

What Makes Up Gamification and How to Implement into the Workplace

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Abstract

Employee engagement is critical to the success of any organization. It is important in reducing attrition, increasing attendance and improving performance to support the overall bottom line. However, due to the technological advances made with cellphones, computers, social media, and the entry of Millennials to the workforce, employee engagement is now even more important. To keep employees engaged, organizations should look at implementing gamification into existing processes within the organization. Gamification is not intended just for learning and it is not just applying games over the top of existing processes. There is a defined process, constructs, and traits that need to be utilized when implementing gamification. The gamification has to be engaging for the employees and follows the SIMPLE characteristics. If an organization follows these steps, as well as hiring an experienced gamification designer, you are destined for successful gamification and improved engagement.

What Makes Up Gamification and How to Implement into the Workplace

Employees **who are** engaged come to work on time. They are not absent. They **are not** looking for another job. They outperform others. In fact, according to the Q12 Gallup poll, a survey engagement assessment, "...business/work units with high employee engagement nearly double their odds of above-average composite performance in their own organizations and increase their odds for above-average success across business/work units in all organizations by 2.1 times." (Harter, Schmidt, Agrawal, Plowman, & Blue, 2016, p. 27). With increased performance, reduced attrition, and overall money saved by corporations, participation, and experience of engagement in organizations **should** be rampant. **The** truth is most organizations **do not** know how to implement or improve overall engagement. The purpose of **the following paper** is to examine existing literature to define gamification and explain what traits and constructs are required to design effective gamification. **Gamification will be examined to show how it is a useful tool for increasing engagement.**

Gamification Defined

Everyone likes games and competition (Nelson, 2017) so by integrating games into the workforce, we make things fun and encourage engagement from our employees. We see gamification in our everyday use of technology and the apps in which we have downloaded. Badges earned for reaching **certain levels**, a leaderboard and a percentage complete bar when taking a survey are all examples of gamification.

Training is typically where gamification is utilized the most. This is because gaming as learning leads to a 75% retention rate compared to passive learning – watching video – which has a 10% retention rate (Lowman, 2016). But gamification **is not** just for training. It can be utilized across all areas of **the** organization. "...the core of gamification is a design process intended to augment or alter an existing real-world process using lessons (initially) from the

game design research literature to create a revised version of that process that users will experience as game-like.” (Landers, Auer, Collmus, & Armstrong, 2018, p. 317). A more technical definition, but simply, the use of game design elements in non-game contexts (Lowman, 2016) is what gamification is all about. Examples range from an onboarding system that allows you to earn badges as you progress within a new organization to a leaderboard for existing performance showing your employees, or even teams of employees how they rank. These are just two examples of gamification and how it can be applied to keep employees engaged and excited. Hsu (2016) shares, “...gamified workplaces have a 24% higher attendance rate.”.

Gamification Complexity (Constructs)

Gamification is not as simple as it would appear to be. Yes, you can simply take a process and overlay some fun activities and call it gamification. But in reality, this is not the case. It is important to make sure gamification can solve the problem at hand. (Quick Guide to Gamification for eLearning, 2018). Will the gamification motivate the employee or learner? Will the gamification drive the desired engagement? When gamification is done correctly, the answer to both questions is yes. Understanding specific constructs and how they interact with each other makes gamification successful. Landers, et al., explain that there are four person-focused constructs within gamification: Game elements (predictors), targeted organizational outcome (criteria), intermediary individual changes (mediators), and personal and situational contexts (moderators). (Landers, et al., 2016, p. 319). For gamification, predictors are the game elements of the process or learning. Criteria is the end goal you are trying to accomplish by gamifying. Mediators are the behaviors or psychological states which we are trying to influence. Lastly, moderators are the strength and direction of the outcome. For example, you cannot implement a leaderboard (predictor) on a process and call it gamification. You have to have a

complete plan in regard to what outcome (criteria) or goals you are trying to drive. You also have to understand whether the game (predictor) or media used for gaming will be a direct or indirect effect on the end goal. Different things motivate different people, so it is important for gamified processes to appeal to all the different types of persona. (White, 2016). Every person is different and as Landers et al. (2016, p. 323) state, "...gamification design succeeds based upon its effect on individuals, not organization." The game design has to appeal to all individuals and motivate all of them accordingly, so a result is achieved organizationally via individuals.

