

On April the 4th, Brian Burke, via his blog announced that Gartner had changed its definition of gamification. It would be;

“the use of [game mechanics](#) and experience design to digitally engage and motivate people to achieve their goals”

http://blogs.gartner.com/brian_burke/2014/04/04/gartner-redefines-gamification/

At first I chuckled. This was very similar to the definition I use in my book;

“the application of gaming metaphors to real life tasks to influence behaviour, improve [motivation](#) and enhance [engagement](#).”

However, the smile faded as I reread it. I could forgive the misguided use of the phrase [Game Mechanics](#). I have come to terms with the fact this will always be misused by certain sectors of gamification, but it was the word *digital* that suddenly struck me and made me read it a third time.

As I read the reasons behind the definition, my heart sank.

First was the game mechanics explanation.

Game mechanics describes the use of elements such as points, badges and leaderboards that are common to many games.

This is a set of examples that most of us in [gamification](#) are trying to stop putting in the forefront of people's minds. Ignoring the fact they are feedback mechanics, not game mechanics, they are the lowest example of [gamification](#) implementations.

The next bit that tipped me over the edge was talk of [gamification](#) being a way to **digitally engage**, explaining that [gamification](#) is about engaging people with devices such as smart phones - not other people.

This is where it all fell apart for me. When challenged on why he would choose to limit his definition of gamification to just digital, Brian came back with;

The reason we limit gamification to digital is because it answers the question, 'why is gamification a trend?' Without including 'digital', there's nothing new about gamification.

This seems to miss the entire point. First, a definition should not be answering a question no one has asked - why something is a trend, it should tell you what it is. Gamification is not a trend, it's use has begun to trend, but gamification is a tool, a methodology, a set of ideas and ways of thinking that help is to solve various problems. It is not a technology. This definition states that if you use game ideas in a non digital way - it isn't gamification.

Also, why does gamification have to be new? It isn't. The use of digital in gamification is new and has accelerated it's development and made certain applications of it very popular.

It is like saying that games are nothing new and thinking that is a problem. It is like saying that games only become relevant when they went digital.

I feel for Brian. He seems like a great guy and I can't wait to meet him at GWC. However, he has this out there now and it is in his book and he will have to defend it.

I also feel angry though, as this could set us back a few years in certain circles. The one thing we had pretty much all agreed on is what gamification basically is. Gartner has now stated that gamification is nothing more than technology and without technology, it is nothing.

Whilst we know that is nonsense, the readers of Gartner don't. They will see this and start asking if gamification is about points and badges - all over again. This definition distils gamification down to everything we have been fighting to put behind us for the last 3 years.

Read Brian's post. Then read the comments of a few industry voices and experts and see what you think.