Training's the Name of the Game

Learn how to translate training into a lively boardgame.

By STEPHEN SUGAR

It may not go down in training history, but it certainly was unique when a federal government agency chose to use a boardgame for teaching about issues and regulations in the highly charged arena of equal employment opportunity (EEO).

Why a boardgame?

Risk of failure is inherent in any training program, particularly in the explosive area of EEO training. Many managers are encouraged to attend EEO training as a preventive control against embarrassing and costly errors. Those managers may view EEO training as an interference with their workday and with their way of dealing with subordinates. EEO trainers too often face managers sitting back in silence and indifference to "observe" training.

The safe, traditional approach is to hire a training consultant well-steeped in EEO regulations and issues. The training may be sedentary, but carries small risk of getting out of control. Everyone is satisfied: The training department suffers neither incident nor problem, the organization conducts its mandated program, and the managers return to the workplace none the worse—though possibly none the better.

A Treasury Department EEO staff specialist had a different idea. After seeing a boardgame on sexual harassment, she suggested that a game based on EEO be incorporated into a one-day training module scheduled for the central office.

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Later the boardgame concept was introduced to the entire EEO staff. In a planning session they reviewed the game to consider whether they could adapt it appropriately to their material and their managers. The decision wasn't easy. A well-designed and -implemented game would be a definite plus; it would add impact and might serve as a training model for outlying offices. But a poorly constructed game could detract from the material, upset participants, and in a worst-case scenario might undermine the entire EEO initiative.

After deliberation the staff decided to construct a boardgame for the EEO module while maintaining full control over the material and flow of the game as dictated by rules and board setup. With strong backing from their organizational development and training counterparts, the EEO staff established a budget, outlined a three-month schedule, and hired the writer of the sexual harassment game as a consultant to construct and implement the game. An exciting experiment was underway.

The design process

How do you go about constructing a boardgame? The process is markedly similar to the one for creating a lesson design for a whole training session. In both processes you establish your objectives, collect data, adapt it to audience needs, and package the information for presentation. The major steps of boardgame design are the following:

■ *Determine your objectives.* Establish your learning objectives, intended audience, length and difficulty of training, and how the boardgame will complement the rest of the training module.

■ *Select and adapt a frame.* The frame, like a picture frame, is the part of the boardgame that is open to fill in with the rules of play and information. Select a frame that is user friendly but challenging, adaptable to your audience and material, and flexible enough to meet your training aims.

■ *Develop game rules.* Write rules that tell players what they are and aren't allowed to do, how to tell who is winning or losing, and how to judge when the game is over.

■ *Collect data for writing questions or situations.* Collect the information that is vital to learning and then write it in such formats as true-false questions, role-play directions, case-study questions, and so on.

■ *Construct the game.* Construction of game materials includes designing and printing a gameboard, typing and printing question cards, and assembling paraphernalia like chips, dice, play money, or pawns.

■ *Play it.* Play the game before a live audience, preferably a pilot group. This will test the validity of "easy" directions and questions, show how the game fares under actual play, and give feedback on the effectiveness of the material.

■ *Revise as necessary.* Save the game parts that proved effective in the pilot test and modify or eliminate parts that were vague or confusing. You may have to repeat this step several times before a functioning, effective game evolves.

Let's look at how the process went at EEO.

Establishing objectives

To decide what they wanted to ac-

PROMOTION POINT Receive 1 Chip	NEED TO KNOW! (Draw Card)	CAREER LADDER Roll BROWN Die and Advance	STAFF MEETING (Draw Card)	WHEELCHAIR CORNER Roll RED Die
EEO LAW (Draw Card)		A QUESTION OF EEO		BY THE CASE (Draw Card)
FOR WOMEN ONLY! Women: Receive 1 chip Men: Give 1 chip				FOR MEN ONLY! Men: Receive 2 chips Women: Give 2 chips
BY THE CASE (Draw Card)		*Developed by Stephen Sugar* Copyright 1986		EEO LAW (Draw Card)
EXCHANGE PROGRAM Trade places with anyone on the board	STAFF MEETING (Draw Card)	CAREER LADDER Roll BROWN die	NEED TO KNOW! (Draw Card)	GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE Roll BROWN die

complish by using a boardgame, EEO staff formed a boardgame committee—of their staff, an organizational development (OD) staff member, and the games consultant—to construct a game for a pilot group. The committee established a 12-week timetable with milestones for writing the first set of sample question cards (week four), committee review (week six), pilot game (week seven), and two training sessions (weeks 10 and 12).

