality are extensive and well-documented; however, the misconception of the high cost of Virtual Reality has often prevented the use of Virtual Reality in the schools.’<sup>11</sup>

Through the effective utilization of internet collaboration and learning applications such as Course-Compass<sup>12</sup> or Blackboard<sup>13</sup> software, the learner is connected with others within a local, regional or even global context. The immersion of a training participant in virtual simulations will test and assess the law enforcement candidate in the rigors of police stress, while applying an application of role playing and situational awareness. Similarly to products developed for the military, virtual training systems can exist as a component to this technologically integrated public safety training environment. Consider a virtual training system that realistically puts a law enforcement trainee, ‘virtually’ into the action.

As a developed product of the Quantum Corporation (Quantum 3D<sup>®</sup>), “Virtual Squad Training Systems, the product ExpeditionDI<sup>14</sup> systems employ wireless connectivity to provide un-tethered, man-wearable, fully immersive, individual and collective Dismounted Infantry training and mission rehearsal capabilities. Virtual Squad Training Systems are designed to provide scenario-based training for Dismounted Infantry across a range of virtual training environments including Mobile Operations in Urban Terrain. This Virtual Squad Training Systems is intended to complement live

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<sup>11</sup> Virtual Reality in the Schools - Virtual Reality and Education Laboratory East Carolina University (2004) <http://vr.coe.ecu.edu/vrits/5-1pylypiw.htm> (Accessed June, 2009)

<sup>12</sup> Course Compass On-Line Courses - Pearson Education Inc.© 2009  
<http://www.coursecompass.com>

<sup>13</sup> Blackboard On-Line Learning – Blackboard© 1997-2009 <http://www.blackboard.com>

<sup>14</sup> ExpeditionDI – Quantum 3D<sup>®</sup> Visual Simulation and Computer Systems  
<http://www.quantum3d.com>

training by providing elements of the Contemporary Operating Environment that are too difficult or expensive to replicate at home station training.”<sup>15</sup> This, as just an example to what could be utilized in integrating greater technology in the law enforcement training environment proves hopeful in changing the training environment in law enforcement. In the course of research, a marketing specialist, Dawn Ahlquist from the Quantum3D Corporation was interviewed regarding the applicability of such products and the integration of virtual technologies as a new landscape for law enforcement training. Regarding these training systems, Ahlquist said "...as new technology it's a big opportunity for on the ground training particularly in law enforcement.”<sup>16</sup>

Lastly, as the trainee continues through the “experience” of this technology dependent basic training, the requisite need to demonstrate basic competencies is critical. Drawing back to Nicole, in the earlier scenario, she sat preparing for her exams and competency demonstrations for the Public Safety Training Experience as she prepared to complete her training. Such would be an essential component to ensure all of the on-line and virtual elements of the training are proven and verified. Competencies such as application of physical force, force options, decision making and the like would come to verification in a final demonstration or examination.

Among the notable distinctions between the traditional methods of training delivery to that of the desired state is flexibility. In a training environment, issues of consistency, development of muscle memory and sound tactical practices along with

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<sup>15</sup> Quantum3d ExpeditionDI fielded by U.S Army for Virtual Squad Training Systems (VSTS) Military Embedded Systems / Open Systems Media Corp. (Accessed May 2009)

<sup>16</sup> Research Interview – Marketing Specialist, Dawn Ahlquist Quantum 3D Corporation (June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009 – Pleasanton Ca.)

injury prevention, the integration of virtual training technology will be a benefit to that of the “old style” scenario role play. As a more contemporary option, utilizing technology will provide participants with more effective, meaningful training experience more appropriately connecting the participant with the critical disciplines in the profession.

The importance of this training transition is as important as basic law enforcement training itself. As critical as it is to prepare new recruits for the challenges ahead in providing police service, the need to hit the mark and deliver training that will stick and “click” with the learner is huge. As such, funding, budgeting and maintaining the proper authority to develop requisite programs, support service and infrastructure to make the new training environment successful is equally as huge. Given the importance as suggested, prioritizing the development and managing implementation strategies should be a notable concern with the California State Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training in collaboration with agency or regional representatives.

### **Conclusion**

With the noticeable changes in tomorrow’s generation of worker, the sophistication of society and the availability of dramatically fast-paced technology emerging onto the market, the law enforcement arena is well positioned to transition its training platform to a more contemporary technology based virtual environment. The ability for California law enforcement make use of such emerging instructional technologies to deal with the varied learning styles of future law enforcement recruits in the coming years is the subject at issue within the construct of this writing.

Indications and trends suggest that as more and more individuals become comfortable with the desired state of virtual training, the greater the success in the format

becoming mainstream. The integration of collaborative learning environments and virtual technology will enable great success for law enforcement candidates and the profession overall.