THE IMPACT OF LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

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**LEADERSHIP MAKES THE DIFFERENCE**

**INTENTION, INTENSITY OF EFFORT AND CHOICES DETERMINE OUR CAREER EXCELLENCE**

By SANDY CLARKE
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"We each know how good we have become, but none of us know how good we can be." That is the assertion that drives business educator and international best-selling author Mark Sanborn’s passion for helping others. The noted expert in leadership is president of Sanborn & Associates, Inc— an idea studio dedicated to developing leaders in business and in life—and he has worked with over 2,600 clients in a career spanning over 30 years in transformational coaching.

The Leaderonomics Show host Roshan Thiran caught up with Sanborn recently during the National Achievers Congress 2017 by Success Resources to learn more about his leadership journey thus far. His message to everyone he meets, who looks to realise their potential, is straightforward and simple: being extraordinary and exceptional is a choice. The American educator began his professional speaking career at the age of 19 as a means to work his way through college as an after dinner speaker. In these early days, he would often relay insights from motivational speakers such as Zig Ziglar and Robert Schuller, but soon realised he would have to create his own insights if he was to make a name for himself.

“We emulate to learn, but innovate to earn,” says Sanborn. Appearing for the first time on The Leaderonomics Show, he related the story of how his first speaking contest at the age of 10 went badly. Rather than allow the pain of failure to beat him, he used it as an inspirational force to set a goal of winning a state speaking competition. Later, he would surpass his ambition and go on to win a national contest.

It was from this point that Sanborn’s interest in leadership deepened. “Leadership doesn’t make a difference,” says Sanborn, “leadership makes the difference. Personal leadership makes the difference in your life, and organisational leadership makes the difference in an organisation.”

“Whether it’s politics or in the community, the way you influence others really matters—it makes the difference for an organisation, community, or nation.”

The best-selling author of *The Fred Factor* insists that anyone can be exceptional, and demonstrates through the story of real-life mailman Fred Shea that, no matter what we do in our professional lives, excellence can always be achieved.

Fred’s inspirational service to others led Sanborn to write about his mailman’s story, from which he gleaned four core principles for success that benefit organisations as well as individuals. The four principles are:

- Everyone makes a difference.
- Everything is built on relationships.
- You must continually create value for others, and it doesn’t have to cost a penny.
- You should reinvent yourself regularly.

In Sanborn’s experience, being exceptional is a choice because every single person who is exceptional is so because they had the intention to get better at what they do every day. It’s a choice, he says, to invest in yourself and prevent yourself from being stuck in a rut and doing the bare minimum needed to get by.

"The only thing that gets better accidentally with age is wine," he says. "People have to choose to get better. I’ve never worked with a company or an individual who accidentally got better—it just doesn’t happen. You have to have the intention of getting better, and you have to have a system for getting better... or you won’t."

Author Mark Sanborn with Roshan Thiran at The Leaderonomics Show

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THE BEST WAY TO LEARN IS PLAY
BUILDING AN INQUISETIVE AND INNOVATIVE MINDSET THROUGH GAMIFICATION

By ROSHAN THIRAN and SANDY CLARKE
editor@leaderonomics.com

The developmental psychologist Jean Piaget once observed that “play is the answer to how anything new comes about.” While we might turn off in curiosity and creative imaginings, the rigidity of conventional education often stifles our natural tendency to explore and experiment as we grow older.

In place of play, inquisitiveness and innovation, we find order, structure and stringent rules to be followed.

At school, we are instructed not to colour outside the lines. When painting a tree, it must look exactly like a tree. In music, these two chords shouldn’t go together. In language, and a syntax, and inventive and creative use of words – a view that would have horrified Piaget, Wodehouse and Oscar Wilde.

In his later years, Piaget laments, “Our real problem is: what is the goal of education? Are we forming children that are only capable of learning what is already known? Or should we try developing creative and innovative minds, capable of discovery from the preschool age on, throughout life?”

For traditionalists, learning is a serious business — and so it is. However, the provision of the learner's mental and linguistic way of learning is an important component of learning. These days, more and more teachers know how to help students pass exams, but the true aim of education must surely be to cultivate critical thinking, deepen curiosity, and foster creativity.

To be able to play in an educational setting is vital for a child's development. It helps to nurture the imagination and dexterity, and develop cognitive, physical and emotional strength.

Play is what allows children to make sense of the world around them, to make social connections, and make fascinating discoveries. Play, to paraphrase Piaget, is how progress is made. Play is essentially experiences we gain interacting with each other and the world around us.

Just last week, I (Roshan) spent the day with CEO of Help Education Group, and prominent psychologist, Dr Goh Chee Leong. We were both lamenting the need for more “experiences” to be baked into education.

He immediately offered the use of Help International (HIS) to imbue leadershipship experiences into his school curriculum. And he reinforced the belief that play is not a waste of time. It’s critical for growth.

