

GAME DEVELOPMENT AND APPLICATION FOR SALESPEOPLE TRAINING

Work in progress

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Abstract: Gamification can improve salespeople training by promoting game experiences in organizational contexts. Despite the potential benefits to the area, the literature on the subject is scarce. The aim of this paper is to fill this gap by investigating the requirements to apply gamification on salespeople training and provide managerial implications to the field, thus contributing extensively to the impact of research to the practice. The research took place in one of the information technology global leaders. The company has more than fifty thousand employees globally and uses gamification to improve the performance of its salespeople. Game-based training developers were interviewed as well as managers and salespeople who participated in these training. The findings contribute by indicating the requirements for the development and application of games. Game development requires the practical content approached in a fun context; promotion of competition; feasibility of self-analyze performance; and promotion of simulated challenges. Game application requires instructors who have a good personal reputation among the salespeople and knowledge in the sales area; the co-optation of salespeople through the indication of the benefits received by other professionals; the setting of the environment of the game; the promotion of competitions between subsidiaries; the provision of financial or non-financial awards; and conflict management among players. The observation of the identified requirements increases the knowledge sharing among participants, as well as the engagement and performance of salespeople.

Keywords: Gamification, game design, sales training, salesperson knowledge

INTRODUCTION

Salespeople are a critical resource in organizations. This makes them deserve special attention from management (Farías et al., 2017, 274). This attention includes identification (Guenzi et al., 2016, 3707) and later dissemination of salespeople knowledge to the other members of the sales team (Tanner et al., 2008, 193). The dissemination of information through training enables salespeople to identify new business opportunities (Liu and Comer, 2007, 565), and transform product knowledge into a competitive advantage (Mariadoss et al., 2014, 143). On the other hand, the non-dissemination of knowledge contributes to the creation of information silos. The elimination of these information silos can increase sales (Bachrach et al., 2017, 88). Training is an alternative to eliminate information silos.

Gamification is an alternative to improve knowledge management (Allal-Chérif and Makhlouf, 2016, 1539). It implies the use of game elements in other contexts (Deterding et al., 2011, 9). Another definition indicates that gamification is a process to improve services with game-based experiences, providing to players the same psychological experiences of traditional games (Huotari and Hamari, 2012, 17). This refers to the use of game mechanics and game-thinking in non-games applications (Simões et al., 2013, 345). The use of organizational games gives the player real challenges involved in pleasurable situations (Vesa et al., 2017, 273). Examples such as these were identified in financial and health sectors (Deterding et al., 2011, 9), in service marketing (Huotari and Hamari, 2012, 17), service adoption (Shi et al., 2015, 82), in motivation to the use of intranet (Farzan et al., 2008), and in organizational training (Calderón and Ruiz, 2015, 396; Hamari et al., 2014, 3025).

Despite its possible benefits, gamification is still a recent topic in academic studies (Hamari et al., 2014, 3025; Hamari and Keronen, 2017, 125). One of the less explored fields is the use of games for salespeople training working in the B2B market. Aiming at contributing by filling this gap and to address the “links between research on the one hand, and education and industry impact and practice on the other” (Industrial Marketing and Purchasing Group - IMP, 2018), this case study investigates the following question:

RQ - What should be done to apply gamification in the sales training?

The investigation of this question is conducted in one of the largest software companies in the world. It has more than 50,000 employees working in different regions around the globe. One of the goals of the company is to increase its sales to medium and small companies globally. This market is still little explored by this company, despite its excellent perspectives. The feasibility of this goal can significantly leverage the company's profits, given the existence of many organizations of these sizes. However, the exploitation of this market presents some challenges: 1) the high number of salespeople to be trained, 2) the geographical dispersion of these target companies, and therefore of the professionals who need to manage sales with them and 3) salespeople's turnover who work in this market. To overcome these barriers, the company has developed different games to enhance the engagement and the qualification of its salespeople. Game adoption analysis indicates that its use has helped to improve salespeople's performance and motivation, to accelerate their integration into the company, and to disseminate complex content.

