



# THE COMMUNIQUE FROM LIFE

June, 2019



EXPERT'S TALK

## Mr. Kartic Vaidyanathan

Play Based Learning Advocate

### HOW GAMES ENABLE LEARNER-CENTRIC, CREATIVITY, PEER LEARNING IN A FUN-FILLED WAY

I thought it will be interesting to recollect and share how my tryst with game-based learning happened. Back in 2010, I had joined a large IT services firm leading a huge offshore team of about 400 members serving a large North American Insurance Company. It was a very reputed company that has been having a very trusted relationship. But in the second half of 2010, the attrition started skyrocketing. [Several Reasons: We will not get into them]. This started

worrying the client. Finally, no matter how technology and process savvy we all are, we finally rely on capable people. Although as an IT services vendor, we were confident of managing to recruit and train new people, customers started getting worried. Their worry was also because some of their senior staff who were experienced in the products and domain were also retiring.

We studied the various different reasons why people were quitting and classified them as "within our control/influence" and "outside our control". In the "within our control/influence" category, we identified a few factors like people getting tired with the same type of work, long working hours during the transition phase and a few others. We took some steps to address this. We provided newer training and learning opportunities for associates.

But beyond this, we also decided to focus on how to make the work more enjoyable. We noticed that we as a team either worked too hard for many days together and took a one-off day for partying/going out. We also used to celebrate the different occasions be it festivals like Pongal, Deepavali, Christmas etc, apart from birthday bashes. How could we bring in fun at work, but yet not allow it to affect the business deliverables?

Around this time, I happened to get invited to a CII Knowledge Management Summit in Bangalore. While there were various different and interesting topics, one of them by a speaker caught my attention. He spoke about how games and gamification could be used at work. Back then, I had no idea of what it meant but even after I returned, the words stayed in my mind. I thought of running it past my team leads to try piloting out some games of the business processes. Two of the teams started on it and came up with some nice innovative stuff. Later we rolled it out to other teams. It was also the time of the annual visit of the client team to our facilities. So, we used that opportunity to ask the teams to prepare as many visual and game-based artefacts as they could imagine. Some sample board games and visual artefacts created in the insurance domain are shown below.



STLC Snake & Ladder



UCFE Trade Game



In the next two weeks, the entire floor looked like a carnival with a variety of creations. It did not look like the regular IT company at all. We decided to call it the "Knowledge Theme Park". Our team, being a creative one, decided to create counters for seeing various different games and entry tickets (dummy ones, but just to give a real world feel).



And, so the customer visit did happen. They were just blown away by what they saw. They thoroughly enjoyed each of the team creations and gave us some raving feedback, some of which is produced below verbatim. A few of them are mentioned below.

This is one of the best demonstrations of knowledge management that I have ever seen. Truly amazing. Great thoughts and even greater execution. I felt like, I stepped into a real theme park with domain stuff and games. This is like Montessori style of teaching and will stay in associates mind forever.

#### - Head of Insurance Quality Assurance Department

Very impressed with the visualization- complex topics structural and made simple. Thrilling with the level of creativity, ownership and teamwork.

#### - SVP Commercial Business Line (Client)

Outstanding creativity to reflect knowledge of the business and applications. Truly shows your commitment to extend learning. Appreciate your handwork & commitment.

#### - SVP Consumer Business Line (Client)

Excellent example of employee engagement. The ability to provide simple context for complex business and systems is extremely powerful and impressive. The "Fun" way that the simple context is provided is very engaging and multiplies the effectiveness of the understanding and team ... Well done!!

#### - VP BI, Sales & Distribution (Client)

Post the customer visit, we realized that this creation must be seen and relished by many others, and even shared across teams. So, we decided to invite a lot more teams over the coming weeks and each one of them were Wowed. A few of them even learnt from our teams in terms of how they created it. All of them were happy and reproduced something similar in their own contexts for their teams too. The icing on the cake was that later that year, we submitted this project for the annual innovation awards. This got selected as the best 5 projects in the company in the finals and not just that, ended up winning the FIRST PRIZE in PROCESS INNOVATION. It was a big testimony to team work and the best part was CREATIVITY, COLLABORATION, CRITICAL THINKING and FUN were the core ingredients of this.

### Instructional Learning Vs Interactive Learning

For a moment let us all go back in history to the start of our formal education. The KGs were filled with a lot of stories, poems, drawings, activities that involved all parts of our brain. It was a lot of fun with bare minimal information. The formal learning was supplemented with so much variety that appealed to our emotions that kids really enjoy them. And then, what happens? As we head to middle school and then high school, the fun, emotions and interactivity decrease very rapidly and its just volumes of information to be digested. Complexity and boredom set in. Teachers barely have time to complete the portions and hence adopt to lecture or instructional learning. This results in boredom, disengagement in the learning process. To top it, asking too many questions is discouraged

Things continue to worsen as we head to colleges and then in corporate world. People become way too serious and the joy of learning is completely taken away. This results in a lot more disengagement in the learning process. People kind of become mechanized and accept things. The few exceptional performers who either are naturally talented or inclined towards a particular subject end up relishing whereas others just coast on.





