



General Mills Makes Values Resonate With Learning Games

General Mills Inc.
Best Use of Games or Simulations for Learning Program
January 2017



Company Background



Company At-a-Glance	
Headquarters	Minneapolis MN
Year Founded	1866
Revenue	USD 17 billion
Employees	42,000
Global Scale	100+ countries across six continents
Customers/Output, etc.	Global food manufacturing company, with popular brands such as Cheerios cereal, Betty Crocker dessert mixes and Pillsbury refrigerated dough.
Industry	Food processing
Stock Symbol	NYSE: GIS
Website	www.generalmills.com

Budget and Timeframe

<i>Budget and Timeframe</i>	
Overall budget	\$38,000
Timeframe to implement	4 months
Start date of the program	Click here to enter text.

Business Conditions & Business Needs

The General Mills Inc. culture was changing and adjustments were needed for learning to remain agile and responsive to changes in consumer behavior. There could not have been a better time to revisit company values and make them come alive using real stories about General Mills, its individual employees, and its teams. This project was unique because it was not tied to a specific business need.

The culture at General Mills is one that promotes innovation, family, community, and security. The challenge was to determine how best to make such values resonate with every employee and partner. Instead of simply defining values, how could they be brought to life?

First, the company redefined its values to strengthen them for a diverse, global staff:

Figure 1: New Values



Source: General Mills Inc. 2016

Overview

With a heavy focus on eLearning and bite-sized training modules, the team of learning professionals General Mills' Global Business Solutions began exploring new ways to deliver learning. Employees were familiar with General Mills values, but it was a challenge to make them engaging. Employees knew the stories, but what would compel them to read these stories again and relate to them this time?

Managing content that would be launched to 42,000 people would be a major undertaking. The GBS team realized that much of the messaging behind "Play to win" is also true of learning games. The team emphasized learning goals for new training:

- We're stronger as a team; we learn from others' skill sets.
- We leverage different experiences and perspectives.
- We make better decisions faster.
- We are more successful when we use games to support learning.

The GBS team got into a storytelling mode and started exploring the actual meaning of the values to employees. Through this period of development, changes were beginning to occur at General Mills and the stories started making more sense as real GMI examples. Leveraging the talents of communication experts at Tata Interactive Systems, the group set out to find real-life General Mills stories that exemplified the Core Values and began writing scenarios and building the game around them.

Components

The final solution would have two components. The online game had a real-time leaderboard and a physical board game that could be played by eight players at a time (four teams of two people each).

The theme became an adventure that required a group of five travelers to cross a valley filled with challenges. At each stage, questions are posed to them and they could progress only by answering the questions correctly.

Mode of Playing

Five different houses were created and each employee was assigned to one of these houses. During play, individual scores as well as the house scores are shown on the



leaderboard. This feeling of competing with peers and the entire organization enhanced the overall gaming experience for learners.

Design

The global audience included 42,000 employees, a highly diverse group in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, and experience. The employees at General Mills are very competitive and avid team players at the same time. The GBS team wanted them to have an experience that would leverage both of those qualities while fostering a better understanding of the new values.

Challenges faced. Initially, there was a fair amount of resistance from the key stakeholders on introducing a game into the General Mills culture. The scenarios that GBS shared were division and individual specific and it was a challenge to generalize them to make them relatable to the entire company. The alliance between the learning professionals at General Mills and Tata turned out to be a great aid.

Design. The design of the Core Values game was a collaboration, synergizing the respective strengths of the GBS learning team and the Tata design team. The two teams analyzed the requirements and decided that the users' experience would have to be a relevant and engaging. In addition to injecting the design with the high levels of energy that would appeal to the large, diverse audience, it was critical that the design and tone of delivery was fresh and realistic so it would create a unique General Mills learning identity. The plan was to make subtle but strong changes in the culture of the company. The desired outcome was:

1. **Enhancing the organization's image.** Deliver a game for learning and awareness that would position the organization as innovative, "with the times," and open.
2. **Increasing engagement.** Games are engaging and tend to have higher completion rates. Learners keep returning to it even after they have completed it!
3. **Boosting business impact.** Job-oriented tasks when aimed at building skills and abilities improve efficiency and productivity.

