

Engaging Participants Through Gamification

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Introduction

Concerned with balancing the health and productivity of their people and the bottom line of their organization, employers have tried a range of health improvement incentives, programs and communication tactics. The problem is, whether they're at the workplace or at home, employees are facing more decisions and being bombarded by more messages than ever before. But there is a time-tested approach that can help cut through the clutter and enhance employers' health improvement efforts: Play.

There is growing evidence that gamification, or the use of game mechanics and player-centric design to motivate and engage people, can help drive healthier choices and healthy behaviors in people that have tuned out traditional messaging. However, getting to that healthier bottom line requires taking some time to understand gamification—why it applies, how it works and who's playing.

Everyone's a Gamer

Even if they've never picked up a video game controller, kicked a ball, declared "check mate!," or flung an angry bird, nearly every employee in most organizations is a gamer. People love to play, even when they don't know they're playing.

Play is and always has been an essential trait of evolutionary success and one of the strongest drivers of human behavior. It's part of what people seek and what they do. Employees are not just ready for games, they're already looking for them. The proof lies in some of the latest numbers on gaming in the U.S.:

- There are over 100 million active gamers¹. This includes video games, online and computer games, social media games and gaming apps. That is roughly 1/3 of the U.S. population.
- 29% of gamers are over the age of 50. In fact, the average gamer is now a 37 year-old woman².
- There are over 215 million hours spent gaming every day³. That is about 41 minutes of gaming per person, per day in the U.S. alone.

It's time to let employees play with their health and wellness.

Letting Games Do the Work

Gamification describes the broad application of game mechanics to non-game environments to motivate people and drive specific behaviors. It translates people's love for play and games into a new approach to solving behavior-based problems while generating predictable, measureable results. While gamification may lead to a mobile app or video game with entertaining game play, most uses of game mechanics and game theory don't immediately look or feel like games at all.

¹ Enterprise Gamification Workshop. San Francisco, CA, Wanda Meloni

² PSFK, P. et al. (2011). The future of gaming (White paper). PSFK, New York, NY: online report.

³ PSFK, P. et al. (2011). The future of gaming (White paper). PSFK, New York, NY: online report.

Customer loyalty programs, for example, rely heavily on game mechanics to engage people in accumulating rewards (and therefore spending more with a particular brand). And lately, Fortune 1000 companies like Nike, Delta, Cisco, P&G, NBC, and Dell are all getting in on the fun and applying gamification in different ways to help improve employee productivity, health and training.

- The software engineering firm NextJump saw employee participation in regular weekly exercise increase from 5% to 80% in 2 years⁴.
- Google's gamification of its travel expense process translated into 100% compliance within six months of its launch⁵.
- Blue Cross Blue Shield saw 80% of employees participate in at least one of its gamified wellvolution programs, which translated into a 50% drop in smoking and a similar increase in regular physical activity. Additionally, the incidence of hypertension has fallen by two-thirds, and disability claims are down among participating workers⁶.

And this is just the beginning.

What's Your Game?

Just as there isn't one type of organization, there isn't one do-it-all use of gamification. There are three general types of design, motivational design, serious games and fun systems.

Motivational Design

A gamification type that emphasizes function, not fun. Motivational design uses game design in stealthy or unconscious ways to simplify, re-enforce and drive behaviors. In motivational design, users are not aware that they are playing a game. Examples of motivational design include programs like Delta's SkymilesSM, WeightWatchersTM or eHarmonySM.

Serious Games

A gamification type where function and fun are present in equal parts. Serious games augment training, education or behavior change with game design, by using game design in transparent and obviously motivated ways. In other words, users are completely aware that the program is a game with a specific result or business objective driving it. Examples of serious games include Rosetta StoneSM, The Biggest LoserTM or Wii FitTM.

