

Strategy Game at the Ericsson R&D Center in Budapest

What problem does it solve?

Today's fast-moving business environments tend to have difficulties with the successful internal communication of the corporate goals and objectives, and to make the strategy transparent enough for all the employees within the company. The problem of motivation and employee engagement is a frequently researched topic. Several multinational organizations and their leadership teams have to face such difficulties on a daily basis and struggle to find a suitable method to solve this issue.

The Strategy Game is a new approach to this **problem: the game informs and engages employees** when it comes to the site **strategy**. The main purpose of the game is to make the strategy related information transparent for our colleagues, and to translate the high level concepts into everyday activities that can be easily connected to their life, inside and outside the company. It does not only trigger the employees to improve their mindset related to strategic activities, but also empowers them and calls them to get involved. With the help of the Strategy Game the employees are more aware of how they can contribute to the strategy and have a sense of responsibility about their actions matching the long term goals of the organization.

What is the solution, innovation?



To resolve the difficulty of how to communicate about strategy and how to engage the whole organization in the strategy implementation, we used gamification, the application of game mechanics and design techniques in non-game context. Using game elements - such as point-hunting, badges, leaderboard, prizes - employees had a better understanding of the strategy and focused on how they can contribute (whether it is part of their daily duties or an extra activity).

The easily accessible graphic interface also supports the same purposes; and as such a **platform** it enables the players to realize our vision. The main page of the game presents the visualization of the strategy, covering all the strategy areas in focus.

The players need to collect **points** in order to progress in the game, and they can do that by pursuing activities in the different areas. Freedom and sense of empowerment are key aspects of the game, the players can join existing challenges, select any activity from a predefined list or create new activities related to any of the strategic sub-areas.



Our colleagues' coming up with their own activities also strengthens the creative mindset by connecting daily activities to the vision and strategy of the organization, simply by thinking over what kind of activities can help to reach our vision and what strategic area does the particular activity fit into. Every hour spent with strategy related activities equals one point in the game; dealing with activities that have an outstanding value for the specific strategic area is rewarded with extra points (set by the strategic area driver).



Strategy Guru badge

The various **badges** that can be obtained are vital parts of the game; they do not only serve as elements of fun, but they also help to call attention to the recognition and appreciation of certain tasks and activities that strengthen the corporate goals and visions. A perfect example for that is the *Strategy Guru* badge which can be obtained if the players collect points in all strategic areas.

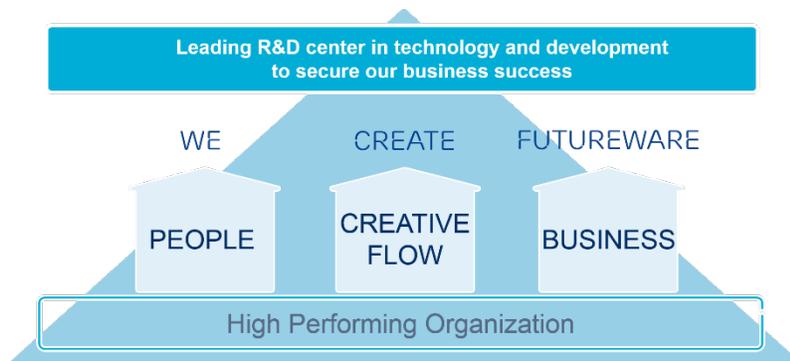
With this badge we trigger multiple actions at the same time: the player is encouraged to register an activity in all strategy areas (therefore make at least four strategic activities), hence players get familiar with all the areas, and the game also helps them to identify the kind of activities that can be related to each and every strategic area.

In addition to encouraging collecting points from various areas, we also have badges for the more-of-a-specialist type of people. *The Great Enabler* badge for the ones having the highest score in the Creative Flow area, or the *Duracell Bunny* for the highest score in the High Performing Organization area.



