

A network diagram consisting of black dots connected by thin black lines, forming a complex web of connections. The background is a light gray gradient.

Turning Lead into Gold



Disruptive
Learning
Solutions

Overview

We are a multidisciplinary team focused on delivering value to HRD. We are inspired by [hard core gamers / e-sport](#) - community, team and individuals - experience of solving complex team and leadership problems through nontraditional methods of learning and development. And we are also influenced by [Clayton Christensen](#) and his work on disruptive innovation, [Chris Argyris](#) and his research on organizational communication and [Fons Trompenaars / Geert Hofstede](#) and their work on culture. All three works point to the paradox of being GOOD, “good leadership and good management, good communication and good culture leading to systemic failure. That being good, making the right decisions, doing the right thing, being smart actually leads in the long run to dumb decisions, doing the wrong thing and bad outcomes. We believe that when you understand the key principles and habits of how we learn to make decisions then you can develop and transform this process to work for you so that it becomes a valuable skill and a real asset to the business.

Our experience has been forged by combining new technologies and our understanding of innovation, learning, culture, complex problem solving and hard core gaming into a unique set of Disruptive learning products and services. We believe Human Resource teams should invest in Disruptive Learning Content which is agile, challenging, demanding and focused on higher learning performance and less expensive and more effective than traditional training.

We see business as a contact sport. There are winners and losers. And that is a tough message for many people. But it is a fact. We see disruptive learning as an important training support to make HRD relevant in the fight to helping both you and the business to win. We believe Disruptive learning is the means by which you stay ahead of the curve of future trends in a marketplace based on creativity, collaboration, disruptive innovation and technological evolution.

The art of failure

The learning experience built into great games can be described as “the art of failure” that is people learn new skills in solving complex problems by learning, failing, relearning, failing and re learning. This cycle of learning and unlearning develops the gamers skills in leadership, collaboration, communication in such a way that [it is immediately viable and available to complete and compete in the game's challenges](#). Far from the media driven stereotype, hard core gaming is not a key bashing teenagers’ hobby which creates anti-social behavior. It is at its highest level now recognized as a highly skilled team based worldwide competitive sport across a whole range of strategy and multiplayer high level games. It is from this [world of e-sport](#) and hard core gaming that HRD learning and development and talent management can use the “art of failing”, that is forward error, as a key design principle to create games and business scenarios that deliver real and tangible results. And we can dispense with a major objection that you need to have born holding a

controller to play games: not so. The average of our clients playing the Heist and Conquest and other simulations has got be around 40-50 years old with some people never having played before. But with our train the trainer programs and our coaching practice these players became our greatest champions, selling their learning experiences to their colleagues and friends. Just ask to see our videos and pictures. They tell their own story.

Working at the Coalface- turning practice into theory

Our experience comes from the coalface. From designing and co-creating complex learning solutions with clients addressing immediate business needs. We were working with Royal Dutch Shell, Computer Science Corporation and Philips Design on team learning and collaboration scenarios for engineering and health when [IBM / Synchronicity produced their white paper on Games and leadership](#). We tested, designed and built multiplayer and role playing learning and collaboration solutions for which we jointly won Innovation awards with Royal Dutch Shell. The financial tsunami of 2008/9 wiped away all our work and most of the clients we were working with and the practice of innovation was replaced by accountants. We became beginners again. We used this time to rebuild ourselves and create complex learning solutions that used the hard core gaming/ e-sport principles but re-designed for business needs. Working with Laureate Education we built social networks for 5000 students and teachers for language training in Paris and ran business gaming workshops focused on teamwork, leadership and learning and development. With PRO BTP we have had the privilege to work with their Training and Human Resource Department in developing and implementing a wide range of new training scenarios, simulations and training programs aimed at re-inventing the training process and using new technologies to both manage costs and create valuable learning processes.

Transferable skills

The holy grail of learning and development is to be able to create training scenarios for soft skill, leadership, teamwork, collaboration and communication skills that are immediately transferable to the business world. And the latest [Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends report](#) shows that worldwide HRD are investing in new technologies but are still failing to meet this goal and consequently the needs of the business. Fundamentally investing in technology is a good thing and at the very least delivers incremental cost changes and increases knowledge take-up and sharing but in and of itself it is limited, and unless you address the required changes in process and people the goal will be missed.

The HRD challenge and Disruptive Learning

The four fundamental issues facing HRD are 1. culture and engagement, 2. leadership capability 3. learning and development and 4. re-inventing HRD ([see Deloitte link above](#)). These are serious gaps in the HRD business model, but they also point to a great opportunity for HRD step up to the plate and deliver some ground shaking changes that revitalize and transform the principles of training. With this challenge in mind we coined the term Disruptive Learning to describe our key design principle. That is, we upset the traditional business training pedagogical principles underlying HRD programs by focusing on creating “positive error” rather than error as “measure of failure”. That is making errors, making mistakes is a positive state and moves the learner **forward**, rather than backwards, in the learning process. In fact, “forward error”, learning and unlearning, creates new skills which are immediately available to the business upon finishing the training programs. That is when you or the team fail to communicate or collaborate effectively you have to go back again and again until you develop the competence high enough to work for you and the team. Then these skills created during the scenario are transferable to the business. That is when you fail, when the team fails you have to re-evaluate why and how and have a go again and again till you succeed. In many training sessions we have had multiple participants fail to solve key problems. They had to work at and sweat it. Eventually solving this scenario allowed the teams to work across a wide range of competencies, display advanced communication and collaboration skills and also dig into their reserves and find the grit and character to continue and persevere at achieving the scenario: paradoxically hard resulted in fun and a real sense of accomplishment: this is disruptive learning.