The findings of this case study came from semi-structured interviews with game developers, as well as managers and salespeople who participated in the training. Document

data and participant observation also compose the evidence collected in the study. These findings contribute by suggesting alternatives to the improvement of the games; indicating learning gaps not covered by the literature; suggesting alternatives to increase the engagement, autonomy and emotional control of new salespeople; as well as to induce knowledge sharing between new and veteran salespeople. This work is organized according to the following logic. First, it presents an understanding of the literature in games and sales training, as well as a summary of the literary review. Next, the qualitative research methodology is presented with its case study and data analysis. Right after, it highlights the findings of the research and finally the discussion of these findings based on the literature among with the conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review addresses the literature on sales training and alternatives to implement gamification-based training. Literature is scarce in relation to the use of games in the business environment. Thus, the literature on sales training was also considered. This literary base assists the attainment of the objectives of the present work.

Games

Games were classified as entertainment, utilities (Hamari and Keronen, 2017, 125), or social (Simões et al., 2013, 345). The combination of gamification and social approaches produce better learning performances (De-Marcos et al., 2016, 380). Studies with entertainment games identified that the games can promote consumption (Badrinarayanan et al., 2015, 1045), as well as cooperation and engagement of group members (Morschheuser et al., 2017, 169). An educational game is one example utility games. These games seek to present content in a fun way, aiming to motivate students (Domínguez et al., 2013, 380). Offer prizes for the winners of an educational game seem to increase the student engagement in virtual discussions. These prizes include medals, trophies, progress bars and avatars (Ding et al., 2017, 126).

Games are gaining space also in the corporate world. Its use contributes to increase loyalty, productivity and sensation of well-being among the collaborators (Oprescu et al., 2014, 1). Games can also be used to integrate new employees (Allal-Chérif and Makhoulf, 2016, 1539), and in trainings that bring practical experiences (Calderón and Ruiz, 2015, 396). Marketing studies identified that games contribute to improve services, (Conaway and Garay, 2014, 1; Shi et al., 2015, 82), helps to create value (Huotari and Hamari, 2012, 17), and increase customer engagement with competition and fun (Conaway and Garay, 2014, 1). An analysis of corporate games identified that they use mechanisms and aesthetics (Kaap and Cone, 2012, 2), combine reward and competition (Shi et al., 2015, 82), and seek to leverage employee motivation (Vesa et al., 2017, 273). Other studies investigated adoption of Second Life (virtual reality). The first study identified that training based on virtual reality presented better results in terms of convenience entertainment and experience sharing (Gallego et al., 2016, 81). The second study was one of the only made in marketing and sales area. This study analyzed the use of Second Life in salespeople training and gamification platforms for financial compensation of sales teams (Moncrief et al., 2015, 45).

The literature suggests that ten elements can increase players motivation: points; ranking; achievements and medals; levels; theme (narrative); clear objectives; feedback; prizes; progress and finally challenges (Hamari et al., 2014, 3025). However, other study identified that games that aim to leverage performance should adopt social mechanics and hedonism, removing rewards (Shi et al., 2015, 82). The team structure to dispute the game was also investigated. The best practices in creating virtual groups indicate it is efficient to create groups with professionals with different knowledge, but a similar level of expertise (Zheng et al., 2016, 3468). Other study identified that the proximity of competitors during a game decreases the capacity of reflection of the player regarding their choices. This approximation also increases the players desire of seeking short-term efficiency (Vesa et al., 2017, 273).

Salesperson training

Sales training is part of the investment to maintain salespeople in the company (Fariás et al., 2017, 274). Such investment can guarantee learning promotion among professionals (Tanner et al., 2008, 193), retrieve information from salespeople (Liu and Comer, 2007), promote product knowledge (Mariadoss et al., 2014, 143), and also help with emotional capabilities (Bande et al., 2015, 142). The results of sales training are influenced by the level of dedication of salespeople and the actions of managers and instructors (Honeycutt et al., 1993). The dedication of the salesperson seems to be an issue since they only put effort into activities that reward them financially (Oliva, 2006, 395). This problem can be mitigated through manager's actions. The literature indicates that these managers play a fundamental role in training salespeople (Cavusgil, 1990; Honeycutt et al., 1994), and may influence their behavior and the results of the sales department (Piercy et al., 2009, 459). To improve training, managers need to define measurable objectives to evaluate the quality of the trainings (Honeycutt and Stevenson, 1989, 215; Weeks and Stevens, 1997, 423), consider cultural differences among countries before training replication (Honeycutt et al., 1996, 42), and select the best instructors to conduct training (Bachrach et al., 2017, 88). These instructors need to interact with the training participants (Erffmeyer et al., 1992, 185). Besides, they need to be patient and informal to get salespeople out of their comfort zone (Ricks et al., 2008, 593).