These goals led the teams to create a set of game concepts, which were shared with General Mills leaders who finalized the team-based dilemma game based on an adventure theme. All the essential game elements were built into the design to enhance the user experience. These included timer, score, bonus points, loss of energy, and loss of points

for an incorrect answer. The game would be available through the company's SharePoint and include such features as the leaderboard, links to the game, rating system to gather feedback, and an instant survey.

Figure 2: The Values Journey



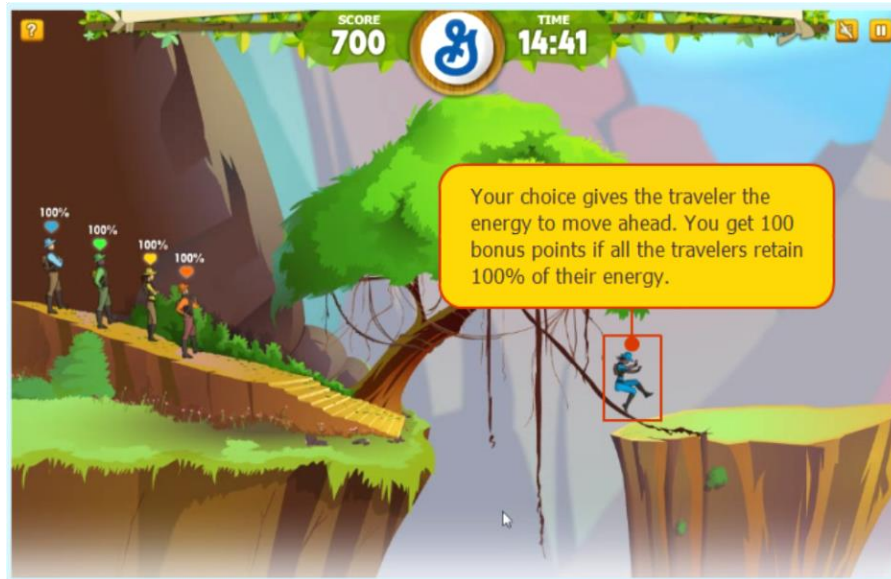
Source: General Mills Inc. 2016

Figure 3: Earn Points



Source: General Mills Inc. 2016

Figure 4: Game Progression



Source: General Mills Inc. 2016

The game deployed via the SharePoint page created for it included these features:

- Individuals compete against each other to gain points and with each other and/or their individual teams.
- However, if an individual player fails to represent the team during any of the games, the team itself can be penalized by receiving negative points.
- Houses and individuals compete against each other to claim the top positions on the Leaderboard.

These are further explained in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Team-based House System Game Play

A Team-based House System Game Play

- Players will be sorted into Groups or Houses. For example, if there are 2000 individuals, we can have 10 Houses of 200 individuals each or 4 Houses of 500 individuals each.
- The user will individually log in to the SharePoint page and will find the House to which s/he belongs.
- After playing the game, the score will be posted on a Leaderboard, hosted on a connected SharePoint page.
- Grouping of users into houses using the SharePoint groups feature.
- Create separate SharePoint Lists for each group for tracking data.
- Provide the participants write permission on this SharePoint list.
- Host Game on SharePoint in Document Library.
- Tracking of data in the SharePoint list.
- Leaderboard will show 2 tables one with top 10 scorers for user's house and another a comparative view across houses

Source: General Mills Inc. 2016

Board game. The second game element is a physical board game based on “dilemma cards.” Each dilemma is based on one or more values. This part of the package was designed to foster deeper understanding of the values while having “fun.” The team-playing aspect also uses discussions to help players gain insight into the values.

