WORK ENVIRONMENT, COMPANY CULTURE AND GAMIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to look at Gamification in the work context. Gamification is a new concept which is being used successfully by a few pioneer organizations like Google, Microsoft, and Cisco. During the last few years more and more of the world's best companies are transforming their work environment with entertaining activities. The need for staying enthusiastic and connected to work has become more challenging following the Covid-19 pandemic since it can be difficult to stay focused during work from home. The reward for accomplishing a task should not be delayed unnecessarily as the players are likely to lose interest. In general, a positive contribution should be rewarded in a few days at most, as waiting for weeks would defeat the purpose of Gamification as employee motivation or interest could be lost.

Keywords: Gamification, Fun at work, Work Gamification, Employee Engagement, Improved performance.

INTRODUCTION

Work is notoriously known for being an uninteresting activity that we are forced to do in order to survive. However, who says that this can't be changed? Through work gamification, we can bring engagement and motivation back into place. Why not provide our employees with fun activities at work so they don't feel like giving up?

The work environment plays a vital role in an employee's productivity. The more you improve and take care of your work atmosphere, the more your productivity will increase.

GOOGLE'S AND VIRGIN'S FUN CULTURE

A major contributor to Google's unique work environment is all the amazing incentives the "Googolplex" has to offer. More than 64,000 Google employees can take advantage of perks like free gourmet meals, laundry, and fitness facilities, generously paid parental leave and on-site childcare.

Google's employee perks are a massive popularity point for the company. But the most amazing thing is that one of the biggest companies in the world provides recreation and gaming facility to its employees.

Thanks to Gamification, 100% of Googlers Submit Travel Expenses. Google, like many companies, needed more of its employees to submit travel expense information on a timely and regular schedule.

When Google employees take a work trip, they receive an allowance for each location. Google gamified the expense process by letting employees who didn't spend their entire allowances choose what happened to the remaining money — getting paid out in their next paycheck, saving funds toward a future trip or donating it to a charity of their choice.

Gamifying Google's travel expense system translated into 100 percent compliance within six months of launching the program.

In a recent article published by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, it is clearly indicated that, along with the tourism sector, cultural and creative sectors are among the most affected by the current COVID-19 crisis.

The crisis has sharply exposed the structural fragility of some producers in the sector.

Cultural and creative sectors are largely composed of micro-firms, non-profit organizations, and creative professionals, often operating on the margins of financial sustainability. Large public and private cultural institutions and businesses depend on this dynamic cultural ecosystem for the provision of creative goods and services.

One of the leading group of companies, Richard Branson's Virgin Group is the biggest example of making a workplace a fun place. In a wonderful story published in Forbes, describing how the Virgin Group was voted one of the top seven best companies to work for in LinkedIn's top companies list, it was evidently explained that the lofty position comes as no surprise to those familiar with the company. Indeed, Sir Richard Branson himself said that by taking care of employees at Virgin, everything else will take care of itself and with a net worth of approximately $5 billion, it's hard to argue with him.

Sir Richard Branson has built his global business empire on his unique principles and ethics. While the common adage, "The customer is always right," is important, Sir Richard follows his own beliefs. He is quoted as saying:

"Clients do not come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients."

A recently published book co-authored by Branson's daughter Holly, which chronicles the culture that binds various companies operating under the Virgin umbrella. A strong focus on the well-being of employees goes to the heart of what makes the best companies stand out from the rest, so you can perhaps imagine how exciting it would be to listen to Branson himself, about how important the company culture is to Virgin, and how he went about building it.

When asked for an advice to build a company Richard would always say. "Make it a fun place."

It is clearly noticeable when observing Virgin employees at work just how happy and engaged they are. It should prompt every other company CEO to ponder whether it was their happiness that drove the strong financial results of the group or the other way around with strong financial results of the group driving employee happiness.

A positive culture with fun filled challenges creates the kind of openness to failure and willingness to experiment that sits at the heart of the lean culture made famous by Toyota in manufacturing, but is rare in the irregular service-driven world typified by Google, Virgin and Apple and other great companies these days.

In these company cultures, employees are willing to provide suggestions and ideas because they are praised for their efforts, which makes them unafraid to give their input. Their feedback is actioned upon by the leadership and is used to improve the quality of the offerings.

It is said that "Putting the employee first is the first step to success."This also means that you should know what your employees actually need to be more optimistic and productive. The most effective way to keep your employees happy and dynamic is Gamification.

Getting back-to-office life in a new normal has become a challenge.

