Work Gamification Framework(WGF)

How to turn work in every company into a game, have better results and happier workers

Intro

What is the Work Gamification Framework?

The WGF is a set of guidelines which can potentially transform labor on a global scale for the better of all sides. At its core, as the name implies, is the application of gamification methods in all works processes.

I will use the excellent article by [Woodcock, J. and Johnson, M. R. (2018) Gamification: What it is, and how to fight it](#) to clarify what I mean by that term.

Gamification is a relatively recent approach to transform various activities by introducing game elements to them. Although it was very popular and widely discussed in the 2010s it remained mostly untried in the field of work. At best it was poorly understood by management and introduced only very partially without a full understanding of its core ideas. Companies who tried it basically tied various KPIs and metrics to rewards in order to stimulate better productivity and outcomes.

This is NOT what gamification is all about and as can be seen from those previous attempts it didn't succeed and didn't become popular while other methodologies such as Agile and it's Scrum framework became the defacto standard. This doesn't mean that gamification doesn't work it just reflects the poor implementations of it so far.

Before I dive into the definitions of WGF I have to introduce two terms from the article mentioned above. Gamification-from-above and gamification-from-below are two references for gamification introduced top-down and bottom-up. To avoid any nuances of influence from the article WGF is none of the two. At least not as defined there.

WGF approaches the problem at its core by taking into account the motivation of two seemingly contradictory sides, analyzing their goals, conflicts and possibilities for better outcomes for both sides. The most appropriate example of what WGF can be taken from [Game Theory](#):

Game theory is the mathematical study of strategic decision-making, analyzing situations where the outcome for each participant, or "player," depends on the actions of all other participants. It uses mathematical models to predict behavior in scenarios of conflict and cooperation, with key concepts including players, strategies (available actions), payoffs (outcomes), and equilibrium (a stable state).

Motivation

What motivates businesses

Business is a game. A game of growth. The single and only reason for a business to exist is to make profit. This is achieved by using tools such as innovation, automation, efficiency, organization, and optimization.

Companies use various metrics to measure results and outcomes such as Key performance indicators(KPI). The whole legal framework that constitutes a business is rigid in order to make everything measurable and predictable.

Businesses use planning, reporting and analysis on a daily basis to structure processes.

There are two mainstream methodologies across all industries nowadays.

[Waterfall](#)

The Waterfall methodology is a linear, sequential approach to project management where each phase must be fully completed before the next can begin, much like a waterfall. It organizes projects into distinct stages—typically including requirements, design, implementation, testing, and deployment/maintenance—with extensive upfront planning and documentation. While it provides structure, predictability, and is ideal for projects with fixed requirements, it offers little flexibility to accommodate changes or evolving needs once a phase is complete.

[Scrum](#)

Scrum is an Agile framework that breaks down large projects into smaller, manageable chunks called sprints, which are short, iterative cycles of work, typically lasting one to four weeks. It uses specific roles (Product Owner, Scrum Master, Development Team), events (Sprint Planning, Daily Scrum, Sprint Review, Sprint Retrospective), and artifacts (Product Backlog, Sprint Backlog, Increment) to promote transparency, inspection, and adaptation. The goal is to deliver high-quality results efficiently by focusing on teamwork, collaboration, and flexibility to adapt to changing requirements.

These two methodologies reflect two different mindsets depending on nature of industry and flow of work. For example manufacturing can not apply Scrum due to

the sequential, linear order of operations. IT companies on the other hand have moved from Waterfall to Scrum because their async operations benefits from flat structures.

Still both frameworks are very similar in terms of measuring results. They use the same KPIs and account sheets to evaluate success. Eventually boiling down to profit.

WGF on the other hand takes a completely different approach to the problem. To understand WGF you have to think from an alternative perspective. It relies on the invisible motivators that drive human behavior. Gaming companies are the closest to understanding WGF because they already use these motivators with their customers. Gamification relies on internal motivation and giving up control. Something very hard to grasp at first by management. After all work culture has been all about control and discipline ever since the first Industrial Revolution.

But games prove otherwise. If you gamify work even for the management itself then the whole point of work changes. You don't clock-in and clock-out, you switch to a new mode of daily operation. The one of playfulness and curiosity. When you play a game you play for the pleasure of the game itself, not for its results or by schedule. Yet the most obsessive and fun-loving "workers" are gamers. They spend countless nights and sometimes 12-hour days to complete quests, to win competitions and to simply have fun with other gamers. Things like dopamine kicks and other psychological effects are much more powerful movers than direct command and control which neglects the spontaneity of human nature.

