

Introduction

Since I consider my life to be a game, it is only appropriate that I begin this book with a condensed story of my life.

The Story of My Life

Like any other Tamil child, I grew up playing all sorts of folk games (except I was not permitted to play marbles with the street children). My favorite game was Goats and the Tiger. Whenever I chose to handle the goats, all my fifteen goats were soon devoured by the single opposing tiger. Whenever I chose to be the tiger, I was quickly trapped by the opponent's goats. I managed to keep losing several other games also. Things came to a crisis when I was seven years old and my uncle taught me how to play Checkers. Losing this game repeatedly gave me an inferiority complex. In sheer desperation, I suggested changes to the rules of the game. With these rule changes, I was able to win more than half of the time. This is when I realized that it is better to be a game designer than a game player.

Twelve years later, I made the important connection between playing and learning. At that time I was trying to teach physics to a high-school classroom of fifty adolescents who were not too excited about the four-stroke cycle of the internal combustion engine. In desperation, I organized the students into teams and announced a contest to see which team brought a carburetor to the next class.

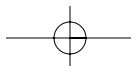
One of the students asked, "Hey teach, what's a carburetor?"

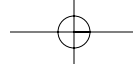
I advised him to check out the physics textbook. All students scrambled through the textbook, reviewed the content, and studied the diagrams with avid interest. Sure enough, three teams brought carburetors to the class next day, one from a repair shop, one from his family's abandoned car, and one from some mysterious source. I designed a game that involved taking the carburetor apart, identifying each part, and putting everything back. Players earned score points for their physical skill and cognitive talents. I kept simplifying my elaborate scoring system, rewarding student-players for higher-order thinking skills. Most players cheated, but everyone spent a lot of time learning lessons in physics.

Fast forward three decades: On March 21, 1998, I began designing one new training game every day (making sure that each day's game was of a different type from the ones I designed during the past three days). Through this exercise, I learned about different types of interactive training activities and started publishing a monthly online newsletter about training games.

I now conduct public and in-house workshops on how to design training games. All my participation in professional conferences involves conducting interactive sessions. I design games and simulations for corporate clients and nonprofit organizations. I have branched off into online games and e-learning courses integrated with games and simulations.

Prediction about the next segment of the life-game: My epitaph says, "He never worked a single day in his life."





The Origin of This Book

Let me rewind the autobiography to the current time. Recently, when my friend Martin Delahoussaye, an editor at Pfeiffer, suggested that we should publish a collection of my favorite games, I tried to discourage him by claiming that I had hundreds of favorites. But Martin persisted and I had the unpleasant job of choosing among my children. With inputs from my more objective friends, I eventually came up with the 100 training games that are included in this book.

What Are Games and Activities?

Technically, this book does not contain 100 games. It contains 100 training activities.

A game has four defining features: conflict, control, closure, and contrivance.

Conflict arises when players have a goal to achieve and various obstacles that prevent them from achieving the goal. Conflict frequently occurs in the form of competition among players or teams. But you can also have cooperative games in which the conflict is represented by previous records, tight time limits, and limited resources.

Control refers to the rules of the game that specify how you take your turn, make your move, and earn score points. Some rules may be explicit (example: *you must not change your symbol from "X" to "O" in the middle of the game*), while others may be implicit (example: *you must never deliberately throw a game*).

Closure refers to a special rule (called the *termination rule*) that specifies when and how the game ends. Termination rules involve time limits, target scores, or elimination. They determine who wins the game.

Contrivance refers to the characteristic of a game that makes people say, "After all, it was only a game." This term refers to the built-in inefficiencies in a game.

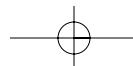
An *activity* is an event in which a person participates. Training activities refer to both physical behaviors and covert mental processes that are related to the achievement of learning objectives. According to this definition, all games are activities. However, different types of training activities are not games. This book contains 100 training activities, some of which are games, while the others are not.