Indeed, the notion held by some that play is a waste of time is now recognised by research as misguided. Play helps us to connect — and not just as children, but also as adults.

It’s seen on the golf course, the football field, on team-building retreats and in offices where creativity and innovation are central to success. At Leaderonomics, work is play and we built our offices to ensure everyone is involved in “serious play.”

Dr Stuart Brown heads up a non-profit called the National Institute for Play, which aims to unlock human potential.

In an interview with npr.org he notes, “What you begin to see when there's a major play deprivation in an otherwise competent adult is that they're not much fun to be around. You begin to see that the perseverance and joy in work is quenched and that life is much more labourious.”

It's suggested that, on average, the human brain can maintain concentration for approximately 20 minutes before our focus declines.

Learning something new can often be a challenge and, if the material is presented in a conventional, linear fashion, we’re likely to struggle to process much of the information in a way that sticks. This likelihood increases if we have to learn a new skill or process, regardless of our level of interest in the subject.

Last week, Leaderonomics was invited to Dwi Emas International School to meet a group of foundation leaders. The school presented a special item which showcased how students learnt complex chemistry and science formulas using dance. Yes, dance.

These days, education views teaching as means to help students pass exams, but the true aim of education must surely be to cultivate critical thinking, deepen curiosity, and foster creativity.

As adults, we don’t need less play. On the contrary, we need more of it if we hope to discover new ideas that can help to change and shape our world for the better.

Last year, Leaderonomics decided to provide every single company in the world with an affordable LMS or Learning Management System (and at US$250/RM1,000 per company all-inclusive: we knew everyone could afford it).

In a partnership with CourseNetworking, owned by University of Indiana-Purdue, we knew that gamification had to be built into the LMS. We also knew that every piece of content we prepared had to have gamification elements. In fact, every part of our business, be it employee engagement or even our communications, need to embed elements of play into it.

All of this creates deeper learning within participants as they Ingram what they’ve learned as something of a success, of “level-upping” or unlocking an achievement. Compare this method of learning, say, French with learning the language through the use of audio instruction and reciting words on a page.

Conversing in a new language will accelerate progress to an extent, however, conventional learning often lacks the elements of fun challenges, competition, and reward that play frequently offers.

The best way to learn is by playing because, when we play, we become much more focused on the task at hand — we literally have something to play for.

In bringing gamification into our learning, more of what we learn sticks as the information we process is done in an interesting and stimulating way that holds our attention in ways traditional learning cannot.

EVEN BOARDS CAN PLAY

Every month or so, Leaderonomics gets invited to help facilitate company board meetings. Boards generally are traditional in their approach to discussing key issues and making decisions.

Last year, we were facilitating a board meeting where Gary Neville, the former Manchester United football star happened to be a participant. He asked me (Roshan) at lunch, before the board session started, what we would be doing for the board meeting. I gleefully smiled and replied, “we are going to play Lego today.”

And we did. We ended up conducting the entire board session with Lego blocks, using play as means to make critical decisions and resolve nagging issues that cropped up.

And as the board played and became engaged in the play — with every single board member giving input — it ended up being a very productive board session.

If we look at great innovators of today such as Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg and Lori Greiner, all their success stories stem from doing what they love to do and finding ways to overcome tough challenges. As adults, we don’t need less play. On the contrary, we need more of it if we hope to discover new ideas that can help to change and shape our world for the better.

So, find ways to play with your employees and your team members.

Build your ideas into your organisation, even your board meeting and watch as your organisation learns and grows even more. Play on!

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Roshan Thiran is CEO of Leaderonomics and dedicating the next 10 years of his life to build digital learning games and play elements. He plays a lot, even in the office, much to the dismay of his ‘serious’ colleagues.

Sandy Clarke is the former managing editor of www.leaderonomics.com and is from the UK with over 10 years’ experience in journalism and PR.
**ARE YOU GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR TRAINING?**

**WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TREAT ATTENDING A WORKSHOP AS A ‘HOLIDAY’**

**By MATT NAYLOR**

matt.naylor@leaderonomics.com

“WHAT are the facilities at the venue? Is it a four or five-star hotel?” If these are the first questions you ask when being assigned for an off-duty training course, then you are in for the wrong reasons, according to a top Malaysian trainer Selva Ganapathy SG, affectionately known as Selva.

“I had a friend once who told me that he was going for a holiday at a five-star hotel in the centre of Kuala Lumpur,” said Selva.

“It turns out that his company was sending him for some upskilling training, but he was looking at it as an easy opportunity to get out of the office for a few days.”

Selva has seen it all through his work as director of PSG Infotech, where a litany of ISO-certified training and workshops across the industries has earned him a good reputation.

