

Training Games

for the
Learning
Organization

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48

Experiential
Learning
Activities

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Training Games for the Learning Organization

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Preface

If you have been looking for fun, innovative, concrete ways to make your company a learning organization, you have picked up the right resource. *Training Games for the Learning Organization* contains 50 exciting games to help employees put aside old ways of thinking, to become more open with one another, and to better grasp how their company really operates. By playing games like Five Star Goals, players will discover new ways of fashioning a company vision that co-workers get excited about, and learn how to better work together to achieve shared goals. As a collection, the games hold powerful ideas successfully used by companies that have decided to take charge of their own destinies.

James J. Kirk
Lynne D. Kirk

Training Games for the Learning Organization

CONTENTS

Preface xi

1. Introduction: The learning organization and the games in this book

The Learning Organization	3
The “Five Disciplines”	3
Freedom to Learn Games	3
Meta Learning Games	4
Remodeling Games	4
Group Portraits Games	5
Hybrid Learning Games	5
Parts and Engine Games	6
Using This Book	6

2. Freedom to Learn: Games for developing a favorable learning environment

Climatize	11
Forecasting Follies	15
Learning Your C,C,Cs	19
Motivation Bingo	24
Please Pass the Risketts	45
Risk Style Decoder	52
RunOn Rewards	57
Smart Acts	59

3. Meta Learning: Games for learning how to learn

Action Figures	66
Do It Myself	70
Domain	75
Power Learner Play-Offs	83
Remember This	90
Study Buddies	94
Teaching Machine	100
Top This	106

4. Remodeling: Games for exposing and changing the ways we see the world

Bewitching Behaviors	118
Diversity Screen	128
Gap Gapers Feud	144
Great Siberian Freeze Off	147
Mind Readers' Rally	152
Senge's Tiles	158
Shifter	161
Walking the Talk	168
Who in OD Am I	175

5. Group Portraits: Games for involving everyone in the organization's vision

Bench Pinching	189
Dimesworth Buy In	193
Five-Star Goals	197
Hands Up	200
Mystery Missions	204
Resister Blisters	207
Vision Telling	212
Vision Testing 1,2,3	216

6. Hybrid Learning: Games that facilitate group learning

Blind Reflections	223
Body Listening	226

Domino Communico	230
Jigsaw	239
Question My Question	242
Sound Off	245
Team Leading Roles	249
Unmentionables	254
7. Parts and Engines: Games for focusing on the intra-workings of an organization's parts	
Archetyping	259
Fishbone Puzzle	263
Human Flow Chart	268
Life Cycle	277
Mind or Soul	287
Six Box Puzzle	294
Storming Norming	297

The Gaming Table

Concept	Game	Page
Acceptable and Unacceptable Risks	Please Pass the Risketts	45
Active Listening and Reflecting	Blind Reflections	223
Archetype Diagrams	Archotyping	259
Becoming a Learning Organization	Walking the Talk	168
Benchmarking	Bench Pinching	189
Body Language	Body Listening	226
Cause-and-Effect Diagrams	Fishbone Puzzle	263
Communicating a Vision	Vision Telling	212
Communications Climate	Domino Communico	230
Company Life Cycles	Life Cycle	277
Cooperative Learning	Jigsaw	239
Delta Analysis	Gap Gapers Feud	144
Developmental Stages of Teams	Storming-Norming	297
Effective Goals	Five-Star Goals	197
Exemplary Learning Organizations	Smart Acts	59
Experiential Learning	Action Figures	66
Favorable Learning Climate	Climatize	11
Five Disciplines	Senge's Tiles	158
Flow Charting	Human Flow Chart	268
Forbidden Discussion Topics	Unmentionables	254
Force Field Analysis	Forecasting Follies	15
Gap Analysis	Mind Reader's Rally	152
Instructional Models	Teaching Machine	100
Learning Hierarchy	Top This	106
Learning Leaders' Qualities	Power Learner Play-Offs	83
Learning Styles	Study Buddies	94
Levels of Risks	Risk Style Decoder	52

