



## It's All in the Game

### Description

It was a big successful organization. One in which everything ran like clockwork – everyone knew their job and when an instruction was issued from the top, it made its way through the various layers of leadership to action at the front line. It was effective. It dominated its environment sweeping aside all competition. That was until the day it faced a different sort of rival – ones that were agile, fast-moving and innovative. This new rival didn't wait for orders from the top; those at the front line took responsibility themselves, seized the initiative and created a decisive and winning advantage.

You'd be forgiven for thinking that this sounds like a tale of our times – high street stores fighting online retailers for customers or newspapers battling bloggers to be first with the news. In fact, it was the Prussian army of the 1806 battle of Jena. And their rival? The army of Napoleon I. The key lesson for the Prussians, and as it turns out for many big organizations since, was simple: *decision-making authority had to be devolved to the lowest position possible.*

This meant that their soldiers had to be trained, empowered and schooled in the environment they were expected to make those decisions. And so the Prussian Military School created the 'War Game' – a means to simulate the speed, complexity, and ambiguity of the environment their people would operate in practice what it took to succeed. This is the essence of the 'serious game' – using role play, simulation to provide a challenging environment that stretches and develops decision makers.

### Serious about playing

Today, major corporations around the world are using serious games — the more common term today is gamification — to develop the talent and skills of their employees in areas as diverse as customer service, innovation, and lean manufacturing. Hilton uses a game called Ultimate Team Play to teach customer service skills, for example. IBM developed INNOV8, a simulation game in which players design or modify business models to satisfy customers or optimize supply chains (among other goals). Our simulation – The Kaplan Business Challenge – has been used in over 25 countries to train our client's staff from graduates up to board members.

Simulation games are particularly powerful developmental tools. They create the unfamiliar and

challenging environment that is essential in triggering personal and professional development. The research supports this. A study by the Federation of American Scientists showed that participants remembered 10% of what they read, 20% of what they heard, 30% of what they were taught if visuals were also included, and 50% of what they were taught if they also saw someone performing the tasks. However, they remembered 90% of what they learned if they did the task themselves — even in simulated conditions.

## **Gamification: competitive game, collaborative learning**

The goal of gamification is to leverage the informality and fun of games to break the psychological and cognitive boundaries that, often unwittingly, restrict the potential of traditional brainstorming or reflection. In a presentation at the second annual Gamification in HR Summit in Vienna, Anthony Scarpino, Senior Director of Talent Acquisition at Sodexo, highlighted five components of good gaming solutions

- **Challenge:** empowers participants to solve problems and think creatively, thus completing the mission
- **Fun:** satisfies the need for novelty
- **Social:** requires collaboration toward team goals
- **Meaning:** engages employees through goals with meaning
- **Achievement:** creates a virtuous challenge, win, euphoria loop in the minds of participants

The Summit highlighted research by Gartner, Inc., which concluded that 70% of Global 2000 organizations will have at least one gamified application by the end of 2015, and 40% of Global 1000 organizations “will use gamification as the primary mechanism to transform business operations.” Whether gamification is as central to operational transformation as touted by Gartner, there is no doubt that it has revolutionized organizational learning and strategic thinking. Apparently, when faced with intractable problems or challenges, there is, in fact, no better time for fun and games.

## **Making decisions in a volatile and complex marketplace**

Business life has always featured the unpredictable, the surprising, and the unexpected. But it is also dealing with a new level of complexity – a complexity that affects the products we design, the jobs we do every day, and the organizations we manage. Elements of business and social life that used to be separate are now interconnected and interdependent, making them, by definition, more complex.

Complex markets are far more difficult to manage than merely complicated ones. It’s harder to make sense of things. It’s harder to predict what will happen – the past behavior of a complex system may not predict its future behavior.

The new version of the Kaplan Business Challenge (KBC) gamifies the complexity of a crowded, competitive marketplace – participants develop interests, create businesses, interact and create new businesses, shape or be shaped by their environment. Organizations need to be able to flex, and change, adapt and respond to the environment – the new KBC model presents this challenge to its player. And – like Napoleon’s foot soldiers – these players have to take responsibility, appreciate the wider ramifications of their actions, mindful of the impact of their actions on their colleagues, their partners and on their rivals.

## **Did you know?**

Simulations and games are more effective at transferring learning to students than case studies.

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