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# Gamification and Workplace Behavior Modification

## Podcast Transcript

Can the power of games be harnessed in the workplace to raise the level of employee engagement, and drive desirable change in behavior? We'll examine that question in this installment of the High Performance Business Podcast Series: **"Gamification and Workplace Behavior Modification."**

So, what exactly do we mean by the term, "gamification"? It's the idea of using game design and game mechanics in workplace environments to improve employee engagement and effectiveness. This can take the form of actual games played in the workplace that teach skills or generate friendly competition. Or, it can involve more subtle use of game mechanics—such as levels, badges, points and virtual currency—to motivate

workers and shape their behavior without having them experience something they would necessarily think of as a game.

Gamification is especially appealing to enterprises now because commercial gamification engines are making it easier and more affordable for organizations to get started by grafting game mechanics onto existing systems and processes. Vendors, such as Badgeville and Bunchball, are providing gamification technologies which integrate with various enterprise applications and social collaboration platforms, such as Salesforce and Jive. So some forms of gamification can now be implemented without writing new software.

Gamification is a concept that has only recently become very popular. The initial applications of gamification have generally been related to relatively simple, short-term behavior change, such as encouraging employees to fill out expense forms on time.

The most common approach to gamification uses the simple mechanisms of badges and leaderboards as extrinsic rewards, to give employees small nudges to do simple behaviors. This seems best suited to incenting behaviors which employees already know they can and should perform, but which they might otherwise procrastinate about, or ignore altogether.

While gamification has gotten a lot of attention, the initial wave has also

been accompanied by a significant backlash. Critics aren't arguing against the use of games and game mechanics in the workplace; rather, their main complaint is that gamification is exercising limited game design techniques and a narrow ambition regarding what the games can achieve.

The big questions now are: How can the gamification trend be broadened to tap more of the power of great games to connect to key behavior-change objectives? and how can gamification solutions promote deeper, more meaningful behavior change?

Two key insights about the nature of behavior change can really help us solve these problems.

One insight is that the key to producing sustained behavior change is to align any approaches with employees' intrinsic motivation. So, for example, a gamification mechanism that just rewards me any time I perform a tedious task is less likely to succeed than one that clarifies the connection to a goal I intrinsically care about—and then uses game mechanics to show me how well I am approaching my goal.

A second insight is that behavior change often follows a stereotyped pattern of stages and that different kinds of behavior-change challenges dominate each stage. This is referred to as the behavior-change lifecycle. The key to using gamification to make significant and sustained behavior change is to understand those challenges, and to develop specific gamification techniques for the challenges at each stage.

Here's a **5-stage version of the behavior-change lifecycle** which we have adopted from recent literature and research:

Stage one is "Raising awareness"  
Stage two is "Building buy-in"

Stage three is "Learning how"  
Stage four is "Initial adoption"  
And stage five is "Maintaining and refining."

Now, let's look briefly at each of the stages of the behavior-change lifecycle and how we can overcome key challenges through gaming techniques.

The first stage involves raising employees' awareness of what the behavior patterns presently are and achieving an initial understanding that there are opportunities for improvement.

### **Behavior instrumentation games**

provide a way to measure and monitor real-world behaviors. In an enterprise context, an example might involve a game which tracks project work, captures and logs task-duration estimates, and awards points to employees who estimate accurately and make deadlines.

The second stage involves building up the level of buy-in for taking actions, because people are not always psychologically committed to the actions or the time, energy, and resources required to execute the change.

### **Cause-and-effect game**

**simulation** can help raise awareness of the impact of the user's existing behavior patterns and the need for change. In an enterprise context, an example could be teaching employees the significance of quality customer service in a call center type scenario.

Once an employee has bought into the effort to acquire new behaviors, the third stage is to acquire an understanding of the mechanisms involved to execute the behaviors.

The key challenge for employees is the lack of understanding of the principles involved in target behaviors or how detailed background knowledge ties to

achieving a larger mission.

**Dynamic system games** represent a way to teach the mechanisms underlying certain kinds of behaviors. An example is SimCity, which helps players develop an understanding of urban planning.

Now that the change effort is underway and the basic prep work is done, employees are ready for the fourth stage—acquiring new behaviors, or forming new habits. This phase can be a very long process, requiring high levels of motivation and support until the habits take hold.

The key challenge for employees is that they are not yet comfortable executing target behaviors and lack the practice needed to translate the theory acquired into execution.

**Skill-building games** can motivate players, provide guidance, and reduce frustration by monitoring their progress and providing continuous feedback in the form of scores, prizes, or advancement within the game.

The final phase of behavior change is to maintain and refine new patterns. The biggest challenge at this stage is keeping employees interested and engaged.

The same kinds of behavior games introduced in stage one can be used in stage five in a different way to maintain and refine the target behaviors. Social interaction and friendly competition with other employees can often play a big role at this stage.

The most challenging of the five stages, is often the fourth stage of the behavior-change lifecycle, which involves abandoning old habits and forming new ones. Let's take a more in-depth look at how gamification can be used to sustain behavior-change at that fourth stage.

One trend we are seeing is enterprises seeking to instill a more proactive attitude about career development among the workforce. In this more entrepreneurial model, employees take a very active interest in developing their skills and are encouraged to seek tasks and roles to build their skill portfolio. We have designed a relevant gamification approach that leverages two kinds of intrinsic motivation identified in the behavior-change literature. The first involves the desire to be more self-directed and the second involves the desire to achieve meaningful mastery of something that matters.

To summarize briefly, our system uses gamification mechanisms that help people earn reputation badges after successful completion of tasks. These badges help them over a period of time to increase their seniority and expertise in that skill.

In an enterprise scenario, employees care and are motivated towards developing their skills so that they can take on more meaningful and challenging tasks and advise others who may need help in that area. The gamification approach supports and strengthens employees' intrinsic motivation to develop their skill-set and enhance their reputation in various skill areas.

Most of the gamification applications we've discussed today are more complex than simple game mechanics of badges and leaderboards. Yet, our message isn't an argument for more complex games; it's an argument for matching the game mechanics to the actual behavior-change challenge at hand and aligning these mechanics with employees' intrinsic motivation.

We recommend that companies interested in enterprise gamification begin by assessing which behavior-change stages represent their most important business priorities. If they first understand what stage of change challenges their employees and why, they can then develop gamification techniques to address them. We also recommend that companies design these gamification techniques to align with employees intrinsic motivations for what is going to drive sustained long-term behavior change.

Game mechanics are already effectively engaging and motivating the workforce as well as maintaining and intensifying certain employee behaviors. As the gamification community becomes more skilled at mapping enterprise behavior-change needs to specific game types and designing approaches that would promote employee intrinsic motivations, we can expect even more "epic wins" in the future.

This concludes our High Performance Business Podcast. We thank you for listening. We hope you found these insights valuable and engaging. For more information about Accenture's experience and research helping organizations achieve high performance, visit us at [www.accenture.com/researchpodcast](http://www.accenture.com/researchpodcast)