game on
## A Primer on Gamification for Managers

BY DAVID ZINGER

Managers face serious tasks, problems, and challenges. They require a fully engaged workforce, yet Gallup has revealed that engagement levels may be as low as 30 percent around the globe. Gamification is rapidly being integrated into our contemporary ways of working, along with employee engagement and social media. And on many occasions, the three are woven together because games are engaging for players, and this same experience of engagement attached to work is sought-after in the workplace.

But many managers believe that games interfere with work because some disengaged employees launch Candy Crush or Angry Birds on their mobile devices rather than perform the work expected of them. How can managers be expected to embrace gamification with so much already demanding their limited attention and energy? As one manager told me, "We have gone from doing more with less, to doing everything with nothing."

How gaming techniques can help boost employee engagement and productivity.

Progress 75%
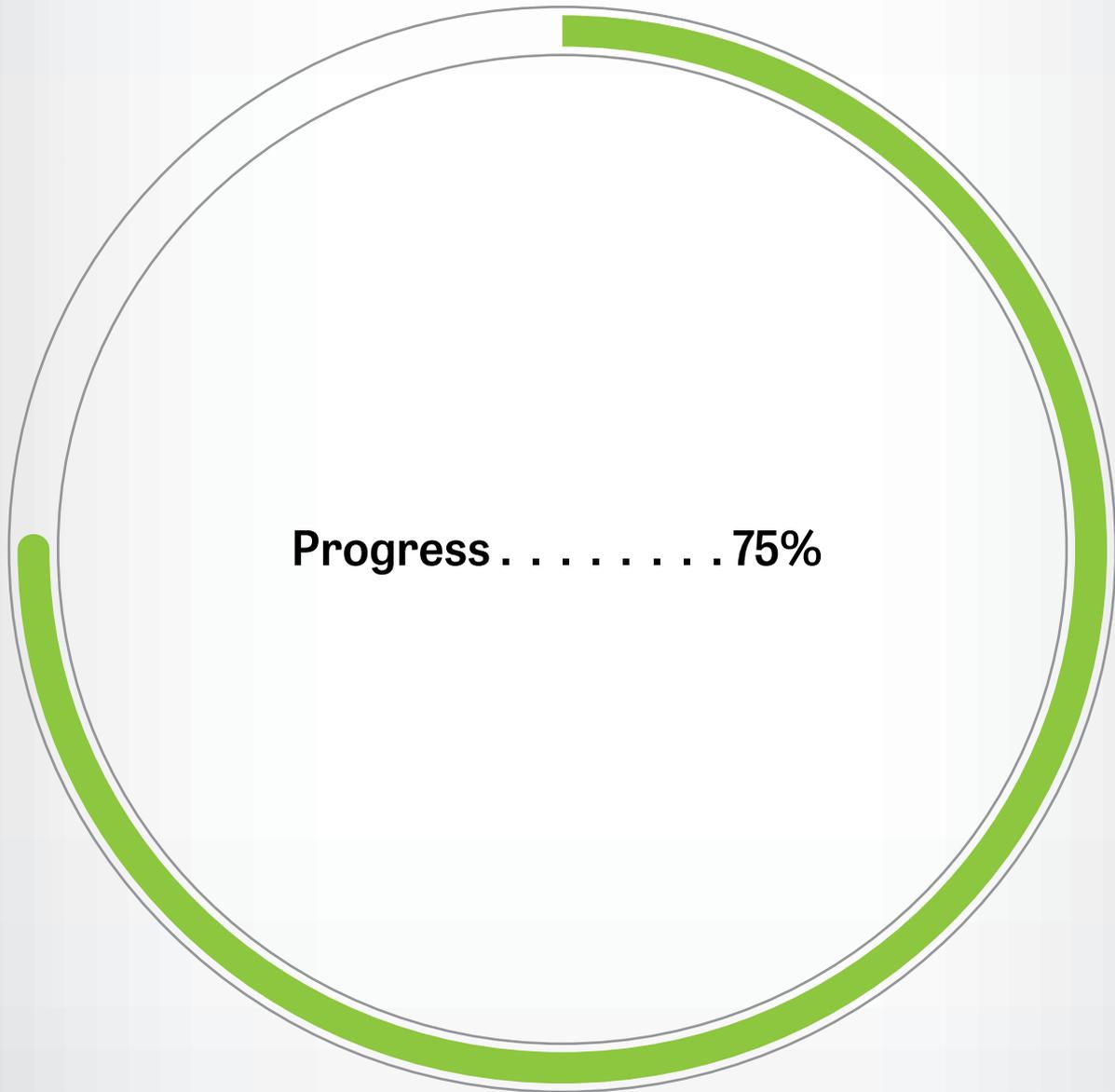
Not a fad

Gamification—the use of game thinking and game mechanics attached to work—is infiltrating workplace practices and cannot be dismissed as superfluous. Gartner predicts that by 2015 the online gaming industry will be worth $112 billion globally and that within this year more than 70 percent of global organizations will have at least one gamified application.

"The cases for using gamification are numerous and growing," writes Prithvi Shergill of HCL Technologies in a January 2014 *Wired* article. "SAP uses games to educate its employees on sustainability; Unilever applies them to training; Hays deploys them to hire recruiters; and the Khan Academy uses it for online education." Shergill refers to a 2013 report by the Aberdeen Group that reveals that organizations with gamification in place improve engagement by 48 percent compared with 28 percent for those that don't.

AS OPPOSED TO ELABORATE GAMES REQUIRING A LARGE AMOUNT OF PROGRAMMING AND GAME DESIGN, USE GAME THINKING AND GAME MECHANICS TO IMPROVE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT.

In the January 2014 issue of *T+D*, Siddhesh Bhobe, CEO of eMee, and I shared the story of how gamification eliminated the drudgery of yearly performance appraisals while supporting strategic objectives, and contributed to meaningful insights into what drives performance. eMee's gamified appraisal system saved one company 28,000 worker-hours while lowering attrition, improving customer ratings, and increasing employee satisfaction.

What makes games engaging?

Employee engagement embraces our connections at work. This includes our connection to the work itself, our connection to our managers and leaders, our connection to one another, and our connection to the organization.

When we fully engage in work we may experience the state of flow popularized by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience.* Flow creates intense and focused concentration, a balance of challenge and skill, a merging of action and awareness, a loss of self-consciousness, a sense of personal control, a distortion of our sense of time, and an experience of an activity as intrinsically rewarding. These factors also are designed into most game platforms to make them engaging for the player or participant.

