



# Imagine This

The Transformative Power of Edu-Larp  
in Corporate Training & Assessment

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## Chapter I: Imagine This (executive summary)

Welcome to the first step of our imaginative journey. You are here to explore a new tool in business education: edu-LARP<sup>1</sup>, which is short for *educational live-action role-playing*.

Chapter I is not a real chapter. Just as Pinocchio was not a real boy. Nor is Chapter I a standard executive summary. However, this book *was* written for business executive audiences, so we are providing you with a “best-of”, executive-summary style introduction. It contains the crème de la crème of this book’s greatest takeaways. Surely the summary will rob you of the “Nordic<sup>2</sup> magic” found in the following chapters. To make up for this we will begin the summary with a first-person account of a business edu-larp experience. This passage will entice your brain and speak to your imagination. After a little taste of the world of larping, we shall proceed with a clearly structured approach, trying to reach maximum insight in minimum time.

### **A Taste of Larp: Red and Blue**

*I had been looking forward to this day. In fact, it was one of my major reasons for switching jobs in the first place. After my brother died I realized that my days of being a thirty-something were limited, more than I cared to admit. So besides doing what I love, I decided to work for and with people who make me feel good, free, and accepted. People who challenge me and encourage me. Life is too short not to grow together. Life is too short not to work with not only the brightest minds, but also with the warmest hearts.*

*My manager Axel has been running a two-year project with HR. Besides regularly attending events on seriously work-related topics (we’re all about next-gen user interfaces), HR wanted to create a series of training sessions, a project called Universal & Deep. Axel explained he believed some values and attitudes should be universal; not just applicable to our company, but to society at large, too. Furthermore, he believed that we must forever remain curious and open to knowing more – not more-more in terms of quantity, but more-deep in terms of fundamentals and universal truths. I’ll never forget the last sentence in his speech. He claimed: “The thing we always need to know more about is ourselves. Learning about anything is really learning about the self.”*

*A lot of coffee turned cold during our heated discussions in the cafeteria. My senior colleagues assured me Alex is no new-age wackjob. They hardly managed to let one person speak up about the special HR project they ran three years ago. That was a story I read on their company blog and was one of the reasons I became interested in working for them in the first place.*

*Two weeks later we met Anders, “edu-larp” author and “game master”. He explained what edu-larp is. I didn’t quite get it, but I gathered the gist that it was some sort of*

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1. Actually, we no longer write LARP in capital letters. These are normal words now: *larp*, *larping*, and *larpers*.
  2. Edu-larp derives from the Nordic larp tradition, revolving around the Knudepunkt annual conventions. More on Nordic larp in Chapter 5.





*role-playing deluxe and a sort of a transcendental experience for teams. Listening to Anders and his ideas got me half excited and half scared. For a moment I missed the comfort of keynote speakers and Q&A sessions, not to even mention the safety of default templates in PowerPoint!*

*A week later Anders came by again and ran a 2-hour workshop. We had a blast. There were all sorts of exercises and games, supposedly a legacy of drama education and contact improvisation movement. We were sweating and we were happy!*

*The next week it was again Anders time and he brought us into another workshop. Surprisingly we got to keep our shoes on, but we had to take off our personalities. It was perhaps the most far-out proposal I've ever received. Anders led us through a fast-paced series of exercises that resulted in us all creating our new personas or "characters", as he called them. Our new selves had a backstory, beliefs, limitations, favorite songs, political preferences, personal philosophical ideals, and even a favorite embarrassing moment to share! Even more, each character was connected to at least three more characters in the room. In two hours we created a whole new group of people!*

*A week before the event I received an envelope containing a bunch of materials and instructions. I had to bring some props like a hairpin and wear a blue bow tie. I had to write a 1-page essay on the difference between the CIA and the KGB. And most importantly of all, I was told not to say a word to anyone about my character or the envelope. The next few days were strangely quiet in the cafeteria, glances exchanged in silence, the air bursting with that "something's going oooo-on!"*

*I could easily write a 10-page blog about the edu-larp we played that Friday. Anders was there, all dressed up as a top behind-the-scenes spy overlord. We were indeed entering a spy-themed role-playing game. Three hours passed by in a flash! The first thing "I" noticed was Anders again, inviting us to come back to reality, counting from 1 to 10... or the other way around. He urged us to not jump into discussion but to take a moment and make a 1-minute documentary (in our heads!) about what just happened. Then he had us write our feelings down on post-its. A few minutes later and all windows were covered with our overflowing emotions. Only, now, they were nicely structured so they could later be debriefed in groupings. Then he led us to play some of the activities from the workshop we ran two weeks before, just to let go of some emotion and share some energy in the group again.*

