Driving Employee Behavior through Gamification to Improve Business Outcomes

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Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) serve a useful purpose. But just how quickly and the way in which enterprises leverage the KPIs is what turns them from useful into truly having a major impact on the company. With a few simple clicks, KPIs can be integrated into a gamification platform that allows team managers to launch their own team initiatives that modify employee behavior. This approach ultimately increases employee engagement by focusing on driving behavior towards business goals while creating an environment of transparency, collaboration, competition, social interaction and fun.
Executive Overview: Team Gamification Sets the Stage for Enterprise Success

The term gamification gained popularity in 2010, but the concept within business environments go back several decades. Gamification is all about motivating workforces by deploying game concepts into the business environment. To do so effectively, businesses need access to information that measures employee behavior and can be delivered in real time so employees receive immediate feedback.

Thanks to the real-time attributes of the internet and social media, gamification has picked up steam in recent years. Feedback cycles are now immediate—with the ability to connect entire workforce teams at all times and deliver game data instantly. This allows gamification to function optimally as users compete against each other in real time.

Gamification plays a vital role in helping enterprises combat the problem of employee disengagement, which is reaching endemic levels. As cited by a recent article in Technology Advice, it’s estimated that US businesses lose between $450 and $550 billion per year due to disengagement, which manifests itself in turnover rates, poor productivity, and below average work. The same article also cites a survey that demonstrates how gamification can alleviate disengagement: 54 percent of the survey respondents indicated that they would be more likely to perform a task if it had game elements.

Successful gamification initiatives rely on three basic elements:

1. The principles of game design, such as competition, transparency, fun and rewards
2. Understanding employee behavior and developing games within this context
3. The availability of real-time KPI data to drive game results

While gamification creates fun in the workplace, it’s not just about encouraging employees to play games that generate leaderboards followed by giving out points and rewards. And the concept won’t work if you force participation. Employees must opt in willingly and see how this win-win equation benefits them as well as the business.

Gartner placed gamification at the “peak of inflated expectations” within the Gartner Hype Cycle for Emerging Technologies report in 2013, just three years after the concept of gamification was first introduced. Indeed, enterprises increasingly began using gamification for initiatives relating to contact center agent optimization, community engagement, customer on-boarding, education, productivity, quality, innovation and employee retention.

Despite the sharp interest, many businesses experienced less-than-expected results in their attempt to deploy gamification. A 2012 Gartner report predicted that by the end of 2014, 80 percent of current gamified applications will have failed to meet business objectives primarily due to poor design. And in August 2014, Gartner declared gamification is heading towards the trough of disillusionment—where “interest wanes as experiments and implementations fail to deliver.”

Heading towards the trough of disillusionment is often driven by enterprises trying to deploy a solution they don’t understand or else taking an impractical approach. In the pages that follow, this white paper from VirtusaPolaris presents a practical approach along with the solution blocks and the expertise that enterprises require in order to assure gamification success.

The paper describes two general approaches to gamification and how focusing first on Team Gamification, which can be applied at the department level, is often the best way to begin a gamification initiative. Team Gamification—in comparison to Enterprise Gamification, which is applied across an entire company or business unit—typically takes less time to deploy and generates specific KPI results that make the smaller-scale approach easier to evaluate.

Once the business experiences success with Team Gamification, perhaps in several instances across multiple departments, it will then find it easier to secure gamification buy-in at the enterprise level.
Deciding which Gamification Approach to Apply

When devising a gamification strategy, enterprises can choose from two basic approaches:

**Enterprise Gamification** usually covers a broad area, typically the entire enterprise or an entire business unit. Because of the diversity and complexity of applying gamification across an enterprise, the process should begin with extensive consultation and analysis (perhaps by an external resource) to confirm the objectives, develop a business case, identify the measurements of success, and design the components of the system—a combination of business processes, behavioral design, software, and data integration with the core systems that generate the KPIs.

Most Enterprise Gamification projects require six or more months and often turn into multi-year programs. Because a large investment is required (particularly in relation to the time internal resources must invest), advance business-case justification is key. Achieving success can also be tricky—there’s potential for huge benefits but also high risk if the Enterprise Gamification project does not sync with the business objectives or the landscape sensitivity of the company.

For example, the gamification initiative may succeed but the business objectives may not be met. Or, employees may not adopt the initiative because they do not see value for them in the gamification initiative. Most often, adjustments can be made to address the former, but the latter presents a much more difficult problem to overcome.

