

GAMING UNPLUGGED

*Apex Consulting Team presents a report indentifying and advising
Electronic Arts on their company's problems*

COMM 292

Tracy Gurton

Section 106

Apex Consultants:

Apex Consulting Meets Electronic Arts

Apex Consulting was given a case study about the many issues surrounding the multi-billion dollar company, Electronic Arts. The mission of the case study was to identify and evaluate the problems caused by challenges that EA is facing. Then, it is to recognize and resolve the various causes to provide a detailed implementation plan to solve and resolve the issues plaguing this gaming company.

The first step that Apex Consulting took in the EA case study was determining the issues most significant to the growing problems within the company. Once the shared ideas were collaborated, three issues were selected as the primary challenges presently facing EA. These issues were poor internal motivation on the employee's behalf, a lack of creativity and innovation within EA, and problems relating to the structure and culture of the corporation, namely management.

Apex Consulting researched the issues and assessed the problems that these issues were causing within the company. It was predominantly important to pinpoint the symptoms that EA was exhibiting so that a diagnosis could be made. This was not an easy task as the matters surrounding EA were complex and at times, discrete. Additionally, much of the researched material was exposed to the subjectivity among group members, making it difficult for the consulting team to achieve a consensus.

The last step of this consultation was the most important for the assessment of the case study. When the symptoms, problems and causes of those problems had been identified, Apex Consulting brainstormed possible solutions to the organizational behavioural problems affecting EA. Solutions were put forth, simple and complex, and together the team evaluated the best combination of solutions. The final process was the establishment of John Kotter's eight-step plan as the device for implementation. The plan was well thought out, thorough and meticulous in order to be a success.

Thus, the consulting process for Electronic Arts was a multifaceted and comprehensive task that required rigorous consulting input in order to achieve a desirable result ideal to EA.

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1.1 Situation Overview:

It is evident that Electronic Arts has risen above their industry and demonstrated the ability to thrive in the worldwide market of developing, publishing, and distributing interactive entertainment software. EA was founded in 1982 by an ambitious and previous Apple employee named Trip Hawkins, and was started up with a modest funding of just \$200,000 USD. Today this company establishes the title of the world's leading gaming developer and is situated on a multi-billion dollar foundation. EA creates numerous types of products for video game systems, personal computers, wireless devices and the internet. Some titles include the very popular *The Sims*, and a variety of sports oriented products such as *FIFA Soccer*. Appealing to the adventurer who seeks thrill within the comforts of home, games such as *Need for Speed and Burnout* have been developed to satisfy the art of interactive shooting and racing. Needless to say, there are a variety of game genres to choose from.

EA has employed over 9000 people in locations all across the world with the main headquarters in Redwood City, California. With numerous studios all around the world, EA shows commitment to developing exciting and thrill-seeking entertainment for gamers everywhere.

Demonstrating an aggressive, competitive, and an almost narrow-minded attitude towards the gaming development, EA has faced serious problems that have compromised the company's reputation and creativity. Known to have intense work hours, especially near "crunch time", EA creates a culture with a negative vibe that is unsatisfactory to most. As far as the variations of the games that are made for the public, EA does not stray far from its prime consumers, young boys and men. As the economy reaches all time lows, EA has been dealing with poor sales, despite the popular belief that the gaming world will be bullet-proof to the declining economy.

Regardless of the successes that EA has managed to cultivate during the last two and a half decades, this company is facing problems that are threatening their organizational culture and structure which in turn is hurting the employees who have worked to bring this company to where they are today.

1.2 The Issues: Economy Downturn, Limited Consumer Market, Class Action Lawsuit

1.2.1 Economic Downturn and Poor Sales:

EA recently announced that they will be cutting “1500 jobs before the close of March 2010” because of huge second quarter losses amounting to “\$391 million” (Stuart, 2009). Unfortunately, the noted decline in sales and overall losses are only a symptom of the much larger problems brewing in the company. When investigated as to why EA was experiencing intense economic downturn and substantial financial losses, it was found that the problems behind the issue were numerous. Employees at the company stated a number of complaints about the working conditions, which include a lack of **workplace injustice**, poor management and **leadership**, and a toxic **culture**. However, the most significant of all complaints came from the problem of **internal motivation**.