Jane McGonigal, one of the world's leading experts on gamification, states that, overall, games have four traits: a goal, rules, a feedback system, and voluntary participation. It is helpful to remember these four traits as we proceed because it is easy to get lost in the complexity of gaming and lose sight of the fundamental attributes that spark engagement.

Although gamification in the workplace may appear to be a brand-new concept, that simply isn't true. The platforms have certainly evolved from a piece of chalk to massive multiplayer online games, but many of the principles and practices are timeless.

Charles M. Schwab, the American steel magnate, in the early 1900s wrote about the practice of gamification in *Succeeding With What You Have.* He recounted the following story.

Schwab was concerned about production in one of his steel mills and asked the day foreman for the production number, or "heats" produced, by the day shift. It was six, so Schwab grabbed a piece of chalk and wrote a large number six on the floor. The night shift saw the number and asked about the meaning of it. Upon hearing that Schwab had put down six for the productivity of the day shift, the night shift competed hard and, based on their productivity, they erased the number before morning and put down seven.

The day shift, getting into the "game," completed 10 heats and very quickly this mill,

formerly the poorest producer, was turning out more than any other mill in the plant. With minimal application of a goal, rules, feedback system, and voluntary participation, the "game" greatly enhanced the productivity of this workforce more than a century ago. Who would have thought that Schwab was an early work-gamification designer even if he never used the word?

In *The Progress Principle*, Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer explain how instrumental progress is in motivation and how setbacks create high levels of disengagement for knowledge workers. They discovered that progress may be the single most significant variable influencing knowledge workers' motivation and engagement.

A SIMPLE approach to games

As opposed to elaborate games requiring a large amount of programming and game design, use game thinking and game mechanics to improve employee engagement. Imagine how you might use flow, goals, rules, feedback systems, and voluntary participation to enliven the four enablers of engagement identified by the United Kingdom's Engage for Success movement:

- visible and empowering leadership who offer a strong strategic narrative about the organization
- engaging managers who offer focus, scope, coaching, and stretch to their employees
- employee voice is woven throughout the organization and employees are seen as central to organizational solutions
- organizational integrity is maintained, with the values reflected in day-to-day behaviors with no "say-do" gap.

