Executive Summary

Gamification involves the use of game elements to engage a learner’s competitive nature. It includes the application of typical elements of game playing (e.g., point scoring, competition with others, rules of play) to encourage engagement with a product or service. Using extrinsic motivation, the gamification of learning leverages the intrinsic motivation and desire to win. When structured properly, the underlying process has the effect of changing the learner’s behavior.

Although the primary objective isn’t for learners to have fun, by changing the behavior of a learner by making the learning experience fun, the retention of the content will be longer than if the learner attempted to learn it through traditional means. Gamification can be applied in a wide variety of settings that include e-learning, employee training, and website conversion.

This white paper presents an overview of gamification and explores its value in the business setting.
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT GAMIFICATION

Gamification, also known as gamified learning, is an effective tool to help businesses accomplish a wide range of goals such as increasing sales, and training staff to boost their efficiency and effectiveness in the workplace.

Gamification uses game mechanics including badges and leaderboards in a non-game environment to engage and motivate learners during training to create a behavioral change or support knowledge retention. Innovative companies are using gamification to gain a competitive advantage.

Outside of increased engagement and motivation, many businesses are leveraging gamification because the metrics generated enable training and HR professionals to monitor progress as well as performance in the module from a productivity perspective.

As Michelle Greenwald explains in a September 2014 Forbes article:

“It’s often accompanied by progress tracking metrics. The objectives are to engage users and change their behaviors in ways brands and organizations want. The extremely broad and expanding range of ways gamification has been successfully utilized in recent years provides insights into other ways the tactic can achieve strategic objectives.”

In other words, improvements and adjustments in the game can enable employees to learn more or increase productivity, or motivate customers to engage more with the business or product.

WHEN GAMIFICATION FAILS TO DELIVER A POSITIVE RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

Gamification doesn't always succeed in delivering the expected ROI. However, the reasons for this failure are easy to identify and correct.

As Adam Hollander explains in a Fast Company article:

“Another statistic from Gartner shows that 80% of those same gamification implementations will fail to meet their business objectives. I’ve heard many companies talk about using gamification solutions because they look fun. This is the wrong reason to use gamification. Gamification in the enterprise is not about fun or even engagement—it’s about driving business results through changes in employee behavior. Gartner says that the reason most gamification implementations will fail is because of poor design. In my experience, poor gamification design is a direct result of not identifying (and being able to measure against) key business problems a company is looking to solve.”
Unfortunately, many companies get caught up in the idea of gamifying their training to get their employees to have fun, and lose focus on what is really important: the learning. While it is true that a manager can hand someone a training PowerPoint and tell them to “gamify it” and make it fun, the chances are that the organization won’t get the results it intended by using this approach.

**HOW GAMIFICATION IMPROVES LEARNER ENGAGEMENT**

Traditional training methods don’t always provide learners options for interacting with the content. Usually, learners can simply read the material and answer questions about it, or if they’re lucky they might be able to listen to a narrator read it to them. These are both passive learning methods that aren’t able to effectively grab a learner’s interest in a way that leads to knowledge retention.

Gamification is an unconventional way to learn new material. The thing that makes gamification work is its mechanics. Essentially, the mechanics of a game define how it is going to be played and what learners will learn out of playing the game. If the mechanics of the game are not well-defined with the learner and the end-goal in mind, the company will fail to achieve their training goals.

**ENGAGEMENT MATTERS**

While the primary focus of gamification is to enhance knowledge and change learners’ behavior, the game must also be designed to increase overall engagement. The goal is to develop a game that learners want and like to play. Understanding the target audience and designing a game that is in line with their interests and learning objectives is key. However, it all ties back into the mechanics of the game.

Using game mechanics to provide clear feedback for learners, as well as something they can manipulate, interact with, and understand are all important factors when seeking to increase engagement. The proper mechanics will motivate learners to respond positively to an element of uncertainty with games. Learners actually become excited when they think they might have predicted something accurately and will want to go back and learn more.

Game mechanics directly affects how individual engagement can be transformed through the psychological and neurological impact of gamification.

**GAMES REWARD THE BRAIN**

The mechanics of a game are crucial to the learner’s experience because they contribute to how much the learners are enjoying the game while they are learning. Games that are designed to reward the brain and keep users interested and searching for more have the greatest impact. The tasks and elements of a successful game should always be supportive of the learning process while also rewarding the learner.
So how, exactly, is the brain rewarded by the various game elements? Any time a learner is doing something that is encouraging their brain to work, and they are simultaneously thinking to themselves that they are enjoying the game; they are receiving a psychological reward. Remember that rewards are not always tangible. Learners are rewarding their brains simply by interacting with and participating in an action that is not only giving them more knowledge, but is also capturing their attention and enhancing creativity.