Board Game Components

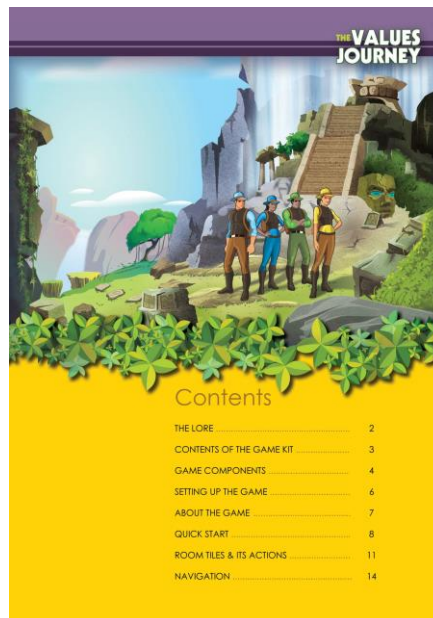
- The board
- Four explorer pawns
- Three card decks – Values Deck, Fortune Deck, Fated Deck
- Room Tiles
- Gem Sheets
- Game Master's Manual
- Quick Reference Guide – inside the box cover

Figure 6: Game Board



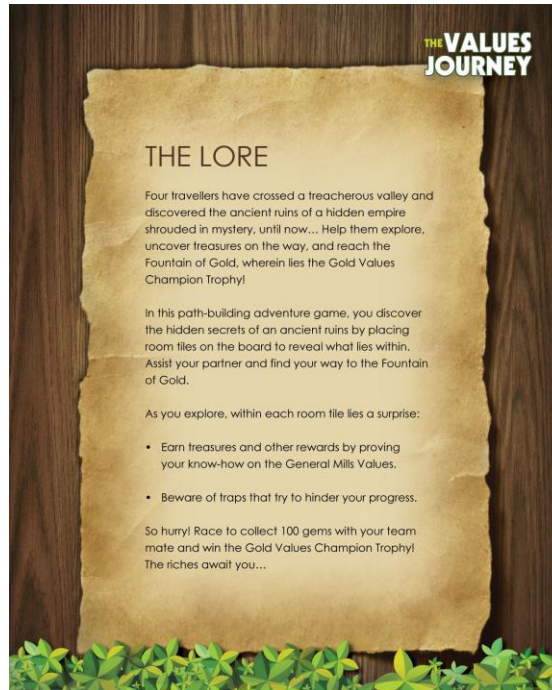
Source: General Mills Inc. 2016

Figure 7: Game Contents



Source: General Mills Inc. 2016

Figure 8: The Lore



Source: General Mills Inc. 2016

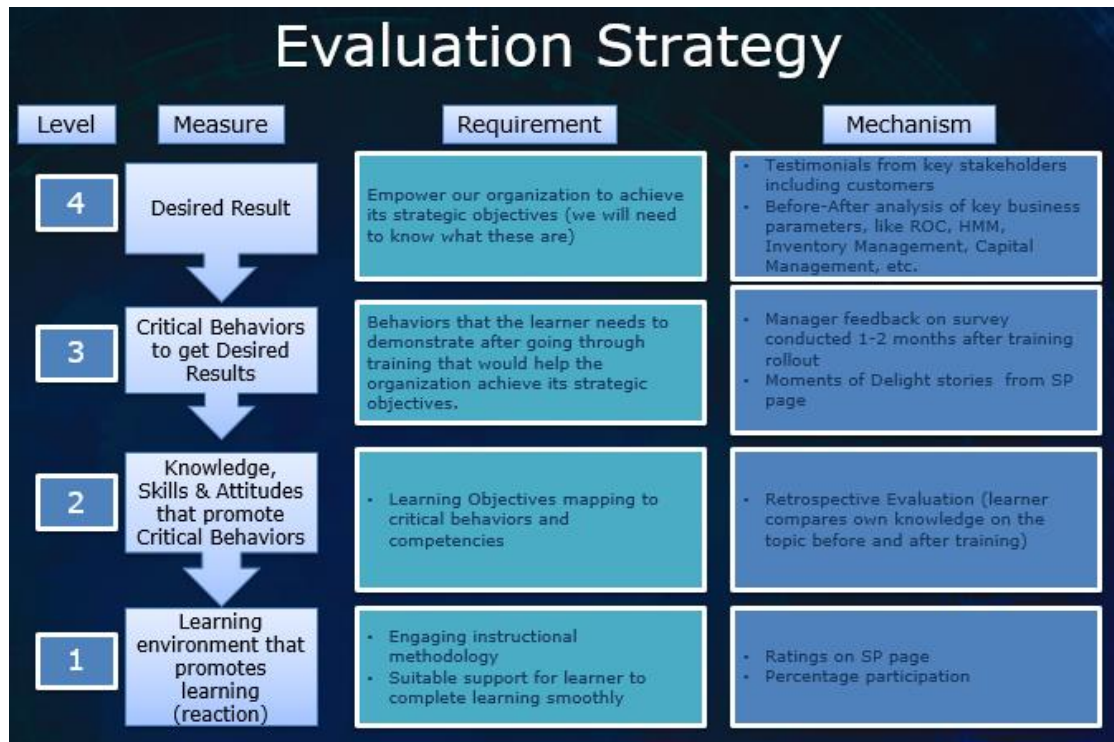
Figure 9: Game Components



Source: General Mills Inc. 2016

Evaluation strategy. The evaluation strategy measures the effectiveness and impact of both components and is further elaborated in Figure 10 below.

Figure 10: Evaluation Strategy



Source: General Mills Inc. 2016

Delivery

After approval by the Senior Leadership Team and several User Acceptance Testing sessions, revisions were made to the game and a soft launch date was scheduled. The game was launched to one division at a time and was not mandatory. The vision had learners telling others about the new games and, in turn, creating more demand for them. The monthly newsletter announced the game, offering employees an opportunity to try the latest and greatest learning solution at General Mills. All users were invited to share feedback as it would be vital to learning innovation and building gamification at the company.

Figure 11: GBS Today



The screenshot shows an email newsletter header for 'GBS Today News for GBS employees' dated July 16, 2015. The main content is an announcement for 'Gamification Comes to GBS'. It describes a new interactive game called 'The Values Journey' created by the GBS Learning & SharePoint Services Team. The game is designed to engage employees and teach company values through friendly competition. It will run from July 16 to August 14, with a special award for the highest scorer. The newsletter includes details about team assignments, leaderboards, and a link to play the game.

GBS Today
News for GBS employees
July 16, 2015

