



What's wrong with gamification?

Description

Can everything be gamified? (See last week's post [Gamification 101](#).) It already is — especially if you believe in — man the player, — *homo ludens* a term popularised by Johan Huizinga. The concept of gamification refers to only a part of what being *homo ludens* entails.

Even through the limiting lens of instrumentalized, managerialized and manipulative gamification, the elements of competition, rewards, progression markers, leaderboards, and scores pervade human social organisation.

Formal education thrives on it (grading, degree awards). Management structures award pay grades, job titles, preferred roles on the basis of performance or loyalty. In democracies, people vote for candidates, and are polled, to produce popularity leaderboards.



Limits of gamification

We don't need to concur that these elements provide the primary motivation for people to do what they do. An article by Scott Nicholson adds that "players engage with games for an exploration of narrative, to make interesting decisions, and to play with other people" (4). He advocates for "meaningful gamification" (4) that encourages players to explore and develop their own individualised goals and motivations.

It's not just that we seek higher grades, but the challenge of the learning experience, or the sociability of university life. People don't just seek higher pay grades, but fresh challenges, and more interesting interactions. Voters and pollsters are not just motivated to see their candidate score higher, but expect them to bring about some kind of change if elected.

The motivational aspects of scores, rewards, and leaderboards are palpable amongst spectators and players at sports events, quiz nights and management retreats. Some articles that address just how effective in commerce and personal development are included in the bibliography.

Here's a clip from the movie *The Circle* (2015) First Day In Office. The desk worker handling customer inquiries is introduced to a method for improving customer satisfaction scores. The play context of the work environment is vital for success in the firm as workers are required to participate in (voluntary) weekend social events. Everything the worker does is logged.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ByQ35OLoMM>

Bibliography

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- Nicholson, Scott. 2014. A Recipe for meaningful gamification. In Torsten Reiners, and Lincoln C. Wood (eds.), *Gamification in Education and Business*: 1-22. New York: Springer.
- Woodcock, Jamie, and Mark R. Johnson. 2018. Gamification: What it is, and how to fight it. *The Sociological View*, (66) 3, 542-558.

Note

- The tug-of-war photograph was taken at the Edinburgh Highland Show this June.
- For an accessible survey of gamification in training see Apostolopoulos, Aris. 2019. The 2019 Gamification at Work Survey. *TalentLMS*, August. Available online: <https://www.talentlms.com/blog/gamification-survey-results> (accessed 6 October 2019)

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1. Play

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Date Created

October 5, 2019

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