

EAR Framework Handbook

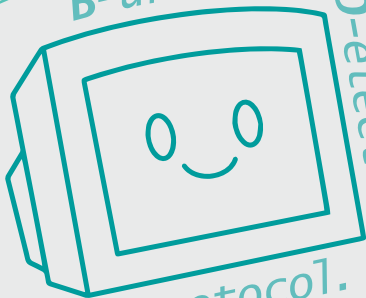
**A motivational approach
to team management**

EAR Handbook

B-urnout.

D-detection.

P-rotocol.



*At your
service!*

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Andres R. Saladrigas P.

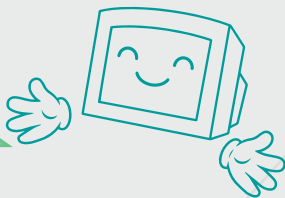
EAR Guide

The gaming industry is expanding at an astounding rate. Studios have adjusted their methods to meet the rising demand for video games while making the most of their limited resources.

It's no secret that for many in the video game industry, the rising pressure and working methods have worn down the team's morale and raised stress levels. Both are bad for teams; they cause problems and slow development.

As a solution, **EAR** was created to increase team morale and motivation during development. *It's built on a lot of research done in the field and in academic literature.*

Hello, I'm B.D.P. and I will be your guide to mastering the EAR framework in no time!



This new framework uses tools and strategies to improve all employees' motivation and the working environment, which has a positive effect on company results. Together, we can find out more.

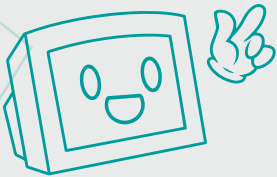
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Values

Similar to Agile, EAR establishes a **core set of values and principles**. It explains the framework's nature and helps managers create their own dynamics. But I will describe that later on.

The three primary values are



Easy

Avoid unneeded intricacy and difficulty.

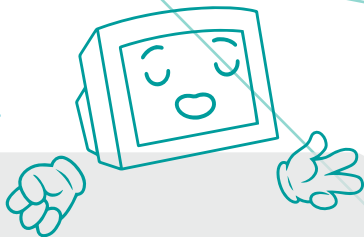
Accessible

To be utilized by everyone, being simple to gain, understand, and reach.

Relax

Describing a joyful and tranquil condition in contrast to stress, which causes concern and nervousness.

Principles



Simplicity over complexity

Quick and clear communication over complex meetings and protocols

Flexibility over constraints

Guides over fixed steps

Equality over Hierarchy

Horizontal structure over verticality
Encourage mixed team activities over team based
Promote self-evaluation over external evaluation

Team needs over company goals

Providing communication means over forcing company views

Informality over formality

Fun rules and environments over traditional ones

Motivation over demanding

Promote inner motivation over external pressure

Follow up over evaluation

Constant feedback over fixed interval reviews

Assessment over criticism

Highlight the good over the bad

Cooperation over competition

Team cooperation over inside team competition

What is EAR?

*EAR is an acronym that stands for: **Easy, Accessible, and Relaxed.***



Based on these three key values, **EAR** aims to reduce noise in the workplace to improve mental health.

We can use our senses to detect and monitor potential roadblocks to the team's progress. I will tell you later what steps to take to find and come up with solutions for your team.

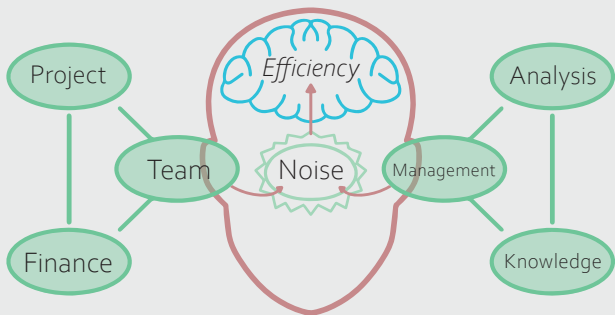
This technique works as an add-on to Agile methods and is based on iteration. Its structure is simple to change and adapt to the needs of the team.



