TECH TEMPEST

Preparing Students for the Digital Age with Timeless Human Skills

In a world increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence and rapid technological change, one educational game is helping students not only understand the digital fabric of society but also develop the timeless human skills they'll need to thrive within it. Tech Tempest, a real-world simulation game created by veteran tech leader John Burgin, is making waves in classrooms by blending experiential learning, historical context, and modern AI tools into a dynamic, team-based challenge.

FROM BIG TECH TO EDTECH: JOHN BURGIN'S JOURNEY

John Burgin's career spans over four decades in the tech industry, starting with his first role splicing fiber optic cables in Melbourne, Australia. With experience at HP, Oracle, and various startups, Burgin has seen firsthand how technology transforms industries and how human skills remain essential. After stepping away from big tech, he turned his attention to education, inspired by a friend's challenge to "make it interesting" for students when he was asked to come share about his career in technology. The result was the first iteration of Tech Tempest: a game that started as a simple classroom activity and evolved into a powerful learning experience.

John Burgin working with students during a Tech Tempest Session

WHY A GAME?
WHY NOW?

The game's appeal lies in its relevance. Students build a fictional banking service using real-world tech concepts, AI tools, and collaborative problem-solving. But it's not just about tech. It's about preparing for life. As Burgin explains, Tech Tempest focuses on *"timeless skills…the skills that computers will never be very good at."* These include:

Curiosity: Asking better questions and refining them to uncover deeper insights.

Critical Thinking: Evaluating AI outputs with discernment, understanding error rates and biases

Creativity: Designing solutions with purpose and imagination.

Collaboration: Working in teams to solve challenges and build services

Courage: Navigating uncertainty and risk, just like in the real world.

These "5 Cs" form the backbone of the game's learning outcomes, helping students develop competencies that transcend academic knowledge.

> **I think the key element, if I summarize it in the shortest way is…we're focused on timeless skills, the skills that computers will never be very good at.**
>
> John Burgin
> Founder, Shift 127

WHAT HAPPENS IN A TECH TEMPEST SESSION?

Tech Tempest is a team-based simulation game that immerses students in the real-world dynamics of building a tech-enabled business, using AI tools, navigating risk, and solving complex challenges. Designed for students in Years 9–12 across all subjects, Tech Tempest runs for 3 to 6 hours and accommodates groups of 15 to 40. The game unfolds in a cabaret-style classroom setup with two screens—one for the game storyboard and one for the scoreboard tracking team progress.

Students:

- Take on historic roles (e.g., scribe, advocate) that mirror modern professions.

- Use generative AI to solve real-world business problems.

- Navigate risk through the "Tempest Wheel," which introduces chance and unpredictability.

- Build and pitch a new banking service to a fictional New York bank.

- Earn capability cards that reflect their learning in areas like finance, design, and social impact.

LEARNING IMPACT: WHAT STUDENTS GAIN

Tech Tempest helps students:

- Learn about global technology trends and the impact of AI.

- Understand the limitations of generative AI and practice using it effectively.

- Explore the evolving roles of different professions in tech companies.

- Deploy AI agents to improve business processes and address the human impact of automation.

- Strengthen essential human skills—creativity, collaboration, critical analysis, and judgment.

The game is structured around 12 modules, each lasting about 20 minutes, and includes research challenges, creative exercises, and team presentations. Teachers play the role of the banker, evaluating student pitches and guiding reflection.

The flexibility of the game is key, as modules can be used/completed in one sitting, in a few a time or over a course of days, like in a unit of learning. Currently, most schools are opting for a introduction to the work and completing 4-6 modules during one day of learning (4-5 hours). Just this past month, a student came back for his own "day two" with a different group of students because he enjoyed it so much. When asked about the experience, a student shared, *"We learned a lot of crazy cool new stuff today!"* Another told our team, *"If this opportunity ever comes by again, I will beg them to let me join!"*

ENGAGE | MEASURE | EMPOWER | TRANSFORM

REAL-WORLD RELEVANCE IN ACTION

Learners explore the tech ecosystem and discover the human skills that matter most. This is not just about tech. It is about purpose, possibility, and contributive learning.

