

[Home](#) → [SCCE](#) → [CEP Magazine – June 2025](#)

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Enhancing compliance training with engaging and effective game-based learning

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By Natalia Gindler Corsini

In today's corporate environment, compliance training is often seen as tedious—something employees endure rather than engage with. But what if compliance training could be fun, interactive, and truly memorable? Enter game-based compliance training, an innovative approach that makes learning enjoyable while reinforcing critical compliance concepts.

Game-based learning taps into fundamental psychological principles such as motivation, rewards, and cognitive engagement. By integrating compliance topics into employees' routines through interactive games, companies can promote deeper understanding and meaningful participation.

Traditional methods like lectures, slide presentations, and online training—often favored by companies for their practicality, accessibility, and supposed traceability—can be passive and ineffective. In online training, employees can easily cheat by skipping through modules, letting videos play in the background while multitasking, or even having someone else complete the training for them. Without active engagement, these methods often fail to ensure real learning and retention. In contrast, game-based learning thrives on active participation, repetition, and goal accomplishment, making it a powerful tool for retention and practical application.

The neuroscience behind gamification

Gamification applies game-like elements—such as rewards, competition, and performance feedback—to everyday tasks.^[1] These elements activate the brain's reward system—particularly the release of dopamine, which boosts motivation and engagement. By making learning enjoyable, compliance training transforms from a mundane obligation into an engaging experience.

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that plays a key role in motivation and reward-driven behavior. When individuals anticipate or achieve goals within a gamified system, dopamine is released, creating feelings of pleasure and reinforcing the desire to continue the activity. This process enhances learning by making the experience more enjoyable and engaging.

Incorporating gamification into compliance training leverages this neurological response, transforming what might otherwise be a routine task into an engaging and motivating experience. Employees become more actively involved in the learning process by introducing elements such as point systems, leaderboards, and immediate feedback, leading to better retention and application of compliance principles.

The pleasures arising from thinking and learning will make us think and learn all the more. — Aristotle



Game-based learning has deep historical roots. In ancient Greece, philosophers like Plato and Aristotle recognized the educational value of play.^[2] Plato viewed play as a foundational step toward acquiring true knowledge, while Aristotle considered it a form of relaxation that ultimately enhances learning.

Psychologist Jean Piaget extensively studied the role of play in cognitive development. He identified four types of play—functional, constructive, fantasy, and games with rules—that correspond to different stages of a child’s development.^[3] Piaget believed play is integral to the development of intelligence in children, as it allows them to explore, experiment, and understand the world around them.

By integrating game-based elements into compliance training, companies not only boost participation rates but also foster a culture where employees genuinely understand and apply compliance principles in their daily work.

How game-based learning enhances compliance training

Game-based compliance training enhances traditional education by transforming mandatory learning into an engaging, interactive experience. Unlike conventional training methods—which often rely on lengthy presentations or dense reading materials—game-based training actively involves employees in scenarios where they must apply their knowledge in real time.

Employees are more likely to embrace compliance training when it feels dynamic and less like a chore. These key benefits highlight how game-based training transforms compliance education into an engaging, effective, and practical learning experience:

- 1. **Engaging employees:** Games hold employees’ attention longer.
- 2. **Improving retention:** Employees retain information better through active participation.
- 3. **Providing real-world application:** Games simulate ethical decision-making.
- 4. **Offering immediate feedback:** Employees see the consequences of their choices instantly.
- 5. **Creating risk-free learning:** Simulations allow employees to experience compliance risks without real-world consequences.

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Effective game-based learning methods for compliance training

Here are some game-based methods that can enhance compliance training:

- **Combo:** Games that combine traditional board game elements with digital components, like compliance board games that integrate digital quizzes and challenges that engage employees across different learning styles.

- **Simulations:** Games that mimic real-world scenarios, allowing employees to practice compliance-related decision-making in a controlled environment. For instance, a bribery risk simulation can help employees identify red flags and respond appropriately.
- **Role play:** Games that allow employees to step into the shoes of compliance officers, investigators, or whistleblowers. This helps them understand the importance of ethical decision-making and regulatory adherence.
- **Review:** Games like Compliance Quest or Expedition Ethics make reviewing policies and procedures interactive and competitive, encouraging employees to recall and apply what they’ve learned.

There are numerous benefits to using game-based learning in compliance:

- Enhances problem-solving and critical thinking skills
- Increases engagement and motivation
- Encourages teamwork and collaboration
- Provides immediate feedback and measurable results
- Supports situational learning in real-world compliance scenarios

Like anything in life, this learning system comes with challenges. However, overcoming them is possible—and understanding them is the first step.

The challenges:

- Can be time-consuming to develop and implement
- Might distract from learning if it is not well-designed
- May require technology access, which could be a barrier for some employees
- Needs alignment with company policies and compliance objectives
- Requires proper training for facilitators to ensure effectiveness

Measuring the success of game-based compliance training

Measuring training effectiveness is crucial. The good news is that game-based training provides ways to track important information, which should be kept in an accessible file for future reference. Here are some key insights companies can gain:

- **Completion rates:** How many employees complete the training?
- **Knowledge retention:** How well do employees recall and apply the material?
- **Engagement levels:** How actively do employees participate?

- **Practical application:** Are employees making better compliance decisions in their roles?

Building a culture of learning through gamification

Creating a compliance training culture goes beyond understanding laws, establishing policies and

1. **Assessing training needs:** Identify relevant compliance topics and tailor content.
2. **Defining the target audience:** Segment training by department, role, and risk exposure.
3. **Developing a training calendar:** Schedule short, engaging sessions throughout the year.
4. **Choosing the right format:** Determine whether to use digital games, in-person workshops, or a mix of both.
5. **Using quizzes and case studies:** Test employees' understanding and reinforce key lessons.
6. **Analyzing training results:** Evaluate feedback and refine the program based on performance data.
7. **Encouraging continuous learning:** Compliance requires ongoing education and reinforcement.

Game-based compliance training isn't about checking a regulatory box; it's about empowering employees to make ethical decisions and embrace compliance as part of their daily work. By making compliance fun, engaging, and practical, organizations can build a strong compliance culture that resonates across all departments.

Takeaways

- Game-based compliance training enhances engagement by making learning interactive and increasing employee participation and motivation.
- Compliance professionals should incorporate active participation methods to improve knowledge retention, ensuring employees remember and apply key concepts.
- Simulations provide a risk-free environment for employees to practice ethical decision-making, making compliance training more practical and effective.
- Immediate feedback reinforces learning in real time, helping employees understand the consequences of their choices.
- To foster a strong compliance culture, professionals should integrate gamification into daily operations, encouraging ethical behavior beyond mandatory training sessions.

1 Ethan S. Bromberg-Martin, Masayuki Matsumoto, and Okihide Hikosaka, "Dopamine in motivational control: rewarding, aversive, and alerting," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 68, no. 5 (December 9, 2010), <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3032992>.

2 Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991); Aristotle, *Politics: Books VII and VIII*, trans. Richard Kraut (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

3 Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*, trans. Caleb Gattegno and F. Hodgson (New York: Norton, 1962).