Examples of corporate objectives that might be addressed through Enterprise Gamification include improved employee morale, higher customer survey ratings, increased profit margins, and lowered operational costs. Success in any of these areas obviously has a major impact on the long-term health of the company.

But because all of these initiatives are influenced by and require action from all business units, applying Enterprise Gamification can be challenging in terms of deciding which objectives to tackle and realizing the impact each business unit has on the gamification scoreboard. Success in areas such as employee morale and customer satisfaction is not always tangible. The enterprise could find it challenging to determine which factors cause scores to go up and down.

In comparison to enterprise-wide initiatives, **Team Gamification** empowers departments and teams to run their own focused gamification initiatives. Team Gamification can occur within any business function that generates KPIs, such as customer contact centers, software development teams, sales groups, marketing departments, and even accounting teams.

Such gamification initiatives can be deployed quickly and with minimal or no consulting, as each team has the knowledge it needs for creating its own customized game. By conducting the games on a smaller scale, the upfront investment in software and processes is small, and most gamification campaigns, also referred to as quests, can be implemented in less than three months. In many cases, Team Gamification can be applied to short-term quests, ranging from a few weeks to a few months, but the concept can also apply to on-going KPIs that are critical to a department’s performance.

Although each individual Team Gamification effort may not deliver corporate-wide benefits, there’s also little risk involved in terms of the time the company invests. And when successful, Team Gamification sets the stage for large Enterprise Gamification initiatives by showing employees and management just how effectively gamification can drive positive business outcomes.

Team Gamification ROI is also relatively easy to measure as the results of the games are directly connected to the KPIs of the department playing the game, such as a contact center looking to increase the number of customer issues resolved on the first call, or a development team looking to decrease the number of bugs discovered during the testing phase.
Applying the Team Gamification Approach

Using a Self-Service Gamification Platform, individual teams within a company can launch their own Team Gamification quest focused on one or more KPIs. The quests can be created for teams to compete against each other, which fosters collaboration, and for individual people, which generates a healthy competitive spirit.

The participating team members are the pivot around which each gamified system is built and have a major impact on the chances of success. So when building each team and individual quest, the company should include input from team members representing each of the typical online gaming personas (as defined by the Bartle Test of Gamer Psychology):

- Killers—focused on winning, rank and direct peer-to-peer competition; engaged by leaderboards.
- Achievers—focused on achieving status and goals quickly and completely; engaged by achievements.
- Socialites—focused on socializing and establishing networks; engaged by news, friend lists and chat.
- Explorers—focused on exploring and discovering the unknown; engaged by obscure achievements.

The Team Gamification concept relies on the knowledge within each business team and empowers managers to create quests that align to a business need. Any business function that relies on KPIs is a candidate for Team Gamification. Ideally, the platform will have access to KPIs that can be generated in real time so team members receive immediate feedback and rewards for their performance.

Each business team manager should consider starting with the worst-performing KPIs that has a high impact on the team’s performance. Then present the quest to entire team, the rewards they can receive, and how they can earn extra awards—such as contact center personnel closing tickets on their own personal time before their shift starts or after their shift ends. Such awards should be given to personnel for going beyond their required job responsibilities.

Self-Service Gamification Platform Core Components: The leading gamification self-service platforms come with business adapters that can communicate with any core system containing KPIs the team will put into play for the selected gamification quest. The business adapters feed the KPI information into the gamification platform components that allow team members and their managers to view the results of each game.

Gamification platforms typically include the following components:

- Quest Manager—the central component of the platform that launches new quests dynamically and automatically creates leaderboards (as described below).
- Competitive Quests for individual people.
- Collaboration Quests for teams.
- Leaderboards—Absolute, Relative, Social and Hall of Fame (as described below). Each gamification quest automatically includes Absolute and Relative leaderboards while Social leaderboards are optional and created by employees.
- Scoring Engine—a simple rules engine that processes all the points, levels and badges for each gamification quest.
- Messaging Platform—for team members to collaborate and view system-generated messages.
- KPI Comparison—so teams can compare their KPIs in real-time against global averages and trends from other departments within the enterprise.
- Scaffolding Framework—recommendations for next actions participants should take to achieve goals specified by each quest; also notifies participants when they are close to achieving results that will earn a reward as well as when they are falling behind.
Career Path—this gamification component provides transparency into what each game participant needs to achieve to reach the next level or role within the team structure; can also show progress toward overall objectives, perhaps combing the results of multiple quests.