We have other motivators in the game: the leaderboard and the dashboard clearly work as great tools for not only showing the progress players made throughout the game, but also for creating the atmosphere for friendly competition among the individuals and the teams. There are also draws every half a year on an All Employee Meeting where one person from the top hundred players is randomly chosen (and also rewarded with a popular tech gadget). This rite also serves a great motivator for the others to participate and hunt for more and more points in the game.

It is important to note that the Strategy Game is part of a **coherent** strategy **system**: it supports existing, ongoing initiatives by providing a platform for engagement and participation. It provides guidelines how to join certain strategic activities, and what are the activities of high



importance in a certain strategic area, and also calls for creative ideas on what could take us closer to the vision.

To mention a few **examples**: these initiatives include

voluntary participation in strategy activities like discussions around the strategy areas, various trainings and conferences, mentoring programs, job fairs, local and global hacking marathons. It is dynamic system, new and new activities get defined in the game (by drivers as well as players) and the game keeps itself alive.

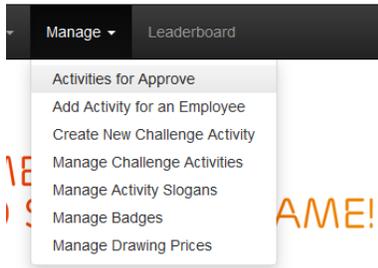
The game does not only provide an opportunity for individuals to get involved in strategy implementation but also for **teams**. Our self-learning challenge, for instance, called teams to nominate with a plan how to develop themselves.

What we have found impressive is that by this concept, to get engaged in strategy implementation is starting to work in a proactive way. Leaders from the top still needs to put effort into making the strategy clear for the organization, but the concept of the game supports both bringing clarity about the strategy and building motivation when it comes to strategy implementation. It is also infectious: if someone gets aware that the guy sitting next to him just collected huge amounts of points for being part of a certain activity resonating to the strategy, they become interested and want to be part of the strategic activities and the game themselves.

How did it come to life?

The **idea** popped up in a side discussion on a leadership team meeting. The new strategy was being discussed and how we can translate the messages to the organization. As gamification, in its best forms, serves clear business needs and supports clear business objectives, what could be better use of gamification than supporting the implementation of an organization's strategy?

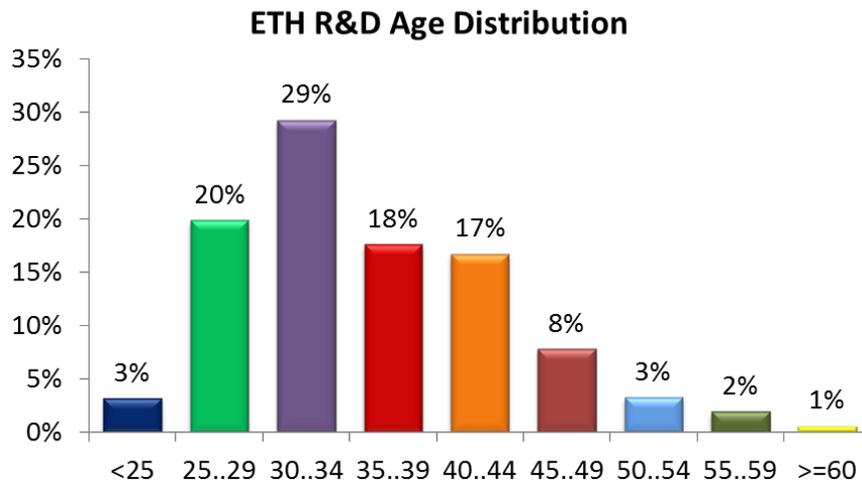
The **execution** of the Strategy Game was a joint effort of the internal communications team and the gamification community of the Ericsson R&D Center in Budapest. The actual implementation and the launch of the game were fully supported by the leadership of the



organization. It was seen as a new, innovative strategy communication method, different from the traditional management communication.

