

Chapter 3

Problems with Applying Gamified Thinking into a Product



Abstract As we know gamification is the process of integrating or applying the aspects and elements of games into mundane tasks and product development processes. In this digital age, gamification has become an exciting concept in the business world. An increasing number of businesses and teams are applying gamified thinking in their products. However, it seems that people’s expectation of this application can become unrealistic sometimes. Gamified thinking is not the miracle cure for all your product’s woes. It is unrealistic to adopt a lousy process, add game elements, and end up with a fantastic product. One should not become much reliant on gamified thinking that one obscures the primary purpose of the product. Setting expectations and knowing the problems with applying gamified thinking are important for the projects to succeed, which make the gist of this chapter.

Keywords Gamify · Shallow gamification · Game designer · Games are cool—gamification is not · Juicy feedback · Gamification problems · Ethical problems · Algorithms · Big data · Real time · Performance

3.1 Introduction

A critical aspect of a product to be successful is the excellence of its user-centered design. The User eXperience (UX) is the process of developing products that provide personally relevant and meaningful experiences for the users. This entails the careful design of the product’s usability and value the customers will get from using it.

Today, gamification is heavily being used in design as it is believed to help solve several problems in the user experience design of the products. The suitable use of gamification and carefully selected game elements and mechanics can become a

useful tool for user experience designers to gain increased user engagement of the product and higher conversion rates (Byron and Leighton 2009).

Using gamification for the user experience design of a product, we have seen that gamification is usually mistaken as game design. However, these terms are not the same; even more, these are opposite in a few aspects. As known, the word gamification means the technique of applying game-like elements: mechanics, dynamics, and components into a nongame setting, like applications and websites.

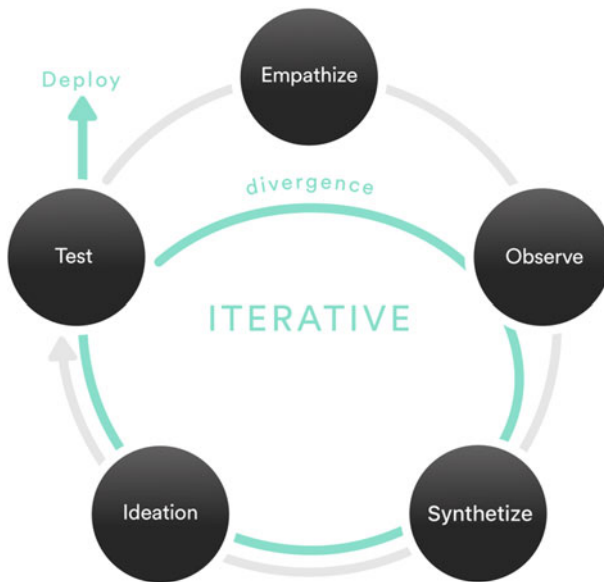
For instance, if you want your users to interact more via your application, you can consider adding a game element such as challenge so the users can be challenged to check-in daily every week and be rewarded if they do so. The point is that users like having a clear-cut goal and even more to get rewards after doing that. Hence, any such challenge has a greater chance to get noticed among the users. In this way, a gamification designer can influence the behavior of the users and motivate them as players to do the required actions through game elements like a challenge and reward.

3.2 Do You Need to Gamify?

Various reasons are attributed to why people are increasingly using gamification. First, a gamification design adds an element of motivation to, for example, a product, service, application, and website. Users enjoy the engagement, challenges as well as competitive spirit much like they do in games; hence, they are encouraged to go back. Moreover, the game mechanics are the great motivators for the users. These elements are connected with tasks and promise rewards to those who achieve those tasks. The excitement and curiosity drive the users to keep performing different tasks and spend more time on the website or on the app.

Gamification is now a mainstream technique on the path of proving its reliability as an effective and successful product design method. However, its popularity is growing rapidly, and hence it has good chances to be the leading approach in near future with its problems being neglected or overlooked.

Arguably, gamification has become one of the key design approaches today. Many designers have captured the hype and are actively using this technique in different projects. Hence, many users might already have experienced the interaction with gamified products that mean they expect the similar from yours (McGonigal 2011).



The above-illustrated design process inspired by Van Grove (2011) is applicable to the gamification as it is applicable to other aspects of design. Experts say that it is not about the “gamifying”; rather, it is about saving costs, driving revenue, and making users more efficient.

We know that gamification is about taking certain aspects of gaming and using them to the task to make it more engaging. The goal is not to make the task a game completely. In fact, the idea for successful planning is to keep things as simple as possible. Similarly, you need to keep the addition of elements of gamification to a subtle level because by doing that, the engagement enters without the user’s knowing the point that any kind of game is going on.

