PSYCHOLOGY
of
GAMIFICATION

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BEHAVIOR

There are three factors which underly human behavior. Ability, motivation and trigger. The ability describes whether someone can carry out a behavior, factors can be time, money, physical effort, and many more. The motivation describes whether someone wants to perform a behavior, because of pleasure, pain, hope, fear, acceptance, rejection, etcetera. The trigger describes whether a behavior is prompted, for example because of a reminder, a cue, a question, a call for action, etc. These three elements must converge at the same time for a behavior to occur. When one of them is missing, behavior is likely not to happen. If the motivation for a certain behavior is high but there is a lack of ability, a trigger is not likely to lead to an action. Same goes for an easy task when the motivation is missing, a trigger wouldn't be much effective here. With this insight every act or behavior can be analyzed in respect of the three elements. It can be understood why one behaves a certain way or why one doesn't behave. Ability is the most tangible one and certainly doesn't need an explanation. Motivation and triggers are by far more complex and exciting for understanding gamification.

MOTIVATION

A widespread theory to describe human motivation is Maslow's hierarchy of needs. It is often portrayed in the shape of a pyramid in which five key needs are sorted by importance from bottom to top. These are physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Let's just keep these in mind because we need them later on when analyzing how gamification works. Another concept which describes motivation is the concept of core human desires. These can be seen as complementary to Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. They describe in more detail what is ultimately important for us and can be found at the base of every behavior. Relatedness, mastery, autonomy, purpose, avoidance, curiosity, scarcity and ownership are the eight core human desires. Let's also keep those in mind.

GAMIFICATION

Gamification is the concept of using game mechanics to drive game-like engagement and actions in a non-game context. Gamification has the purpose to enhance all three factors which underly human behavior. The ability or the self-efficacy can be increased by supporting the user when necessary. The motivation can be increased by targeting the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in form of satisfying needs and core human desires. And triggers can be placed in the game-like environment exactly when both ability and motivation are high enough to initiate the desired behavior. In a gamified environment most human needs Maslow defined are taken care of, except the physiological needs. Players are truly safe from harm, they can't loose their job, get sick or be robbed in ‚real life' while engaging in the game like experience. The need for belonging can be filled thru social interactive elements. Esteem can develop thru achievements, status, ranks or reputation for their endeavors. Gamification can also target the need for self-actualization thru learning or discovery. Gamification can satisfy almost every need Maslow elaborated.

ELEMENTS

The classical elements of gamification are points, badges, and leaderboards. They can satisfy different core human desires. Points can be collected which in itself can already appeal to some people. They could also be used to buy goods or unlock content. Badges are often point thresholds. After reaching a certain amount of points users each the next level. Badges and points together with achievements can be great components of motivation for gamification. Leaderboards bring aspiration of fame. Competing agains others is especially exciting for the killer player type. These three are just the classics and many more elements can be implemented thru gamification. With the help of the background knowledge about human behavior, human needs, and core desires it should be possible to understand how these elements and any other element work.

ENGAGEMENT

Gamification is not just about basic human needs or desires. Not every person would fit in one category get the same predictable result each time. Game like elements might be a nice way to address human needs and desires but this will only work when the player or employee, if it's used at work, engage with it. If employees think that leaderboards are not appropriate in the workspace it's unlikely to affect performance or job satisfaction. More broadly, if people don't ‚buy in' the idea of gamification, using it won't yield much success. It also is very important to consider the target audience. If some users feel left out or rewards are not balanced evenly a whole project of gamification might have negative consequences. If the implementation of gamification will likely to work out, one key point can be to use extrinsic rewards only to satisfy intrinsic needs. Like this you will motivate the users to engage more even if rewards should diminish. There are many possibilities but gamification only leads to magic if the circumstances are well thought through.