



ProfitAbility
BUSINESS SIMULATIONS

Serious Games

For organisations that want
to win



Trusted by the best.





It's a bit like football...

In September 1994, I was an extremely shy and nervous 7-year-old muddling my way through my first days at a new school.

Lots of things would make me cry: my mum dropping me off for the day, teachers asking me a question I couldn't answer, the horrible food, the boisterous other kids ...

My first clearly positive memory of school was an informal, chaotic game of football which took place at break time towards the end of September. I found myself charging around, immersed in the action, with dozens of other boys, all from different year groups. I didn't have a clue what I was doing at first, but I quickly got the hang of it.

That football game made me feel like I was part of something. I was learning through play, I was forming relationships and I was creating meaningful shared experiences with others.

On the pitch, I had the confidence that I was lacking in the classroom. I did not give into my shyness and nervousness by withdrawing into myself as I had so many times before.

That informal game of football gave the vacuum of breaktime – which I usually dreaded – structure and purpose.

The game itself broke down hierarchies and naturally created bonds. Individually, I rapidly improved in my shooting, tackling and passing by observing others then by trying myself within the dynamic, competitive context.

In the game, I started to gain the confidence that helped me to enjoy all aspects of school life – except the food! That was genuinely revolting and would still make me cry.

It is not too much of a stretch to compare my schoolboy struggle of September 1994 with the task facing many managers in large companies in 2022:

- For shyness and nerves, read stress and disempowerment
- For the sterile classroom and my habit of withdrawing to my own company, read traditional learning methods, most e-learning and disconnection from colleagues
- For the impact the football game had on me, see the agendas of most L&D/HR/Talent leads

"Serious games simply swap the 'football' in my story for any topic – leadership, sustainability, business acumen. They enable participants to rapidly develop skills in that area in a highly relevant, engaging and memorable way."

Graham Hutchings
CEO of ProfitAbility





The real world impact of Serious Games

Game-based learning has become increasingly prevalent in academic and corporate environments over the past 10 years. The market is forecast to more than triple in size between 2022 and 2028 to become a \$50bn industry ([Research and Markets, 2021](#)).

Although the pandemic was certainly good news for this sector – as isolated individuals found meaningful social connections in digital gameplay against others – this growth has primarily been driven by research, which consistently shows game-based learning to be highly effective for learner engagement and impact. For example, studies by authors like [Zafar et al](#) (2022), [Perotta et al](#) (2013) and [Sitzmann](#) (2011) have found that game-based learning, when compared to traditional training methods:

- Improves knowledge retention by up to 90%
- Improves training completion rates by more than 300%
- Improves learner satisfaction by more than 80%



How to measure impact?

Despite these encouraging findings, the perennial challenge faced by most training providers and Learning & Development (L&D) departments is to connect the cause and effect of a particular initiative with a meaningful business impact. This assumes that the initial challenge has been overcome by the training supplier and the buyer aligning effectively on intended outcomes. It can be useful here to apply James Kirkpatrick's ([2016](#)) model of training evaluation:

Level 1 – Reaction:

How did participants like the training?

Level 2 – Learning:

Did the participants learn something new?

Level 3 – Behaviour:

Did the participants' behaviour change after and due to the training?

Level 4 – Results:

What business outcomes did the training bring for the organisation?

Level 1 assessment is easily done with the familiar post-session “happy sheet.” In their own right, enjoyable and engaging learning experiences are becoming increasingly central to a positive employee experience (LinkedIn, [2021](#)). Given the immersive, competitive and social formats, satisfaction and engagement scores for PBS games regularly exceed 90%. Comments like this follow many courses:

"By far the best interactive training I've been involved in."



Armando Garcia
Visible Value participant, 2022

This sort of feedback is more than just good marketing material: L&D buyers like to be reassured that a solution has been enjoyable – especially in an era of unengaged workforces – and are more likely to re-buy as a result. However, what happens as a result of the training is more important.

Impact assessment should then progress to looking at knowledge acquisition, Level 2 in the Kirkpatrick Model. This is best done with a post-training knowledge retention survey. This is much easier for technical topics, where there is often a “right answer,” than it is for leadership or strategy training, where the emphasis falls on shifts in mindset. Though still self-assessed, answers to Level 2 type questions – such as “what have you learnt today?” – are clearly more useful than the Level 1 style of question. For example:

“A wonderful experience – financial terms are no longer 'Greek' to me and I have a better understanding of the impact my operational decisions have on the financial side of my division.”



