

Milestones & Mindsets: A Board Game to Navigate Emotional Baggage, Inspired by *Klassens Tid*

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Abstract

Workplace burnout has become a growing concern across professional environments, with emotional suppression contributing to employee stress, disengagement, and reduced well-being. While many organisational interventions focus on workload management or individual resilience, fewer address the emotional climates of workplaces where employees process, express, and make sense of their experiences. This study explores the use of a serious game, the Emotional Baggage Boardgame (EBBG), as a structured intervention to facilitate emotional reflection, empathy, and collaborative dialogue among working adults. The study involved 68 Asian working professionals in Singapore who participated in facilitated gameplay sessions during a company-wide learning day, with 37 participants providing response to post-game survey. Each session was conducted in small groups to encourage interaction and reflection. Data were collected through facilitators observations, conversations during play and post-game survey. Template analysis was used to examine participants' experiences and identify key themes emerging from gameplay. Findings suggest that the EBBG created a structured and psychologically safe space for participants to articulate emotions, share perspectives, and reflect on workplace challenges. The gamified format lowered barriers to discussing sensitive topics, enabling authentic conversations that fostered empathy, relational awareness, and collaborative problem-solving, which are often challenging to achieve within conventional workplace settings. The study demonstrates how EBBG adapted the principles of *Klassens Tid* from educational contexts to the workplace, offering organisations a practical approach to facilitate emotional dialogue, strengthen interpersonal understanding, and support employee well-being as part of broader efforts to mitigate workplace burnout.

Keywords: workplace well-being, burnout, serious games, emotional labour, emotional expression, Asian organisation culture

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Introduction

Burnout is a widespread challenge in professional settings, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, with consequences for individual well-being, team performance, and organizational sustainability (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; WHO, 2019). Nearly half of employees globally report burnout symptoms, highlighting the urgency of interventions (Boston Consulting Group [BCG], 2024). While many approaches focus on workload or individual resilience, less attention is paid to workplace emotional climates to create spaces where employees process, share, and regulate emotions, which are central to both the experience and prevention of burnout.

A key contributor to burnout is emotional suppression (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Maslach et al., 2001). Many professional environments implicitly reward composure, rationality, and restraint, requiring employees to manage or conceal feelings to conform to workplace norms (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). Sustained suppression has been associated with increased psychological strain, relational tension, and reduced well-being (Lieberman et al., 2017). Cultural expectations, particularly in Asian contexts, further constrain emotional disclosure, as communication prioritizes harmony, hierarchy, and face-saving (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001; Hwang, 1987).

Despite growing awareness of burnout, workplaces rarely provide structured opportunities for emotional reflection. Organizational practices such as meetings or feedback sessions typically prioritize operational goals and performance outcomes, leaving little space for emotional processing. In contrast, Scandinavian educational settings implement structured emotional sharing sessions, such as *Klassens Tid*, which provide protected time for dialogue, shared concerns, and collective problem-solving (Adecco Group, 2020) that normalise emotional expression. However, equivalent practices are uncommon in adult professional environments. Bridging this gap requires culturally sensitive mechanisms that create structured spaces for emotional dialogue without violating social norms. Serious games (Abt, 1970; Crookall, 2010), designed for learning and development rather than entertainment, offer a potential mechanism to fill this gap.

This study examines the *Emotional Baggage Boardgame (EBBG)*, a facilitated serious game designed to encourage emotional literacy, empathy, cognitive-flexibility through emotional sharing among working adults in Asia. It explores how this structured gameplay may create a culturally adaptive and psychologically safe space for emotional sharing in professional contexts, enabling adults to engage in collective dialogue similar to *Klassens Tid*.

Literature Review

The following Literature Review situates this study within four interrelated domains: the relationship between emotional suppression and burnout; the concept of emotion expressions in the context of Asian cultural norms; the pedagogical practice of *Klassens Tid* as a model for structured emotional reflection for organizational settings; and how serious game can be a model of intervention, specifically the *Emotional Baggage Boardgame (EBBG)*, which serves as the primary intervention examined in this study. By examining these literatures, the review provides the conceptual foundation that informs the design of this study's research framework.

