

Meet the chairmen of the board game

Helen Carter

PLAYING games is big business for small Melbourne company Manage By Design.

It creates tailor-made board games to help large companies with corporate issues, usually after other attempts have failed to solve problems.

The team might be called in to help employees embrace a new strategic initiative, product or merger/acquisition.

Chief executive Peter Dyson said employees were often cynical when they first saw the board games, mats, cards or jigsaws.

Within hours they were won over. "They're a fun way of taking staff on a journey of discovery that leads them to the same conclusions as management," he said.

"If you let people explore the factors around an initiative such as the history and culture of the organisation, current factors at play in the marketplace, competitors and trends, nine times out of 10 they see the logic behind new strategies and welcome them."

Mr Dyson said organisations invested heavily in developing and implementing strategic initiatives but a major cause of failure was the inability to get staff to understand and buy in to the initiative.

The games help get them on the same page before a launch, he said.

"They identify with what's happening and develop their own commitment," he said.

He believed the games led to reduced staff turnover, higher morale and increased productivity. One bank facing a strike by 3000 staff cut operating costs by 10 per cent from employee suggestions made while playing.

Mr Dyson, 48, began his working life as an apprentice electrician with the former State Electricity Commission and left as commissioning manager for a \$500 million project before being involved in mergers and acquisitions for a large company.

He established his unusual business after taking part in a business simulation called Tango while completing a Masters of Business at Monash University.

The facilitator was Professor Karl-Erik Sveiby from Sweden, an international expert on knowledge man-

agement. He developed the simulation with Klas Melander from the Swedish company Celemiab, a global leader in developing communication tools and learning methodologies.

Mr Dyson was fascinated by the simulation and asked about teaching it as part of his consultancy practice. Prof Sveiby taught him how to run it but let him do it his way and licensed him as a facilitator.

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After running a Celemiab franchise for five years, Mr Dyson was keen to apply the tools under his own banner.

The company bought back his franchise yet it wasn't until 2004 when fate presented the right person to help reignite the business idea, the company's director of design Richard Jones, 33.

Mr Jones had worked in Europe for 10 years as a consultant for blue chip companies before consulting in Australia. While performing one of the simulations with Mr Dyson, he decided this was for him and left his job to join the company.

"I was cynical and thought it would be a waste of time but after a while I realised I'd been writing big fat reports for 10 years often with no change resulting, but here was a way of getting the message across and getting things implemented," he said.

One two-to-three hour session is the equivalent of a five-day workshop using traditional methods, but people retain information and come up with ideas that are acted upon.

"It's a way of tapping into ideas about what can change and be done differently. It gives people the opportunity to play with the business and understand it and the logic," he said.

Clients, who come from mining, transport, finance, legal, government, engineering and supermarket sectors, keep and re-use the games.

□ Net link: www.managebydesign.com.au



Your turn: Richard Jones, left, and Peter Dyson show off their innovative board game for company management. Picture: NORM OORLOFF