**GAMIFICATION AND GAME-BASED LEARNING: WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE?**

Gamification and game-based learning are both buzzwords in the education and training industry because they share the same DNA. Both are rooted in game thinking, mechanics, and design. Both are used to solve problems. And both are used to engage users.

However, they are distinct from each other. Although both are innovative ways to train learners, the terms cannot be used interchangeably.

Gamification is adding game-like mechanics to non-game experiences to encourage a specific behavior and motivate learners. It is not simply having learners play games. It incorporates motivational elements from games, such as badges or achievements, and utilizes them to encourage learners to perform a specific behavior.

On the other hand, game-based learning involves using games to teach specific content. This can be through a game created for education, or a non-educational game for educational purposes. For example, using the game Angry Birds to reinforce X and Y intercepts or Cooking Dash to introduce what it is like working in a restaurant.

**WHY GAMIFICATION WORKS IN A BUSINESS CONTEXT**

Gamification is being used more and more in the workplace to engage professionals at every level. This trend is growing because gamification works when done right.

Although many business-minded people may find it hard to step back and examine how gamification can be beneficial in the workplace, it is crucial that they do so. Gamification supports efficiency and business growth while also serving as an excellent tool for engaging employees.

In the workplace, gaming elements are being used to make mundane tasks more interesting for employees. By incorporating gaming principles into daily work tasks and training practices, an organization will give an exciting boost to these routine tasks that many people find boring and hard to get excited about.

Not only will a company’s employees notice the difference in the way workplace tasks are being presented, they will want to be a part of it. As gamification is essentially an art that works by applying game theory to non-game contexts, it helps to create a work environment that fosters creativity, engagement, and collaboration.

Because one of the biggest challenges for businesses is keeping employees engaged and motivated, using measurable gaming elements is a great way to increase interest. And, it allows an organization to keep track of what works and what doesn’t.

“many companies get caught up in the idea of gamifying their training to get their employees to have fun, and lose focus on what is really important: the learning.”

—Andrew Hughes, President of Designing Digitally, Inc.
THREE REASONS
WHY YOU CAN’T IGNORE GAMIIFICATION

Gamification is more than just a fad or a hip new way to motivate employees, it has given corporations an effective means to engage employees and see real-time benefits. As the workforce continues to become younger and the role of technology grows larger, the enterprise must adjust in order to succeed.

Whether a company starts small or jumps head first into gamification, the fact of the matter is that gamification is effective and cannot be ignored.

Here are the top three reasons why gamification has the potential to motivate employees and drive business success.

1. Gamification Increases Engagement

Employees yearn for social interaction and fun in the workplace. From forming a work softball team to going out to lunch together, employees want to feel like they have a place and a professional circle that has a positive atmosphere.

Gamification does this in a virtual sense. It provides employees with friendly competition and engagement with peers by way of leaderboards and achievements. Getting employees engaged is a first step in meeting learning objectives.

2. Gamification Boosts Knowledge Retention

Hearing information and retaining it are two very different things. Even though employees are listening in the training sessions, they typically do not retain that information long-term or to the degree needed. By incorporating game-based elements in training, companies are providing a way for employees to become engaged and interested in the material. Engaged employees are more likely to retain information for much longer.

3. Gamification Enhances Achievement

In the workplace, employees are judged based on their knowledge of the business, skills, achievements, and corporate reputation. Giving employees a platform to become masters of their skill, as well as interact and share with others, is an excellent way to enhance overall achievement.

Gamifying learning content will establish a community that serves as a platform for employees to recognize one another’s achievements which will help grow team camaraderie and, in turn, improve productivity.
NINE TIPS TO FOR IMPLEMENTING BEST PRACTICES IN WORKPLACE GAMIFICATION

Employees often view mandatory training as an unwelcomed obligation that is heaped onto an already demanding workload. However, it doesn’t have to be that way. Whether the company requires training on customer service standards or workplace ethics, employees can be motivated to learn when they are challenged, surprised, and entertained.

1. Create a Strong Theme and an Even Stronger Narration

When creating a theme and a script for a training program, grab the employee’s attention and surprise them. Consider incorporating pop culture references or even inside company jokes. This adds an unexpected twist to the material.

One of the fastest ways to turn off participants is by reciting a list of tips in a dry, monotonous tone. Make the content lively and be amazed at how employees react.

2. Focus on the Learner

Tailor the message to specific employees or by departments. This is not a one-size-fits-all process. Motivate employees to want to learn by making the content relevant, compelling, and challenging.