Emotional Suppression and Burnout

Emotional suppression is a form of emotion regulation in which individuals consciously inhibit the outward expression of their internal emotional states (Gross, 1998). Rather than altering the emotion itself, suppression focuses on controlling visible responses such as facial expressions, tone of voice, or behaviour (Gross & Levenson, 1993). In many professional environments, this restraint is often interpreted as professionalism, where employees are expected to remain composed, rational, and controlled even in emotionally demanding situations (Hochschild, 1983). Organisational norms frequently encourage workers to conceal negative emotions – such as frustration, anger, or distress, in order to maintain professional relationships and workplace harmony (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

This expectation is closely linked to the concept of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983), defined as the process by which employees regulate their emotions to conform to organizational “display rules” during workplace interactions. In professions involving high levels of interpersonal engagement, such as healthcare, education, hospitality, and customer service, employees are often expected to display warmth, patience, and empathy regardless of their genuine feelings. As a result, workers frequently rely on emotional suppression to align their behaviour with these expectations. This behaviour creates a discrepancy between felt and displayed emotions, known as emotional dissonance (Grandey, 2000, 2003). Over time, repeatedly suppressing authentic emotional responses requires sustained cognitive and emotional effort, which can gradually deplete psychological resources (Grandey, 2003). This process has been strongly associated with burnout, a syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment resulting from prolonged occupational stress (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Emotional Expression in Asian Workplace

Emotional expression and suppression are shaped not only by individual personality but also by cultural norms and values (Gross, 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Many Asian cultures, which are predominantly rooted in collectivism, place strong emphasis on group harmony, social cohesion, and maintaining “face,” a form of social respect (Hofstede, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These cultural expectations often encourage restraint in emotional expression tend to prioritize group interests over individual desires, encouraging individuals to regulate or suppress negative emotions such as anger, frustration, or sadness (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013).

Research suggests that in collectivist societies, emotional suppression is not necessarily viewed as maladaptive (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Instead, it may be regarded as socially appropriate and even morally desirable. Studies shown that individuals in Asia often suppress emotional impulses to avoid conflict or embarrassment and to maintain smooth interpersonal relationships (Klein et. al., 2024). In this context, emotional restraint can signal self-control, maturity, and respect for others (Tsai & Levenson, 1997). Public displays of strong emotion may therefore be perceived as disruptive, particularly within formal or hierarchical workplace settings (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

However, even when culturally sanctioned, prolonged emotional suppression can contribute to psychological strain. Research found that service workers in Asia experienced higher risks of depression and anxiety when working in emotionally restrictive environments, despite strong social support (Kim, 2020; Zhao et al., 2020). Similarly, Choi and Kim (2014)

reported that expectations to suppress emotions in Korean workplaces contributed to burnout when employees felt unable to express themselves authentically. A large-scale study in China also found that emotional suppression intensified and increased the risk of job burnout (Zhu et al., 2021).

These findings suggest that while emotional suppression may be culturally normative, its long-term psychological costs remain significant (Chong et al., 2019). When employees lack opportunities to collectively process emotional experiences, suppressed feelings may accumulate, contributing to emotional exhaustion and relational strain. Existing research therefore highlights the need for a culturally sensitive interventions that provide structured, low-risk spaces for emotional reflection and dialogue in Asian context.

***Klassens Tid* for Organisational Settings**

Klassens Tid, a practice originating in Scandinavian educational contexts, provides structured time for reflection, discussion, and collaborative problem-solving (Sandahl, 2017). Its structured format allows participants to articulate emotions collectively while minimizing social evaluation or disruption. Participation is normalized, the process is predictable, and reflection becomes both personal and communal.