What did the committee want the game to accomplish in the training session? Since it was scheduled for the notoriously deadly after-lunch training slot, they wanted the game to engage participants' active interest, to enhance their learning from the morning session, and to create an atmosphere of fun. And by employing different learning methodologies such as role-play, case study, question-and-answer, and group discussions the boardgame should "bring home" or personalize information from the morning session.

Managers and supervisors designated for updating through mandatory EEO training were the intended audience. EEO anticipated no special problems although, as previously noted, this kind of audience can be troublesome because they may begrudge leaving their regular work for any training, especially EEO training. The level of training would be moderately difficult, covering the day-to-day issues a departmental supervisor was likely to face. The length of training would be 90 minutes, with flexibility for condensing or expanding as necessary.

Selecting the frame

The committee decided to employ a gameboard frame modeled after "Monopoly." To simplify play, the committee condensed the gameboard from a square of 36 spaces to a square of 16 spaces, as shown in the artwork on opposite page. This frame had several advantages:

■ It was easy to recognize, simple to understand, and had already tested well on professional managers.

■ It allowed for a good balance between the number of action spaces, which require a player to take a specific action such as rolling a die or taking chips, and knowledge spaces, which require a player to answer a question or speak about a case study.

■ As few as five or as many as 12 people could play the game.

■ It would easily adapt to the specific needs of the subject matter. The main change the committee made was replacing the existing game cards with new ones

containing data relevant to EEO. After that, only modest rule revisions were needed.

■ Participants could play the game within the desired time frame of one to two hours.

Board design

The key to boardgame design is to build in a balance between luck and skill. Too many knowledge spaces make a game that moves too slowly and, even worse, becomes very predictable. Too many action spaces convert the game to one big dice roll. A simple method for providing the desired balance is to alternate between action and knowledge spaces.

One solution is to display each question space's title twice. On the EEO gameboard, for example, there are two spaces marked "career ladder." Landing on either of them directs a player to the same pile of question cards, while landing on either of two spaces marked "need to know" would send a player to a separate set of questions, and so on. This makes writing *and* playing the game much simpler. The game writer has fewer rules and question formats to write and print, and players have less to figure out before getting at the subject matter. As a learning bonus, repeating question spaces increases each player's chance to be exposed to vital information. Since the information on the question card is the heart of the game—and the hardest part of game writing—the game is strengthened by reducing the number of card stacks.

Developing game rules

Game rules set the basic climate of the learning experience. The rules' "dos and don'ts" create a simulated environment. In the EEO game players try to "win" within a simulated organizational structure. The rules and the question cards attempt to synthesize a working environment similar to the one in which managers play out their normal workdays. In hope of making learning more meaningful and applicable, the game designers based all questions, answers, and interpretations on actual agency work environment.

Thanks to the recognizable Monopoly frame, players were easily reacquainted with basic rules of play adapted to EEO situations, including interpretations to enhance the meaning of agency policy. For example, a "wheelchair corner" required each player to role-play from a handicapped person's perspective for at least three turns. This underscored an agency initiative while bringing additional realism to the play.

Want to Know More?

If you think you'd like to try developing a boardgame for your company's training needs, here is a list of books and other literature you might find helpful.

A Handbook of Game Design by H. Ellington, E. Addinall, and F. Percival (New York: Nichols).

"Get Results from Simulation and Role Play," *INFO-LINE*, December 1984, #412 (Alexandria, Virginia: ASTD).

The Guide to Simulation Games for Education and Training, Fourth Edition, by R.E. Horn and A. Cleaves (Beverly Hills: Sage).

A Question of EEO by S.E. Sugar (Kensington, Maryland: The Game Group).

