**Preliminary Gamification & Stickiness Research Findings**

Prepared by Meghan Lazier

**Challenge:** How is it possible to integrate gamification elements, which normally rely on leader boards and point systems, when the American Foreign Service Association is concerned about permanent feedback, which rules out star ratings, skill plus-ups, endorsements, or public feedback?

**Background:** As Jane McGonial writes in her book, *Reality is Broken*, "If the goal is truly compelling, and if the feedback is motivating enough, we will keep wrestling with the game's limitations – creatively, sincerely and enthusiastically – for a very long time." That's why feedback is so important and critical to games.

Feedback is also one of the four key elements of game design, which also includes a goal, rules and voluntary participation. That's it. "The definition may surprise you for what it lacks, interactivity, graphics, narrative, rewards, competition, virtual environments, or the idea of 'winning' – all traits we often think of when it comes to games today," writes McGonigal.

Below are some ideas to incorporate feedback to the CrowdWork platform in ways that are not public or tied to individual performance.

**Ideas:**

* **Personal Point System:** Since public point systems are out of the question, it might make sense for users to create their own private point system. These points would only be viewable to the user. Every individual user could assign points to each task completed (for example, on a scale of 1-5), for how much effort the task took. An example of rewarding points to various tasks is well executed in the Chore Wars game. In Chore Wars, families or roommates sign-up to compete with each other to see who can get the most points by doing chores. Typically, the most loathed chores get the most reward points (and the points for each chore are determined by the players). Therefore, Chore Wars players are motivated to do the tasks they normally avoid. For our purposes, the user would be able to compete against himself. A personal and private profile page could display an all-time record of points, which would encourage each user to compete against him/herself for how many points he/she can accumulate in a week or in a month. Most importantly, these points would not be tied to any formal recognition system. It's essential to incentivize the right elements when creating a point system; for example, it wouldn't make sense to reward the number of hours spent on a task as it would encourage spending more time on tasks than is actually necessary.

When this idea was brought-up during a CrowdWork meeting, the group mentioned that junior officers or officers wanting to switch tracks could use work completed on the platform to get hours of experience in a particular area. So, if the platform can track personal data that remains private to the user, it could be helpful during reviews or applying for more senior positions.

* **Competency Challenges:** Each task on the platform could be assigned a relevant competency. For example, all types of work typically fall into the following categories: high-stakes work, busywork, mental work, physical work, discovery work, teamwork and creative work. While these example competences would need to be reworked for marketability and relevancy, rankings on a personal profile could indicate what types of competency challenges each user has undertaken. For example, a task involving translation would get a language competency recognition. For each task in the language category completed, there could be a progress bar counting how many tasks in this area have been accomplished. Again, this way of showing progress would not need to be publically available, but could help junior officers or officers wanting to switch tracks.
* **Private Feedback:** People need to feel rewarded for their effort when playing a game or completing extra work. As McGonigal writes, "Real-time data and quantitative benchmarks are the reason why gamers get consistently better at virtually any game they play: their performance is consistently measured and reflected back to them, with advancing progress bars, points, levels and achievements." Since feedback on tasks cannot be public, users will be able to communicate to one another by e-mail. It might also be helpful for users to make notes about certain tasks, if they liked the work, how long it took and what type of challenge they may want to take on next. Likely, this information could be placed in the comments section after a task is completed.   
    
  For those adding tasks to the platform, they could make notes about how long it took for task completion and how to include more clarity the next time they post work.

**Challenge:** What elements of gamification and communication can be leveraged to create a viral platform, where users encourage other user sign-ups and participation?

I have included separate ideas for promoting the platform launch in addition to ongoing sticky elements.

**Launch Ideas:**

* **Beta Testing:** As beta testing rolls out, ensure that the first tasks submitted to the platform come from well-respected leaders within the State Department. It may seem obvious, but by integrating key influencers within the Department as the platform rolls out, it will demonstrate buy-in from important decision makers and lead to the product's credibility. Of course, this will only work if real identities, not avatars, are used.
* **Limited Invites:** Remember Gmail required an invite to sign-up or when Hotmail had the post-script line: "PS: I Love You. Get Your Free Email at Hotmail," which led to one million users within six months? Limited invites can create buzz at the water cooler, and ensure that people are talking about the rollout of a new initiative.
* **Early Adopter Badge:** Issuing early adopter badges for a limited number of people who beta test the platform, can be a way to incentivize early users. Additionally, connector badges could be awarded to people who send and invite and others join the platform through a customized referral link. However, it's essential to be mindful that we reward what we value. As a team, we value more users on the platform, but it may not be a value that State wants to encourage.

**Ongoing Ideas:**

* **Group Challenges:** Though users may be working on a small task, it is likely part of a bigger project. It's important to give the small task context within the bigger scope of the project. Tasks could be sorted into group projects, so that users will know how and what their work will impact. Badges could be given to users who successfully complete a group challenge. Groups could also "compete" against each other to try to complete a similar task before another group. The fitness app, Fitocracy, is well-known for its group challenges, and is able to create a sticky platform because of this social element. While further research is needed on how to run a challenge on the CrowdWork platform, specific training guidelines and educational materials could help encourage users to take part in a challenge.
* **Rewarding Stickiness:** In order to create a sticky platform, it's important to reward sticky behaviors. Through a private profile or dashboard, the platform could create a personal record for the most tasks completed in a day and/or a how many consecutives days the user has logged-in to the platform. Again, we have to think about what we are rewarding and if there could be unintended consequences, for example, if a supervisor becomes concerned about how many hours an employee is spending on the platform.

**Next Steps**

From here, I think my next steps could be further researching areas that may be realistically implemented. I would also like to spend more time researching stickiness, as I wanted to get more familiar with game elements this past month.

Other areas for further research include empathy and the FSO's esprit de corps in a gamified environment. McGonigal brings up the Yiddish word, naches, in her book, which is a feeling of pride when someone we've helped or taught has succeeded. I think this element, of cheering others on, could be incorporated into the platform, but I haven't seen many examples that do not rely on public feedback.

Similarly, McGonigal also writes, "We need a way to connect with others who care about the same massively scaled goal we do, no matter how arbitrary the goal. And we need a chance to reflect on the truly epic scale of what we're doing together." Some of the most successful games, like the videogame Halo, create a platform that integrates meaning into every element of the game. The State Department, through its mission and global reach, should be able to leverage meaning and cultural norms, like a sense of esprit de corps, into the platform to help make it sticky and seamless within the existing cultural values. These values can also be integrated to training and educational materials. All of these areas are ripe for further investigation.

Additionally, as we talked about in our initial conversations, we want to make it as easy and natural as possible for both local and foreign staff to feel empowered to use the platform when asking their boss for time away from normal responsibilities or job functions. Without an organizational norm like Google's 20% time, how can we help users of the platform take on more work?

One of the key ways to create a culture that encourages usage of the CrowdWork platform is to create training materials that educate supervisors about how the platform can be useful to their subordinates. For example, the CrowdWork team would like to encourage LES staff to ask their supervisors if there is a task they are interested in working on through training materials. We would also like training materials to encourage supervisors on how to cross-train people and help expose them to new skills and tasks.

**"Ultimately, the people who understand the power and potential of games to both make us happy and change reality will be the people who invent our future."** – Jane McGonigal

**Sources**

"Interview with Meghan Ventura of Games for Change." Telephone interview. 16 Oct. 2013.

McGonigal, Jane. *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*. New York: Penguin, 2011. Print.

Penenberg, Adam L. *Viral Loop: From Facebook to Twitter, How Today's Smartest Businesses Grow Themselves*. New York: Hyperion, 2009. Print.