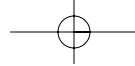
The Book Is Organized into Sections

The training games and activities in this book are organized into eleven convenient sections. Three of the sections are related to the positioning and the function of the activities during a training session:

Openers

The book begins, appropriately, with a section that contains opening activities (sometimes referred to as *icebreakers*). The criterion that I use in designing, selecting, and conducting these opening activities is that the activity should be related to the training objective and content. Like most participants, I hate irrelevant icebreakers that provide "fun" and end up wasting time. The eight activities in the opening section of the book explore topics and help participants achieve goals related to establishing expectations, identifying current levels of participants' experience, exploring potential areas of application, defining the training topics, identifying participants' attitudes toward the topic, encouraging collaboration, getting acquainted with fellow participants, providing a preview of the training session, and encouraging interaction among participants.





Closers

Equally appropriately, the book ends with a section that contains closing activities. The five activities in the final section of the book explore topics and help participants achieve goals related to enhancing participants' self-image, visualizing successful application of the new skills and their potential impact, planning for application, and identifying personal highlights in the session.

Review

A special type of closing activities involves reviewing the training content. These review activities can also be applied before and during the training session to reinforce reading assignments and lecture presentations. The nine activities in this section (which precedes the final *closers* section) deal with goals that are related to demonstrating the mastery of the training content by answering questions.

The other sections in this book are organized according to popular topical areas in corporate training.

Communication

Skills and knowledge associated with communication provide the foundation for all workplace performance. The eleven activities in this section explore topics and help participants achieve goals related to identifying and using different modes of communication, solving communication problems, applying best practices in presentations and storytelling, identifying humor in everyday situations, making personal statements, increasing communication flexibility, increasing meaningfulness, summarizing messages, collaborating spontaneously, taking appropriate risks, and using plain language.

Sales and Marketing

Everyone is a salesperson who sells different things, ranging from merchandise to services to ideas. The six activities in this section explore topics and help participants achieve goals related to creating mission statements, applying effective sales practices, improving relationships among suppliers, employees, and customers, influencing and persuading others, answering hostile questions with honesty, and focusing attention on end-users and customers.

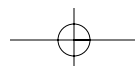
Teamwork

Most corporate work is being increasingly conducted in teams. The fifteen activities in this section explore topics and help participants achieve goals related to recognizing stages in team development, applying teamwork principles, ensuring effective participation by all members of a team, handling changes in the team, clarifying team-member roles and responsibilities, increasing trust, behaving in a socially responsible fashion, mediating and managing conflicts, negotiating effectively, encouraging win-win solutions, increasing the effectiveness of virtual teams, and tapping into the wisdom of crowds.

Leadership

The concept of leadership is undergoing critical changes and become more flexible. The nine activities in this section explore topics and help participants achieve goals related to identifying leadership concepts through a survey, analyzing leadership advice, identifying

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characteristics of effective leaders and facilitators, exploring everyday applications of leadership principles, taking charge when appropriate, specifying performance goals, and delegating roles and responsibilities.

Diversity

The increasing diversity in the corporate workplace is presenting interesting challenges and opportunities. The six activities in this section help participants achieve goals related to identifying and integrating concepts related to diversity, leveraging diversity in work groups, encouraging mindful examination of differences, exploring the causes and consequences of stereotyping, and experiencing the pain of being excluded.

Problem Solving

All jobs involve solving problems and making decisions. The eleven activities in this section help participants achieve goals related to improving brainstorming, generating and integrating ideas, identifying future impact of present decisions, appealing to different stakeholders, planning in a proactive fashion, critically examining assumptions, and avoiding the complacency due to initial success.

Critical Thinking

One of the main goals of this book is to require and reward participants to think critically. The ten activities in this section help participants to achieve goals related to recognizing mindless behaviors, reducing negative self-talk, increasing recall, predicting the impact of business strategies, recognizing critical (but hidden) components of the total system, applying principles of experimental research, making logical inferences, and avoiding overestimation or underestimation.