FOR LEADERS: KNOW WHY YOU ARE SENDIN G YOUR PEOPLE FOR TRAINING

Sending an employee for upskilling is about much more than hitting key performance indicators (KPI) or having a more engaged workforce.

It is of the utmost importance that HR leaders and department heads recognise what the course is about and why they are sending some of their best talent out of the office for a few days.

If you are not communicating properly to those attending the sessions, it can often lead to a complacent attitude, in which attendees sit dourly-eyed through the training without really new to bring back to the office.

“People can spot the people that are there for the wrong reasons because the questions they ask are not related to the course material,” said Selva.

“They spend the first day asking ‘what time is lunch’, ‘how long are we breaks’ and ‘when can I check into my room’.”

“They come in late, leave early and believe that just turning up is all that is expected of them.”

It is each department head’s duty to ensure that their workers are fully equipped for the challenges of the business and recognise that training is not just “attending” a workshop, but getting something productive out of it that they can then bring back into the company.

As a leader, you send your best employees for training because you want them to be change agents in the business. You want them to be upskilled so that they are able to contribute more to the company’s future dealings and you have high hopes for their potential.

FOR EMPLOYEES: KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO GET OUT OF IT

The concept of lifelong learning has become a real buzzword for HR professionals globally and the need to upskill and reskill staff is greater than ever.

Today’s fast-paced corporate landscape harbours a constant need for human capital development. It’s time to keep up with the times and remain competitive.

“What people learnt in university or other formal education facilities may no longer be relevant in today’s world with new practices introduced constantly,” said Selva.

“You instantly become more valuable to your organisation with each new skill and qualification that you acquire and that is why it is so important for employees to take their training seriously. If your organisation marks you out for upskilling, it is imperative that you make the most of the opportunity and get as much as you can out of the session.”

Selva’s primary area of expertise is in the medical and pharmaceuticals industries and he recognises that keeping up-to-date with the latest innovations and theories is the only way to stay ahead of the curve.

With programmes dedicated to all the challenges faced by modern organisations, PSG Infotech offers courses in everything, from a wide range of ISO Technical series such as 14001, 22301, 27001; intermediate and advanced GAP courses; talent acquisition to leadership development and performance appraisals.

By LIM HUISAN

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**MY LOCKDOWN KL EXPERIENCE**

The same experience of immersive gameplay was relived again recently, when Leaderonomics had a chance to play at Lockdown Kuala Lumpur, a reality first-person-adventure game, simulating virtual escape room game. Players are locked in a room and must exploit their surroundings to make an escape within an hour.

The psychology-infused game using the Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s Flow Theory in particular taught us some good lessons on leadership.

Here are some of our key learnings:

1. Great leaders have your best interests in their hearts

“Calling our group of five ‘Braveheart’, we entered the Kidnapped Room – one of the simulation rooms allocated – blindfolded and we started exploring the heavily dimmed space.”

Thinking it was the only space that we needed to explore and free ourseves from, we became so engrossed in the whole experience that we didn’t realise the clock ticking away.

It was then that David Szecsei, our captain, who together with me was monitoring us from the CCTV (closed circuit television) fitted in the rooms, called us on a mobile phone to drop clues for us to proceed further.

The mobile phone was actually for us to call him (not vice versa) for assistance if we were stuck for solutions.

2. Watch out for unnecessary distractions

There were obviously a lot of items in the rooms we were in, that could possibly be clues for something as we tried not to discount anything that comes within our sight.

In my mind, at least, I was eager to look for logic and patterns. I was asking myself and others: “Why this item is peculiarly placed here? Could the children’s posters mean something?” and, “Are the pictures on the wall interrelated?”

While we were required to be observant, at times we overcomplicated the situation by focusing on things that did not matter. And that led to time wastage as they distracted us from tasks that could have led to our escape.

3. Lessons

Great leaders are those who have the people’s best interests in their hearts. They are there to walk us through to reach our end goals, not necessarily giving us all the answers to our problems.

Great leaders watch from afar to monitor our progress because they want to see us succeed. In this case, to make our escape. Great leaders care enough to check in occasionally to ensure we are on the right track in our pursuits, and to avoid unnecessary failures.

If Szecsei had not called us to assist and remind us of our time, we would have been stuck in the same place for a good 45 minutes before realising that help was available.

4. For assistance if we were stuck for solutions.

There was an item that appeared to be something that was overlooked by my brother.

RELIVING CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

The years of growing up watching my brother play first, or third-person computer games such as ‘Half-Life’ and ‘Silet Hill’ have somewhat groomed me to become more attentive to details of my surrounding in real life.

Those were the years when I would actually sit in front of his computer for hours, passively immersed in the gameplay. I watched as he meticulously searched every nook and corner to find items, weapons and health, while opening secret doors and accessing bonus levels.

Occasionally, we would put on our critical thinking hats together to look out for clues and patterns to solve riddles and puzzles that would allow us to move to the next level of the game. There were occasional proud moments when I could see or solve something that was overlooked by my brother.