*It took me some time to calm down, remember who I was before I became Daisy Twelves, the English spy, and regain authority over my body. Martina (who played with us as the watch-store owner Mrs. Hands) joined Anders and together they led a session on discovering teaching moments in our role-playing adventure. It gradually crystalized: the whole game was designed to provoke our ideas on cooperating with "the others", sharing for the "greater good", and – wait, what is the greater good anyway? Changing characters, personalities, and perspectives resulted in very loose ideas and even looser attachment to those ideas – it was all becoming shades of grey. Martina stepped in like a lighthouse, showing the way to shore by speaking to the moral compass in all us, the one that exists beyond cultural conditioning and even beyond the "easily confused" mind. And, indeed, that debriefing session blew my mind. In exchange I gained a posture, an inside clarity I have never felt before. It was (still is) a natural kind of moral compass, even before the concept of good and bad.*

*The next week Alex and Aidan from HR gathered our group of ex-spies (they all still called me Daisy whenever I claimed I knew something for certain) and explained that our adventure had laid the foundation we would be using for reflection and growth*





*over the whole year. Our next step was getting skilled in hard-core negotiation techniques. It hit me in my solar plexus when Alex explained how negotiations were the next logical step: “We’re not interested in you becoming the best negotiators, winning and all. We’re interested in you becoming masters of making new business deals that create and are based upon true partnership, real understanding. You had the heart. Now you have the deep understanding. Learning negotiating tools will be easy. You will become lighthouses. No need to come in like the storm like the businessmen of old did.”*

Excerpt from Julia F. Kendall’s report on the *Red and Blue* edu-larp experience

Welcome back. You are kindly asked to keep with this feeling as you read on. This executive summary will demonstrate how edu-larp relates to experiential learning, game-based learning, and role-playing, making the most out of the three worlds: education, business, and creative entertainment.

### **Why Nordic Larp?**

Professionals and scholars all over the world have proven over and over again that playful learning is **the** learning. Of all playful edu-activities out there this book focuses on role-playing games. Out of all the varieties of role-playing we have become die-hard fans of edu-larp, a methodology grounded in the Nordic larp community. Here is why:

- It works fast to transform experience into new learning.
- It has great team-bonding side-effects.
- It is surprisingly cost-effective and logistically feasible.
- It offers a rich set of advanced tools and mechanics for game design.
- Its framework has always been based on the remarkable values of the Nordic larp community.
- It is a young tradition growing wise fast because of sharing knowledge between professionals: practitioners and academics.
- Its immediacy, physicality, and social dynamics make it the most authentic of all instructor-led learning environments.

## **1.1 About Us**

Before we go further, let’s get to know a little about each other. And by “us” we mean you, too.

**Blaž Branc:** I co-created my first board game at the age of 8. My first poem was published when I was in 6th grade. I joined a semi-professional theatre group in the 3rd year of high school. I co-wrote a theatre play in 2000; we played it twice on the opening night and never again, because the “process has been completed”. Today I’m involved with several businesses, but running a consulting & education company with game-based learning is my primary one. This book is my contribution to the corporate learning tradition as well as it is the business world’s first introduction to professional edu-larping.





**Michał Mochocki:** I've spent more than half of my life with role-playing games: a role-player since 1993, a larper since the turn of the millennium. What started as a teenager's hobby has evolved into a life-long passion and profession. I went all the way from a player to game master, writer, translator, magazine editor, community manager, and designer. In my more adult life as assistant professor (Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, Poland), I approached role-playing games as a researcher and educator. I have used larp in high-school and university education, and have published papers on edu-larp for academic and popular audiences. For this book I wrote Chapter 6: How Edu-Larp Works, and co-authored this one.

**You:** We will repeatedly call upon your imagination, so it is fair to start by challenging our own. How did we imagine you, our Dear Reader? We see you as a businessperson who is well-aware that the road to business success is paved with great people who make great teams. You have a keen interest in innovations in professional training and assessment. Our first image is: a CEO looking for new ways to empower the HR development department and the rest of the company. Second image: you are a Human Resources specialist hunting for new tools for your training toolbox. Third image: a manager of any department who cares about the development of skills and attitudes among your teams. Fourth image: a CEO of an innovative small company with a fresh organizational culture. We assume you are experienced in traditional corporate training – but you are new to larp. It may even be the first time you have heard about it.

You may also be an experienced larp designer, interested in doing more business with, well, businesses. Your adventure with the book will be of a different kind – but it should be no less fruitful.

For starters, we'll ask you to imagine what larp looks like. We'll follow that up with a list of the hottest results, scientific claims, and benefits, plus some of the more thought-provoking insights from the world of playful learning.

## 1.2 Imagine Larp

Remember “traditional” business negotiation role-play? Typically, two or three people are asked to act out a negotiation scene. They are given a short outline of the situation, the roles they will adopt, and the goal they should try to achieve. And they go at it, observed (and evaluated) by either a business coach or a professional actor.

For instance, Person no. 1 is an employee asking for a raise, Person no. 2 is the boss unwilling to give it. After a few minutes of prep time both players enter the conversation as their character and try to argue their point successfully. As the negotiation ends, the dialogue is evaluated. Players get feedback and learn about what they did well and what needs improving. Often they would try role-playing the same scene again (and again), until the business coach decided that the players “got it”. They might even try role-reversal to pep things up. The coach might have other trainees





observe the role-play before trying themselves.

