PLAY AT WORK

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“Menkaure Menkaure Menkaure!” the discerning roars resounded through the expanse of the Sahara, as the shadows of men hauled big slabs of stone for assembling a future world wonder. Two distinct teams chanted spiritedly, as they competed against each other to haul these slabs up the Pyramid of Giza. Cheers grew louder as the gang of “Friends of the Menkaure” moved ahead, seemingly in a position of victory. Although this was in the 5th Century BC, all that remained was a powerful vestige of victory upon the walls. This was indeed one of the most notable incidents of competition as a means of motivation. Play at Work!

Due to the intricate nature of architecture, and the short timeline for development, the workforce was divided into two teams, each consisting of 2000 men. This was further divided into 5 phyles, each comprising 200 skilled/unskilled workers with gang names or titles such as “Friends of Menkaure”, from the Menkaure Pyramid, or “Stepped Pyramid gang” in order to track progress, boost morale and mark achievements of these individual gangs. (The Myth of Ancient Egypt, Charlotte Booth)

Signs of competition acting as motivators were not uncommon in the olden times; games were a part of history. In fact, there was no division between play and work as there was no concept of work – the art of hunting & gathering relied upon opportunity presenting itself, intercepting the prey, working collaboratively to search for food, all of which were pleasurable activities. The behaviors associated with these activities have laid the foundation for exploration, intuition, improvisation, and eventually adaptation. (Lee, Y, Heeter, C, Magerko, B, & Medler, B 2012)

Play, artistic creation, creativity, and evolutionary human development have been closely allied. Play has been closely tied with being the basic framework for myths, rituals, behavior & meaning. Through these, we have learnt to identify and relate the building blocks of reality. Subsequently, learning strategies between the self and the environment have come to the fore through play. Although in contemporary environments, learning occurs mostly through formal teaching, in traditional human environments this was not the case. Learning mostly occurs and is best done through observation, exploration, and play (Lancy, 1996; Smith, 2004).
What is Play?

So then, what is play? As defined by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, in the Rules of Play, “Play is free movement within a rigid structure”.

When faced with a relatively novel or uncertain, but safe, environment, play creates opportunities for innovative thoughts & behaviors which in turn, results in subsequent practice of newly developed behaviors and strategies (Bateson, 2005; Bjorklund & Rosenberg, 2005; Bruner, 1972; Kpinka et al., 2001; Stamps, 1995; Sutton-Smith, 1966, 1997). It poses as an invaluable medium for learning, innovating, and stimulating creativity.

TIS’ Approach to Game Based Learning

There still exists a social stigma to the concept of play. This is due to the conditioning of societal constructs wherein individuals are taught through formal education that there exists a distinction, a mutually exclusive relationship between work and play.

At Tata Interactive Systems, our instructional design methodology is built around the concept of Play, Practice, Perfect. We encourage higher engagement through Play, higher skills and higher retention through Practice, and higher efficiency through Perfection. Our approach to Game Based Learning involves designing games with business rules/needs at the core, with a game layer that governs the game, players’ actions, the game’s reaction, and the final outcome.

By combining both these methodologies together, a system for experiential learning is developed, which in turn creates a holistic experience for the learner.

“To stimulate creativity, one must develop child-like inclination for play and the childlike desire for recognition.”
- Albert Einstein
Learning Mindsets

Utilizing Dweck’s implicit theory of intelligence, we determine the absorption rate of a belief or thought process and in turn understand the effect on learning outcomes, behavior and response to failure. Comprehensive research done by Dweck details the effect different mindsets (due to contrasting belief systems) have on learning behaviors & outcomes. (Lee, Y, Heeter, C, Magerko, B, & Medler, B 2012)

Delving into the theory of mindsets, we explore the two existing types: Fixed and Growth driven. By definition, individuals with fixed mindsets believe that their abilities and traits are developed or fixed. They, therefore have a proclivity towards remaining averse to change. They are also not comfortable with showing effort, as their mindset is fixed on performance through innate intelligence; therefore, their fear for failure is far greater. Their approach to problem solving is to seek out familiar challenges, and avoid those where the result is unpredictable, and failure may be likely.