For instance, some social media platforms incorporate a progress bar to drive its users to complete their personal profiles. This is a very basic thing to implement. It is not likely that making a progress bar is based on completing the increasingly tough levels of the shoot them up game, which would be as effective. This is because the users enter using the social media network in a way different from how they would enter a game that calls for shooting the things appearing in the player’s field of view. A clear vision or goal is needed for any gamification design. It is important to keep the purpose of the design’s use firmly in mind.

Keep in mind that you cannot just get some random game mechanics and add them to your product or application if you want your gamification idea to succeed. There is a place for badges, points, and leaderboards (PBLs), but it is not everywhere. You must select the right tool for the right job and often this will need a trial and error method. That implies knowing your market inside out, testing the design

again and again before rolling it out, and not to lose sight of the fact that you are playing another game with high stakes in the process of producing a great design without risking your and its own reputation (Huotari and Hamari 2012).

3.3 Shallow Gamification

According to many game design professionals, a poor gamification design is one of the more prominent failings of several gamified applications today. The emphasis is on the prominent game mechanics like badges, points, and leaderboards, instead of subtler and more vital game design elements like neutralizing competition and balancing collaboration or explaining a meaningful game economy.

Poor gamification features can surely prevent users from getting engaged in the product or task in hand. Your goal is to engage users, not annoy them. For example, social media platforms hold a prominent professional nature and look. With a slight visualizing, you can picture the potential users as being corporate executives, looking up one another to gain a thorough understanding of who each is and what each of them can do. It would be the last place for you to add a glitzy-looking element. It is not that these users are deadly serious and detest leisure; it is just that there is a place and time for everything, and irrespective of the point that behaviors toward gamification shape the generation gap, the corporate people are still likely to be serious-minded for the millennial generations to come. Therefore, keep in mind who you are really designing for. To keep the testing features prior to releasing that may help to achieve this, the real tracking of success usually needs feedback from the whole user base (Hamari et al. 2014).

The idea of gamification development should be interpreted in the historical context to determine why gamification mechanics don't eventually result in a great design.

There are several case studies on gamification that show and pledge a great influence on the world; however, there are also many cases of poor practice, numerous misconceptions, imperfect application, and failed attempts.

Many designers believe that if you add points or badges in something boring, that once-boring product will become exciting instantly. Indeed, that is also what many gamification platforms specialize in, i.e., adding points, badges, and leaderboards (PBLs) into different products in a scalable manner. And as an outcome, many of the less informed people who are curious about gamification begin to believe that sum total of gamification philosophy and methodology is the plain process of adding points, badges, and leaderboards to the products. This indeed makes them believe that the gamification is a "shallow" fad and not much influential (Fuchs 2012).

This has also faced a backlash from the game development community since they claim that the gamification spoils the true intrinsic essence to good gaming. And who is going to blame them? Traveling companies, for instance, seems nothing more than badges, points, and leaderboards based on the places visited; a shoe

brand may follow the same thing in the context of running. Is this deep as gamification stands for?

Indeed, PBLs have an important position in game design and that's why they are added in many games. They can motivate people to do certain actions. However, gamification is much more than PBLs. Many experts having limited exposure just know how to use PBLs mechanics and even these sometimes create value, majority of them fully miss the point of engaging users.

If you ask a professional gamer about the elements and mechanics that add engagement in a game, they might not disclose the PBLs, to intact the authenticity. They play it since there are elements of strategy, since it's a nice way to hang out with friends, or they like to challenge themselves. The badges and points are usually added as additional bonus that is good to have based on the context. This differentiates extrinsic motivation, where users engaged due to a goal or reward, from intrinsic motivation, where the task itself is exciting and fun, with or without a reward.

Games are not essentially engaging due to flashy animations or high-quality aesthetics. There are several unpopular, poor-selling games having state-of-the-art high-resolution graphics, and there are also the games having very basic or even zero graphics but have a bigger community of addicted players (Herger 2011).

Clearly, games are far more than "meet the eye" aspect. Unfortunately, many people working with gamification assume that using mainstream game mechanics, which are PBLs, will automatically turn the product or user experience engaging and exciting. However, how do you make a successful gamification design is not only what you put in, but it is also when, how, and most importantly, why.

