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A Gamified Volunteer system

This paper presents a conceptual of the Gamified volunteer system and its primitive design. I put down this in a hurry, so grammar error and typos are expected.

CLASSIFIED

# Introduction

I am not going to say any about gamification.

About the volunteers, there are great needs for volunteers especially in a chaotic city like Wuhan. But there simply aren’t remotely enough. People are so under educated to be volunteers. They either don’t care about the social good nor do they realize being volunteers can be helpful for themselves. For some people they for some reason what to be volunteers (whatever the reason is, these people are great), however it is really hard for them to be. They cannot find anyone who is organizing this kind of activities, or it takes great amount of effort to do so.

The government on another hand has done little for volunteers. This is of course not their fault, they have tones of more important things to see to, like constructing roads and bridges, tearing down buildings, catching unlicensed street shopping stands, fighting against terrorism and educate people not littering all over the place. However, didn’t they realize that if there are volunteers out there, it is much easier for the city manager and there citizens.

So if we can setup a system that can easily recruit volunteers, manage volunteer activities and create an atmosphere of volunteerism. I am not talking about government should simple post more volunteer activities nor reward the volunteers. I am talking about creating an ecosystem that people feel like being volunteers, volunteers are appreciated and really problems can be solved by volunteers. This system will surly do the world a favor.

# Conceptual

## Why gamification?

Gamification is making something game like. This word is confusing, it makes people thinking of video games. No, I am not making a video game or online game. Here I mean making volunteer activities more fun thus more people will take part in. Some video game elements will be used, but that’s not the point. The points are to motivate people and to get them take part as volunteers by making it fun.

## Analysis the volunteer activities

By analyzing the volunteer activities, we can see that the gamification is right choice and later will provide guidelines for Gamified designs.

### Motivation

Why people want be volunteers?

1. They want do the community a favor.

Some of them cannot look and do nothing about the problems. If they find people need help they will try to help. This is the biggest motivation of volunteers. It comes from sympathy I guess. Some also believe one day if himself needed help people will do the same.

1. They feel good when helping others

This is called “乐于助人” in Chinese. Someone will naturally feel happy when helping others

1. They want to be regarded as good people.

They want to be good, so they find being volunteers is a way. Some volunteers are considered as an honor like the Olympics’ volunteers. This is still mostly intrinsic motivation. But some people use this as a way of getting status thus they can use this status to get tangible reward, this is not a voluntarily action. But as long as they are not cheating and doing actual good for people it is still useful.

1. To get an experience

Helping other sometime requires techniques, like teaching in rural area, doing medical help for injured in disaster. By doing this, they gain training or get precious experiences that may be helpful. This is still intrinsic motivation

1. Show competence

Some people have some special skills. In a certain task, there maybe not enough professional to do it, so volunteers with special skill is required. Like in an earth quake event, many doctors became volunteers. Besides the above motivate, here lays another: they can show their competence of their skill.

1. In order to get a certification

In some school you have to be a volunteer to get some points or credits, or else you can get your degree. This is totally extrinsic.

After the above motivation analysis we find, although being a volunteer is not quite creative activities but it most requires intrinsic motivation. That’s why it is call “voluntarily”. But there are extrinsic motivation as well.

### Obstacles

Why people do not want to be volunteers?

1. Do not care about others.

It is busy for everybody to maintain a living if you are not a boss right? Or if you are a boss you get busy enjoying the extravagance.

1. Little personal help

Similar as the above. Nowadays people are chasing things with values.

1. Yes, I want to, but how?

Being a volunteer is difficult; there is no organization for this. What a petty.

### Conclusion

From the above we can draw a conclusion that if we want to make people do more voluntarily stuff, we need to do two thing: add more motivation, low the difficulty.

The gamification is designed to add more motivation. It can use game techniques to enhance the motivation mentioned above and from new motivation: fun. Fun is an intrinsic motivation for everything. We do stuff because it is fun. Besides that, a well designed gamification can be a platform that manages the volunteer activities easily and provide an easy way for people to participate in. you never find it difficult to accept and finish a quest in MMORPG right?

# Gamification guidelines

## Objectives

There are two objectives. Wait a second, 3? I guess we are talking about get people feeling like being volunteers? Yes that is the first one and the biggest one. But along the way of achieving this, we are also going to do some good for the volunteers, provide some benefit for those who really care about own society. This in return is very helpful for achieving the first goal. The last but not the least, it will provide a way that people can easily organize and manage volunteer activities. This is beneficial for those who need help like the poor and the government. Together the 3 objectives will lead to a healthy ecosystem for volunteers.

## Target users

This system will have 2 kinds of main target users: the volunteers and the activity organizer.

