

Drive Engagement and Elevate Performance

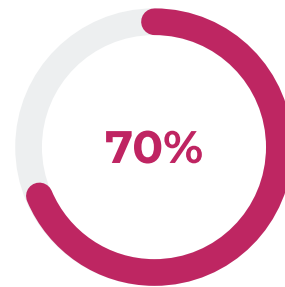
A Learning Games
Design Model

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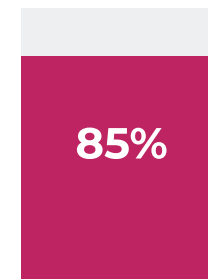
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Introduction

Learning games are not new—they've been around for decades—but over the last fifteen years, learning and development (L&D) professionals have discovered just how effective gamification can be. As one of the most impactful learning tools, games allow learners to collaborate, compete, and have fun while they learn. Through the act of play, learners can explore complex cause and effect relationships in a safe space. A growing number of organizations are choosing games and gamification as learning solutions for their people, and it's easy to see why:



The average knowledge retention rate for game-based learning is **70%** higher than conventional training¹.



85% of employees show more engagement when [gamification solutions](#) are applied in their workplace training programs.



80% of adult learners believe game-based training is more effective than other approaches.

¹ "Increasing Training Efficiency and Learner Retention with Games", Learning Technologies, 2023.

Play is Purposeful

Games are uniquely immersive experiences that differ from other learning methods in four significant ways.

1

Games are active

during play, learners take an active part in the learning process which drives a personal investment in the experience.

2

Games inspire emotions

games have the unique ability to make learners feel excitement, curiosity, and frustration, transforming the act of learning into an emotional experience.

3

Games provide clear objectives

games deliver identifiable goals that learners can use to gauge their success.

4

Games are challenging

when learners struggle with a difficult game it helps to alleviate boredom and inspires greater engagement.



Games are architectures for engagement.”

Constance Steinkuehler, associate professor of digital media at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

1 Games Increase Engagement

Gaming greatly improves engagement by giving learners an active role in learning. Games empower learners to compete, collaborate, explore, strategize, analyze, create, solve problems, and experiment. This freedom triggers intrinsic motivators such as autonomy, mastery, and purpose to keep learners engaged. The use of recognition through badges, points, and other rewards reinforces positive behaviors and achievements, motivating learners to continue improving.

2 Games Improve Retention

People forget the majority of what they learn in a matter of days. Games can help offset this [forgetting curve](#), by driving deeper retention on a chemical level. Games offer challenge, victory, and rewards, all of which release dopamine in our brains. Studies show that this [neurotransmitter plays an important role in the formation of memories](#), which greatly enhances the retention of knowledge.

In a game, learners are constantly receiving information on how well they are performing. This feedback combined with other interactive elements reinforce the learning and improve memory retention. This sustained engagement leads to better learning outcomes because learners are more likely to continue with the content².

² “Actionable Gamification: Beyond Points, Badges, and Leaderboards”—Octalysis Media, 2015

3 Games Offer Solutions for Every Challenge

Games are the most flexible medium for communicating ideas, with design patterns suitable for any type of content. When designing a learning solution, there are [multiple learning modes to draw on](#), which can be deployed in a variety of ways. Adding narrative, competition, and achievement—among other elements—can work to trigger neural engagement, setting learners up for success. By incorporating various gamified elements, we can create engaging and interactive learning environments that address the individual learning needs and interests of the audience³.

4 Games are an Infinite Well of Data

Games are a rich source of data for demonstrating success at all levels of evaluation. When a learner engages with a game, they constantly make decisions, use strategies, and interact with information. This data makes it easy to track the learners' progress over time, observe changes in their behavior, and demonstrate the game's capacity for transformation.

This information can provide valuable insights into employees' learning preferences, enabling designers to build more effective gaming solutions. Studying this data can also help uncover skills and knowledge gaps within the organization. Bridging these gaps in future learning will help employees build new skills and enable the organization to become more efficient.

³. "Play hard, study hard? The influence of gamification on students' study engagement", Frontiers in Psychology, 2022.

5 Games Resonate with Modern Learners

Gaming is a significant cultural touchstone and influence for Gen Z and Millennials. These younger generations are accustomed to learning through games and have come to embrace gaming as a universal language that crosses cultural boundaries, fosters collaboration, and creates community.