Employees are going to find the office very different when they return, with social distancing measures to remain a fixture for years to come. As Reuters offers several interactive games that simulate office life — from navigating blocked-off desks, one-way hallways, and more. There is a whole new way to transform work into fun, keeping it wonderfully productive. While change can be disorienting, experts urge workers keep a positive and enthusiastic attitude. Companies are also considering to appoint new cultural advisors for working in a social distancing environment for communicating workplace changes clearly A Gamification culture is the need for today's post pandemic era.

WHAT IS WORK GAMIFICATION?

According to Gallup, 7 out of 10 employees have disconnected & disengaged from their organization's mission. This is not only a career's crisis but a leadership crisis when we have 70% of the employees not coming to work to make a difference by creating innovation and great client experiences. Gamification can also be used to enhance learning process and engage students and workers to learn more easily.

Gamification is a process by which you can transform your work environment into a fun culture to enhance the desire to complete projects. This process accelerates organizational performance. By using "Work Gamification" employees will feel less stress and more engagement to their work. The key objective isn't necessarily for a company to transform all its digital applications into a game. It is about rewarding, appreciating the behaviors and accomplishments that are most closely aligned with the firm's purpose, principles, and goals.

This concept is new and revolutionary, but it works! It guarantees improved performance, engagement, and is a win-win model to be adopted in your organizational work processes.

The concept of gamification, well explained by 'Vantage Circle', was probably cemented a decade ago, where various companies who sold themselves as gamifiers and gurus popped up and offered these simple techniques as services. Naturally, these didn't work, as they weren't well thought out, they weren't holistic and they were too short-term in their requirements and strategies.

But Gamification is a way of naturally understanding the psychology that motivates us to take challenges and enthusiastically engages us to do certain actions expecting certain outcomes. It then uses the knowledge and principles of human psychology and applies them to *an* organisation's strategies and remarkably increasing its productivity.

BENEFITS OF WORK GAMIFICATION

Work Gamification a win-win model for the organization and the employees. The organization gets higher quality of work and the employees start to enjoy their work more. There is a tremendous incentive for the employees to enhance performance and thus generate more revenue for the company. No one loses by trying out work gamification methods.

Adding game elements and mechanics are only secondary to this process, it happens after you've figured out emotional drivers and intelligence to figure out what motivates the consumer or the employee, and then you help them reach the desired goal with you.

''The only way to do great work is to love what you do.'' – Steve Jobs

CISCO's Gamified Solution

Cisco had invested in a global social media training program for its employees and contractors to build and leverage their social media skillset. But with over 46 courses as part of the program, it was overwhelming to figure out where to start.

Cisco introduced three levels of certification for the social media training program: Specialist, Strategist and Master, as well as four sub-certification levels for HR, external communications, sales, and internal partner teams. It also mixed in team challenges to incorporate a healthy dose of competition and collaboration into earning social media certifications.

Since gamifying its social media training program, more than 650 Cisco employees have been certified with over 13,000 courses taken.

Engine Yard's Gamified Solution

Cloud app management platform Engine Yard had invested in a Zendesk knowledge base to encourage self-service and community troubleshooting, but employees and customers weren't engaging with the knowledge base as fast as hoped.

Engine Yard implemented Badgeville's game mechanics into its Zendesk platform that rewarded contributors with Achievements and introduced Missions that users could complete for additional recognition after completing customer surveys or reporting bugs.

Once Engine Yard gamified its knowledge base, the company saw a 20 percent drop in customer complaint tickets, a 40 percent uptick in forum engagement and knowledge base searches and a 40 percent improvement in customer support response time.

WHY SHOULD WE GAMIFY WORK?

Gamification of work isn't just a theory. We apply engagement psychology to work gamification by understanding the motivating factors that make work fun, understanding the brain's genetic clarity when completing processes, and how they are currently affecting people actions.

How attitudes and competencies can also be gamified. You can become more creative through gamification. You can eventually learn and apply creative problem solving to identify gamification opportunities.

Gamification enhances organizational culture and creates a consistent system of performance measurement that is fun. It also provides a platform for training, policy ROI (Return on Investment) assessment, and develops leadership across all positions.

EXAMPLES OF WORK GAMIFICATION

You do remember how our parents at home and especially our teachers at school made education fun by using different techniques, right? And we used to like practicing our lessons the same way and compete against our peers to earn the goodwill of our teachers and parents. Well, times do change, but the habits don't. As humans, we are more inclined towards doing things that satisfy our thirst for challenges to excel and out-do the rest. The same inclination is also prevalent in today's work culture. Employees like to deal with workplace challenges and win them. The trick is how you give them those challenges. And hence the employers, in order to make problem-solving more fun, have resorted to the concept of mixing gaming elements with work to improve employee engagement and productivity.