Remember the *Ugli Orange* exercise, popular in the 90s? Two corporate scientists are competing to purchase some rare oranges, desperately wanted by their companies as ingredients for products that will save lives (and make profit, obviously). As it later turned out, the companies didn't have to compete in the first place, since one needed only the juice and the other the rinds. But this they were only able to discover this during the negotiation.

How do we get from such small-scale role-plays to a full-blown larp?

### Imagine Characters

In a standard negotiation role-play there are no characters. Instead, sketched functional roles are used, defined simply by their position in the current negotiation scene. The role card includes only essential information that is directly relevant to the situation at hand:

- your professional background and status
- available resources
- your primary objective, and
- options you may be considering

Rarely will you see a human character behind this soulless cardboard cut-out.

Now imagine this: you and your co-players enter the scene as well-developed characters, with personalities, backgrounds, social lives, emotions, worldviews, and relationships. Your mind would not be 100% set on the agenda of the negotiations. Indeed, you all have other goals, interests, and problems of both a professional and personal nature, which may have an impact on your behaviour. Thanks to all this, your interactions – and the simulation as a whole – feel authentic. Natural. Real.

“Game play looks rather like any business seminar or meeting: people are talking, disappearing into private conferences, negotiating, debating, giving presentations, and so forth. They are pursuing both public and hidden agendas. As much as possible, the activities of the game are easy to conduct so as to permit differing behaviors to emerge. The multiplicity of overlapping and conflicting goals virtually guarantees that conflict will emerge” (Balzac 2010, 299).

### Imagine Fiction

Now imagine it's not just one isolated negotiation scene hanging in the empty air. Instead, role-play is rooted in three interconnected contexts.

First, it is a part of an ongoing narrative, just a stage in a **larger meaningful story**. It doesn't even have to be realistic; it can be science-fiction. The *Ugli Orange* exercise (even though it's not a larp) is one of these: a history of fierce competition between rival companies, their ground-breaking scientific (sci-fi) inventions, and the many lives that can be saved in the near future.

Second, it is a part of the personal history of your character, interwoven with your





character's ambitions, desires, previous actions, etc. The negotiations are **personally meaningful to your character**.

Third, the negotiation is not the only role-played scene. It's a longer game, with more scenes and more people in it. You are interacting with a group of characters, who may be distractions, obstacles, or helping hands. All of them are somehow related to your character: friends, colleagues, rivals, family, or romantic partners. Some of them have vested interests in the outcome of the negotiations. Some may even pressure you about it. This role-played experience will make the story **personally meaningful to you**.

"These experiences are bodily, and the endorphins and the adrenaline are very real – even though the encounters themselves are also fictional" (Stenros and Montola 2010, 25).

### **Imagine Game Mechanics**

Let's simplify and say that role-playing is basically communication with others. Now imagine that in the game you could do countless other actions – not merely "communicational" ones.

Imagine you could generate events and control things outside of the larp room. You could order chemical samples to be tested in a lab, manage your factories and shops in other cities, buy and sell on the stock market, obtain bank loans, train special agents, discover and unlock secret missions, solve puzzles to retrieve critical information. Even more! In non-realistic settings you could cast magic spells, or use superpowers or futuristic technology.

All this could be facilitated by a rule-based system (simulation) used to resolve actions that people cannot or will not perform physically. This is commonly called game mechanics. It can be used to stage violence (fist fights or terrorist attacks) and even romantic and sexual scenes, if it makes sense for the story and characters.

### **Imagine All This Coming Together**

In a nutshell you can imagine an edu-larp as a more complex form of traditional corporate role-play, which:

- is more complex, intense, authentic, and engaging
- has well-rounded characters endowed with personalities and relationships
- is wrapped up in an inspiring story, which the characters will develop through their actions
- is expanded with game mechanics, which affords many more in-game actions than can be performed in role-playing

Combined, this is a complex simulation engine which allows participants to experience work-related situations and practice problem-solving in different conditions and settings. Edu-larp may take them anywhere from everyday workplace routine to critical case scenarios they have never even faced yet.





“As these games can portray any world or society imaginable, they are a natural tool for studying questions such as what kind of a world is possible, what the world should or could be like, and what our world actually is like. It is one thing to postulate an alternative society on paper; constructing and living in one is another thing entirely” (Stenros and Montola 2010, 25).

## 1.3 What Else Is Coming Your Way

By the end of the book you will know what edu-larp can do for your company (or your client). We will guide you on this quest all the way from *Chapter 1: Imagine This* to *Chapter 9: The Beyond*.

Knowing our results-oriented audience, we’ve included sections on results throughout this book. And since this introductory chapter serves as the executive summary, we’ve gathered some of the most potent findings on the effects of game-based learning in general, and role-playing in particular.