User Profile—a snapshot 360° view of users that leverages game mechanics, such as <status>, <ownership> and <progression> that are common to social media sites such as LinkedIn; allows other users and managers to post recommendations.

Platforms with built-in social adapters allow the gamification quest to exchange real-time messages and award updates with social platforms such as Yammer, Jive and other private social networks that help employees collaborate across departments and locations. These social platforms can even be made available to the team’s customers or the end users they provide services to so that those groups can also watch the game results.

Social platform connectivity is key in today’s world where younger employees frequently use social networks. The social platforms help build recognition for team members that excel and give them a greater sense of accomplishment as their colleagues and their end users/customers can easily recognize their achievements.

Gamification Leaderboards: Creating Broad Recognition

One of the most critical aspects of a successful gamification deployment is to create a set of leaderboards that recognizes a broad range of successful participants but without trivializing success by rewarding too many. Failure to strike this balance—by either rewarding too few or too many—is a major reason why many gamification deployments do not experience success. Poor use of leaderboards is one of the reasons cited in the previously-mentioned 2012 Gartner report that gamification initiatives often fail.

Based on gamification science best-practices and in alignment with the Bartle Test of Gamer Psychology personality types, leading gamification solutions rely on three major leaderboard types:

**Absolute:** The Absolute leaderboard is the primary scoring mechanism and is used in every gamification quest. This leaderboard shows the top performers—which could be the top five, top ten or top 25 depending on the overall size of the group. For a group of 100, for example, the Absolute leaderboard could post the top five performers.

**Relative:** The Relative leaderboard generates views showing each participant only those other participants that are just above or just below them on the Absolute leaderboard. This allows them to compare themselves to participants with similar quest results and gauge whether they can improve in comparison. For example, at a call center with 100 agents, an agent who is ranked #75 will see a Relative leaderboard that also shows the agents ranked #70 through #74 and those ranked #76 to #80. Each individual agent sees only the view that applies to where they rank among all agents.

**Social:** Social leaderboards are optional views that give participants the autonomy to create leaderboards on their own. Participants can thus create their own game within the quest among their friends, a particular office, or other social group identifier. Participants can decide who they want to send invites to in order to create the Social leaderboard groups they want.

Utilizing all three leaderboards allows businesses to design gamification quests that leverage an array of game mechanics—competition, transparency, progression, social interaction, fun, and autonomy. Doing so also appeals to all four Bartle personality types, which ensures participation in each quest across the entire targeted workforce group.

To complement the leaderboards, which will change at the end of each quest cycle, enterprises can also establish Hall of Fame designations. Team members earn distinctions for significant long-term performances and short-term outstanding achievements, such as a new sales or customer service record for one month or one quarter. By “inducting” team members into the Hall of Fame, their recognition becomes a permanent record.
A Team Gamification Use Case

Managers of global teams across different time zones often find it difficult to communicate with personnel to motivate them to achieve performance goals. For large teams, trying to get everyone onto a conference call or video session at the same time is next to impossible, let alone trying to get them all into the same meeting room face-to-face.

But gamification makes it possible to convey short-term goals and motivate global teams to improve their performances. The key is to clearly state how people will be measured and to create transparent views of the results in real time so everyone can see and compare their progress.

As an example of how gamification pays off, a customer service operations director—who oversees four contact centers with 500 service agents for a global telecommunications firm—views her department KPI dashboards showing products ranked by various high-level metrics. She notices that over the past 30 days, Product A ranks last in customer satisfaction.

This is surprising given how well the contact center teams have performed in providing service on Product A in the past. Since Product A generates 60% of the company’s revenue, improving customer service relating to this product is critical for the company. She knows the teams have to be fully motivated and productive to improve this metric but also wonders how to do so as the teams are distributed across four global groups that work various shifts throughout the contact center’s operating hours.

The customer service operations director then clicks on the gamification <Quest Manager> to launch a team collaboration quest that will address the issue. She selects a $10,000 reward for the contact center team generating the most improvement in customer satisfaction on Product A while the second-place contact center team will receive $5,000. The director then clicks <Launch Quest>, which generates an automatic email sent to all 500 global service agents with the quest details.

Upon receiving this quest, the contact center manager at the company’s U.S. location, which has a staff of 125 call-center agents, decides that his team should win the 10K reward and earn positive recognition from the customer service operations director. So he decides to create his own individual competitive gamification quest called <Super Customer Support Agent> for his team.

