EDGE Video Script:

The US Army faces a variety of different threats and challenges in many global locations. Nothing is more challenging or complex than understanding human networks. Insurgents using Improvised Explosive Devices, or IEDs, criminal gangs and drug and human trafficking are all threats created by human networks. Other networks may be friendly and supportive of the Army mission- such as host nation army and police forces. Large portions of a population may be neutral. They are neither threatening nor friendly towards the Army mission. These human networks are part of the Army’s operational environment, and they must be identified, understood and appropriately engaged to fulfill the Army’s global mission.

Threat networks can come in many forms and serve many purposes. Over the past several years Improvised Explosive Devices, or IEDs, have proven to be a significant casualty-producing threat. IEDs are the weapon, but their source is a human threat network of leaders, suppliers, operators and other actors within the IED network. Identifying and disrupting these threat networks helps prevent lethal attacks against friendly forces, builds relationships with the local population and helps achieve stability in a unit’s area of operations.

Understanding how to engage threat networks, support friendly networks, and influence neutral networks are the key pillars of the Army’s doctrine known as “Attack the Network”, or AtN. The AtN Mobile Training Team at the Army’s Maneuver Center of Excellence trains Army units on Attack the Network principles so units are better prepared to understand their operating environment and support, influence or engage human networks within their area of operations.

The Maneuver Center’s Attack the Network mobile training course provides units with a framework and methodology for engaging human networks. Attack the Network training is conducted through classroom instruction but the mobile training team has added a new feature at the end of the course: a computer-based virtual practice exercise on AtN called the Enhanced Dynamic Geosocial Environment, or EDGE.

EDGE is a multiplayer game environment that allows Soldiers to apply their knowledge of Attack the Network principles in a virtual world. EDGE can be played by a single-player or by a team collaborating on decisions and actions. Using EDGE, Soldiers collaborate and share information to identify human networks and choose the appropriate actions to engage the networks. EDGE is not the typical “first person shooter” type game most people are familiar with. It is an analysis and decision-making exercise- a “First Person Thinker”. The EDGE simulation focuses on interacting with virtual people in their virtual village environment to gather information and make good decisions according to sound Attack the Network principles.

To accomplish their mission within EDGE, Soldiers must gain an in-depth understanding of the human environment by communicating with virtual village residents, analyzing their available information, and employing appropriate actions and tactical enablers. Soldiers must decide if the virtual residents they meet in the village are friendly, neutral, or threatening towards their unit mission. The Soldiers play through six virtual ‘days’ within the EDGE environment conducting interviews with individuals in the village, employing their available assets, and determining which actions would best satisfy the needs of their given mission.

An important feature of EDGE is that actions taken each virtual day, good or bad, will have some effect on options available on the following days, as well as an effect on the final outcome of the EDGE scenario. While there are a number of possible outcomes for the scenario, both good and bad, there is a critical path of actions throughout the 6 virtual days which will lead to a “best possible outcome”. When all virtual "days" have been completed, Soldiers are presented with a video summary showing the effects of their decisions and actions on the village residents.

EDGE reinforces what the Soldiers have learned in the classroom and allows them to apply that knowledge in an engaging, but safe virtual setting. Moving from abstract classroom learning, to immersive applied learning allows Soldiers to be engaged in the learning process, and to demonstrate their ability to apply Attack the Network principles. The EDGE platform has potential application to other learning experiences where cognitive skills and critical decision-making needs to be demonstrated in a safe virtual environment. The environment is…EDGE.