

*PDW (#14667) proposal for the 2019 AOM Annual Meeting on:*  
**The Use of Serious Games in HRM Research, Teaching and Practice**

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**Proposed primary sponsor:**

Human Resources (HR) Division

**Other sponsors that might be interested in the workshop:**

Organizational Behavior Division  
Organizational Development and Change Division  
Research Methods Division

**ABSTRACT**

Serious games have the potential to serve as research tools in the HRM domain, educational tools for the teaching of HRM, and tools for HRM practice. In this PDW we will not only address these three use cases for serious games, we will invite participants to experience a serious game that we have designed and used for all three priority mentioned use cases. InLine is a strategic HRM serious game in which players are challenged to design a firm specific HRM configuration. InLine has been used as a research tool by enabling insight in decisions by HR-professionals regarding firm specific HR-practices over multiple years, as an educational tool for the teaching of configurational HRM, and as a decision support tool for the design of a firm specific HRM configuration in practice. The goal of the PDW is to inspire participants to consider the use of serious games in their research, education and practice of HRM. Take home deliverables for participants are (1) an exploration of the possibilities of serious game in HRM research and teaching, (2) insight into the development and implementation of serious games in HRM research and teaching, and (3) consideration and specification of the use of serious games in research and teaching through a plenary discussion.

## **WHY THE WORKSHOP SHOULD INTEREST THE POTENTIAL SPONSOR(S)**

A serious game uses its entertaining quality not solely for entertainment but for training, education and strategic objectives (Zyda, 2005). As (serious) games enable the observation of actual behavior (Jackson, 2011), serious games and gaming methods can be considered valuable tools for conducting research (Babb, Leslie, & van Slyke, 1966). However, the adaption of serious games as research tools in the HRM domain has been limited. Additionally, due to their effects on learning and retention (Wouters, van Nimwegen, van Oostendorp, & van der Spek, 2013) serious games can be valuable tools for the teaching of HRM. Finally, as HRM revolves around increasing employee skills, knowledge, abilities, motivation, and opportunities through practices like training (Jiang et al., 2012), the use of serious games as HRM tools seems promising. This PDW is of interest to the HR Division and its members because it probes the implications and opportunities of using serious games in three areas: HRM research, HRM teaching and HRM practice. Ultimately, this supports the HR Division's dedication "to understanding, identifying, and improving the effectiveness of HR practices". At the end of the PDW, participants will have an increased understanding of the applicability of serious games for research in the HRM domain, the teaching of HRM, and HRM practice, and will be motivated to apply the knowledge gained to their own research/teaching/HR practice domain. We expect a substantial number of workshop participants as prior held workshop using our serious game InLine were well attended (30 workshops have taken place, 400 participants in total).

## DESCRIPTION OF THE WORKSHOP FORMAT

The goal of the workshop is to inspire scholars and practitioners to use serious games as research tools, teaching method and as a support tool for the HR profession. We do so by discussing their potential but also by enabling participants to experience an exemplary serious game. As such, the workshop will have an interactive character; participants get to experience a serious game and engage in interactive discussions in which they can share their experience, learn from other participants and post their questions and challenges. This PDW consists of three parts; introduction, gameplay and discussion.

During the **introduction** (30 minutes) we will elaborate on the benefits of using serious games for (1) research in the HRM domain, (2) the teaching of HRM, and (3) HR professionals decision support. We will discuss pro's and con's with participants who are invited to explore the opportunities for the use of serious games. During the **gameplay** (90 minutes) we will invite the workshop participants to take part in a serious game (i.e. InLine: <http://www.gamelab20.nl/inline/>) that we have developed. In so doing, we want to showcase how a single serious game can serve the threefold 'research-teaching-practice' purpose.

During the **discussion** (30 minutes) we will reflect upon the challenges we experience with developing our serious game. Also, the workshop participants are provided with the possibility to get answers to their questions on the use of serious games for HR research, HR practice and/or teaching HR; and to get feedback on their first conceptual ideas on how to use serious games for HRM.

## OVERVIEW OF THE WORKSHOP

Games provide an valuable vessel for examining multiple concepts such as social skills and decision making (Järvelä, Ekman, Kivikangas, & Ravaja, 2014). As (serious) games enable the observation of actual behavior (Jackson, 2011) opposed to, for example, survey measures, games have been used in different fields such as psychology and economy. The use of serious games in HRM research however has not been leveraged to its full potential. This is surprising since serious games can be used for HRM research (e.g. observations or field experiments), for HRM teaching (e.g. allowing students to run simulations on HRM interventions) and HRM activities (e.g. implementing a serious game to induce desired employee behavior). The goal of this PDW is to provide participants with insight regarding the use of serious games for HRM research, HRM teaching and HRM activities through plenary discussions and experiencing a serious game.

InLine, the serious game for strategic HRM included in this PDW, has been utilized as a research tool. Designed to reflect the complexity inherent to firm specific HRM design, we used InLine as a research tool by inviting HR professionals and general managers to play the game. Players are challenged to (groups of 3 to 6 players) pick those HR-practices that align with an organizational strategy (see picture 1,2 and 3).



*Picture 1, 2 and 3. Gameplay pictures.*

Additionally, players prioritize the HR-practices and specify them to a practical level of detail. We consider this selecting, prioritizing and specifying of HR-practices as valuable research output; a wide range of research questions can be addressed using the data collected.

We can now for example verify whether the HR-practices selected by the HR-professionals are those HR-practices that are theoretically aligned with the organizational strategies. Additionally, insight is attained concerning the design of HRM for hybrid organizational strategies. Furthermore, the prioritization enables us to assess the relative importance of specific HR-practices within a specific organizational context. In the last two years, more than 30 InLine workshops with over 400 participants interested in HRM have taken place. During this PDW we will discuss the use of serious games as tools for HRM research in general and the use of InLine specifically.

HRM professionals have been adapting serious games to address specific HR-practices such as recruitment, selection and training (Allal-Cherif & Makhlouf, 2015). Additionally, more general, free form HRM simulations games that include role playing and a large degree of player autonomy have been designed (Klabbers, 2004). However, while the potential of serious gaming for HRM seems evident, serious games have yet to address the complex challenge of firm specific HRM design. To address this gap, we focus on the functional characteristics of firm specific HRM design and have designed a serious game that supports HRM-professionals in designing firm specific HRM. InLine presents to the players the complexity of firm specific HRM design and aims to be a valid presentation of the design of HRM in practice. As such, InLine enables the players to experience the outcomes of their actions in terms of the well-known concept of HRM alignment (Gratton & Truss, 2003). InLine hereby provides the opportunity to tailor HRM to organizational strategy and support HRM-professionals in the design of HRM. In this PDW we will address the opportunity to use serious games for HRM in general, and the use of InLine for the HRM profession specifically.

Additional to their potential as research vessels in the HRM domain, and as HRM tools useful in practice, serious games are commonly used in education (Susi, Johannesson, &

Backlund, 2007). However, while games can support strategic thinking and collaboration (Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004), the adoption of games in HRM education is, to our best knowledge, limited. There seems to be a particular lack of serious games that address the complexity of designing firm specific HRM. InLine addressed this gap and enables students to gain in depth knowledge on the importance and effects of alignment between HRM and organizational strategy. As such InLine has been used by multiple universities in their bachelor studies for HRM. In this PDW we will address the opportunity to use serious games for HRM education, and the use of InLine for HRM education specifically.

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