The six ingredients of an effective game

Gamification is a scalable approach that achieves desired behaviour and improves performance in the workplace in a sustainable way. It combines innovative technology, change management, and elements of play in the real world. It's about learning and development in practice. Gamification is used, among other things, to improve collaboration within teams, increase sales, or achieve sustainability goals.
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Do you want to know the steps involved in building a game, how to ensure maximum engagement among different participants, and achieve your goals?
Then keep reading!

The six ingredients of an effective game

1. Start with the end result

2. Guide concrete behavior

3. Cater to different player types

4. Encourage sustainable behaviour

5. Choose the right platform

6. Make it fun!

1. Start with the endresult

The clearer the goal you have in mind, the more effective the game. So, before you build a game, always ask yourself this question: What is precisely the desired end result?

BOVAG

Local bike shops in the Netherlands are often affiliated with BOVAG. This association noticed that many of their members were facing competition from online providers. More and more, people would come to the shop to look at a bike, take a test ride, and then leave to order the bike from an online competitor simply because it was ten euros cheaper. What to do?

With a physical store, it's nearly impossible to guarantee the lowest price. Competing on price is not an option. However, you can win with better service and customer friendliness. That sounds simpler than it is. As BOVAG explained, the average bike mechanic would rather tinker with gears and oil than strike up a conversation with a customer in the shop.

A significant problem, because how can you respond to a customer's needs if you don't know the customer at all? And how do you demonstrate friendliness if there's hardly any interaction with the customer? So, the end result of the game was crystal clear! Make sure that the bike mechanic steps away from his workbench more often and engages with the customer.

"The average bike mechanic would rather tinker with gears and oil than strike up a conversation with a customer in the shop."

Translation into missions

Once the end result is established, we devise tasks in the game. These tasks are called missions. Each mission has a well-thought-out and clear goal that contributes directly to the desired end result. During each mission, teams compete with each other, earning badges and scoring points, for example. These missions always align with the player's experience.

To teach bike mechanics to recognize different types of customers and their needs, we had them play the 'recognize-your-customer quiz.' In this mission, we asked them questions like: A customer asks you if a bike bell is included in the price. Is this A. a customer looking for benefits, B. an informative customer, or C. someone just browsing? What do you think?

In another mission, we pushed the bike mechanics a bit further out of their comfort zone. We tasked them with taking a selfie with a customer. While many bike mechanics felt safer behind their familiar workbench, they now had to stand next to the customer literally. Exciting? Absolutely. But it led to plenty of hilarity. And, it worked!

Success factor

When designing the missions, we always kept the end result in mind. The competitive element of gamification ensured that the bike mechanics played the quiz even more and took more selfies to improve their scores. The best part of it all? Without realizing it directly, they were engaging in a fun way to develop new behaviour.

2. Guide concrete behavior

You have a clear end result in mind. But what concrete behaviour goes along with it? This requires an analysis. What behaviour do employees currently exhibit? And what will they do later?

Case Study: A major Dutch bank

Financial advisors interact with their clients daily. In the office or over the phone. Often, these clients have a specific question, such as about applying for a mortgage. But what doesn't always come up in such a conversation is the client's financial health. What does the client need financially to be prepared for the future? And what does an advisor need to discuss this with a client?

To answer that, we started with an analysis. Here we mapped out the behaviour exhibited by the financial advisors of this bank and especially why.

Our consultants shadowed multiple advisors, conducted interviews, attended client meetings, and analysed the topics discussed. Thanks to the analysis, we understood exactly why the advisors didn't always discuss the theme of 'financial health' with their clients.

With that knowledge, we developed the Wealth Cup: a game with five challenging missions using sports as an analogy. Each mission focused on a specific aspect of the current and desired behaviour of the advisors. Think of collaboration, knowledge sharing, and, of course, understanding and addressing the needs of the client related to financial well-being.

Succesfactor

The intended end result, advising more and better on the respective theme, didn't provide enough information on how to steer towards the desired behaviour. The pre-analysis phase was thus essential in this regard. It told us exactly what behaviour needed to be changed, what the employees needed for that, and how we could structure the missions accordingly. With success, by the way. 633 players from 66 local banks developed the necessary skills and gained the right knowledge to better advise their clients on a financially healthy life. And, importantly, by playing the Wealth Cup, the participating banks recorded an average of 13% more inflow of invested capital compared to the non-participating banks.

3. Cater to different player types

Some people really can't stand losing. Others couldn't care less; they mainly play for the social aspect. Everyone needs something different to enjoy a game and keep playing. An effective game, therefore, includes the right triggers to appeal to each player type.

Researcher and professor Richard Bartle developed a model based on four player types:

1. **Socializers**
   Mainly enjoy collaborating and interacting with other players.

2. **Explorers**
   Have fun discovering new elements continually.

3. **Killers**
   Simply want to be the best and therefore be at the top of the leaderboard.

4. **Achievers**
   Want to see their own progression and continuously improve themselves.

Bartle's model is not without controversy, not least because most people recognize themselves in multiple player types. As far as we're concerned, the model is a bit too simplistic. However, it does

provide guidance in game development. Determining player types is, therefore, a logical next step after analysing desired behaviour in ingredient 2.

