

Health libraries: sharing through gaming

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Abstract

Information science is a fast-changing field, and medical librarians need to develop their roles to meet the users' new requirements. The professional development becomes a major challenge, not only regarding the evolving core activities, but also in finding innovative ways to shape the librarians' and users' learning experience. In order to invent new tools for training, a group of librarians with different backgrounds decided to create a game inspired by the "Bucket of doom", which is described by its creator as a "Card game that meets storytelling with a sprinkling of comedy". This adapted version for health libraries will face players with real professional situations. To overcome each challenge and have fun, librarians must use their experience and imagination with a high dose of creativity and humour.

Key words: health libraries; professional library development; collaboration; open access training; evidence-based practice training; research data management training; research support; games in libraries.

Introduction

The use of games in libraries, for teaching and professional development, has increased significantly in recent years. There are already many experiences in the field of scholarly communication and open access (1), and also in the context of evidence-based medicine for medical students to test their EBM skills (2). Many of them are particularly designed for students, early career or academics (3-5), librarians and researchers (6, 7). The user feedback about those games is mostly very positive. However, in the biomedical context, there is little literature looking at using games with medical students to teach information skills, and participation rates in some early pilots was low (8). Nevertheless, even if some research suggests that gamification does not always show positive effects, in the context of libraries it may help to increase users' and librarians' motivation to both learn and teach.

Last but not least, the motivation for developing this game was not only to create a tool for health sciences and research librarians to learn new things having

fun, but also to show the effectiveness of a collaboration born in the context of the EAHIL conference.

Objectives

The aim of this game is to acquire new knowledge and improve professional skills, as well as to generate fruitful discussions and information exchanges among the players, thanks to the evocation of a shared professional culture through a wide variety of assets and situations. Additionally, through the interactions arising during the game, participants may identify new partners for future collaborations.

Methodology and development of the game

The very first idea of developing this game came up in Cardiff after a very stimulating day at the EAHIL 2018 conference when the authors gathered for some relaxing time playing a game discovered in a bookshop, the "Bucket of doom", which is described as a black comedy story-telling game, where you've got to escape from tons of seriously dodgy situations

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with the help of hundreds of seriously useless objects. The game meets storytelling with a sprinkling of comedy (9). During the game the question arose: what happens when librarians play a game they like in these circumstances? And they started thinking about the way to turn this idea into a workshop for the next EAHIL event.

The project was carried out thanks to an almost year-long online collaboration using different tools, instant messaging group discussions, some web call meetings, as well as shared documents writing. The idea was to cover many topics that health librarians face or might face in their work. Confronted with real-life inspired – sometimes dramatized – professional situations, the players will have to be creative in order to overcome each challenge. The professional assets and challenges of health and research support librarianship are represented by cards. Some jokes in the form of “fantasy cards” were also added to keep the game light in tone and help to create more imaginative and funny solutions. Thanks to the different backgrounds and working places of the group members, the authors were able to collect a wide variety of situations and assets necessary for the game related to: open access; impact of research; data management and protection; issues around systematic reviews and synthesis of evidence; questions about licensing and acquisitions; use of databases, reference managers etc. The difficulties of the diverse tasks of librarianship are also evoked in different situations, i.e. teaching, management, relationships with users and institutions etc.

Every challenge was discussed by the authors to ensure a way out existed and they could provide it in case the players got stuck. Game mechanics were also tested before the Workshop and it appeared that more fantasy cards should be added. The diverse makeup of the group was also an advantage to review the list and guarantee that the content of the game would be understandable by anyone, as all the challenges and assets unclear for one of the author were rewritten or even discarded. Eventually different logos were proposed and the final one was chosen through a vote.

Description of the game

The game is composed by 4 different types of cards:

- Challenge cards: They describe the situations

that a librarian has to face and resolve. Most of them all of them are real situations that one of the author had experienced (i.e. “You must convince physicians to cancel a subscription to a prestigious journal, which they do not read” or “You have a very famous researcher who only cares about IF and you need to explain the implications about Plan S”), and in order to make it funnier, there are very few crazy situations (as “The Incredible Hulk is your new cataloguer and you have to make a deal with a big ebook publisher”).

- Resource cards: These contain tools, resources or skills players can use to resolve the challenging situations. Some of them are serious (i.e. “The PRISMA checklist”, “A membership to PRESS forum”, “A course about the 3R: Refine Reduce Replace”, or “The DORA statement signed by the Rector of your university”), and others have a more entertaining tone (“An Elsevier gift card for 75% discount”, “A T-Shirt with the ‘I love Open software’ slogan”, or “A phone call to EAHIL ex-president”).
- Fantasy cards: These are funny cards that can also be used as tools to solve the given situations. They are intended to create a more relaxed and amusing atmosphere (i.e. «A key to a Swiss bank safe”, “A big big hug” or “A teleportation machine (Star Trek style)”).
- The game includes also blank cards as “jokers” (to be used 1 per payer to add another tool when all other cards are not helpful).

For this first version of the game, we created a list of 42 challenging situations, 80 real tools, and 55 fantasy cards. In addition, to start the game in a more easy-going manner, a “pick your name” table with a set of nouns and adjectives was proposed. The table alludes to the different tasks of health librarianship (communication, research, management...) but in a lighter perspective, in order to encourage the players’ participation.

Game play

The game is designed to be played by a group of 4 to 7 people, helped by a game master who presents the scenario. In order to start the game with an icebreaker, instead of formal introductions, each participant has to select their “game name” from the given “pick your name” list, choosing one adjective

(spectacular, innovative...) and one noun (fixer, negotiator...). Second, to start the round a set of 7 cards is dealt to each player: 4 normal tool cards, 2 fantasy cards and 1 joker. Following that, the game master reveals the first situation turning up one of the challenge cards. After reading the text aloud, the game master ensures that all participants have clearly understood the situation and then the round of proposals for escaping the situation starts. Using one of their cards (or combining several cards in another variant of the game), each player explains how he or she would resolve the situation (Figure 1). They are free to elaborate their scenario as much as they like. When all the participants have finished (they are free to pass their turn if they are not inspired) the players vote for the best scenario, and the most successful wins. After that, the players replace their used cards and a new challenge is drawn.



Fig. 1. Example of a challenge situation, and a hand of 7 cards

Testing the game: interactive workshop at the EAHIL Workshop in Basel

The game was proposed as an interactive workshop at the European Association for Health Information and Libraries Workshop that took place in Basel, on the 19th of June 2019. After a short introduction the participants started playing immediately. The challenges seemed to resonate quite well with their personal experience and they were never short on creative solutions to overcome them, sometimes clever, sometimes funny, very often both. It was a fine example of the friendly spirit of the EAHIL participants, and laughs were heard at every table.

Conclusion

Games can be an excellent tool to create a positive atmosphere and think creatively to solve new or old problems in a collaborative and imaginative way. Furthermore, in the present case, using the game for an interactive workshop seemed like the perfect opportunity to test if gaming could improve the way to learn or help to do it in a funnier manner. Based on the very positive comments of the attendees participating in the workshop and subsequent feedback, the game seemed to be a success. The authors' way to thank the workshop participants for their creativity and warm welcome of the game, is to make available to the community a version of the game that can be used by all those who are interested. The game will be available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 License. (CC BY-NC 3.0) in Zenodo with the DOI 10.5281/zenodo.3360452 <<https://zenodo.org/record/3360452>>. Anyone is free to share it and to adapt it.

Now it's your turn to play, please tell the authors how your game went!

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