This is what gamification is all about, not some leaderboards, charts or rewards. It's about another state of mind. Although it's been well researched in terms of hormone levels and biological effects this is not the point.

The takeaway is that gamification changes the whole perception of work across all divisions of a company. It changes the company culture altogether. And it brings better results for all.

What motivates workers

Being a worker is a role just like being a business. We play all sorts of roles in life and associate with them. When you ask someone who is he people mostly respond with their occupation or profession. Although so deeply embedded in culture we should not forget these are all made up terms and a successful worker or a business is after all just a human or bunch of humans doing something successfully. Being a worker is closer to human nature since we all have the strive for achievements and realization in life. A human is motivated most of all by humane things, things which are specific to homo sapiens and doesn't exist in machines – spontaneity, playfulness, autonomy, appreciation, sense of achievement and security, togetherness.

In a present day organization the pressure for profit and growth drives the environment more and more towards machine-like behavior. Reports, meetings, sync ups and team buildings. These are all inherited from the Taylorist and Fordist eras from a century ago. Even Scrum itself is taken as-is from Toyota's assembly lines and applied in IT. These are all standard by now across all industries with very few exceptions. And by mainstream metrics they do just fine. But this is only from the business point of view, or the machine-like approach. Calculated in numbers and reports.

But if work was at optimized from human perspective we wouldn't divide work time and leisure time. We have the mask of being serious and disciplined at work and whoever we are in our spare time. That reveals the whole contradiction.

How does gamification resolve that from the worker perspective?

It dialectically replaces strictness, discipline, schedule and order by spontaneous play. But play contrary to work is addictive in a healthy way. When you play you don't feel how time passes by. Games tend to make us forget about surroundings, space and time. At the same time they provide variety, you can play many games, not just one. And this is the whole point.

We can summarize that society plays a single game – the game of money, while we haven't explored yet all other games we can play.

Goals

A business organization puts resources, manpower and knowledge to create products and services. It creates structures to orchestrate all that into productive units in order to measure the output. Creating structure leads to a schedule in order to maintain that structure. Goals are not always aligned with motivation. In fact they are quite often misaligned. For example being motivated by profit doesn't automatically create a successful goal in input or output terms. Goals differ in that they provide a way to achieve an aspiration. Motivation is the driver goal is the car.

The tried and established way of setting goals so far has been to define them and move towards them. In terms of inputs this is investing with the prospect of profiteering. This leads to a narrow, very straight-forward path. But this path has a limit and this limit is the amount of creativity and focus you can get when you think of the same thing everyday. You get up, go to work do the same thing, track progress and repeat until it's done. Yes it does the job but what if it could produce much better outcomes? What if the alternative was never tried?

Gamification on the other hand approaches goals in very diverse and unpredictable ways. There are linear games which follow the business pattern. And there are games where there is no start, no end, no objectives and no final goal. Yet such games unexpectedly produce a much higher retention rate than any job. And this is considering that jobs have the real survival element to them while games are always for fun, even survival games. How is this possible then? Quite franky games are open-ended scenarios, there is no one right way and that makes them so much fun. If you get bored with one genre you can change to a completely new one, unlike jobs where organization barely differs across sectors and industries. Games reflect our true spontaneous nature as human beings. They reflect the unpredictability we crave, the variety and element of surprise we find amusing and attractive. At the same time they can be tailored to fulfill the sense of security and calmness sought after by others.

So obviously goals can be achieved in many ways. And the more subtle, the more indirect the approach is – the more appealing and alluring it is for workers. The task of management is to actually apply that creativity in the working process and measure the results.

Next we will proceed with examples how gamification absolutely crushes mainstream approach to work and doing business as a whole.

Gamification

What is gamification and what it is not

Gamification as stated previously is not merely turning KPIs into tasks, competitions, leaderboards, charts and rewards. Think of real games. They are played viciously because they are fun and addictive. You want to achieve that same level of immersion so that the player actually feels in a game and not into a company quiz. The whole point of the game is to get work done by not realizing it. To get lost in the game and forget about time. It's that subtle. A player of World of Warcraft or League of Legends is devoting sometimes more than 40 hours a week to play it but doesn't get bored or burned out. Think why?

Of course gamification varies across sectors, industries and workflow. But there are common principles which apply to gamification as a whole:

- true game, not a cover up for work
- an environment which disconnects from the business world of money, pressure, schedules and collectivization
- personalization
- creativity without boundaries, think of open world games
- endless choices, not a single path

Next up we will cover some examples from various sectors. From recruitment to manufacturing and ending up with creative works.

