

# The Devil's Advocate

Gamification Belongs In The Workplace



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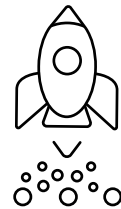
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# 1. Introduction



Today's employees expect to be developed at work, and while 83% see it as primarily their responsibility (rather than the company's) to keep their skills up to date, human resources consulting firm Mercer found that globally the three most important things that help employees thrive at work are: manage work and life balance; recognized for contributions; learn new skills and technologies.

Unfortunately, a recent Gallup report shows that just 15% of employees worldwide feel engaged at work. Yikes.

What's the solution? Gamification. It can engage, excite, incentivize, and remove the monotony of routines.

It can also help employees retain information better. Gabe Zichermann, author of *The Gamification Revolution* and founder of creative agency Dopamine, found that making work or learning more fun pays off. In fact, employees' retention and skills increase by up to 40%. When designed correctly, gamified learning and development can engage employees in their training and prepare them for the future in a way that is similar to how they already consume information outside of the workplace.

# LET'S GET STARTED.



## 2. Why gamify training

The cognitive scientist and behavior therapist, Andrea Kuszewski, states that fluid intelligence (what we rely on to problem solve) can be strengthened by exposing ourselves to five experiences on a regular basis:

- \_\_\_\_\_ **Seek novelty**
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Challenge yourself**
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Think creatively**
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Do things the hard way**
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Network**

These five traits may look familiar because they are the basis of most games. They also yield an exceptional increase in learning as well as an increase in the brain's gray matter, which has many benefits.

In addition to the positive impact on our brains, game designer, Jane McGonigal, explains that games also help us feel important emotions like a sense of urgency, a little bit of fear, deep focus, and the inspiration to collaborate and cooperate. These experiences can help us practice taking calculated risks and work through challenges.

Gamified experiences can be valuable in the workplace as well.

In her TED talk, Janaki Kumar, author of *Gamification At Work: Designing Engaging Business Software* and expert in design-led innovation, explains that companies looking to adopt gamification should think like a game designer. The knowledge and skills the design team must have includes:

- \_\_\_\_\_ **Empathy, or the ability to put themselves into the shoes of the future players**
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Clear understanding of the mission and purpose**
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Insight into how to motivate others towards the mission**

To incorporate gamification into learning and development requires more than casually inserting PBLs (points, badges, and leaderboards). Gamifying training needs to be done thoughtfully and purposefully.

Consider these game design mechanics when designing a gamification system or training framework:

\_\_\_\_\_ **Rewards: Use progress bars to measure experience or give a reward for effort. Collective and individual rewards can both be included because it creates a group dynamic and effort. Figure out a schedule to keep players engaged.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Feedback: Plan for rapid, frequent, and clear feedback. It's both hard to learn and stay engaged if consequences aren't equated to action.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Engagement: Humans are inherent reward seekers. Therefore, problem solving and an element of uncertainty are neurological goldmines.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Goals: Incorporate multiple short- and long-term aims or achievements.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Motivation: The cycle of challenging oneself and achieving is a form of intrinsic reinforcement. This releases dopamine.**

### 3. Common gamification misconceptions





Gamifying learning and development is sometimes wrongly considered a synonym for just playing games. While they have some of the same benefits – collaboration, problem solving, and fun— gamifying training or learning and development has huge potential for creating an environment for highly engaged employees.

Researcher and expert on play, Brian Sutton-Smith, stated that the opposite of play is not work but depression. In her Psychology Today article, Dr. Lois Holzman, backs this up. She writes, “Play helps us belong, and belonging helps us move about and around feeling alone, isolated, and victimized. Playing is how we become part of existing communities.... We become part of communities...by imagining ourselves to be competent members of those communities and creatively imitating others—in other words, by playing at being members before we knew how.”

For training or learning and development initiatives to be effective, companies need to engage their employees. Incorporating play and gamification at work can be the natural next step.

Smartphones and games can be great tools to help us learn. A recent Harvard Business Review article explained that “learning is a consequence of thinking, not teaching. It happens when people reflect on and choose a new behavior. But if the work environment doesn’t support that behavior, a well-trained employee won’t make a difference.”

Thoughtful gamification that gets employees actively involved, thinking, and learning will be successful. By embracing new ways of training and learning, companies can begin to think of their employees as internal customers, which opens up a way of thinking and different ways to engage. Play and games create a sense of community and an opportunity to learn by thinking and doing.