Ears and noise

In the EAR framework, "**noise**" refers to things that cause stress or affect levels of motivation. People will be **less motivated** and **more stressed** if there is **more noise**, while they will be **more motivated** and **less stressed** if there is **less noise**.

Hearing is one of the most important ways to figure out where noise is coming from.



One ear to listen for environmental influences and the other to tune in on internal factors that may be at play. Depending on what we're listening to, we refer to either the inner or the outer ear.

By looking at both ears, we can find out where most of the noise is coming from and make plans to deal with it.

Agents

There are two main groups in EAR.

Contributors

Those who make things move, look at data, and write it down. The most important thing for contributors to do is to understand how the team works and make sure it stays healthy. Contributors may be managers or people in charge of a team. These are usually people with a broad view or who are in charge of other people.



Actors

Actors are people who take part in a variety of activities. Most likely, actors will be members of a team. If necessary, contributors can also take on roles as actors in the events.



Motivation 1.0.1

To begin, let's get a handle on the concept of motivation.

There are two kinds of motivation: motivation from the inside and motivation from the outside. Each type will give the team different short- and long-term results.

When someone is **intrinsically motivated**, it's because they enjoy the activity they're engaged in—whether that's playing a sport or baking their favorite cake. **External motivation** comes from things like deadlines or payments that force us to do what we need to do. Unfortunately, the use of **external motivators can backfire** when the novelty wears off or the source of the motivation is no longer available, making team members much more dependent and difficult to lead.

Yet, in order for people to feel motivated and perform at their highest levels of creativity and efficiency, psychological theories outline a small number of basic needs that must be met.

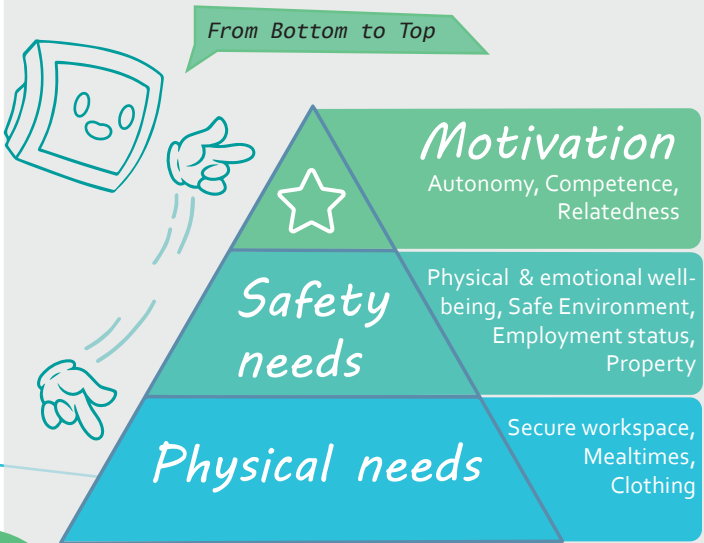
Physical needs

Making sure they have a safe place to work, meals, clothes, a bathroom that meets their needs, and time to rest.

Safety needs

A safe place that's good for their physical and mental health, trust in their job situation, and protection for their personal belongings.

A person can only be motivated when these three needs are met.

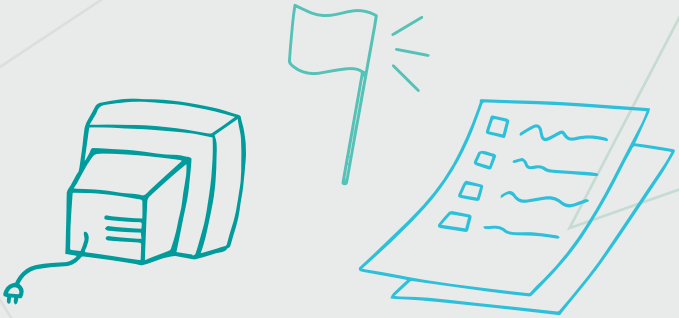


Autonomy: is the desire to have control over one's actions, activities, behaviors, and objectives.

Competence: a want to master, learn, and feel capable; a drive for success; and a desire for recognition with certain impact and meaning.

