

Why Games Belong in the Work Place

Suppose the world had a workforce that was highly skilled at solving some of the most challenging problems. This workforce is motivated, hard working and highly collaborative with others. And to make matters even better, this workforce is not driven by traditional rewards such as money, but more by the thrill of accomplishing something great. Such a workforce exists and it is estimated to be 500 million strong and growing rapidly. It's the workforce of gamers. People who play games are perhaps the most untapped resource on the planet.

This argument is well made by Jane McGonigal, a leading game designer and author of the book: Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World. McGonigal contends that most people are totally bored out of their minds with traditional work and when you couple this with the incredible problems facing the world, gamers are literally escaping and using their talents in a virtual world as opposed to wasting away in the real world where there is no leadership, collaboration, and problem solving taking place. This is unfortunate given the enormity of challenges we face and the fact that gamers are so motivated and skilled at solving complex problems.

According to Tom Chatfield, a leading expert on games, people are transfixed when they play a game. They perform at an intense level that dwarf's how other people work in the traditional workplace. Chatfield believes that more and more people are not motivated by money, but more by their emotions. This is one of the reasons why games kick performance into such a high gear; it satisfies our emotional needs. Chatfield cites other contributing factors why games are so potent:

- Games give people immediate feedback on their performance. Contrast this with the current workplace where feedback is infrequent and highly subjective.
- Games provide a wide range of tasks in a very fast moving environment. Contrast this to traditional work where you do the same task over and over again.
- Games have a set of well defined rules that all players must follow. Contrast this to the typical workplace where rules vary by group and in many cases, rules are not evenly applied.

McGonigal also notes that younger people are spending an incredible amount of time playing games. It is estimated that by the time someone reaches age 21 in a society that plays games that this person will spend as much time playing games as they spend in school from 5th grade through high school. So people are incredibly skilled at games.

So how can an organization bring games into the workplace? One good place to start is with gamestorming, a term coined by authors Dave Gray, Sunni Brown, and James Macanufo in their book: Gamestorming: A Playbook for Innovators, Rulebreakers, and Changemakers. The book describes numerous games such as Poster Sessions – having each person describe a project or work they would like to do, but are currently not doing. Many of the games are quite simple, requiring simple things such as post it notes, flip charts, and whiteboards.

As Dave Gray points out in his lectures, most businesses have completely missed the boat on games for a simple reason – they are very linear and process oriented. They can't think in a creative non-linear way. Just look at the physical work environment – it consists of cubicles, separating everyone and discouraging collaboration. Games work the opposite, requiring an open, creative, and collaborative environment. Games are about people, paper and passion, something missing from most work environments.

Games provide a much better framework than traditional work – they motivate people into action, provide social connections for collaboration, set boundaries on how work must get done, and provide immediate feedback on results. Given the fact that so much mind power is going to waste and this is the key to solving so many of our problems, all organizations need to take a serious look at putting games into the work place.

“Collaborate or perish is perhaps the single most urgent rallying cry for our times. The ability to collaborate at extreme scales isn't just a competitive advantage in business or in life anymore. Increasingly, it's a survival imperative for the human race. I believe whole heartedly that the core value of developing our collaboration superpowers will be proven by games that help gamers save the world – by changing how we consume energy, how we feed ourselves, how we create better health, how we govern ourselves, how we conceive of new businesses, and how we take care of each other and the environment.” – Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World by Jane McGonigal

Matt H. Evans, CPA, CMA, CFM

Web Site: www.exinfm.com

Additional Articles can be found at: www.exinfm.com/board

You are free to distribute this article provided that you include the source as referenced above.