### The volunteers

The volunteers will be the majority of the users. As a Gamified system, they are regarded as player.

For them we are going to encourage them to be volunteers as well as been beneficial for them.

The expected user characteristics are:

**College students** (maybe some high school students): young, has enough spare time, building life styles, energetic and has some leave of feeling of social response and want to be good.

They are motivated mainly by “gain personal experiences”. To gain experience, it requires that the activates are well designed to include skill developing, problem solving and fun. Also they are students, they are been thought to be good and being social responsive. If engaging them in “fun” volunteer activities, they will feel the people fun and serious fun. This will help them to build a life style that helping others is fun which is good for the society. Beside the above intrinsic motivation, we can pose some extrinsic ones too. Like giving them school credits or coupons. Be careful with these do not crowd out the intrinsic ones. As they are young, video game elements is appealing to them.

**Young Mid-class**: well educated, do not have to fight for living, descent incomes, building life styles and feel strong responsibility for the society.

These people are mainly motivated by the “do the community a favor” and “乐于助人”. This is the essence of being a volunteer. We have to stick to this motivation. Enhance these motivations we need to use feedback. If they can say the impact they have made to the society they will be more pleased. Also these people what to be good, so the status is meaningful to them. Create a system which they can build up their status is necessary. Still be careful, over emphasize on status is bad, not everyone is drawn to status. Video game elements may still do some help. But tangible reward is not that important.

**Rich people:** most not that well educated cares most nothing about the society, plenty of time and money to waste but care a lot about its status.

This people are motivated by status. They are so called poser. These people aren’t bad at the beginning, but when you have that much money you became an asshole. They do social good to build a status of being less asshole. They more or less did some harm to the society when getting rich, they want the people to think they are good ones so forget what they have done bad.

**State employees or similar ones that are forced to be “volunteers”:** these are actually not volunteers since they are not doing it voluntarily. They are doing this because they just have to. They will need to be volunteers to get school credits, to get promotion or their boss “suggested” so. Like in our university, students have to do some social work like pick up trash, mow the lawn. We will minimize this kind of users, but we cannot ignore them.

### The organizers

In a game besides players there are NPC (Non-Player Characters). The organizers are the NPC in this system. They will provide activities.

The expected organizers are:

* Government:

They are the major organizers. In a chaotic city volunteers are really needed. The can organize activities like clean the city, enforce the rule of the road, look after the elderly, serve a public event and etc. government are rich basterds, they can provide funding for some tangible reward.

* Charity organizations

This is also a major user. They are poor, so they relies on heavily on volunteers

* Schools, universities:

They got plenty of people and plenty of stuff to do, why not make the student volunteers. Not only does they get thing done but also their student gets educated.

* Various communities, like a neighborhood or inside your company:

Social communities sometimes got problems that seem to be everyone’s problem yet no is responsible for it. I would summon some volunteers rather than hire people to do this. I mean it’s you own job. But if you have already paid, that’s another story.

## More fun for the organizers

For the organizers, in order to encourage them to come out more and better activities, game design techniques can be used too. Like put on a competition between organizer communities. The volunteers can write review about the activity and give them scores.

## More Motivation

Here we will no add any new motivations; we just enhance those mentioned before.

The following are techniques we are going to use in this system. They will be used to guide the design of this system.

### Make it fun

All techniques we are using will make the system fun. In this section we talk about pure gaming fun. Game element and design techniques are used at some degree.

* Serious Fun: ()

We create an atmosphere that everyone is willing to help others. And we highly praise thus. We let the people know that being a volunteer is good and you will do a lot of good to the society. When they became a volunteer they will feel they are good people, which is fun. This is not by giving them status or reward, just create a culture, an atmosphere and a life style.

* Include problem solving and skill developing:

We all know that boring task is not fun. If we carefully design our activities to include problem solving and skill developing people will want to take part in because it is fun. Besides that when people involved in such activities they gain valuable experiences which is another motivation. And this kind of tasks always introduce a learning curve which bring up progression, this will be covered later.

* Make it interesting game

Actually it is a part of the above. But if a volunteer task is fundamentally not creative and you cannot bring any skills or problem solving into it. At least you can make it fun by adding game element. There is a great example: in an airport there is an exit which you can exit but not allowed to walk in through there. A security guy is sitting there making sure no one walks in. What a boring task. But a company has developed a thing that uses a camera film the gate and transmits the video to a monitor in the control room. On the monitor they use motion-capture technology to transform all the people into monsters walking out through gate of a castle. Suddenly it becomes a game that you need to catch a monster going into that castle.

* Game elements

Like point, levels, badges, avatars and lead board, simple isn’t it. Simple but effective.