### Chapter 2: Being Better Humans

In the second stage of our journey we will explore the foundations of business education. You will see what position this book takes on human resources management, leadership, and organizational culture. You will be introduced to the triad of knowledge/skills/attitudes, and the market value of soft skills and attitudes. Finally, we will talk about the idea of experiential learning and provoke you with free thinkers!

Leaders and followers do not operate in a vacuum. Rather, they are engaged in a form of elaborate roleplaying, in which each member of the group attempts to fill a certain role vis-à-vis everyone else (Balzac 2016, 4–5).

#### Research & results

- Companies and economies are struggling with employee disengagement, estimated in 2017 at 37% globally (42% in Europe) by AON Hewitt and 85% globally by Gallup.
- Engagement is a facet of attitude/motivation, and can be addressed in formal and non-formal education focused on the “A” in the KSA model (Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes).
- Holistic experiential learning should include active experimentation, concrete experience, and guided reflection after the experience (Kolb 1984). Games with debriefings are perfect tools for this (Erdogan et al., 2017).

### Chapter 3: Game-Based Learning

Edu-larp did not spring out of the blue. It is rooted in the rich tradition of games, play, and drama in education. Chapter 3 equips you with a map enabling you to locate edu-larp in the maze of terms: serious games, edu-games, gamification, and simulation. It helps you better understand the “game” element in larp, such as game mechanics.





“Whether they are a game or play, larps can be an amazing catalyst for classroom engagement, improved student focus, drive, motivation, and even understanding across a wide range of subjects” (Vanek & Peterson 2016, 221).

#### Research & results

- Thanks to collective action and spontaneous agency games allow players to “improvise unique and effective solutions to unfamiliar, complex problems” (Sadowski et al., 2013).
- A game can expose the gap between players’ moral ideals and moral actions and have the players become aware of the gap (Kahneman in Sadowski et al. 2013, 1327).
- The serious games movement – games with a serious (educational) purpose – has its roots in the 1970s, and has become a pretty serious industry in the 21st century (Balzac 2010).

#### Chapter 4: Role-Playing (Games) Meet Business

Then comes the time to delve into “role-play” in larp. There are many roots of role-playing both as a hobby and as a tool for education and development. Again, you will need a map to position larp between role-playing as an activity, role-playing games (RPG), and corporate role-playing games (corpoRPG).

You were role-playing even before you could read. The first role-play scenario you took part in was (co)designed by yourself.

#### Research & results

- Research has shown that role-playing games 1) develop group skills, 2) serve as a reflectional tool, 3) enable the development of empathy and social skills, 4) provide space for practicing critical ethical reasoning, 5) positively affect creativity and imagination development, etc. (Meriläinen 2013, 62–64).
- Role-playing activities have been successfully used in professional training across industries and disciplines: the military, medicine, nursing, judiciary, journalism, aviation, crisis response etc., including corporate-relevant fields such as finances, management and negotiation (Thong 2016; Bowman 2014; Vanek & Peterson 2016). Taking part in role-playing games had been beneficial to taking on leadership positions after graduating (Guenthner & Moore 2005, 59).
- Physical role-played simulations are highly cost-effective compared to virtual simulators or guided practice in a real workplace (Bosse et al., 2015; Vanek & Peterson 2016).

#### Chapter 5: Nordic Larp

This leg of the journey takes us to the Nordic countries. It is there that the larp community has developed cutting-edge theory, practice, and values (yes, values!) in larp design and larp-based education. If you want state-of-the-art know-how, this is





where to go. Well, not necessarily in the geographical sense. The Nordic larp culture has spread globally, so now you can find Nordic-style larp all around the world. But the name “Nordic” still holds.

The concept of winning is replaced by the idea that overall experience matters more and that the players should enable one another to immerse themselves into roles and create a collective illusion, instead of personally pursuing their character’s goal.

#### Research & results

- The Nordic larp community has been building knowledge, design tools, case studies and values (yes, values!) for more than 20 years in close collaboration between practitioners (designers, players) and researchers (Montola & Stenros 2010).
- In the Nordic approach larp is seen as a serious business. It is highly valued as a form of art, expression, persuasion, and education, able to tackle serious topics and be used in professional endeavours (Stenros 2014; Deutsch 2015).
- Having the power to create transformative experiences, Nordic larp can change people’s attitudes (Bowman 2014). By changing people it can help change the world (Holmås in Raven, 2012).

#### Chapter 6: How Edu-Larp Works

This chapter starts with the “who”, “what”, and “where” of edu-larp. You will visit different countries, institutions, and educational settings: formal schools, universities, and informal edu-centres. Then we move on to the “how”. What are the super-powers of edu-larp that make it work? And how exactly does it work?

**Imagine this:** Challenge + Fantasy + Curiosity + Control + Collaboration + Competition + Recognition. A well-designed edu-larp will psychologically rub people in the seven right ways.

#### Research & results

- Edu-larp is already successfully used in school, university, non-formal edu-centres and NGOs, and employee training (Mochocki 2012, Mochocki & Wrona 2013; Bowman 2014; Vanek & Peterson 2016).
- It combines the immersive power of two engines: role-play and gameplay, and even one of these is enough to get players engaged (Mochocki 2013a).
- Due to live performance, role-enactment, unscripted agency and immediate feedback from co-players, larp is a powerful tool of transforming attitudes (Bowman 2010; Bowman 2014; Simkins 2015).