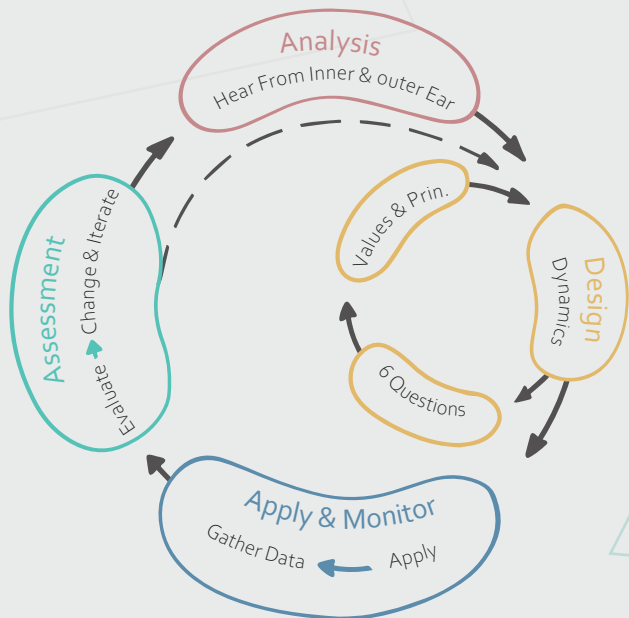
Relatedness: feeling like a member of a team, corporation, or group, as well as a sense of belonging.

When these conditions are met, we enter a state of mind where ideas and originality come easily.

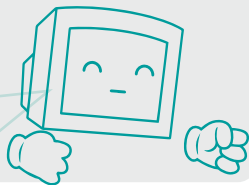


We must offer helpful feedback and recognize individual or team successes if we want to increase intrinsic motivation. **Avoid any type of punishment at all costs** because it promotes stress and burnout among employees and can quickly spread to the rest of the team.

Stages



EAR development can be broken down into **four distinct phases** that occur repeatedly during the development process. These four classes define the steps that must be taken to investigate noise-causing elements and create noise-reducing dynamics.



Analysis

The goal of the analysis is to understand the current state of the team, the project, and how contributors' work has an effect on it. This identifies noise sources.

Design

Developing countermeasures for the identified sources of noise that will facilitate long-term preparation, raise spirits, and spark new ideas.

Apply and monitor

When you've finished making the necessary changes, it's time to put them to the test, get feedback from your team, and fine-tune. You will monitor the group's actions over time to assess whether there has been a shift in morale or general well-being.

Assessment

As a final step, we'll evaluate the information, think about the shifts we've seen, and decide if changes are needed. There will be a return to either the analysis or design phase, depending on the outcomes or the passage of time.

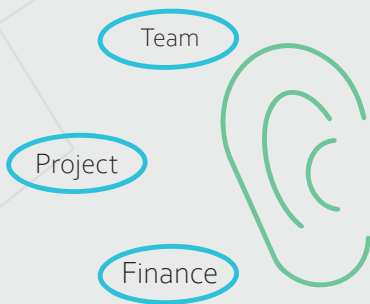
Be patient. It will take at least four weeks for the full process to run its course and show any noticeable results.

After six months, you should go back to the initial assessment and retest your ears.

Analysis

The analysis is a **self evaluation** technique to determine the necessities of the team and the project. First, answer the outer and inner ear questions. This helps the contributor **identify current and future challenges** and improvement areas.

Okay, let's begin with the **outer ear**:

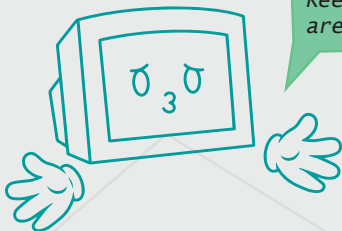


We'll talk about the team, the project, and the finances. The focus should be on learning the truth, not making any drastic changes. Ask the team members if needed.

Keep track of information in some way (a notebook, a post-it, a spreadsheet, etc.). Keep all data, even from events that may seem unrelated at first glance, they may prove useful down the road. Finally, be as objective as possible.

