



Just rewarding activity is not gamification: stop it!

## Description

I have promised in the past not to write about the [dangers of extrinsic rewards](#) anymore. However, can't stand reading about gamification being a failure anymore, when the articles proclaiming this almost always start with "gamification is about awarding points, or physical rewards to people for doing dull tasks".

No quoting from Dan Pink or Deci and Ryan this time, just facts based on experience.

If you offer a reward, especially a material reward that has value to people, you are setting yourself up for failure. Every time I have seen a 'gamified' campaign that offers someone like an iPad as a prize for participation, it has had problems. The worst culprit is when the prize is offered for nothing more than activity (so no actual creativity needed).

This carrot approach leads to one of two main outcomes. The first, rubbish input from people wanting the prize. Offer a reward for commenting, and you get hundreds of "Great. Awesome. Amazing." type comments. Offer rewards for likes or votes and you get hundreds of meaningless votes. Worse than that, you get people gaming the system and colluding to generate votes and comments.

The other outcome is just plain cheating. Fake comments and votes are one one thing. Creating groups and allies to force / fake the desired outcome is par for the course and within the parameters of most systems. However, if you offer a reward that has real material value to people, they will do anything to get it. Hack the system, disrupt people (yeah – remember my disruptor user type?), break any rule they can and basically run rings around you to win.

The effects are more damaging than you may first consider as well. What happens to the other players? They see a small group of people gaming the system and they just think "what's the point?". They stop using the system and you are left with just the ones trying to get the prize.

My advice to you? Listen to the people like me (and many others like Mario Herger, Roman Rackwitz, Marigo Raftopoulos, Yu Kai Chou to name but a few), in gamification who keep saying stop using rewards. Read about the damage that extrinsic rewards can have on anything creative (incentivise and creative do not belong in the same breath!). Listen to your gamification designers when they suggest

other ways to encourage participation and activity, chances are – they know what they are talking about. Most of all, stop trying to bribe people to do things. If they can't find an intrinsic reason to be involved (RAMP), you won't get the best out of them, and may well end up getting the worst!

### Category

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### Tags

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