Another dimension that has a damaging effect on learning is the assessment process. Be it formal tests/exams in educational institutions or performance ratings in-corporates, it encourages a behaviour of display of individual competency. Social/Peer Learning which is very vital completely dies since people want to outperform each other.

### **Bringing joy back to learning**

Real Learning happens through multiple interactions and is not a one-way transmission from the instructor to the learner. It encourages questioning, reflecting, group discussion and peer learning. The best teacher is one who realizes they are mere facilitators of the learning process. They realize that they don't know it all but believe that by effective facilitation, the knowledge bits residing in learners is unearthed and can be aggregated and presented in a neat way.

It also recognizes that humans have different emotions and have varying learning preferences. VARK (Visual, Auditory, Read-Write, Kinaesthetic) is a popular framework to classify learners.

The learning environment should also encourage persistence. This is all the more crucial in topics that are often perceived dry/monotonous or difficult.

Learning, Knowledge acquisition, retention and sharing should also be fun and be a form of self-expression (i.e. related to some art/hobby/creative expression of the learner)

### **Now how do games & play help address these?**

Well, first and foremost, games by nature provide the fail-safe mode of learning. Games are often competitive with a single player wins but this is not of the type that we have in real life. The competition does not in any form affect the self-esteem or self-confidence of a player

Losing a game is perfectly acceptable and does not discourage a player from trying again and again, thereby encouraging persistence. The fun elements that are there always keep the players motivated, be it in the form of points, luck, intra-player interactivity dynamics.

Games provide a social learning environment where players interact a lot and observe moves of other players and learn from them. Games can also be designed at varying learner levels providing opportunities for even a person with beginner level capabilities to succeed and graduate to subsequent levels.

Games and play are a form of self-expression and creativity. Creating games help exercise the portions of the brain beyond just logical and analytical thinking. Although games do have rules, it is perfectly normal that they get adapted/modified to needs.

All of these make game-based learning a very effective way to teach and learn.

### **Are there scientific or research backed evidence to game-based learning?**

Yes, indeed. There is a lot of scientific evidence. While research continues to go on, it is worthwhile looking into some already published work. Provided below are some of them

Rich Delgado(2015) in this article talks about how organizations are using gamification as a technique to help their workers overcome the fear of failing

<https://www.smartdatacollective.com/eliminate-fear-failure-gamification/>

Kevin Shane (2012) in another article talks about how games in education help children learn by failing. [ <http://www.gamification.co/2012/11/19/games-in-education-could-help-students-learn-by-failing/> ]

In the dissertation titled "A Model of Flow and Play in Game-based Learning: The Impact of Game Characteristics, Player Traits, and Player States" by Davin Pavlas in 2010, the relationship between flow state, serious games and learning was examined.

In their paper, "Promoting Social and Emotional Learning With Games: Its fun and we learn things"[2009] Sue Roffey and Robyn Hromek discuss games and the correlation with development of Social and Emotional Skills

[http://www.academia.edu/2404072/Promoting\\_Social\\_and\\_Emotional\\_Learning\\_With\\_Games\\_Its\\_Fun\\_and\\_We\\_Learn\\_Things](http://www.academia.edu/2404072/Promoting_Social_and_Emotional_Learning_With_Games_Its_Fun_and_We_Learn_Things)





### Lessons and Reflections For all of us:

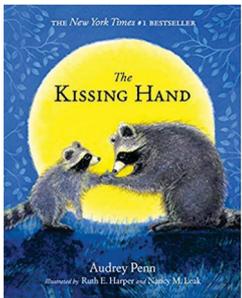
- There were NO RULES right from the beginning. Team mates were given broad guidelines and were allowed to use their CREATIVITY. The only thing was whatever they did (games/artefacts) should have a business relevance.
- People came together and the hobbies, interests, self-expression of various different forms (art work, writing) were brought to the fore. Typical structured work does not allow this.
- As one of the guest visitors had remarked – This was a kind of Montessori form of education – just that it happened in a corporate (which is very rare) but also something to reflect on.
- The exhibits were done by the people, for the people. Managers played an advisory role at best and it was the people at the junior/ground level who did everything from design to execution, and also finally explained the clients. This gave the clients the confidence that the ground level person has knowledge in the domain and also has the creativity in them.
- Finally, it was a classic case that help us recollect the famous quote.

**Tell me and I forget teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.**

*-Benjamin Franklin*

### Question for the readers:

What is your take on free play that enables creativity in the business context as highlighted in the article? Have you had any similar experiences in the corporate world? Would love to hear from you all.



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**Audrey Penn** is an American children's writer. She is best known for writing The Kissing Hand, a picture book featuring anthropomorphic raccoons.

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MARGARET XAVIER  
**LIVE**  
ON FACEBOOK

**TOPIC: Educate Don't School**

Margaret Xavier has over 2 decades of experience in the field of all aspects of Education. She's experienced in blending passion for Learning and Development with technology to create effective programs for educators and educational institutions globally. She is an expert in creating programs

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