Games Trainers Play and *More Games Trainers Play* by E.E. Scannel and J.W. Newstrom (New York: McGraw-Hill).

STOP Sexual Harassment by S.E. Sugar, C.F. Buddenhagen, and S. Carey (Kensington, Maryland: The Game Group).

Frame Games by S. Thiagarajan and H.D. Stolovitch (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Educational Technology).

"Can Games and Simulations Improve Your Training Power?", *Training*, February 1982.

Here are some adapted Monopoly frame rules that show how the committee adapted them to fit the EEO work environment:

■ The object of the game is to win by collecting 15 chips or by having the most chips when play stops. The natural wish to win is an important incentive for player involvement in the game's competitive spirit.

■ Before the game starts one player is designated as "personnel." Personnel distributes chips, reads questions, and acts as arbitrator and final decision maker in all disputes. This simulates the existing policy, implementation, and decision-making roles of personnel within an organization. The player who acts as per-

sonnel comes away with a clear understanding of the responsibilities and pressures of the personnel office. Other players gain a firsthand understanding of pressures of the personnel officer.

■ Each player rolls a die and advances his or her pawn the number of spaces indicated by the die's dots. In the EEO game, red and brown dice are associated with particular spaces, but their colors have no other significance. But, in other cases, *men* roll a blue die that has the normal number of dots while *women* roll a white die that only goes up to four dots because the five and six dot faces are blanked and count as zero. The zero simulates no chance for advancement.

This rule introduces sexism into the game. Men who have never been exposed to the "going nowhere" syndrome of a sexist environment may be very moved by the experience. And a sudden "policy change" in which men and women switch dice for the rest of the game involves *all* players in consideration of sexist restraints.

■ When a player's pawn comes to rest on a space, the player must follow the directions printed on it. The "personnel" player will supplement or clarify directions as necessary. This reemphasizes that we must play by the rules of the specific office or organization we work in.

■ If a space requires an answer to a question or situation, personnel determines whether the answer is appropriate and either awards or takes away chips. All decisions of personnel are final. Once more players are reminded of the powers and responsibilities of a personnel office.

■ Every time players pass "promotion point," they receive a chip, even if they roll zero while on the space. This reinforces the concept of seniority and reward for movement within an organization.

■ Players who lose all their chips are considered "fired" from the game and must leave the board. This reinforces the if-you-don't-play-by-our-rules-you-must-leave climate.

Collecting data

The selected frame is "loaded" or filled with the content material selected for the training. The loading process is the most time-consuming and difficult aspect of game writing. Specific information must be researched and formatted as case studies and questions.

To accomplish this task, the EEO boardgame committee adopted a modified Delphi technique for data collection. Committee members wrote out the EEO information they wanted the game to cover, both generic and Treasury-specific. Their suggestions then were collected and forwarded to the consulting games writer. The games writer translated the data into a set of sample question cards portraying the information via questions, role plays, and situations. Then the writer photocopied all cards and mailed them to committee members for their comments and recommendations. The committee then sent all cards, with revision recommended or not, back to the games writer who wrote a revised set of question cards for the pilot game. Finally the committee reviewed the final cards before the pilot test.

With timely turnarounds and speedy mail service, this back-and-forth process only took two weeks and allowed everyone access to information about what was going into the game. The committee then made final preparations for the pilot run.

Writing question cards

The question cards are the heart of the finished product, so it's essential that they convey the information or activities you want to cover. Consider the following tips and techniques for writing question cards:

■ State questions simply and in a format that calls for a brief answer. Lengthy answers slow down the game, and players will be distracted from the game's purposes if they are forced to stop play to search for reference resources.

■ Try to place the questions *and* answers, including rationales and references, on the question cards. This provides immediate feedback to reinforce learning.

■ Participants should read aloud all questions so everyone can learn from the information being tested.

Sample Questions

The following are some examples of questions from the EEO boardgame. Questions follow different formats, noted in parentheses following questions.