3.4 Do You Need to Be a Game Designer to Make a Gamification?

Game designers are usually considered the true game engagement experts, and a great game designer is required to create an effective gamification experience. However, a bad game designer is certainly not needed in any case. Do you know the difference between a good game designer and a bad game designer? Knowing this difference is important to create a meaningful user experience by applying gamification to your product or application (Dille and Platten 2016).

To understand the gist of good gamification design, let's see the example of how an inexperienced game designer may design a game. While designing a game, a game designer might start thinking like:

So, what game elements and game mechanics should I add? Well, indeed we want monsters in the game as well as swords, so where should all it be placed? What about the crops that players would fertilize? How about the birds showing enough attitude? I am sure that it is going to be admired and make an impact.

(It's an assumed general thinking perspective)

It is evident from the explanation above that a game may have all the right ingredients but still be too dull if users' motivation is neglected. If you consider this, every single game available in the market has what we call the game elements and game mechanics in them but could still be taken as incredibly boring as well as financial losers. Just a few well-designed games are taken as engaging and addictive.

Now let's see what a more thoughtful designer does in the same situation. Rather than starting what game mechanics and game elements to use, a good game designer starts by thinking:

So, how do I want people to feel? Do I want them to get an inspiration? Do I want to make them feel proud? Should they be effective or productive? What is my objective for their desired experience?

Once the Game Designer Understands How the User Wants to Feel Intrinsically, He or She Starts to Think

So, what type of game mechanics and elements can help me achieve my objectives of enduring the users feel this way?

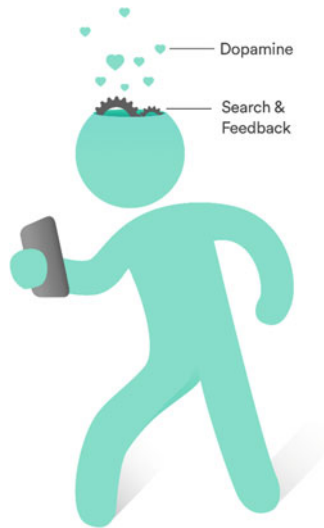
The solution might lie in swords, or plants, or maybe word puzzle games. The point is that game elements are only the means to an end, rather than an end. Game elements are just there to pull and push users' core behavioral drives.

3.5 Games Are Cool—Gamification Is Not

As mentioned quite a few times already, gamification is the application of game elements to nongames. In simpler terms, the gamified experiences are generally otherwise applied to monotonous stuff that is decorated with game elements such as achievements, badges, and leaderboards. What gamified products typically lack are the fundamental mechanics of games that make the user experience intrinsically fun. Unluckily, all badges, achievements, points, trophies, and leaderboards in the world will not ever make up for an unexciting core experience.

Surely, the games are fun, but they also engage the users at psychophysiological level that creates a positive behavioral change unlike any other medium. It's not just games and fun, it's a science, even more comprehensive than the idea of gamification.

It's a myth that games are just for fun. The current studies have demonstrated that games significantly enable behavioral change (Chou 2015):



- Pleasure is related to the emission of dopamine in the brain. After deciding and getting feedback that the decision was correct, the dopamine releases and urges the brain to try to reap that behavior.
- Games are impressive at providing feedback for progress. Elements such as accumulating points, progress in the story, sound effects, visual success indicators, social recognition, animations, all help push the release of dopamine.
- Through feedback, the neuronal circuits get stronger, reinforcing the wish for the activity that led to dopamine response. It may sound like addiction, but games can surely be addictive.
- With thorough feedback, the wish to continue transcends the external rewards, which becomes internal since the brain wants another release of endorphins. This is the foundation for a long-term behavioral change.

In games, the objective to use a game is to get a learning goal or skill. The game is embedded in the learning journey. In gamification, on the other hand, it's a pedagogical system. The whole learning journey is developed around the idea of playing a game, but not playing a game itself. It implies creating a game out of something that is not.

One of the key problems with gamification is that it incentivizes the winning over other goals like getting extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. For business training and development, you don't want employees who know how to ace a test but don't essentially know what they've been taught. Gamification is an effective tool for making users engaged, but it must be implemented with great care, monitored on a continuous basis and developed to ensure performance and learning are the required outcomes.

3.6 Dull or Juicy Game Feel

The potential to make a “juicy” product within learning, which is more satisfying and interactive, is clearly desirable because it increases the chance of fulfilling the central objective of the product—to aid learning. A lifeless product will fail to engage the learner with the content and doing tasks related to it. In content gamification, create the “juicy” feedback. Feedback is the important component in any kind of content gamification since feedback informs the learner of the level of the correctness of his or her actions while providing guidance, immersion, and interest simultaneously. Juicy feedback is the concept of designing for the visceral reactions in learners so they can experience the emotions (Werbach and Hunter 2012). A juicy experience is engaging from the time you start till the time you end.

