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Gamification: Impact on learning and development with special reference to Deloitte Leadership Academy

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Abstract

The main objective of this article is to review contemporary perspectives on the gamification of business and to discover the implication that it has on learning and development. The author also analyse the precognitions that allowed gamification to attract mainstream attention, the diversity of understanding about the phenomenon and the possible relations between usage of gamified content and enhanced human resource productivity. The paper primarily concentrates on the hypothetical aspects of the application of gamification in various sectors of economy, as well as on the best practices of application of gaming methods in the area of learning and development. The study shares case study of Deloitte where gamification in learning and development has been successfully implemented. It is also suggested that by including gamification in multiple aspects of human resource management, the level of employee engagement can be enhanced.

Key words: Gamification, Learning and Development, Gameful Design, Gaming mechanics.

Introduction

The sustained interest to the gaming techniques in the theory and in the practice of management is determined by their wide opportunities in the processes of research and solution of specific social and economic problems of an organisation, increase of the level of its competitiveness, training and development of staff, in self-organisation. Gabe Zichermann and Joselin Linder suggested that actual and potential consumers of goods and services apart from the employees of the organisation should be engaged in business processes while

playing. Moreover, A. Popov believes that one cannot imagine the work of a modern marketing manager without using various games in order to attract buyers. With this regard, Michael Hall emphasises the psychotherapeutic methods – neuro-linguistic programming, therapy of behaviour and emotions, reality therapy and logo therapy to improve business performance efficiency. Gamification is considered as a tool for increasing labour productivity, and affects the efficiency of HR and working time usage by an enterprise. The labour productivity growth means the saving of materialized and direct labour, and is one of the most important factors of productivity enhancement. Therefore, the application of gamification must be focused, first of all, on the productivity enhancement through the labour productivity growth. In the background of organisation of employment activities, gamification is most extensively used by the HR managers and line managers of various levels.

Gamification

Gamification is the use of game-play mechanics for non-game applications. This widely accepted definition clearly shows the distinction between “serious game” (the design of full-fledged game for non-entertainment purposes) from “gamified” applications that incorporate some (and not all) of the game design elements. Experts have defined game mechanics as rule driven systems that enable and inspire a user to discover and study the properties of their space through the usage of feedback instruments. Other definitions evidently highlight gamification’s role in creating experiences. For example, Fullerton et al. (2004) describe the process of designing games as envisioning what kind of an interactive experience a game should create, and proceeds to create the necessary designs in the form of rules and procedures.

Many researchers (Hamari, 2013; Shneiderman, 2004) defined gamification as a process of augmenting services with (inspiration) affordances in order to raise gameful experiences and further behavioural outcomes. Many researchers stressed that gamification invokes the same psychological experiences as games (generally) do. Even though, the definitions differ in importance, they all consists both a systemic element defining how the game is constructed (e.g. the use of game mechanisms) and an experiential element describing the human involvement and outcomes within the game. According to this conceptualization, the gamification concept and aims are effectively implemented when the following chain of effects are achieved (Pavlus 2010): game mechanics are used for triggering motivational

affordances and creating psychological outcomes to the users, which in turn lead to behavioural outcomes. This sequence of gamification implication is considered as the holistic gamification engagement (Reeves & Read, 2009) or as the ‘gamification engagement flow’ (Xu 2011).

Gamification takes the crux of games and employs these to a series of real-world processes inside a firm, including learning & development. The technology research firm Gartner, Inc. forecasts that gamification will be employed in 25 percent of restructured business processes by 2015 and this will grow to more than a \$2.9 billion business by 2016. They also prophesied that three fourth of top corporates in the world will be managing at least one “gamified” application or system by 2014.

Gamification in Learning and Development

Gamification is all about employing game-design thinking to non-game applications, and is increasing in acceptance in the learning and development sphere. The objective of gamification in learning and development is to encourage both enjoyment and engagement through the learning experience by capturing the attention of learners and motivating them to continue learning. Apart from that, the new technologies and games on the rise in the learning and development space, give the multi-generational workforce instant feedback.

Gamification is also taking off in education (Domínguez, et al., 2013), due to the conviction that it supports and motivates students, and can thus lead to enhanced learning processes and outcomes (Kapp, 2012). Gamification’s impact on student motivation and performance is an important topic, as there has been increased interest in gamification (Hanus & Fox, 2015) at the college level. Gamification done well provides opportunities for the learner to cooperate and connect with others and solve problems as well as receive instant feedback on performance. Like good game-design, the capacity to provide progressively challenging ‘levels’ (rather than simply gaining points with no true end in sight), is how gamification will alter the way firms apply technology to transform learning & development.

However, despite the huge potential gamification can have on corporate learning & development, it cannot be seen as the future principal mode of learning delivery. Gamification, like any substitute learning channel (eg. eLearning or blended learning), is not always the most suitable nor effective strategy to encourage every learner in every learning situation.

