

# Entertainment, Engagement and Education in e-learning

A White Paper

By

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## 1. An exchange of ideas

Let's begin with a conversation between e-learning specialist Jack and training manager Janet:

Jack: I've got this wonderful idea Janet; let's do the code of conduct training as a story based solution.

Janet: Story based? Hmm...Sounds interesting. How will you do it?

Jack (excited): Well, you see, the entire course will be in the form of short, 3 minute stories. And nothing else! What do you think?

Janet: Sounds good. And after the stories are over, we can give them the tutorial on the Code of Conduct?

Jack: Um...well...I was thinking that there will be no tutorial.

Janet (shocked): No tutorial? But how will the learners learn?

Jack (tentative): Through the stories?

Janet (exasperated): But they are stories Jack!! How will the learners learn from them?

Jack: Didn't you learn your first lessons from Aesop's?

And the debate goes on. Straightforward content delivery is the best, say some. But, we're talking to adult learners – they don't want to learn in the first place, say some others. And then there are those who will say – they are adults, busy, eager to get on with it – give them just what they need, bullet points, visuals instead of text, make it as short as possible.

Whew!

Andragogy, Constructivist, Component Display, Minimalist, Multiple Intelligence, Criterion Reference...there are more theories about learning than there are learning programs perhaps. But, finally, what is the problem we're addressing? There's X content, and Y learners, with Z skill or knowledge in the domain and they need to be able to do ABC tasks at the end of the course. What's the best way to teach them?

Our question is simple – can entertainment help Y Learners learn X content and do ABC tasks better than a straightforward, short and crisp training program?

## 2. Definitions of entertainment, engagement and learning/education

Before we proceed any further, let's define entertainment (I can almost hear the purist mind screaming "but what is entertainment?")

Entertainment is defined as 1: the act of entertaining 2a: amusement or diversion provided especially by performers 2b: something diverting or engaging as (i) a public performance (ii) a usually light comic or adventure novel.

From this definition and from the general idea most people have of entertainment, there seem to be a few characteristic features of entertainment:

- It's a diversion
- It's amusing or fun
- It's usually of a light nature
- It's engaging

Engagement, on the other hand, is defined as emotional involvement or commitment. "Learner engagement can be defined as the learners' act of investing effort and commitment to meaningful activities in anticipation of learning outcomes." [*Courtesy: Nellie Deutsch in Engaging the Blended Classroom Learner on WiZiQ education.online.*]

From these definitions, it can be assumed that entertainment can lead to engagement, in general terms. However, how does entertainment in the context of e-learning lead to learner engagement with the program, if at all? To get an understanding of this, a survey was delivered to a small sample group of people spearheading learning development across the world and e-learning developers. Some of the findings of the survey are presented below to illustrate the points being made in this paper.

## 3. Who needs entertainment?

To begin with, respondents were asked whether entertainment in e-learning is important. Here is the question and the results:

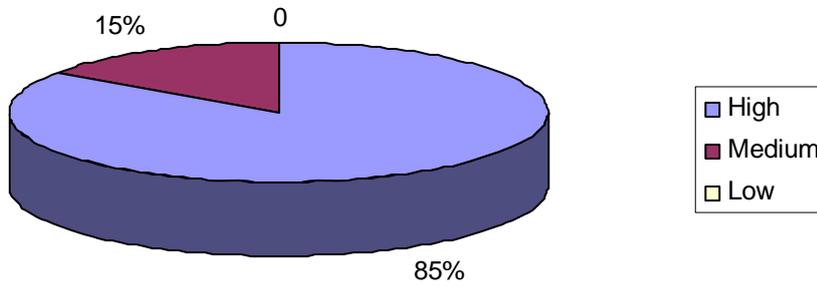
*How important do you think it is to entertain learners while they learn, provided the learning is business-critical and not just for compliance? (Here entertainment refers to instructional strategies like interactive scenarios, stories, games, etc.,*

*which arouse the learner's general interest beyond the immediate interest in the subject matter. Simply, the learners have fun while they learn. These solutions could come with or without rich multimedia elements.)*

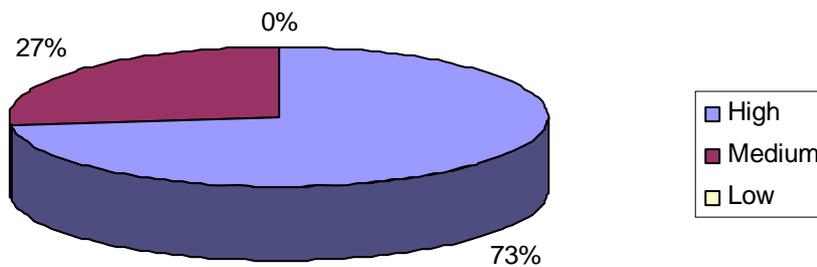


So who needs to be entertained – do learners of all age need it? The survey threw up the following results:

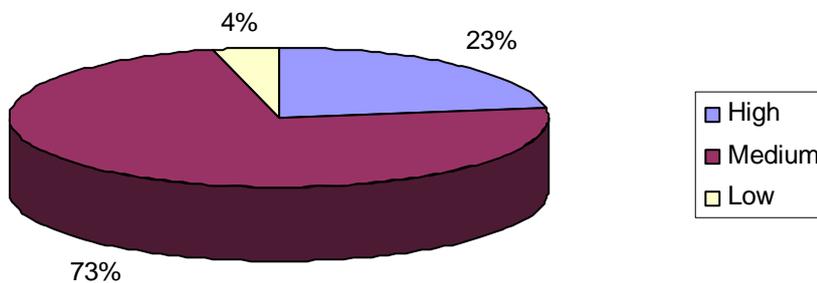
**Preference of entertainment in learning - age group (8-18 yrs)**

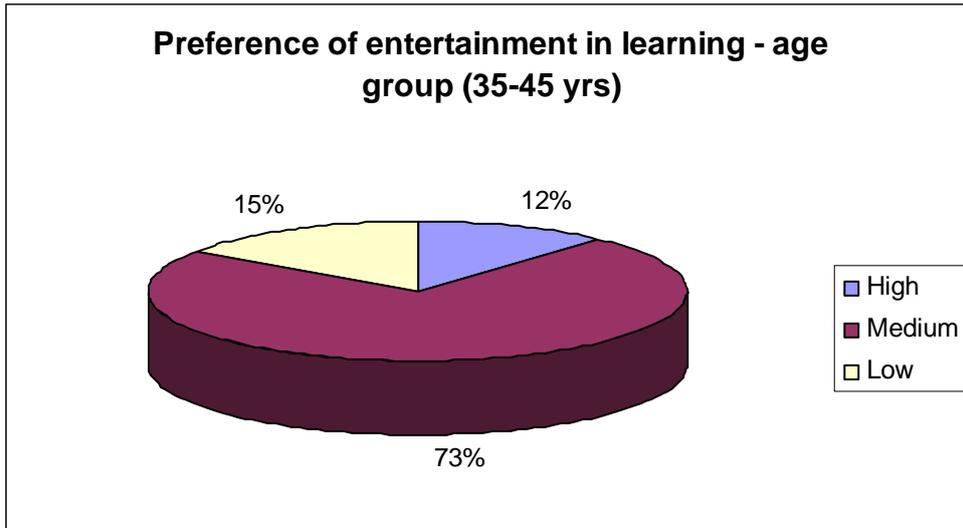


**Preference of entertainment in learning - age group (18-25 yrs)**



**Preference of entertainment in learning - age group (25-35 yrs)**





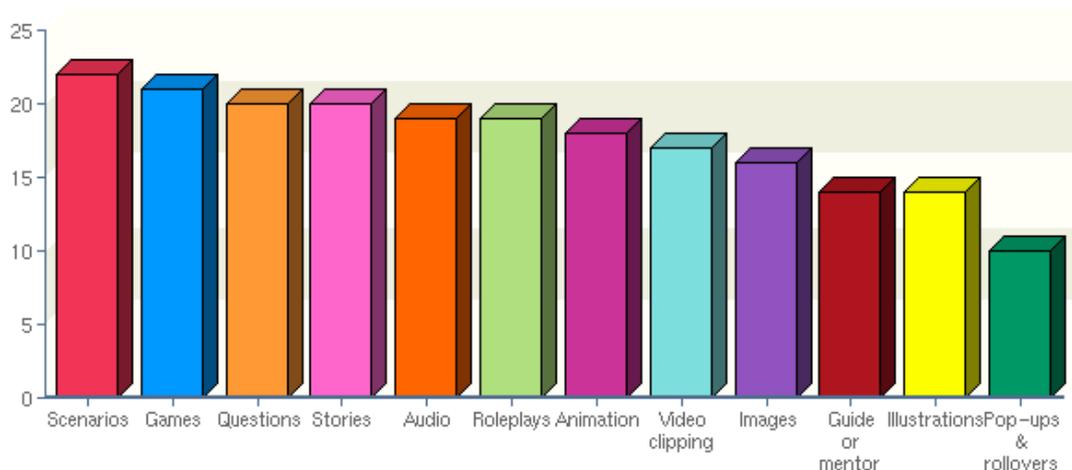
The findings here seem to indicate that people of all age groups need either high or medium entertainment while learning. When we look at these figures in conjunction with other research data on those who play games – entertainment being at the core of game design – we find further validation. It was found that it's not only young people who play games; there are a considerable number of middle aged gamers. In fact, the average game player is 35 years old and has been playing games for 13 years. [Courtesy: Entertainment Software Association's [2008 Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry](#)]

While the kind of content also plays a significant role in deciding the amount of entertainment in a program or the choice of instructional solution (game, stories, etc), the general assumption that only young people need to be entertained while they are being trained may be a fallacy.

