How Gamification Works

Gamification is the adaptation and application of game design principles and game interaction elements to workplace processes and behaviors.

As the effects of gamification come under increasing academic scrutiny and examination, the constituents of it have gained clarity as well.

The two key components that form gamification are “dynamics” and “mechanics”.

Gamification has two distinct aspects to it. The psychological effects and human characteristics are called “Dynamics”. These relate to the qualitative characteristics of simply being human. Dynamics consist of a players’ psychological reactions, emotions, how their sense of self is affected, and how these qualitative factors affect their performance.

The second aspect of gamification is to do with the methods and/or mechanisms that affect Dynamics. These are called “Mechanics”. Mechanics can be described as the machinery that instills the different dynamics in players. The two concepts, dynamics and mechanics, are closely related in a “cause and effect” kind of way.

Specific mechanics can be used to sustain or refrain certain dynamics. For example, the use of a Leaderboard mechanic instantly generates the dynamic of Competition amongst the players. If Competition was to be reduced, then one could implement the Shadowing mechanic, where an individual player strives to beat their own record and see an improvement in their performance.

The relationship between dynamics and mechanics is a complex one, where there multiple dynamics that can be influenced through a single mechanic.

Through our research, we sought to understand these complexitions and eventually synthesized our learnings into a simple diagram.

The diagram (figure 06), displays dynamic groups in the inner most circle, mechanic groups in the second circle, and finally, the individual mechanic. Each “slice” when read inside-out, aims to provide the relationship at a high level, to how it expands at a more granular level.

Dynamics fell into 5 groups:

01 **Collaboration and Group Loyalty**
Consist of behaviors associated with team building, strengthening inter-team bonds, etc.

02 **Competition**
These rely on behaviors driven by comparison and contrast to instill motivation in players.

03 **Self Expression**
Focused entirely on an individual player, these dynamics speak to how one manifests themselves in a digital form.

04 **Status and Ownership**
These dynamics address an individuals players’ performance by measuring against self, team, or third party imposed benchmarks. Such dynamics are closely tied to psychological factors around ownership of tasks and goals since they are directly related to the success or failure, and accomplishment.

05 **Reputation**
Dynamics associated with how an individual player is perceived by others, what the perceived value of an individual contributor is, and how one might assess themselves.

Mechanics were organized into 4 groups:

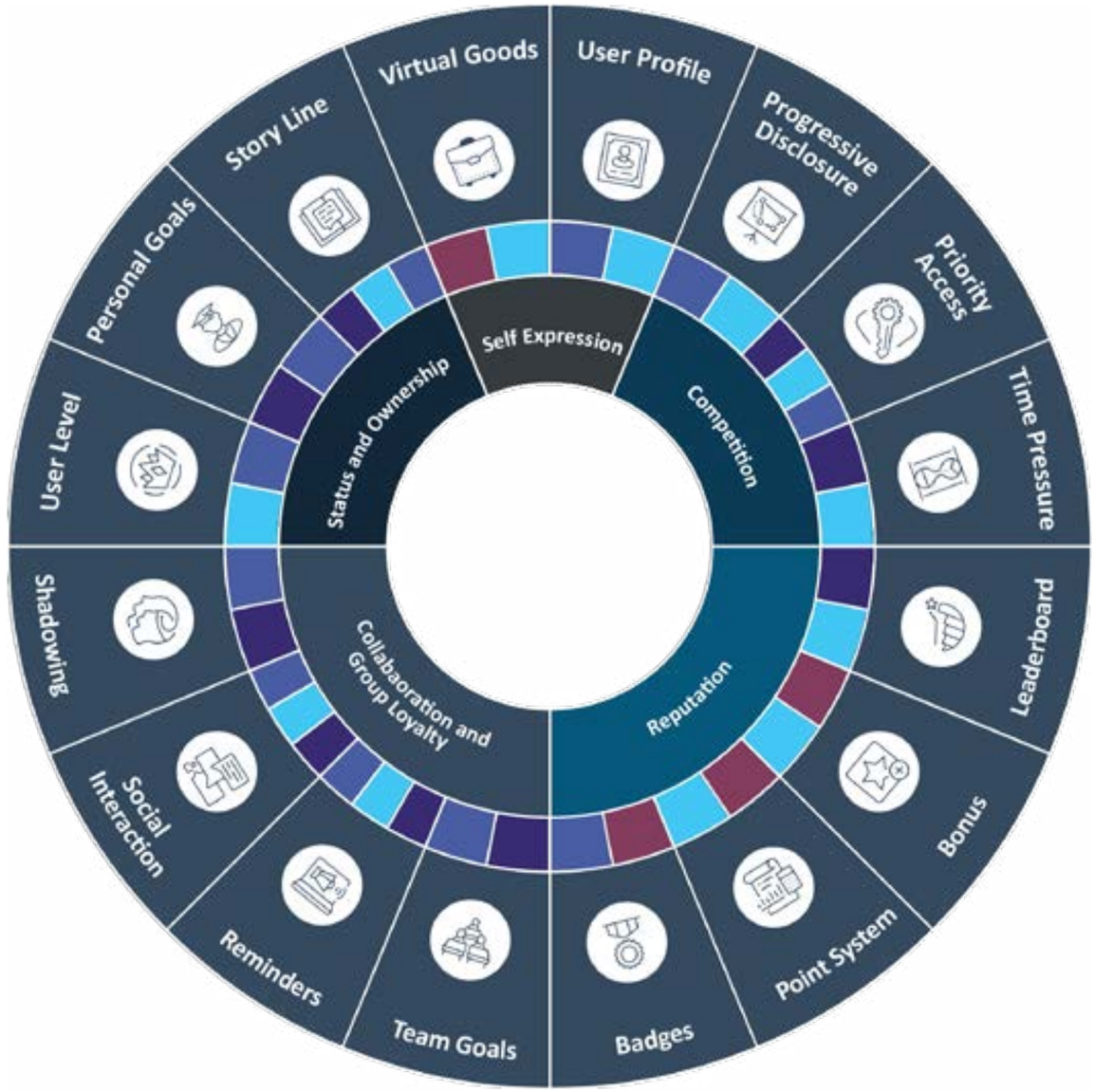
01 **Rewards**
There are several types of rewards that can be used to encourage gameplay. These are typically deployed when a task or set of tasks have been completed to acknowledge a players' achievement. Rewards also vary in how frequently they are deployed, and what the size of it is.

02 **System Design**
Mechanics that are related to how a gameplay manifests in a system fall into this group. These are perhaps the most dependent on proper execution of a user interface, else the effectiveness of these suffers.

03 **Task**
Gamification relies on some form of task and/or goal to be completed by a player. Both tasks and goals need definition, have a reward defined, have some time to completion boundaries, and may or may not need guidance. Task mechanics account for all these variables in different combinations to drive dynamics.

04 **User Specific**
A player is perhaps the most important ingredient in any gamification effort. User specific mechanics focus on the player or a group of players and are best used to drive intrinsic motivators.

Keeping the diverse nature of mechanics and dynamics was imperative in the creation of the relationship diagram. As a tool, the diagram seeks to simplify relationship between individual mechanics and the multiple dynamics they affect.



Mechanic Grouping Key

Task | System Design | User Specific | Rewards

Figure 06: Explaining relationships between gamification mechanics, the dynamics they affect, and the groups they fall into.