Team

- Are you familiar with the team members?
- How big is your team?
- How many are leaders, managers, or role models?
- Are we constantly rushing to finish the objectives?
- What overall experience does the team have?
- How autonomous is the team?
- How effective is the team as a whole?
- What worries does your team have?
- Have they made any recommendations?
- Do the team members get along?
- What is the formality level on your team?
- Does your team have the option to participate in activities and tasks they find interesting?
- Do they make crucial choices that affect the outcome of the game?
- Does your group require follow-up?
- Do team members have the option to work in private?



Keep in mind, these are the minimum to ask

Project

- Where is the challenge, team, technology, or design?
- What are the project's main obstacles?
- Is your team in charge of resolving these issues? What emotional impact does it have?
- What are the project's top priorities?
- Is the team familiar with them?
- Have these priorities changed anything for the team?
- Do they have the required means to achieve their goals?
- Is there a management methodology applied?
- Is the team reluctant to use the methodology?
- Have you adapted the methodology to better serve your team and the project's current state?
- What are the main points of the company culture?
- What are the consequences of such a culture for the team?
- Is overtime required for the company/project?
- Are there numerous processes to be done for work?
- Is your team working remotely? What impact does it have on the project?
- Are there any activities or exercises for team building?
- Who can take part?
- Is it possible to retry unsuccessful features?

Finances

- Who provides the budget? the company or a third party?
- Who sets the company objectives, goals, and milestones? Do they make development decisions?
- How does internal/external decision-making affect your team?
- Are you aware of the company's financial capabilities?
- Can the company afford activities? additional non-essential supplies?
- Can the company hire more employees? How much expertise can they afford?
- What bonuses does the company offer?
- Is the company financially pressed? How does it affect the team?
- How are employees' working conditions? Do they make full use of them?
- Is overtime compensated?
- What are the working conditions like in the office?
- Can members of the team work from home?
- Is it possible to work flexible hours?
- Are sports promoted in any way?

Noise indicators include



- Few producers, team leaders, or any other individual who aids in the supervision process
- Low levels of team members' efficiency, autonomy, and experience
- Members have a poor or nonexistent relationship
- Not being aware of the needs or suggestions of the team

- Employees being hampered by a methodology
- Too many risks and challenges are being borne by the team
- Employees are being hampered by company culture
- Priorities that are unclear or contradict reality
- Lack of resources to overcome difficulties
- Continuous Overtime
- Insufficient collaboration among team members
- External funding sources
- External source of authority and decision-making
- Being unable to reiterate in previously worked tasks

- A scarcity of guiding figures
- Workers' lack of experience or expertise
- Labor conditions are not optimal or are not being used to their full potential.
- A lack of measures to improve working conditions

Now, about the **inner ear**:



Let's take a close look at the contributors' knowledge, management, and analysis skills.

Recognize our limitations and the effects we might have on the team as a result of our surroundings.

The answers are kept secret and are meant to help you figure out what your future goals might be. Take notes and be honest, as you did before.



Management

- Is there any kind of hierarchy in your team? If so, where are you?
- Does the team hierarchy display more verticality or horizontality?
- How does it impact the capacity for decision-making?
- Is hierarchy upheld in the face of disputes?
- What's your role in the methodology?
- Do you typically lead, delegate, or persuade?
- With the team, how do you communicate? How do they feel?
- Do you know what your team thinks and what ideas they have?
- Do you make crucial decisions during development conflicts?
- Does the team know how it turns out? How does a team usually react?
- Your job involves conflict resolution? What's your plan?
- When making important decisions, are there any rules that managers should follow?
- Is the team involved in them? How?
- How do you handle issues with overtime?

Knowledge

- Is the team updated on project tasks, challenges, and successes?
- Do you provide feedback to others? task- or person-related
- What is the frequency of feedback? How does the group react to it?
- Is there a plan for setting goals, personal development, and tracking progress?
- What are their thoughts on it?
- Does home office affect communication?
- Do you have conflict-resolution skills? What's your strategy?
- Do you organize meetings?
- Are meetings considered excessively long, unimportant, or both by employers?
- How frequently do you meet with them?
- Does the team have a way to reach you or offer suggestions or advice?
- Do you have experience using the methodology applied?
- Does the methodology meet the needs of the team?
- Do you use management tools?
- Do you give tasks additional time buffers?
- Is the team being pushed or forced to complete any steps of the methodology?