3.7 Gamification Problems

While applying gamification, it must be kept in mind that one size doesn’t fit all. The most frustrating aspect of gamification is that lightning doesn’t strike again. A lot of designers have made a game that was very successful in one setting, just to turn around and have it totally flopped in another. This doesn’t imply that game was poorly made, but it means that it was poorly executed. You might have the most aesthetically beautiful and intuitive game in the market, but if it doesn’t match with objective of your training, it is not going to engage learners with the content (Kapp et al. 2013).

It is to be kept in mind that the learners are customers and the content is the product. If you want your product to work in your favor, you would need a market research. By knowing what engages and motivates your target market, you can take the information into development. This process also lets you understand if the gamified product will be effective or not.

3.8 Ethical Problems

We can see that businesses of all kinds are exploiting the potential of gamification to motivate learning and behavior change, whether it’s about getting customers more loyal and engaged with their products, brands, or messages, or motivating the employees to perform better at service, sales, training, and collaboration.

It might be tempting to see gamification as a means to bring additional layers of control in the workplace or try and fool employees to do more than they are expected to. That’s not a good idea in ethical terms. First, and most importantly, it is not ethical, even if one may argue seeing who can manipulate the users for the most profit could itself be boasted as a game at personal cocktail parties. However,

despite the rights and wrongs of “conning” or “persuading” people into doing the things, users would work out fast when they are being forced or manipulated into the things, anyway. Then, they would struggle to withdraw the gamified environment and such offending design would become. Not just people tend to feel humiliated being viewed as pawns or rats, but they would also tend to express their dislike regarding the design in a very public manner (Lowry et al. 2013).

It is of utmost importance to use an ethical approach to the gamification and think yourself on the user end of what you are creating. Especially when you have a user base who can discuss the design amongst themselves, and also tell the world about it, the last thing you would want to do is to try to outsmart them this way. Once the user feels used, patronized or tricked, it might be just a matter of time prior to the first reviews appear. Hence, if your design embraces their intelligence, it would have a better chance to win their loyalty as well as more users.

3.9 Do Not Forget Algorithms and Big Data

Studies have shown that by capturing the big data on user activity and using this data to make a more engaging experience, businesses are able to engage and motivate their employees with greater precision. Combining the big data with gamification is a very powerful tool for driving business results, motivating better performance, and generating a competitive advantage.

By taking the big data that employees are generating as they interact with the business systems and using that data to motivate better performance and drive a hard return of investment (ROI) (Herger 2011).

Much of the focus on gamification has been on its use for motivating the employees, but gamification applies just as eloquently to the customers, students, and business professionals. With each action they take, users are raising their hands and telling you something about their interests, their activity, and even how they prefer to spend their time. Smart companies can use this activity data to motivate customers to engage, contribute, participate, share, purchase, and be more loyal.

3.10 How Can Real-Time Use of Gamification Drive Performance or Not?

Imagine a basketball coach who skids along the court, following his team as they invest all their body strength and skills to fight off opponents’ scores, and keep up their offensive within the team. The coach throws out his feedback in real time, so his players can fix their mistakes on the spot. If his point guard is taking too many shots in the first quarter, his coach will have him back on the right track by the end of the second.

Performance management is generally a good idea: set goals and measure their achievement. The problem is that most performance management practices involve setting of annual goals, which soon become stale. In addition, communication with employees about performance is marred by the practice of ranking employee performance—which people (naturally, of course) find threatening, confrontational, and discouraging (Kapp et al. 2013).

Gamification brings this dynamic to your employees' performance. If the system is modern, the feedback is given on the spot, by showing Key Performance Indicator (KPI) and personalized benchmarks and goals within the gamification application, so employees can rectify flaws in real time, instead of through retroactive feedback that is weeks or months late.

3.11 Conclusion

Gamification is a popular concept, but it is not a magic wand. Ineffective products are not going to be accepted just because you added some gamification. You can achieve limited outcomes through gamification and being a product developer, you don't want your product to become a game with a remote secondary benefit; gamification design is not the gaming design. Gamification designers must focus on what they can expect realistically to achieve in the design process, considering cons of gamification on mind, be very cautious that they cannot make a pig in a dress anything but a pig, no matter how much gamification is done. Also, always keep in mind that the users are able to see through trickery. It may take just few bad reviews to earn a questionable title of cynical exploiter rather than what you want it to be, a successful investment.

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