#### **4. What leads to engagement in an e-learning program?**

Now that we have established from various sources that entertainment is an essential element for most age groups, what is it that provides entertainment within an e-learning program? Here are some pointers from the survey:

*What are methods used in e-learning programs that engage learners?*



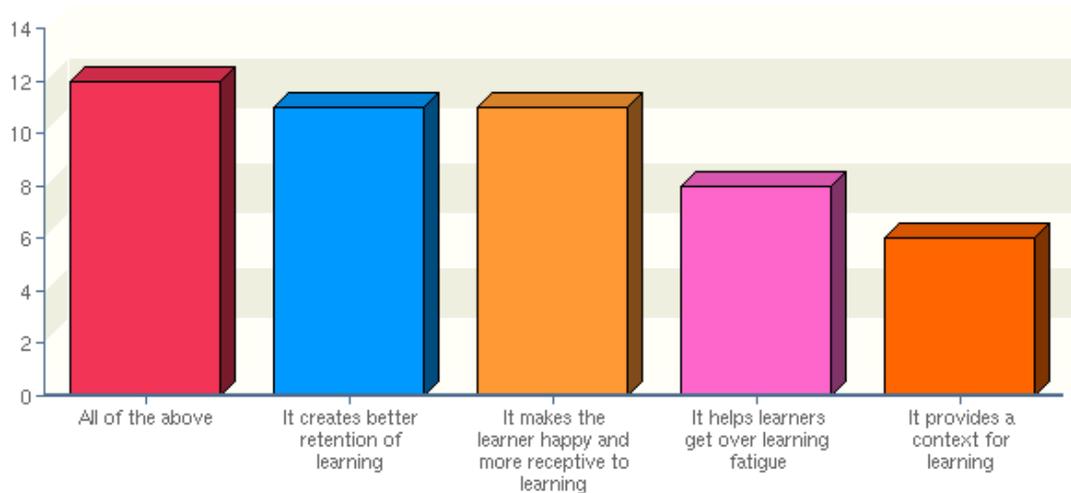
The top 'engagers' almost all have elements of 'fun' or 'entertainment' in them – 96% voted for scenarios, 91% for games, 87% for stories (convinced Janet?). One of the conclusions then is that all entertainers engage though all engagers may not be entertaining.

The interesting aspect is the focus on 'mental' interactivity as opposed to mere physical interactivity (see the dismal results for pop-ups). This is significant in relation to the kind of entertainment suitable for e-learning – that which is intrinsic, e.g. challenge in a game as opposed to mere trappings like clicking of buttons.

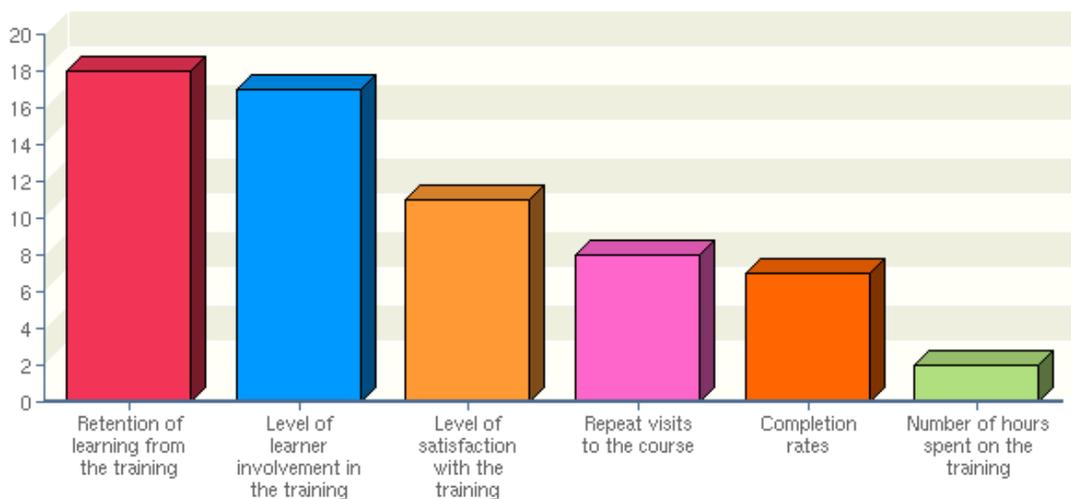
## 5. Connection between entertainment and engagement

To delve further into the relationship between entertainment and engagement in e-learning, the following questions were asked.

*Why do you think entertainment is required in training?*



*How do you define learner engagement in the context of e-learning?*



If one compares the responses on why entertainment is needed and how engagement is determined, there's a lot of common ground. Engagement is determined primarily through the level of retention, level of learner involvement and level of satisfaction with the training. All of these also seem to be identified as the reasons why entertainment is required in an e-learning program. The relationship between entertainment and engagement seems to emerge strongly, and the strongest common factor is the 'retention of learning'.

## 6. Instructional Design and 'Fun'

After reviewing the survey responses on entertainment, engagement and their relationship, let's go back to the basics and see what learning theories have to say in this regard.

### **6.1 Traditional theories, modern learning approaches**

The traditional learning theories have evolved from psychological theories like Cognitivism, Behaviouralism and Constructivism. However, increasingly many training designers feel that the traditional learning theories, which evolved in the 'industrial age', are not suitable for what is now called the 'information age'. Traditional learning is linear – it delivers training in the set format of tutorial, knowledge checks and final assessment and it is most often delivered from the point of view of the trainer and not the learner. Content is broken up into logical modules and topics and then delivered following a linear structure.

Traditional ID models are becoming obsolete, or are being modified, as more people are bending towards entertainment based learning or games/serious games. Here, the structure is not linear – content is not arranged in modules or topics. Instead there are themes, or specific missions that lead the learner towards the achievement of a learning objective.