In recruitment

Recruitment is traditionally a very conservative sphere. It barely changed over the course of the past 50 years. Hiring is a ritual as most business processes. It becomes a standard and then is followed by all organizations as it becomes mainstream. There is a structure of phases called interviews, there are tasks and references. Evaluatated and evaluator. But does it actually produce the best results possible? Can you really narrow down the complex creature a human is to a report with a couple of bullet points and final score and be sure you have selected really the best candidate?

Let's look at the same example from the perspective of gamification and compare.

Imagine a candidate shows up and instead of cross-examination similar to a teacher questioning a student at an exam disguised as a conversation you simply present a game and give the only instruction there is – play!

What do you think will happen? Have you tried? Well, I have, when I had the chance to, and I was amazed by the result. I was thinking on the topic for a couple of years and eventually when I had the responsibility to do hiring I came up with a simple 3D maze game. The candidate showed up at the office. There was a meet and greet after which I only said – do you want to play a game?

The person in front of me was shocked. What?!? He was so caught by surprise by this turn of things that didn't know how to react. 5 minutes later he was drinking a coke and curiously crawling the dungeons of the maze I created the previous week. Some of the walls had interactive boards where questions or puzzles appeared. He was very engaged and looked intrigued. The questions and puzzles didn't have anything to do with work, expertise or experience. They were subtle, logical, sometimes philosophical questions meant to extract the same information in a more natural, spontaneous way. There was a room with 2 pills – blue and red, all you had to do was to choose one. No instructions, no clarifications and no outcome. Just a choice.

After the interview we talked for a while about the game. The guy was astonished by the effect it had on him. The clear response I had was – "I would attend only such interviews if possible". No stress, no survival mode, no sweating hands, no awkward silence.

This is the power of gamification. It turns your head around and makes you rethink everything you believed was "right" and "professional". Businesses who manage to grasp and apply this idea creatively will see the day when there is no separation between work and leisure and that day will be celebrated by both employers and employees the same way because they both win.

In manufacturing

Manufacturing is a sector which is more or less the same for a century now. As such it is dominated by linear, sequential operations and very resisting to change. Gamification is harder here due to time and space limitations but not impossible. All is subject to creativity as always. The key factor here is that work revolves around direct measurable outcome – number of details produced, number of failed components etc. Bonuses are applied again based on production units and productivity. This in turn opens the door for utilizing the analytics and reporting system as the backbone of our game.

Imagine each worker having an app on their smartphone. Each day after they clock-in they log into the game by their own initiative. They have an avatar which can acquire items. So called bonuses automatically lead to items acquisition. This creates a completely new reward system which is not based on survival and is rather supplementary to the main game – work. But things get interesting once you analyze what backs those virtual items. They are backed by work hours, expertise, knowledge and measurable production. Now compare that to things we consider valuable – money, they are subject to inflation and centrally controlled, crypto currencies, backed by electricity and algorithmic work which doesn't produce anything except itself. Now you get the picture, those items are way more valuable socially then what they look like initially. This inherited value which is so precious in our society based on work is the perfect candidate for a global marketplace when backed by modern proof of existence technologies like NFTs. Why would people trade items given that they are not useful anywhere compared to for example true in-game items?

Because they have a society-wide acknowledged value. If I am an investor and buy your magic sword which is worth 100 work hours in manufacturing this is a much harder currency than fiat and crypto altogether because it is based on something we value more – work. Work is our stamp for being decent and useful to society. Our badge of honor if you will. So it will always be more appreciated then easy earned money and get rich schemes.

Going back to our example let's see what incentives we have already created by this item reward system. First of all the employer doubles the benefits without paying anything for that extra incentive. Secondly the worker gets a way to receive money at work which are not generated by the employer and are not capped by a bonus system. The worker thus becomes a completely autonomous subject on a global item trade market, similar to gamers. This extra freedom makes the worker feel in a completely new territory while being in the same old place and same old conditions, with no further investment from the employer except the gamification of the working process.

I hope by now uou can easily see how gamification creates value for both sides. And that's with a ROI which is far greater than any conventional business incentive or investment in working conditions. On the worker side it generates a sense of autonomy, of holding faith in your hands. This is because in a sense you become an entrepreneur while being a worker, you have stocks which were reserved only for the privileged few ones before.

In creative works

We live in a tech world. As such we have to admit people in the creative field are already spoiled with perks, incentives and benefits on top of very good compensation. Or so it was a few years ago writing that in 2025.

