

Recently I have been thinking about purpose or meaning a lot. It's one of the four motivators from [RAMP](#) that seems to be the hard to explain and achieve.

When I first started looking into gamification, people used to talk about Epic Meaning when speaking of [game mechanics](#) (incorrectly, but that is another story). This is the feeling of being part of something greater. An example I often use is Wikipedia. People contribute to that, freely, because many of them like to feel that they are contributing to something that is larger than themselves and has great meaning to others. So for Wikipedia contributors that is their purpose - "epic meaning".

Another example of purpose could be better described as altruism (actually so can the Wikipedia example, but bear with me). This is described as "The belief in or practice of disinterested and selfless concern for the well-being of others." In other words, helping others with no benefit to yourself. Of course, there is benefit to the individual concerned, a warm fuzzy feeling that they have helped someone else - this is a strong motivator for the Philanthropist type. A good example of this comes with Q&A sites, such as Quora. People answer questions for a number of reasons, the most common because they like the feeling of helping others. There are other reasons, points, status etc.

However, the more I think about it, the more I have realised that at times it can mean much simpler things.

Far too often people are expected to do things, just because they are. You go to work and do your job, because that is what you are paid to do. What many people are missing is a purpose - a reason WHY the work has to be done. You could describe this as narrative. Some places may have a set of values, for some this could be the reason they need - I am proud to work here because we have these values and I believe in them. For others it may be that the little bit of work they are doing will enable the company to save money or will help another person finish their work.

Think about games, most of them have some kind of story to drive the game. Take Mario. If you remove the story, you have some fat plumber waging a one-man war on turtles - killing any that stand in his way and collecting money as he goes. Along the way, he invades peoples castles and eventually kidnaps a princess from one and takes her away. His actions have no meaning. Put back the story, give the character and settings some context and he is a actually a hero trying to save princess peach from the evil Bowser.

We need to move away from the idea of people just doing things because they fear the consequences of not doing them, we need to re-enforce the bigger picture. They need to

know what they are contributing and how it benefits everyone else. Give them a reason why, beyond pure financial reward and fear.

If you want to see an example of the importance of context, try my new mini game [Context](#)

Check out my [presentation from Gamification World Congress](#) to see a little more.

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