**PSG Infotech provides the tools necessary to help companies achieve their business results by developing skills and modifying the behaviour of employees. Selva and his team provide added services to close the performance or skill gaps in today’s marketplace.**

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**www.leaderonomics.com | Saturday 15 July 2017**
GAMIFICATION DEVELOPS CHARACTER AND BOOSTS ENGAGEMENT

WHO SAYS THE WORKPLACE CAN’T BE ALL FUN AND GAMES?

By MATT NAYLOR
matt.naylor@leaderonomics.com

GAMIFICATION, a word almost unheard of until 2010 and now described as the “future of employee engagement”. As traditional methods of education continue to be phased out in favour of a more interactive, hands-on approach to learning, the world of gamification is changing the way we learn and engage with our work.

Applicable to office cultures regardless of industry or staff size, the new trend of introducing fun and games to a company’s internal narrative is already reaping huge benefits and looks set to be the go-to human capital development system of the world.

NOT JUST FOR KIDS

Today, more Generation X-ers are using their spare time playing games consoles than millennials. Gone are the days when video games were being played exclusively by teenagers and so-called “nerdy” adults.

Similarly are the days of video games being considered unproductive. Everybody, at some point in his or her childhood, has been told to stop “wasting time” playing video games. It was only recently that we started recognising the perks of developing our minds through gaming.

Research has shown that an hour of video games a day is hugely beneficial for blowing off steam as well as keeping an active social life and engaging our brains. And now that same philosophy is being brought into the working environment.

Developing the idea of levelling up and scoring points for completing office tasks is bringing a new competitive element to offices across Malaysia and one local company, SelfDrvn, is ahead of the curve in bringing such a system into the country.

“When a video game gets too hard, we don’t complain about it or procrastinate; we spend hours and hours working at it and trying new ways around things. So why can’t we bring that same mentality into the workplace to stop people from putting things off for being too difficult and instead, give them an incentive to complete the task,” says Lam Mun Choong, chief executive officer and founder.

“Apart from just a release, playing games is all about recognition. It’s about being recognised for doing something well, which is why we earn badges, level up, unlock new achievements and compare our scores against our friends on the leaderboard.”

LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

That system of levelling up and earning achievements along the way is the foundation of SelfDrvn’s success with offices across Malaysia that are reaping the benefits of learning through play on the app’s wildly successful interface.

Introducing a fun competitive element to the process of learning has always been critical to getting the information to stick.

Previously, companies were focused on content and having a syllabus in place,” says Lam. “Employees were told that if they pass the course, they will be promoted. And what happened was that a lot of people would pass the test in front of them but rarely understand how to apply it to their everyday work or even just forget what they had learnt.

Think of a book that you were told to read. You probably hated it, only to read it years later as an adult and suddenly realise what a brilliant piece of fiction it really is. When you’re told to read something and know that you’ll be tested, it can be hard to find the energy to actually enjoy what you’re reading.

The same principles apply to workplace training. Doing something because you have been told to do so is never nearly as engaging as doing it because you want to.

“Every employee should ask themselves: why should I learn?” says Lam. “If the answer to that question is ‘because my boss asked me to’, the employee will learn nothing and may even resent what they are being asked to do. That is where gamification comes in.

We make people want to learn and want to improve because of the simplicity of our incentives and motivational options.”

GAMEIFYING OUR LIVES

Apps such as Waze and Pokémon Go have captured international imaginations in recent years by gamifying the day-to-day tasks that people were doing anyway. Waze became the go-to-application for satellite navigation as they introduced the social element to driving. By rewarding its drivers with badges and a leaderboard for most miles driven and encouraging them to contribute to the community of drivers on the road, Waze was able to add the element of gamification to the daily ritual of commute.

Similarly Pokémon Go was able to add a fun scoring system to the pastime of simply walking around the neighbourhoods as the app took the world by storm in 2016.

“What Pokémon Go does so well is to tap into humans’ need to collect things and then to show them off,” said Lam. “It’s beauty is in its simplicity. You walk around, your phone buzzes, you swipe to ‘catch’ something and then you tell all your friends about what happened later and compare your roster of Pokémon. The SelfDrvn philosophy follows the same principles.”

Rather than asking people to go out of their way to accomplish a task, SelfDrvn logs the everyday office rituals of its users and builds on a points-based system. Simple efforts such as giving a colleague feedback, attending meetings and making suggestions for company improvement all add up and can ultimately be exchanged for electronic gadgets and other rewards.

TAKING GAMIFICATION INTERNATIONAL

A step ahead in introducing such technology to the Malaysian workforce, Lam has huge ambitions that the forecasts of gamification continuing to change workplaces globally means opportunities for SelfDrvn to expand.