The game's structure mirrors real-world dynamics. Students earn capability cards by completing challenges, but success isn't guaranteed. A spin of the "Tempest Wheel" introduces risk, teaching students that life isn't always a meritocracy. This element of chance sparked a pivotal moment during a session at Sunnybank State High School, where one student wanted to eliminate the spin because "We did the work, we should earn the reward (card)." In the moment, the facilitators engaged students in a discussion and in the end, students voted to keep the risk rather than guarantee rewards. "It was a really interesting moment in pedagogy," Burgin recalls. "They understood that life doesn't go in a straight line."

Even students who don't see themselves in technology find relevance. Whether they're interested in business, law, philosophy, or the arts, Tech Tempest shows how technology intersects with every field. "It's the world of tech for everybody," says Burgin. "We've had enterprise customers play the game too, and they love how it showcases the contributions of all professions."
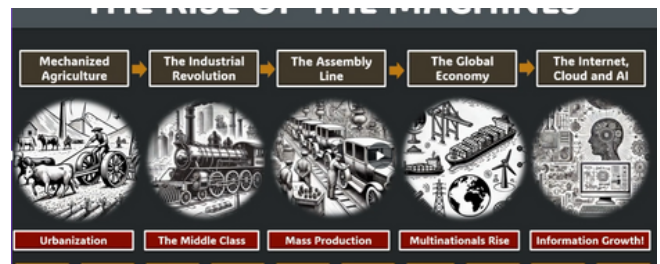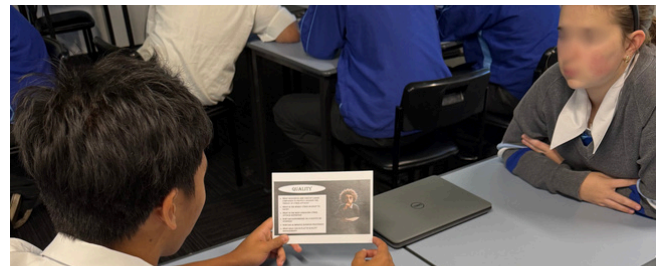
HISTORY MEETS INNOVATION

One of the game's unique features is its integration of historical context. Students learn about figures like Alan Turing and events like the Great Stink of 1858—not through lectures, but through research challenges and storytelling. This approach makes history memorable and meaningful, connecting past innovations to present-day challenges.

Tech Tempest is more than a game—it's a gateway to future-ready learning.

Whether you're an educator, possible funder, or just passionate about equity in education, there's a role for you.

Sponsor a School
Help bring Tech Tempest to communities that need it most.

Partner With Us
Join Shift 127 and The Learner First in scaling impact globally.

Spread the Word
Share the story. Advocate for inclusive, future-focused learning.

LEARN MORE

info@Thelearnerfirst.com

EMPOWERING STUDENTS FOR A TECH-DRIVEN FUTURE

Tech Tempest isn't just a game. it's a movement toward more relevant, engaging, and human-centered education. In an era where AI is reshaping the workforce, students need more than technical skills. They need curiosity, courage, and creativity. And thanks to experiences like Tech Tempest, they're getting a head start.

SCALING FOR EQUITY AND IMPACT

Tech Tempest is designed to be inclusive and adaptable—relevant for students of all interests, not just those interested in technology. With growing interest from schools and enterprise partners, the game is poised to scale across diverse educational contexts, helping students everywhere prepare for the future of work.

Shift 127 and The Learner First are actively partnering to bring Tech Tempest to schools around the world. As interest in the game grows, Burgin is exploring scalable models to ensure broader access. "Some schools can afford to pay, others can't," he explains. "We need to develop funding strategies and partnerships that make the game accessible to all."

ENGAGE | MEASURE | EMPOWER | TRANSFORM

SHIFT127
Engaging Directed Inclusive

THE Learner First™
ENGAGE | MEASURE | EMPOWER | TRANSFORM