



## **Building Successful Organizations and Teams** Using Board Games as Strategic Learning Tools

Organizations today face many strategic, financial, operational, “people,” and communication issues. Some individuals work in highly-matrixed organizations; others need to build a common corporate culture from disparate sites and functions. A frequent roadblock is under investing in the design and delivery of key internal messages.

What is the value of a strategy and tool to mitigate the harmful effects of miscommunication? What about a tool to share policies, roles, and systems - a tool to put everyone on the same “page” that captures and involves employees to hold their interest? What if this tool helped you build common understanding and commitment for your team or company? Custom board games designed to focus on your business and processes are the ideal solution.

One example is The PHARM Game®. Originally developed to educate both novice and experienced employees about the pharmaceutical business and its challenges, it has been customized by many organizations – for example to teach content or processes specific to their company or to raise awareness of the drug development process for groups in facilities and finance. The board itself is a colorful picture of the drug development process, and game elements mimic typical business challenges. Customization for your organization can facilitate learning about company roles, culture, values, strategies, or other goals.

In general, board games help to:

- engage all participants in the topic.
- create a relaxed, enjoyable team environment.
- illustrate and reinforce your content.
- apply adult education and instructional design principles.

- make complex information understandable and interesting.

It is often said that training should be interactive, but what does that really mean? For some it means using group discussions or case studies. For others, it may mean low-ropes course initiatives to promote diversity and teamwork. Either way the goal is clear - to engage participants and to promote learning.

An often underused engagement strategy is *Play for Performance*® business-based board games that address a specific topic, such as effective partnering, procurement, good manufacturing practices, financial management, drug development, or sales skills. Board games that teach and let participants experience complex business processes and procedures provide a level of impact not found in most learning tools. The head and the heart are fully engaged in well-designed games. A board game provides the structure, content, and foundation for learning and frees facilitators to observe participants and reinforce learning.

### **Business board games are successful when:**

- They are used to support learning goals and content.

Even the most fun, interactive board game will fail if it is played without clear objectives. The advantage of using a board game is to reinforce and teach new content and to provide a vehicle for team problem solving and decision making. Games provide non-traditional methods to present information and reduce a trainer’s design time. Trainers can then concentrate on the transfer of knowledge during the game and hold discussions to verify retention and application.

- They are played in teams to promote collaboration and diversity.

In most family board games participants play individually and are engaged primarily during their turn. Well-designed business board games engage participants at all times. In addition, teamwork is reinforced when members consult with each other before providing answers. Such games mimic the real world where many decisions and projects are completed in collaborative environments. Trainers can have the greatest impact on a group by observing how participants handle communication, collaboration, problem solving and decision making. Wrap-up discussions are excellent places to explore teamwork dynamics.

- They are designed to be played within a short time frame.

Business board games must have a purpose beyond fun. They are meant to teach in a relatively short time and are interactive, unlike a traditional seminar. However they must be flexible to allow for multiple uses and designed so that when content changes the game can also easily change. This ensures an accurate, long-lived, up-to-date tool. The time constraints also provide the end-of-game discussion with opportunities for participants to relate to deadlines and time impact work assignments.

### **Creating Business-Based Board Games**

To be effective in creating business board games, allocate enough time and resources for development. Following these steps will help you create a successful board game that meets your goals.

*Partner with a company experienced in creating business-based board games.*

All though it may be exciting to create a game on your own, nothing is more important than experience. Find a company who already has proven development processes and procedures. Locating and running test groups and obtaining the pilot testing data can be overwhelming. Companies with experience will

help you structure this part of the process with little hassle.

*Ensure your game is playable, flexible, and usable.*

Business-based board games do not have to be dull as they teach regulations or industry concepts. They do need to be:

- Playable, meaning that anyone from the company can learn how to play within minutes.
- Flexible, so that they can be used in a variety of ways.
- Useful, so they provide the information and experiences to meet your goals.

*Ensure your audience and top management support the concept of learning by doing.*

Success in learning isn't always about the method. It's also about the culture of an organization. Before venturing into creating a game, test the idea with current participants and upper management. The more support and energy you have around using business-based games before creating them, the more successful you will have.

Board games serve a serious purpose. Research at a northeastern university showed The PHARM Game to be the most effective tool from a learning and retention perspective and the students' most preferred way of learning. As more senior managers learn about the impact of board games and overcome fears about using games in business settings, we will see more and more games being developed and used.

The Learning Key has spent 18 years designing interactive learning tools and board games for technical and non-technical groups. Call us at 800-465-7005 for help with your next strategic learning tool so that you too will continue the journey of *Play for Performance*®.