Leaders are the most influential (and trusted) sources in an organization when it comes to site strategy, the open and effective communication about the strategy implementation is indispensable to engage the employees. The leaders' visibility in the game was a key factor from the beginning of the design process, as it inevitably encourages the participation in the game as a desired behavior. In accordance with this, the leaders, as drivers of strategic area, are involved to a great extent. They have clear task in the game: it is their role to manage the various activities of the players on a regular basis, to approve them and it is also among their tasks to create new challenge activities for the players. To have a dialogue with the players about the new activities, to remind them to register an activity (via e-mails, face-to-face communication) is also part of the drivers' tasks.

Throughout the design process we also took into consideration the trends and changes in the market. We are aware that high-quality strategy communication is vital for reaching our vision, and the employees' expectations of internal communication media has changed with the millennials entering the workforce. For millennials, to understand how their contribution fit into the big picture, and the impact and legacy they leave behind is of utmost importance. With the Strategy Game, we encourage all employees to have a better understanding of how crucial their everyday contribution is to the life of the organization, and create a space for them to come up with their own ideas about how they could possibly take their part in the strategy implementation.



The **game development** is an iterative process, with new features continuously included, while always having a working product with a certain number of features. To achieve this, the people behind the game have regular meetings where they share their observations related to the game and it is also a forum for discussing the feedback from the players. We put a strong emphasis on keeping them up-to-date about the new features of the game and about the most popular activities in the game.

The team behind and how to make it sustainable:

- **Players** who play.
- **Drivers** who define the challenges, and follow the activities defined from the individuals and teams.
- **Superusers** who manage (e.g. conduct draw).
- **Internal communications** team who secures that there is a continuous information flow about the strategy and the game.
- **Gamification community** who prioritize and secure the new features to the game. It is a community of practice, made up of volunteers interested in the topic of gamification.
- **Game designer** who makes all the changes in the game happen.

What are the effects of the project/solution?

Results for 2015 are already available, 457 people from the 1200 were involved in the implementation of the strategy, 19521 points were collected, 1402 activities were defined, and 4718 hours were spent with implementing the strategy. This clearly shows that strategy awareness and strategy implementation is not considered as a privilege of a small group but rather a joint issue for the whole organization, something we all thrive for.

What have we learned from it?

The Strategy Game clearly serves as an excellent **tool for spreading information** about the site strategy; it helped to convert the rather complicated strategic concepts and goals to everyday activities. With the help of gamification, we managed to raise the attention to specific activities related to the strategy, instead of just having strategy concepts on a buzzword level. It shortly became clear for the players what is behind the strategic areas and how the high-level objectives of the organization translate to the employees' everyday activities.

However, it is important to mention that even good and purposeful game design does not substitute the open communication of leaders about strategy and vision. As they are the most trusted and number one source of information for the employees.

Besides, the game also revealed who are the most engaged and motivated employees within the organization. It served as a sociogram, displayed the employees who are the most active in the organization, and are ready to participate in various events and initiatives related to the strategic goals and objectives.

It was also interesting to learn, how an individual's or team's own idea on how to implement the strategy can cross-pollinate others. It very easily become knowledge available and accessible for the whole organization, so the game also serves as a **knowledge/idea sharing** platform when it comes to initiatives what can help to realize our vision.

And of course, we learnt that to have a platform, a not so serious way to enable the strategy work, can help involve the entire organization in implementing the strategy.

Plans for the future: next steps

We would like to make it more appealing for **teams**, i.e. to encourage the employees to team up and take part in the strategy implementation on team level. It is also our goal to increase the number of regular players who visit the site, and register activities, on a daily basis. This would

mean to get even those people on board to take part in the strategy implementation, who are otherwise not so motivated to do so via the team spirit.

We also learned that although the Strategy Game fulfills its purpose and it is already fully functioning, some changes are still needed to turn it more **user-friendly**. This is not a one-time objective, something to tick out once and for all, but we have it as a continuous goal.

We also became aware that **continuous communication** is needed, to inform the players about new activities, to remind them to register the activities (for example: after various trainings, events). So to keep up the same communication level is a must.

And of course we are in a continuous dialog with the players to find the points of improvement that could bring the greatest benefit for the organization as well as the players.