



What Is the Opposite of Engagement?

Description

In gamification, we talk about engagement a lot! After all, the whole point of gamification is to engage people and get them to do more of something!

But what is the opposite of engagement and why is it important to know this?

Firstly, let's get our definition of engagement. I like to use the one offered by Macey and Schneider in 2008, which whilst focused on employee engagement, I think fits generally for many gamification purposes.

Employee engagement is “a desirable condition that has an organizational purpose and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy”. In other words, engagement is when employees are fully invested in their work and feel a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

It would be easy to say that the opposite of engagement is disengagement and quote it as

“An undesirable condition that has an organizational lack of purpose and connotes lack of involvement commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy.”

Macey and Schneider in 2008

However, I feel that is a little lazy and unhelpful!

If that is the case though, what is the opposite of engagement here? I like to break it into two different parts; Burnout and Alienation. Let's dig in.

Burnout

The first part of this is Burnout. This was first defined by Herbert J. Freudenberger in 1975 as

Physical, emotional, or mental exhaustion accompanied by decreased motivation, lowered performance, and negative attitudes toward oneself and others.

People who experience burnout may feel detached from their work, their colleagues, and their clients, and may have difficulty coping with the stress and demands of their job. Burnout can have negative consequences for both personal and professional well-being, such as reduced performance, increased absenteeism, lower satisfaction, and a higher risk of depression and anxiety.

Alienation

The second part is Alienation. This was given a good definition by Melvin Seeman in 1959 who states that alienation is identified by five alternative meanings:

powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement

Powerlessness refers to the lack of control or influence over one's life or circumstances.

Meaninglessness refers to the inability to comprehend or find significance in one's actions or goals.

Normlessness refers to the loss of moral guidance or social norms that regulate one's behavior.

Isolation refers to the separation or detachment from one's community or group. Self-estrangement refers to the alienation from one's own feelings, thoughts, or identity.

As you can see, neither of these looks great.

Bringing these together

If we wanted to tie these together, we could create a broad statement that the opposite of engagement can be Burnout and/or Alienation.

People who are suffering from this could experience any of the following

- Emotional exhaustion: feeling drained and emotionally depleted
- Depersonalization: feeling detached and cynical towards work and colleagues
- Reduced personal accomplishment: feeling a lack of achievement and competence in one's work
- Chronic physical and emotional fatigue: feeling constantly tired and worn out
- Reduced productivity and effectiveness: experiencing a decline in work performance
- Powerlessness: feeling a lack of control over one's work and decisions
- Meaninglessness: feeling that one's work lacks purpose or significance
- Normlessness: feeling disconnected from the values and norms of the organization
- Isolation: feeling socially isolated from colleagues and the organization
- Self-estrangement: feeling disconnected from one's own desires and needs

Let us see if we can simplify that a little, by looking at the differences and similarities between alienation and burnout

– Burnout is when you feel exhausted, stressed, or overwhelmed by your work or life demands. You may lose interest or motivation in what you do, and feel like you can't cope anymore. Burnout is more

emotional and behavioral, meaning it affects how you feel and act.

– Alienation is when you feel detached, disconnected, or indifferent to your work or life. You may feel like you don't belong or fit in, and that your work or life has no meaning or value. Alienation is more cognitive and attitudinal, meaning it affects how you think and view things.

– Burnout is more reactive and situational, meaning it is caused by external factors that put pressure on you, such as workload, deadlines, expectations, or conflicts. Burnout can vary depending on the situation and may improve if the situation changes.

– Alienation is more proactive and dispositional, meaning it is caused by internal factors that shape your personality, such as values, beliefs, goals, or identity. Alienation can persist regardless of the situation and may not improve even if the situation changes.

One obvious difference is that Burnout is more focused on external factors, such as workload and work-life balance, whereas alienation is more about intrinsic factors such as values, personal goals, and so on.

Defining Disengagement in a gamification context

This gives us two clear simplified definitions for disengagement.

Alienation: being disengaged due to personal factors such as your views, beliefs, goals, and personality.

Burnout: being disengaged due to external factors such as workload, expectations, deadlines, and conflict

We could then go on and say

Disengagement is a state characterized by a lack of purpose, diminished involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy within an organizational context. It represents an undesirable condition resulting from factors associated with either burnout or alienation.

Individuals who are disengaged typically harbor negative feelings towards their organization or specific tasks, leading to decreased motivation and reduced effectiveness. Disengagement can hinder productivity and hinder personal and professional fulfillment.

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Suffice it to say, whichever side of this an employee falls, they won't be doing you much good and you are probably not doing them much good – something will need to change or you will lose them one way or another.

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2. Freudenberger, H. J. (1975). The staff burn-out syndrome in alternative institutions. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, 12(1), 73–82. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0086411>
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Tags

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