In fact, there are two divergent thoughts on the role of instructional designers (read traditional ones) in game design. While some feel that instructional designers are needed in game design to connect games to learning outcomes, there are some like Mark Prensky, who think that including instructional designers leads to boring, educational games without the fun element!

Modern approaches – serious games, story based learning, simulations – where Constructivism actually comes into its own, look at learning in a non-linear manner. These approaches address the learner need to feel 'connected' to the learning and entertainment provides one of these connections. For a generation that has grown up on video games and interactive methods of classroom training, the 'What's in it for me' (WITFM) factor may often include fun, challenge and excitement along with the more traditional WITFM of achieving desired learning outcomes.

### **6.2 The GATE theory**

William R. Watson, the proponent of the GATE (Games for Activating Thematic Engagement) Theory, has this to say about 'fun' or entertainment in learning:

"While the value of developing understanding in the information age has been stressed, it is perhaps not as important as the value of making learning fun and engaging learners with the topic to be learned...Furthermore, current learners

who Beck and Wade (2004) identify as the Gamer Generation, and who Prensky (2006) calls Digital Natives naturally crave engagement and become quickly frustrated when they do not receive it. Perhaps the primary tenet of this theory of instruction is that learning must be engaging. If learners become engaged with a topic and seek to truly understand it, they are more likely to recognize the value of the knowledge and how it relates to their own lives. Fun is also a by-product of the choice that will be given the learner in shaping his or her own learning goals, as well as the interaction of the learner with his or her peers and instructor, who will challenge, provide feedback, and aid in developing the learner's understanding."

Other researchers also emphasise the fun element of games. While one calls the enjoyment from video games "hard fun", others talk about "fun killers" in games which should be avoided: micromanagement, stagnation, insurmountable obstacles, arbitrary events, and predictable paths (like the tutorial-practice-assessment structure of traditional models).

### **6.3 Counterpoint**

However, the traditional learning theories, which still form the basis of most of today's e-learning solutions, do not rule out the use of entertainment as a method of 'hooking' the learner. Entertainment could well be the first event of Gagne's Nine Instructional Events – Gain Attention. The context Knowles speaks about in his Andragogy theory could be delivered well through a story or the narrative in a game. Constructivist principles of learner creating his own schema of learning and pattern recognition are anyway at the core of modern approaches like stories and games.

Thus, it may be deduced, that while the traditional theories do not structurally support entertainment based training approaches, in terms of content delivery methods, they are not in direct opposition to the use of entertainment or 'fun' in e-learning. Modern approaches that use entertainment heavily as a method of engaging learners are either creating new ID models or modifying the traditional ones to achieve greater learner involvement.

## **7. Entertainment and "Creativity"**

Now that we've looked at the structural differences between traditional and modern training theories, let's move on to the actual instructional approaches. One would suppose that entertaining approaches would need to adopt more creative instructional solutions. However, there is a need to dwell on some basic questions about creativity in this context. What does creativity mean in e-learning? Sophisticated instructional design, simulations and virtual games – I hear my learned colleagues saying.

What if the audience is not too familiar with computers and e-learning to start with? What does creativity mean in that context? Creativity means, well, very simply 'things moving' or 'things happening'. Here, we are talking about creativity at a screen level and not at a macro design level. In many cases, it ends up in being creative for the sake of being creative, without any specific learning outcome attached to it. It's the old advertising malaise, where one felt compelled to show the efforts of one's right brain and ended up with some bizarre examples of creativity, which may have amused some people but definitely did not end up selling products! Even in a so called 'creative' field like advertising, the learning has been that focussed creativity leads to greater recall.

If the analogy can be extended to e-learning, we can say that creativity or entertainment which doesn't contribute to achieving a learning objective may well be a waste of time and effort – most learners, especially adults, are discerning enough and know when you are taking them for a ride.

## **8. Entertainment – the cerebral element**

The survey responses showed us that most of the entertainers and engagers in e-learning are of a cerebral nature i.e. they go beyond the mere physical interactivity of clicking buttons to view information to actually inviting the learner to use their cerebral powers to discover learning.

According to the Constructivist theory, the aim of education is to help the learner think for themselves, instead of accepting what's being offered to them. Bruner's instructional theory focuses on discovery learning, defining discovery as learners gaining knowledge for themselves using their own minds. Through discovery, learners find their own patterns or similarities and dissimilarities and draw their own learning conclusions. Appropriate instructional strategies should therefore be used to optimize effectiveness, with Bruner recommending discovery through problem solving of culturally appropriate and realistic problems.

In her paper *Engaging by Design: How Engagement Strategies in popular Computer and Video Games Can Inform Instructional Design*, Michele D. Dickey says:

"Although the primary purpose of games is entertainment, the underlying design employs a variety of strategies and techniques intended to engage learners in "gameplay". Strategies of design that lead to engagement may differ depending on the game genre, but may include role playing, narrative arcs, challenges and interactive choices within the game, as well as interaction with other players. Depending on the genre and individual game, players may be required to

analyze, synthesize, and use critical thinking skills in order to play and execute moves.”