1.2.2 Ineffective Internal Motivation

In order to improve conditions socially and financially for EA and their employees, the main factors that are causing the problems within the company must be tackled. It is noted that employees were suffering from a lack of **internal motivation** in the workplace. EA did an excellent job at providing many **extrinsic motivators** such as competitive pay, stock options, child care, dry cleaning, health and dental benefits as well as many other extrinsic rewards. However, according to the **cognitive evaluation theory**, all of these extrinsic rewards “for work effort that was previously reward[ed] intrinsically will tend to decrease a person’s overall level of motivation” (Langton, Robbins & Judge, 2009). Because of this theory, EA executives should refrain from handing out extrinsic rewards in the hopes that they will motivate efficiently.

1.2.3 Limited Consumer Market Targeting Only Boys and Young Men

Electronic Arts has been losing profits and market shares to other competitors because of its lack of creativity and innovation for reaching broader consumer markets. In the past, EA has strictly focused on attracting the male gender to the video gaming industry, as opposed to incorporating women’s typical interests to attract a more diverse market. Videogames like the usual shooter, racing and sports titles have long been considered the domain of teenage boys and

young men (Kane, 2009). There is the apparent lack of audience growth for core games, which is restraining Electronic Arts advancement as a company. It is calculated that if EA increases its female players by 5%, it could translate into as much as \$1 billion in new revenue for every year (Kane, 2009).

1.2.4 Lack of Creativity

Neil Young, the general manager of Electronic Arts Los Angeles, states that “consumers will be bored if we give them the same games, only prettier.” EA tends to rely on independents such as profitable sports games and movie tie-ins to generate new ideas for their games, instead of using their own unique visions. The EA employees may be influenced by some organizational factors affecting creativity such as **expected evaluation, surveillance, external motivators, competition and constrained choice**. The root cause of the employee’s lack of creativity, however, is the organizational culture at EA. The employees are burdened with long work hours separating them from their individual personal lives. EA manipulates their employees into having only one life: a work life by providing freedom and extra facilities at the workplace. Although this is a good incentive, it does not completely compensate for ensuring each employee has a balanced life style. A **positive organizational culture** stresses the importance of “not only organizational effectiveness, but also the individuals’ growth” (Langton, Robbins, Judge, 2009, p. 395).

1.2.5 Class Action Lawsuit

When Jamie Kirschenbaum, an image production artist, filed a lawsuit against EA on July 29, 2004, a sigh of relief seemed to resonate within the walls of every EA games’ offices. It was a unanimous agreement about how dissatisfied the workers were with their management for not being compensated for working long and gruelling hours during “crunch time.”

1.2.6 Dishonest Management- Moral Leadership

EA faced a matter of poor management, but more specifically a matter of dishonest management. EA had many problems with their superiors because there was essentially no **interactional justice**. It was not uncommon for employees to be notified via email the night before to come in on a Saturday. Two of the four points outlined by Professor James Clawson of the University of Virginia about “**moral foundation of leadership**” are used below to show where EA went wrong.

1) **Truth Telling:** During the lawsuit, allegations were made to show that EA improperly classified employees as exempt from the overtime pay. No further information was discovered to show if EA knew about this misclassification.

2) **Respect for the individual:** The lack of respect to compensate, and correct mistakes that affect their employees is poor conduct. Furthermore, the management's behaviour was an example of scoring high in **Machiavellianism**. They did not care how the employees did their work as long as they finished it in the given time frame.

2.1 Recommendation overview and Solution:

The problems that EA face are like blisters. If treated correctly, they will cause some temporary grief, but will eventually go away; if they are not treated with care and are hastily popped, the pain will linger and there is no telling how bad the damage will become. Electronic Arts is a company that strives for perfection in their products and in their working environment. Unfortunately, such ambition has gone astray somewhere along the line. The lack of innovation and creativity, the lost drive to be motivated and to motivate, and the far from utopia experience that the employees are feeling is evidence of EA's weak culture and structure.

