

New course a challenge to participants

There is a new course for Network Systems product management personnel which, according to the two managers involved, simulates real job conditions.

Gerry Kaufhold, product management curriculum manager, Morristown, N.J., said the "Network Systems Product Management Process Training" course, NS1251, is the first he is aware of that brings all aspects of the product management job to the classroom. The course covers the necessities required to manage the profitability of a product through all phases of the product's life cycle. "It is the keystone course in the new curriculum," he explained.

One of the objectives of the course, according to Jim Costello, project manager in Morristown, is not only to teach the product life cycle phases (concept, realization, maturity, decline and discontinuance), but also to manage a product through these phases. "This requires the development of a product plan for each phase," he said.

Upon completion, participants will be able to:

- describe the product life cycle phases
- produce a business proposal and business case
- produce a product plan
- define the key product manager (PM) outputs and associated/required inputs per product life cycle phase plan
- produce financial analysis data and outputs
- facilitate product team meetings
- define and demonstrate the various roles played by a PM per each of the product life cycle phases
- define product realization process
- set priorities within time constraints
- define situation analysis
- define the major business plan calendar events which impact the PM
- identify inputs from other organizations to the PM per the business plan calendar
- demonstrate an understanding of the strategic planning process.

"This is a highly interactive, instructor-led course in which the

students actually run product team meetings," said Costello. "They gather information from the various organizations represented on the team and make decisions which ultimately affect the profitability of the product."

During the eight-day course, Network Systems product management personnel, including Media (cable and wire), Operations Systems, Switching, and Transmission, act as product manager as well as assuming the roles of all major organizations with which they interface. "This is so they look at the function from both sides of the fence," said Costello. "They experience first-hand the issues and interests other organizations bring to the table."

The course uses a five-sided game board, each side of the game board representing one of the five phases of the product life cycle.

The game follows a common board game pattern. Just before the simulated product team meeting, the PM rolls the dice and moves across the board, inevitably landing on the spots called "breaks." They must then draw a "breaks" card. "There are good and bad breaks, just as there are in real life," said Costello. "Players must adjust their plans to meet conditions dictated by the cards."

A good break, for example, might indicate that sales projections have

increased by 5%. A bad break could involve the competition lowering its price 5%, or manufacturing costs increasing 10%.

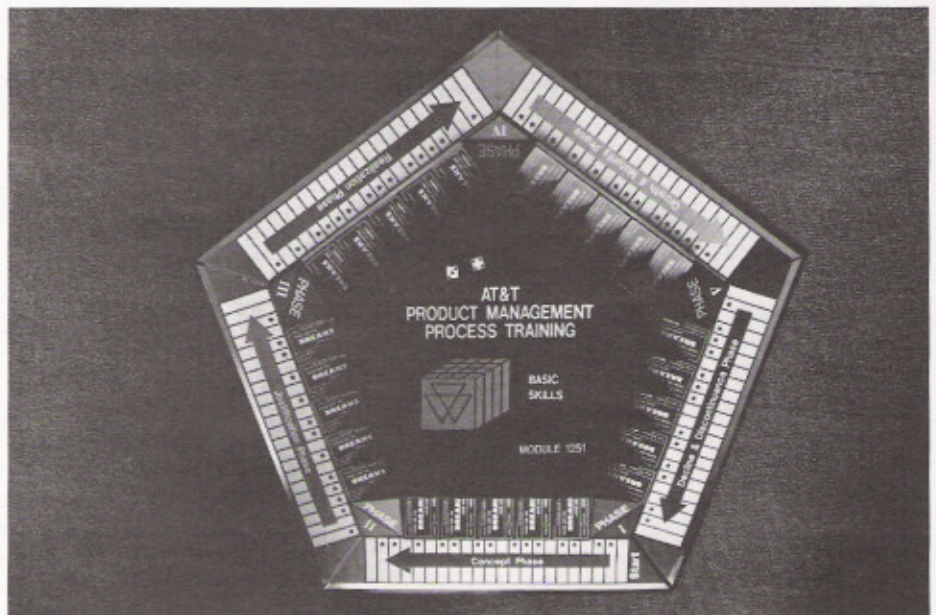
Two teams play at a time. There are five positions (see below) at each table, and one or two players at each position. Each person represents a different organization, as follows:

1. Product Management
2. AT&T Bell Laboratories
3. Manufacturing
4. Sales Organization
5. Product Support

Each participant is given a data pack. This gives the players the information needed to play the role they have been assigned. (Manufacturing or Bell Labs, for example). Among other items, the pack includes: notes from the last product team meeting, a memo from the boss and information on financial and sales matters. "The product manager takes all this and makes decisions concerning features, manufacturing quantities, product pricing and profitability. They gather all this data and develop a product plan," said Costello.

The course was successfully trialed at the Hickory Ridge Training Center in Lisle, Ill. last October. Three sessions are scheduled for 1988.

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Game board used in new Network Systems course