Here we are talking of the potential of achieving higher level learning objectives on Bloom’s hierarchy (analysis, synthesis, etc); the connection between higher entertainment and higher level of learning or education seems to emerge strongly.

According to Bruner, humans organize their experience and memory of events primarily in the form of narratives. Proponents of narrative based training have the following points in favour of this approach:

- Narrative transports the learner to a different time and place
- It makes the learner a participant in the narrative through experience and not a passive observer – in other words, they are engaged
- The learner can draw their own conclusions and interpretations
- Engagement and immersion allow learners in narrative based training to co-construct the narrative, explore the narrative, and reflect on the narrative
- It helps meet learning goals through discovery

The GATE theory too attaches importance to the narrative, where it allows the learner to participate in unfolding the narrative by playing the game. It also lays emphasis on the experience the learner gains out of this participation.

Barbara Sealund of *Sealund and Associates*, a company developing Serious Games, says in her blog:

“The logical path is this: Games are great fun. Fun is one aspect of a pleasurable experience. The pleasure centers in the brain stimulate us to want more of the pleasure they register. The brain’s pleasure centers connect closely with the brain’s emotion centers. We remember longer and more clearly experiences linked with emotions. So the “rush” of gaming... becomes a component of instructional design for Serious Games.”

*[Courtesy: Barbara Sealund, [www.sealund.com](http://www.sealund.com)]*

From the above, it is quite clear that stimulating the mind is an essential element in entertainment based training. Entertainment in e-learning is most effective when it is not merely delivered through external trappings – illustrations, animations, etc. – but through intrinsic elements like challenge and immersive narrative. It should stimulate the learners’ minds, and make what Hercule Poirot calls “the little grey cells” work a bit to achieve the learning objectives.

## 9. Why do training managers fear entertainment?

“Can someone actually say no to entertainment?” asked a shocked colleague. You guessed it; he designs game-based learning!

With due respect for his sentiments, it must be said that most detractors of entertainment feel that it is removed from reality, the real issues at a work place. Followers of traditional learning feel that learners will not be able to decipher the metaphor embedded in a game; they are uncomfortable with games since they are created in a different environment, since games are fantasy. Here again, one is tempted to refer back to an advertising analogy. David Ogilvy, one of the pioneers of advertising, famously said “The consumer is not a moron; she’s your wife”.

Taking the analogy to e-learning, we may say “learners are not that dumb”, or as technologically challenged as most people would like to believe. Nor are they incapable of making the connection between a ‘setting’ and the real content. Take a game to teach the names of places in a geography course and the response is – but how can you teach geography without showing maps? Yes, the maps do have their use when you are teaching ‘location’, but when you are teaching or testing just the ‘names’, difficult to remember and recall, a game is probably a more effective option.

### **9.1 The offline-online contrast**

The objection discussed above is a purist one. Some of the most successful training stories – both online and offline – have involved uprooting from context, shocking the learner out of his comfortable area of expectation and surprising him. For instance, executives are pulled out of the air conditioned comfort of their offices to participate in rock climbing to learn the values of teamwork and leadership. A game of chess is used to teach strategies to corporate executives. A professor of Robotics uses comic books to teach his students! Management programs are replete with anecdotes and stories far removed from the corporate world to teach various aspects important in business. Each of these approaches use entertainment liberally as a tool to get learner engagement and teach them concepts and principles almost without their being aware of the formal process of learning. And each of these uses the ‘removed from reality’ formula to create impact.

While creative instructional strategies are quite common and popular in an offline scenario, when it comes to e-learning, the picture is still quite different. Though games are catching on and it’s fashionable nowadays to talk about using serious gaming techniques in one’s training curriculum, when it comes to an entire program based on games, in most cases, the inevitable request to include

a tutorial before the game is just lurking round the corner! The fear is that the learning will get lost since there is no tutorial 'explaining' the content.

## **9.2 Understanding the offline-online difference**

The difference in approaches towards entertainment in offline and online scenarios perhaps lies in the online format itself. E-learning, training managers must be thinking, is already a one-way format, where the learner has no chance to interact with the trainer. Therefore, they try to pack in all the explanations that in an offline format would probably come out of discussions with the trainer, into the e-learning module itself.

It is important for them to understand that due to the impersonal nature of e-learning, it is even more important to engage and motivate the learner, either through entertainment or any other form of engagement like application-based training. The concern over delivering all the necessary content is valid; however, the nature of the medium also demands precision and the need to avoid information overload. It is unrealistic to think of including all the material that can be learnt in extended face-to-face training sessions, with a facilitator clarifying doubts at each level and often going into areas that are strictly not within the purview of *that* training. There is a need to take a hard look at the content that is absolutely critical for learning and design the course in such a way that only that content is covered in the main tutorial and the additional information is provided to the learner as links or job aids, to be accessed as and when required.

Also, for adult learners, it works when you make them work to find the information they need – the challenge in a serious game works on this motivation. It's not necessary to *give* the learner everything; let him *find* it on his own and internalise the learning in the process. This, of course, is the classic Constructivist premise. The other point of view here is of course that what the learner needs desperately, he will find anyway. For instance, is it that important to train the learner how to fill up leave forms? Won't he find out anyway when he needs to apply for leave?