A large chunk of today's workforce comprises of millennial workers. And one thing which sets them apart here is they require instant recognition for their work and they love gaming. Adopting a gamification platform that allows instant rewards and recognition on completion of tasks helps a lot in increasing the level of engagement and productivity of these employees at work.

Gamification helps employers bring a healthy transformation to their businesses as it gives a meaning to the tasks carried out by the employees.

If you're wondering how? Here's an example.

Imagine you and your team have been asked to sort and arrange some important documents and files.

Seems tedious and boring. But what if we view the same task as a game or transform it into one?

Like within a given time frame the first employee or team to complete the task advances to the next level which may comprise of subsequent challenges with certain rewards for completing the task. Or based on the time needed to complete the task, you can allocate points for rewarding the employees and motivate the others to do the same.

As we all know Microsoft has myriad language localization needs for its many products, and ensuring that translations were accurate and made sense was a huge challenge for just one team.

Microsoft built a "Language Quality" game, which involved a very simple Silverlight application that let users view screens to check for language accuracy. Microsoft included intentionally poor translations to make sure its employees were paying attention.

4,500 users reviewed 500,000 screens to correct or improve translations based on their native languages. Microsoft Japan took a company-wide day off to play the game and ended up winning the leaderboard.

Sounds convincing, doesn't it?

Here are five examples of work gamification that you can incorporate into your place of work.

1. **Gamified training.** When training employees on new topics, use trivia and point based quizzes to assess understanding.

2. **Leaderboards.** Make a leaderboard for the best employees every week. Your staff will want to work harder because of the friendly competition incentive.

3. **Competitions and rewards.** Have company competitions that end with small rewards. This can be as small as a $5 gift card for the winner. The prize doesn't have to be big to gamify the process.

4. **Goal- tracking.** Have your employees set goals and track their progress? This creates competition within them to do better.

5. **Social media shout outs.** If your company has a social media page, shout out your employees that are doing well. This increases the amount of workplace moral that your company has and allows your employees to try to be good enough to get a shout out.

FEEDBACK MECHANICS - KEY TO SUCCESSFUL GAMIFICATION

For any project to be successful, the feedback mechanism needs to defined and used correctly. For success in Gamification the key is accurate and on spot response. If the feedback takes a long time, people start losing interest and the Gamification process is likely to be less effective. The reward for accomplishing a task should not be delayed unnecessarily as the players are likely to lose interest if the reward process takes far too long.

Once a player receives points for a useful contribution in a game context, the player is likely to feel more engaged to the game. In the same way once an employee receives points for a completing a task for exhibiting behaviour in a Gamified workplace, the process is likely to bring about more engagement.

The game tools and game-based concepts can be successfully integrated into the work place to achieve a better organizational culture which supports more engagement at the work place.
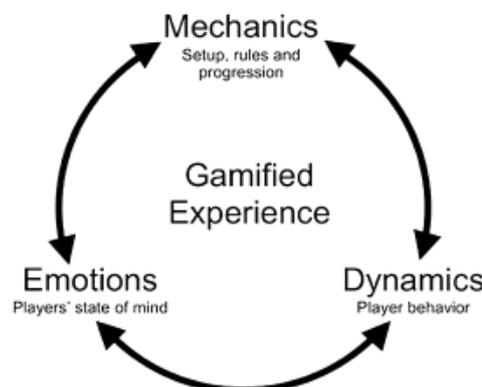
Source: Karen Robson, Etal (2015)

POSITIVE FEEDBACK / REWARDS

One of the easiest and commonly used ways to gamify work processes is by setting up points, leader boards, badges, and rewards. Points can be awarded for completing small but meaningful tasks to achieve the bigger goal for the company. Leader boards provide instant feedback to enhance motivation for competing team members. Leaderboards can be maintained for a weekly time period, so that all members get a fair chance of getting to the top of the leaderboard.

Badges have been successfully used in the armed forces, boy scouts, girl guides to enhance and distinguish good performance. Different types and mechanisms of rewards can be setup for providing instant feedback to the players playing the game.

CONCLUSION

This paper signifies the importance of improving the work environment and transforming a workplace into a fun place for more productivity and engagement. Even if the company culture is already good, using gamification to increase motivation can be a wonderful boost. Especially in times of change and new normal in this post COVID-19 era.
If an employee feels like an expert and rewarded, he is much more likely to engage with the company, which creates a great culture of collaboration, teamwork, and continual learning.

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