



Driving the wrong behaviours with rewards.

Description

I have written about this whole thing quite a lot already, but I have some new insights based on things I have witnessed recently.

We know that extrinsic rewards are meant to demotivate people when doing anything that is even slightly creative. So why do we keep seeing them being used in gamification and marketing. On the face of it, that kind of thing works well. Offer a reward and ask people to do something simple. Like this, follow that, +1 the other and you can win a book. Low and behold you can get hundreds or thousands of these clicks – great. The question is, how many of these are valuable? What is the goal? If you are trying to develop new and worthwhile interactions and relationships. Does the same person liking everything you have ever written, just to win the prize, have any actual value long term?

Add another dimension. What about asking people to write something as well. They get an extra entry to the competition for writing something that you feel may be of value to you in your research. Every new piece of written work earns an entry.

What is to stop people just entering multiple times with complete rubbish? Have you designed the system so that you have to check the written work is of value? Probably not, you trust human nature. Trouble is, humans are not trustworthy when a prize they want is on offer. If they can find a loophole or a trick that gives them the edge, they will make full use of it! This is not their fault, it is the way some people are programmed – the killer / Achiever profiles (from Bartle's player type). They want to win, they have found a way to do that that you have not blocked or told them they can't do – they will use it!!

The answer here is, don't offer a physical reward (or even a virtual reward) if you want quality. Far to many people mistake quantity with quality!

Let's look a little bigger. The research that Deci and others has done implies that if you want creativity – take rewards off the table. The introduction of a reward for creating something reduces the creativity employed. But why? Well, take a video game company that has produced a massive hit – let's call it Medal of Duty. They know that with very little extra work, they can generate vast oceans of cash by just reproducing and repackaging their previous game the next year. They tell their team to just make it

look a little different, but not to spend much time or money on it. Why? Because, there is no need to. When you know that what ever you produce you are going to get a reward – why put any effort in? We are back to quantity over quality. Give me £1 for every line of text I produce, no matter what the quality, all you will get is lines and lines of adasd asd asd as ereww das das da ds asd as dgpoasdpoasod asodi asd asdlkja sld . The money (extrinsic reward) has taken the place of the reason I was writing in the first place.

What about performance based pay, I hear you cry? Pay more for better quality. The problem with that is, it doesn't work.

Dan Pink, in his FLIP Manifest gives just one example of research done on this. The US Education system. They spent millions on linking teachers pay to their students performance. In 2011, Roland Fryer of Harvard Business School examined this programme in 200 schools.

His conclusion? "Providing incentives to teachers did not increase student achievement in any statistically significant way". Paying more just doesn't give you better – not always. Actually, going back to Mr Pink, he just suggests pay everyone slightly more than they expect – take money off their minds, and sit back and enjoy the fruits of their creative labours!

Rewards can blind us to the real value of a task – both from the users perspective and the controllers perspective. It is easy to think that quantity is more important than quality. You want those followers on twitter, you want those likes on Facebook. But ask yourself, how will they help in the long run? If that is all you want, great, go for it. If you want something meaningful and you want quality, find another way to appeal to peoples creative side.

I was just finally reading Daniel Pinks: Drive (all the way through, rather than skimming!) and found this great and very relevant excerpt:

Carrots and Sticks: the seven deadly flaws

1. They can extinguish intrinsic motivation
2. They can diminish performance
3. They can crush creativity
4. They can crowd out good behavior
5. They can encourage cheating, shortcuts, and unethical behavior
6. They can become addictive
7. They can foster short-term thinking

Category

1. Gamification
2. Technology

Tags

1. andrzej marczewski
2. business

3. engagement
4. fun
5. Gamification
6. gamify
7. motivation
8. productivity

Date Created

12/11/2012

Author

andrzej-marczewski

default watermark