Success mantra for Gamification

Gamification, is not a technology product but is a methodology, a way to develop desired engagement among its users and to solve problems. Gamification is a behavioural design trend that is applied to motivate the actions and behaviour of a user through game elements in non-game context. Gamification requires understanding of Player Psychology, Human behaviour and desires, Culture, Marketing, and Economics etc for effective design.

From a psychology point of view, Gamification requires creation and development of a mental state among the user which generates intrinsic motivation. In this state the player is engaged with the activity, without any external disturbances and limitations, to achieve better results than others and to improve his/her performance as compared to his/her historical performance. It is important that the challenge that the player is facing to enter the state matches player's ability (or perceived ability), if there is a huge misalignment between the challenge and ability then the player feels demotivated or get bored of the challenge. If the challenge is too easy the players easily get bored

and if the competition is very challenging then the players start losing interest in the challenge, because they feel that the objective is not achievable. It is very important to keep the game-challenge under the control state of the players. The TED Talk. by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi explains Flow – the control state of the player, as a secret to player satisfaction.

Players often fail to realize that their skills and ability to perform an action is not stationary. Humans are programmed to learn from the feedback they get from challenges and incorporate the feedback to improve their ability. Most of the game players are often engaged with challenges that are comfortable according to their ability levels. As soon as the player starts getting bored at that level they are given incremental challenge, proportional to their ability acquired. Now the player starts engaging with the new challenge with improved ability. At the new challenge level, the learning curve of the player defines the duration after which a new challenge will be thrown at the user. If the player has a steep learning curve, he is posed a new challenge faster and if the learning curve is shallow, or if the player takes time to learn the new skills, then the new challenge for the player is delayed.

The video-game industry has pioneered the player psychology and have implemented the game elements for making games engaging and addictive. Try to analyse the game elements used in games like Temple run - running around an old temple from the monsters or Need for Speed - driving cars through streets with precision, or Candy crush – identifying patterns and crushing candies. All the games employ this basic principle - start with a basic ability level and gradually increase the difficult level in the game. The player identifies a comfortable game-level according to his ability and then learns the nuance of the game by repeatedly doing the same set of activities at that level. After the player ability has improved he advances to a new level and so on. Imagine the complexity of the advanced levels in some of the games that we play in our day-to-day life – Candy Crush, Angry birds etc.

It is almost impossible for a player to complete these levels without learning the basic techniques from the previous stages. Gamification leverages the capability of the players to engage in such type of self-improvising systems through positive reinforcements without putting a conscious effort at skill building and utilizes this to solve complex looking problems in non-game context.

Gamification designers are controllers who control the challenges, competition faced by a player in the system. The following Gamification framework illustrates the use of game elements at different stages of the player journey. For achieving a continuous improvement in human behaviour and habit formation Gamification motivates the player according to his perceived ability and conducts positive interventions / triggers for nudging the player to perform better and better. Gamification organizes the game elements in the order of their increasing feedback cycle. i.e. at the start, the Gamification system starts giving points to the players for every action –

- Points – are the granular building blocks of the Gamified system and have very small feedback loop. The player is awarded points as soon as the required activity is performed

and collection of points can be viewed as a score

Once the player starts accumulating considerable amount if points they are assigned various levels / badges according to their score.

- Level / Badges – are the qualifiers for a player into a league of peers who are performing better. At an informal level it also provides players with social bragging rights among the peers and motivates players to perform better

The players are provided with a ranking among other peers through leader boards, highlighting their position among the peers.

- Leader boards – are the rank tables which depict the performance of a player against his peers. The key here is to generate various leader boards across various dimensions and highlight the dimensions in which an individual player is performing well and provide actionable feedback that how can he / she do better in other dimensions with development need

Other elements which are also used in Gamified systems are –

- Trophies for past performance / continuous performance – Players historical performance as well as consistent performance is celebrated through trophies.
- Special recognition for improvement in the rank – Not only the top performers, but the top gainers in performance are recognized.
- Ranking of the group that the player belongs to in the case of a team / group formation – Creates an atmosphere of collaboration to achieve the group target and improving the productivity of the group.

All of these game elements are ranked according to the feedback cycle of these elements and are placed in a game scenario in order to create maximum engagement of the player in the game. These game elements boost the motivation level of the player and prevents the player from getting disinterested in the game.