After carefully analyzing last month’s metrics, he creates the following shortlist to be part of the quest scoring rules:

1. Average Handle Time
2. # of Calls Handled
3. Incident Type
4. First Call Resolution

Based on the contact center manager’s industry experience, he also adjusts the weight factors and gives ‘First Call Resolution’ the highest weight value—60%. The manager also decides to give an iPad reward to the top five performing team members, and then clicks <Launch Quest>.

At the same time the U.S. call center manager creates this gamification request, the call center managers at the other three global contact centers are working on their own gamification quests. Each manager has the autonomy to select their own KPI metric on which to focus, knowing what works best for their team. But each quest also indirectly aligns to the overall objective of improving customer satisfaction as established by the global customer service operations director.

The U.S. call center was the highest contributor to the overall customer satisfaction improvement, which was a direct result of the perfectly-blended quest created by the U.S. contact center manager. From the company-wide perspective, the customer satisfaction level on Product A increased 20% in just one month. Previously, the company required multiple quarters to create the same level of employee focus that would achieve similar results. Not only did the gamification platform achieve such results in a much faster timeframe, it also did so at a fraction of the cost.
The Gamification Platform

Given the complexity of deploying a gamification platform, it is advised to partner with a solution provider that offers self-service options such as VirtusaPolaris. To help enterprises launch their gamification initiatives, VirtusaPolaris offers vAchieve—a combination of gamification solution consulting, a self-service platform, and solution delivery. After helping you identify your desired outcomes, the internal teams you want to target and their KPIs that measure performance, we help you conceptualize the behaviors you want to change. We then assist in determining the game mechanics that will be most effective and the KPI integration points.

Conclusion

Team Gamification Success Builds Foundation for Enterprise Gamification

After launching team and individual gamification requests, to measure the success and the ROI, focus primarily on employee participation. If they use the system, that means they are paying close attention to the KPIs on which their actions have an influence. Participation also means they’re having fun, and the more they participate, the more rewards they receive as they simultaneously help the company drive KPIs in the right direction.

From the corporate perspective, an established gamification platform—with rich features, real-time updates and scalable leaderboards—pays off by ensuring all company employees feel comfortable engaging with the platform. Corporate can thus work with all department heads to launch product-specific and service-specific gamification quests that the company needs most in relation to the KPIs requiring the most improvement—and to ensure employees are engaged.

Once teams within the enterprise builds a Team Gamification platform and completes their first quests, the business can then reuse the platform to accelerate the creation of new team and individual quests within the same teams or by other teams in the enterprise. The platform ties together all the game elements that make it easy for other teams to get involved in future quests and essentially serves as a multi-tenant platform instance. This allows all team managers to launch dynamic quests on-demand with associated leaderboards.

When the enterprise experiences success with Team Gamification across multiple teams and departments, taking on Enterprise Gamification initiatives will not seem so daunting. Employees, their managers and senior executives will all understand just how effective gamification can be in providing employees with additional rewards and improving critical KPIs.

They will then be much more open to the concept of long-term, enterprise-wide gamification initiatives. And when companies launch successful Enterprise Gamification initiatives, they will find themselves reaping the benefits of full employee engagement—lower turnover rates, increased productivity, and above-average work output.
Citations


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Prem is responsible for building solutions catered to the Millennial Generation which involves R&D, solution conception and Go-To-Market strategies. These solutions focus on increasing ‘User Engagement’, ‘Personalized Services’ and ‘Business Outcomes’ using Social, Cloud, Big Data, Mobile and concepts like Gamification, Crowd Sourcing, etc. He has a masters from College of Engineering – Guindy, Chennai with a total of 17 years IT experience.

About VirtusaPolaris

VirtusaPolaris, the market-facing brand of Virtusa and Polaris Consulting & Services, is a leading worldwide provider of information technology (IT) consulting and outsourcing services that accelerate outcomes for Global 2000 businesses in banking and financial services, insurance, healthcare, telecommunications and media. Through a proven platforming methodology, domain expertise and technology innovation, VirtusaPolaris enables organizations to consolidate, rationalize and modernize IT operations. VirtusaPolaris’ preemptive outsourcing solutions allow businesses to improve efficiency and reduce costs. VirtusaPolaris’ digital enablement solutions empower companies to reimagine the customer experience, creating lasting value. Virtusa Corporation is headquartered in Massachusetts, and together with Polaris, has 50 offices across North America, Europe and Asia.

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