We Need Cooperation to Save Our World- and Other Lessons Learned From Gaming

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Dear readers of Simulation and Gaming,

As we have repeatedly pointed out, we live in a world full of conflicts, such as international, regional, and discrimination among different ethnicity or religions.

Game designers and researchers are actively building and seeking solutions by designing games that address these issues, such as refugee games that promote international cooperation. For example, the success of the board game 'Pandemic,' published in 2008, has inspired numerous cooperative games, including its own expansions. Pandemic was a frontrunner, as today we have many cooperative card, board, and online games that need cooperation to win. In other words, there is not a 'one' winner that takes it all. Everyone wins -or everyone loses. But even in classic highly competitive games such as the well-known 'Risk (1959)', it is not an 'all for one or one for all ' strategy that makes a winner. Collaboration, partnering, and lending support to other players before one can be positioned as a party preparing for the final one-on-one strike in the endgame is vital.

Typically, solving riddle games is a hot trend now. 'Bomb Busters' (2024) is a cooperative game where players work together to clear the bombs. It won the 'Spiel des Jahres' prize this year, which is evidence of the growing popularity of cooperative games.

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A similar trend is also evident in the world of digital games. There are so many games requiring players to work together, to fight virtual opponents collaboratively, or to seek treasure. And in real life, popular escape-room games are no exception. Players must cooperate to exit the situation, and in educational settings, escape-room games are used for training purposes. Even in healthcare, where stakes are high, ER's practice solving 'medical mysteries' and use clinical simulation escape rooms to learn to deal effectively with high-risk environments (e.g., He et al., 2024; Jaspers et al., 2024; Kakos et al., 2025). Additionally, you can read related articles in this journal, especially those of the Special Issue in Volume 52, Issue 1 (Editorial: Diaz & Clapper, 2021).

Why do we come to prefer cooperative games instead of the traditional competitive ones, in which one player wins? We may be tired of the conflicts in the real world, or we may be cooperative in nature. We editors cannot have appropriate reasons. Besides that, it is fun, and it benefits us all. No one likes being the loser, after all.

Now if we prefer to play and design cooperative games, how do we transfer those game experiences to the real world? In games, we follow the rules and behave cooperatively, especially in cooperative games. Otherwise, we can't win. But how does it work in real life?

There, we learn our lessons largely from (ours or others') experiences from trial and error. And the rules, regulations, and wins are not always so clear. But we all know alone, you may go fast in life, but together, you end up advancing further. Maybe that is what we need to realize from time to time. For if you try, try again, and help each other, whether through gameplay or in real life, we will find our way to decrease conflicts and find better, faster solutions.

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Author Biographies

Marlies P. Schijven, MD PhD MHSc, is a professor of surgery with vast expertise in the simulation and gaming field for medical education. She is the former president of the Dutch Society for Simulation in Healthcare (DSSH), longtime member of SSH (Society for Simulation in Healthcare) and SESAM (European Society for Simulation) and president of the WATCH society (wearable technology in healthcare). She is the former Chief Medical Information Officer of the Dutch Government, and national lead on eHealth.

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