By 2025, Millennials will make up 75% of the global workforce



As these generations increase their presence in organizations, games will become an essential component of any [workplace learning strategy](#).

A man with a beard is wearing a VR headset and gesturing with his hands. The image is overlaid with a large orange semi-circle on the left side, which contains the text. In the top right corner, there are navigation icons: a back arrow, a home icon, and a forward arrow. In the bottom right corner, there is a logo for 'GP' with a cluster of dots to its left, followed by the text '| 07'.

Crafting a Unique Gamified Learning Experience

Every game is unique. By leveraging specific mechanics, narratives, and learner interactions, you'll achieve different types of play and levels of engagement. Choosing the right genre and game mechanics for your learning is essential, as each type of play appeals to different learner motivations and preferences. For example, simulations offer detailed and immersive mechanics that mirror real-life processes, while role-playing games (RPGs) provide deep narratives and character development that encourage learners to immerse themselves in expansive worlds and complex storylines.

Below, we will dive into four popular types of play, and unpack how they can be beneficial for shaping a compelling learning experience.



Scenarios

Scenario-based challenges encourage learners to solve dilemmas through critical thinking and problem solving. This approach can be adapted to a learning context by creating scenarios that reflect the learners' job role or workplace. In this fictional environment, learners can explore the consequences of important decisions and fail safely.



Strategy

Strategy games work best in highly complex situations with many different variables and support critical thinking and forward planning. This allows learners to determine how to make the most impact, work through gray areas, and fully explore the consequences of their decisions. They require patience and skill as there are many different ways to succeed and fail at each stage. Strategy games are great for engagement as they encourage learners to come back and have a high level of replayability.



Puzzles

The best puzzle games supply simple mechanics to meet increasingly complex challenges. This encourages further engagement until the problem is solved and the learner can move on to the next stage. Escape rooms offer a perfect opportunity to develop problem-solving skills. Learners must collaborate to solve a series of clues before the time runs out. Escape rooms prioritize strategic thinking and teamwork, making it perfect for team building activities.



Simulation

In a simulation, learners can safely experiment with complex systems that can be dangerous or costly in real life. Simulations are often linked with strategy games and offer detailed mechanics and systems that mimic real-world environments, equipment, or situations. In a simulation, learners can experiment, strategize, and observe the consequences of their decisions within a controlled virtual space.

A Robust Learning Game Design Model

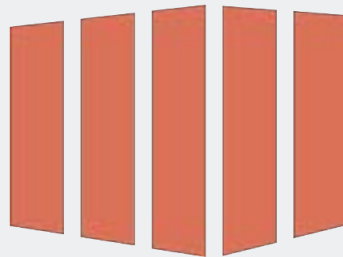
Designing a game without a solid strategy can lead to unnecessary expenses and time delays. Our proven learning game design model focuses on your unique learning goals. This enables us to reduce both development time and costs while delivering a user experience perfectly tailored to your audience and objective.

Here is a brief look at how to bring your gaming concept to life.



Our Learning Game Design Model

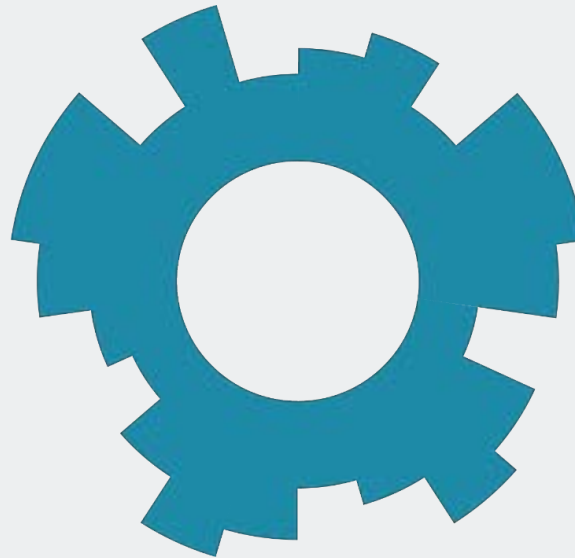
Our design model is a tried and tested method to develop a game concept for any learning objectives, audience, or context.



