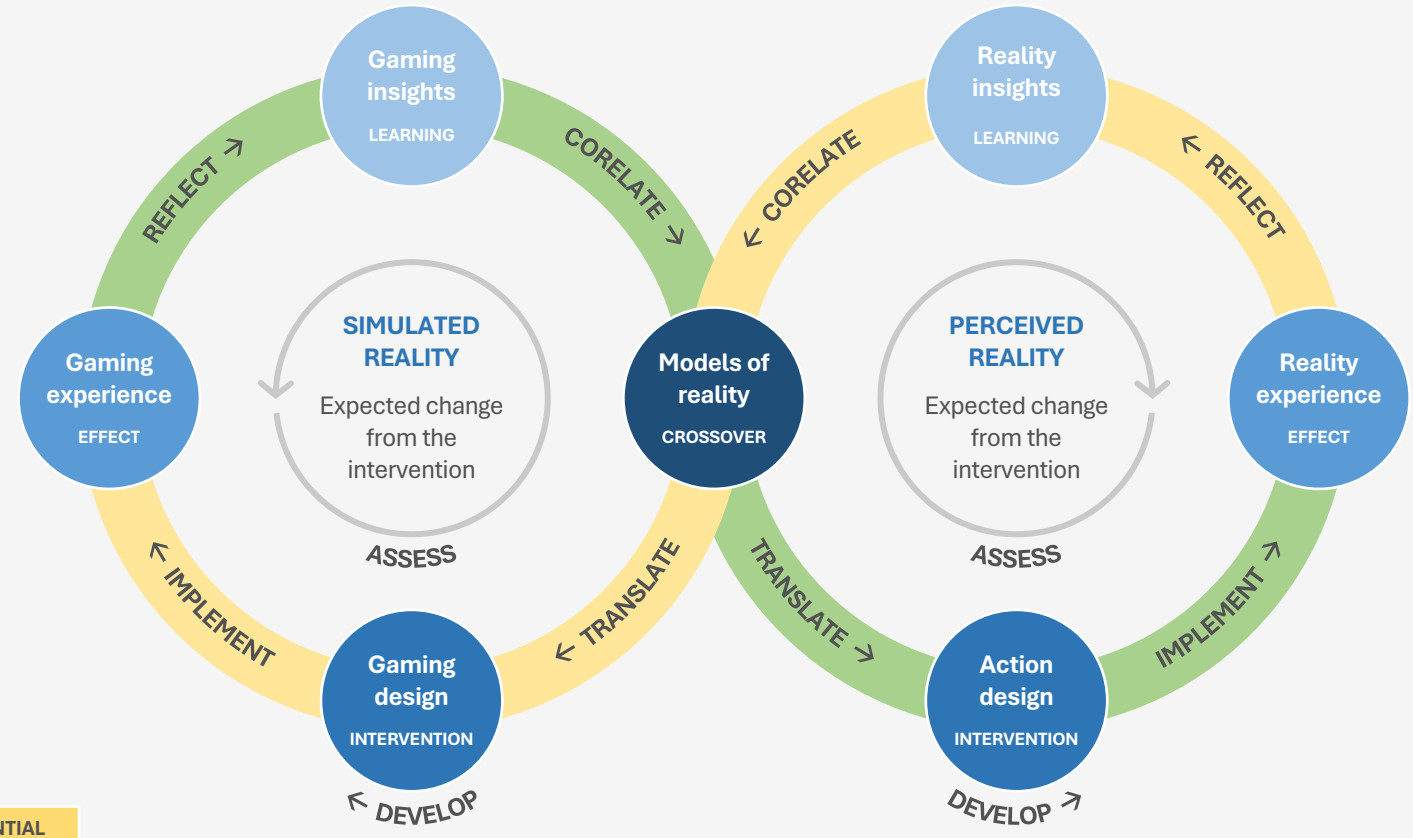
DELIVERING VALUE WITH SERIOUS GAMING



© IVO WENZLER

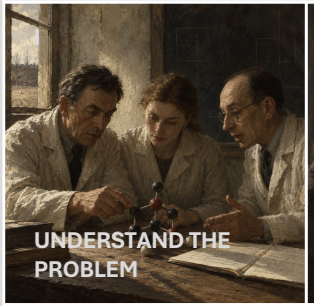
LEMNISCATE OF REALITY

BRINGING SERIOUS GAMING FROM VALUE POTENTIAL TO VALUE DELIVERY



For more information on the lemniscate of reality, see presentation: **Serious gaming methodology.**