Gamification enables companies to engage their employees while making it fun. Another reason that gamifying learning and development works well is it allows for microlearning, or learning small bits of information in a short timeframe. For example, Duolingo, a language-learning app, teaches users a language of their choice through short, 10-minute lessons. It also gamifies their experience by giving out badges, using leaderboards, and providing immediate feedback. While this is an example of a consumer business (B2C), companies can take what Duolingo does successfully and adapt it to their own environment. Microlearning is more aligned with how we work, and it’s more memorable than traditional training by lecture.



## 4. Skills gamification allows us to practice

## 4.1 Fast decision-making

Some decisions need to be made over a long time. However, sometimes the decision-maker may be happier when they don't have too much time to dwell. This is backed up by research from cognitive scientists at the American university, University of Rochester, who discovered that video game players develop heightened awareness, which improves everyday skills like “multitasking, driving, reading small print, keeping track of friends in a crowd, and navigating around town.”

Interestingly, thriving employees— defined as growing and contributing, connected and empowered, and healthy and energized— are three times more likely to work for a company that enables quick decision-making, human resources consulting firm, Mercer, found in the recent survey *Global Talent Trends 2019*. Practicing quick decision-making in a gamified setting can help employees make better decisions at work, and employees are more likely to be happier at an organization where they can practice this skill.

## 4.2 Grit

This significant predictor of success, grit, was made mainstream by author of *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* and a psychology professor at the University of Pennsylvania, Angela Duckworth. She defines grit as passion plus persistence: “It combines resilience, ambition, and self-control in the pursuit of goals that take months, years, or even decades.”

Grit is a trait that companies should look for in employees. Individuals may cultivate grit through intensive games like *World of Warcraft* or *Grandtheft Auto*, but it can also come from life experience or achieving a long-term goal. However, organizations can also introduce gamification into the workplace to encourage employees to get grittier.

# 4.3

## Experience fear and take risks

In his [TED talk](#), “The Decline of Play,” psychologist Peter Gray explained the evolutionary purpose of play. It teaches us emotional and social skills as well as fitness skills. Knowing this, Dr. Gray says that we can take the ideas and mechanics of games and apply them to change or adjust behaviors.

As people get older, they tend to take less risks. Knowing this, simulations or gamified training can be a smart solution. For high-risk business decisions, companies can create simulations where employees get to practice and see the result of their decisions in a safe environment. Pilots and [police officers](#) practice in simulation, so why shouldn't other professionals?

Truly immersive game experiences can be an effective method for learning, especially in high-risk, high-cost scenarios, but just adding game-based elements like PBLs does not equate to immersive game-based learning. Just using game design elements may dilute the effectiveness of these tools suggests the [CIPD](#). Therefore, it's important to add gamification into work in a meaningful way.

Games can also engage employees in a variety of ways. It can be a safe place to give feedback, a fun way to learn a new process, or a chance to take a quiz to better define the next career step.

## 4.4 Learning from failure

Gamifying lessons or playing games gives us the chance to learn and make mistakes in a simulation. In his [TED talk](#), “The Future of Creativity and Innovation is Gamification,” Zichermann rightly explains that a culture of failing fast is prized in certain economies and businesses. However, is our society set up to really allow us time to fail in school or at work? Games give us the time and chance to do this.

In addition to potentially experiencing failure, many games put us in situations where we need to think about the decisions we make and how they impact the steps ahead. Practicing this in gamified learning can help employees think more strategically about their work and how it impacts the broader business.

# 5.

# Conclusion



Though gamification is sometimes discarded as a trend or fad, or time to be distracted or off task, it is actually an effective tool that can be integrated into the workplace. A good place to start is to identify monotonous or repetitive tasks and think of ways to engage employees in a gamified way.

According to [Deloitte](#), gamification is successful for three reasons:

—— It provides instant feedback because gaming creates a world that gives us instant results based on our performance

—— We experience a sense of flow where we are completely absorbed in an activity

—— It allows us to experience advances, which are intrinsically gratifying

Feedback, flow, and gratifying experiences are extremely valuable to employees. This leads to greater engagement, higher learning retention, and higher completion rates of tasks. It's human nature to want to complete tasks, and by making them fun, companies will benefit from engaged employees and memorable work experiences.

Focus on the skills and traits that gamification develops rather than how it's perceived, and use this e-guide to create memorable gamified learning. Remember, the devil is in the details.

# Want to know more?

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