Recognising that he would not be able to do it alone, however, his participation in the Malaysia Digital Economy Corp’s GAIN programme has given him the platform he needs to reach the next level.

“The immersion programmes that GAIN offers were exactly what we needed to give us the international exposure and business match-making. It’s helped our business grow exponentially and we’re finding it easier than ever to find our target customers,” he said.

Forecasts for the future are certainly bright and the visibility of Malaysia on a global stage due to gamification developers bodes well for Lam and for SelfDrvn.

Proving that work can be all fun and games and with a talented young workforce as energised as he is, SelfDrvn will undoubtedly be on the global stage due to gamification continuing to change workplace globally means opportunities for SelfDrvn to expand.

In line with a vision to develop Malaysia’s digital economy, the Global Acceleration and Innovation Network (GAIN) programme was incepted to catalyse the expansion of local technology SMEs that have the potential to become global players through market access, leadership and capability development, technology disruption and scale-up capital.

Customising its programmes to each individual company, the programmes benefitts are wide-ranging and have already helped hundreds of Malaysian businesses achieve their financial and professional goals. For more information on the GAIN programme, visit www.mdec.com.my
Developing a Sense of Agency Through Exploration

WHY WE NEED TO ALLOW CHILDREN TO BE CHILDREN

Erikson’s Psychosocial Development

Children are malleable, and indicates that the environment around them has much to do with how they turn out.

Those that doubt their ability and tend to reduce their academic and social work, build their resilience, and develop more problem-solving skills. Over time, they may have long-term effects as it may jeopardize their future. The missing link is this: Why do some people develop high levels of self-esteem when other people, like, Paul also thinks so himself. Another key element in helping students to be significantly reserved for adults but some with superior agency turn to do whatever we wanted, “when children know they will have it. They say “The analytical and psychological foundation for the crucial contribution of play in human life, and especially for children, is drawn to – by encouraging them to...". Kids that lack agency may lower their levels of self-efficacy on the same plane.

A goal way to provide children with opportunities to develop their confidence in exploring, asking questions, offering ideas, and also learning from mistakes. Creativity, curiosity, imagination, inquiry and experimentation all require a dose of independence, and encouraging these would help a child’s agency at the same time.

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DOPE YOUR LEARNING

THE SCIENCE BEHIND GETTING YOUR BRAIN TO ENJOY WORK

By SASHE KANAPATHI
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W

e all want to learn, or at least, we say we do. Though, sometimes, I have my doubts if most people genuinely mean this. We also know that learning should result in some sort of a change; ultimately, a change of behaviour.

And change is something that leads to anxiety in some way or the other. So how do we make change easier to digest? By making it fun of course. Did you know that when you are having fun, the excited brain releases more dopamine? Yes, this is the same neurotransmitter that we associate with mediating pleasure.

Some other helpful benefits of dopamine are to enhance memory, attention and even cognition. So the more fun you have, the more dopamine in your brain, and as a result, you become more engaged and attentive. As Martha Burns from sciencemag.org states, “If you refer to dopamine as the ‘save button’ in the brain. When dopamine is present during an event or experience, we remember it; when it is absent, nothing seems to stick.”

In that sense, it would be easy to conclude that if learning is made to be fun, then there is a higher chance for learning to be absorbed meaningfully. Hence, we need to “Dope our Learning”. The idea is to have fun while learning, to enhance the learning experience. In adult education, this is easier said than done. Each person has a different way of having fun.

So, how do you deliver a programme to make learning fun for everyone? How do we present content in an exciting and novel way that applies to everyone?

For adults, experience has proven that there are five key components to achieve a fun learning experience:

1. HUMOUR

Humour is universal in its appeal and is something that can be injected by facilitators to engage the learners. It’s important not to overdo it of course, so that it isn’t distracting, just the right amount can go a long way to keep engagement levels high.

2. TECHNOLOGY

Technology has now become a part of everyone’s lives and something that is second nature to most. It is important to use technology for the value that it provides in making learning accessible. By using something that is familiar yet, it provides benefits in terms of speed and complexity at your fingertips, it enhances the learning experience.

3. EXPERIMENTATION

Experimentation is fun if it entails exploring new concepts in a safe environment. We need to create an environment that allows for failure while engaging the learners’ imagination to try out new things.

4. COMPETITION

It’s important to allow for competition in learning, as long as it is friendly competition. However, it should also be challenging enough to keep learners motivated. This is a key component of gamification.

5. BENEFIT

It’s important to show learners that the learning is beneficial to them in some way. This can be with rewards (as in gamification), but also show them how it can be applied to real life. Of the five aspects of training listed above, the first one, humour, is one that is left to the facilitators. However, the remaining four aspects can be delivered through creative programme design. The most efficient way to deliver this fun learning experience is through simulations.