In Danish schools, *Klassens Tid*, or “class time,” is a compulsory weekly session conducted from ages six to sixteen (Børne-og Undervisningsministeriet, n.d.). The aim of *Klassens Tid* is to cultivate empathy by providing time and space for students to listen, understand, and collaboratively support one another (Adecco Group, 2020). Such sessions allow students to feel acknowledged within a larger community while also giving teachers opportunities to reflect on how they foster safe and inclusive learning environments (Sandahl, 2017).

Beyond educational settings, the principles underlying *Klassens Tid* may hold relevance for adult workplaces. Organizations increasingly recognize that empathy and compassion contribute to positive individual and organizational outcomes (Meechan et al., 2022). Research also highlights a strong relationship between empathetic leadership and employees’ sense of psychological safety, motivation, and well-being (Chu, 2016).

However, many workplaces still lack environments where employees feel comfortable expressing emotional concerns. Surveys around the world indicated that a significant proportion of employees are hesitant to share personal or emotional challenges with managers due to fear of judgment or negative consequences (MHFA England, 2026; Milieu Insight, 2024). In such contexts, structured reflective practices similar to *Klassens Tid* may offer a valuable framework for fostering healthy emotional dialogue, empathy, and collaborative problem-solving for better wellbeing at workplace.

Serious Games as Intervention for *Klassens Tid* Moments at Workplace

Serious games are interactive games designed with purposes beyond entertainment, often aiming to educate, train, or influence behaviour in real-world contexts (Djaouti et al., 2011). The concept was first introduced by Clark C. Abt (1970), who defined serious games as games with explicit educational objectives rather than purely recreational purposes. According to Abt (1970), these games are structured to achieve specific learning or behavioural outcomes, distinguishing them from traditional entertainment games. Since then, the concept has expanded to include both digital and non-digital applications across fields

such as education, healthcare, and professional development, where interactive gameplay serves as a medium for experiential learning, reflection, and skill development (Djaouti et al., 2011).

Among non-digital applications, LEGO® Serious Play (LSP) represents a notable methodology that applies serious game principles in organisational settings. Developed by Johan Roos and Bart Victor (1999), LSP was initially designed to help managers articulate complex ideas and strategies through hands-on model building. The LEGO Group later formalized the methodology as a facilitation process used to support dialogue, strategy development, creativity, and reflection within teams (LEGO Group, 2010). In LSP sessions, participants build symbolic models using LEGO bricks to represent organisational challenges, ideas, or solutions. These models then become tools for storytelling and shared reflection, enabling participants to communicate perspectives and collaboratively construct understanding. Unlike traditional games, LSP emphasizes reflection and dialogue rather than competition or entertainment, making it particularly suited for professional learning and development (Roos & Victor, 1999).

Empirical research highlights the potential of serious games to influence emotional outcomes. Studies in educational and clinical contexts suggest that serious games can enhance emotional regulation, reduce anxiety, and promote empathy (Sitzmann, 2011; Wouters et al., 2013). In organisational contexts, serious games have been applied to leadership development, team training, and collaborative problem-solving. By simulating workplace challenges within a structured and low-risk environment, serious games can facilitate reflection, dialogue, and emotional awareness. Such characteristics align closely with the objectives of *Klassens Tid*, suggesting that structured gameplay may offer a culturally adaptable mechanism for fostering meaningful emotional dialogue within professional Asian settings.

Emotional Baggage Boardgame to Replicate *Klassens Tid* at Work

The Emotional Baggage Boardgame (EBBG) is an interactive experiential learning tool designed to enhance emotional literacy and communication within organisational settings. It was developed to address workplace stressors arising from the suppression of authentic emotions (Ng et al., 2024). As such, it is particularly well suited as a mechanism for replicating *Klassens Tid* within workplace environments. Developed collaboratively by Chemistry and Pod of Life (Chemistry Team, n.d.), the game addresses workplace stressors and interpersonal challenges by encouraging participants to explore, identify, and discuss a wide range of emotions in a structured yet engaging format.

EBBG is a facilitated tabletop game for four to six players. Participants take turns moving across the board to accumulate milestones while responding to prompts that stimulate dialogue about emotional experiences and workplace scenarios, aim to shed emotional baggage. Gameplay typically lasts 45–60 minutes and concludes with a facilitated group reflection. Unlike conventional discussion-based interventions, the game's structure ensures that conversations remain focused on emotional awareness for empathy, and solution-focussed.

