GAMIFICATION: TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING?

DIGITAL SHOREDITCH

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INTRODUCTION

• THIS TALK UNDERTAKES A SIMPLE THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

• SUPPOSE GAMIFICATION TAKES OFF AND TWO YEARS FROM NOW IT’S UBIQUITOUS

• WILL IT BE UBIQUITOUS FIVE YEARS LATER?

• WE KNOW IT CAN WORK FOR INDIVIDUAL CASES
  – SCIENTOLOGY SUCCESSFULLY GAMIFIED RELIGION

• BUT CAN IT WORK ACROSS THE BOARD IN A SUSTAINABLE FASHION?
• **Gamification is a term several decades old**
  - **Used** to mean “turning something not a game into a game”
  - **Now** seems to mean “turning a game into something not a game”

• **Formally, it’s putting game design patterns to non-game use**
  - Implies you can gamify in different ways
  - It doesn’t **have** to be just pointsification
    • Typically it **is**, though, because it’s not undertaken by game designers...
Serious Games

- Gamification differs from “Serious Games”:
  - Serious games want a **Game** at the end of it
  - Gamification doesn’t

- Most gamification **can’t** lead to a game

- Games are **play** you can **lose** at

- Gamified activities are **not** play and you **can’t** lose at them

- Interestingly, serious games **started out** using simplified gamification techniques but **abandoned** them because they didn’t deliver
Rewards

- A key gamification aspect is **Rewards**

- **Intrinsic** rewards are inherent to an activity itself
  - *eg.* formulating a **cunning plan** in chess
  - Play is **itself** ultimately an intrinsic reward

- **Extrinsic** rewards are acquired for doing an activity
  - *eg.* phat lewt

- Gamification **exclusively** uses **extrinsic** rewards
• In games, extrinsic rewards can be used for a number of things:
  - To make implicit progress explicit
    • XPs make your character improve as you improve
  - To breadcrumb players through directionless content
    • Yes, you were supposed to kill those guys
  - To open up new content or shortcut played-through content
    • With this stone you can teleport to the city of gold
  - To indicate the end of a narrative cycle
    • That guy you killed was the boss of this dungeon wing
  - To heighten the response from an intrinsic reward
    • Not only was that fun, you get this!
DIFFERENCE

• GAMES TEND TO OFFER EXTRINSIC REWARDS FOR ACTIVITIES THE PLAYER ALREADY FINDS FUN

• IN GAMIFICATION, RECEIPT OF THE REWARD IS ITSELF THE FUN
  – THIS MEANS THE REWARDS DO ACTUALLY HAVE TO BE WORTH RECEIVING!

• THEY CAN BE INTRINSICALLY VALUABLE
  – A FUN, JAUNTY VICTORY TUNE

• OR EXTRINSICALLY VALUABLE
  – POINTS
• **Gamification is basically bribery**
  - You reward someone for doing something that you want them to do

• **If the reward isn’t valuable, it’s not a reward**

• **Warning: Points that you can’t turn into goods or services are not valuable!**

• **This will gradually dawn on people in receipt of those points**

• **Once people recognise the pattern from their past experiences, you’re stuffed**
• If receipt of extrinsic rewards is taken for granted, it can undermine intrinsic rewards
  – Google “overjustification effect”
• Leads to a disassociation with the content
  – WoW’s torture quest
• Yet rewards don’t have to be regular
• Irregularity can add more gameplay without implying a game
A Dark Path

- Regularity: “Pull this handle **20 times and we’ll give you £1**”
  - Employment, Vanilla Gamification

- Irregularity: “Pull this handle and there’s a **5% chance of winning £1**”
  - Gambling, Advanced Gamification

- This is starting to look like a variable ratio reinforcement schedule
  - Operant Conditioning
  - Very interesting if you have stuff to sell!
• Game designers studiously **avoid** operant conditioning (for extrinsic rewards)
  - It's **not fun**
    • Fun is **intrinsic**, not extrinsic
  - It's an admission of **failure**
    • It means the gameplay is too **weak** on its own
  - It's only usable on **naive** players
    • Once they've **learned** the pattern, they **avoid** it
  - It's **immoral**
    • It can lead to **psychological** problems for some people
• **What does this mean for gamifiers?**
  - They don’t **expect** it to be fun **anyway**
  - They readily **acknowledge** that their content isn’t compelling
    • It’s precisely **why** they’re gamifying it!
  - They need to **realise** that this is a **bubble** that will eventually **burst**
  - They should expect to be **sued** if they **deliberately** try to **addict** people
• They’re not **game designers**...
• **MY PLAYER TYPES THEORY IS INVOKED A LOT FOR GAMIFICATION**

• **PEOPLE PLAY [VIRTUAL WORLDS] FOR DIFFERENT REASONS**
  - Achievers, explorers, socialisers, killers
  - Create **CONTENT FOR ALL FOUR TYPES**

• **GAMIFICATION PROBLEM: REWARDS HAVE TO BE APPROPRIATE FOR THE PLAYER TYPES**

• **POINTS, LEVELS, BADGES, LEADERBOARDS ETC. ONLY APPEAL TO ACHIEVERS!**
Furthermore

• Socialisers don’t want achievement rewards, they want rewards that let them socialise better – which you should give them intrinsically from the start anyway.

• Also, players change type over time – the 8-type model explains how this happens.

• Players don’t stay as achievers or whatever forever – they move on.
RESULT

• **IF TOO MUCH GAMIFICATION GOES ON:**
  - People will realise that **WORTHLESS EXTRINSIC REWARDS ARE WORTHLESS**
    • “YAY. ANOTHER BADGE. WHOOPPEE”.
  - People will eventually **RECOGNISE AND AVOID EXTRINSIC OPERANT CONDITIONING TROPSES**
    • “I’M NOT PLAYING THIS, IT’S JUST LIKE THAT”
  - People will **MOVE ON FROM GAMIFICATION – IF THEY WERE EVER INTO IT IN THE FIRST PLACE**
    • “DO I REALLY CARE IF I LOSE THE MAYORSHIP OF MY LOCAL STARBUCKS?”
CONCLUSION

• **Gamification will **NOT** **be ubiquitous after five years**
  
  – The more it **happens**, the less **effective** it becomes

• **Good news for game designers:**
  
  – Non-gamers will have been **trained** and **may** want to play some actual games

• **Also ok news for gamifiers**
  
  – **Before** this happens, there’s **pots** of money to be made!