The evaluation of training results contributes the objectives that the companies wish to achieve with the training of their salespeople (Attia et al., 2008, 181; Bachrach et al., 2017,88). This assessment should cover the increase in sales observed after training (Honeycutt and Stevenson, 1989, 215), the participant reaction to the training program and content assimilation (Leach and Liu, 2003, 327). Other studies propose that the training evaluation consider the strategic objectives of organizations, change behavior promoted by training and achieved financial goals (Attia et al., 2005, 253). However, evaluations seem to be affected by managerial perceptions, methodological problems and lack of empirical evidence (Attia et al., 2002, 253). Moreover, monitoring goals and learning efforts increase people's commitment to the training (Bachrach et al., 2017, 88).

The literature also presents other elements that can contribute to improve the training. This is the case of the use of resources such as social networks (Kent et al., 2016, 116; Ozkan-Canbolat and Beraha, 2016, 1807) and internal company networks (Kent et al., 2016, 116). For instance, online trainings can increase quantity, quality and content of trainings and improve learning (Yücel and Usluel, 2016, 31). Another element related to sales training is

the promotion of competition. These competitions might consider the company sales goals in the long run (Poujol et al., 2011, 664). Elements like real case studies can increase the results of sales training (Shepherd and Ridnour, 1996, 37). Furthermore, adding storytelling to sales training can promote salesperson ability to share stories and straightening relationships with customers (Gilliam and Flaherty, 2015, 143). Simulations provided by training allow salesperson to evaluate performance and come up with strategies to improve it (Schiff, 1983, 131). Simulations combined with games are widely used, one example found in the literature used a simulation game (BAFA BAFA) to create awareness about cultural diversity (Bush and Ingram, 2001, 65). The simulations can also contribute to improve knowledge, confidence, and reduce the learning curve of new salespeople (Bashaw et al., 2002, 329). In addition to all these elements, the combination of autonomy and self-monitoring increases salesperson engagement, improving sales results (Panagopoulos and Ogilvie, 2015, 162).

The reviewed literature shows the benefits of the use of games in different scenarios. These benefits include improved attitude and player performance (Domínguez et al., 2013, 380; Morschheuser et al., 2017, 169; Oprescu et al., 2014, 1; Vesa et al., 2017, 273). Regarding utilitarian games, it has been identified that the use of games contributes by improving the aggregated value to the customer (Conaway and Garay, 2014, 1; Huotari and Hamari, 2012, 17; Shi et al., 2015, 82). The literature also presents the requirements for structuring generic games or for salespeople training. These requirements are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 – Synthesis of the literature on game and training requirements.

Code	Requirements	Summary
Games	Game design	Promotion of fun (Conaway and Garay, 2014, 1; Gallego et al., 2016, 81) and promotion of competitive situations (Conaway and Garay, 2014, 1; Hamari et al., 2014, 3025; Shi et al., 2015, 82). Induction of knowledge sharing (Gallego et al., 2016, 81). Awards to winners (Ding et al., 2017, 126; Shi et al., 2015, 82).
	Game application	Diversity in the profile of the players of a team (Zheng et al., 2016, 3468).
Training	Training design	Short time trainings (Erffmeyer and Johnson, 1997,185). Promotion of competitive situations (Poujol et al., 2011, 664). Promotion of the autonomy and self-monitoring of salespeople (Hunter and Panagopoulos, 2015, 162). Mitigation of salespeople' isolation or immunity (Peters et al., 2017, 43). Promote awards to salespeople (Anaza and Nowlin, 2017, 14; Oliva, 2006, 395)
	Training application	Management interaction (Cavusgil, 1990, 1; Honeycutt et al., 1994, 65; Piercy et al., 2009, 459). Participatory instructors (Erffmeyer et al., 1992, 125), patient and informal (Ricks et al., 2008, 593) Training evaluation (Attia et al., 2008, 181; Bachrach et al., 2017, 88) Evaluation criteria: analysis of the increase in sales (Honeycutt and Stevenson, 1989, 215), participants' opinion (Leach and Liu, 2003, 327), assimilation of contents (Bachrach et al., 2017, 88; Leach and Liu, 2003, 327).