As I’ve shared in previous articles, simulations come in all shapes and forms. We have simulations that are based on role-playing, as well as board-based, and lately things have become more digital in approach. They all provide the four aspects of fun learning experience described above. Here’s a scenario that demonstrates how the five components – in no particular order – are integrated in a simulation:

Simulations need to be able to transpose the participant, preferably using technology (two), into a very specific situation that has a defined objective. The means of achieving the objective require the participants to accomplish tasks that will help them practise the behaviours that the simulation was designed for. By competing with other people (four), while trying to win (five), participants find themselves trying different behaviours (three). Eventually this leads to an “aha” moment when either the right behaviour is discovered by one team, or it’s shared through an engaging debrief process (one).

In our experience, we find that the best way to use simulations is by prepping learners with some content prior. This gets them primed to the topic and equipped enough to experience the simulation effectively. If there is no content given, some learners may wind up spend too much of the simulation experience trying to navigate and make sense of the situation at hand instead of learning from the experiential opportunity. The post simulation debrief is also as important as the simulation itself to extract the learning and to re-play the experience. It also provides context to the activity. This way, by utilising simulations in any content delivery, we are able to make sure that learning is fun. And fun means more dopamine, which means better absorption as well as retention.

A major factor in determining an organisation’s success is a team that can work together under any situation. The Team Leadership Simulation by Knodkape will focus on resolving interpersonal conflicts with others while effectively and motivating and upskilling team members by identifying and personal conflicts with others while an organisation’s leadership styles in adverse situations. Leaderonomics is the sole licensor distributor of this simulation programme. Contact training@leaderonomics.com to book this programme for your organisation.

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The science behind getting your brain to enjoy work

W

e all want to learn, or at least, we say we do. Though, sometimes, I have my doubts if most people genuinely mean this. We also know that learning should result in some sort of a change; ultimately, a change of behaviour.

And change is something that leads to anxiety in some way or the other. So how do we make change easier to digest? By making it fun of course. Did you know that when you are having fun, the excited brain releases more dopamine? Yes, this is the same neurotransmitter that we associate with mediating pleasure.

Some other helpful benefits of dopamine are to enhance memory, attention and even cognition. So the more fun you have, the more dopamine in your brain, and as a result, you become more engaged and attentive. As Martha Burns from sciencemag.org states, “If you refer to dopamine as the ‘save button’ in the brain. When dopamine is present during an event or experience, we remember it; when it is absent, nothing seems to stick.”

In that sense, it would be easy to conclude that if learning is made to be fun, then there is a higher chance for learning to be absorbed meaningfully. Hence, we need to “Dope our Learning”. The idea is to have fun while learning, to enhance the learning experience. In adult education, this is easier said than done. Each person has a different way of having fun.

So, how do you deliver a programme to make learning fun for everyone? How do we present content in an exciting and novel way that applies to everyone?

For adults, experience has proven that there are five key components to achieve a fun learning experience:

1. HUMOUR

Humour is universal in its appeal and is something that can be injected by facilitators to engage the learners. It’s important not to overdo it of course, so that it isn’t distracting, just the right amount can go a long way to keep engagement levels high.

2. TECHNOLOGY

Technology has now become a part of everyone’s lives and something that is second nature to most. It is important to use technology for the value that it provides in making learning accessible. By using something that is familiar yet, it provides benefits in terms of speed and complexity at your fingertips, it enhances the learning experience.

3. EXPERIMENTATION

Experimentation is fun if it entails exploring new concepts in a safe environment. We need to create an environment that allows for failure while engaging the learners’ imagination to try out new things.

4. COMPETITION

It’s important to allow for competition in learning, as long as it is friendly competition. However, it should also be challenging enough to keep learners motivated. This is a key component of gamification.

5. BENEFIT

It’s important to show learners that the learning is beneficial to them in some way. This can be with rewards (as in gamification), but also show them how it can be applied to real life. Of the five aspects of training listed above, the first one, humour, is one that is left to the facilitators. However, the remaining four aspects can be delivered through creative programme design. The most efficient way to deliver this fun learning experience is through simulations.

As I’ve shared in previous articles, simulations come in all shapes and forms. We have simulations that are based on role-playing, as well as board-based, and lately things have become more digital in approach. They all provide the four aspects of fun learning experience described above. Here’s a scenario that demonstrates how the five components – in no particular order – are integrated in a simulation:

Simulations need to be able to transpose the participant, preferably using technology (two), into a very specific situation that has a defined objective. The means of achieving the objective require the participants to accomplish tasks that will help them practise the behaviours that the simulation was designed for. By competing with other people (four), while trying to win (five), participants find themselves trying different behaviours (three). Eventually this leads to an “aha” moment when either the right behaviour is discovered by one team, or it’s shared through an engaging debrief process (one).

