

Gamification of Executive Education



Companies have long used competition and reward as powerful motivators to direct buyer behaviour. Just look at the prevalence of customer loyalty points programmes. Gradually, this technique of applying elements of game playing into non-game activities—known as gamification—has crept its way into executive education courses as well.

Why gamify executive education? Because doing so has been found in certain instances to improve problem-solving, collaboration and knowledge retention. In a recent survey of more than 400 corporate learning professionals, nearly one in five respondents reported using gamification as a learning modality in their organisation's training programmes.

Simulation and strategy games for aspiring managers

Business simulation games have become a common tool for helping high potentials and early-career professionals get a first-hand feeling for what it's really like to be the big boss. Here are a few examples of game-based activities you can find in exec-ed classrooms today:

- MIT Sloan's Platform Wars, used in some Sloan classrooms, is one of the many web-based business simulation games openly available for companies and consultants to use in corporate training sessions. Participants take on the role of a company's senior executive manager and have to grapple with strategic issues such as market, product offering, pricing, and competition.

- In Wharton's offline role-play simulation Start Up Game, also available to companies and trainers, each participant takes on a specific role in a new company, such as founder, investor or employee. They apply and refine their communication, negotiation and decision-making skills as each works toward respective goals.
- The FutureDeck is a strategic card game recently developed for exec-ed classrooms by a researcher at RMIT University in Australia. As participants play their hand of cards, they develop products and strategies for an imagined future world.
- Companies are also developing gamified employee training platforms of their own to meet their specific enterprise needs. For instance, SAP Roadwarrior simulates a sales meeting in which sales reps have to "respond to customer questions to earn points and unlock badges".

How will gamification impact exec-ed classrooms of the future?

Is gamification just a trend in training, or can we expect to see games become a standard tool in the executive-education instructor's toolbox? Clark Callahan, Executive Director of Tuck Executive Education at Dartmouth, believes games and simulations, as part of a long-term trend of "learning by doing", are here to stay—because they work.

"I think of gamification as a facet of a broad (and positive) evolution in executive education – toward being more interactive, action-based and practical," says Callahan. He also points out how well gamification meshes with emerging online exec-ed offerings: "We are incorporating short game-like exercises in our digital learning offerings. For example, we are integrating virtual role plays, and short game-like exercises in a digital certificate program for early stage leaders in emerging markets – a collaboration with MIT and

Columbia.”

Let the games begin

To get a taste of gamified executive education, keep an eye out for programme descriptions that mention simulations or specifically reference games. Here are a couple examples from the Executive-Education Navigator to inspire you to get in the game:

- Understanding and Solving Complex Business Problems and Strategic Execution include the so-called “Beer Game”.
- Leading Strategies for Outstanding Performance incorporates various simulations and corporate games.

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About the author:

Laura Montgomery is an independent higher-education consultant. This article was originally published on The Economist, Executive Education Navigator



Irene Becker, Just Coach It | The 3Q Leadership Edge

Helping smart people achieve breakthrough results in uncertain/turbulent times

Email: irene@justcoachit.com (416-671-4726) Skype: beckerirene

Irene's assistant, Drew Jones, drew@justcoachit.com (416-737-5075)