Fun Systems

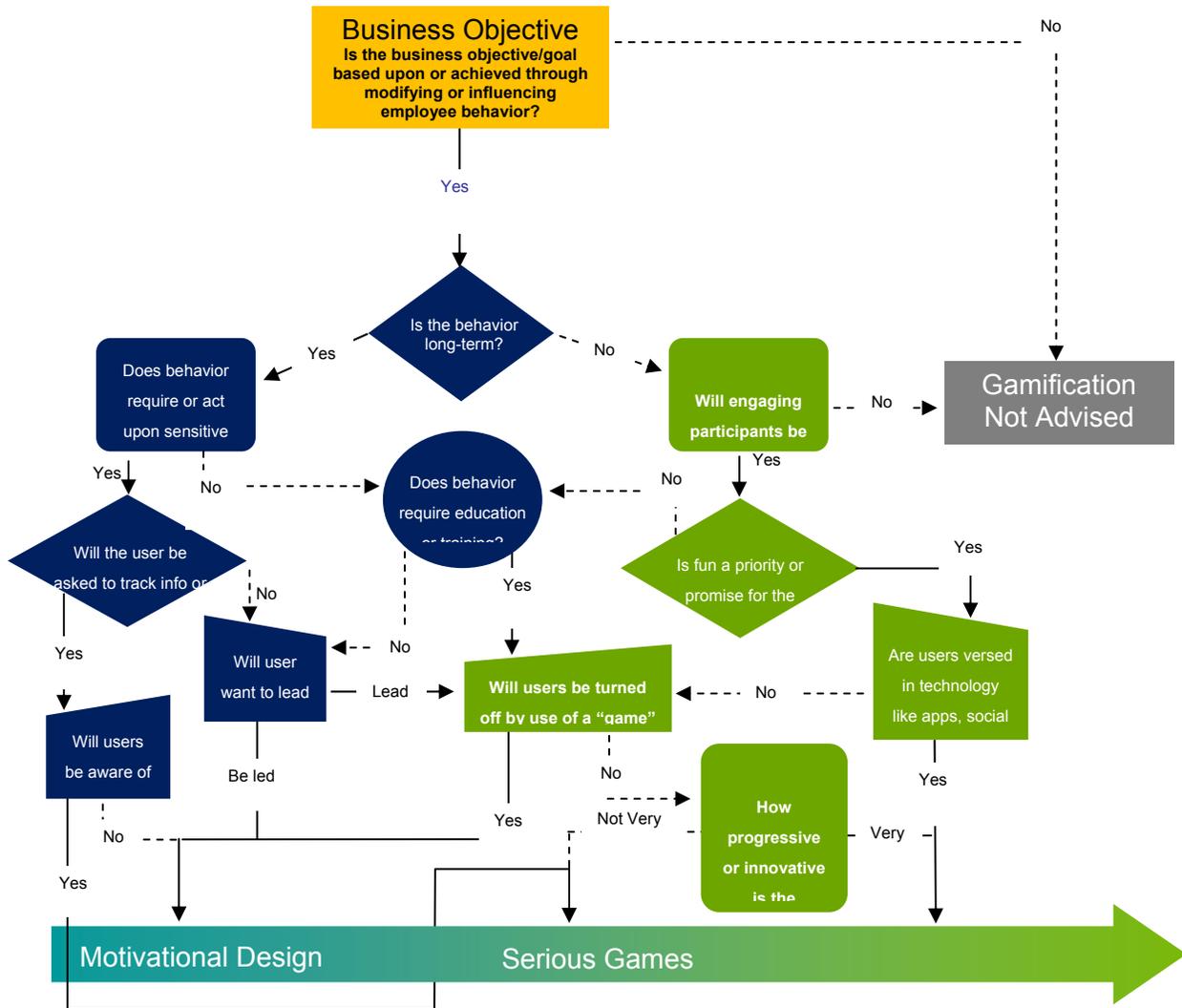
A gamification type that emphasizes fun, not function. Fun systems use the entertainment value of the experience to drive engagement and participation. Users are aware that they are playing a game, but may or may not be aware that there are business objectives at work as well. Examples of fun systems include Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego and Zombies Run. Less tech-based examples of fun systems might include using fantasy baseball to teach statistics or using cooking or baking to teach chemistry.

⁴ Enterprise Gamification of Workshop, June 21, 2012, San Francisco, CA, Charlie Kim

⁵ Enterprise Gamification Workshop, June 19, 2012, San Francisco, CA, Mario Herger

⁶ Enterprise Gamification Workshop, June 19, 2012, San Francisco, CA, Mario Herger

Employers wondering if gamification is right for their organization may consider the following decision tree. Not only will it help determine if gamification is the best play, but it will also help identify which type of gamification best suits the business objectives and culture.



Note: If traditional games like board games, video games, and sports were shown on the above spectrum, they would appear to the far right. They weren't included here because games like those are intended as diversions and make no conscious effort to reach business objectives. However, if those games were repurposed and adapted to a company's business objectives, they could have a positive impact.



Ready to Get in the Game?

Employees are primed and ready to achieve great things through the power of play. Using gamification to align your business objectives with your employees' wants and needs make it an agile and elegant solution to any behavior-based health or wellness problem. So the only question left is, are you ready to get in the game?

Aon Hewitt can help you achieve better results by designing better experiences for your employees. If you're ready to optimize your work with play, contact Aon Hewitt to learn more about how gamification can work for you.



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