#### Chapter 7: Case Studies

Now is the time for the real deal. Real, field-tested examples of business edu-larp, from the USA to Belarus. With pictures!





If you're able to think straight in the face of the submerging ship and a lunatic captain (with all departments wanting to push their objectives to the top of priority list), you'll probably do well tomorrow in the office, too.

Categories based on learning objectives:

- Edu-larp can be used to train soft skills (aka interpersonal/people skills) (Long Ago & Far Away; Mad Teaparty; The Caravan: Merchant's Journey; Bay of Pigs; Miguel's Journey, Dust over Assling City, The Game of Values, The Ark)
- Edu-larp can be designed as a simulation of a specific corporate environment, its processes and procedures (Change Management Process Simulation)
- Edu-larp can be designed as a form of competence evaluation to be used by corporate assessment centres (7 Samurai)

### Chapter 8: Troubleshooting

Troubleshooting guides you from 1) recognising critical gaps in the competencies of your workforce, to 2) setting educational goals, 3) finding the right edu-larp facilitator, 4) choosing the right scenario, 5) running and debriefing the game, and, mostly, 6) learning from it. Finishing with a Q&A section, this chapter will answer most, if not all, of your edu-larp-related questions.

Participants learned from their colleagues that it was possible to think differently and act differently, which was worth infinitely more than if I had to preach facts to them.

Research-based guidelines

- Long before the larp: thinking about educational objectives, choose the right type of larp for the current needs of your company.
- Right before the larp: think about pre-teaching, workshops, warm-ups and briefing.
- After the larp: don't forget about the debriefing (really, please don't) and follow-up activities to drive the lessons home.

### Chapter 9: The Beyond

This chapter is as much about making conclusions as it is about imagining what lies ahead and what trends we are seeing. Disney's interactive *Star Wars* park is opening soon. A new industry might be born, based on narrative and character immersion. Coupled with tomorrow's technology, what futures could it create?

With all the tech rushing into our lives, live-action role-playing seems especially appealing for its human-to-human contact. The transactions between humans are natural, unassisted by technology or medium. Basic. Pure. Larping feels like bathing in each other humanness.





### Research-based predictions

- Edu-larp may be seen as an advanced version of traditional corporate role-plays: more complex, more serious, able to address more issues at the same time.
- Specifically, it is perfectly suited to work on values, identities and attitudes. Which includes company values and employee engagement.
- Larp has become a branch of the entertainment industry in the so-called experience economy, from blockbuster larps in Polish castles since 2014 to the Disney's Star Wars Hotel currently being built in the USA. Immersive role-playing in fictional settings is close to Niven & Barnes's Dream Park (1981), Fincher's The Game (1997), Nolan's Inception (2010) or HBO's Westworld (2016--). Your corporate training & assessment can harness some of its power.

## 1.4 Blaž's Personal Insights

Having covered some of the most potent finding, results, and benefits of both practitioners and academics in 1.3, I would now like to share my own insights from ground-breaking, soul-shaking personal experience with edu-larp.

### Business Insights

This is a selection of quite fascinating general pointers, grounded in theory and/or personal experience:

- As an executive you don't want to be more serious. You want to be more professional.
- You want to hire talented young people. Young people grew up playing games. For them playing is not only fun, but it's how they learn and, to a large extent, how they socialise.
- Game-based learning is how a human being attains selfhood (Mead in Cronk, 2016). This type of learning is called "playing".
- Experiential learning makes up for the experience your (future) employees don't have yet.
- The cost of running educational role-plays is peanuts compared to your daily losses from disengaged and/or underskilled staff (AON 2017; Gartner 2017).
- In edu-larp you don't learn as yourself; you learn as your character, who might be a whole different personality. PowerPoint can try to teach you how to negotiate like Nikita Khrushchev. With edu-larp you negotiate as Nikita Khrushchev.
- Edu-larp creates learning experiences of the highest order: multi-stakeholder situations with complex problem solving, illuminating hidden beliefs and attitudes, exploring the unknown, and, possibly, predicting the future. Not just any future: your organisation's or your team's future.
- Edu-larp is also a great tool for assessing skills and attitudes. Even more so when players – as is frequently reported – get so immersed in the game that they forget about being assessed.





- 1/3 of competencies are made up of attitudes. How do you tackle those? PowerPoint?

### **Transformative Experience (Radical!)**

In Chapter 8.4.e Troubleshooting you will read a story of how one young PhD guy went from being socially awkward to becoming the star of the group in a matter of hours after playing Raul Castro in the *Bay of Pigs* edu-larp. I know this because I was there, having a hard time believing my eyes. And that was only my first encounter with larping!

It would not be exaggerating to say that I have since seen at least one extreme transformation in every larp I have either written, game mastered, or played in.