Gamification Comes to GBS

The GBS Learning & SharePoint Services Team has created a fun, interactive way to bring Gamification to General Mills with the all new Company Values Game ([The Values Journey](#)). As Learning & SharePoint Services continues to explore innovative learning solutions, they invite you to join in on the fun and try a new way to engage and learn, along with a little friendly competition. Your feedback and thoughts on [The Values Journey](#) will be important evaluating Gamification at General Mills.

Please take just 15 minutes to [play the game](#) and share your feedback using the survey linked on the homepage.

The game will run from July 16 – August 14 and the Values Champion with the highest score when the game closes on August 14 will be honored with a special award!

Game details:
When you enter the game, you will be automatically assigned to your team (house), according to your Senior Leadership group: Nordstrom, Malin, Monk, Pescheret or Walker. The leaderboard will track house scores as well as individual Champions. These scores will be posted in the next edition of GBS Today. The leaders from the first week will also be featured at the GBS Quarterly meeting on July 28.

Earn bragging rights for your team and become a Values Champion today!

Link: [Play the Values Journey](#)
Contact: [Learning Services](#)

Source: General Mills Inc. 2016

Measureable Benefits

General Mills' Three Principal Achievements

- Promoting champions by allowing everyone the opportunity to be a values champion.
- Promoting teamwork by enabling people to play individually as well as for houses. Houses like those used in the Harry Potter series where individuals compete as a house are used but scores also are captured individually.
- Showing accountability by providing a summary of player performance and knowledge of the values.

Employees that played the game were overwhelmingly positive about it. There were 3,600 hits on launch day and 1,800 the second day. For the next month, the number of hits per day averaged 400.