STEP 1

Form the Design Pillars

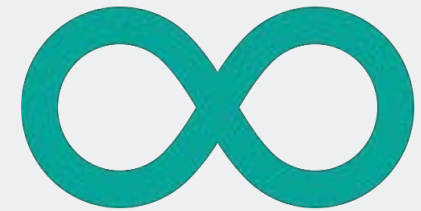
Begin by looking at the big picture and creating a set of core statements, or pillars, which capture the essence and ambition of the project. Every decision made during the detailed design of the game can be traced back to and tested against these principles.



STEP 2

Create the Shape of the Game

Next, define the “shape” of the game. We’ve filtered our approach to a list of six themes containing a total of 22 gameplay principles we can manipulate depending on the type of experience you want learners to have. The “shape” of the game ultimately determines how the story is designed including artwork, mechanics, and challenge in order to maximize the learner’s engagement.



STEP 3

Develop the Core Gameplay

Once the type of experience is determined, you can define the gameplay loop, which determines what the learner does in the game and in what order, as well as how the feedback loop(s) support(s) the intended learning. This gameplay loop is essential in aligning the gameplay mechanics with your learning goals to create the most meaningful experience for your audience.

User testing at every stage

Learning Games in Action



CASE STUDY

A Scenario-Driven Approach

A global leader in wine and spirits wanted to develop a game that would help learners understand and apply their Code of Business Conduct (COBC) to their roles. We created, "Code of Duty," a point-and-click adventure role-playing game with elements of mystery and puzzles. This genre was chosen for its ability to immerse learners in a narrative-driven experience.



These elements helped define the shape of the game:

- ✓ **Narrative Depth:** A strong story that evolves as learners interact with characters and make decisions.
- ✓ **Character Development:** Learners take on roles and develop skills directly tied to understanding and applying the COBC.
- ✓ **Mystery and Puzzle Elements:** Engaging learners with problem-solving tasks to advance the storyline.
- ✓ **Interactivity:** Point-and-click mechanics for intuitive navigation and exploration.
- ✓ **Role Play and Immersion:** Role selectors and character journals enhance immersion and personal investment in the story.
- ✓ **Competitiveness:** Scoring system introduces an element of competition to motivate learners.

The aim was to create an experience where learners felt they were actively participating in and influencing the outcome of the narrative. In the game, learners navigate an island where they interact with characters, solve puzzles, and uncover the mystery of a leaked confidential project.

The gameplay loop was designed as follows:

- ✓ **Exploration:** Learners navigate different locations on the island.
- ✓ **Interaction:** Engage in dialogues and interactions with various characters to gather information.
- ✓ **Problem-Solving:** Solve puzzles and complete tasks to progress the story.
- ✓ **Decision-Making:** Make choices that affect the storyline and adhere to the COBC.
- ✓ **Skill Development:** Develop character skills aligned with the COBC principles through in-game activities.

“Code of Duty” was a highly successful training program that conveyed the necessary COBC information in a way that was engaging, interactive, and memorable. The use of a narrative-driven, gamified approach ensured that learners were not just passive recipients of information but active participants in their learning journey. The game design model provided a structured yet flexible framework, adapting to the client’s specific needs while maintaining a consistent focus on the core learning objectives and the envisioned gameplay experience. This flexibility allowed us to create a sequel for an advanced audience consisting of new characters and stories, while retaining the same game mechanics.

CASE STUDY

Business Simulation Game

“Activate Challenge,” is a business simulation game for a global food service retailer. The game provided a deep and complex management experience, which was designed to help Operations Consultants develop the strategic skills necessary to thrive in their roles.



These elements helped define the shape of the game:

- ✓ **Strategic Decision-Making:** Learners must make critical decisions that impact the success of a fictional restaurant group.
- ✓ **Data Analysis:** Emphasis was placed on analyzing and interpreting data to drive sales growth.
- ✓ **Scenario-Based Learning:** Realistic scenarios mirror challenges faced by Operations Consultants.
- ✓ **Time Management:** Learners have 10 in-game days to achieve their goals, adding a sense of urgency.
- ✓ **Feedback and Tips:** Role selectors and character journals enhance immersion and personal investment in the story.
- ✓ **Short Sessions:** Designed for 5-10-minute sessions to accommodate busy schedules and promote reflection between plays.

