5 Powerful Ways to Use Games in eLearning

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How to navigate the learning games maze
“When we play a game, we tackle tough challenges with more creativity, more determination, more optimism, and we’re more likely to reach out to others for help.”

Jane McGonigal
Award-winning game developer
Introduction

We’re entering an exciting new phase for learning games in the workplace.

With an increasing body of evidence showing that learning games improve employee knowledge and performance, attitudes to learning games are changing. Research by Ambient Insight shows that the growth rate of the game-based learning market is climbing faster than the seven other learning technologies tracked by the organisation. The study says, for a learning technology that has been around for a while, this is an unusual trend signalling “a new phase of market demand.”

This spike in interest reflects the fact that many learning professionals now recognise that games are part of the learning ecosystem required to meet the needs of employees in today’s workplace. However, even though attitudes are changing, some organisations still face challenges. Learning games can take time and expertise to design; identifying when a learning game is most appropriate takes research and experience; and integrating games into existing corporate learning requires cultural sensitivity and judgement.

The aim of my Learning Solutions session is to inspire learning professionals and help them overcome the barriers to implementing learning games. This resource acts as a companion to some of the themes of the session and offers a path through the maze to success with learning games.
5 Surprising facts about games

- 2.2 billion people in the world play games
- The average US female video game player is 37
- 87% of console gamers also play games on PC
- 75% of the most frequent gamers believe playing video games provides education
- The serious games industry is growing at 33% per year in the corporate sector

(Sources: Entertainment Software Association, Newzoo, The Association for UK Interactive Entertainment, Ambient Insight, Serious Play Conference)
What is a learning game?

In simple terms, learning games allow us to learn something by playing.

Learning games are designed with the specific intention of achieving one or more learning outcomes, linked to a training need; they use the same ‘tricks of the trade’ as video games for entertainment.

What’s the difference?

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<tr>
<th>Games</th>
<th>Gamification</th>
<th>Simulations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A stand-alone entity with a beginning, a middle and an end</td>
<td>The use of game mechanics, aesthetics or thinking to motivate and engage learners</td>
<td>Recreates a realistic, often immersive situation</td>
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<td>Rules, terms and a context over a set period of time</td>
<td>Either adds game elements to the structure of learning content or systems</td>
<td>Uses experience to aid learning</td>
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<td>Learning comes from actually playing the game</td>
<td>Or adds game-like interactions to learning content</td>
<td>Feels game-like but doesn’t rely on game play</td>
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<td>Allows the freedom to fail and free play</td>
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<td>Enables proof of mastery and progression</td>
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(Sources: Karl Kapp, Andrzej Marczewski)

In some cases, a stand-alone digital game works best, but often gamified elements are incorporated into elearning to support active fulfilment of learning objectives. This approach, called gamification, introduces game elements into a non-game context, very often to motivate and encourage the learner to succeed.
What can games teach?

There is evidence that games are particularly effective in certain circumstances. One body of research (Connolly et al, 2011) reviewed 129 papers reporting evidence related to the outcomes of serious games in respect of learning and engagement.

A key conclusion was that the most “frequently occurring outcomes and impacts were knowledge acquisition/content understanding and affective and motivational outcomes”.

However, games are a flexible format that can match specific learner needs and workplace challenges. In this respect, there’s little that game thinking can’t solve - what matters is getting the design is right.

Learning games are useful for:

**Problem Solving**

Learners have an opportunity to explore, try out different options and see the consequences of failure. This is particularly useful in high risk situations, where it’s not possible to recreate environments or scenarios.

**Working as a team**

Games are not all about competition. Collaborative games can help teach people how to work together and succeed as a team.

**Measuring success**

Games provide players with a clear goal and actionable steps for achieving that goal. They constantly measure success and reflect on progress. This sense of mastery is a powerful tool for engaging people in learning.

**Facts/declarative knowledge**

Games aid retention, which is why they are so effective for instilling knowledge. A strong game narrative encourages ‘replayability’ and helps people remember for longer.

**Rules and Procedures**

A game is a great way to help people learn key rules and procedures because it gives players the opportunity to practice and repeat. Getting it wrong and trying again is all part of learning process.
But how can you be sure that a game will work and deliver a good return on your investment?

There is a growing body of research, studies and examples from academia and the corporate sector that make a compelling case for learning games.

Evidence from education

Evidence from business

(Source: Sitzmann T. “A Meta-Analytic Examination of The Instructional Effectiveness Of Computer-Based Simulation Games”, Personnel Psychology)

(Sources: Axonify, Walmart, Engine Yard, retaMe, Yapi Kredi Bank)
How to integrate games into workplace learning

One of the great things about games for learning is their sheer flexibility. Games can be harnessed for almost any workplace challenge imaginable from compliance to customer service skills; business systems to brand awareness; product knowledge to productivity.

But knowing how to integrate games into a workplace learning strategy can be a challenge, particularly for organisations introducing learning games for the first time.

‘Capstone’ game

A game can act as a ‘capstone experience’ of a wider learning campaign, giving people the chance to push their skills and knowledge further and feel the benefit of succeeding, even if they have had to play the game several times to be successful.

Part of a blend

Games can work well as part of a blended learning programme. They can support and complement other materials and may bring something new and different to a blend, particularly the opportunity to be playful as part of the learning experience.

Mini games within elearning

By incorporating short games at key stages within elearning it is possible to give learners a taste of game play without committing time or resources to a full game. This is particularly useful for learners who are new to games or resistant to change.

Connecting global teams

Games can bring together people, given if they’re playing on different continents. The shared experience encourages collaboration, as well as friendly competition. This can be particularly effective for motivating people to take part.

During an event

A digital or physical game works well as the centrepiece for an event, such as an onboarding workshop. Games encourage participation and can be designed to facilitate team building.
Next Steps

To find out more about using games within corporate learning, join my concurrent session at the Learning Solutions Conference & Expo, or get in touch with your questions on learning games.

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