The selection of EBBG as a mechanism to replicate *Klassens Tid* in the workplace lies in its features of providing a time-bound and structured play session that focused emotional work-related scenarios, with play mechanism that encourages participants to reflect on their experiences, articulate emotions using emotion cards, and engage in game challenges to

generate solutions to the workplace scenarios. As such, EBBG offers a tangible and operationalizable mechanics that replicate the core dynamics of *Klassens Tid* in a workplace context.

Research Question

This study is guided by a primary research question: How can the Emotional Baggage Boardgame (EBBG) serve as an effective mechanism to replicate *Klassens Tid* moments in the workplace?

The study is conceptually grounded in the rationale that structured and protected time for emotional sharing, modelled on *Klassens Tid*, promote empathy, mutual understanding, and collaborative problem-solving, thereby contributing to the reduction of workplace burnout. For the game to be effective, it needs demonstrate its ability to operationalise these elements in professional contexts.

In addition, the study explores how working adults experience emotional sharing through the game. Together, these questions aim to examine both the mechanisms by which the game facilitates structured emotional dialogue and the participant experiences of engaging in the serious play processes. Conceptually, the model underlying the study positions the game as the intervention – providing structure and process for emotional dialogue to generate emotional awareness, empathy, and collaborative problem-solving as the intended outcomes. This provides a framework for understanding how this particular serious game can replicate *Klassens Tid* in adult workplace settings.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative, interpretivist intervention design conducted through an exploratory workshop setting. Interpretivist research assumes that social realities are constructed through individuals' interpretations and interactions (Schwandt, 2014). Understanding how working adults engage with emotional experiences requires attention to participants' subjective interpretations rather than relying solely on objective measurement. The interpretivist was applied because the study aimed to explore how reflective dialogue and relational functions associated with *Klassens Tid* could be recreated within professional contexts through a serious game intervention.

Intervention-based workshops are increasingly used in organisational research to examine how structured activities stimulate reflective dialogue and collective sensemaking (Cunliffe, 2004; Raelin, 2007). In this study, EBBG, a serious game designed to support reflective dialogue through metaphorical prompts, served as the medium for the intervention. The game as a intervention workshop, provided a deliberate reflective environment, enabling participants to articulate experiences, consider alternative perspectives, and explore coping strategies collaboratively. This format approximated key functions of *Klassens Tid*.

Participants

A total of 68 Asian working adults, each with a minimum of one year of professional experience, participated in the gameplay sessions, of whom 37 completed the post-game survey. EBBG was implemented company-wide by a multinational creative and media company in Singapore as part of their learning day. Twelve trained facilitators conducted the

game across two structured gameplay sessions in a single day. Each session lasted approximately 60 minutes and involved small groups of four to six participants, each guided by a facilitator. This small-group format enabled meaningful interaction, allowing participants to reflect on personal experiences and share perspectives within a structured and time-bound session.

Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, and maintaining participant confidentiality, were strictly observed. Additionally, approval was obtained from the company to use the data for publication purposes.

Data Collection

Multiple qualitative data sources were collected to capture individual reflections and group dynamics. Facilitators recorded observational notes documenting participant interactions and verbal reflections. Participants completed a brief post-session survey capturing perceptions of whether the workshop facilitated meaningful reflection and dialogue about emotional experiences. Facilitators also engaged in structured debrief sessions to discuss recurring themes, group dynamics, and engagement with reflective prompts. Triangulating these sources enhanced the credibility of the analysis by examining patterns across observational, conversational, and reflective accounts (Patton, 2015).