In an offline scenario, learners are interacting with the trainer and other trainees – so even if the content itself is not entertaining, the learning may still be complete. However, in the online format, if the program fails to engage and motivate the learner, it will be a case of clicking the next button as fast as possible and somehow getting through the assessment. And entertainment, as we have discussed, is one of the ways of making sure that the learner is drawn into the program and is motivated to complete it.

## **9.3 Designing with focus on the medium**

While taking a training into the e-learning mode, it's not enough to just digitise the offline material and hope that the learning will be as complete and save money along the way too. One needs to design with the medium in mind. People

read and assimilate much less when they are reading on the computer screen – learner fatigue is a key issue affecting learning effectiveness. The content screening – what’s required and what’s not – is of prime importance to achieve learning effectiveness. Once the structure has been created with these things in mind, there is no harm in actually using creative approaches used in offline training to engage and motivate the learners – to ensure that the ‘removed from reality’ nature of e-learning does not reduce learner motivation.

## 10. How do entertainment-based programs score over others?

We’ve seen what training developers have said in the survey results reported before; here’s some user and client feedback on entertainment based courses that have been rolled out.

Our analysis of some user feedback on courses developed by TATA Interactive provides some interesting insights. Sample this – a story based course, which was categorised as non-mandatory training, saw 90% of employees taking it. The same content, delivered in a more traditional WBT format, had earlier failed to draw the learners’ interest. No wonder, the course also won a major e-learning award for the client and TATA Interactive.

Similarly, a story based module slipped in between eight other traditional but visually rich modules on health and safety for a major logistics player in the UK garnered the following response:

*“People who’ve seen this module have been generally very impressed. From our perspective the story flows well and the learning objectives are hit almost by stealth.”*

A game based course teaching facts had learners saying the following:

*"This is an excellent way of learning the product. I am most impressed, and will insist all my staff complete it!"*

*"This is a great and fun way to educate us, travel agents, in order for us to sell efficiently..."*

*"I like this training module very much because it uses a lot of ideas that drive the motivation of the learner to continue the learning as if I am going for treasure hunting. Very interactive! Merci!"*

*"The best workshop I have done, it was fun and entertaining! Not a lot of reading and boring!"*

*"This training tool has proven to be more effective than simply reading plain paper materials... It makes it easier to recall the topics learned. Congratulations."*

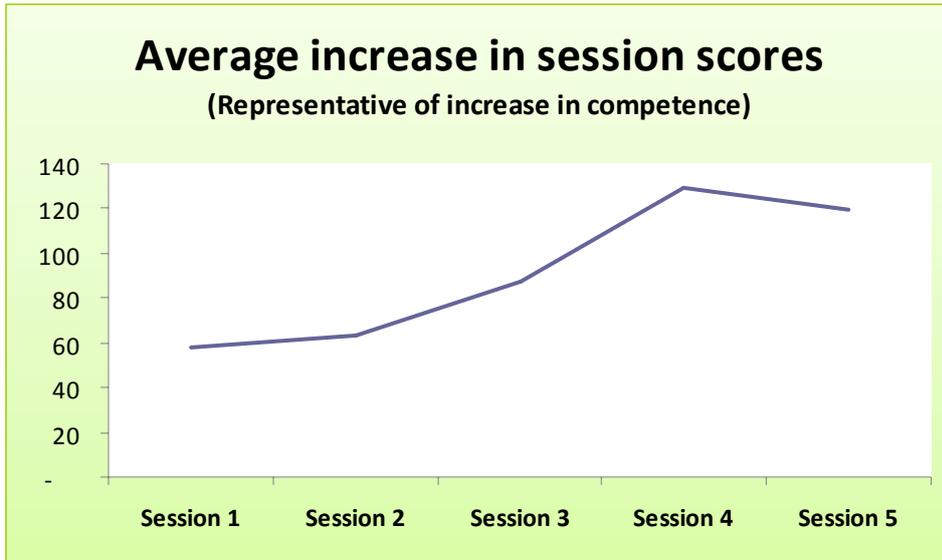
The overall feedback on the above game-based training on different parameters:

Feedback Type	Totally agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Totally disagree
Appropriate Time	461	344	116	98	14
Ease of Use	515	395	61	54	8
Entertaining	653	317	52	9	2
Interesting & Useful	629	360	31	10	3
Visually Attractive	731	279	19	2	2

A game created for a multinational bank to train employees to recognise errors in cheque got the following ratings:

Scores for different attributes of the game (On a scale of 1-6)	average rating	6	5	4	3	2	1	5 or more	3 & less
Visual	5.1	15	27	7	1	0	0	84.0%	2%
Fantasy	4.8	12	20	16	2	0	0	64.0%	4%
Challenge	5.4	26	20	4	0	0	0	92.0%	0%
Play Again?	5.3	22	22	5	0	0	0	89.8%	0%
Message?	5.4	28	15	5	1	0	0	87.8%	2%

The scores for the game increased session by session.