Case Study: A major Dutch bank

At another Dutch bank, we presented three different storylines for a game: a competition, a challenge, and a shared journey. The third storyline was chosen. In the game, Team2Peak, participants must climb a mountain together. Although the story and missions also attracted adventurous Explorers and achievement-oriented Achievers, 'joining forces' turned out to be the decisive factor. The Socializers, therefore. In the game, we included individual achievements for the Achievers and the opportunity for the Explorers to discover new things. But with the above in mind, we mainly emphasized missions and tasks in which team members have to collaborate and help each other.

Success factor

Of course, nobody fits into just one box. Yet it's good to know what the dominant player types are when you're developing a storyline and missions. Because a game that targets everyone ultimately targets no one.

4. Encourage sustainable behavior

The ultimate result of a good game is the sustainable realization of new, desired behaviour. In our gamification solutions, we use so-called activity loops as part of missions: small actions where participants practice new behaviour playfully step by step. Gradually, and with many repetitions, until the player acts with confidence.

BOVAG

Above, we told you about BOVAG's bike shops, where employees had to step out from behind their familiar workbench onto the shop floor to engage with the customer. Not exactly comfortable, especially if you're not very socially or communicatively skilled. An impossible step to take all at once even. This is where the activity loops come in.

What activity loops did we develop for the bike shops?

Write a review

Employees are asked to write a short review of their favourite product and display it in the store.

They earn points for uploading a photo of this review.

Use the review in a customer conversation

The employee can then use this review in their advice during a customer conversation.

They earn points for uploading a selfie with the customer during this conversation.

Take a selfie with the customer

To establish more connection with the customer and step out of their own comfort zone, an employee must take a selfie with the customer.

They earn points for uploading the feedback.

Ask the customer for feedback

Ultimately, it's about learning. The employee is encouraged here to actively ask the customer for feedback on the conversation.

They earn points for this through peer review.

The idea behind the activity loops is based on the **Flow model** by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihaly. This model assumes three conditions to take your next step in the growth and learning curve. In the context of activity loops, these are:

1. *A clear goal linked to your tasks*

2. *A balance between the skill and difficulty of an activity*

3. *Clear feedback loop on the activity performed*

Success factor

If a player experiences too little progress, they may become bored. But if an activity is too difficult, you also risk the player dropping out. So, it's important to set this up correctly. An optimal activity loop, therefore, gradually becomes more challenging with each step and thus more stimulating.

5. Choose the right platform

We use gamification to stimulate desired behaviour in the workplace in a scalable way. To make a game scalable, it's supported by a platform. We use a website or app and sometimes do this in combination with guidance from our consultants. That's what we call a hybrid variant. Our clients want maximum player engagement. Therefore, when choosing the platform, we consider the goal, target audience, and context (work environment). Building an effective gamification solution is therefore custom work.

In the examples below, you'll see why this is crucial:

A website

The advisors of one of the mentioned banks use their computer in their daily work. They hardly use their mobile phone during working hours. So, we developed a game for them that you log into on a website, making it suitable for desktop.

A digital game for mobile and tablet

A well-known multinational has the ambition to achieve their sustainability goals through gamification. The target audience of this game has a broad geographical spread. Additionally, the players are often on the go and used to communicating via mobile. So, we developed a game supported by a mobile app for them.

The hybrid variant

For the advisors of one of the mentioned banks, we opted for a hybrid variant. In addition to the online environment, we provided coaching by one of our consultants or a member of the bank's sales

team. The so-called 'Wealth Coaches' came by at the start of each mission to help the team kick off. This allowed us to better support the teams in collaboration, goal setting, and skill practice.

Success factor

Each platform has its own characteristics. A purely digital variant has the advantage of scalability but is limited to smaller, relatively straightforward tasks. A hybrid variant, on the other hand, is less scalable but allows for more complex tasks. Platform choice is therefore decisive in how well you can align with the goal, target audience, and context.

6. Make it fun!

Why would you play a game if it's not fun? If you don't get positive energy from it? Fun is perhaps the most important ingredient of gamification. Fun generates motivation, which is a crucial requirement for change. Of course, fun is different for everyone. Therefore, it's important to align the fun elements with the different player types.

Fun is…

…competition

Bike mechanics like to be the best. We discovered this during the development of the game for BOVAG. Competition was the motivating fun element for them. That's why we organized the tire repair competition. Who can repair a tire the fastest? You couldn't win anything; it was purely for fun. For the record: repairing a tire takes 23 seconds. Including pumping!

… experiencing together

In the Team 2 peak game, we included offline elements related to vacation and mountain climbing. This includes exchanging experiences during a campfire that you build together and recording a video where you as a team look back on the 'climb' you made together.

… sport

Sport is something that fits perfectly with one of the aforementioned banks. Therefore, the storyline of the Wealth Cup game was centered around sports. Sponsored Olympic athletes from the respective bank recorded a video explaining various aspects of the game. This gave the players a tremendous boost!

… doing something good

The players of a game we developed to work smarter together and reduce CO_2 emissions turned out to be particularly keen on actively engaging with the theme of sustainability. Doing something good. Using more digital solutions, flying less, and thus reducing emissions; it makes them proud, motivates them, and activates them, leading them to challenge and stimulate each other.

Success factor

We only develop fun elements after careful research. What player types are going to play the game? What do those players find important? How do we involve them in the game? It's crucial to have this clear first. You can come up with all kinds of gimmicks, but a fun element is only effective if it aligns with what the player experiences as fun.

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