In our experience, we find that the best way to use simulations is by prepping learners with some content prior. This gets them primed to the topic and equipped enough to experience the simulation effectively. If there is no content given, some learners may wind up spending too much of the simulation experience trying to navigate and make sense of the situation at hand instead of learning from the experiential opportunity. The post simulation debrief is also as important as the simulation itself to extract the learning and to re-play the experience. It also provides context to the activity. This way, by utilising simulations in any content delivery, we are able to make sure that learning is fun. And fun means more dopamine, which means better absorption as well as retention.

The science behind getting your brain to enjoy work
By JOSEPH TAN

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TRUST and relationshipships go a long way in building a healthy and productive working environment. Through our ‘Building Trust and Relationship Simulation’ with Knolskape, participants will be able to identify their relationship style, build trust to accelerate business development, influence others and resolve conflicts, become a trusted advisor by increasing their confidence and capabilities, build customer loyalty by understanding the client’s solutions. Contact training@leaderonomics.com for more details.

LEGO brick is the 4 x 2 red stud brick. Eight of these bricks can be combined in 915,103,765 ways! Hence, this moves beyond any fixed structure or limiting templates and provides an environment where the sky is the limit when it comes to the application of imagination.

LEGO Serious Play® method

1. It is an intentional gathering to apply the imagination
2. It is exploring and preparing, not implementing
3. It follows a specific set of rules or language

APPLYING THE IMAGINATION

Imagination precedes innovation. The ‘templated’ approach to creativity will work in situations where predictability and compliance takes centre stage. However, how do participants form a mental image of something that does not yet exist – in order to see things that do not yet exist – in order to see things that
can be discovered – sometimes, the model itself may surprise the builder!
Consider this – the quintessential contribution of the participants, not the facilitator. This ensures accountability and ownership.

SPECIFIC SET OF RULES OR LANGUAGE

When imagining, participants must follow a specific set of rules or language. This helps break the pattern of normal thinking and encourages participants to use their imagination freely.

The focus in LEGO Serious Play® is not on the bricks; it is on the story they create. The bricks and the models become metaphors, and the landscapes of the models become stories. It is within the storytelling environment that participants are free to explore different paths, zigzag, and find what does and does not work. This in essence is what play is about – the freedom to experiment and express different options before settling down on what the solution could look like.

In fact, many of the things that are proposed will remain merely ideas; others will be carried into action. But action isn’t the point of the process, exploring is. In one of my facilitation sessions, we used the LEGO bricks to explore different scenarios and reasons why the team was not functioning in a cohesive way as it should.

The benefit of utilising the bricks was that a potentially sensitive and emotional issue could be discussed with a high degree of objectivity because the focus was on the models built rather than on any one person’s words or tone of voice. Furthermore, the LEGO Serious Play® process also mandates the application of a reflection phase where every person takes time to crystallise their thinking in relation to the built model. As for the team that went through this process, we concluded the session with a set of five team operating principles which was created entirely by the team after many rounds of exploration and preparation.

Unlike a typical training programme where the outcome is usually dictated by the trainer, the end result of a LEGO Serious Play® session comes from the
In the current times, “lifetime employment” is replacing the concept of lifetime employment at a company. Employees are more interested in jobs that contributes to their long term career goals than being loyal to a company. This means, the lesser you invest in your people with the fear of them leaving, the more valuable they become to the organisation and successful in their jobs. The lack of career development support such as training, mentoring and coaching contributes to early employee attrition. 

Having someone looking out for their development goes a long way as it demonstrates a genuine interest in their employees’ personal and professional growth and shows the caring nature of the organisation that has its employees’ best interest at heart. Employees cannot be successful on their own and learning is accelerated when there is someone encouraging their development. 

When you develop your people well enough to move up to the next level, they leave a trail of knowledge behind as they pass it on and create a pipeline of leaders within the organisation. Promoting employees in the organisation therefore, makes good business sense as it not only improves productivity and performance capability, it also builds loyalty and improves employee engagement.

**Engagement through Development**

Companies need their managers to encourage development and coach their employees, more than just managing work, correcting and evaluating people. When a manager is able to propel individuals ahead of their career through role modeling and facilitating an environment for growth, it provides the psychosocial support and confidence employees need to excel in their jobs. 

This is in line with Gallup’s 6th Element of Great Managing, Q6: Someone At Work Encourages My Development which addresses an employee’s plea to “help me grow.” Employee development in the company needs to be encouraged by providing employees the necessary resources and tools to do their best job. Gallup defines development as “helping individuals find the right opportunities that fit their unique combination of skills, knowledge and talents.” This includes the autonomy and freedom to take risk and embrace challenges for growth without force-fitting them into a box.

According to Gallup, less than 1% of employees are engaged when the employer has no one to advocate for their development. In contrast, 90% of employees who works in companies with high Q6 scores are engaged with their work and business goals. Statistics suggest that a mentor-mentee relationship, one which has a substantial amount of personal interaction and investment with the manager and employee, is necessary for engagement. This “manager see, manager do” phenomenon is not new as the fundamental step to great managing is through mentoring and setting an example for the team. 