User feedback on the same game:

*“When I started, I could hardly find errors in a cheque, but after practice, I could track errors quite easily. So definitely playing over again I would look forward to improving my scores and reducing the errors.”*

*“It made me sit back and concentrate to ensure good scores.”*

A simulation for the same bank garnered the following response from the client:

*“The learners report that the Simulation provided them with a feel of the real life environment to a great extent. It was useful in practicing the various processes taught in the classroom sessions. It transported them into a risk free environment to hone their skills before actually going to the real-life job. The Simulation provided the right mix of practice on banking software, process adherence and customer interactions. It enabled them to develop time management and stress handling skills.*

*The training programmes previously used, primarily classroom-based role-plays, were interactive but allowed limited variety and replicability. The Simulation motivated the participants to learn at their own learning pace and time-convenience, and the extensive variety of scenarios motivated them.”*

From these figures and responses, some recurring themes can be identified.

- Almost in all cases people mentioned having fun
- Learning objectives being achieved by stealth – this indicates the need for learning programs to be somewhat ‘disguised’ to ensure learner interest.

- The level of information and proficiency was either appreciated by learners or proven through the increase in proficiency
- Motivation and involvement have been running themes too.

## **11. What's the right amount of entertainment?**

That's the big question. Often, training programs end up using entertainment for the sake of it. What one needs is adequate task analysis, audience analysis and needs analysis. To decide what level of entertainment to use, we need data, not just impersonal data – how many people, their job profile, etc, but more empathetic data – what do they do after work? What turns them on? What do they think they can do better with the time they are spending on training?

And then, we can look at more historical data about which training worked the best with a certain target audience. Here again I would cite the example of the non-mandatory story based course that had 90% of employees hooked to it whereas the same content, delivered in a more traditional WBT format, had earlier failed to draw their interest. With such clear data of audience preference, one can venture into more 'different' zones which use entertainment effectively as a teaching tool. Another assumption about entertaining programs – that they appeal more to the white collar worker – is also not correct. A game based training program was used to teach security staff manning ATM machines for a bank – the program taught them the entire process of loading cash in the machines.

In a nutshell, choice of solution and the level of entertainment therein, are dependent primarily on the audience and also on the content being taught. Boring, difficult to remember content often demands a higher level solution; learners with short attention span, lesser education often respond better to games; at the same time, complex content involving decision making and targeting an evolved audience (management trainees & senior leaders) is best dealt with using games, simulations and stories.

## **12. The great balancing act**

All said and done, balance is tough – and we don't always achieve it. While at times entertainment is sacrificed at the altar of 'learning', at others, learning may be a bit sidelined at the altar of 'creativity'. After all, how does an animation of a cow mooing and rubbing its neck against another cow add to learning about

food hygiene? Or, how does a stick figure continuously falling down a makeshift ladder, teach more about health and safety?

While the examples could be a bit extreme, the basic assumption here is that all elements in a program should contribute to achieving learning objectives. However, if we really examine, say, an educational film – does every frame of it contribute to learning? The story the professor tells you in class to illustrate a point – does ALL of it contribute to learning? Is there a scope for setting the context, creating environment? I would hazard an ‘yes’ – because for a story or a game to work, one must first create context and environment, introduce characters and establish the link between the content and the treatment. While the strategies themselves – like setting context, introducing characters, rules in a game – may not directly contribute to learning, the overall idea, e.g. teaching facts through a game, should focus on the learning outcome.

In entertainment based programs, primarily we need to focus on elements that actually teach. However, for approaches based on narrative element, there is a need to create context, which may by itself not contribute to learning, but can aid learning by preparing the learner to live another ‘reality’ within the context of the program and learning from experiences within that reality that will help them perform better in their real life work environment.

The level of entertainment should be decided after thorough analysis of audience, task, content and historical data. This is not to say that the same group should be taught similar type of content using the same approach. One may find that a group that has given great feedback on a certain type of solution for 3 courses, returns an average or bad feedback for the 4<sup>th</sup> course developed along the same lines. In such cases, it’s important to gauge learner mindsets and surprise them with a new approach. User testing of prototypes could give early indications of whether the experiment will work.

### **13. Is structure the enemy of ‘fun’?**

Throughout this paper, I have tagged entertainment based approaches as ‘modern’. However, one must make the point that entertainment through learning is not a modern concept. If we look at e-learning in its nascent stage, when the structural aspects of design were still evolving, when ‘templates’ existed only in PowerPoint, we will find some programs that were highly entertaining but at the same time very effective in terms of learning too.

On taking a closer look, one may often find that there was no evident or set structure to those programs and no obvious templatisation. One screen flowed into the other without becoming predictable and often pleasantly surprising the learner. With focus shifting towards structural integrity, most training programs

started following a set structure of 'Introduction-Objectives-Tutorial-Practice-Summary-Assessment'. This became a predictable structure and it was left to the design of each template within this structure to sustain learner interest.

This is not to say that we should sacrifice structural and instructional integrity as well as templatisation in order to design more entertaining and therefore engaging products. The structural details should remain outlined for the developer but they should not become too evident to the learner. It is a matter of using templates, with minor variations intelligently to give that effect of something fresh in each screen. It is the same argument which states that using measurable verbs for objectives could perhaps be kept 'hidden' – used by the developer to create better assessments, while the learner is given verbs that may not be measurable but are easier for them to understand.

