# Games Business Experts Play
## Winning at the Games of Business

# L. Michael Hall, Ph.D.

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*Overview*

# Games Business Experts Play

This book is about *games*. It's about all of the behavioural games, speech games, even the mental and emotional games that we play in the field of business. It's about the Business Games that the experts play that enable them to succeed as they do. It's about the games that we can learn to play to replicate the success of the experts. The book addresses how the experts think about the business games, and how to replicate their frames of mind. Why? To become much more productive and efficient in the games that we play. That makes this book about setting new frames of mind and refusing the old frames and the old games that undermine success.

In *Part I*, we will focus on *figuring out frame games.* This presents the idea of business as "games" and is the only theoretical part of the book. Here I will introduce and describe frame games and how to shift your thinking about your career in terms of frames and games. This sets the stage for everything else: how to detect and identify the games, how to appreciate the driving power of our mental frames and not get seduced by thinking that they are real.

*Part II* describes the most foundational games—the *games that make for personal effectiveness* in every realm. Games for personal empowerment establish the foundation for excellence and expertise in every field—personal, business, athletics, finances.

*Part III* then gets down to business—the actual business games that make for *expertise and excellence in business.*

## A Template for the Games

While I have a more thorough model for thinking about games in Chapter 3 and have two worksheets there for more extensive frame analysis, I have used the following template as a simple way to think about the games in the following chapters. It follows from

what we mean when we talk about a set of actions and interactions as a "game."

- The **name** and the description of the game: What is the game? How does it work? Does the game enhance or limit?
- The **rules** of the game: How is the game set up, structured? Who plays the game? When?
- The **cues** of the game: What are the questions that elicit the game, the terms that reveal the game? What triggers recruit us into playing the game?
- The **payoff** of the game: What are the benefits, values, and outcomes of the game?

Intentions—Desired Outcomes

Rules of the Game

Game Description

Person → Person → Payoffs

Cues for the Games
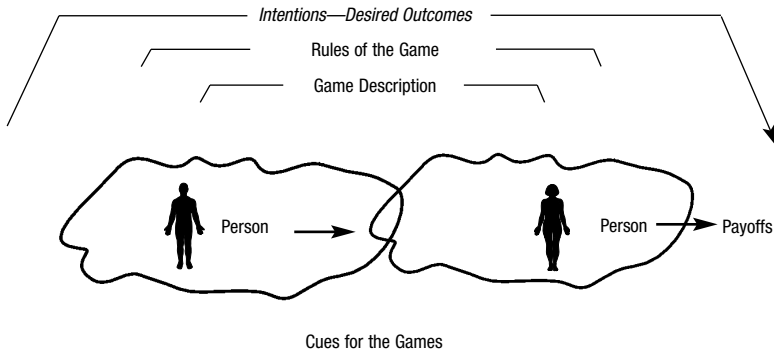
## *Toxic or Empowering?*

It doesn't matter what we call a game. I've invented lots of insightful as well as silly titles in the following pages and I invite you to do the same with the games you play. What matters is whether they work for you or against you. You need to know both. Business experts do. It's not enough to know the positive, wonderful games that you want to play and want to say *"Yes"* to. Frequently, we can't say a thunderous *"Yes"* to what we want until we've said an equally impactful *"Hell, No!"* to the games that undermine and sabotage our best efforts.

It's for this reason that I will constantly be contrasting *Bad Game/Good Game* in the following pages. Your clarity on toxic or enriching will give you the personal power to *cut* (de-*cision*) a clear

path toward your desired outcomes. It will also empower you to stand strong and firm when the toxic games put on a seductive show and try to recruit you for them.

## *Becoming an Expert Game Player*

Here's the overall game plan of this book. First, we learn to *detect* games. By naming the games we put the spotlight of awareness on them. This allows us to flush out the sick and morbid games that have terrible payoffs and empowers us to refuse them. Game detection means becoming mindful, aware, conscious. It's the wake-up call. It's like the wake-up call that Neo received in the movie, *The Matrix*. Until he took the red pill and woke up to the Matrix that he had been living in, he didn't even know what game he had been playing.

Second, we *access the personal power* it takes to play the games. It takes energy, power, and vitality to become conscious, to look the games in the face and to decide which ones get the thumbs-up and which ones get the thumbs-down.

Third, we access the higher frames of our mind to turn on even greater sources of power and insight. This introduces the human dynamic of frames into the picture and underscores the cognitive-behavioral nature of our lives. As we think and believe, so we play the games that we do. Games are governed and directed by frames. This provides us the central leverage point regarding how to transform things quickly. It doesn't take years of analysis: it takes the change of a frame. We use two raw and primordial powers to do that—our powers to confirm and to disconfirm, to say *"Yes"* and *"No"*. By these powers we exercise executive control regarding which games we'll play and which we will no longer tolerate.

Fourth, we will *temper this power* lest it go to our heads. We will qualify our frames with the kinds of frames that will texture our games so that we play the *Business Expert Games* with the kind of values, visions, and beliefs that truly keep us balanced, healthy, and sane.