Corporate Training Topics

This section contains a miscellaneous set of frequently taught topics. They include prioritizing tasks in a to-do list, maximizing the value of time, identifying frequent time wasters and reducing their impact, understanding and applying paradoxical principles related to training, selecting interactive training strategies, experiencing the power of job aids, exploring facts and opinions related to outsourcing, planning for change management, coping with constant change, and preventing workplace violence.

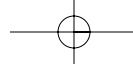
How Each Activity Is Organized

During the last couple of decades, I have been developing, testing, and revising a structured-text format for communicating step-by-step instructions for conducting training games and activities. I have used this approach to effectively explain game rules and instructions to thousands of facilitators, trainers, and players. Each activity in this book is described using this validated format.

Each activity begins with a short introduction to provide background information. Then the description of the activity is organized under the following functional sections:

Purpose

This section identifies the learning outcome in terms of what the participants will be able to do at the end of the activity. Although I am capable of writing precise behaviorally



stated training objectives, I prefer to specify the learning outcome in simple, plain language.

Participants

In this section, I identify the minimum and maximum numbers of participants for the activity and give a range of numbers that produces the best play outcomes. This section also indicates whether (and how) participants are divided into teams. In general, the best size for a group of participants is between twelve and thirty, preferably twenty-four. The best size for a team is between three and seven, preferably five. Most games in this book permit play with a wide range of group sizes.

Time

This section specifies a range of time for conducting the activity. In general, I prefer briefer games and conduct them at a fairly fast pace. The time requirements for the activities in this book range from ninety-nine seconds to a couple of hours.

Supplies

This section lists the supplies and equipment required for conducting the game. Generally, I tend to be a minimalist and use easily available materials. This section also lists handouts that are used during the game. Reproducible masters for these handouts are found at the end of each activity.

Whenever I conduct games, I always use a count-down timer (for implementing time limits) and a whistle (to announce the beginning and the ending of an activity and to get participants' attention in the middle). Inexpensive electronic timers are readily available in kitchen-supply stores. I use a software program with a countdown timer that can be projected on a screen through an LCD projector. After testing several noise-makers for getting participants' attention, I have selected a wooden train whistle because it produces the least jarring and the most pleasant sound.

Preparation

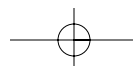
This section gives instructions for preliminary activities before conducting the training activity. Examples of preparation activities include photocopying sufficient copies of handouts, constructing appropriate survey questions, and collecting the latest information from the library.

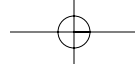
Flow

This key section provides step-by-step instructions for facilitating the activity. In this section, each step is pre-viewed by a short sentence in bold letters. Some steps are followed by examples printed in italics.

Debriefing

Reflection and sharing of insights after a simulation game is a critical component in the learning process. The debriefing section after an activity provides suggestions on how to conduct this type of discussion and what key learning point to emphasize. In some cases, this section includes a set of suggested questions.





Handouts

Whenever appropriate, reproducible masters for handouts, forms, and other documents related to the activity are included immediately after the description of the activity.

Additional Sections

In addition to the preceding list of standard sections, you may see one or more of these additional sections in some activities:

Set-Up

This section contains preparatory instructions for arranging the furniture in the room and for distributing supplies ahead of time.

Caution

This section identifies things that can go wrong and explains how to avoid or handle them.

Adjustments

This section explains how to compress or expand the time requirement and modify the game to suit different group sizes.

Participant Allocation Table

These tables indicate how different numbers of participants are distributed among different teams and how participants should pair up to work with a partner.

The Best Way

I have organized the book and structured each activity to make it easy for you to understand and conduct your training sessions. The best way to master these activities, however, is to walk through each of them with a group of colleagues and friends—and actually conduct them with real participants. At the end of each session, debrief yourself by reflecting on what went right and what can be improved. Feel free to modify the activities to suit your skill, your needs, and your resources.

Remember, a good facilitator plays within the rules of a game, while a great facilitator plays with the rules of the games.