* Procession

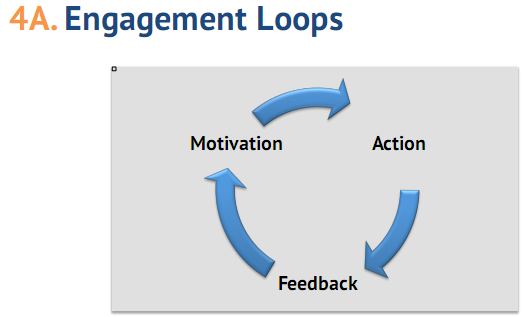
This is a game design technique. And it is a key step to achieve heart flow (why people are addicted to video games). We bring in level unlock activities little by little. Older players will have more knowledge and skill compared to new comers. We can put some limitation on tasks, so high level player can participate. Or you have to complete a certain task (training like or skill test) to get a certification to participate in certain activities. This also adds a motivation that you can show your competence of skills. Competence is one of the key of intrinsic motivation.

### Feedback

Feedback is an important game design technique.

* Basics

This is very important in game design; it is a key element in the engagement loop;



When you are motivated you will take action. The action will have some effects, you find the effect by feedback. When you know what you have done you can make choice of the next action. This becomes motivation again. Like if you shot at a target you can check which ring did you hit and do some correction for next round. But if you pull the trigger, nothing happened. You probably will give up this game. And Constance rules between action and feedback is very important too. It provide autonomy, meaning the player has the control. This is another key of intrinsic motivation. You cannot randomly reward or punish one that helped a granny to cross the road right?

So we will give immediate feedback to the volunteers, so they can decide next move. Also we have to so the impact their actions have made to further motivate them.

* Impact

Impact means you got to know the effect of what you have done on the society. This can bring much relatedness to you action. You will find what you have done is good for the society for yourself. Relatedness is a key of intrinsic motivation.

You can show the impact the player made like how many trees you have saved, how much money you save or how many old people have save. As well personal impact, the impact of the activities the player took part in can be shown. Since this has a much bigger impact than one player’s impact, it is going to be a bigger motivation. Also some activities that the play not yet takes part in can be shown to encourage him to participate.

* Feedback from the beneficiary

What if the granny you helped sends you an email saying thank you? And she also twits about it on her twitter. That is motivation. Community can use this trick to, say thank you to the volunteers that have helped on its media.

### Status

Status are social tags put on people. People sometime will chase status but not everyone does. Status is not always extrinsic motivation, and to everyone’s surprise most of the time it is intrinsic. When people did good, their wish they will be regarded as good people. Most solders won’t fight for a medal of honor, but if given one it will greatly encourage them.

* Badges

Badges is simple, it is given to the player as they have achieved something. Badges can be put into a show case to show the personal achievement and status. Kind of show off, put it is a way to make people appreciate your achievements. It makes what you have done more meaningful. Speaking of meaningful, the badges themselves must be meaning for. A piece of metal and a purple ribbon may be nothing. But what if I tell you that you have to be wounded in a fight for you county to win this purple hear metal? If you giving badges to player for meaningless action that badges contains not value.

More on badges. As I mentioned before, to archive progression, some activities may need the players to archive something or be certified for a certain skill. Badges can be that certification. When you participate in an activities and performed well you may get a badges. Or if you have some certification like a doctor’s license you get a badge. These badges will promote the player to participate in high level activities. Shown the requirement of the badges and the requirement of activities, which can be a motivation.

* Social media:

Social media is like Weibo, Facebook and Twitter. The effect of status can be magnified using social media. Also we can use social media to start a viral phenomenon.

* Offline community:

Most player care lots about offline lives. Some players care little about online crap, like some rich basterds. So we have to throw some offline party that in cooperate with some offline communities.

### Community

People are social beings. We are somehow involved in some communities. Communities can bring some motivations.

* Community pressure, leader board:

If all your neighbors or classmates are participating in volunteer activities, how can you sit there and do nothing. This is social pressure. This can ask help from social media. Like even you are not a player of this system, you will be seeing twits about this every day.

As mentioned, it’s important that the players are put in a community context, like their neighbors or schoolmates. Friends have influence on you, a stringer does not.

And a game element can be used here, the leader board. This can give you both social pressure and competence. But it has to be put in a community context. It’s not that meaningful saying you ranked in the middle in the whole country rather than showing your rank among you friends.

* Serve the community first:

When serving your own community you have more relatedness, and you get more appreciated, because your friends are watching you. In return you can motivate them as well. You get a feeling of dong what you are supposed to do. Finally it is easier throw an offline activity.