10 COMMANDMENTS FOR DELIVERING VALUE WITH SERIOUS GAMING





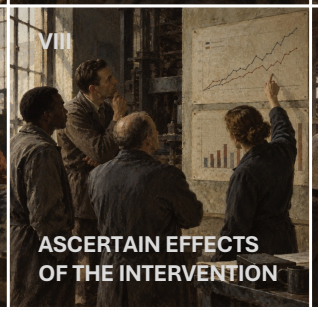
















The ten commandments provide a pragmatic approach to the question of how to ensure that a serious gaming intervention not only delivers the desired learning but that this learning will be effectively translated into action and real-life performance improvement – focus on both recognizing the needs of stakeholders and delivering of value to these stakeholders.

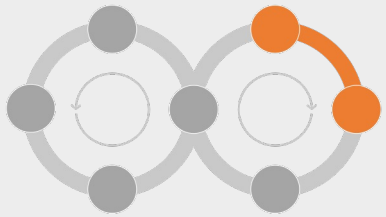
COMMANDMENT I

UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM OR OPPORTUNITY THAT NEEDS TO ACTED UPON



Inside every big problem there is a small problem which is struggling to get out.

Arthur Bloch





TO CONSIDER

- Identifying the true need is challenging, as problems are often interconnected and difficult to distinguish.
- A thorough understanding is required – not just of what is needed, but also who needs it, when, and why.
- The way in which a need is defined depends on the context in which it is considered and can significantly affect design outcomes.

Overconfidence in understanding the problem can cause hasty action without sufficient reflection!



EXAMPLE

- After just one meeting with the client, it was concluded that the core issue was a lack of cooperation among stakeholders.
- Within less than an hour of playing the game that was designed to explore this issue, the participants refused to continue.
- The players did not perceive the lack of cooperation as their problem and considered the game a waste of time.

COMMANDMENT | **II**

DEFINE A SPECIFIC VALUE TO BE DELIVERED BY THE INTERVENTION



If it is suspicious, make sure it sounds convincing.

Arthur Bloch



TO CONSIDER

- Understanding the value to be delivered requires clarity on who will benefit, by how much, and at what time.
- Value of the intervention can only be measured effectively when it is clearly defined and articulated in advance.
- Beyond quantity, value should also be assessed based on its timing, quality, and long-term sustainability.

Value recognition is crucial to secure organizational commitment during both design and implementation phases!



EXAMPLE

- A significant amount of development time was dedicated to creating and communicating business case scenarios.
- Because the client recognized the value the simulation would provide, organizational commitment was strong.
- This commitment was critical not only during the development process but also in applying the simulation results to real-world policy decisions.

COMMANDMENT

III

DETERMINE RISKS INVOLVED IN DELIVERING THE EXPECTED VALUE



Any system that depends on a human's reliability is unreliable.

Arthur Bloch



TO CONSIDER

- Gaining acceptance of the business case – and confidence in how the intervention is designed and implemented – is essential for success.
- It is important to assess how existing processes influence current practices and how they align with the proposed approach.
- Both the feasibility of implementation and the extent of organizational commitment and support should be evaluated upfront.

It is essential to understand whether the organizational infrastructure can support both the design and the rollout!



EXAMPLE

- The game was originally intended to be hosted on the company's intranet and accessed via a web interface by several hundred users worldwide.
- However, shortly before the launch, when it was tested in the live IT environment, it failed to work.
- This was the first time the solution was tested in a live environment, and the embedded security protocols blocked access to the game.

COMMANDMENT **IV**

RECOGNIZE THE STAKEHOLDERS' CAPACITY FOR SPONSORSHIP



If you can not convince them, confuse them.

Arthur Bloch



TO CONSIDER

- Clarifying who the client is and whose expectations must be met to ensure a meaningful impact on performance has to be done upfront.
- Effective sponsorship demands active involvement and a genuine time commitment – both of which are often in short supply.
- To minimize the need for separate sponsorship, intervention should be embedded within a broader, well-established change initiative.

There is no single, observer-independent reality, and stakeholders are likely to have differing agendas!