- J.M. went from a quiet mouse to team leader, based on his strategic thinking skill in 7 Samurai (see Chapter 7)
- A long-standing romantic couple met as players in Isabelle. In the game her character had sparks with another player's character and ultimately chose to marry that player over her real-life boyfriend. The emotional disturbance of "you chose another man" the couple experienced lasted for days, until they managed to "find" themselves again (Branc, 2017). The incredible thing is that Isabelle is only a 15-minute larp scenario.
- Z.N. returned a new man after coming back from the Fairweather Manor larp. He said he played a character who was actually who he, as a being, truly is. Playing his true self for two days brought peace and deep satisfaction to his life. And it was obvious; we could all tell: his coworkers, friends, and family.
- Giuseppe played the character of a mother whose child is in intensive care at a hospital. When tears rolled down his eyes in the debrief after the game, we all believed him when he said that this experience made him feel his feminine side, and his inner mother for the first time (Branc 2015c).
- I learned that I am also a directive, autocratic leader who would stop at nothing after I played a part in Bay of Pigs, trying to save the world from nuclear war (and myself from being backstabbed by my generals)(see Chapter 4.4).
- A good-natured woman was terrified to realise that politics came naturally to her after playing the character of the CEO of a steel factory, scheming to avoid heavy penalties in Dust over Assling City (see Chapter 7).

These cases are not just accounts of how somebody got better at something (think: developed a skill). These cases speak of **radical insights and changes in players' personalities**. All happening in a safe, controlled environment.

Hopefully you feel it too: the rush of live-action role-playing. The immense potential it has for touching upon hard-to-reach parts of your employees' minds. The power to create transformative experiences and to turn them into competencies, resulting in improved workplace performance.

We hope you enjoyed this executive summary-style introduction. More importantly, we hope it has painted a clear image of what lies ahead.





## About the editor

Larp has been a part of my educational work and academic research for nearly ten years now. I have published papers on edu-larp for various audiences: researchers, teachers, and larp designers. I have used larp in my own classes at the Department of English Studies (Kazimierz Wielki University [UKW] in Bydgoszcz), in upper and lower secondary schools as research and educational projects, and in museums as a part of NGO historical reenactment. I have also trained (with and without games) adult professionals – school teachers, academic staff, visual artists – not in the corporate sector, though. I did have a small episode with corporate training (bank employees) with Sirius Game Studio, but not enough to claim experience. In this book Blaž is the business guy. I just happen to know a thing or two about edu-larp.

Most of my larps used historical settings, even before I entered the Academia. Actually, it had been historical role-playing that brought me to larp in the first place. In the late 1990s, as a student at University of Gdańsk, I got fascinated with the tabletop RPG *Dzikie Pola* set in the 17th-century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. I tend to get deeply involved in what I do, so I moved fast from player and game master to author, editor, and designer. Since the early 2000s I have worked as author, editor and community manager for the print RPG magazine *Portal* and online portal *Valkiria Network*. Running 17th-century larps, frequently combined with costumed feasting, was one of my contributions to the *Dzikie Pola* community. At that time, tabletop RPG was my primary interest, with larp being a secondary activity. But this was about to change.

Moving back to my home town (Bydgoszcz) in 2005, I reunited with my friends who were into 17th-century historical reenactment. So, being still passionate about this historical period, I moved away from tabletop role-playing to physical reenactment. Costumes, weapons, fencing, battles, campsite events, all that. Which we spiced up with a bit (or a lot) of character role-playing, even though it was looked down upon by hardcore reenactors. We also got involved in historical education, running living history lessons in schools, museums and culture centres. This is when larp moved to the forefront. A tabletop session can conveniently accommodate just a few players, while larp can easily engage 15, 30, or 50 people. Given the typical size of classroom or museum visitor groups, it comes as no surprise that larp beats tabletop RPG as an “edu” tool.

2007 brought a big change in my professional life. Since 2002 I had been working as a translator of *Dungeons&Dragons* handbooks, simultaneously writing a PhD dissertation on the dual (game/literature) nature of tabletop RPG scenarios. Getting my PhD in November 2007, I took up a position as assistant professor at UKW just the next month. Hence, games, role-plays, and history/heritage activities became the focus of my research within literature and culture studies. As an academic teacher I was also interested in game-based learning and gamification. Around 2010 I gave up historical reenactment, but stayed involved in historical education, with a significant role of (Nordic) larp. For instance,

- In 2012 I was the lead author of historical edu-larp scenarios for 1100+ junior



high school students (all of them first-time larpers) in the DEMOcracy Project, led by a historical reenactment NGO from Kraków, Poland with funding from the Swiss-Polish Cooperation Programme (more info in Mochocki & Wrona, 2013).

