

Leadership in a distributed world

Lessons from online gaming

Globalization is placing new demands on today's corporate leaders. As organizations continue to expand and operate in a more virtual environment, executives are being asked to provide guidance and direction to teams working across time zones and distances. In addition, the competitive environment is requiring leaders to make sense of increasingly disparate sources of information and make decisions more rapidly. In this changing environment, where can organizations turn to see the future of leadership? How can they determine the skills and tools that leaders will need to be successful? We believe that online gaming provides a window into the future of organizations and the leadership capabilities necessary to guide enterprises to success.

Initially, seasoned executives might scoff at the notion of learning leadership lessons from the world of computer games. Yet, massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), which bring together thousands of simultaneous players in a fast-paced online environment, can provide an interesting portent for the future of organizations. The similarities between the online, globe-spanning gaming world and the emerging picture of the globally integrated enterprise of the future are actually quite striking.

As technological innovation enables companies to disaggregate and send increasing amounts of work to employees and external partners around the world, organizations are conducting more work virtually. Corporate leaders must both coordinate and motivate individuals who are separated by time zones and cultures. Collaboration – at an individual and corporate level – has become a necessity. And in today's dynamic business environment, leaders must take more risks and execute with greater speed – briskly connecting talent and moving information and knowledge around the globe to fulfill organizational needs.

Given the parallels between the gaming environment and the globally integrated enterprise of the 21st century, we decided to explore the similarities and differences in leadership across both domains. To do so, we tapped into an extensive cohort of gamers who work for IBM. Because our 214 respondents have experience in both the corporate and gaming worlds, we believe they are well-suited to evaluate leadership behaviors and tools in both environments.

Overall, our study led us to six key recommendations for business leaders working in a more distributed world:

1. Apply virtual communication tools and facilitation techniques to more effectively connect people from around the world.
2. Use collaborative spaces to gather knowledge, express ideas and concerns and share passions.
3. Spend more time on setting organizational context and communicating where the organization needs to go.
4. Improve the visibility of both formal and informal skills.



5. Use dashboards linked to collaborative tools to capture key realtime information about people, activities and outcomes.
6. Provide more frequent guidance and link performance to recognition.

To request a full version of this paper,
e-mail us at iibv@us.ibm.com

© Copyright IBM Corporation 2008

IBM Global Services
Route 100
Somers, NY 10589
U.S.A.

Produced in the United States of America
December 2008
All Rights Reserved

IBM, the IBM logo, ibm.com and Lotus are trademarks or registered trademarks of International Business Machines Corporation in the United States, other countries, or both. If these and other IBM trademarked terms are marked on their first occurrence in this information with a trademark symbol (® or ™), these symbols indicate U.S. registered or common law trademarks owned by IBM at the time this information was published. Such trademarks may also be registered or common law trademarks in other countries. A current list of IBM trademarks is available on the Web at "Copyright and trademark information" at ibm.com/legal/copytrade.shtml

Other company, product and service names may be trademarks or service marks of others.

References in this publication to IBM products and services do not imply that IBM intends to make them available in all countries in which IBM operates.

FIGURE 1.
Areas of study focus.



Source: IBM Institute for Business Value.

How can IBM help?

IBM's Human Capital Management practice can provide assistance in addressing a range of leadership development, collaboration and talent management issues:

- **Knowledge and Collaboration** – connecting and supporting a global workforce to operate productively no matter where they are located.
- **Learning Solutions** – designing and implementing effective and efficient learning capabilities that are aligned with the organization's business objectives.
- **Integrated Talent Management** – leveraging IBM's Lotus collaboration software and Cognos analytics with selected talent management software providers and drawing upon HCM's consulting capabilities to rapidly design and implement effective talent management solutions.

Key contacts:

Human Capital Management Practice:

Global and Americas	Tim Ringo, tim.ringo@uk.ibm.com
EMEA	Tom McCabe, tom.mccabe@uk.ibm.com Brian Comella, brian.comella@us.ibm.com
Japan	Yukiko Mitsumaki, mtmk@jp.ibm.com
Asia Pacific	Wayne Peat, waynep@sg.ibm.com
IBM Institute for Business Value:	Eric Lesser, elesser@us.ibm.com