The analysis of Table 1 indicates some elements in common between the requirements of game design and conventional training: promotion of competitive situations and offer of awards. The analysis of the same table also indicates that the feasibility of gamification benefits can be leveraged by observing the requirements described in the literature. Therefore, this analysis presents a leverage model that will be used to guide the structuring of the study (see methodology section).

RESEARCH METHOD

A unique, qualitative and exploratory case study was chosen to contribute to the emerging literature in gamification and training for salespeople teams. The case study methodology can enhance existing theory by filling the gaps (Dubois and Gadde, 2002, 553; Siggelkow, 2007, 20). This research strategy focuses on understanding the dynamics present within a single scenario (Eisenhardt, 1989, 532; Yin, 2001, 34). The present single case study (Piekkari et al., 2010, 109; Siggelkow, 2007, 20) focuses on the application of games in salespeople training. Case studies can combine methods of data collection such as file analysis, interviews, questionnaires, observations, etc. (Eisenhardt, 1989, 532). To achieve these objectives, three groups of professionals were interviewed: salespeople, sales managers and training providers for sales teams. Participant observation was used to complement the understanding of the interviews (Yin, 2001, 34).

Sample and data collection

The case study was conducted at an information technology multinational. The company has tens of thousands of employees around the world and is one of the global leaders in the software industry for business management. A co-author of this study works in this company at the area of training development for sales teams. This co-author was responsible for collecting the necessary information for the development of the present study. The other co-authors collaborated in the planning of the study, analysis of the evidence and writing of the article.

The choice of the company considered that it uses games to enable or evaluate the knowledge or to encourage and recognize the performance of its salespeople. The evaluated knowledge by the company through games include products, processes, corporate image to be passed on to customers, and alternatives to leverage sales with a great number of small and medium customers. As determined prior to the study, these customers are the focus of the company's business expansion, which is already a leading software provider for large corporations around the world. These elements contribute to the generalization of the findings, facing the selection of generic cases (Seawright and Gerring, 2008, 294).

Fifty-two professionals were invited to participate in the study, but only twenty-two accepted or could participate in the research. Thus, the data collection was completed in twenty-two semi-structured interviews with salespeople, sales managers and sales training developers. The interviewees are from the Latin America and Mexico region. An interview guide was created to ensure the consistency of the interview content and procedure. This guide was based on the concepts of the studied theory that covered gamification and sales

training. The questionnaires were based on the same structure but contained different questions focused on each group. The first questions proposed the definition of gamification in the light of the interviewee's knowledge and experiences. The second round brought the gamification applied to salespeople training. The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. All the interviews were made through virtual communication platforms (Skype), recorded and transcribed. The perceptions and conclusions of each interview were shared and discussed with the other researchers. The interview data were complemented by documents, e-mails, website and corporate intranet and internal documents.

Additional data were collected through participant observation (Yin, 2001, 34). Since one of the researchers is responsible for part of the sales training, participant observation occurred during the study (e.g., evidence analysis and informal meetings). The researcher also participated in the development of gamification-based training. The combination of the different sources of evidence provided the triangulation of the data (Eisenhardt, 1989, 532; Gibbert and Ruigrok, 2010, 710; Yin, 2001, 34). The investigated developer group develops training for salespeople who serve medium and small businesses in various regions of the world. The managers were chosen based on their impact of acting in their region. The salespeople selected participated in the training formulated by the developers interviewed. Table 2 reflects the profile of the interviewees:

Table 2 – Interviewees profile

Group description	Group	Age (Years)	Length of time in the company (Years)
Sales training developers	Developer 1 (D1)	33	5
	Developer 2 (D2)	32	3
	Developer 3 (D3)	45	5
	Developer 4 (D4)	40	10
	Developer 5 (D5)	36	4
Sales Managers	Manager 1 (M1)	48	3
	Manager 2 (M2)	45	20
	Manager 3 (M3)	45	6
	Manager 4 (M4)	35	7
	Manager 5 (M5)	45	
	Manager 6 (M6)	50	1
	Manager 7 (M7)	40	2,5
	Manager 8 (M8)	45	7
Salespeople	Salesperson 1 (S1)	40	0,5
	Salesperson 2 (S2)	40	6
	Salesperson 3 (S3)	38	7
	Salesperson 4 (S4)	32	4
	Salesperson 5 (S5)	38	7
	Salesperson 6 (S6)	50	2
	Salesperson 7 (S7)	45	7
	Salesperson 8 (S8)	38	4
	Salesperson 9 (S9)	35	1