The first step in creating a new organizational structure has already been initiated by EA. They have decided to distribute four new managers directing four newly created departments. These departments were created to help "streamline decision-making, improve global focus, and speed new ideas to the market" (Boyer, 2007). The departments will be divided into popular games, casual games, sporting games and action games. This specialization and division of labour will improve efficiency and organization within EA.

The following criteria are a fusion of the organizational structure components along with the primary characteristics of a culture to help EA recreate their original vision of the company.

Work Specialization: Innovation and Risk-taking

EA does exhibit an effective work specialization. The only suggestions for this area are to:

- Consider hiring more workers in specified fields

- Optimize their output level by delegating shifts to more people to utilize all hours of the day without exploiting the workers' time and rights
- Increase workforce diversity in order to improve innovation and **risk-taking**.

Departmentalization: Attention to Detail

Now that EA has decided to have four distinct labels, the workload on the employees will be more defined. A worker in *The Sim's* department will not have to worry about the development of *FIFA Soccer*. Employees who are placed in a specified area to focus on a more concrete project:

- Are motivated and expected to perform optimally with greater precision and attention to detail
- Will not be moved around to do a "quick touch up" in another department for urgency reasons
- Could participate in making a new label created for women by women as a result of reconstructing the departments.

Chain of Command

It is important that employees know who to report to when they have a problem or are in need of help in order for an organization to function. EA's management did not consult the issue of unpaid overtime because:

- EA's management lacks **delegation**
- The communication system was not efficient; an **all-channel communication model** can keep management informed of dissatisfying activities on the workplace

Span of control: Team Orientation

It is one thing to have qualified managers to do a job; it is another to have *enough* managers so that they can do *all* the jobs.

- The greater the span of management, the more the company has to pay for the numerous employees, but with more managers to deal with the employees' inquiries, less problems will occur
- Team orientation is all about how closely management makes decisions with the team rather

than the individual employee's best interest in mind.

- If there were more managers working to solve the compensation issue before drastic measures, EA would have never had to waste \$14 million to settle the matter when it became a class action lawsuit
- By increasing the amount of leaders in the work place, there are more supervisors to lead by example.

Centralization and Decentralization: People Orientation

How management is conducted is the major issue that EA is experiencing. With employees feeling the lack of motivation and needing a stronger leadership strategy, reallocating the power in the company would be necessary.

- Centralization helps regulate the decision making to mainly the top management
- Decentralization allows lower levels of management to call the shots.

Having so many employees to accommodate and already establishing a greater span of control, decentralization allows EA to make management decisions to benefit each employee and to empower them with their own decisions regarding production.

Formalization: Outcome Orientation

Alain Tascan, EA's chief of their Montreal office, has confirmed that his employees are not restricted to a standard procedure while doing their job.

- Workers are not obligated to dress in business attire
- No time card to punch when coming into work
- By not emphasizing formal wear and formal work gestures, EA shows that the main focus is on the outcome of their employees' work
- Formalities of business etiquettes are not necessary to achieve EA's production goals.

With this outline procedure to overhaul the previous flawed organizational structure, EA is expected to tune up in the management and creativity dilemmas and be ready to get back on their feet for new and better creations. The organizational cultural aspect of the plan is to ultimately create a measuring device to determine how high or how low the culture is so that some fine

tuning can come into place when needed. If EA can effectively work under these new conditions, there will be fewer lawsuits, gaming dilemmas, and poor sales situations in the future.

2.2 Specific Issues Resolved:

2.2.1 Economic Downturn and Poor Sales: Ineffective Internal Motivation

Instead of putting emphasis on extrinsic rewards to enhance motivation, EA should try to improve employee motivation by increasing the sources of internal motivation in the workplace. EA can introduce and utilize goal setting using a **management by objectives** program. Goals in the workplace are especially effective when set properly, and they motivate employees by directing individuals' attention to what they should be doing, regulating the effort that individuals' put in to a given task, increasing the persistence an individual exhausts on a given task and encouraging the development of strategies and action plans. It is important that this goal setting program has specific targets, participative decision making, performance feedback, and an explicit time period in order to improve employees' internal motivation. Another way of enhancing poor internal motivation is to improve employee **self efficacy**. **Self efficacy** issues are solved in four ways: **enactive mastery, vicarious modelling, verbal persuasion** and **arousal**.