3. Vary the Outcomes

Often employees are required to repeat mandatory training every year. To keep employees interested, it’s important to create dynamic content that offers different outcomes depending on the path the user chooses. While this is more work for the trainer, employees repeating the course will continue to have opportunities to learn rather than just review the same static material.

4. Engage to Enlighten

Use interactivity to create interest and motivate a learner. Encourage active participation through mini-games and dynamic interactions with varying end results that depend on the employee’s actions. Try to avoid true or false and multiple-choice questions. These rote forms of learning are less likely to engage employees.

5. Let Form Follow Function

Avoid focusing more on looks than content. Make sure there is a strong theme, clear learning objectives, and measurable outcomes prepared before doing any graphical work. In this way, the focus will be on ensuring learning objectives are met. Refining how the content is taught is secondary to give the training the best look and feel.

6. Make It Competitive and Social

Incorporate business gamification into training modules in the form of badges, points, or bragging rights. Competition and rewards provide employees with a greater sense of accomplishment and satisfaction when the course is completed.

7. Customize The Game

Every organization is different, so the gaming elements utilized should mirror the workplace culture, mission, audience, and objectives. If there is too much deviation, there is a risk of failing to motivate employees by creating a learning experience that does not appeal to them.
By customizing the user experience, a model can be built that meets the company’s specific needs. Implementing various gamification elements that are carefully considered based upon business goals and objectives is an important step towards building a successful model.

**8. Make it Enjoyable**

Gamification allows for the creation of a dynamic platform that fosters creativity and company investment by using game mechanics to create something more interesting for the audience. It gives employees a new and fun way to complete training, which will help bolster their enjoyment of their work.

The benefits don’t stop with educated and entertained employees. Gamification also boosts retention rates, as employees will engage with the material in a more interactive way. The more employees retain, the more likely a company will see improvements in job performance.

**9. Be Supportive**

In order to find success with gamification in the workplace and to change employee behavior for the better, it is important that it is supported by all levels of the organization. Gamification cannot just be used as one of many attempts to engage employees. It should be implemented as something that all managers, trainers, and leaders alike support and believe in.

Employees engage with training material more thoroughly when they feel their professional growth is important to the leadership of the organization. Be sure the gamified learning experience has the leadership support it needs and deserves to accomplish training goals.

---

**THE FUTURE OF GAMIFICATION IS BRIGHT**

Forbes Magazine contributor, Dan Schawbel, interviewed author, professor, and New York University Assistant Director of the Business & Economic Program, Adam Penenberg, about the future of gamification. Mr. Penenberg offered the following response:

“I see a day when a person will log into work from home, his avatar interacting with other employees. Companies like IBM are big into avatars, by the way. Then the person will, in a game-like architecture, perform his job, receiving constant feedback as if he is in a game. This, too, is already happening. The next time you go to Target, notice the checkout screen. On it you’ll see a game that rates the cashier’s speed. According to one report, Target maintains a running average of an employee’s scores, requiring that more than 88 percent of transactions make the speed cut, with a cashier’s score affecting salary and promotions. Target has turned cashiers into players of a corporate game.”

Target is an excellent example when it comes to hitting the bull’s-eye with regards to efficiency and customer service with gaming.

From boardrooms to warehouse floors, and call centers to dispatch vehicles, businesses large and small are discovering the capabilities gamification can bring. Whether the business seeks to motivate workers toward better customer service or create behavior change, gamification can aid in reaching those goals.

“[Gamification] should be implemented as something that all managers, trainers, and leaders alike support and believe in.”

—Andrew Hughes, President of Designing Digitally, Inc.
CONCLUSION

Gamification provides leaders in the workforce with a whole new, richer set of techniques that are designed to motivate people. People love games and social interaction, especially if done well and in a manner that they can relate to.

From customizing for a specific audience to ensuring the gamified learning experience being implementing is supported on all levels of management, the tools for planning out the company's strategy and successfully putting it into action is a significant responsibility. Organizations will want to seek out professional and experienced help to achieve training goals.

To learn more about how gamification can aid your organization's training efforts and how Designing Digitally can help, contact us today by calling us at 1-866-316-9126 or emailing us at sales@designingdigitally.com

RESOURCES

http://www.forbes.com/sites/danschawbel/2013/10/07/adam-penenberg-how-gamification-is-going-to-change-the-workplace/2/#a0344c612083
https://www.designingdigitally.com/blog/2015/05/gamification-what-it
http://www.designingdigitally.com/blog/2015/01/what-you-should-know-about-gamification
https://www.designingdigitally.com/blog/2014/08/workplace-gamification-how-implement-best-practices
http://www.designingdigitally.com/blog/2012/04/get-gamified-gamify-your-e-learning
https://www.designingdigitally.com/blog/2015/01/serious-games-and-gamification-future