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How to use a gamification taxonomy to guide design decisions

Published on August 22, 2018



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Taxonomies are an important resource in organising information on a topic so the content can be used strategically and consistently in an organisation. I created an Enterprise Gamification Taxonomy several years ago as part of my doctoral research based on an audit and analysis of over 300 enterprise gamification projects. I'll present it here now as a resource that you can use.

The key value of a taxonomy for a field as new as gamification is that it codifies best-practice and provides a common language for when you're developing your own strategy. It also provides practical insights into the characteristics of these applications for business purposes. At the highest level, the enterprise gamification taxonomy comprises of six dimensions (note that I have kept this analysis of the taxonomy fairly flat for this article). This provides a framework to guide your design decisions with a set of six key questions.



Primary Purpose

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recorded for the gamification project. This is the strategic intent for the quantifiable outcome. These include productivity improvement, innovation, solving, marketing, customer loyalty and learning and development.

Question to ask: What is the purpose of my gamification project? As well defined is half solved. Also think about why you think gamification of the solution.

Target Audience

We recorded 9 different target audiences for gamification projects such as internal staff, customers, learners, patients, and the general public.

Question to ask: Who are the real people at the heart of this project? Dig deep and don't just skim over this with mechanical 'persona' development - people are complex and multidimensional, and systems drive a lot of the behaviour in an organisation. Be mindful of not designing a solution without the meaningful involvement of your target audience.

Enabling Technology

There was a large range of enabling technologies that were recorded for the projects in our audit. These ranged from digital games and simulations, enterprise platforms, third party 'plug and play' platforms, product modifications, wearables and virtual reality. There are also analogue enabling technologies that have been recorded within the broad umbrella term that gamification has become that includes methods such as escape rooms, Lego Serious Play, tabletop, board or card games, and playful experiences such as 'Gamestorming', LARPs and improv.

Question to ask: Which is the most cost-effective way to deliver the gamification project so that it solves the problem (without creating new ones)? Ideally this should be the last question we ask, but experience forces me to bring this forward. Key implications with enabling technologies that impact your design decisions are cost and integration with legacy systems.

Game Play

We identified the core game play for each of the projects in our audit, or in other words, the core gameful or playful experience. Whilst there are a vast number of different types of game play in entertainment games, we identified 15 commonly recurring ones in gamification design. The most common types of gameplay are survival, chance, prediction, trading and puzzle solving.

Question to ask: What kind of game play will enable our players to solve the problem? Game play comes loaded with covert values in preferred behaviours (e.g. co-operative vs competitive gameplay) or in how we perceive and reward people (trophies vs power-ups). Be mindful that you are not inadvertently recreating the mental models and culture that created the problem in the first place.

Game Mechanics

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entertainment games. However in our audit of gamification examples, commonly occurring mechanics. Game mechanics are the tools that are agency, measurement and feedback and the ones in common use are narrative, points, badges, leaderboards, rewards and status.

Question to ask: Which mechanics bring the game play to life, and seamless links between the problem, the players and the outcome game play, mechanics come with inbuilt values so use them wisely.

Design Ethics

My work on gamification design ethics was undertaken separately to the taxonomy but it has recently been added as a dimension given the significant impact that ethical elements have on the efficacy of system design, user perception, adoption and trust. There are 16 elements under design ethics which include data leakage, privacy, disclosure, autonomy, addiction, gambling and surveillance.

Question to ask: What are the ethical implications of the project we have designed? Working through ethical issues is not a luxury but a necessity; it defines your business model, your organisation, and your relationships with your key stakeholders.

Taxonomies are an evolving construct

Taxonomies are constantly evolving and this original work provides a foundation for ongoing development and refinement as the design practice of gamification matures. I see it as a collaborative effort from this point on as practitioners, researchers and business leaders continue to explore the opportunities for performance improvement and innovation that a gamification strategy can offer.

A detailed list of the items in the taxonomy is provided for you below.



As always, if you have any questions I'm more than happy to answer them. And if you're keen to see the original peer-reviewed publication, which includes a detailed explanation of the methodology you can find it [here](#). Please note that there have been ongoing refinements to the taxonomy since its original publication.

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