## 14. Conclusion

From the data and examples above, we can come to the conclusion that while entertainment for the sake of entertainment does not add to the efficacy of a training program, used appropriately, it can lead to engagement and retention. Let's revisit the salient points presented here:

1. According to a survey conducted among training managers and developers, **entertainment is an important element in e-learning programs and is needed for all age groups.**
2. Scenarios, stories and games are seen as more engaging – they are also more entertaining options. The interesting aspect is the **focus on 'mental' interactivity as opposed to mere physical interactivity.** This is significant in relation to the kind of entertainment suitable for e-learning – that which is intrinsic, e.g. challenge in a game as opposed to mere trappings like clicking of buttons.
3. Engagement is determined primarily through the level of retention, level of learner involvement and level of satisfaction with the training. All of these also seem to be identified as the reasons why entertainment is required in an e-learning program. **The relationship between entertainment and engagement seems to emerge strongly, and the strongest common thread is the 'retention of learning'.**
4. While traditional learning theories do not structurally support entertainment based training approaches, in terms of content delivery methods, they are not in direct opposition to the use of entertainment or

'fun' in e-learning. Modern approaches that use entertainment heavily as a method of engaging learners are either **creating new ID models or modifying the traditional ones** to achieve greater learner involvement.

5. **Creativity or entertainment which doesn't contribute to achieving a learning objective may well be a waste of time and effort** – most learners, especially adults, are discerning enough and know when you are taking them for a ride.
6. **Entertainment in e-learning is most effective when it is not merely delivered through external trappings** – illustrations, animations, etc. – but through intrinsic elements like challenge and immersive narrative. It should stimulate the learners' minds and get them involved in the training.
7. Most training managers seem to be open to entertainment in offline training programs but not in e-learning. This is because they feel that e-learning is already one step away from reality, in that it is a one-way format, where the learner has no chance to interact with the trainer. Adding entertainment, which often creates its own context removed from the immediate work context of the learner, would actually make the training twice removed from reality. However, **it is due to the impersonal nature of e-learning, that one needs to entertain and motivate the learner**, so that they imbibe the content instead of merely going through the motions.
8. While taking training into the e-learning mode, **it's not enough to just digitise the offline material; one needs to design with the medium in mind**. People read and assimilate much less when they read on the computer screen. This is why content screening – what's required and what's not – is of prime importance to achieve learning effectiveness. Once the structure has been created with these things in mind, there is no harm in actually using creative approaches used in offline training to engage and motivate the learners – to ensure that the 'removed from reality' nature of e-learning does not reduce learner motivation.
9. How an entertainment based program scores over the traditional format can be determined from some user feedback figures and responses for such courses developed by TATA Interactive. In these programs people mentioned that **they had fun, learning objectives were achieved by stealth** – meaning the training program did not feel like a training program; the level of information and proficiency was either appreciated by learners or proven through the **increase in proficiency; motivation and involvement was high**.
10. **Choice of solution and the level of entertainment therein, are dependent primarily on the audience and also on the content**

**being taught.** Boring, difficult to remember content often demands a higher level solution; learners with short attention span, lesser education often respond better to games; at the same time, complex content involving decision making and targeting an evolved audience (management trainees & senior leaders) is best dealt with using games, simulations and stories.

11. Like any training program, we need to focus on elements that actually teach in entertainment based programs. However, **for approaches based on narrative element, there is a need to create context,** which may by itself not contribute to learning, but can aid learning by preparing the learner to live another 'reality' within the context of the program and learning from experiences within that reality that will help them perform better in their real life work environment.
12. **The level of entertainment should be decided after thorough analysis of audience, task, content and historical data.** This is not to say that the same group should be taught similar type of content using the same approach. One may find that a learner group that has given great feedback on a certain type of solution for 3 courses, returns an average or bad feedback for the 4<sup>th</sup> course developed along the same lines. In such cases, it's important to gauge learner mindsets and surprise them with a new approach. User testing of prototypes could give early indications of whether the experiment will work.
13. **The idea behind the entertainment strategies should be geared towards delivering a learning objective.** While the strategies themselves – like setting context, introducing characters, rules in a game – may not directly contribute to learning, the overall idea, e.g. teaching facts through a game, should focus on the learning outcome.
14. A predictable structure often takes away from the entertainment value of a training program. **The structural details should remain outlined for the developer but they should not become too evident to the learner.** It is a matter of using templates, with minor variations, intelligently to give that effect of something fresh in each screen. It is the same argument which states that using measurable verbs for objectives could perhaps be kept 'hidden' – used by the developer to create better assessments, while the learner is given verbs that may not be measurable but are easier for them to understand and relate to.

## 15. Footnote

Entertainment – its meaning and importance – is viewed differently by different cultures; while UK and Europe tend to prefer the more obviously entertaining treatments, the US seems to prefer entertainment in the form itself. Adequate provisions need to be made keeping the cultural aspect in mind.

Strictly speaking, all entertainment doesn't directly contribute to learning – some of it creates context and hooks learners so that they are in a more receptive frame of mind to accept learning.

So would they not learn without entertainment? They probably would not have the strong associations with learning that entertainment provides. None of us have ever forgotten the cocky hare and the diligent tortoise, or the motto that the story taught us – though in the 'information age' we are probably more bent on proving that the slow and steady doesn't win the race!

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