



# PLAYING THE GAME

## **ABSTRACT**

SMART objectives lead to excesses and business failures. DUMB objectives keep the organization focussed, motivated and successful.

**Motivation Matters Limited**



## Introduction

I'm not a connoisseur of SatNavs but mine has a display of how early or late you are for your appointment. This useful, innocent feature wakes the devil in me. The SatNav calculates journey times against expected speeds over parts of the road network. Am I the only person to accept the challenge to beat those anticipated speeds? Do you find you drive a little faster, have a little less patience and make a game of beating the forecast arrival time?

That is what we humans do. We make a game of whatever we can. Whether we are avoiding stepping on the cracks in the paving stones or beating the SatNav, it is these games that lighten our lives.

Some are fortunate to have a big game. Perhaps you have your own business and the game is to achieve your goals – could be to build better mousetraps or to make lots of money. Either way as the business owner, you can play that game.

Now think about your employees. They know the organization's goals so their game is to achieve them, right? Sadly not normally it isn't. Your employees do not have the scope to achieve the goals by themselves or in their team. The goals have to be achieved by every team, every person doing their bit.

That just isn't fun. The employees don't have sufficient control of the outcome individually or their skill only contributes marginally to success. It isn't **their** game.

## What is their game?

Bonus schemes are good examples of bringing the game to the employee through a subset of the organization's goals over which the employee has a major influence.

The banks' bonus schemes drove their businesses out of business. The employees gamed the bonus system to the maximum (proving on the way how effective the bonus schemes were) producing the terrible outcome with which we all had to live.

Is there anyone left who thinks the tick box goals mentality in the UK public services produced a good outcome?

On a smaller scale, has anyone ever been cut off by a call centre after explaining what you want? Perhaps your call would have upset their percentage success rate bonus so down goes the phone!

A good bonus scheme must be possible but a worthwhile narrow based scheme I have yet to see.





## The other game

The good thing about bonus schemes is they take all the horrible complexity of the real world and turn it into a simple money-making calculation. It is easy to manage. The bad thing about bonus schemes is the same as the good thing.

Bonus schemes push employees to play the wrong game as circumstances change.

Presenteeism is defined as being at work but not working.

Some research in 2007 identified these top five non-work behaviours and the mean time lost in a working week.

Chatting with anyone about non-work issues	83 minutes/week
Using the Internet for non-work issues	81 minutes/week
Doing personal emails at work	73 minutes/week
Making personal phone calls	61 minutes/week
Daydreaming	14 minutes/week

That is about 13% of a working week. Anyone recognise any personal behaviour in the list?

You may think the time lost is quite high and surely management is tougher now? If I tell you the data is from the US not the laid back UK/EU zone is that more significant?

Some employees are in such a badly designed job they have little influence over any game, other than **how much work they do or not.**

Have we all met these people who talk of doing nothing today to see if anyone notices?

How distant is that behaviour to my teenage behaviour of lying in bed thinking “if Mum doesn’t come and wake me soon I will be late for school”!





## Managing the game

The key to designing an engaging game that will stimulate eager participation is control. The employee must have a large part to play in the success or otherwise of the game.

Making all these games gel together to fit the overall organizational goals is not simple.

Certainly SMART (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, **T**imely) objectives do not work as they need to be changed too often.

I propose a new acronym for objectives:

**DUMB** (**D**emand driven, **U**nifying, **M**otivating, **B**road) objectives

Unfortunately DUMB objectives need to be constantly changed to meet **demand**. They have to fit within a **unified** goal management system. Working toward the objectives must be achievable and therefore **enjoyable** and **motivating**. Finally the smallest objective has to be **broad** enough to meet whatever demands the organization's environment throws up in the future.

All of this means you can no longer set SMART objectives once a year and get monthly emailed Excel updates showing how well everything is going.

You now have to adjust, explain and amend to manage the resources toward the overall goal.

You have to talk to people to find out what is needed, explain why it is needed and organize the resources needed to succeed.

Then people will take control and achieve what you need to be done.

There is a bonus too. Instead of presenteeism you will see discretionary effort being made.

Just make sure you reward that astonishing performance by valuing the person and paying them more. Don't pay for the performance, pay for the person.





## Conclusion

Unless you manage the game to be played at work somebody else will.

The three things you need to do are:

1. Make the game support the goals with DUMB objectives.
2. Make sure the game is within the person or team's control.
3. Make sure the feedback on results is fast and make it fun.

## MOTIVATION MATTERS LIMITED

### VISION

Inspiring good management, and thus achievement, within organizations will improve employee attitudes, engagement and job satisfaction to create stronger companies with more productive people.

More productive companies build competitive advantage creating a sustainable business with safe growth, healthy profits, secure well paid jobs and contribute to the well-being of the UK.

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