

Two Paths to Motivation through Game Design Elements: Reward-Based Gamification and Meaningful Gamification

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Abstract

One definition of gamification is the "use of game design elements in non-game contexts" (Deterding et al, 2011, p.1). Gamification is used to change behavior, to educate, or to motivate. Many corporate gamification systems rely upon rewards and a very thin layer of a game experience to engage people through points, levels, leaderboards, achievements, and badges. This type of reward-based gamification has become commonplace, almost to the point of being expected, in new social media and information-based applications. Reward-based systems can be appropriate to engage people in short-term activities or to teach people valuable skills. When used for long-term change, however, there are some significant concerns about reward-based gamification.

In one of the core books on gamification, *Gamification by Design*, the authors state that "once you start giving someone a reward, you have to keep her in that reward loop forever" (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011, p. 27). In the marketing messages for gamification systems and online presentations about gamification, this warning is not typically given. Organizations are starting reward-based gamification systems unaware that they will need to maintain these rewards to maintain engagement.

The motivational theory behind his concern is based on Organismic Integration Theory (OIT), which is part of Self-Determination Theory. OIT presents how people integrate external motivation into their sense of self. If someone perceives an reward as an attempt to control behavior, then that external motivation will be attached to the rewarded behavior in a negative way to the person's sense of self. If those rewards are then taken away, then the person's motivation to engage in the behavior will also disappear (Deci, Koestner, and Ryan, 2001).

On the other hand, if someone finds meaningful connections between his or her own interests or their background and the desired behavior, then the chances are much greater that the person will integrate that behavior into his or her sense of self in a positive way. The goal of meaningful gamification, as developed by Nicholson (2012a), is to help users find meaningful connections with the underlying non-game activities, and using rewards only when truly necessary. In order to do this, multiple types of game and play experiences are needed, as the theory of situational relevance tells us that different users find meaning in different things (Schamber, 1994). Another method of allowing users to find what is meaningful is to allow the users to create their own goals and rewards within a gamification structure. A key design constraint is that the needs of the users need to be placed before the needs of the organization in creating a system for meaningful gamification (Nicholson, 2012a).

From an information science perspective, meaningful gamification is about using game elements to convey relevant information about a non-game context. Games can be used as information containers to communicate. As the user engages with the gamification system, he or she discovers information about the non-game activity that has been placed there by the designer. This can be done explicitly through text, voice, or other traditional ways of conveying information, or can be done implicitly through embedding information in the play of the game that causes moments of discovery and reflection. This concept of persuading through the play of a game is known as procedural rhetoric (Bogost, 2007).

The goal of this poster is to contrast the reward-based gamification model with the model of meaningful gamification. The poster will explain the basic concepts of gamification, present the two models of gamification, discuss when each type of gamification is appropriate, provide gamification and meaningful gamification examples, and point attendees to additional information about gamification. The poster will present Nicholson's BLAP model of gamification (2012a), which focuses on Badges, Levels & Leaderboards, Achievements, and Points, and compare it to Nicholson's recently developed RECIPE for meaningful gamification, which focuses on Reflection, Exposition, Choice, Information, Play, and Engagement (developed from 2012b).

Keywords: gamification, games, motivation, relevance

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