The aim was to create an experience where learners felt they were actively participating in and influencing the outcome of the narrative. In the game, learners navigate an island where they interact with characters, solve puzzles, and uncover the mystery of a leaked confidential project.

The game was tailored for mobile play, making it accessible and convenient for all potential learners. The core gameplay involved a series of strategic tasks over 10 in-game days, requiring learners to:

- ✓ **Analyze Data:** Review and interpret data to inform decisions.
- ✓ **Build Strategies:** Formulate strategies to drive sales growth.
- ✓ **Make Decisions:** Implement strategies through decision-making.
- ✓ **Interact with Stakeholders:** Strengthen relationships to support their strategy.
- ✓ **Reflect and Adapt:** Reflect on performance and adapt strategies as needed.

The “Activate Challenge,” game successfully condensed the essence of the Operations Consultant role into a gamified learning experience. The strategic simulation provided a safe, realistic, and challenging environment for learners to test and develop their skills. The game’s design ensured that it was both educational and fun, receiving positive feedback from users for its practical application and engaging gameplay.

CASE STUDY

Onboarding with Puzzles

A global biopharmaceutical business wanted to create a puzzle-based gamified onboarding experience for their Global Business Services (GBS). In GBS, new starters learn about the various functions of GBS through a gamified experience that encourages exploration and critical thinking.



These elements helped define the shape of the game:

- ✓ **Exploration and Discovery:** Learners explore different GBS towers, uncovering symbols and their meanings.
- ✓ **Challenge and Puzzles:** Each tower presents challenging tasks that require logical thinking and analysis to solve.
- ✓ **Non-Linear Navigation:** Use of text, graphics, audio, and animations to engage learners.
- ✓ **Support and Feedback:** Learners can navigate freely between towers, promoting personalized learning paths.

The goal was to familiarize them with the diverse functions, cultures, and operations within GBS, making their transition smoother and more effective. In the game, learners explore eight GBS “towers” to decode mysterious symbols, representing the idea that understanding GBS requires learning its unique “language.”

The gameplay loop involved:

- ✓ **Explore Towers:** Learners start by selecting a tower and exploring its floors.
- ✓ **Interact with Objects:** Each floor has interactive objects providing information in various formats (text, graphics, audio, etc.).
- ✓ **Solve Puzzles:** Learners collect symbols and use contextual clues to decode their meanings.
- ✓ **Complete Tasks:** Each tower has a representative presenting a logic-based task requiring decoded symbols.
- ✓ **Progress Tracking:** The Directory tracks learners’ progress and symbol meanings, helping them complete the game.
- ✓ **Feedback and Support:** After completing a question or task, the learner will receive feedback. Throughout the experience, learners will also uncover clues, receive hints, and access a glossary for unfamiliar terms.

This gamified onboarding successfully integrates our game design model, creating an engaging and challenging experience, yet providing support throughout. Simple interactions make the game easy to interact with, ensuring it suits any kind of learner. The shape of the game, with its emphasis on exploration and discovery, creates a unique and refreshing learning experience—something we guarantee learners have never experienced before.

Harnessing the Power of Learning Games and Gamification

Gaming greatly improves engagement by giving learners an active role in learning. Games empower learners to **compete, collaborate, explore, strategize, analyze, create, solve problems, and experiment**. This freedom triggers intrinsic motivators such as autonomy, mastery, and purpose to keep learners engaged. The use of recognition through badges, points, and other rewards reinforces positive behaviors and achievements, motivating learners to continue improving.

Ready to harness the power of learning games and gamification?
Find out more about our game-based learning solutions.

Learn more 



About GP Strategies

GP Strategies Corporation is one of the world's leading talent transformation providers. By delivering award-winning learning and development solutions, we help organizations transform through their people and achieve meaningful change. GP Strategies has delivered our innovative consulting, learning services, and talent technology solutions to over 6,000 organizations globally.

Our global staff of expert learning specialists, combined with our transformation focus and custom solutions, deliver superior business results. Whether your initiative requires developing the skills of your people, harnessing the power of AI in your learning ecosystem, the implementation and adoption of learning technologies, or refining critical processes, GP Strategies is a transformation partner you can trust.