2.2.2 Limited Consumer Market: Lack of Creativity

By recognizing the difference between the people's work life and personal life, the employees tend to be happier, therefore, they are more likely to generate more creative ideas. This is based on the theory of **creative-thinking skills** in the **three-component model of creativity** (Langton, Robbins & Judge, 2009). EA has already established a good physical environment for their employees. For instance they have a basketball court and several lounges within the building (Caplan, 2005). These facilities, however, can take the employees away from their personal lives. Incorporating these two aspects by allowing the employees' family members to use the company's facilities will result in the employees being able to focus more time on their personal life. Together, the employees and their families can experience EA's leisure facilities, which can improve their personal happiness. By encouraging employees to engage in their personal lives, it will be more apparent in EA's organizational culture that the members should value balanced life styles. Furthermore, McShane (2003) states that fostering a creative work environment falls under three categories: establishing **organizational support**, ensuring

intrinsically motivating work and allowing **sufficient time and resources**. Therefore, EA can reinforce these three aspects into their organizational culture in order to enhance the creativity within their employees.

To build a foundation to develop a new customer loyalty within the female population, EA can begin an entire new branch ‘for females by females.’ This new branch will allow the women to collaborate their ideas as a group in order to create more innovative games for the female audience. It is proven that groups brainstorm and tend to be more creative in their decisions opposed to just individuals (Langton, Robbins & Judge, 2009).

2.2.3 Class Action Lawsuit: Dishonest Management

To reform from dishonest management, the company must step back from the situation and understand some of the goals and objectives that can help them attain the greatest performance level. Here are key steps to follow to re-establish a stronger management team:

- Re-establish goals to remind everyone that they are striving for brand new innovative games to satisfy the consumer markets
- Ensure that everyone involved in this job has an equal measure of importance
- “Treat all staff fairly and equitably to mitigate (illegal) bias and to encourage loyalty and high performance” (Broda, 2003)
- Have an immediate compensation action take place in order to alleviate further finance problems
- Create a **climate with a high level of trust** using interactional justice by personally apologizing
- Re-design the management team by re-evaluation; determine who stays and who goes
- Begin a new hiring process to replace employees that have been terminated
- Align the new values, and replace unwritten **norms** with formal rules and regulations
- Hire the best managers, consultants and advisors to guarantee employees’ rights and needs, to develop effective timelines for designers, and to keep the new plan intact

When damage control is set in place, a new refined vision for EA can be promoted to strive for a new organizational structure and culture.

3.1 Implementation Plan:

Now that specific solutions are provided to tackle the issues to uphold a strong company foundation, the last step is to implement all of these factors into one cohesive plan. John Kotter's eight-steps for implementing change is recommended to ease EA into a new and revised organizational structure with new elements of managing and culture.

Take two weeks; Steps for 1-3

1-Establish a sense of urgency for change:

EA needs to stress urgency for a new organizational structure and culture. Notification would need to be distributed effectively and evenly throughout the company for everyone to know about the change. This can be the first step in exercising the all-channel communication method where everyone communicates with one another.

2-Form Coalition to Lead the Change

This need for change must benefit everyone in the workplace. Thus, a committee consisting of advisors, consultants, effective management and employees, is needed to begin this revolution. When a diverse group is composed to represent everyone in the workplace equally, recommendations of how to proceed with things will be voted on by the team with their respected party's interests at hand.

3-Create New Vision and Strategies

EA's vision is to have a stronger culture and structure to satisfy all of their employees. By seeking change in these two areas of the workplace, EA hopes to change the way their employees have to work. This is done so that employees will not have to work long overtime hours. Their creativity will grow with the hopes that their market will branch into broader markets, and that the company will be sustainable even through the hard times in the economy.

After two weeks, take one month for Step 4

4-Communicate Vision

To ensure that the message is clear and unambiguous, two weeks worth of meetings will be held to accommodate everyone working at EA. Every worker, regardless of their position, will attend one of the mandatory sessions held within reasonable work hours so that there will be no conflict with family life and other non-work commitments. These meetings are held strictly to communicate to employees of the upcoming transition into a new home and organization concepts. By doing this, a sense of interactional justice is met, and the company is beginning to exercise even more all-channel communication, which has been identified as an indirect key factor to improve the company's overall performance. The Change Committee will have representatives from each meeting to document any questions, and comments from employees. This is to ensure that everyone's opinion is accounted for.

