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ABSTRACT

Trainers in 82 organizations completed a questionnaire that explored the use of training games for instructional and group process purposes. Respondents reported that they had little formal education on the use of games for which they spend an average of 18 percent of their training time. Trainers tended to use games for a variety of instructional and group process purposes. Many games were self-made and were used in several ways: to reinforce previously covered information, teach new concepts, and introduce new ideas. For the most part, trainers felt that competitive games were more motivating to participants than noncompetitive games. Common problems associated with the use of games included finding games that were relevant to one's training objectives, a reluctance on the part of some learners to play games, and the large amount of time it takes to play games. The results of the study indicate a need to offer college courses on the theory and use of instructional games, a need to research their effectiveness as an adult learning strategy, and the opportunity for adult educators to develop instructional games specifically designed for adult learners. (Author/YLB)

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ABSTRACT

Undertaken to explore the use of training games for instructional and group process purposes, a survey questionnaire was completed by trainers in more than 80 organizations around the nation. Respondents reported that they had little formal education on the use of games for which they spend on average 18% of their training time. Trainers tended to use games for a variety of instructional and group process purposes. Many of the games were self-made and were used to reinforce previously covered information, teach new concepts, and introduce new ideas. For the most part, trainers felt that competitive games were more motivating to participants than noncompetitive games. Common problems associated with the use of games included finding games which were relevant to one's training objectives, a reluctance on the part of some learners to play games, and the large amount of time it takes to play games. The results of the study hold several implications for adult educators.

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Games: Why & How Trainers Play Them

Please take a few minutes to check your company's library. Does the title "The Games Trainers Play" show up anywhere? How about such works as "More Games Trainers Play" and "Still More Games Trainers Play?" There is a good chance that some or all of these books are in your organization's library or your own personal collection of training materials. The proliferation of such training resource books is a direct result of an ever expanding use of instructional games and simulations. In fact, a recent survey of trainers in 82 organizations across the nation revealed that on average trainers use 18% of their training time facilitating games and simulations.

Undertaken by the author to explore the use of training games for instructional and group process purposes, the survey questionnaire asked respondents to rank order their reasons for using training games. With respect to instruction, trainers indicated that they most often used games to;

1. Reinforce Previously Covered Information
2. Teach New Concepts
3. Introduce New Ideas
4. Measure What Participants Have Learned During The Training
5. Assess What Trainees Already Know About A Subject Prior To Training.

In terms of group facilitation, trainers most frequently used games to;

1. Generate Ideas
2. Break The Ice
3. Motivate Participants

4. Build Rapport Among Group Members.
5. Build Group Cohesion

These results suggest that trainers are using more and more of their training time in facilitating gaming activities. Furthermore, trainers appear to be expanding their use of games. Not only are they using games to achieve such traditional purposes as "to teach new concepts" and "to reinforce previously covered material," they have begun to use games for some new and novel purposes (e.g., the pre and post testing of participants' knowledge and skills). The use of games for group process purposes also appears to have broadened. In addition to using games "to break the ice" and "to motivate trainees" trainers are also using them to "generate new ideas" and "build rapport among work group members."

As to the source of their games, 58% of the trainers reported that they primarily relied on games they had created themselves whereas 42% of the respondents indicated that they mainly purchased the games they used. It was felt that purchased off-the-shelf games were most effective at introducing new concepts, reinforcing previously presented information, breaking the ice in a new group of trainees, and building cohesion among group members. The two principal advantages trainers perceived in the games they used were their effectiveness as an instructional strategy and their ability to motivate learners (i.e., get trainees involved). Among the disadvantages of games cited by respondents were difficulties finding a game relevant to their specific training objectives, a reluctance on the part of some learners to play games, problems with making connections between some games and the "real world," and the amount of time it takes to play games.

Most respondents to the survey (54%) had learned to facilitate games through on-the-job experience. Only 15% said they had ever attended workshops or any formal

training on game facilitation. The same percent (15 %) said they had been coached by colleagues on how to run a game or simulation. Trainers reported that 62% of their supervisors considered the use of games superior or comparable in training effectiveness compared to traditional instructional strategies. Only 1.22% of the supervisors felt that training games were a "complete waste of time."

Trainers indicated that certain groups of employees liked playing games more than others. In general, women tended to be more enthusiastic about gaming activities than men. Learners under 40 years of age liked to play games more than individuals over 40. Supervisors/managers, sales/marketing personnel, and professionals were perceived as being more active game participants than technicians, support staff, and operations workers. Most trainers (70%) felt that competitive games were more effective at motivating participants to learn than noncompetitive games. Furthermore, trainers acknowledged that 33% of the time they facilitated competitive games they offered tangible rewards to the "winners."

On a subject which game experts believe to be the most important part of gaming (i.e., debriefing) 42% of the respondents said they spend more than 15 minutes each game engaged in debriefing activities. Twenty-three percent (23%) claimed they spend 11 to 15 minutes and 24% said they spend 5 to 10 minutes debriefing players after each game. Eleven percent (11%) indicated that on average they spend less than 5 minutes on debriefing after any given game.

Of the countless games currently available to trainers, respondents seemed to most favor...

- Desert Survival

- Diversity Bingo
- Flying Starship
- Gold Of Desert Kings
- Lost At Sea

Other well-liked games included...

- Arctic Survival
- Arctic Tent Game
- Bafa Bafa
- Barnga
- Blue Monday
- Budging The Gap
- Customers From Hell
- Five Square
- Flying Starship
- Jungle Escape
- Jungle Survival
- Lego Tower Inferno
- Management Flight Simulator
- Promises, Promises
- Subarctic Survival Game
- The Clarifier Game
- The Electronic Maze
- Twelve Angry Men
- White Water Team Building
- Woopee Pump Game

Trainers' favorite game books came as no surprise. They included...

- Games Trainers Play
- More Games Trainers Play
- Still More Games Trainers Play

Other cherished game books were..

- Active Training
- Activities For Trainers: 50 Useful Designs.
- Annuals For Group Facilitators.
- Creative Training Techniques
- Encyclopedia Of Group Activities
- Games For Actors
- Great Games Of Business
- Play Framegames
- The Encyclopedia Of Games For Trainers
- The Instructor's Survival Kit.
- The Power Of Teambuilding.
- The Winning Trainer
- Thiagi Of Nasaga.
- Tinkertoys.

In conclusion, the results of the survey hold several implications for adult educators. For example, with such a large portion of trainers' time being taken up with gaming activities (approximately 18%) along with the high percentage of trainers without

any formal education on game facilitation (approximately 80%) there appears to be a present need to offer college courses on the theory and use of instructional games. Furthermore, the large amounts of time being spent on training games to achieve a wide variety of purposes strongly suggest a need to thoroughly research their effectiveness as an adult learning strategy. Finally, the current popularity of games should afford highly creative adult educators an opportunity to develop instructional games specifically designed for adult learners.