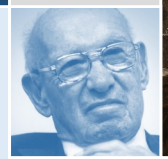
EXAMPLE

- It was initially assumed that the players were a homogeneous group of managers motivated to improve their performance.
- However, during gameplay it became clear that the group comprised individuals with diverse, personal, and sometimes conflicting agendas.
- The participants' objectives differed from those set by the client, and these differences were not identified before the session.

COMMANDMENT

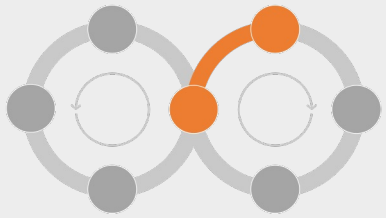
V

ASSURE THE OBJECTIVES ARE CLEAR, SPECIFIC, AND MEASURABLE



What gets measured gets managed.

Peter F. Drucker





TO CONSIDER

- Without clearly defined goals, it is impossible to determine whether these goals have been achieved.
- Because serious games often target behavioral aspects of performance, qualitative objectives are typically more suitable.
- In the absence of measurement, it's difficult to demonstrate a clear connection between the game activity and performance outcomes.

Without clarity, objectives may take on their own dynamics and change both in their amount and direction!



EXAMPLE

- Because it was not possible to reach a timely agreement on specific objectives, the goals were made more abstract.
- As the objectives lacked clarity and measurability, they were open to multiple, often conflicting, interpretations.
- This made it difficult to demonstrate that the game achieved its intended outcomes or that its results could be linked to real-world performance.

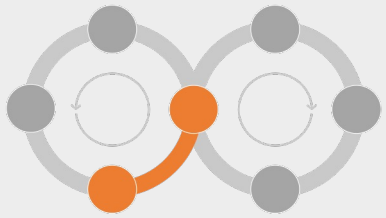
COMMANDMENT VI

SAFEGUARD THE ITERATIVE AND INTERACTIVE NATURE OF THE DESIGN PROCESS



Experience is proportionally dependent to the damaged equipment.

Arthur Bloch

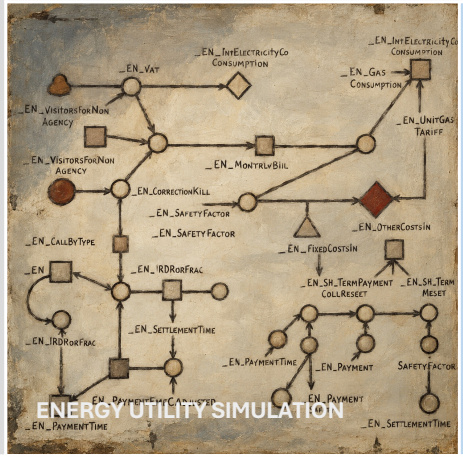




TO CONSIDER

- Iteration supports rapid prototyping, experimentation, and early identification of errors before they become major issues.
- Avoid the assumption that the initial design accurately reflects reality – this mindset can hinder critical evaluation and improvement.
- The most valuable insights often emerge during the design process itself, rather than through the act of running the intervention.

Extensive interaction between stakeholders and the design team deepens the collective understanding!



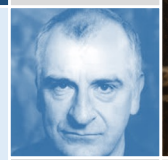
ENERGY UTILITY SIMULATION

EXAMPLE

- The simulation results were intended to inform a new policy document that would influence budget negotiations.
- To meet tight deadlines, compromises had to be made on the number of iterations and the extent of stakeholder engagement.
- Although the results were delivered on time, their value was questioned because not all stakeholders had been involved in the process.

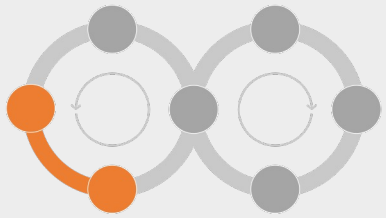
COMMANDMENT VII

SECURE THE OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE OF IMPLEMENTATION



In cases of major discrepancy, it is always the reality that has got it wrong.

Douglas Adams





TO CONSIDER

- Even the most well-designed solution will have no impact on performance if it is not put into use as intended.
- A major challenge lies in ensuring the target audience is both willing and able to engage in the learning process.
- To maximize impact, the rollout should align as closely as possible with the go-live date of the intended change.

