

# Gamification Is Afoot in the New Workplace (May 14)

Recently, I was asked by some colleagues to get involved in a gamification project. Being a Boomer, I had some quick learning to do. Here are a few insights into what I learned.

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“The game’s afoot” is a phrase that has been with us from at least the time of Shakespeare’s Henry V, although most people know it from the Sherlock Holmes stories, TV shows, or films. “Afoot” means something is in process, and *gamification* is certainly in process. While there has been much hype, academic studies showing the positive impact of gamification on user engagement have been trending upward for a while. Gartner research estimates that more than 50 percent of organizations managing innovation processes will *gamify* aspects of their business by 2015. A 2013 survey of the Forbes Global 2000 companies said that 70 percent of them plan to use gamification for marketing and customer retention. M2 Research predicts that gamification will be a \$2.8 billion industry by 2016.

Recently, I was asked by some colleagues to get involved in a gamification project. Being a Boomer, I had some quick learning to do. I know there are other Boomers out there, so I thought a few insights into what I’ve learned might be useful.

## What Is Gamification?

The aim of gamification is to increase user participation and engagement by integrating game mechanics into non-game experiences—for example, a site, a service, an online community, or a content management system. Through attractive features such as achievement and status levels, “player” competition and collaboration, recognition and reward mechanisms, and self-expression, gamification seeks to improve results—individual, team, and organizational—by injecting “play” into everyday tasks and learning.

## What Are Some Typical User Interface Elements in Gamification?

**Points:** A numerical value given to a player for a single action or combination of actions, e.g., watching a training video, achieving a passing score on a quiz. Points are granular measures of a player’s actions in relation to desired behaviors.

**Leaderboard:** A visual display tracking a player’s performance in relation to others. There can be different types of leaderboards: global in which the individual is ranked against everyone else on the site or friend-based in which the individual is ranked against others in a small group of colleagues, friends, or team members. Other leaderboards could be designed around geography or experience level.

**Badges/Achievements:** Having collected a specified number of points—in relation to using the system as a whole or engaging in a specific activity such as content sharing—a player is awarded a badge, such as “Explorer” or “Collaborator.” Several badges may count toward a higher-level achievement.

**Constraints:** Timed activities such as quiz completion or a narrow window in which to make a decision often motivate individuals to overcome the odds.

**Journey:** Each player is on a learning journey, and game mechanics can help facilitate that journey. For example, feedback on where the individual is in the journey and what he or she might want to consider doing next helps the learner to navigate ahead.

**Challenge:** A challenge is a difficult, but achievable task. A challenge set at the right level for the learner can bring the learner into the content and engage with it. Some challenges can be open-ended in terms of outcomes and connected to a crowd-sourcing problem-solving activity. Challenges can be set at different phases in the learning journey. A quest is a challenge in which specific obstacles must be overcome.

**Story:** Some games have compelling storylines and will keep learners engaged throughout their journey. Stories can be complemented with graphics and/or sound to help engage learners at an emotional level.

**Collaboration:** Many online games are social and enable players to collaborate in creating new content, problem solving, or knowledge sharing.

**Motivators:** Some gamification offers extrinsic rewards such as gift cards or even cash. As people in the learning field, we should focus more on developing intrinsic rewards such as a sense of mastery, meaning, belonging, and self-esteem. This makes achievement levels so vitally important.

**Levels:** We are familiar with levels in the offline world, e.g., Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum in our frequent flyer programs. Individuals can “level up” by increasing their total number of points, or they might trigger an internal criterion such as completing a difficult sequence of activities. Levels motivate users to keep coming back. Certainly, my grandchildren get excited when they move on to the next level.

What my grandchildren delight in is the potency of immediate feedback. If they learn something or make a mistake, they know about it immediately. No waiting for some ponderous feedback that may or may not be helpful. They also learn the art of experimenting and adapting quickly without the fear of embarrassment.

Gamification in the workplace is in its infancy, and that is what makes it exciting to me. This is one Boomer who is happy to be jumping out of his habitual comfort zone and leaping into his long dormant play zone.

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