

The Systems Thinking Playbook: Using Simple Games to Convey Difficult Concepts

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Purpose of this Session

- Demonstrate the value of simple games from the *Systems Thinking Playbook* in teaching the attitudes, skills, and knowledge involved in systems thinking.
- Prepare you to use the *Playbook* games and other initiatives in your own practice.
- Illustrate the introduction, conduct, and debriefing of several games. We will focus primarily on new games from volume III of the *Playbook*.
- Provide time for group discussion of experience using experiential activities to build systems thinking capacity.

The Functions of Games

- Provide entertainment, create motivation, release energy
- Team building - communication and negotiation skills, trust
- Build a shared vocabulary, establish metaphors
- Teach the relation between structure and behavior -make archetypes real
- Establish the relative effectiveness of alternative decisions; test the level of understanding
- Provide scenarios of the future.

Today we have
only these goals

Experiential Learning

There is a world of difference between knowing that something is true, because one has been told it by some authority and knowing that it is true, because one has experienced it (albeit in a simulated situation) for oneself. (Elgood, 1990, p.17)

I have learnt that it is only possible to use something I have read or heard, if that 'something' connects with my own experiencing. (Wylde, 1989, p.115)

Using Games for Learning

- Create a frame for the experience
- Be very precise about the goals and rules
- Carry out the exercise
- Debrief

Creating a Learning Environment

- Create a space and a schedule that leaves each participant in interactive mode.
- Share the underlying principles of the design.
- Respect diverse backgrounds and learning styles. Always be concerned about safety - physical and psychological.
- Have them check in and consider a group contract.
- Provide participation options.

An Effective Game Is:

- Multi person
- Iterative
- Mechanically simple
- Fun
- Challenging -> satisfaction in success
- Not dominated by chance
- Related to important issues
- Transferable
- Open to all participants

A Guide for Game Operators

- Be clear about your pedagogical purposes,
- Show respect for the game and the players,
- Integrate the game with other materials,
- Be familiar enough with the game that you can run it well (Rule of 10)
- Be sure you have adequate personnel to run the game
- Make up a realistic time schedule.
- Prepare all materials; decide which to distribute ahead of time.
- Prepare the space and furniture arrangement.
- Decide on your policy regarding visitors.

Sources of Games

- Scannell, E.E. & J.W. Newstrom, *Games Trainers Play*, (4 in the series), McGraw-Hill, New York, 1983-1991
- Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer Publishing (800-274-4434) or <http://www.pfeiffer.com>
- Crisp Publications (800-442-7477) or <http://www.crisp-pub.com>
- *Simulation & Gaming*, Sage Periodicals Press, Thousand Oaks, CA (805-499-0721)
- Interact (800-359-0961)