Data Analysis and Reflexivity

Qualitative data were analysed using Template Analysis, a form of thematic analysis that facilitates the development of hierarchical coding templates informed by both theoretical constructs and patterns emerging from the data (Brooks et al., 2015; King, 2012). This approach aligns with the interpretivist paradigm, allowing analysis to be guided by a conceptual framework derived from *Klassens Tid* while remaining open to emergent insights. Initial top-level themes informed by the principles of *Klassens Tid* and the study's research questions were used to guide the coding – protected reflective time, emotional labelling, perspective-taking, empathy, and collaborative problem-solving. These themes served as sensitising concepts rather than fixed categories, providing a templated but flexible coding structure that accommodated the identification of additional themes and subthemes as they arose from participants' accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Reflexivity was a central component of the analytic process. Given the researcher's involvement in the development of EBBG, third-party facilitators conducted the workshops to preserve neutrality and mitigate potential bias. Reflexive awareness was maintained throughout coding and theme development to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' accounts rather than reflecting the intended design of the intervention (Finlay, 2002). Analytical decisions were guided by sustained engagement with the data and a commitment to openness, allowing emergent themes to be identified beyond the initial conceptual framework.

Together, the use of Template Analysis and reflexive practice ensured that the analysis remained both conceptually informed and empirically grounded, capturing participants' experiences of reflective dialogue, emotional articulation, and collaborative problem-solving within the structured gameplay context. This approach allowed the study to explore how EBBG could operationalize the relational and reflective dynamics of *Klassens Tid* in a professional setting.

Findings

Analysis of the workshop data revealed several key themes reflecting how participants engaged with EBBG and how it functioned as a mechanism to replicate *Klassens Tid* in the workplace. The findings are presented using the initial coding template – protected reflective time; emotional labeling; perspective-taking; empathy; and collaborative problem-solving, while also integrating emergent patterns related to impact of gamification, subtle awareness, and enhanced communication. This dual approach allows for both theory-driven interpretation and recognition of novel insights arising from participants' experiences.

Framing Reflective Time Through Play

Participants consistently appreciated the opportunity to pause from work, yet the reflective function of the workshop was not always immediately apparent. Many participants perceived the session primarily as “game time” rather than an explicitly reflective activity, making it feel less like heavy mental work. All participants expressed appreciation for the chance to take a break from work, engage in playful interaction, and discuss emotions in relation to workplace challenges.

The findings suggest that framing protected reflective time as play reduces resistance to engaging with emotional topics. The gamified format acted as an entry point, making reflection approachable and lowering cognitive and emotional barriers typically associated with conventional reflective exercises (Katsaliaki et al., 2025).

Emotional Labeling Effect Aligns With Affect Labeling Theory

The EBBG incorporated 106 emotion cards, of which participants received only seven at the start of the game. This intentional limitation restricted access to emotional vocabulary, requiring participants to navigate their emotional articulation with a finite set of labels. Some participants reported frustration with this limitation, noting that it constrained their ability to fully verbalise experiences. This aligns with *Affect Labeling Theory* (Lieberman et al., 2007, 2017), which suggests that the process of naming emotions can help regulate affective responses but may also be hindered when vocabulary is insufficient.

Despite these initial constraints, the majority of participants reported learning new emotion labels through the cards and gameplay, improving their ability to identify and articulate emotions. Many expressed that this experience increased their confidence in labelling emotions and recognizing nuanced emotional states after the session.

The findings suggest that structured exposure to emotion labels within a playful activity can support emotional awareness and skill development in professional contexts.

Perspective-Taking as Catalyst for Empathy and Collaborative Problem-Solving

Although participants did not explicitly report an increase in empathy, the activity consistently exposed them to alternative perspectives. Many were positively surprised by viewpoints differing from their own when addressing workplace scenarios.

This exposure to diverse perspectives appears to foster incidental empathic understanding, even if participants do not consciously recognize it. These findings are consistent with

perspective-taking theory, which posits that cognitively engaging with others' viewpoints can enhance understanding, inform problem-solving, and support relational well-being (Batson et al., 1997; Galinsky et al., 2008).