However, fostering a growth-driven mindset, allows the learner to develop abilities and skills that are dynamic. By proactively seeking out challenges to improve themselves, individuals with this type of mindset are far more likely to succeed in uncertain or unpredictable situations, especially in the workplace.

Although change has always been inevitable, it has in many ways been the driver to evolution and growth. Through peaks and troughs in the economy, and many industrial as well as manufacturing revolutions — we have changed for the better, and are creating a better future not only for ourselves but also for those to come. It is with this very preset that we believe that while many are averse to any sort of change (for instance: reasons of stigma, prejudice, preconditioned mentality), the number of people in the world today willing to take the plunge and change/shake things up far exceeds the former.

All in all, given the slight resistance one might witness in today’s marketplace for the multitude of reasons just mentioned, we see an optimistic outlook — one that is willing to implement newer and more creative tools and techniques to the workplace so that we can all do our jobs better.
Advantages & Applications of Game Based Learning

The application of game based learning has been prevalent amongst adults since the days of the Magna Carta (1215 AD). Very commonly from warfare to the arts, these fields have informally found a way to inculcate their best practices amongst children & adults alike through elements which we identify as games today. Albeit compelling to know why, the reason is really a simple one at the end of the day – which is to teach a complicated/complex structure in the most engaging, entertaining and yet the easiest way. The mind often tends to slow down in trying to imbibe the best from complicated practices. Therefore, an easy and a more practical way to remember is by association – by a more modern game based learning. Why? Well we tend to ‘brand by association’ today and we do so to remember key brands so as to garner an eventual loyalty. Very simply “branding by association” is merely the “link method” of memorizing concepts/names/sequences/patterns et all. At its very core the fundamentals are very similar to ‘game based learning’ which teaches us to remember, absorb information by association to a variety of patterns, mechanics and perhaps even a storyline.

As has been briefly mentioned before, the plethora of gaming applications that we can put into the marketplace today is infinite. From the service sectors to industrial and manufacturing spaces, the opportunity for people to learn concepts, rules, regulations, best practices & train on all things relevant to their firms, is tremendous. For instance, regulations pertinent to the Securities & Exchange Commission are extremely tedious and often require alternative careers for one to hone themselves in. However, game based applications might actually help lawyers, asset managers, investment bankers and even consultants learn the very regulations that essentially govern financial markets. With smartphone and tablet penetration increasing across global markets, the opportunity to reach and connect with people is immense. This allows institutions like ours to remain attuned and poised to exploit lucrative opportunities in the market whenever they resent themselves.
Large industrial and manufacturing firms often find themselves in states that require a massive organizational restructuring exercise, that are often lengthy, tedious and generally see a tremendous amount of resistance among employees. These restructuring exercises include a revamp of business models, go-to-market strategies, sales and marketing techniques, industry best practices, facilities & safety training exercises and implementation of management or enterprise wide information systems. In such cases it would be simpler to teach, train or help individuals learn these relevant tools through a simpler stress-free mechanism like game play or game based learning, that could be accessed even when they are idle or commuting in trains or other public transportation systems.

As far as game based learning is concerned, those in the middle management prefer to do some research and receive feedback from relevant market-based sector. Those in the senior management, however, still seem wary of these practices, while the younger lot of senior management is more adept at quickly and creatively embracing gaming technologies for their organizations in a lot more efficient and cost-effective manner. Gaming and game based learning has always been inherent to our evolution, and therefore adopting the same practices to today's market with its ever fluctuating dynamics is becoming not only extremely relevant but also a growing necessity.

Citations

- 'Playing to win at work in the future' 2011, Recruiter, p. 27, Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost, viewed 20 June 2014.