Often when people talk about gamification, they speak about adding fun to everyday work related tasks. The whole Mary Poppins "A Spoonful of Sugar" analogy pops up regularly. Anyone who has stuck with this blog for a while will know exactly how I feel about her...

The trouble with fun is how you define it. The Oxford dictionary (thanks Google), goes with

> Enjoyment, amusement, or light-hearted pleasure: *the children were having fun in the play area*

Now, I've said this before, but it is worth saying again – fun is subjective. What you find fun, I may not. Consider the following event.

Bill goes and buys a ball. When he gets home he asks his sister, Jill, if she would like to play with him. He wants to play catch, he finds catch loads of fun. The problem is, Jill doesn't like playing catch. She prefers playing football- a game that Bill can't stand.

Both siblings have totally different views of what fun is, even though they are both considering playing with the same ball.

Now the problem facing Bill and Jill is how they can both enjoy playing with the same ball, even though they find different things fun. They have to design a new game that incorporates bits of fun for both of them. They create Kick 'n' Katch. Bill throws the ball to Jill, who then kicks it back to him to catch. It takes some time, but through iteration and agreements, they end up with a game that both find fun.

In this example they children have to design a system that incorporates elements they both find enjoyable. It takes time and cooperation – and that is just for two people.

Now consider a large enterprise, tens of thousands of people, each of whom may find fun in different things. How do you cater for all of them?

You could survey the populace and try and figure out what the most common "fun" things are for them. Then at least you can try to design a system that caters for the majority. You could just decide what you think is fun and build that (a common error sadly). You could take sample groups and brainstorm for a few days and try and work out what the general consensus is and work with that.

All of these are viable options, to a lesser or greater degree. There is another option to

consider though. Forget fun!

Gamification does not have to be about fun. It is about using elements and lessons from games in places that are not generally considered games. If you can understand your users and the core problem, you can use these elements and lessons to design a system that solves the issue you are dealing with in a way that is engaging and interesting, compared to what there may have been before. With a great design, good use of game elements, narrative, reward structures etc, it is possible that the users will find and even create the fun themselves.

It is easy to lose sight of the core purpose of a system when you focus on fun. The focus should be a well designed solution to the problem at hand – with luck, the fun will follow! Keep fun in the function!

Please wait...