But beyond that, a mentor can wear many hats including that of a friend, coach, counselor, advisor and supporter. 

**Development for Employees**

There is an unspoken expectation when employees join the company, that their learning and development needs would be looked after. Employees need coaching and guidance and if the company does not provide right opportunities for growth, they will look for it elsewhere. This is due to human’s innate desire to progress, succeed and be better individuals, particularly at work or in their career as it is easier to reinforce a more measurable view of development and motivation. Nevertheless, development does not necessarily mean “promotion” as growth can happen without changing roles. Debunking the assumption that we are all motivated by extrinsic rewards such as compensation and promotion, some rather stay in their current position or even be willing to take a pay cut for a role that has better learning opportunities. 

There are some instances of which role development precedes career advancement where employees turn down a promotion that does not match their talents or interest. In our current times, “lifetime employability” is replacing the concept of lifetime employment at a company. Employees are more interested in jobs that contributes to their long term career goals than being loyal to a company. 

Instead of assigning roles that do not suit them, great companies would maximise employees’ talents by creating the best job-role fit based on the employees’ strengths, competencies and experiences. In addition, employees’ developmental needs to be addressed differently – with a tailored approach – so they find the right job roles and growth opportunities.

**Encouraging Development as Managers**

Managers and direct supervisors are typically the first in line to assume the responsibility of their team members’ development. This is when the ability to coach and mentor becomes a highly valuable skill and naturally reaps immense benefits for the team.

As a manager, ask yourself:

- How do I help my people develop?
- How do I help them find the right task, roles and career paths?
- Do I understand which development opportunities are most important to each team member?
- Do I understand which opportunities are most relevant to his or her career growth?
- Struggle to answer these questions? Talk to us by dropping us an e-mail or visit our website at http://leaderonomics.org/goodmonday/

Invest in Your People

**Encourage Employee Engagement and Development through Mentoring and Coaching**

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LASTING LESSONS IN GAMES

TAKAN can seem extra laborious when they’re not framed within an exciting context, but when we inject a fun spin on things, even the most menial duties can become purposeful.

Most of us have encountered monotony, and sometimes even a sense of thanklessness when performing routine work. And the perennial question remains: what do I gain from doing this?

As we explored the focus in this week’s issue – play and experiential learning – two important elements stood out: the principles of play can continue to steer growth in the workplace and, gamification breaks the mundane.

This is where the strategic nature of play brings its lasting effect – for children, right up to lifelong learners – as it presents participants hands-on experiences in situations they would not typically encounter in everyday routine.

Taking a break from this nature in a professional setting can challenge their ability to work around problems and induce the need to find creative solutions to reach their goals.

Leaderonomics has infused play and learning into our organisation’s DNA, and over the years, this practise has given us a fun, yet high-performance culture. And here’s how it can work for you:

1. Re-discovering your place in the work environment.

Through intermittent play at work, employees get to give their minds the ‘recess’ it needs to recalibrate and discover new perspectives to getting tasks done. Making way for more interaction between departments with light, but meaningful games, allows for observation of and, reflection on our unique, evolving set of skills.

Roshan Thiran and Eva Christodoulou examined the concept of ‘agency’ on Page 6, and the ability of people to express their own individual power, through thoughts or actions and subsequently be in charge of shaping their experiences. While it’s crucial for this to begin at childhood, a sense of agency can still come through in later years as long as the environment encourages it.

2. Collaboration and reflection.

Each exercise is crafted from the intent to learn from it. This turns what is traditionally a structured and top-down activity, into a chance for employees to bond without pressure, understand their roles in the organisation’s bigger picture, and see how these fit into their own personal belief system.

What’s even better is that experiences cling to memory and a fun experience moves and engages the workforce, in a way that – as Amanda Chua observes in her piece on Page 10 – gives talented, motivated and engaged employees who have the desire to become more valuable to the organisation in the long term, the opportunity to build relationships and collaborate.

3. Concrete experiences.

The ability to understand concepts and theory is just as important as paying attention to the practicality of the ideas you have. In balance, play and experiential learning enrich the classroom learning experience with its emphasis on performing a challenge in a safe and fun setting, where anyone can take control.

As Joseph Tan had said on Page 9: It takes a combination of both seriousness and playfulness. Even if there’s no intent to derive specific learnings from fun activities, it’s important to note that good memories in itself can serve as important frames of reference in interpersonal relationships and cohesion between departments.

Thank you for reading our issue this week, and we hope you enjoy the weekend filled with fun and games!

Lydia Gomez
Editor
Ke medan baharu
Portal Kepimpinan kini dalam Bahasa Malaysia

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