After one and half months, take three months for steps 5-6

5-Empower Others by Removing Barriers for Change

Employees who are reluctant to the dramatic change will need to be reassured and educated about what exactly will be taking place in order for the vision to become a reality. Constant communication is crucial to make sure that employees are receiving adequate information. At the meetings to communicate the vision, participation and interacting with the workers will allow them to feel the tangibility of this change. The more active the workers are in the process of change, the more likely they will understand and retain information as to why this change is happening. It will be easier for passive members to just cross their arms, turn their heads, and resist the change if no one takes initiative to get through to them. Give the employees the choice to speak out and voice their opinions as to why they are against the change. This is the time for the company to show that they care by "bending over backwards" to prove that change is going to benefit everyone.

6-Plan and Create

Plan the reformation of the management team. Immediate evaluations of all managers will be conducted to see which managers have the best leadership and managerial skills. The evaluations will be thorough and will look for efficiency, cooperativeness, leadership and

decision making abilities, and positive attitudes. These evaluations will be conducted by a panel of human resource professionals hired by EA to improve the quality of the managers they employ. Twenty percent of the managers with the poorest evaluation results will be terminated. There will be a scheduled hiring period instigated to refill these vacant managerial positions.

Create the vision of new and more effective management, and employees with a more structured work time line. The managers will re-evaluate each employee's motivation by reinforcing **task significance, autonomy, feedback, self-leadership** and **flow** to align the workers' competencies with their job. After placing everyone in their respected departments, the HR recruitment team can conduct a transfer of some women in the company to the new branch of 'for females by females' to increase **team orientation** within the organizational culture. With internal recruitment completed, a second round of hiring can begin to fill in any more missing gaps in the workplace.

EA will excite their workers by conducting **job transfers** and **job-rotations**, and by shaking up **sub-cultures**. Management will be trained to be positive role-models when they are shifted to their new respectable departments, and this will start a new and improved culture.

After four and a half months, take six months to one year for steps 7-8

7-Reassess Changes and Adjust

Given a time frame of six months, the company will have a thorough evaluation conducted through surveys and group meetings to express their thoughts on the changes. At this point, both employees and management will each have an assessment of how their performance has been since the change. Benefits and set-backs should be noted. How has the creativity improved since the change? How are work hours since the change? How is the overall employee satisfaction been so far? How has your family life improved/digressed since the change? These questions should be taken into consideration to give the company a snap shot of the direction the change is going in. Any negative factors that can be cured should be evaluated by the Change Committee and the HR team to compose any resolutions.

8-Reinforce Change

As constant assessment goes on following the six-month mark, the company's HR team should continue to focus on this implementation plan for another six months. Projected goals should be ready by the one year mark so that the company will have something to work towards as soon as everyone has assimilated to the culture. Meetings, inquiries, communication, and feedback should be continuing factors helping to shape this change. As EA continues to evaluate and critique their performance, it is predicted that by 2012 that there will be no more drastic economic loss and that EA will be recognized as one of the best overall employers.

3.2 Justifications and Resulting Benefits/Difficulties

EA is, for the most part, a strong company striving to remain at the top of their industry. In order to retain that title, EA must remember that it takes dedicated and passionate workers to take them to the next level. Because this company faces problems that interfere with the way work is delegated and with their workers' behaviour, reformatting the organizational structure and culture is the most efficient way to reach optimal success.

From the recommended solutions, these are the foreseeable benefits and difficulties that EA may encounter.