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- In 2012-13 I led a research project on edu-larp in history lessons in high-schools in Kraków and Gdańsk, carried out by the Games Research Association of Poland with the educational publisher Nowa Era (more info in Mochocki 2013a and Mochocki 2014).
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- In 2013 I created GAMEDEC: Game Studies & Design specialisation in the newly launched 2nd Gen Humanities B.A. programme at UKW: a humanities-based degree focused on skillset in game design (more info in Mochocki 2016). Of course, RPG and larp design was on the curriculum. We have a mandatory larp design lab in the freshman year, and then team projects where students can pick larp as an option. Plus, there is a capstone edu-games lab and final B.A. project, which also can be larps. So, we train larp designers and (if they choose so) larp educators.
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- In 2014 with Mikołaj Sobociński (also Gamedec.UKW teacher and coordinator), we hosted the EU study visit on “Gamification in Education”. Yes, the fruitful event you have read about several times: the distant origins of this very book. This is where I first met Blaž and Blaž met edu-larp.

All this brings us near the present moment. The two of us (Blaž and I) meet every now and then at Nordic larp events, and we find room for collaboration at a distance. Of course, you don't need Nordic larp to build collaboration, trust, and friendship. But you need these qualities to do Nordic larp, in a manner of speaking. You need this kind of openness to feel comfortable in the larp community. Larp was not the only thing to bring me and Blaž together you can also blame gamification, EU funds, and a crazy Wednesday party night. But it was larp, nothing else, that has kept us together. In 2016 Blaž invited me to be co-supervisor of his B.A. paper on corporate edu-larp. In 2017, coming full circle, I asked Blaž to be an industry consultant for my student Anna, who was writing a business edu-larp as her B.A. project. Last summer Blaž took two gamedecs for Erasmus+ student internships as game designers. Now we have completed this book. In all likelihood this is not our last word.

Michał Mochocki



## About the author

### Serious stuff

I hold a BA degree in *Sociology – human resources management*. It took me 16 years to finish my thesis and finally graduate in 2016. But during all those years I had the best of excuses: I held several management positions in a web startup company, namely Domenca/Mimovrste, which was founded by my friends in 2002. My first position was in sales and project management. Soon I took over the web design department and led a group of 12 programmers, designers, and animators. I got into digital marketing in 2006. In 2004 the company made a spin-off, an online computer and electronics store Mimovrste, which became the largest Slovenian online retailer in 2009, and I was its marketing manager. Domenca/Mimovrste went from 2 to 102 employees in 7 years. What a ride it was.

In 2007 I founded my own company called Baltazar marketing. I became seriously involved with my own business in 2010, after I left Mimovrste. I have since worked with domestic and international organizations like Porsche, Hewlett-Packard, Samsung, Toshiba, KD Funds, Si.mobil, Talum, Adriatic Slovenica, Gorenje, Astellas pharma, Studio Moderna, Austrian Airlines, OpportUnity UK, and many others.

The year 2014 brought about a change in my core business. Instead of providing digital marketing services, as I had done since 2007, I was receiving more and more inquiries for lectures, workshops, and training courses, as well as consulting offers. By 2016 I had completely stopped with my marketing agency work and went fully in education, training, and consulting.

Most in-demand training course topics:

- Entrepreneurship
  - From craftsmanship to entrepreneurship: an intense training course for micro and small business that want to grow
- Marketing
  - The undisputed basics of marketing (and how they apply digitally)
  - Use of storytelling for your corporate, brand, or product story
- Product re-engineering
  - How to successfully re-launch the fading champions
- Sales:
  - Let's get deep: Hard-core training for sales people: aligning your source potential with your sales communication
- Gamification:
  - Low-tech gamification in Sales
  - Low-tech gamification in HRM
- Game-design:
  - Live experience design: using game design for creating engaging live experiences (event management)
  - Service design: using game design for creating engaging customer



experiences

- TforT:
  - Training for Internal trainers on Experiential learning (Kolb)

Today I'm involved with several businesses, but running a consulting & educational company with game-based learning is my primary one.

I currently live and work in Slovenia's capital, Ljubljana.

### **Playful experience**

Seeing edu-larp produce personal transformations (remember Chapter 1.4: Transformative experience) happening in front of me (and to me as well), I could not help but want to get into it. And in I went. Having had previous experience with fiction writing, public performance, theatre acting, script writing, film acting, lecturing, and facilitating learning groups, I found it easy to start using Nordic larp frameworks, as well as adopt its values and become a part of its community. I knew from the start that larping for educational purposes would be my weapon of choice.

Since 2014 I have written 7 edu-larp scenarios, trained and mentored 4 international training course groups, and produced an additional 15 scenarios.

In 2017 I became a licensed facilitator of Copenhagen Game Lab for two serious games: InnoCulture (on innovation management) and Team Leader (on situational leadership).