Data analysis

After interviews, document analysis, and participant observation, data were analyzed applying qualitative content analysis (Miles et al., 2014, 276). Data from the interviews,

documentation and participant observation were analyzed to identify if the case met the requirements of the present study. The analysis of these data allowed its classification in categories related to the research question. In this way, it was possible to guarantee that the relevant information had been collected. The triangulation was elaborated based on the data collected (Eisenhardt, 1989, 532; Gibbert and Ruigrok, 2010, 710; Yin, 2001, 34) and provided the reliability of the findings and validation of the constructs.

The guide for the semi-structured interviews provided detailed descriptions and the transcription of the documents and collected documents provided transparency of the information collected (Yin, 2001, 34). The findings of the interviews were again validated with the interviewees to ensure their best understanding (Miles et al., 2014, 276). This validation was done informally through face-to-face and virtual meetings. This strategy also made it possible to revisit the findings and ensure the identification of practical elements that can contribute to the academic literature.

FINDINGS

Findings on how to apply games to salespeople training have been divided into two groups. The first group presents a structure of the game design and the second one presents the findings about the application of the games. These findings indicate that a game should facilitate the combination of theory and practice, propose challenging situations, induce cooperation among players, induce sharing of technical or commercial knowledge to avoid information silos, and encourage competition among participants or teams. The viability of these objectives requires attention to the game content, promotion of fun, qualified instructors, previous organization of the teams, favorable environment, virtual regional competitions, awards, diversity and conflict management. These findings are presented below.

Game design

The development of a good game for sales training starts with a mapping of the current knowledge in the company or of the new knowledge that could be added to it. The knowledge selected forms the content of the game (S6; D5). After this understanding, the content needs to be put into a gamified map based on instructional design (D5). The goal of the map is to create context to the activity inserting the salesperson in the game environment (D1, 2, 5). The map also allows the future provision of instant feedback and improvements of the game design (D4). The analysis of the documents revealed the content inserted into the best games versed in negotiation techniques customer approach (D2,4; S4,8; M1), internal tools and processes (D1,2,3; M6), product specifications (M3; S9), customer business details or demands (S1, 2; D2). Additional content aim to broaden the salesperson's view of activities related to challenges faced by other areas of the company (M3). This kind of content contributed to increase the flexibility of the salespeople to the constraints imposed by other departments (M5). The content plan also needs to be gauged to have between 15 and 30 minutes. Games that are this short, contributed to improve the salesperson ability to close deals (S8), increase customer confidence in the sales proposal (M5; D4), and facilitate the generation of new leads (V2).

Besides knowledge, games should promote a fun and competitive experience. Play games contribute to reduce player’s evasion – especially in games that are too long (M2, 3, S1, 2, 7). The researcher observations suggest the existence of following ludic situations: use of characters to mixt reality and fantasy, proposition of unpredictable activities, and use of artifacts like flags and mascots. The activities analyzed expose the participant to comical situations. In a situation observed by the researcher, the loser is requested to come up with a song related to a training content. In another situation, the group that made a mistake during a game step was asked to present a video that contained a funny story about a product’s sale. The socialization of situations like these ones helped to increment the dissemination of knowledge (M5).

Games should explore simulations. These simulations contribute to increase the sensation of reality provided by the game, thus better preparing the salesperson to face the adversities of a negotiation (M3,4,6; S3,5; D3). Simulations also facilitate the assimilation of technical topics (M3, S7), or very formal information (D3, S9). The simulations analyzed also make use of stories (Storytelling). Storytelling improved knowledge assimilation associated to complex situations or topics (D1,3, S3,6,7), and improved the understanding of the games’ challenges (D1,2,5). Storytelling also enabled comparisons of individual or teams results, thus leveraging knowledge assimilation (M6). A good simulation should also provide instant feedback with information that allows participants to evaluate performance and learning (M1,7; S5). Simulations should also be brief and new (S5), as well as to clearly specify the participants roles (S3). Data from archives indicate that a simulation provided the knowledge necessary for a group to close complex negotiations. Participant observations indicate that the simulations also make use of a punctuation ranking. In the search for a better score, salespeople increase their engagement in the game (M1).