■ "One of your support staff speaks with a noticeable accent. Every time other members of your staff speak to that person they speak very s-l-o-w-l-y, use oversimplified words, and raise their voices. The support person looks somewhat hurt, but never complains. How do you feel about that?" (Mini-case study exploring the feelings workers who speak English as a second language; discussion.)

■ "Is it fact or myth? A manager is responsible for accommodating an asthmatic worker who cannot tolerate tobacco smoke." (Short answer covering current agency policy; discussion.)

■ "Your wallet is missing. Ask the person to your left where you may have left it. Make it sound sincere." (Process; role play shows how a thoughtless, possibly innocent, statement can sound like an accusation.)

■ "You are at lunch at Dominique's when you see Mr. Ferris, a married black manager, sitting down to lunch with a very young and pretty blonde from the accounting office. What do you think they are talking about?" (Case study; discussion of assumptions based on racial guidelines. Would the observer question the "relationship" if Mr. Ferris was a white manager?)

■ "Ms. Greenly, a Black Muslim, is required to wear traditional dress at all times. Her position requires her to advise the public about your agency's policies. She's employed at the center in Birmingham, Alabama. What do you do?" (Case study; discussion to examine the dress code in light of religious traditions.)

■ "You have to drive to the office Christmas party. When you offer a ride to anyone who needs it, only Roger Jones, a mentally retarded man, said he needed one. The party is two miles from the office, it is raining out, and it's two in the afternoon. What do you do?" (Case study; discussion to examine how people really feel about dealing with handicapped people on a one-to-one basis.)

■ "You are handicapped for three turns. If you decide to play the space, turn in three chips, roll the red die and, since you are considered 'odd,' advance only if you roll a 1, 3, or 5. If you roll 2, 4, or 6, you lose that turn. Collect one chip at the end of each roll. If you decide not to play, turn in five chips and sit out one turn." (Activity; role-play made less threatening by giving the player the choice of not playing the space.)

■ Players should receive immediate feedback, in the form of reward or penalty, at the time they answer. This also reinforces the learning process.

■ If possible, place players in teams of three or four. This creates a mini-dialogue in which players share ideas during the answering process. Small-group interaction often adds to both fun and learning.

■ There are five categories of game cards format: short answer, case study, role play, discussion, and activity-process. You can mix formats to increase player interaction. The sidebar, "Sample Questions," includes some of the questions used in the EEO game.

Constructing the game

Game construction tests your resourcefulness in thinking of and obtaining supporting game equipment and materials. Thoughtful use of gaming supplies can add to the reality of the game. You don't have to be extravagant, just utilitarian. Resourcefulness is a form of creativity, the ability to relate everyday items to the context of the game.

EEO modified the existing gameboard by taping copier labels imprinted with new titles over the former space titles. A word processor printed the questions on heavier cardstock. Dice, chips, and pawns came with the game.

Here are some ideas for using your office equipment and supplies to construct a game from scratch:

■ *Copying machines*—to copy question cards, gameboards, game rules, manuals, play money, and so on. Many copiers are equipped with special features such as reduction, front-and-back copying, collation, and enlargement to make these tasks easier.

■ *Word processors*—to print out question cards and game rules. Word processors are important timesavers because you might have to change question cards and rules to accommodate different audiences, update regulations, or reword questions for clarity.

■ *Paper cutters*—to trim question cards and boardgames to uniform size. You can assemble gameboards by using sheets of paper backed with cardboard from the supply cabinet, old boxes, or laundered shirts.

■ *Miscellaneous materials.* You can buy extra pawns at toy stores, or you can use buttons. Expended materials are money-savers. One games writer converted old cotton bottle plugs into pawns by brightening them up with Easter egg dye.

Copier labels are useful for making corrections on the gameboard, question cards, or master copies before photocopying them. These labels are handy for any last-minute corrections.

