

Human resources actions



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

My first day on the job is turning into a nightmare. I am about to meet with a promising young manager who has just botched a new assignment, and in just a few hours, I'm scheduled to make a strategy presentation to my new boss. But the phone won't stop ringing, and I'm being deluged with e-mail.

It's a good thing this isn't really happening. I'm at a makeshift office in suburban London taking part in a workplace-simulation exercise. It's just like the one hundreds of Motorola Inc. executives around the world will go through in the coming months as part of a wide-ranging effort at the company to identify and evaluate tomorrow's top international managers. Like many multinationals, Motorola is pressing to find talented leaders to run its increasingly complicated global business. As companies cross borders to make acquisitions and expand operations, the demand for employees with international management skills is growing exponentially. The consequences can be dire for firms that fail to build up a cadre of competent global managers.

Poor decisions can lead to multi-billion-dollar flubs, as products flop and marketing campaigns go awry. Motorola's Internet-based test, developed with Aon Consulting Worldwide, can be administered remotely any place in the world. As Aon executives explained to me how the simulation would work, I imagined myself enduring several hours of awkward play-acting. In practice, the experience is startlingly lifelike.

My role is Chris Jefferson, regional manager in the finance unit of a fictitious conglomerate, Globalcom. My laptop computer has been specially set up so that I can send and receive e-mail, look up information about my employer,

and consult my calendar??” where several meetings have already been scheduled. An Aon psychologist will play several roles, phoning me from an adjacent office and popping in at the end in the role of Jean Dubois, my boss. As soon as I settle in to my windowless, brick-walled office, the telephone calls begin, and unexpected visitors arrive. Urgent tasks come so fast and furiously that I quickly forget it is all a game. Several calls and e-mails concern a promising middle manager who has let several details of a critical new assignment fall through the cracks.

Another Aon psychologist is playing the role of the manager, and he enters my office for our meeting. I try teasing out of him information about what's going wrong. We talk for several minutes before a voice in the back of my brain reminds me that it's all only make-believe. The meeting is over and I have less than two hours to get my presentation ready. I hurry to prepare, scouring my computer for information about Globalcom.

I find things like market research, news reports, results of an employee survey, and corporate press releases, but just like one of those bad dreams, I keep getting sidetracked by a steady stream of telephone calls. An irate customer rails shrilly at me about poor service and threatens to bolt to the competition. E-mails, some of them demanding immediate attention, keep popping up on my computer screen.