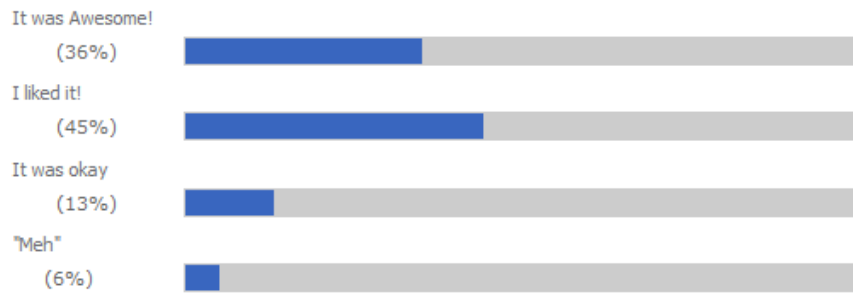
Initially, GBS team members were concerned that they would need approval from the Senior Leadership and the Corporate Communication teams regarding messaging. This project was internally funded as GBA operates on a charge-back system so there was risk involved. If the project was completely shot down by senior leaders, budget money would have been wasted or significant changes would be needed costing more money than what was budgeted.

GBS explored gamification as a living strategy and set out to build a game that could be delivered with relevant content. The response to the final product exceeded expectations and the company now had a medium that could serve as a shell for other content, such as customer service scenarios or sales scenarios.

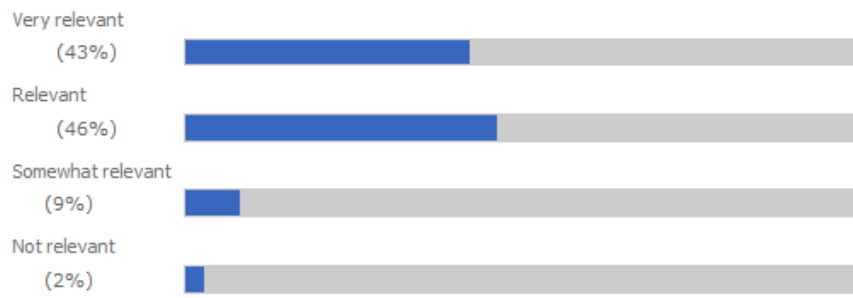
The impact of the game was so strong that many requests and suggestions were made for a 2.0 version with new levels and more advancement. Other business teams, excited about the gamification, inquired about using it for their learning content, allowing the GBS team to start introducing other gaming concepts and recommending learning solutions.

Figure 12: Employee Feedback

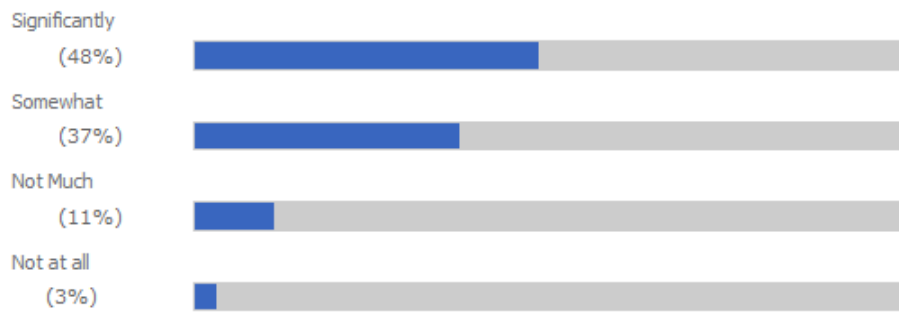
1. Did you enjoy the game?



