



The Dangers of Forced Fun

Description

We've all been there. You go to a meeting or an event and there's an Ice Breaker. It might be something as simple as "turn to the person on your right and tell them your name", or it might be something more pointless like Hat Colours. But sometimes it is something even more sinister... **a game**.

I love games. Always have, always will. However, the games that I like have two key elements. They are made by game designers and they are played voluntarily. Both of these points are critical to my enjoyment of said game. If just one of those is missing, it is highly likely that I am not going to enjoy the game.

Made by a Game Designer

We all like to think we can make games because we like games or even studied game design. But that doesn't mean we actually can make **good** games. For all of the hundreds of games released each year, few are going to be considered good by the majority. Even fewer excellent. In fact, if you look at the game charts over the last few years, they have been dominated by only one or two games (or updated versions of them). If you look at Minecraft and Grand Theft Auto V, both have held solid chart positions since they came out (2011 & 2013).

Actually, when you look at those games, one was made by an individual game designer (initially), the other by an enormous team of designers and engineers. Both hold a place in the social fabric of today's society! Now that is a testament to a good game. Pure marketing can't achieve that!

I digress. The point is a good game is usually made by a good game designer. That doesn't mean a bad game has a bad game designer, the game designer may just have had their ideas left behind by a committee of business people. I don't think there are many games out there that people actively enjoy that was made by a bad game designer though. Games are really hard to make. Good games are really really hard to make!

So when I hear in a meeting, "we're going to play a game" I cringe. My first instinct is to run. I know that

the game is A. most likely not really a game and B. probably wasn't made by a good game designer.

Played Voluntarily

This is more important than the quality of the game. I have played many bad games and enjoyed some of the experience because I knew I could stop at any moment.

When you are told you are going to play a game, suddenly you no longer have that control. If we step back from games for a moment and focus on play, [play is freeform](#). It takes place outside of predefined game rules. Being told you *must play* instantly removes the lack of rules. There is a key rule – you have to play. That doesn't mean you can't then go on to enjoy it, if the environment allows for play to happen or the game is very enjoyable then even forced play can be fun. But it will never be the same as voluntary play or fun. It will always be tainted.

The other thing with playing games voluntarily is that you only play games that you know you will enjoy for extended periods. So even if I am enjoying a badly made game, at some point the novelty wears off and I can stop.

In a setting where you are with work colleagues or at school and you are being forced to join in with a game, if it isn't something you already enjoy, it is unlikely to be a fun experience, especially as you know you can't stop when you want!

The Danger

The big danger of forced fun is that it puts people in an awkward position. If they hate it and want to not participate, then they stand the chance of social or professional backlash.

“Oh, not a team player then?” “As it happens, yes I am. However, I do not under any circumstances want to pass you a balloon from between my legs as this has nothing to do with how I will work with you as a web developer Steve.”

Some people just don't like to be in the spotlight, so to avoid that they go along with it and that is even worse. They then start to feel that the only way to be accepted is to not be themselves. If this is work-related, imagine how that could affect them.

“Am I now working for a company that has no respect whatsoever for me?”

Very, very rarely have I enjoyed a “forced fun” exercise. The only exceptions have tended to be when the forced fun was being organised by an external company that actually knows how to make games and implement them well, or a tried and tested template is being followed. Usually, it just makes me die a little inside!

The Alternative

No one implements this sort of thing with malice in mind. It is always with the best of intentions. If you want to then here are some things to consider.

1. Get professionals to do it.
2. Follow a tried and tested template.
3. Give prior warning of what is going to happen, give details – don't think it will be a fun surprise on the day – It probably won't be.
4. Offer people a chance to decline beforehand, in a private and non-judgmental way.
5. If it is a live event, during the day, offer a "safe space" where if someone has had enough they can go and just decompress for a moment.

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1. fun

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