Analysis

- Does there exist a way to recognize dependencies or bottlenecks?
- Has the business or you updated the pipelines? Can they be improved?
- What are the main opportunities and threats for the project?
- Do you provide insight on issues and solutions from a business perspective?
- Do you anticipate potential team tensions and conflicts before they occur?
- Is there competitiveness within a team? If so, what is the consequence?
- Are the current working groups efficient?
- Does anyone on the team have too much stress or feel burned out?
- Do you regularly suggest any improvements for the team and the business?
- Are there any protocols to control errors or damages?
- Did a group take into account the possibility that circumstances and objectives could shift?
- Is there a plan in place for potential delays in that project?
- Do employees have any say in recommending changes?
- Do you notice any differences between teams or departments?

Noise could be connected to



- More hierarchical organization
- Aggressive leadership
- Conflict negotiation

- A lack of conflict resolution abilities
- Insufficient knowledge of methodology
- Methodology is being imposed on employees
- Feedback is associated with a negative stimulus
- Too many protocols
- Pipelines are a barrier to work

- Failing to recognize dependencies
- Failure to account for risks and possible improvements
- Communicating with the business and dev teams using the same language and perspective
- Not planning for possible delays and goal changes
- Failure to modify approach to fit the group
- Failure to avoid potential conflicts
- Unhealthy team rivalry
- Groups that don't work well together
- Team members showing signs of burnout
- A lack of damage or error control procedures
- Disparity between various departments or teams

Design

It's time to put your knowledge to good use and **create some dynamics**.

Either noise is removed or its effects are dampened. Try to make changes, even if you think it will be extremely difficult to do so.

Dynamics are activities that reduce noise. Causal dynamics aim to improve general experiences, while specialized dynamics target a specific issue.

Dynamics can be either active or passive. Passive dynamics require little initiative from agents, while active dynamics do.

Use passive and active dynamics to avoid group overload



To create the dynamics, follow these steps

1. Go over your analysis notes.
2. Recognize the constraints and opportunities.
3. Be flexible and imaginative.
4. Set goals.
5. Evaluate your dynamic with the values and principles.
6. Ask yourself the 6 EAR design questions.

Use values like game's pillars, each choice and action must be judged to see if it fits and adds value to the team.

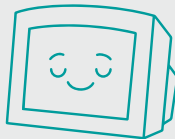
We may use a table and ask ourselves some questions to aid in our planning.

- Why are we making this change?
- What will change?
- What will the actors learn or develop?
- How can we make this happen?
- How do employees feel?
- Who will be the contributors and actors?

These questions will help us come up with steps that are narrow enough to target the problem and get us closer to a solution.

Check it against the values and principles and consider how to reduce workplace stress, improve communication, cooperation, and foster a more casual and respectful attitude. The simpler the suggestions, the better.

Use visual elements for easy identification of noise-generating factors (color cards colored post-its marker chips)



Apply and monitor

It's time to **start testing your dynamics and fine tune them**. Watch how the team responds as time goes on.

Keep notes to track the team's activities and look for shifts in their mood or morale over time.



- Any changes in how they are feeling?
- Any significant variations?
- Any changes that need to be made?
- Any ideas for a team?

The environment of the team, the number of disagreements, the openness to talk to other team members or even to managers, the frequency with which people laugh, or just everyone's general disposition could all be important signs.

Make any adjustments necessary. **Making gradual, unobtrusive adjustments over a long period of time** is the key to accurately identifying differences. Be wary of piling on too much work for the team. If necessary, make a single, minor change by the end of the week.

Assessment

After refining and performing the activity for four weeks, it is time to assess whether or not any progress has been made.

- Do we keep this dynamic or make a new one that fits our goal?
- Are there any changes to the team's priorities?
- Have their needs changed?



If we need to **make big changes**, we **go back to the design phase**, make the changes, and then put them back into action.

The whole process must **go on for at least four weeks before changes and effects can be seen**. We must exercise patience.

In my experience, it takes at least four weeks for people to really change on the inside, so I doubt we'll see any major shifts in that time. Repetition is the key to making an impact and cutting down on background noise.

Suggested dynamics

Begin with passive dynamics. Preparing work environments is important for team emotional health.