Dice are the best "energizers" or devices for directing movement of the pawns around the board. They are easy to use and last forever. They or their use can also be modified to add new dimensions to the game—such as when the five and six dot faces were blanked out to simulate zero.
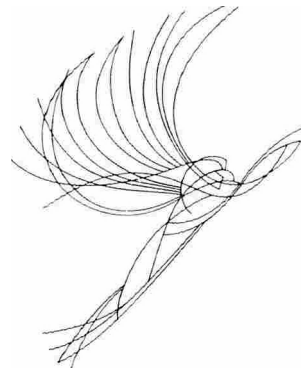
Magic markers are useful for creating special touches like a sign to designate an armchair as the "wheelchair." And save the markers' tops for durable pawns in a variety of colors.

You can buy play money at a toy store or "forge" it on copiers—but don't use real currency. Personalized "funny money" adds to the spirit of the game. Poker chips from the toy store are excellent for use in your

accounting of who is doing well and who is not. Lack of chips has been known to spur underachievers into action. Or use chips to cover spaces in creative forms of the tic-tac-toe board, like "Management Bingo."

A pilot run

Before EEO unveiled the game in a formal training session, they conducted a pilot run. The games writer administered the game; volunteers who hadn't had any of the EEO training participated. This approach helps reveal the best ways a game can be used in traditional training design. Participants can evaluate the game solely on its merits independent from other aspects of the training module, and observers can assess the game's suitability for use as a stand-alone training activity.

EEO conducted the pilot game just after lunch, the same time slot slated for the real game session. The games writer briefed players on the rules and conduct of the

that nonplayers vicariously learn from the game almost as much as players do. Since players asked and answered all questions aloud, nonplayers became *informed* observers, processing the information along with the players. Knowing this proved useful later when a participant in the real session could not play the game because of religious conviction against rolling dice.

Another by-product that evolved from debriefing was the idea of using the game as a stand-alone piece in outlying offices. If employees can use a game by itself with little or no introduction, its value as a training aid is greatly increased. With an explanatory handout or a videotape, the training department can send it to other offices.

After the pilot game the boardgame committee reconvened to reexamine all the cards and rules. They made several recommendations:

■ Modify the gameboard to ensure that a

sions before setting up the game. The committee decided to use two games for the 15 participants. To ensure a mix of male-female and minority-majority participants, the committee "assigned" players. The games writer and OD training specialist were the "personnel officers."

After these adjustments, the committee laid out the gameboards, chips, and question cards and placed the pawns at "promotion point." The committee restacked the decks to make sure the top question cards were those with vital information. They also prepared the policy for the game intervention.

The afternoon module began with a trainer-led mini-review of the morning module's information. After introducing the boardgame idea, the trainer turned the podium over to the games writer, who explained the game's function: to cover EEO issues and regulations through play. The writer presented the gameboard and rules along with participants' game objectives and expectations. Players-to-be questioned what the game was supposed to cover and, of more immediate interest, asked what was expected of them during game play. The games writer explained that players were only expected to make an honest effort to try the material in a game format—nothing more, nothing less.

Once players took their assigned places, it was up to the two personnel officers to conduct the game. From the first roll of the dice, players really got into it. They happily received bonus chips when correct and graciously accepted penalty chips when mistaken. The personnel officer began a cross-table dialogue, and one gave penalty chips to the other table's players for being too noisy. This good-natured dialogue promoted kidding among the players.

As the players acted out role-plays and answered questions, discussions developed about issues brought up by the question cards. Many players volunteered their own opinions about the issues of dress, racist expectations, and handicapped persons. The game inspired openness that allowed sincere discussion of people issues.

The game stopped after 70 minutes. An air of excitement prevailed during and after the game. Managers seemed to share a common understanding of the subject matter.

After the game, players from both tables got together to discuss what they'd learned from the game and what they thought could or should be changed in it. Several comments indicated that players had

> **Since players asked and answered all questions aloud, nonplayers became informed observers, processing the information along with the players**

game. The writer then conducted the game as a role model for observers from the boardgame committee. As the game progressed it became evident that although the format of the question cards was acceptable, the wording of several cards needed revision.

The most perplexing and difficult task in writing a game is composing concise, totally understandable question cards. Perhaps genius-level skill in this is the basis of the popularity of "Trivial Pursuit," a game that should be examined by every prospective games writer.