Concept	Game	Page
Male-Female Communications	Sound Off	245
Mission Statements	Mystery Missions	204
Motivating Employees	Motivation Bingo	24
Motivation to Learn	Learning Your C,C,Cs	19
Organization Analysis	Six Box Puzzle	294
Organization Development Experts and Models	Who In OD Am I	175
Paradigm Shifts	Shifter	161
Personal Visions	Hands Up	200
Mnemonic Memory Devices	Remember This	90
Questioning	Question My Question	242
Resistance to Change	Resister Blisters	207
Rewarding Personal Mastery	RunOn Rewards	57
Self-Directed Learning	Do It Myself	70
Stereotyping	Diversity Screen	128
Structural and Human Subsystems	Mind or Soul	287
Superstitions and Cultural Mindsets	Bewitching Behaviors	118
Support for Visions	Vision Testing 1,2,3	216
Team Leading Roles	Team Leading Roles	249
Three Learning Domains	Domain	75
Unfreezing and Refreezing	Great Siberian Freeze Off	147
Vision Selling	Dimesworth Buy In	193

Chapter One

Introduction

The term “learning organization” was first used in the 1980s by Richard Pascal. However, it was the publication of Peter Senge’s best seller, *The Fifth Discipline*, in 1990 that popularized the phrase. Because this commonly used expression means different things to different people, the authors offer their definition of the term before proceeding any further. As used in this book, *learning organization* refers to “any company having a climate that speeds up individual and group learning.”

While thousands of individuals have purchased *The Fifth Discipline*, many buyers confess that they have never actually read the book in its entirety. Many of those who have read the book admit to having difficulties in understanding and applying its ideas. It is in this context that *Training Games for the Learning Organization* is offered as a resource to assist trainers, group facilitators, organization developers, adult educators, team leaders, supervisors, and managers in comprehending and putting to use a variety of learning organization concepts. It is recommended that *Training Games for the Learning Organization* be used in conjunction with *The Fifth Discipline* and other works on the learning organization. For this reason, most of the games in this volume are grouped according to Senge’s “five disciplines,” which include systems thinking (comprehending the big picture), personal mastery (doing the job well), mental models (critically questioning old assumptions), shared vision (arriving at a collective purpose), and team learning (working together collaboratively). The other games in the book focus on learning how to be a better learner.

Freedom to Learn Games

It is the basic human need to learn, grow, and achieve personal mastery that fuels and provides substance to all learning organizations. Thus, no organization can truly be a learning organization without its individual members being free to learn. Employees must be taught, encouraged, and granted permission to become creative architects of their own work lives. Furthermore, they must not allow themselves to think of personal mastery as some elevated state of super human perfection. Rather, employees must permit themselves to think of personal mastery as a process of continuous growth and development.

The games in Chapter Two are designed to foster personal mastery within work groups and throughout an organization. In the game *Climatize* players learn which conditions encourage employees to engage in personal mastery. The games *Please Pass the Risketts* and *Risk Style Decoder* address limits to individual mastery. The game *Please Pass the Risketts* focuses on limits imposed by the employing organizations, whereas *Risk Style Decoder* explores limits individuals sometimes place on themselves. *Learning Your C, C, C’s* and *Motivation Bingo* address the matter of motivating workers to engage in personal mastery. *Learning Your C, C, C’s* considers reasons why people might voluntarily engage in new learning, and *Motivation Bingo* identifies five factors that make employees want to work harder. The games *Forcecasting Follies* and *RunOn Rewards* concern themselves with keeping

personal mastery alive. *Forcecasting Follies* looks at forces that are capable of supporting or hindering personal mastery. *RunOn Rewards* stimulates thinking on potential ways of rewarding or encouraging workers to engage in personal mastery. Finally, *Smart Acts* provides participants examples of actual companies who are well on their way to establishing supportive learning climates.