Good management is the reasons businesses fail - the backstory to innovation

Our Educational Technology products and services include ready available leadership and team scenarios like Conquest and the Heist. Conquest is a team versus team multiplayer competitive scenario based on capture the flag principles. The Heist is a team based communication and collaboration scenario. We built a back story around the games based on understanding of the key principles of disruptive innovation and the key obstacles to achieving innovation in a business. The story is based on two companies fighting for market dominance. On the one hand there is The Circle a company driven by a philosophy of “good-management” ([this is according to Clayton Christensen one of the main root causes of business failure](#)) where leadership is about being right and management is about doing the right thing. And on the other hand the Black Swan team (which uses broadly, tongue in cheek, the principles of [Black Swan philosophy](#) to explain the psychological biases of why people are blinded to key events and large changes - thus making the need to make mistakes, positive error, learn and unlearn key requirements for innovation and creativity) and which represents the key values that are the antitheses of the of The Circle/good management -summed up in the phrase “ when everyone thinks the same nobody thinks”. The Circle holds dominion over its employees through a company wellbeing drug program in which it covertly includes a “special formula” in its daily vitamin

regimen for all employees to ensure their unquestioning obedience. The Black Swan team's job is to close down The Circle manufacturing plant and create an antidote to The Circle "good-management drugs program. Loosely based on the Matrix we have created this story, available as part of the Conquest and The Heist game briefing packs and as a *bande dessinée*, to help participants work with the key fundamentals of disruptive innovation. We wanted to bring home to people that the groundswell of innovation comes from human behavior, their behavior and not some external source far out of their control.

Good communication blocks learning

Chris Argyris and his now classic work on double loop learning demonstrated that our common sense approach to the rules of communication and management actually block and ensure we under perform. What he found was as remarkable as Christensen with regards to Innovation. He discovered that the key principles of good communication actually prevent you from getting an optimal solution. Our common sense and classically trained/educated understanding of the rules of good communication, self-censure, consensus, and compromise actually prevent real communication. That is you get really good, skilled incompetence, at not actually saying what needs to be said. Single loop learning is where you make decisions based on largely untested assumptions. Double loop learning is where you adopt processes that test and validate views, hypotheses, tactics and strategies. Whilst double loop learning was made popular by learning organization advocates and turned into the practice of action learning it is our experience that the essence of Argyris work has been lost. In that action learning has simply become a metaphor for learn by doing-it. "Doing-it" doesn't make any difference to the outcome if you haven't got a process that tests why you are doing it. Consequently, we have incorporated De Bono's six thinking hats collaboration and teamwork methodology into our Disruptive Learning development programs to provide leaders and teams the means to communicate, plan and execute in a business world dominated by innovation, creativity, risk, agile and lean start-up models.

Good culture blocks decision making

Where do the rules, the schemas, that underpin our processes of good management and good communication come from? They come from the way we are educated by our culture to solve problems, manage tasks, work with authority, deal with change, experience time and make social relationships. You, your team and your organization are organized by a set of pre-established rules, culture, which you follow to determine what's right and wrong (norms-company rules) and decide what's good and bad (values-implicit company values). And so your organization's meta- rules, your organizational culture views of being right and wrong and doing the right thing and not the wrong thing lead you paradoxically to being wrong. Culture provides the superstructure for good management and good communication These rules fundamentally lay down the building blocks of your experience and largely remain unchecked. Disruptive learning is about ensuring that you

“change the rule book” for culture, engagement, leadership, teamwork, communication and collaborating.

Disruptive learning template (accelerated learning scenarios)

Our educational simulations and coaching processes are built around a “disruptive learning template” that allows us to quickly co-create and design scenarios (we built The Heist from concept to alpha in six weeks as a mobile multiplayer virtual reality scenario) aimed at developing specific competency sets. The Heist was built for PRO BTP and used as a trainer the trainer scenario for rollout to the human resources department and as a key example of Games that Change in a major PRO BTP immersive learning conference.

Achieving scale

That then begs the question of how do you scale up and is answered by a train the trainer program we created with PRO BTP which certifies the trainers in the coaching principles of disruptive learning and educational technologies. Train the trainer allows trainers certified in Digital Skin specific scenarios to roll out quickly specific skills across an organization. We bring together holistically the three parts (people, process, and technology) of an organization by using educational technologies and specifically designed content to produce key results with people. Content is the key. By creating content specifically designed for a business need, like the two key areas we have under design now, crisis simulations and key account selling, we are able to create multiplayer and role playing complex problem solving scenarios which participants learn to master without worrying about risk. Here participants can learn and unlearn and master new valuable skills which have an immediate business relevance. Training scenarios can also be released through on-demand multi-platform technological solutions so that scenarios can be use 24/7 across the globe.

Co creation - HRD the disruptive learning journey begins

Our journey has just started. As we invite HRD decision makers to play and test these Disruptive learning scenarios we hope you will recognize the value of co creating which is the foundation of this endeavor. It is in this spirit which we work. That is, we seek not so much to sell new products and services but to jointly create value for the HRD to meet the needs of the business. We invite you to contact us and come and experience the Heist or Conquest by yourself and/or with your teams to test the value of disruptive learning and the benefits of accelerated learning and cost management can bring your HRD organization. You will see that our standards of design, creativity and innovation are very high and we believe unique. We fundamentally believe that in working with you we can help you to win. Like the alchemists of old we help you turn lead/error into gold.