

Concept

Gamification

Using game design elements (points, levels, challenges, leaderboards) in something that isn't a game, so it gets used more or more eagerly.

In Spanish
Gamificación

Origin
Deterding, Dixon, Khaled and Nacke (2011)



+10



What problem it addresses

Explains why so many language, fitness or work apps have points and streaks, and why they don't always work.

An example

The same task list for a course, presented in two ways.

Not gamified

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|--------|
| ☒ | _____ | Oct 12 |
| ☒ | _____ | Oct 15 |
| ☐ | _____ | Oct 19 |
| ☐ | _____ | Oct 22 |

Tasks and dates. **Just the task.**

Gamified

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|--|
| ☒ | _____ | |
| ☒ | _____ | Level 3 |
| ☐ | _____ | +20 points |
| ☐ | _____ |  5-day streak |
| ☐ | _____ | |

The same tasks, with points, a level and a streak. **How it is presented changes.**

Game elements are added, but the task doesn't become a game. That is why the effect depends on the task and on who does it.

Why it happens



Points and levels make progress visible;



challenges and leaderboards add a goal and a comparison,



and that can encourage people to keep going if the goal matters to the person and isn't just novelty.

Applications in design

✓ Use it like this

Make progress visible in something people already want to achieve.

✗ Avoid

Adding points and badges to a task that gives nothing to the person doing it.

👁 Don't fall for it

Measure beyond the first few weeks: part of the effect may be just novelty.

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Positive effects on everything

Only partly

What the research says

Among the studies with statistical tests, only those found positive effects on everything they measured; the other 13, only partly (Hamari, Koivisto and Sarsa, 2014).

● ● ○ **Debated evidence.** A review of 24 studies. The effects depended on the context and the people, and part of them could be due to novelty.

Connections

Used in

■ Interaction design

■ Behavioral design

Related to

■ Flow

■ Goal-gradient effect

■ Deceptive patterns (dark patterns)

■ Self-determination theory

Authors and works

2011	Sebastian Deterding, Dan Dixon, Rilla Khaled and Lennart Nacke	Defined it as the use of game design elements in non-game contexts.
2014	Juho Hamari, Jonna Koivisto and Harri Sarsa	Reviewed 24 studies: gamification had positive effects, but they depended heavily on the context and on who used it.

Sources

Original sources

- Deterding, S., Dixon, D., Khaled, R., & Nacke, L. (2011). From game design elements to gamefulness: Defining “gamification”. In Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek Conference (pp. 9–15). ACM. [View source \(https://doi.org/10.1145/2181037.2181040\)](https://doi.org/10.1145/2181037.2181040)

Academic reviews

- Hamari, J., Koivisto, J., & Sarsa, H. (2014). Does gamification work? A literature review of empirical studies on gamification. In Proceedings of the 47th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences. IEEE. [View source \(https://doi.org/10.1109/HICSS.2014.377\)](https://doi.org/10.1109/HICSS.2014.377)

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