Meta Learning Games

Not everyone agrees on what constitutes learning. Many workers consider learning simply “the act of acquiring new information.” For some, learning means “picking up new behaviors and skills.” Others look on learning as “gaining new insights through personal experiences.” The games in Chapter Three provide players the opportunity to engage in meta learning -- to look at learning from a variety of perspectives and to learn and practice ways of increasing their own learning capabilities.

The game *Teaching Machine* offers players four definitions of learning and how each might be applied in work situations. *Top This* and *Domain* focus on various levels and categories of learning. Knowledge gained here can help employees develop their higher-level thinking capabilities and select learning strategies appropriate to the type of learning they wish to undertake. *Study Buddies* exposes players to different learning styles. Participants learn about their personal learning preferences as well as those of coworkers. *Action Figures* and *Do It Myself* explore two approaches to learning highly favored by many employees, experiential learning and self-directed learning. *Remember This* helps players improve their memory. The game *Power Learners Play-Offs* highlights the personality traits of effective “learner leaders.” Learner leaders have been successfully used in some organizations to facilitate rapid, widespread strategic learning.

Remodeling Games

Mental models are images, assumptions, and beliefs that everyone carries around in their heads. They include strongly held beliefs about self, family members, employing organizations, and the world at large which exist in the subconscious. These mental maps help people simplify, organize, and make sense of their complex world. A distinguishing characteristic of learning organizations is that they operate from a strong factual base. Learning organizations are willing to continuously discard or revise obsolete and sometimes treasured beliefs and embrace new and unfamiliar mental models.

The games in Chapter Four are intended to serve two primary purposes: (1) to help participants gain a better understanding of the concept of mental models and (2) to get employees actively involved in testing and revising of their own mental models. The game *Bewitching Behaviors* highlights some of the rather bizarre mental models at work in American society, whereas *Gap Gapers Feud* assesses the credibility players give

selected corporate models. The game *Mind Readers' Rally* underscores common discrepancies between spoken and unspoken models. *Diversity Screen* demonstrates how mental models in the form of stereotypes affect employees' behaviors. *Great Siberian Freeze-Off* illustrates the process of unfreezing, restructuring, and refreezing mental models. Two games in Chapter Four, *Who in OD Am I* and *Senge's Tiles*, test players' knowledge of organization models. *Walking the Talk* provides participants with a seven-step model for becoming a learning organization.

Group Portraits Games

In the learning organization all workers, regardless of their position, are invited and provided with opportunities to create, test, communicate, and promote the company's mission. Employees are asked to play a strategic part in setting the goals and quality standards that will turn their company's shared vision into reality. Workers are also encouraged and given assistance in setting and aligning their own visions and goals with those of the organization. In this way learning organizations have a definite advantage over their competitors: They are able to benefit from the collective intelligence, creative know-how, and commitment of all employees.

The games in Chapter Five are aimed at helping players understand and actively participate in such strategic organization processes as collective visioning, goal setting, and the establishment of performance standards. The game *Mystery Missions* takes players to the starting point of most strategic planning -- creation of a company mission statement. Participants learn about their company's mission and compare it to those of other well-known organizations. Three games in the chapter help trainees address critical aspects of the visioning process: *Vision Telling* gives players practice in communicating a vision to others, *Vision Testing 1,2,3* shows the importance of testing potential vision statements, and *Dimesworth Buy In* draws attention to the crucial issue of selling a new vision to key stakeholders. *Bench Pinching* and *Five Star Goals* introduce players to benchmarking and criteria for effective goals. They can be used in setting goals and quality standards that when accomplished will turn the company vision into reality. *Resister Blisters* addresses the issue of resistance to change. It can be used by group members to better understand and overcome the inevitable resistance some of their planned changes will face both within and outside the team. The game *Hands Up* involves players in reflecting on their own individual missions or personal visions.