Gamification in Deloitte Leadership Academy

Getting employees involved with training can be a challenging task for many organizations. According to James Sanders, Manager of Innovation at Deloitte Consulting, training is simply not the first thing people think of doing when they have some free time irrespective of how easy is it to access or how brilliant the learning programs are. If given a choice between watching ESPN or doing training on a typical Sunday Morning, most people will opt for the former. By proper utilization of gamification principles, Deloitte has witnessed use of its Deloitte Leadership Academy (DLA) training program increase. It was found that participants, who spend more amounts of time on the site and finishing programs in higher numbers, show almost addictive behaviour. Since the integration of gamification in to Deloitte Leadership Academy, there has been a 37 percent increase in the number of users returning to the site each week.

Deloitte Leadership Academy is an online program for training its own employees as well as its customers. Deloitte Leadership Academy found that by integrating missions, badges, and leaderboards into a user-friendly platform alongside video lectures, in-depth courses, tests and quizzes, engagement levels of users have enhanced and they are more likely to finish the online training programs. The Academy has had over 21,000 executive users since its inception in 2008.

Deloitte Leadership Academy employs content from some elite management organizations such as Harvard Business Publishing, Stanford Graduate School of Business and Melbourne Business School. The content on the site can be categorised into three: videos, in-depth content, and self-assessments like tests and quizzes. Some of the content are in interactive formats while others are PDFs, but all offer a segment for learners to communicate with each other or to leave questions or comments. To facilitate group cohesion of the community, each learner's home screen gets news feed updates from the users they follow. They can then relate with each other's status updates, in an arrangement similar to that on Facebook.

Before starting the online learning programs, learners must finish their first mission, dubbed the on-boarding mission. They do this by viewing a 3-minute video, which describes how to use the website, and in the process of seeing the video, they are taught how to customize the site to their personal learning priorities. Upon successful completion of the on-boarding mission, learners get a badge and then have the choice to link to their individual networks on

LinkedIn and Twitter so they can effortlessly upload a profile and photo. This level of customization is essential, because it results in a higher level of engagement.

As learners finish each online learning program, they get a badge to mark their accomplishment. Most of those badges are gained upon completion of straightforward proficiencies, but some are ‘secret’ badges, labelled “Snowflake” badges. These are created to surprise and delight learners and are unlocked only by attaining certain objectives. For instance, if all individuals of one department view the same video during the same week, they all get a snowflake badge. The average user completes adequate online learning programs to gain three badges.

Deloitte Leadership Academy’s design of its leader board is also informative. Instead of exhibiting one customary list of the top ten scorers overall, each common “level” of user has its own top-ten leaderboard, so that each user’s race for top-ten is restricted to other users on that same level. That board rearranges every week. Conventional leader boards are, in fact, counter-productive. The same regular top users, with very high scores, turn off everyone who recognizes they have no chance of beating them. But at Deloitte Leadership Academy, learners have a new chance to be the best learner on the site every week. This weekly reset also means that executives won’t be disheartened from using the site just because they missed a few weeks — and fell behind in scores — while on vacation or traveling for work.

Getting Started: Using Gamification for Learning & Development

Executives interested in applying gamification as a business improvement initiative should start asking the following business-related questions:

- What are your business objectives? First of all, you should clearly define the business problem that gamification is trying to address and find out whether gamification can contribute to solving this problem. Rollings and Adams (2003) define a game as “a form of participatory, or interactive, entertainment” and contrast this with passive activities, such as watching television or reading. As learning is a participatory process, it follows that there could be greater benefits from incorporating games concepts with learning and development than with these other, passive activities. Start by benchmarking what your peers in similar firms are doing with gamification and find out what works and what does not work. For instance, do you want to include gamification for learning to ensure that more learners finish their certifications or

compliance programs? Or are you trying to be attractive to a rising segment of Millennials who express a desire for learning to be fun, engaging and highly collaborative?

- Who is your audience? Will this be concentrating on internal employees or external stakeholders such as dealers or distributors? Do you want to design rigid missions or create more open experiences? The key lies in viewing the game from the learner's perspective. Games have been shown to be effective in promoting learning (de Freitas, 2006; Liu et al., 2014; Moreno, 2012) and are more motivational for learners than non-gaming teaching methods (Barab et al., 2005; Batson & Feinberg, 2006). No one wants to permanently be at the bottom of a leaderboard. Instead, prove to learners how they can progress toward higher levels of mastery. The objective is not to "game" or manipulate target audiences, but rather to blend behavioral science with social technologies to enhance collaboration and engagement levels among your users.
- How will you track success? Have a plan in place for evaluating the efficacy of your gamification efforts. Apart from capturing data, you need to analyze it as well. Some measures to think about consist of level of engagement among learners, number of regular users on the site, learning completion rates, satisfaction rates and the association between engagement and achievement levels on the site and discrete promotions, and other external career progressions among your users.

Conclusion

Gamification of business processes is a contemporary tool for stimulating employee's creative potential and ensures efficient use of human resources. Gamification practices adopted to support learning processes are a rapidly growing phenomenon. Enhancement of motivation and engagement in learning tasks is the main driver for adoption of gamification techniques, i.e. to make learning more attractive, captivating and, ultimately, effective. But researches of the business environment have shown that the idea of gamification has not attracted enough attention of managers and senior level executives. To study and implement it, organizations should explore on how to use gaming techniques to improve the learning activities of organisations based on gamification.

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