The interpersonal or the groups’ competitions are mandatory for the success of a game-based training. The competitions contribute to reduce the player’s requests for help during the game, thus reducing the workload of the managers (M4) or of the trainer (D2,5). Competitions also improved the integration and the engagement of the salespeople (M4,7; S1,4,6), enabling them to act in real stress situations (D5; S9; M1), and helping to improve their problem’s solving skills (M4; D1,2). Beyond that, the competitions improved the salespeople emotional skills (M2,3,4). The use of boards and rakings that present the sales achievements induced the players to fight for the top of the raking. Table 3 presents the synthesis of the findings of what should be observed in game design.

Table 3 – What should be done in game design.

Requirement	Actions
Content plan	Identify existing or innovative knowledge and create a gamified context map; Prioritize knowledge about negotiation techniques and customer approach; tools, internal processes and products; customer demands or business situation; and challenges faced by other areas of the company; The games should have between 15 and 30 minutes. Make use of storytelling so that salespeople can analyze contrasts.
Fun promotion	To use characters in the game; to propose unpredictable activities; and to include comical punishments for the participants that loose.

	Such punishment should be designed to improve the salespersons' skills or knowledge assimilation/use.
Competition induction	<p>Present simulations that lead salespersons to compete with their peers as well as evaluate their own performance and learning;</p> <p>Predict competitions that reward the number of training performed or the completion of a fictitious sale in the shortest amount of time;</p> <p>Promote broad promulgation of performances to increase engagement and leverage expected results (e.g. sales made by salespeople after games).</p>

Game enforcement

The selection of instructors and participants is the first step in the application of games. The instructors who will apply the games must have a good personal reputation among the participants (M5), experience in sales (S5), and knowledge of the reality of the business and the company's operations (S3). Instructors who meet these conditions facilitate participant engagement and learning (G7; S9), and can identify opportunities for future game improvement (M2, S6,8, D1). The salesperson participation in game-based training should be optional (S6,7). Thus, it is necessary to capture the interest of future participants in the game in order to mitigate the salespeople rejection of this kind of activity (S8, D5). Based on this argument, previous improvements on the salesperson's performance after game-based training must be shared to stimulate further participation (M1,3; S3,6,7). This sharing also contributes to raise the interest of management in the use of games (M4,8, S4; D5). Conclusively, the objective, benefits, and requisites of the game-based training methodology must be presented to salespeople in advance to promote engagement (M8; S1; D2,5).

The existence of a good environment for the games is also important. Participant observation indicates that the best locations are outside of the company. The use of external environments contributes to increase the sensation of informality during the game (S1,5). Aiming to reinforce the sense of informality, the company enhances the environments with thematic images and decoration associated with the game, asks salespeople to wear casual clothes (M6), and informs them that the organization's traditional hierarchy is not valid during game application. This lack of hierarchy seems to level managers and salespeople, thus leveraging the results of the training based on games (M2; S4). The inexistence of hierarchy also induces the participants to express themselves without fear. This position contributes to the valorization of diversity in teams and to the improvement on the team's performance (S2; M4).

Virtual competitions between different regions constitute a powerful instrument to eliminate local information silos, to pull together members of a team, and to leverage the expected results of a training. These competitions extrapolate the cultural differences and can strengthen the teams (M7), especially to leverage sales (M1,2; S2). Virtual competition between countries through a game constitutes a sort of regional competition that can be performed easily, cheaply, and in a short time. The results of the virtual competitions contribute to speed up the completion of the tasks and to increase the viability of the goals intended at the global level (M4). The planning of the application of these virtual regional competitions should contemplate aspects such as cultural differences, time zone, and the

economic situation of the participant countries (S3,8). Besides, content should be emergent and common to all regions (S6), thus ensuring uniformity of conditions between participating regions (M7). It is also necessary to consider the information privacy and the existence of information systems that works equally (M7,8; S4; D1,4,5).

