

Let me expand on this.

A discussion started on twitter when I mentioned in passing to a couple of gamification people, that really gamification is often a benign form of manipulation. It became an interesting chat, fast. I suppose I expected that! However, when you look at the definition of manipulation in the Oxford English Dictionary you get these two definitions

1. handle or control (a tool, mechanism, information, etc.) in a skilful manner
2. control or influence (a person or situation) cleverly or unscrupulously

Of course, we take notice of the second normally - focusing on the more negative connotations, but it is the first that I am interested in. As gamification people, we understand behaviour and how to use [game mechanics](#) and the like to influence this behaviour. We use this information to set up systems that promote certain actions. Sometimes this is for the benefit of the end user, other times it may be for the interest of the company (or brand or whatever). Either way, it is done in a way that is meant to [engage](#) the end user (god forbid let them have a little fun as well).

We control the system, to control the behaviour of the users in a skilful manner.

This sounds a lot like the definition of manipulation...

The argument is that games don't need to manipulate you for you to play them. Is that true though? I find that a good games designer is a master of controlling how I feel whilst I play a game. When I laugh, when I cry, when I feel excited or scared. As skilled as a surgeon is at manipulating a scalpel, they can manipulate every emotion precisely by controlling the system within which I am playing. This is what makes the game enjoyable, fun maybe ☐

This is not malicious or unscrupulous. It is skilful and wonderful for the player.

Things that we are applying gamification to are not generally enjoyable. We use game mechanics and more to guide the user or influence them. Sometimes this is done to make the task fun, or just to help make it less of a grind to do. Other times it is to try and create a predictable outcome to something. Of course there are many other uses, but you get the idea. Again, this is all done in a skilful way, controlling the environment that our users are inhabiting. This is not done (I hope) with a malicious intent. When it is done with underhanded intentions, it will fail monumentally. Using your users against their will, will kill off your attempts almost instantly.

So as I say, personally I feel that gamification is a benign form of manipulation - and that is

Is Gamification a benign form of manipulation and does it matter?

not a bad thing or a slight against it!

I really want to hear your thoughts!!!!

Please wait...