Fifth, we will learn a *structural template* so that we can quickly or extensively analyze games. Frame analysis will enable us to become more strategic and thoughtful in our approach. It will enable us to not be blind-sided by facets of our games that we didn't see.

Sixth, after that we will explore the world of *the Business Games that the Experts play*. This is *Part III*, where recommended business games are introduced for your success. These are the games that allow you to take charge of your world, your responses, and your ability to make a difference. Here you'll get to decide which games to say *"No"* to and which ones to validate with, *"Yes!* Let's play!"

Seventh, in the area of business, as in most other complex domains of life, there will be games for different seasons. Games for positioning yourself (Chapter 10), games for making work meaningful and satisfying (Chapter 11), games for handling things with mastery when things get tough (Chapter 12), games for being your own best boss (Chapter 13), games for adding value to the lives of others (Chapter 14), games for resolving conflicts (Chapter 15), and games for inventing even better games (Chapter 16).

## *Ready to Play?*

If you're ready to go to it, then I'd recommend you read the book in its entirety to get a sense of the overall game plan. Then return with a game-plan notebook and the ability to play the Implementation Game. Then you can pick and choose the games of business excellence that you want to make *yours.*

# Chapter 8

# *Flexibly Adjusting to the New Games*

## *There's a New Game in Town*

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**Games in this chapter**
*The Flexibility Game*
*The "Know Thyself" Game*
*The Self-Responsibility Game*
*The Aim Game*
*The Personal Boundaries Game*
*The "Managing Your Own Behavior" Game*
*The "Learning and Unlearning" Game*
*The "Accepting Uncertainty and Taking Risks" Game*
*The Context Game*
*The Personal Resourcefulness Game*
*The Implementation Game*
*The Discounting Game*

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- What *frame games* do I need to play in order to succeed?
- What are the central features of business today that I need to know about and deal with effectively?
- To be a genius at work, what models, skills, and states do I need in order to get to the top?
- How often do you think about *fully* accessing your personal work genius?
- What specific understandings support and empower us in developing excellence for work tasks?

When it comes to business in the twenty-first century, there's a whole new set of new games in town. "The times, they are a changin'" has become especially true for the work environment.

In *Smart Work* (1995), Lisa Marshall and Lucy Freedman describe the new workplace that has been emerging, and that will continue to evolve, in the new century. They primarily focus on the new workplace as becoming increasingly knowledge-intensive and service-based. These are the new games. Work demands, and will continue to demand, more from us as we face greater diversity and an ever-increasing global economy and world market.

In this new century, we can expect the continual growth of technology, an increase in information, and an ever increasing pace of change that will challenge all of us in new and different ways. Marshall and Freedman have suggested nine guiding principles for anyone who wants to survive in the new workplace (see Figure 8:1). I quote these guidelines here to highlight that the new games fall into two categories: *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal*.
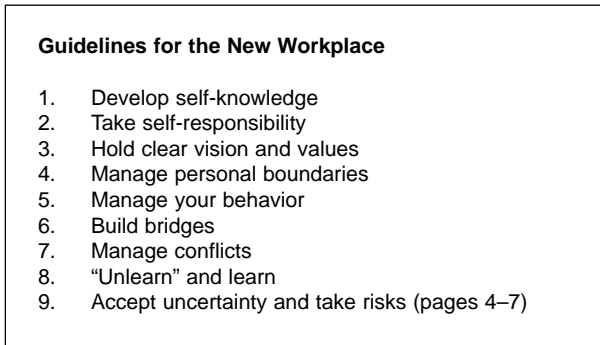
The interpersonal category comes as no surprise. Yet it does highlight how work has become more and more people- and knowledge-intensive, and how it will continue in this direction. This means the building and maintaining of rapport games will become increasingly important. Getting along with others will become less and less optional. As business becomes more sales- and service-oriented, listening, questioning, and connecting skills will play a crucial role. Business will become more *psychological* in the sense that we will be called upon to understand and relate to others.

This domain of interpersonal relations will also highlight the significance of communication, conflict management, "getting to resolution," or defusing hotheads.

The big surprise for many people, if not for most of us, involves the intrapersonal category. *Psychological awareness*, intelligence, and skills are going to become increasingly important. Are you ready for that? The features in this category indicate that business success will become much more dependent, not on what you do or can do, but on your attitude, your state, your self-awareness and self-knowledge, and your ability to manage your own mind and

life. Yet business experts already play these games, and with skill. They embrace the "psychological" nature of business knowing that they cannot eliminate the human factor, nor do they want to.

*Figure 8:1*

**Guidelines for the New Workplace**

1. Develop self-knowledge
2. Take self-responsibility
3. Hold clear vision and values
4. Manage personal boundaries
5. Manage your behavior
6. Build bridges
7. Manage conflicts
8. "Unlearn" and learn
9. Accept uncertainty and take risks (pages 4–7)

It is precisely in this that the magic of *frame games* becomes exceedingly useful and powerful. These intrapersonal skills support and comprise the structure of excellence or genius at work. This generates a new perspective about the games of business. It allows us to view the first five items listed in Figure 8:1, along with item number 8 and, as some of the new games that we will need to learn. All of these have to do with our mind–body states of consciousness or our frames of mind. These make up our basic attitude as derived from our model of the world and govern the games that we can and cannot play.