The benefits of virtual competitions can be boosted by rewarding the winners (S6,7; D2). The perception that awards are unattractive may induce salespeople to not engage in games (M1). In contrast, the offer of financial awards is highly valued by them. An example is the incentives granted to professionals who reach their sales targets (M7, S1,5, D2,4). However, the non-financial awards also contribute to improve the salespersons' engagement (S6). Examples of non-financial awards include the company's support for a local social project (M5, 7), or the provision of cheap and symbolic awards – eg. t-shirts that clearly indicate the game winners, group dinners, or even a day off (M1,3,4,7; S1,2,4,7; D1). The offer of financial and non-financial awards requires the creation of indicators that consider the growth of the salesperson in the company (M3,8; S2) and the knowledge improvement promoted by the game (M7,3).

Despite the benefits listed, the promotion of competitions can also lead to unexpected problems. This is the case of interpersonal conflicts between participants. One of the most common interpersonal conflicts comes from the attempt to exclude those less engaged or less performing players (S2). This exclusion is usually orchestrated by group leaders, and can only be avoided by defining rules and conditions that value team unity. The absence of such rules may compromise diversity (S6). The findings suggest that the incentive to diversity should begin right at setting of teams that will participate. Attention to diversity contributes to improve the exchange of new knowledge (S7,8,9; D2,4,5), to facilitate salesperson integration, to unveil innovation opportunities (M2,3; S9), and to promote fair games (S8; D1). In addition, the rules that control team structuring should be easy to understand (M3; S4,8), present uniform criteria, and be valid for all players or teams (S4; D2). Table 4 presents the synthesis of the findings of what should be observed in the application of the games.

Table 4 – What should be done on game enforcement.

Requirement	Actions
Choose the instructors and engage players	<p>To select game instructors who have a good personal reputation among the participants, sales experience, and knowledge about the reality of the business and the operations of the company.</p> <p>To capture the interest of future players by advertising how the games helped other salespersons to improve their performance.</p> <p>To present the objectives of the activity, the requirements for the success in the game, and the benefits of the game-based salespeople training methodology.</p>
Offer the proper environment	<p>To apply games in parks or locations outside the company.</p> <p>To decorate the environment with thematic images associated with the games and to request salespeople to wear casual clothes.</p> <p>To eliminate the hierarchy among the participants during the game.</p>
Organize virtual	To promote virtual competitions between different regions or countries.

competitions	To mitigate cultural differences, time zone, and economic situation of regions.
Awards	To offer financial rewards when sales goals are met. To offer non-financial awards: socially beneficial awards or symbolic awards to professionals who achieve sales goals. To define award indicators that consider salespeople participation and learning.
Manage diversity and conflict	To predict alternatives for the mitigation of interpersonal conflicts. To establish rules for the organization of teams that favor diversity, to induce the exchange of knowledge, to promote players integration, or to unveil opportunities for innovation. To present rules of easy understanding, with uniform criteria, and valid for all players or teams.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The planning of a training based must consider the contents to be inserted into it (Agnihotri et al., 2009, 474; Cavusgil, 1990, 1; Nijssen et al., 2017, 1). These contents must be inserted in a playful context (Domínguez et al., 2013, 380; Hamari and Keronen, 2017, 125). The findings contribute to the literature by indicating that the contents of a game for sales training purposes should encompass negotiation techniques and customer approach; tools, internal processes and products; customer demands or business; and challenges faced by other sectors of the company. These contents must be available in games that last between 15 and 30 minutes. These contents must be presented in real simulated scenarios. The importance of the simulation is already stressed by extensive literature (Bashaw et al., 2002, 329; Erffmeyer et al., 1992, 125; Schiff, 1983, 131; Shepherd and Ridnour, 1996, 37). The current study also increment the literature on storytelling and sales (Gilliam and Flaherty, 2015, 143). Findings indicate that storytelling and simulations increase the players' knowledge assimilation and engagement by presenting contrasting situations or alternatives. So, games should provide automatic feedback to salesperson, thus allowing them to compare their performance against the other players performance (Hamari et al., 2014, 3025).

