



Gamification: Learning from our kids that the Task can be the Reward

Description

Let me just start by saying, I am not an expert in the subject of gamification nor am I trying to be. These ramblings are just my opinion.

This opinion is based on the following experience. 10 years in the IT industry, a life time of playing games, running a games review website, writing about and reviewing games for 5 years, teaching martial arts and working in the education sector for a few years helping to develop learning materials.

People learn and develop in different ways, but one thing has become clear over the last few decades of education. Fun makes learning easier. Just look at how your children are taught their ABC's. We all were taught the song. Some of us were shown flash cards – C is for Cat.

However, now it has all become much more entertaining. Fabulous systems such as [Jolly phonics](#) and [Big Cat Phonics](#) exist. These turn the learning process into a series of engaging activities and association style games. I have some great games on my iPhone that my daughter plays all the time. All of them employ the same system. Set a small task (recognise a few shapes, letters, numbers etc.) then offer a small reward. This may be a game to play, a virtual sticker or even just a cheer. This makes the whole process fun and does make learning easier. This is not a guess, this has been researched and proven (one example there are more!). But it is also something all of us know (surely).

Now, this is so far all about learning. This is not a business relevant topic. This won't encourage knowledge sharing, or inter team competitiveness to increase productivity. Or will it?

What is a game? Can it be defined? I think that it can (I know some would argue against me though).

A game is, at its core, is two parts. A task is set and then a reward given for successfully completing the task. In some games there may also be a penalty for failure – though in gamification of processes this tends to be seen as a bit negative!

The problem is, when people look at gamification they take this task / reward mechanic a little too literally. They seem to think that all it takes to gamify a process, is to offer a virtual badge or points to people for completing a task. Sometimes, that is all that is needed. That may work. [GiffGaff](#) have been

using this kind of system very successfully. People are offered kudos, points and financial reward for supporting each other in their community. They are also offered these rewards if they can get new subscriptions to their service. The members supply support and carry out marketing for them and they do it very gratefully, not just because they may get a reward, but because they know that should they need help – others will be only too happy to lend a hand! It is self perpetuating in a great way.

However, it is not always so black and white. Take the Jolly Phonics concept above. There is actually no tangible reward to the learning process. The reward is the fun that is had through the learning techniques. Fun and learning its self. The task is the reward!

How do you make use of this though? Well, that is a conversation for the experts I suppose. Those with degrees and PhDs in this kind of area. However, for me it comes down to common sense. Not every game technique will work in every situation. There is no magic bullet. It is not a replacement for good internal processes – it can only enhance what is already there. You can't polish a turd.

You need to understand what you are trying to apply gamification too and why you are trying to apply it. What is the task. What is the desired outcome. Is it the task its self that needs to be made into a game (such as data entry like [Game it up!](#)), where the reward will be enjoying the task or is it the whole process that needs to be made into a competition. Share your knowledge, help the users and you will be rewarded.

Just remember, people will tire of a game. That is why there are so many video games. If people never tired of a game, Tetris would be the only video game in existence. The trick is, when the game becomes boring, change the game. Up the ante, change the rules – or in the case of Call of Duty – give it a lick of fresh paint and re-market it to the people.

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