## The Flexibility Game

**Cues**: It's the tremendous turbulence of change in the field of business that calls for the need for flexibility. Even the pace of this change is increasing. Though change has always been with us, the acceleration of change, along with the explosion of knowledge and technology, suggests that we most fundamentally need to learn *The Flexibility Game* if we want to effectively adjust to the changing times.

**Descriptions**: *The Flexibility Game* contrasts with *The Rigid Inflexibility Game.* Traditionally we have used the black-and-white

thinking of Aristotelian logic to create a rigid business plan and then stay with it for a lifetime. That doesn't work any longer. While both flexibility and inflexibility as frames and games have their place and usefulness, today's business climate has shifted in such a way that only the flexibility frame works.

Certainly there are some things toward which we should adopt more of a black-and-white orientation, yet in most things we need a more flexible attitude. This is especially true in the business context, where change is the great constant, where markets fluctuate, where new products come and go.

In addition, with the growing complexity in today's world, we need more ability to flexibly shift gears and to keep adjusting to the ever changing environment. Some writers describe this as "sensitive to context." This means that, as such things as contexts, technology, environment, infrastructures, and information change, so do we. Flexibility enables us to become change *masters*, rather than its victims. We need the flexibility of the tennis player who never knows where the market will serve the next change, but is ready to move there quickly to stay in the game.

**Cues**: Successful business people learn how to ride the tides of change—and even pioneer the coming changes, rather than resist, resent, or become rigid about change. As they play *The Ever Ready to Change Game* it allows them to stay abreast of new developments and to waste no time pining over "the good ol' days." Excellence in this area emerges from leading the way in creating the changes and in mastering coping with changes. This calls for flexibility. This also calls for a new way of thinking. It calls for a whole new set of questions, questions that allow us to recognize the cues as to when to play the game.

- What changes are currently taking place?
- What changes can we anticipate in our field in the next one, three, five, or ten years, or even in the next six months?
- What forces, factors, and influences are contributing to these changes?
- What will people need and/or want in order to handle and master this area in the future?

- What resources, tools, technologies, and processes will best give people a handle on the future?
- What information will give us the best mapping for forecasting future changes?

**Contrast**: *The Rigidity Game* emerges from a different kind of thinking. Black-or-white and Either/Or thinking punctuates the world in terms of only two choices: this or that. In attempting to bring order and structure to the world, it *oversimplifies*. Yet in doing so it creates delusions and blind spots. Very few things are of the bivalent Either/Or form. This old form of Aristotelian "logical" thinking (the excluded middle) fails to deal with and therefore accurately map a world of multiple choices, the grays, and the things in between.

This is a problem of levels. It is the meta-level structure of *believing* in our beliefs. Believing is one thing. Believing in something means we are *confirming* a thought that maps some territory. But, when we believe in our beliefs, we then become so convinced in our belief that it shuts out new information and feedback. Information that may call the belief into question is eliminated. This makes for fanaticism. It creates what the sociologist Eric Hoffer called "the True Believer"—the closed-minded, narrow-minded, convinced-even-against-the-facts type of thinker. Now that's a very different game.

The need for flexibility arises from the very nature of our mental maps. We need flexibility to update and change our thoughts because all of our representing and validating of beliefs is fallible, and because at best they are just a replica of the territory, and not the territory. Given this fallibility, we need to constantly check our maps against the external situations and make appropriate adjustments as necessary.

When you appreciate the value of flexibility and develop some skill in adapting, changing, and transforming, then the following games of the new workplace become easier.

**Payoffs**: The payoffs of this game are many: relevance, fittingness, ability to stay sharp and current, ability to anticipate trends and to respond appropriately, proactivity, wise and profitable choices.

# Acclaim for *Games Business Experts Play.*

"From a premier modeler and a master at his craft comes a book that
gives you an opportunity to peek into the minds of those who have been
successful in business and understand the games they play. This
easily-read book gives you models to replicate and thus achieve success
on the playing field of business. If business is your game, this is the
handbook to have."

—*Stephen Campbell, Performance Coach, NLP and Neuro-Semantics Trainer*

"Dr Hall clearly describes practical concepts that can empower us to be
more effective in the workplace."

—*Pascal J. Gambardella, Ph.D.*

"I consider this book the evidence that business expertise can be modeled
in such a way that it is possible to be duplicated. I know that this is a
"must read" for us to accelerate the development of our business
acumen. Any reader can only come away richer having discovered how
the experts do it from the inside, and that it is possible to do so also."

—*Armand Kruger, M.A. (Psych), International Modeling Consultant;*
   *Founder of Neuro-Semantics in South Africa*

"This book provides the insight and all the tools needed to help people
within an organization operate with greater effectiveness."

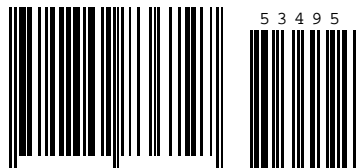—*Addison Woods, Regional Manager, TouchVision, Inc.*