The SIMPLE acronym offers six characteristics necessary to ensure gamification for engagement is effective: sustainable, immersing, meaningful, playful/pleasurable, lucrative, and engaging.

Gamification needs to be sustainable. There often is an initial engagement with games because of the novelty, but for good value we want games to last. Don't get lured in by the latest gamification application without assessing its longevity and contribution to work.

Games should be immersing but not treated as diversionary pastimes. We don't have a lot of slack time in today's workplace, so be cautious of games as a diversion that lessons performance and productivity. For example, in May 2010 Google placed Pac-Man on its search page. According to calculations by Rescue Time, in just one day Google's search-page Pac-Man game consumed 4.8 million extra hours of time available for work, resulting in more than $120 million in lost global productivity.

Although games can help us relax and rejuvenate, we need gamification that enables and motivates employees while being tied to strategy and outcomes that matter—games that help us get more into work rather than out of work.

Ensure gamification is meaningful. I prefer an authentic game that is woven into the fabric of work and well-being as opposed to a game with all the latest bells and whistles yet lacks authenticity and meaning.

WE NEED GAMIFICATION THAT ENABLES AND MOTIVATES EMPLOYEES WHILE BEING TIED TO STRATEGY AND OUTCOMES THAT MATTER.

Gamification Resources

TED Talks:
- "Gaming Can Make a Better World" by Jane McGonigal
- "7 Ways Games Reward the Brain" by Tom Chatfield
- "Are Games Better Than Life?" by David Perry

Books:
- *Gamification by Design* by Gabe Zichermann
- *Total Engagement: How Games and Virtual Worlds Are Changing the Way People Work and Businesses Compete* by Byron Reeves
- *Enterprise Games: Using Game Mechanics to Build a Better Business* by Michael Hugos

Slide Presentations (on Slideshare):
- "Gamification—Defining, Designing and Using it" by Zac Fitz-Walter
- "Meaningful Play: Getting Gamification Right" by Sebastian Deterding
- "Gamification and the Power of Boosting Engagement" by Steve Sims

Meaning cannot be imposed, but sustained voluntary participation in gamification relies on people finding meaning. Many people will not find meaning in points and badges, but there may be other ways to capitalize on goals, rules, feedback, and voluntary participation to enhance employee engagement.

Games can erase the boundaries between work and play. Play is intrinsically engaging. Steer clear of forced or artificial fun. Some of the best gamification of work is actively co-created with employees as they act as both participants and possible designers of the very games they are playing.

Ideal games prove to be lucrative for an organization as opposed to costly. Gamification can engage employees with results that matter to the organization and can increase profits or reduce costs. Jack Stack demonstrated this in *The Great Game of Business* in which he illustrates how open-book management approached with a gamification element can help employees to think and act like owners.

Good games are engaging. If the gamification platform is not fully engaging, it cannot be expected to increase employee engagement at work.

Getting started

Now that you know why and how gamification can be beneficial to employee engagement, it's time to devise a plan. Take the following five steps.

Reflect on your previous experience with games. Perhaps as a child you immersed yourself in real estate with Monopoly, mapped out your future with Careers, or dabbled in the stock market with Stock Ticker. And as an adult, you might play bridge or golf once a week.

What games have you played? Why did you play them? What lessons did you learn?

Find your employees who are gamers. Talk to them about their game playing and what they have learned that can contribute to the workplace. This can involve a hybrid of transfer of learning as they take what they learned in one domain (gaming) and bring it creatively to a new domain (work).

Try out workplace games or smartphone

gamified fitness apps. That will increase your exposure to what you like and dislike about gaming. What captures and sustains your attention? What contribution does the game make to yourself, your work, or your well-being?

Access a recommended resource. View the list on page 34 for suggestions.

Try it. Don't be afraid to make a small, simple game for yourself or your staff to create more firsthand learning about gamification. Fuse it with customization that meets the needs of the organization and the employees. Remember the elegant simplicity of Schwab's game to increase steel output.