Although collaborative problem-solving was not overt during gameplay, specific game challenges, such as tasks requiring them to “put a spin on the situation,” encouraged consideration of multiple approaches to workplace challenges. Encountering a diversity of strategies not only surprised participants but also prompted them to reflect on how they might approach the same scenario differently. In this way, the diverse perspectives provided a form of collaboration to solve the problem even in the absence of direct group coordination. Some groups were so engaged with this particular game mechanic that they actively sought out diverse viewpoints, even when it was not required.

Together, these findings illustrate that structured perspective-sharing within the EBBG facilitates a subtle interplay between cognitive empathy and problem-solving. Participants gain insight into others' experiences, which can inform adaptive strategies for workplace challenges, highlighting how reflection, empathic reasoning, and exposure to multiple viewpoints can collectively nurture relational understanding and emergent collaboration in professional contexts.

Enhanced Awareness in Improving Workplace Relationships

Facilitators observed multiple instances of subtle awareness developed during gameplay. For example, when a player drew a challenge card indicating a co-worker had embarrassed them by correcting their work in public, before the player could respond to the scenario on the card, another participant acknowledged having engaged in the same behaviour and apologised. Similarly, discussion of after-hours managerial communication prompted reflection on how such practices impact team members and inspired consideration of alternative approaches.

These incidents suggest that the structured gameplay provided a low-stakes environment for participants to surface and reflect on relational dynamics, enhancing awareness of workplace behaviours and their effects on others.

EBBG Provides Psychological Safety for Expression

Some participants expressed initial concern about playing the game with their superiors, fearing vulnerability or judgement. Post-game reflections indicated that these fears were largely alleviated, and participants reported enjoying the opportunity to share perspectives and personal experiences with managers. Many highlighted that the game made it easier to express emotions than in typical work interactions, and helped them understand their manager's perspectives and challenges as well.

Other participants reported appreciating the opportunity to engage in a safe and supportive space where they could openly express emotions related to challenging workplace situations. Several participants who had just concluded a difficult client meeting, during which they felt compelled to withhold emotional expression, described the game session as cathartic and helpful in processing their experiences.

These findings are consistent with prior research indicating that gamified activities at workplace can enhance psychological safety by providing participants with opportunities to adopt alternative personas or engage in storytelling, thereby creating emotionally safe spaces for sharing and reflection (Geurts et al., 2020).

High Reflectivity on Success and Emotional Experience

The gameplay mechanics, where winning is based on acquiring milestone cards while managing emotional baggage, prompted participants to reconsider conventional notions of success. Many reflected that achieving milestones often introduced additional emotional challenges, leading to insights that success is highly individual and interlinked with managing positive and negative emotional experiences.

Participants' reflections demonstrate increased awareness of the interplay between achievement and emotional management, consistent with theories of emotional intelligence and self-reflective learning, which emphasise recognising, accepting, and integrating a full range of emotions to guide behaviour and decision-making (Goleman, 1995; Schön, 1983).

EBBG Enhanced Facilitators' Learning

Facilitators reported that their engagement in the gameplay process also offered opportunities for learning. While guiding participants through the EBBG, facilitators described gaining insights from the personal and professional experiences shared by participants. Several noted that hearing diverse perspectives helped them reflect on their own approaches to workplace challenges and deepen their understanding of how different individuals navigate emotional experiences.

This emergent theme suggests that the EBBG not only functions as a tool for participant reflection and collaborative sensemaking but also provides a learning experience for facilitators. The structured prompts and shared dialogues create conditions in which facilitators can observe and internalize patterns in emotional articulation, perspective-taking, and problem-solving. In this sense, the intervention produces a dual-layered learning effect, where both participants and facilitators benefit from engagement with diverse viewpoints and reflective processes.

Summary of Findings

The findings indicate that the EBBG effectively replicates key aspects of *Klassens Tid* in the workplace by providing structured reflection, supporting emotional articulation, and fostering perspective-taking and emergent problem-solving.

Notably, the study also revealed secondary outcomes: increased relational awareness, enhanced psychological safety, and facilitator learning. These emergent themes highlight the game's potential to create spaces for authentic and vulnerable conversations in Asian workplaces, where cultural norms often constrain emotional expression. Together, these results suggest that the EBBG can serve as a practical tool to support emotional engagement, interpersonal understanding, and collective reflection, offering a pathway to reduce workplace stress and burnout in the professional contexts.