Organization Set Up

There are a lot of different opinions of what is required to make gamification successful in the organization. One area agreed upon by most, is to make sure you have an experienced designer that specializes in gamification. (Nelson, 2017). By doing so, you will avoid all the disappointments and failures from the beginning which most organizations face when starting out with gamification. As an organization, you are not just going to hire just anyone. All qualifications, portfolios, and experiences need to be evaluated to hire the best game designer. The game designer will give direction and insight on how and what best to gamify. This direction along with creative and genius instructional design (depending on process), and the technology to implement compliment to the process. These items are not the only things critical to the success of starting gamification.

Talking with the employees is a priority when starting in gamification. It can be done in many ways and different times within the implementation, and range from, surveying the employees to conducting focus groups. Understanding how the spare time of employees is utilized, if games are played, which games, learnings from the games played, key elements of the games played to be utilized inside the organization. Who knows better what your employees would like to see, then the employees themselves? Ideas and suggestions are always best from

the employees, and it gets the entire team devoted to the game. Experience what employees are experiencing - take the games they are playing and play them yourself. This will give you even further insight into what should be engaging.

Zinger (2014, p. 32) states that overall gamification has four traits: a goal, rules, a feedback system, and voluntary participation. The four traits can be explained as a goal: what you are trying to accomplish with the game, the rules: direction on how to win or be successful at the game, feedback: loop of understanding who is winning or losing within the game and voluntary participation meaning the employees are willingly playing without being forced. With these four traits in mind and along with Landers' constructs, a modest plan to implementing gamification can be achieved. Games do not have to be elaborate and overly fancy to accomplish what is needed, they need to be significant and allow for the employees to become motivated and engaging. Zinger (2014, p. 33) continues by saying six characteristics necessary to ensure gamification for engagement is SIMPLE: Sustainable, Immersing, Meaningful, Playful/Pleasurable, Lucrative, and Engaging.

The SIMPLE formula is not as complicated as it looks and is defined in the following sentences. Sustainable is all about making sure the gamification being implemented is sustainable throughout the life of the process. Zinger (2014, p.33) says games are utilized explicitly at first because of the novelty but then will wear off. It is important to make sure the game is sustainable for time. The game needs to be immersive and not a diversion so it will encourage people to work and not "divert" from the work. The game needs to be meaningful with a goal in mind. A simple game with a lot of meaning is better than a complex game with a lot of action. (Zinger, 2016, p. 33). Playful and pleasurable is all about engagement. Making the game fun even though it is work. Games should be lucrative, instead of costly for the organization. There needs to be a huge return of investment (ROI) for the game. All

gamification needs to be engaging. “If the gamification platform is not fully engaging, it cannot be expected to increase employee engagement at work.” (Zinger, 2014, p. 34).

By making it SIMPLE and utilizing the four traits of gamification, we have a framework which can be utilized to design a powerful gamification to increase employee engagement.

Conclusion

Gamification can be effective if implemented successfully within an organization by using the constructs shared by Landers, et al. (2016) and the four traits and SIMPLE design shared by Zinger (2014). Training alone does not have to be the only place where gamification can be implemented. When done correctly, gamification is engaging and motivating for employees at different levels. Gamification will allow employees, to function by learning new skills, behaviors, and problem-solving skills (Nelson, 2017). But gamification requires specific traits and constructs to make sure implemented correctly. It is only through an experienced designer and an organization that is dedicated to following a design process in which gamification can become successful and engage employees.

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