

Ok, so here we are again, looking at the definition of gamification. I have defined it a few times, as have many others. However, this time I am approaching it from a slightly different angle.

Having just been at Gamification Europe, I have realised that my militant stand on needing a definition for gamification is right, but maybe my personal definition is a bit too flaky and the official definitions are a bit too limiting.

Depending on where you look, the generally accepted definition goes along the lines of

The use of game design principles and game elements in non-game contexts

This very specifically precludes the use of actual games as a part of pure gamification. A stance that I still hold onto. As I explained recently, it is important to be able to separate different practices to be able to understand where specialisms may lie. Game design is focused on making fun experiences, where gamification is focused on specific objectives.

However, the more I look at the industry and the more I listen to other experts in the field (and the more I do in the field), the more I realise that we are doing far more than just using game elements and game design principles. So, should we be looking to come up with a definition that practitioners all feel encompasses what it is we do, in a way clients can understand, without defaulting to “it’s a bit like making games, but without making a game...”? All of us using our own versions confuses the general public - those who are actually paying for this stuff!!

For instance, where does play stand in the official definition? What are game elements? What is a non-game context? I often hear and use “game-like” as part of the definition. However, that is not always true. A dashboard can be designed in a way that uses lessons from games but is not game like in the slightest. Nudges, feedback, goal setting etc. don’t create a game-like experience, but can all be seen in games.

When you look at what we are doing, we are using games (we are, we know we are, but we don’t want to lump them into gamification as they are [serious games](#)), behavioural psychology, game design, [game mechanics](#), dynamics, aesthetics, play and probably a lot more besides.

So does a definition need to include all of that? Sticking to our “not building games” mantra provides some limits to our definition. With that in mind, I open the conversation with the

following.

## A starter for 10

### **The use of game design, game elements and play for non-entertainment purposes**

- Game design is the core of what we are doing most of the time. Working out what goes where and importantly **why** it goes there.
- Game elements are those parts or lessons from games that we use in our designs. Goal setting, feedback, rewards, narratives, leaderboards, social interactions etc. These are often considered mechanics and dynamics (as well as aesthetics) but can include more.
- Play is something I am seeing more and more in good gamification, where designers are allowing for some freedom to explore and experiment outside of the “stricter” structural rules of the system. It is hugely important to include this as we move forward with gamification design.
- Non-Entertainment purposes rather than non-game contexts. This may cause some issues as *strictly* speaking this could include real games as it does not explicitly exclude them! However, what I am trying to get at is that gamification is concerned with achieving defined objectives, where entertainment-based products are more focused on fun being the objective.

What do you think? I want to hear what other experts in the field are using and how we might be able to create a working definition that we all feel covers what it is we are doing in the real world now!

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