Hybrid Learning Games

People can learn and think of more things collectively than they can individually. This is due to the fact that people learn from one another. Furthermore, the ideas expressed by one person can set in motion a sweeping avalanche of ideas. In a matter of seconds a work group is can become a thinking machine, producing a set of answers to heretofore

unsolvable company problems or coming up with revolutionary new product ideas.

The games in Chapter Six are directed at promoting group learning through a favorable communication environment, enhanced individual communication skills, cooperative learning practices, and effective learning facilitation. Two games, *Domino Communico* and *Unmentionables*, help groups establish supportive communication climates in which open and candid discussions take place. In games like *Blind Reflections*, *Body Listening*, *Question My Question*, and *Sound Off* players have the opportunity to improve individual communication skills. *Blind Reflections* increases listening and reflecting skills, *Body Listening* advances body language skills, *Question My Question* enhances questioning skills, and *Sound Off* improves communications between the sexes. *Jigsaw* engages players in a cooperative learning exercise. The game *Team Leading Roles* introduces players to three group learning facilitation roles and their appropriate uses.

Parts and Engine Games

An engine has many parts and for any engine to function at its full potential all parts must be operational. The same principle holds for organizations. Organizations are made up of interrelated elements that function as a whole (i.e., a system). Changes in one element or part of the system can cause changes in other elements. In fact, a change in one critical part (e.g., customer service) can set off a chain reaction of continuous cause-and-effect events that ripple and loop throughout an entire company. Depending upon the effect of the change, overall company performance can be either greatly enhanced or diminished.

Studying the relatedness of elements in an organization is sometimes referred to as “systems thinking.” It is a practice carried on in all learning organizations. The games in Chapter Seven arm participants with selected concepts and tools they can use in their own systems thinking. *Six-Box Puzzle* and *Mind or Soul* introduce players to the concept of systems and subsystems. *Life Cycle* and *Storming Norming* help players gain an understanding of predictable changes that occur in systems and work teams over time. The three games, *Archetyping*, *Fishbone Puzzle*, and *Human Flow Chart* supply three graphic tools that can be used to chart and analyze cause-and-effect relationships among system elements.

Using This Book

How *Training Games for the Learning Organization* is used will greatly depend upon the user’s knowledge of the learning organization and the learning objectives that she or he hopes to achieve. Regardless of how a reader chooses to use the book, it is highly recommended that all first-time users familiarize themselves with the content and structure of the volume prior to playing any of the games. This can easily be accomplished by scanning the Table Of Contents and the Gaming Table. In browsing the

Table of Contents, the reader will see that all fifty games are grouped according to six topics (freedom to learn, meta learning, remodeling, group portraits, hybrid learning, and parts and engines). Upon examining the Gaming Table, the reader will discover an alphabetical listing of the 48 games according to their content. A more comprehensive understanding of the contents and layout of the book can be gained by carefully reading through the preceding sections of this chapter. In addition to providing a brief definition of a learning organization, the sections describe the central themes of each chapter and their related games.

Once a reader is familiar with the content and structure of the book, she or he is ready to look at the games themselves. Each game is set up in the following standard format.

The Name of the Game

TOPIC	An overview of the theme or concept the game teaches.
LEARNING OBJECTIVE	What players should be able to do after playing the game.
NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	The number of players the game will accommodate. Most games can be revised by the user to accommodate more or fewer participants.
PLAYING TIME	An approximate amount of time needed to play the game.
REQUIRED MATERIALS	List of all materials needed to play the game.
TO PLAY	Specific step-by-steps instructions to follow when playing the game. A debriefing section gives activities for processing what was learned during the game.
VARIATION	Suggestions for changing how the game is played. Many of the suggestions provide ideas for customizing the content of a game for a particular company or audience.
FOR MORE INFORMATION	Source(s) where facilitators can secure additional information on the topic of the game.