A few recent projects:

- “From inspiration to innovation”, a fully gamified business conference on innovation (Ljubljana, Slovenia), recognized as innovation by the Slovenian forum of Innovation 2014 (the world's first fully gamified educational business event)
- “Knudepunkt Convention”, inspirational speaker (“Rejection: clash of personalities” (Copenhagen, Denmark)
- In 2016 I co-designed sales communication for a company that creates tabletop games for the Talking Tom and Friends license.
- Digital Shift, a serious game about digital transformation, launched at HRM Congress 2017 in Slovenia, played by 190 players simultaneously (game created by Deloitte Slovenia and my company)
- The Dust over Assling City edu-larp is being played at the Congress of Managers 2017 as the concluding experiential section
- Initiator and organizer of the “Business games and Gamification in HR” conference (2014 – ) in Ljubljana, Slovenia

### **Hot in stock now**

What I believe I'll be most busy with in the coming years:

- consulting organizations to become companies with a play-based, infinite





cultures of leadership and education

- writing and running edu-larps to support exploring contingencies, strategic planning, and evaluation
- creating and facilitating bespoke game-based solutions for change-management, and other essential transitions in a company's evolution
- addressing the future with Digital Shift, a ready-made board-game about digital transformation that my company created in collaboration with Deloitte
- advocating for humanism and for regulation towards a paced, balanced commercial introduction of novel technology

### On a more personal note

I'm told I always go deep whenever I find something that draws me. Looking back, that's probably true. Besides my professional and business adventures, I have had several big "going deep" chapters.

Since I was a boy of 5 or 6 I have been often accused of "having a big imagination"! Imagination has been one of the greatest gifts in my life. An unavoidable inspiration. A tireless companion. A shape-shifter, taking form from business to – but – wait. Step by step, shall we?

I wanted to be a writer ever since I gave up the dream of becoming an astronaut. I had my first poem published and awarded several times at the age of 12. Together with 6 other poets, our high school published our book of poems. I have since written many short stories and a couple of novels, but never published one. I joined a semi-professional theatre troupe in my 3rd year of high-school. Becoming a Hollywood-class actor was another one of my childhood dreams, you see. At the age of 17 I realised I had to hurry up if I wanted to become a teenage star and land a role in *Beverly Hills 90210* or something similar. Giving up my cosy artistic life in Slovenia to flip burgers in the US? I guess I wasn't *that* determined about what was best for me.

While I was still at elementary school my father, who used to be a rock and roll drummer in the 1970s and 80s, bought an Atari computer, a Roland MIDI sound module, and a KORG Poly-800 synth. I was 14 when I composed my first electronic song in Cubase sequencer. It was called *My Happy Phone*. I wrote, arranged, and recorded about 100 songs in the period between 1995 and 2015. Ever since I began DJ-ing in clubs (house music, mostly) I was almost exclusively making dance electronica. Finishing a track and test-playing it for a live audience that same night was beyond excitement.

I sold my car in 2011 (but haven't paid back the bank) and was going to use the money to finance myself a simulation game. The simulation was "if Blaž could live like a professional music producer, would that actually make him happy, or was it just a dream?" Three months and money gone later (what great, lavishly lived months those were), I discovered I would actually enjoy being a full-time music producer. But life had a different plan for me, it seemed. Soon after the producer simulation



game I told my business partners (we established a digital records label back in 2009) that I was tired of being broke. I didn't want to wait for life to answer my musical prayers anymore. It took me another 2 years to pay back the bank for the car that I didn't have. I decided to go fully into business.

From 2009, when I met Boris, to 2013 I was finally living another one of my childhood dreams: I had always been fascinated with Shaolin kung-fu. You know: dragon style, snake style. Boris was living in Belgium, so we travelled back and forth at least once a year, to learn together. He was my instructor and refused to be called teacher. I additionally took up tai ji classes in 2012. I was a good student, going to classes twice a week, training on my own at least twice a week more.

In 2013 I met a beautiful young lady who just happened to also be a *tanguera*. At the same time, another friend invited me to join tango classes with her. Another good friend reported to have spontaneously taken a tango Argentino class a week before and claimed it was fantastic. What could I do?

I started learning tango twice: in the fall of 2013 and in the beginning of 2015, with almost one year in between. Two times is a charm. Soon a young tango teacher and her friends took me under their wings. I attended my first tango festival in the summer of 2015. I gave my first public beginner's class at the Larp Design conference in Poland in 2016, with Ismena Ładecka. In October 2017 I was already assisting my teacher with private classes. Supposedly I got quite good, which was to be expected, since I practiced and danced 5-6 times a week. I also play music as a tango DJ and I host a milonga (a tango social dancing event).

Remember when I said one of my earliest childhood dreams was to become a writer? In reality, one of the great insights into "being a writer" is its team-work component. Surely a pop-science<sup>57</sup> work like this book is no fiction novel, but it's still a book, filled with concepts and ideas that I haven't been able to find references for, meaning they might be originally mine. Which is completely irrelevant. What's important is knowing that there's a team making sure the end product is the best that it can be. I much prefer this "author" reality than my old, genius, lone-wolf image of a writer.

Thank you, dear reader, for joining us in this journey of imagining better learning, and better leadership.

For feedback on this book, or business inquiries, please contact me at:

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57. Michał said this book would not be considered academic, but pop-science. I like it. Sounds like something Michael Jackson would be interested in doing as well.





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