

I recently read about a large online outlet who had introduced “Gamification” into the workforce. The idea was that by doing activities that the company felt were correct and efficient, the employee would earn points. Those points in some way affected the “games” they had created.

On the face of it, that sounds ok. However, when you dig down to the [motivations](#) of the company and really start to think about what it means - it starts to sound much less enjoyable for the workers.

The first thing to consider is that to create this kind of experience, you have to track an awful lot of things to create a scoring system. How long it takes an employee to pick an item, how long it takes them to pack an item, how many items they pick and pack in an hour etc.

Second is that that data then becomes very public as it enters into things like leaderboards. This creates competition, where none had existed - not always a good thing. Suddenly just doing your job is not enough, you have to be doing it better than everyone else - but only one person can be the best, so to be better than them you have to find ways to do more. That leads to decisions like “Do I need to eat? Do I really need the toilet? Does this backache really need to be worried about?”

When you consider those two things together, you have a system that is monitoring every action and then reporting on it in a way that potentially everyone can see. It creates an environment where people start to feel that they are being watched - Big Brother is everywhere. It doesn't matter if you try to make it look like a game, control is control! You no longer have a psychologically safe work environment.

Making it feel game-like may soften that initially, but games are only fun for so long, especially if you are forced to play them! Once people start to wise up to the level of monitoring and control but don't feel that they are getting much in return, the system becomes one of fear. Fear of underperforming compared to others, fear of being watched all the time, fear of mistakes and so on. Hence the title “The Fearification of Fun”. This type of system takes something that should be fun and makes it a symbol of fear.

Consider [ethics](#) for a moment. When we look at [ethics in gamification](#) we are looking for experiences that benefit all parties. If these games lead to something beneficial other than “if you underperform you are fired” that would be one thing. If they did not create unnecessary competition and were there to create a feedback system for the employees to be better, to master something, then fine. But they don't seem to be. The only winner is the

company!

It's all a bit 1984 for my liking.

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