Benefits

- Improved employee satisfaction
- More creativity and productivity
- Negotiable/ more satisfying work hours
- Solid structure
- Improved culture
- Clear, well-defined goals
- Effective motivation

Difficulties

- Resistance to change
- Dysfunctional conflict and lack of trust between new management and reluctant/hostile employees
- Stress on management and employees due to uncertainty of the outcome
- Turnover because of change
- Ambiguity in job description for the new women's branch, new management, and new employees

The Glossary Index

All-channel communication model: A channel by which information flows where the speed is fast, the accuracy is moderate, there is no emergence of leader, and the member satisfaction is high

Attention to detail – the degree to which employees are expected to work with precision, and analysis

Arousal – leads to an energized state that drives a person to complete a task

Autonomy – the degree to which the job provides substantial freedom, independence, and discretion to the individual in scheduling the work and determining the procedures to be used in carrying it out

Centralization – the degree to which decision making is concentrated at a single point in the organization

Cognitive evaluation theory – offering extrinsic rewards (for example, pay) for work effort that was previously rewarding intrinsically will tend to decrease the overall level of a person's motivation

Competition – facing win-lose situations with peers

Constrained choice – being given limits on how you can do your work

Creative thinking skills – encompasses personality characteristics associated with creativity, the ability to use analogies, and the talent to see the familiar in a different light

Creativity – the ability to produce novel and useful ideas

Decentralization – the degree to which decision making is distributed to lower-level employees

Delegation – assignment of authority to another person to carry out specific duties, allowing the employee to make some of the decisions

Departmentalization – the basis on which jobs are grouped together

Enactive mastery – gaining relevant experience with the task or job

Expected evaluation – focusing on how your work is going to be evaluated

External motivators – focusing on external tangible rewards

Extrinsic motivators – motivation that comes from outside the person and includes such things as pay, bonuses, and other tangible rewards

Formalization – the degree to which jobs within the organization are standardized

Feedback – the degree to which carrying out the work activities required by the job results in the individual obtaining direct and clear information about the effectiveness of his or her performance

Innovation – a new idea applied to initiating or improving a product, process, or service

Interactional justice – the quality of the interpersonal treatment received from a manager

Intrinsically motivating work – task significance, autonomy feedback, self-leadership, and flow of align competencies with job

Intrinsic motivators – a person’s internal desire to do something, due to such things as interest, challenge, and personal satisfaction

Job rotation – the periodic shifting of an employee from one task to another

Machiavellianism (Mach) – the degree to which an individual is pragmatic, maintains emotional distance, and believes that ends can justify means

Management by objectives (MBO) – an approach to goal setting in which specific measurable goals are jointly set by managers and employees; progress on goals is periodically reviewed, and rewards are allocated on the basis of this progress

Moral foundation of leadership – suggests that there are four cornerstones including truth telling, promise keeping, fairness, and respect for individual

Motivation – the intensity, direction, and persistence of effort a person shows in reaching a goal

Norms – acceptable standards of behaviour within a group that are shared by the group’s members

Organizational support – tolerates mistakes, encourage communication, and offers job security

Outcome orientation – the degree to which management focuses on results, or outcomes, rather than on the techniques and processes used to achieve these outcomes

People orientation – the degree to which management decisions take into consideration the effect of outcomes on people within the organization

Positive organizational culture – an area of OB research that concerns how organizations develop human strength, foster vitality and resilience, and unlock potential

Respect for individual – leaders who tell the truth, keep promises, and are fair show respect for followers. Respect means treating people with dignity

Risk taking – a person’s willingness to take chances or risks

Self efficacy – an individual’s belief that he or she is capable of performing a task

Self-fulfilling prophecy – a concept that proposes a person will behave in ways consistent with how he or she is perceived by others Chain of command – the continuous line of authority that extends from upper organizational levels to the lowest level and clarifies who reports to whom

Span of control – the number of employees that report to a manager

Social loafing – the tendency for individuals to expend less effort when working collectively than when working individually

Subculture – mini-cultures within an organization, typically defined by department designations and geographical separation

Surveillance – being watched while you are working

Task significance – the degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people

Team orientation – the degree to which work activities are organized around teams rather than individuals

Three-component model of creativity – the proposition that individual creativity requires expertise, creative-thinking skills, and intrinsic task motivation

Truth telling – leaders who tell the truth as they see it allow for a mutual, fair exchange to occur

Verbal persuasion – becoming more confident because someone convinces you that you have the skills necessary to be successful

Vicarious modeling – becoming more confident because you see someone else doing the task

Workplace injustice – the perceived unfairness of actions in the workplace

Work specialization – the degree to which tasks in the organization are subdivided into separate jobs

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