Implementation quality and timing strongly impact learning outcomes and their application in practice!



EXAMPLE

- The game had to be run close to the go-live date of the new organization, using the new IT system, which unfortunately was not the case.
- For running the game further from the go-live date, an outdated system had to be used, so participants learned transactions that might change.
- Additionally, participants had to revert to the old processes before go-live, which negatively affected their work performance.

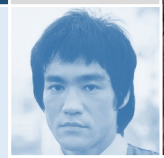
COMMANDMENT VIII

ASCERTAIN THE EFFECTS OF INTERVENTION ON LEARNING



TO CONSIDER

- It's important to distinguish between evaluating the game itself and evaluating the actual reality it aims to reflect or predict.
- Beyond asking the right questions, attention must be given to who poses them – and who interprets the responses.
- The greater the time gap between running the game and observed change in performance, the harder it becomes to draw meaningful connections.



Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do.

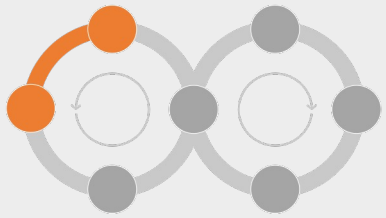
Bruce Lee

Evaluating game results can help anchor learning in practice and guide additional performance improvements!



EXAMPLE

- Evaluations were conducted at the end of each day-long game session, then again after three months, and finally six months post-game.
- Daily evaluation results guided coaches in providing immediate, actionable feedback to participants.
- Longer-term evaluations identified improvement actions and ensured that learning was integrated into real-life business processes.



COMMANDMENT IX

COMMUNICATE THE RELEVANCE OF WHAT HAS BEEN LEARNED



There is always somebody who knows better than you what you meant by your message.

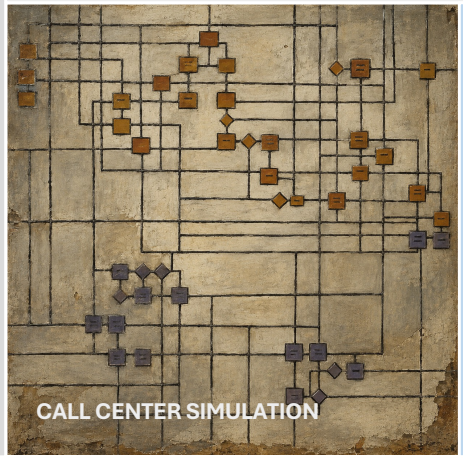
Osmo Wiio



TO CONSIDER

- It is essential to communicate what has been learned, how it relates to performance improvement, and the implications for future challenges.
- Choosing the right communication channel is crucial, as each one varies in tone, reach, and impact.
- Ambiguous messages are highly prone to misinterpretation – often in ways that cause the most damage.

Caution is required, as game outcomes may unintentionally affect individuals and their responsibilities!



EXAMPLE

- The simulation indicated a potential to reduce up to 100 positions by changing and automating key processes.
- However, the draft simulation report was inadvertently shared with multiple stakeholders, leading to negative reactions.
- Despite a strong business case for workforce reduction, the final restructuring was implemented in a less radical form.

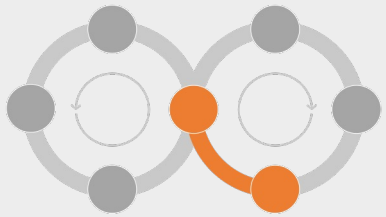
COMMANDMENT X

ENSURE THE LEARNING IS TRANSLATED INTO ACTION



The trouble with learning from experience is that you never graduate.

Doug Larson





TO CONSIDER

- Stakeholders must be empowered, equipped, and motivated to apply the knowledge, skills, or behaviors they've gained.
- A strong alignment between the game experience and real-world application enhances the effectiveness of learning transfer.
- Doing the right job is essential – executing the wrong task flawlessly still leads to poor outcomes.

A lack of an enabling environment is often the main reason why learning fails to translate into real-life performance!



EXAMPLE

- The game aimed to help key stakeholders learn how to use the new ordering processes and supporting IT systems.
- A business readiness metric was used to assess which conditions were in place to translate learning into action.
- This information was then used to identify value creation risks and determine how to manage them.

DELIVERING VALUE WITH SERIOUS GAMING



THANK YOU

© IVO WENZLER