The future of gamification

One hesitates to predict the future in this rapidly evolving approach to work. Perhaps before 2020 gamification proficiency will be a required competency for managers in most organizations. Swipe-cards for your corporeal identity will be twined with an avatar to navigate through the virtual elements of your organization.

With the rise of biological measures in conjunction with smartphones, these new measures may play a role in our engagement. Perhaps pupil dilation and heart rate will become a more reliable moment-to-moment measure of engagement than survey results. Or maybe we will use biofeedback within a game platform to enhance our experience and engagement with work.

It is time for managers to get off of the bench and into the game. You don't have to become a gamification zealot, but a better understanding of gamification may go a long way to helping you be a better manager.

No one has a monopoly on our understanding and application of gamification to employee engagement. You can pass Go, you can collect $200, and you don't have to languish in the Jail of ignorance and trepidation about games at work. Get ready, get set, game on.

■ **David Zinger** is a global independent employee engagement speaker and expert who founded and hosts the 6,300-member Employee Engagement Network; www.davidzinger.com.

T+D

TRAINING+DEVELOPMENT
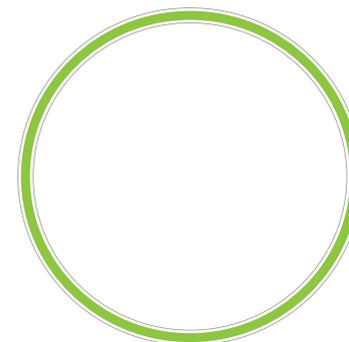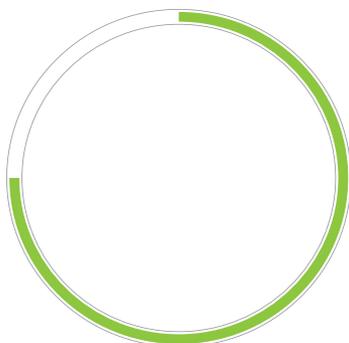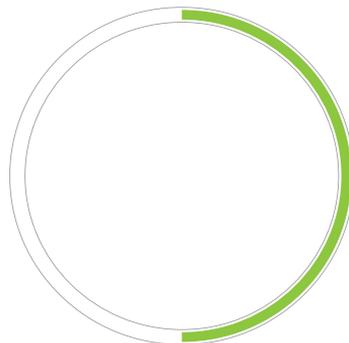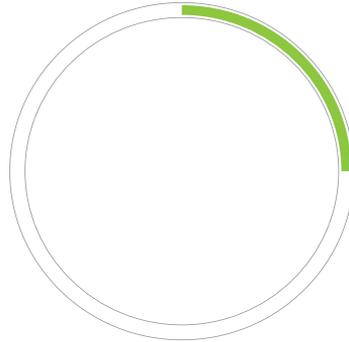
YES!

I would like to subscribe to **T+D** magazine—12 monthly issues that keep me at the forefront of workplace learning and performance.

❏ Individual rate $150 ($216 outside the U.S.)
❏ Institutional rate $300 ($366 outside the U.S.)

TD0833

Order Information

Name: _____

Title: _____ Company: _____

Address: _____ City: _____

State/Province: _____ Zip/Postal Code: _____

Country: _____ Email: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Check One: ❏ $150 (Individual USA)   ❏ $216 (Individual Outside the US)

❏ $300 (Institutional USA)   ❏ $366 (Institutional Outside the US)

❏ VISA   ❏ MasterCard   ❏ Amex   ❏ Discover   ❏ Check (USD)
(Payable to T+D)

Card Number: _____ Expiration Date: _____

Signature: _____

Fax this form to 1.205.995.1588 OR Mail to:

American Society for Training & Development
Subscription Office, P.O. Box 11806
Birmingham, Alabama 35202-1806, USA

Order online at **store.astd.org**
Phone: 1.866.802.7059

Orders processed within three business days.
If you have questions, please contact **td@subscriptionoffice.com**

Prices valid through 12/31/2013. If you should wish to cancel your subscription for any reason, you will receive a refund on all unmailed issues. Your subscription to *T+D* may be a tax deductible business expense. Please allow 6 to 8 weeks to receive your first issue.

T+D is published by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD)

061201.63250

ASTD
WORKPLACE LEARNING & PERFORMANCE