Revising the game

After the pilot game, the writer conducted a debriefing session in which both players and observers commented on the process and problems of the game. Although the overall response was positive, the committee was concerned about players drawing enough questions on vital EEO material. Game dynamics sometimes caused players to miss the desired spaces. And even when players landed on those spaces, they might repeatedly draw cards containing less significant information.

The debriefing showed the committee

particularly popular exercise was reinforced by doubling its exposure, or spaces, from one to two.
■ "Stack" the question cards to ensure that every game addresses key material.
■ Eliminate or change vague and controversial cards.
■ Create the props for game play from readily available resources. For instance, one card requires a player to sit in a wheelchair while explaining feelings about being handicapped. Instead of spending money for a real wheelchair, a wheelchair sign was placed on an ordinary office chair.
■ Liven up the game with an intervention, such as issuing a new personnel policy requiring men and women to change dice in the middle of the game.

Using the game

After many hours of agonizing over details, the boardgame committee finally believed the game was ready for inclusion in the training module. The day's agenda included a morning module of EEO training and a lunch break followed by introduction to and playing of the EEO game. An OD staff trainer conducted the module with assistance from EEO staff.

During the lunch break, the boardgame committee made some last-minute deci-

achieved a high level of involvement. And their suggestions for rewording certain question cards and rules were valid and useful.

In the final minutes of the training day, the OD trainer summarized what the players had covered in the morning module and reemphasized some of the afternoon's important learning.

Was it worth it?

It's always difficult to evaluate a training event objectively—ask any trainer eagerly reviewing the evaluation sheets collected at the end of one. But with this boardgame, the stakes were even higher than usual. Besides monetary outlay, there were other costs and considerations to weigh.

■ *Time.* The construction process took the boardgame committee weeks of work. Clerical work, word processing, and running the pilot game took additional time.
■ *Game production.* Access to the original gameboard, pawns, and chips advanced production, but new question cards still had to be written, typed, and printed.

■ *Classroom changes.* The trainer had to relinquish control of the class during the game. Some degree of confusion naturally comes with active class participation. But the experimenters' bigger worries were that the material or methodology might offend some players or that, in their rush to compete, players might "misplace" the issues.

The boardgame committee assessed the experiment in light of their own experiences and participant feedback. They were ecstatic. Participants had enjoyed the boardgame and remembered much of the information it conveyed; but they'd also shared an *experience.* They'd seen issues portrayed within the game simulation and explored the issues and realities of EEO. These were the outcomes the committee had hoped and worked for.
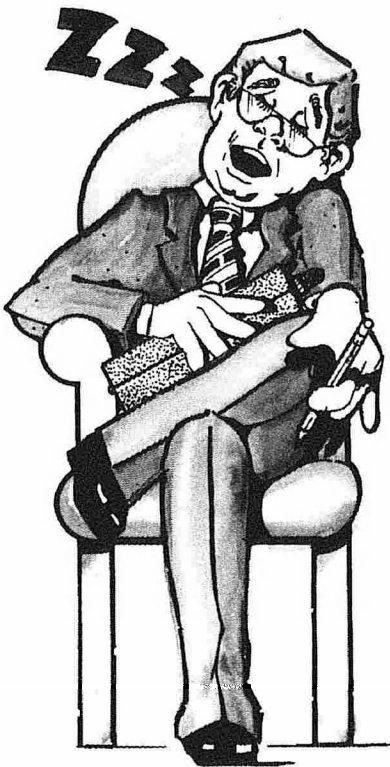
What's next?

As mentioned earlier, EEO is now considering the game for use as a stand-alone event—an outcome not originally contemplated. If the idea of having a regional office staffer unwrap a boardgame and

learn EEO from interpreting its rules and answering its questions upsets your sense of training propriety, that's understandable. But using this boardgame in a controlled training event proved so positive that this alternative use also seems worth a try.

The experiment *was* a success despite the time and risks it involved. Participants left with increased understanding of EEO issues and of their own reactions to the subject. They were obviously more sensitive to the entire EEO program. And that, after all, is what most trainers hope to achieve—a lasting, positive effect on the workers and managers in their organizations.