Discussions

The findings highlight the potential of the EBBG as a gamified intervention to facilitate emotional reflection in organisational settings. By framing emotional dialogue within play, the game creates a low-stakes entry point for conversations that are often difficult in professional contexts, particularly in Asian workplaces where hierarchical norms and restrained emotional expression are prevalent (Jeung et al., 2018; Matsumoto et al., 2008). This suggests that EBBG can serve as a practical tool for organisational development, leveraging on its structured gameplay mechanism, to create a workplace adaptation of *Klassens Tid*, that supports emotional sharing, reflection, perspective-taking, and collaborative problem-solving in organisations.

However, organisational perceptions of “play” may influence the effectiveness and adoption of such interventions. If play is viewed as trivial or peripheral, the intended reflective impact may be undermined, and a single session is unlikely to produce sustained changes at the organisational level. Repeated engagement and integration with broader wellbeing initiatives are likely necessary to achieve lasting outcomes.

Contextual relevance emerged as another key consideration. Participants responded most meaningfully to scenarios that resonated with their professional and cultural experiences, highlighting the importance of tailoring content to local organisational contexts. Customised prompts and challenges with context and cultural relevance could enhance engagement, encourage authentic sharing, and stimulate richer reflective dialogue.

An additional and notable outcome was facilitators’ learning. Facilitators reported gaining insights from participants’ shared experiences, suggesting that the EBBG not only supports participant reflection but also has the potential to function as a developmental tool for leaders. Future applications could explore integrating the role of “leaders as facilitators” (Amy, 2008) enabling managers to strengthen empathy, perspective-taking, and emotional awareness while guiding reflective interventions in their teams.

Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample comprised exclusively Asian working adults with at least one year of professional experience from creative and media industry, limiting generalisability across other cultural and industries contexts. Cultural norms around emotional expression and hierarchical dynamics may influence how emotions were deciphered by the participants and facilitators. Second, data relied heavily on self-reported reflections and facilitator observations, which could introduce social desirability bias (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Paulhus, 1991). Multiple data sources and triangulation were used to enhance credibility, but participants’ responses may have been shaped by group dynamics or perceived expectations. Third, the study examined a single two-hour workshop, so longitudinal effects on emotional articulation, relational insight, and workplace behaviours were not assessed. Future research should explore repeated sessions and investigate transfer effects into day-to-day organisational practices. Finally, burnout was not explicitly measured as an outcome in this study; rather, its potential effects were inferred indirectly through related variables such as increased authentic emotional expression, perspective-taking and collaborative problem-solving. Future research could incorporate more targeted measures to assess burnout more explicitly.

Conclusion

EBBG demonstrates significant potential as a gamified intervention to address workplace burnout by creating structured mechanism for authentic emotional conversations. By encouraging participants to articulate emotions, consider diverse perspectives, and collaboratively explore solutions, the game fosters empathy, relational awareness, and supportive interpersonal dynamics – key protective factors against burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). While a single session cannot produce long-term organisational change, EBBG offers a practical mechanism for surfacing emotional experiences before they escalate into chronic stress, enabling more proactive engagement with workplace well-being (Grandey et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the potential of incorporating leaders as facilitators, which have yet to be tested, may extend the intervention's impact by embedding reflective dialogue within everyday team interactions and strengthening psychological safety across the organisation. In doing so, EBBG demonstrates how serious games can function as an engaging medium to translate reflective and emotionally attuned practices into professional settings. By combining playful mechanics with structured reflection, the intervention adapts the principles of *Klassens Tid* from educational settings to the workplace, offering organisations a practical tool to cultivate empathy, strengthen workplace relationships, and support long-term organisational resilience against burnout.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that ChatGPT and Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing software, was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity. The author further declares that, apart from ChatGPT and Grammarly, no other AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate content in writing the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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