Although the global item reward system backed by work hours is still applicable here we have to account for the different group involved here. These people are used to work being a play to a certain degree. Yes there are rules, there are schedules, most of all there is stress and burnout but creativity is rewarding and people mostly do what they generally like and want to do. Some of those people are future entrepreneurs, others have stocks and so on. It is obvious that here we need to apply more creative approaches. Something which goes beyond the perks of the existing game. You can't lure people who already had skin in the game with the same thing.

But at the same time being a company in the tech sector you have way more resources, innovation and creativity at hand to create something awesome and out of this world. How do you get people interested if money and materialism is not the main factor anymore? By simply creating worlds that satisfy all your other needs. And you have plenty of them – culture, spontaneity, unpredictability, surprise, shock. We are complex being reduced to homo economicus and people from this niche live that. So back to the question, how do you retain those folks in a very innovative way?

Here is a suggestion – how about creating a game which does your job in the background while you do something completely unrelated?

Imagine an accountant, I know quite a boring job, juggling with numbers, reports and communication with authorities. How about playing a game which secretly in the background uses your input to do meaningful work while you play any sort of game?

You play CS:GO, an AI agent does accounting as you kill enemies. Weird, huh?

Potential is endless now with AI, what is limited is creativity. Not in the sense of natural creativity but the one limited by routine, culture, practice and rules.

Outcomes – the big picture

We have already pictured the landscape of global marketplace for WGF NFTs backed by measurable work and expertise. A main feature of anything money-related is that it has to be scarce. We have it – working hours are limited so it's definitely way more viable than crypto currencies and fiat. Now let's outline the global picture of all the proposed changes coming true.

1) WGF NFTs become more valuable than Bitcoin for the simple reasons that:

   a) they don't require crazy amounts of electricity

   b) they are backed by a social agreement more valuable than self-feeding algorithms

2) Games can be indefinitely spawned by each company. In fact companies will have to innovate more in terms of in-house gaming rather than products because this becomes a market on its own. This leads to a far greater change that can be seen by the naked eye. The focus moves again from consumption to production. People spend more time at work because it doesn't feel like work. They don't want more goods and products, they want more joy and wherever they can find it will stay there. Think of mid 90-s internet clubs with mutliplayer. Same thing.

3) Workplaces become a multitude of metaverses where people come and go like in gaming clubs to have fun

4) Work is no longer defined as work

In summary, you might think this is science fiction and we are very far from this moment if it ever comes. Think of betting or other leisure activities, this is already metaverse, we live in a post-scarcity world for more than 20 years now kept artificially not there by crises and wars.

Prospects

As we know future is unpredictable. But there are tendencies. I will try to outline here some of the predictions, risks and opportunities I have thought about.

Predictions

Gamification will become more mainstream for a simple fact. There is no more added value to be extracted in the global economy. Everything is captured and monetized. The only way out is inwards by creating new niches where there they didn't exist previously. And work takes a big chunk of peoples lives. In fact the biggest after sleep if not more. But contrary to global elite's predictions and desires metaverses will not emerge in consumption, but in production, because consumption is way oversaturated already. Gamification is a powerful tool which can create consumption where you least expect it – at the workplace. And this a systemic savior when planned obsolescence and credits are not enough.

Risks

This is a speculative one as everyone perceives risk differently. I am going to be contemplating here from the perspective of risks for gamification. Obviously gamification is only worth in a post-scarcity society. Thus it is a relatively new phenomenon. Starving people are really playful, they first satisfy their real needs then become relaxed. But we live in an era where real needs are satisfied for a long time and even replaced by artificial needs. Looking at all those people who are addicted to buying new cars but can't afford good food or accommodation. It's all a matter of self-consciousness and priorities. Still the biggest risk to gamification is of course survival mode. People who are well off but can't get out of survival mode will never be part of the gamification revolution. And vice versa there are people living off of little who are rich enough to afford this lifestyle simply because they make different life choices.

Opportunities

Gamification was a subject to a false start. It was the famous new baby that was never born. Although subject to all the hype for about a decade nothing fruitful came out of it, except maybe wheels of fortune for consumers in supermarkets, which was really not gamification. Opportunities ahead are endless simply because work is not the only field which can be commodified. When you can't sell more to consumers you can only turn to your employees to start consuming at work. This time something creative and at the same time productive.

Feedback

I would be genuinely happy to read your feedback on the topics covered.

Do you find your field or specific position easy for gamification?

How do you see that?

Post an issue and describe your case.