Some easy-to-coordinate dynamics are:

Individual or **private work zones** give employees a more pleasant, private environment.



Spread **knowledge about burnout** so people can detect it and report individual or group problems.



Pet-friendly days, where even workers bring pets due to their calming effect.



Allowing members to **become caretakers of a plant**. Green plants and hues calm and improve places and people. Promote an activity in which everyone takes care of a plant, and it may also serve as a visual signal of the members' status based on their treatment.



Use or invent games with the intention of rewarding or encouraging such cooperative behavior among participants. Game night can include both tabletop and electronic games.



Making plans to **go out together once a week** is a great way to break the ice and get to know one another better. When people feel like they belong, their relationships with others improve.



The **hat technique** frames the current activity in a more relaxed, casual, and funny way in order to improve communication and, in turn, make the team happier. In the daily stand-up, for example, choose a simple object and start the routine, like the cap. The person who is speaking wears a hat, and only the person with the hat can speak. The hat is passed around the team, and members can ask for it when they need to. The hat is a very casual and external way to ask to talk, which may make the situation less formal but still emphasize respect and communication.



Techniques like the hat are easy to use, don't require much material, and can be changed with any simple element. They prioritize comfort over formality, allow for greater participation from all attendees, and set the tone for a laid-back, positive outlook on the day through their casual atmosphere.

These actions should be adjusted to fit the specific requirements of the situation.

Guide: Making a Dynamic

Now, how to create a dynamic?

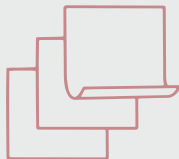
We will start by **looking at how the inner and outer ears are right now**. We get numerous facts from this; each written on a post-it card with a color to identify priorities.



Then **let's choose** the appropriate cards we want to change.

We put these ones together.

- Lack of autonomy
- Group engages in a few activities
- Has a low budget
- Need for more feedback
- Poor visualization of the project's progress ultimately led to a loss of motivation



Now let's **set some goals** with our limitations and possibilities. We need to give people more freedom, make chores more interesting, get constant feedback, and show how things are going.

We now move into the **creative stage**, where we search for a common ground to address all of these issues. We could:

Give the group or person a list of activities from which they can choose one. This gives them a feeling of more freedom.

To get people to do these tasks and keep them interesting, give them points. Let's use tokens as a means of completion. The accumulated chips will allow us to see the evolution of their performance over time.

The tokens can be made of simple plastic, and the activity boards can even be computer programs.

Let's think about whether or not they are in line with our values and beliefs before we move on to whether or not they are easy to implement.

- Is it simple to apply? ✓
- Is it accessible? ✓
- May mixed teams be included? ✓
- Does it aid with self-evaluation? ✓
- Is it more informal, fun, and easy-going? ✓
- Is self-motivation produced? ✓
- Serves as a mechanism for feedback? ✓
- Encourages collaboration over competition? ✗

Most of the standards are met, but it's clear that the activity is more about competition than it is about working together.

Once you've gone through the filters and **identified a consistent weak spot** in the design, you can then **iteratively improve upon it**. In this situation, where we want to get people to work together, tokens and who gets more of them could be a problem.

