

Planning

Section 8 Games



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Planning

Games in Learning and Community Checklist

Not every game system is right for every learning community or opportunity. You can't just take something that has worked elsewhere and import it to your community wholesale. It's important to think about the specific needs of your target audience and how the games are going to tie into that. List the benefits of your games to learners and the learning community. Do they foster social bonds, feelings of enjoyment, being part of a team, making friends and progressing together?

When deciding which games to use or if designing your own game, consider the points in this checklist.

Winning

What does success look like? Which behaviours and attitudes does the learner need if they are going to win? What is your game's aesthetic goal? Working backwards from there, figure out which game dynamics and mechanics will promote those behaviours and attitudes. The behaviours, skills and attitudes that match your learning objectives are a good place to start. If you start with the technology, or with the mechanics, you may end up with a different learning outcome to the one you wanted.

Badges

Badges, like any mechanism of scoring and reward, need to be validated. What do the badges mean in the context of the learning opportunity? Does the Academy or wider community of practice recognise the badge you intend to award? Will you use them to award participation, or only success? Technology is often set up to award badges against a rule framework - for example, a learner gains a new rank once they have contributed a certain number of posts to a discussion - but this can sometimes make it easy to gain a lot of points without creating anything meaningful. Try and include qualitative ways of recognising performance.

Ranking learners

Scoreboards only ever allow you to have one person at the top. Does that create the dynamics that you want? What are you scoring and how are the scores being used? Consider how it promotes the behaviours and culture your learning community values.

Recognising support roles

Olympic athletes only get to the front because of the vast network of nutritionists, coaches, drivers, advisers, and officials who help them to get there. In designing games for learning and community, we should also find a way to surface and recognise supporting roles.

Design counts

The visual design of games is important, but so too is the underlying architecture. Ensure that you put equal attention to both.

Losing

Games don't have to be designed to simply reward a winner: indeed, depending on circumstances, there may be value in losing a game, or at least losing as you learn how to win. Use games within the learning design to ensure the right skills, and not just gaming skills, will be developed.

Sequencing success

Can a learner get straight to success, or pass through a series of learning gateways first? Do learners have to lose before they can win? Focus on outcome, and on the journey to that outcome. Games use an effective combination of storytelling and control. Their journey should be mapped out and benefit from the right balance between receiving and doing, progress and setbacks. Get the balance right and the learner feels part of the experience, get it wrong and they will feel separate and disengaged.

Ways to use Games or Gamification in Social Learning

Onboarding and orientation

Onboarding helps new learners over the early hump of becoming a learning community contributor. It's great for giving them clues as to what an ideal member of the community does. Using gamification, like a reward system or games, like a scavenger hunt, can provide motivation for getting familiar with a new space.

When designing your onboarding rewards system, make sure to include qualitative as well as quantitative methods to measure participation. For example, rewarding new members for posting a lot or starting a discussion can result in them simply creating noise to get a badge.

- Uploading a profile picture. This improves the general look of your community
- Introducing themselves to the community in an assigned introductions thread
- Answering a question for another user
- Contributing to forum competitions, games or other initiatives

While the onboarding process can be sped up with extrinsic motivation, the goal is always to give new learners an intrinsic desire to contribute in the long-term.

Driving engagement

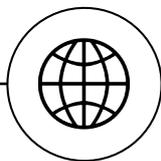
What drives your learners to join in? For most, it will be a combination of intrinsic rewards - the sense of a job well done or a challenge overcome - and extrinsic rewards - badges, points, social rankings. If you understand which rewards are important to your learners, you can design a gamified system around them. If they see more of the rewards that matter to them, they will participate more.

As you are building a social learning opportunity, let's assume that the rewards you are interested in are ones that encourage behaviours that will be useful in a community of practice: collaboration, listening, sharing and mediating, for example. Activities that might encourage these kinds of behaviours are:

- Achieving a user rank with privileges or perks
- Badges for participation and contributions
- Access to exclusive communities
- Points, checkpoints and leaderboards
- Designing projects or experiments as a game

Games for Change. (2013). Play | Half the Sky Movement: The Game.

http://bit.ly/HalfTheSkyMovement_TheGame Introduction and review of 'Half the Sky Movement: The Game', a game-based adventure that aims to raise awareness and donations to empower women and girls around the world



Achievement, or extrinsic reward, through games in Social Learning means including ranking, levels or rewards systems in your design. If your community values achievement, ask yourself: what kinds of goals are right for your community?

The key is that learners feel like they're achieving something straight away. Gamification that takes too long is ineffective, and won't engage. Make sure that there's an early hook or reward to 'playing' (or contributing) so that the reward structure feels tangible and realistic. Afterwards, 'levels' can become more challenging, and more rewarding, to achieve.

The Ingredients of Motivation*

When considering games and gamification, understanding what motivates your learners will be important to deciding on the right aesthetics and dynamics for your approach. What makes them feel happy or trusting? Can you use those feelings to keep learners engaged? There are several building blocks for motivation. There are different reasons why people play games, some related to chemicals in your brain, others related to values.

Individualistic neurotransmitters:

- **Dopamine:** Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that is released in the brain when we achieve goals. It is a short-lived, positive response, and your brain quickly gets used to it.
- **Endorphins:** Endorphins are neurotransmitters that relieve pain and alleviate stress. Exercise and laughter can release these.

Group related neurotransmitters:

- **Oxytocin:** A neurotransmitter that creates feelings of intimacy and belonging, trust and strong relationships.
- **Serotonin:** Activated by feelings of status, importance, significance.

Intrinsic motivation:

Enjoyment that comes from the inherent qualities of the community, for example conversation, social bonds, acquiring new knowledge. Members participate simply to enjoy.

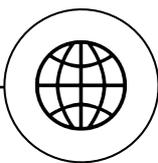
Extrinsic motivation:

Enjoyment that comes from factors outside of inherent community qualities, such as points, leaderboards, perks, prizes etc. Members participate to achieve something.

Here's an example that compares the two types of motivation:

Intrinsic motivation is playing football because you enjoy it, extrinsic is playing football for a trophy.

It's important to note that extrinsic motivation cannot be the foundation of a community. At a certain point intrinsic reasons for any member to contribute need to be discovered, recognised and valued. Intrinsic motivations release the happiness chemicals related to feelings of trust and significance.



Volunteer Motivation:

Six volunteer motives based on Clary and Snyder's study of volunteerism in the US.

1. **Values:** values related to altruistic and humanitarian concern for others
2. **Understanding:** understanding acquired from new learning experiences or using skills that might otherwise go unused
3. **Social:** strengthening social relationships
4. **Career:** gaining career-related experience
5. **Protective:** reduction of negative feelings about oneself or address personal problems
6. **Enhancement:** enhancement via psychological growth and development

Clary, E. and Snyder, M. (1999). The Motivations to Volunteer: Theoretical and Practical Considerations.

<http://bit.ly/TheMotivationsToVolunteer> An article, identifying 6 personal and social functions that are potentially served by volunteering

*adapted from Vanilla Forums eBook: Gamification for Online Communities