2. How relevant were the value examples presented in the game to you?

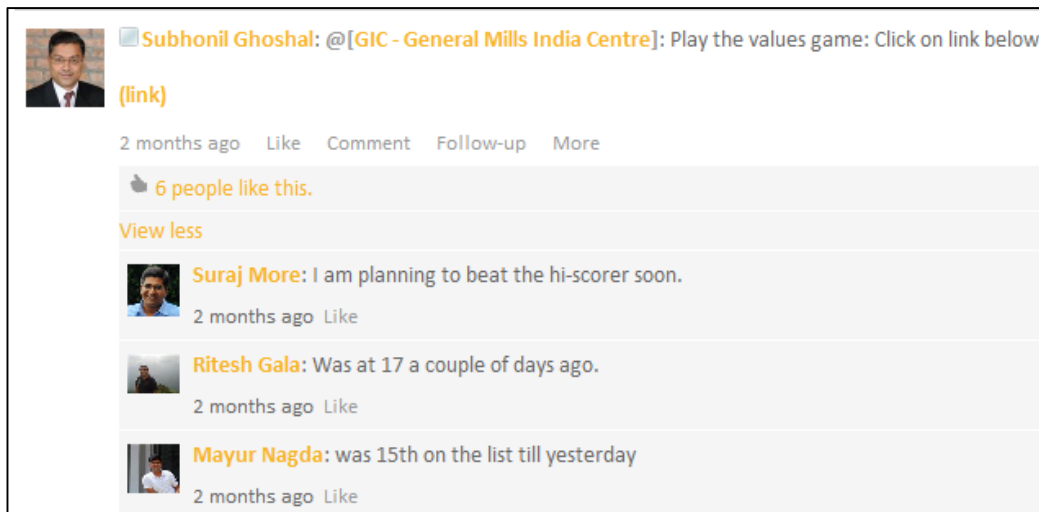


3. How much has this game improved your understanding of the General Mills Core Values?



Source: General Mills Inc. 2016

Figure 13: Actual End-User Feedback



Source: General Mills Inc. 2016

Figure 14: Employee Testimonials

"Very neat, relevant case stories, some difficulty and sense of urgency made this fun and educational. As a non-native English speaker, I probably took a little longer to read each case, making me not read the solution pieces to just move on. Maybe offer a transcript of the content or pause the timer during the solution. Thanks for exploring Gamification. I'd be interested in pricing and measurement of skills learned."

"I am not sure if you have played this game – if you have not, I suggest you do (only 15mins). The link is: Play the Values Journey. I played the game today and loved it. Also, had a sudden inspiration! After our GIC Town Hall, we could have a game released a month later which reinforces the GIC strategies and the promise-reinforcing 'local/global' stories and names of people (example (spotlight?)) This will engage our average young team that are used to gamification. We could also have competitions between cross-functional teams. We may also build in an Indian theme, but with a global feel."

Fun game! I enjoyed it and I must admit, I did learn quite a bit more about the values than I expected!

Source: General Mills Inc. 2016

Overall

Key Findings and Lessons

The soft launch of the game was not without challenges, particularly technical ones.

- The launch took place during a time of shift and change at General Mills and some of the employee lists it received were outdated. There were limited players, and some players added to the game should not have been and some should have been but were not added. This resulted in scrambling to keep up with demands to play.
- The company also found that players that helped with early testing were placed into random houses. When leader boards were cleared before launch, a lot of the UAT groups were placed in new houses for the launch. They then had two houses assigned to their player profiles. This made for inaccurate scoring, as the system was not sure where to register their scores.
- Some users provided great feedback regarding the naming convention for the houses. The decision was made for the first launch to tie each of the five houses to the five senior leaders in the division where the game was launched. While it was covered that each player would be placed into their senior leader's house, the houses carried generic names. There was much interest in customizing the game more so the houses would reflect the actual names of senior leaders. This recommendation showed that there was a strong need to know more about the competition. The competitive nature of the games was strong.

The General Mills learning team is already producing the next official game with another division and it will go out to the entire company. The team also is planning for the Values Game 2.0 launch.

It takes more than a values game to restore confidence and the sense of security needed to move past challenging times, but this learning experience helps employees feel confident that General Mills is doing its best to contribute towards re-engaging employees and evolving to match the shifting learning landscape. This project has acted as a catalyst for change in training and more such learning solutions will be created in the future.



About Brandon Hall Group

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