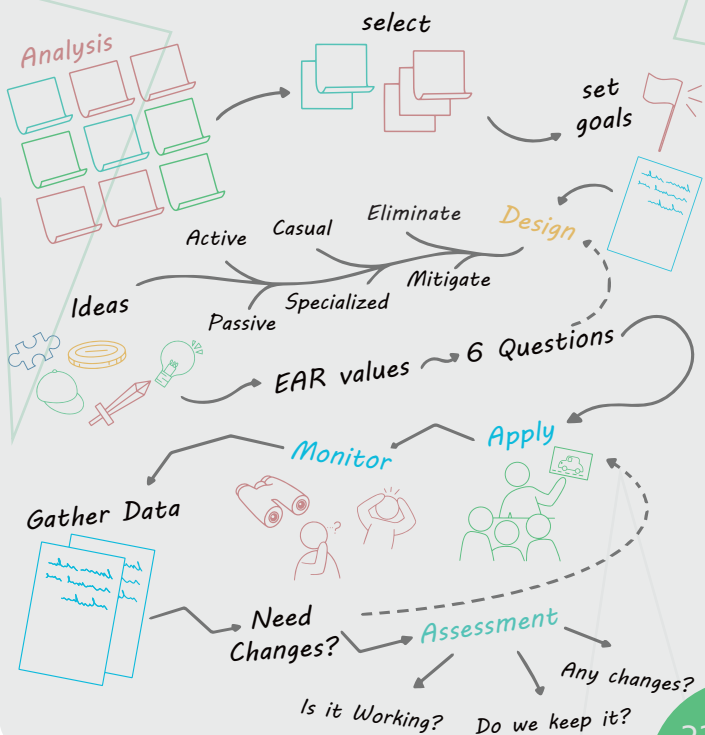


The idea behind the tokens could be changed so that the team trades them instead of holding on to them. Let's change them for something to bring people together. Now, people swap out the pieces for other things, like puzzle pieces, and then put the pieces back together to make the whole puzzle.



- Encourage internal motivation with rewards for tasks.
- Promote autonomy with different task choices.
- Provide feedback on difficulty with tokens.
- Set a long-term goal to finish a puzzle together.
- Everyone works together, creating sense of belonging.
- Provide visual progress with the puzzle.

EAR dynamic creation



Now ask yourself the **six questions from the design stage**.

Why are we making this adjustment? Increased autonomy, visual progress, feedback, and the creation of an activity.

What will happen as a result of this activity? We hope to change attitudes and encourage progress by providing feedback, making work more appealing, increasing autonomy through choice, enhancing competence, and developing more relaxed and enjoyable activities within the organization.

What will the performers discover and learn from? Sense of progress, competence, and autonomy.

How can we bring about this? We just need to buy a puzzle or a few smaller ones that fit our budget and tokens. Even if we have multiple tiny puzzles, we may display them so people can see changes and connect them to their work and effort. So, team and project progress can be seen.

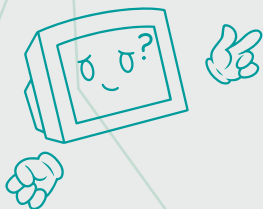
How are the workers feeling? They were demotivated because they could not feel or see the improvement, but now it's possible with a visual clue.

Who will participate and play the roles? In this scenario, the main contributor will be the team's manager or producer, and the team members will be the actors. The contributor will be in charge of completing the tasks, giving a grade, and trading the chips for puzzle pieces.

Once we're satisfied with the system, we'll **put it into action**, monitor the team's reaction to it for at least four weeks, and make gradual changes, such as higher scoring levels for each task. A maximum of one variation per week may be made.

After four weeks, we can do a **careful assessment** to determine if we should keep the dynamic and, if so, whether it needs any additional major changes.

The key is to use the dynamics for a while, write down what we find, and keep an eye on it so that when we do the second evaluation and analysis of the external and internal ears, we can see if anything has changed.



Finally, let's answer some common questions

- **What is the origin of EAR?** A blend of agile videogame approaches and outcome mapping, which changes community behavior.
- **Why should I use EAR?** It will help your team boost motivation and creativity, key in creative industries. It reduces stress. This will help projects move forward.
- **What's the EAR timeframe?** All phases are adaptable. Processes will be spread out over months, daily activities and follow-up shouldn't take hours.
- **Should I answer all questions?** It's a self-evaluation. Questions may be answered by all members, they will help you learn more about yourself and the team.
- **EAR pros/cons?** Once trained, daily work offers long-term rewards. You may hit dead ends or useless dynamics. Creativity and teamwork ensure success.
- **How do I judge my answers?** Use values to self-asses. If you're unsure, ask your team; they'll know what's best.
- **Does it distract?** Dynamics can be changed if needed. Focus daily tasks on long-term dynamics. If duties are done, nothing should go wrong.
- **How can I help the team?** Coaching, leadership courses, and NLP are good management practices. You need soft skills, assertiveness, better communication/ listening, and human behavior knowledge.

If you want to know
more, don't hesitate
to ask!



Creator email:
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Special Thanks
to everyone who
made this possible!

EAR Framework Handbook



A motivational approach to team
management