The findings also contribute with the literature by indicating that regional competitions through distance games facilitate the exchange of knowledge between the players, decrease the demand for the instructor's help, and enhance the salesperson's emotional skills. Such benefits help to improve the business interactions focused by IMP (Waluszewski, 2016, 107). According to the literature, the improvement on the emotional abilities can avoid the turnover of salespeople (Bande et al., 2015, 142). Findings contribute by indicating that the games help to reduce sales turnover, as well as to improve the integration of teams through fun, competition and lack of hierarchy.

The literature indicates that instructors are essential for successful training (Erffmeyer and Johnson, 1997, 185; Honeycutt et al., 1994, 65, 1993, 117; Ricks et al., 2008, 593).

Findings contribute by pointing out that successful applications of games require instructors with good reputations among salespeople (in personal or professional terms in the sales area). The study also contributes by indicating that the participation of salespeople should be optional. Thus, they need to be co-opted for the activity. Success in co-opting requires prior disclosure of the professional benefits that other salespeople had in participating in game-based training. Another finding is that games should be applied off-site in an informal and exciting environment (Ricks et al., 2008, 593). The importance of disregarding the hierarchy among players is another contribution from the study. Furthermore, the study contributes by indicating that games reduce training costs, the total amount of time spent by salespeople in training activities, promotes the union of players from the unit or affiliate, and leverages better sales results. In addition, games contribute by eliminating information silos (Peters et al., 2017, 43). These findings contribute to IMP by indicating alternatives to improve the sales training design with games (Ivens and Pardo, 2016, 25).

Regional competitions require the consideration of cultural aspects (Bush and Ingram, 2001, 65). The findings contribute by indicating the need to also consider the economic reality of the countries from which the salespeople come from. This consideration aims to level the strengths and limitations of each of the players. Another contribution focuses on rewarding the winners. The findings contribute by indicating that nonfinancial rewards can help to improve the salespersons' engagement. Examples of this type of award include support for some social or community action in which the company is inserted. Symbolic awards that praise the team or the winner also have a positive impact on salesperson engagement.

The literature indicates the need to manage interpersonal conflicts through rules that contribute to value diversity (Zheng et al., 2016, 3468). The findings contribute by indicating that the application of the games may lead to conflicts arising from the attempt to eliminate members of the group who perform below the average. This compromises diversity. The findings also contribute by indicating that the existence of rules that value diversity contributes to leverage knowledge exchange, by promoting greater integration among players, unveiling innovation alternatives, and reducing instructor influence on game results. As it turned out, the games that provided the best results for the company were those in which the instructors intervened less during the activity.

The study also has important implications and guidance for managers and developers of sales training who want to increase results with training. Managers who want to increase the flexibility of the employee can promote games that make them work with other areas, for example, with support teams. Also, it is important to coordinate the strategy of the company and goals that must be achieved with the training. Coordinating these aspects with training developers may allow managers to analyze the performance of salespeople after training. Working together with training developers seems to be mandatory to a successful training based on games. Taking content, duration, simulation, storytelling, awards, and diversity into account can contribute to spread knowledge among teams, remove information silos, increase the number of deals, performance and regulate sales emotions. All those benefits observed by this study can be positively impacted using competition during the games. Competition is a reality present in sales (Ingram et al., 1992, 230), thus contributing to the dynamics of learning. Foremost, managers and practitioners must envision ways to market sales training with games promoting engagement from salespeople. This study confirmed the literature that

salespeople hardly engage in sales training if they do not see a financial benefit as a result. For those managers that seek to understand more about their salespeople, it is important that the informality and lack of hierarchy make part of these games. Finally, developers must understand the reality of countries and position the best formula to award the winners, present rules and team building activities that can mitigate conflict and promote diversity at the same time.

Like any research, the present study has some limitations that may serve as an opportunity for future studies. The first refers to the single case study. Multiple case studies could complement the requirements for sales training games. Other studies could also be applied in other industries, complementing the findings of the information technology industry. Further studies can also seek to understand the impact of game-based training on business interactions. This kind of knowledge will help to understand how to straightening and improve relations with other cultures through distance games and innovation (Håkansson and Gadde, 2018, 6; Mazloomi Khamseh et al., 2017, 92). The literature is scarce regarding the evaluation of training based on gamification for sales teams. Studies aiming to fill this gap and address analytics can be of huge help for managers and practitioners. Understanding what requirements are required for the evaluation and analysis of data from sales training with gamification can leverage the methodology and the identification of its benefits to learning.

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