
Towards a Critical Framework for Hedonic and Eudaimonic Engagement in Business Education

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Abstract:

Edutainment has long occupied an uneasy position within higher education. Initially framed as a positive response to disengaged learners, edutainment promised to make learning more accessible, enjoyable, and emotionally engaging. However, critics of the managerialisation of higher education, especially in business schools, increasingly associated edutainment with the commodification of learning, where universities positioned students as customers and entertainment risked displacing critical thought and intellectual challenge. More recently, emerging work in ludic pedagogy has reopened discussion surrounding the role of fun in education, reframing playful learning not simply as distraction or spectacle, but as a potentially meaningful component of engagement, reflection, and learning design.

This provocation paper critically explores how fun is currently conceptualised within business and management education. Drawing on a systematic review of empirical studies examining fun and related constructs in university business education, the paper highlights substantial conceptual and methodological fragmentation. Existing studies variously operationalise fun through constructs such as enjoyment, flow, playfulness, engagement, and gamification, often relying on self-reported engagement measures while rarely examining objective learning outcomes. The review also suggests that contemporary discussions of fun frequently privilege high energy game-based activities, potentially obscuring more eudaimonic forms of engagement such as debate, reflection, and meaning making.

In response, the paper proposes a conceptual framework for understanding fun in learning. The framework positions fun across two dimensions: learner orientation, spanning pedagogy to andragogy, and the purpose of fun, spanning hedonic to eudaimonic engagement. The paper concludes by outlining a research agenda for critically examining the role of fun within contemporary business education.

Keywords:

ludic pedagogy, critical pedagogy, andragogy, wellbeing.