Renisha Singh
Bespoke course participant, 2021

In determining whether knowledge acquisition leads to behaviour changes (Level 3 in the Kirkpatrick Model), educators rely on wider and longer-term data points. Factors like internal observation, coach/manager feedback, and additional self-assessment are often beyond the control of a training supplier. After each course, PBS asks all participants “As a result of this training, what are you going to do differently in your job?” Their responses then serve as a mini-action plan, which should lead to relevant and trackable changes in behaviour. For example:

“As a result of the experience, I’m going to collaborate more with sales, supply chain and finance. We need a good marketing plan based on collaboration with sales in order to get their customer feedback and information on market conditions – as well as motivating them to sell the right products.”



Marvin Mateo
Visible Value participant, 2022

Whilst learner engagement, knowledge retention and behaviour change might be “Key Performance Indicators” of training impact, the holy grail remains a positive effect on business results, Level 4 in the Kirkpatrick Model. Of course, connecting cause and effect in organisations is rarely simple or linear.

Nevertheless, it is crucially important that the training supplier and buyer are aligned on the real business outcomes the solutions seek to support. The regular critique of HR, L&D and Talent departments is that they are not connected enough to the business (Blind, [2018](#)). Undertaking this alignment for every solution will result in more win-win situations.

PBS’ serious games have a track record of contributing to measurable business outcomes in some of the world’s largest businesses:

- If a drug filing process for Roche is delayed, it can be worth up to \$80million per month in losses. Since working with PBS in 2014 to minimise this problem, Roches has completed all drug filings on time.
- New joiners to Compass Group were taking too long to understand how their day-to-day decisions led to business outcomes. PBS have trained 1000s of Compass employees to attain a common understanding of "value," which has supported a 700% increase in share price since the program started in 2006.
- A North American division of Ford was underperforming. The plant managers participated in a customised PBS commercial acumen experience. 12 months later, the division reported a \$34 million increase in profits.



Seeing the business impact of a solution can take many months. This is especially the case when the goal is people related, such as reducing employee attrition, increasing diversity, or even boosting the promotion rates of participants. In all cases, therefore, it is important that clients track learning impacts related to engagement, knowledge retention and behaviour change.

Almost all L&D buyers and suppliers like to claim that they are relentlessly focused on the learning that impacts organisational outcomes. Even if objectives can be agreed on, the measurement and attribution of actual impacts is extremely challenging in these fast-moving, complex and interconnected environments.

As ever, the unmeasurable "gut feeling" of a buyer about a solution can be just as important. The longevity of PBS' client relationships reflect its ability to operate as one with the client whilst delivering on their ever-evolving needs.

The perspectives of the buyers themselves provide the best evidence of impact:

"We were very impressed with the detail that PBS went into when designing our dealership simulation with us. They were eager to learn about our operating model, so they were well-placed to deliver the training too.

This has achieved our aims of creating the understanding that we sought. Our dealer-facing team are now much better placed to support our dealers."



Jon Nixon
General Manager
2022

"We evaluated several partners to create our sustainable finance game. PBS had the most innovative and relevant approach to understanding and meeting our needs.

Participants' feedback has been incredibly positive. The game experience really engages participants and enables them to understand the complex challenges and interdependencies of sustainable finance in a playful and social way.

We have found PBS to be extremely capable, proactive and innovative partners and we look forward to expanding our relationship with them."



Klaus Woeste
CEO
2022

"We decided to work with PBS to co-create our talent management game because they have a proven record in designing and delivering high impact L&D solutions.

Importantly, we knew that PBS would enter into a partnership with us and be able to design something that fit PepsiCo's culture and unique context.

The game has already resulted in higher learner engagement scores and significantly increased our Managers' confidence and ability to make better talent decisions."



Andrew Collier
L&D Director
2022

Contact us to access other papers
from PBS in this series

What are Serious Games?

The learning theories which drive Serious Games
Serious Games for agile learning agendas

Find out more

Get in touch:

W: profitability.com

E: hello@profitability.com

