

Changing the **game plan**

Gamification is prone to hype and snake oil but new research has found a way it can play a valuable role in assessing job candidates, says Richard Justenhoven



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Gamification has been heralded as the ultimate way to differentiate your hiring process and reduce the drop-out rate amongst candidates. However, real success stories are relatively thin on the ground. Part of the problem is that games, game-based assessments and gamified assessments are actually three different things and only one of them should be used to select candidates.

Interactive games, which are undertaken for enjoyment, have a role in attracting applicants. They can encourage people to 'connect' with an organisation and learn more about available jobs. They can even become viral marketing tools that promote the employer brand.

However, a game should not be used to 'assess' the players. Games are fun when the stakes are low. Having said that, recruitment is a high-stake situation for job candidates and when the stakes are raised, any game ceases to be fun. This is a stumbling block for anyone who uses games or game-based assessments in recruitment. If candidates sense that an employer is trying to 'lower the stakes' of their application by using a game, they might presume that they are not being taken seriously and their perception of that employer's attractiveness can plummet.

Another issue with game-based assessments is that the results can be misleading. Adult personality traits and cognitive abilities are relatively stable. If your traits and abilities were assessed today and again in three months' time, you would expect the test results to be similar. However, if you 'play a game', you can improve your performance through repetition, as you learn to adjust your behaviour to achieve the goal. It is difficult to measure stable traits and abilities with an instrument that has a variable outcome. Your experience in responding to the choices available in the game will skew your results, so any 'measurement' achieved through game-based assessment is open to question.

Gamifying proven assessments

If you want to bring gamification into your selection process, the best option is to 'gamify' an existing and proven psychometric assessment, such as a logical reasoning test. This can be achieved either by adding a 'cover story' to provide context or by revising the 'look and feel' of the test. Either way, a gamified assessment is still a psychometric test that will capture job-relevant cognitive ability or personality data. It has simply been customised to incorporate game elements, such as levels, badges and rewards.

Is a gamified assessment better or worse than a traditional assessment? To answer this question, cut-e has undertaken a joint research study with West Coast University of Applied Sciences in Germany, which specialises in practical research projects relating to personnel management.

Together, we designed a simulated selection process in which candidates apply to a fictional company. We created a careers site and provided job role information. A total of 200 participants in the study (from Finland, Germany, Norway and Sweden) 'applied' to the company. We captured initial data about their attitude to games, how motivated they felt about taking assessments and how attractive the organisation appeared to them.

The candidates were split into two groups: one group took traditional assessments; and the other undertook gamified assessments. Four weeks later, the groups were reversed and those who initially took the traditional assessments took the gamified assessments and vice versa. After each set of tests, the participants were asked to rate their perceptions of the fairness of the tests and of the organisation's attractiveness.

The results show that individuals who like to play games rate an organisation higher when gamified assessments are used. However, importantly, those who do not care for games do not rate the organisation lower. Also, the scores achieved on the traditional tests were no higher or lower than the scores on the gamified tests. In other words, people do not perform better or worse in gamified assessments. This is an important finding because it means that gamified assessments can be used on an equal footing with traditional assessments.

The conclusion is that, if your candidates are likely to enjoy games, then gamified assessments are a good option. If the assessments are not overly-gamified, anyone who does not like games will not be put off by them. As with coffee and alcohol, a small quantity of gamification can have a positive benefit but overindulging can be counterproductive.

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Greater choice

With the launch of new gamified suites of ability tests, greater choice is now available when it comes to selecting your candidates. Depending on your industry sector and the likely preferences of your applicants, you can choose either traditional or gamified assessments and you can be confident that both are equally effective.

You may find that candidates in certain sectors, such as the media, advertising and IT, prefer a gamified approach. However, gamified assessments are not a silver bullet. Like mobile assessments, they are simply another option that some organisations will want to use (and others will not). It all depends on the candidates you want to attract.

Whichever assessment option you choose, it is important to look beyond the hype. Ensure your preferred assessments are grounded in scientifically-validated psychometric rigour and that they will provide meaningful, job-relevant insights that will help you make fair and objective selection decisions.



About the author & cut-e

Richard Justenhoven is a leading organisational psychologist and an acknowledged expert in the design, implementation and evaluation of online assessments. Richard is the Product Development Director at cut-e – the global talent management and assessment specialist which was acquired by Aon plc in 2017 and is now part of Aon Assessment Solutions. cut-e and Aon undertake 30 million assessments each year in 90 countries and 40 languages.

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About cut-e

Founded in 2002, cut-e (pronounced 'cute') provides online tests, questionnaires and gamified assessments for attraction, selection, talent management and development. The company's smart, valid and innovative psychometrics have made it the preferred partner of multinational organisations.

In May 2017, cut-e was acquired by Aon plc, a leading global professional services firm providing a broad range of risk, retirement and health solutions. cut-e now operates as part of Aon's global offering in talent solutions, helping clients achieve sustainable growth by driving business performance through people performance. cut-e and Aon, as Aon Assessment Solutions, undertake 30 million assessments each year in 90 countries and 40 languages.