* Mandatory participation

For people in certain communities like universities, we can along with the communities to ask these people to be volunteers or else they cannot graduate. Use this with caution. This is not the intended way of this system works. But since this kind of mandatory participation already exists, it can be integrated into this system.

### Extrinsic motivation

Sometimes intrinsic motivation is weak, in the volunteer case particularly. Bringing in extrinsic motivation is necessary. But be careful, we are talking “volunteers” not hiring people to do stuff. And do not crowd out the intrinsic ones. Last extrinsic motivations may leads to cheating.

* Points

Participate in activities when get you points. Points are reward, intangible reward. So it is an easy way of extrinsic motivations. Points can also be used as a measurement of the player, the better they do in the volunteer activities the more they get. The points better be performance contingence. This will bring some fun (challenge) and less cheating.

* Tangible reward:

Points can used to exchange with some tangible reward, like coupons. You should never do this like a loyalty program. Those loyalty programs are simple that you can use you points to exchange for small gifts. This definitely over ride the intrinsic motivation, and will leads to cheating. You can give out some coupons, and those players above a certain level can have it. Or if you reached a certain level you get school credits or get promotion is you organization. For coupons or small gift you can use surprise, players should not anticipate the tangible reward and surprise is always fun. Also you can you “chance”. You can reward player to play a slot machines with a chance of winning some prize. The tangible reward can be fund by the benefited party like government, or companies and communities, they can use this platform as advertising.

* Keep record

Of course we will keep a record of how the players are doing, this is how we evaluate the volunteer activities and the system. But this record can be useful to the players. Like it can be part of their resume, just like github does. Good people are welcome everywhere. For rich people they can shoe the media their record and use it for their own sake, like advertising.

## Lower the difficulty

As I said someone want to be volunteers because they don’t know how. We have to make it easier to become volunteers for those who want to.

### More activities

This is vital. We can provide a platform that there are tons of activities to choose from. The activities cover a vast variety of places and required skills. Now you don’t have the excuse of “too far away from where I live” or “I am not good at it”. And more choice also brings more control. People can pick what they like.

### Easy to use system

This is vital as well. If you are going to an epic battle it’s ok for you to sign up on the line, check in at the field, and check out when you finish. But what about helping a granny crossing the road. If you have to take photos and filling forms to get this recorded in the system, no one will use it. This relies heavily on UX designs. Game design techniques are required here.

## Trigger

Trigger is simple. Once you have motivation and the action has little difficulty, a trigger can do what it name suggests, trigger the action.

Trigger can be like a sales promotion. You suddenly increase a points of an activity is a trigger but bad one. You can use media to trigger or offline activity. Just use the imagination. The system does not design trigger. The one runs this system design the trigger.

# System Design

We have come this far that we covered in theory how the volunteer system will work. Here we are talking about how the system will be build.

This section will be the guide line for making Product backlog items (PBI) for the project. So to be simple I will use EPIC (extreme large user stories) shown the design of this system.

Note, not all below epics covered the points I talked about above. Many will be applied during the operation phase of this system. And the operation phase of this system will be a serious iteration for this system to evolve toward a better system.

## As Volunteer

As a volunteer I want to sign up in this system. Using my really name and other real personal information is encouraged. With really personal information the system can push me more activities that fit my interests. Suggest communities that I may want to join.

As a volunteer I want I can easily browser volunteer activities. They are arranged in order that the one I mostly would like to participate comes first. I can also select order by others like time or distance. As I brows， I can see a brief intro about the activities as well as a thumbnail picture of it. The brief info includes: the organizer, the brief description, target number of participants current number of participants and date. If it is a repeatable activity it has a rating of it.

As a volunteer, when I click on one activity, I want to see the full info of this activity. It contains a section which is an article with picture and text describing this activity. Using a tab I can switch to a page to see who have taken part in. Below I can see the comment on this activity. Using a tab I can switch to a page to see what kind of requirements it need to participate and what reward do I get, like badges, points.

As a volunteer I want to see each activity’s the impact, and you personal impact in this activity.

As a volunteer I wish on the homepage, I can navigate to a page showing the activities I have taken part in. so I can rate them or write comments about it.

As a volunteer, at the homepage, I wish I can check the activities that are over (me not participated). I can read comments about the past activities.

As a volunteer, I want to see my brief personal statistics on the homepage and check my full statistics by clicking it. It shows my level, my point, how many points to the next level, my badges. Game elements are used here to motivate me.

As a volunteer I want there be an inbox. My friends can send me letters and vise versa. The most important thing about inbox is the organizers and the beneficiary of the activities I participated can send me letters saying thank you.

As a volunteer when I sign up, check in or check out for an activity I can easily share this with my friends using my social media like twitter or Weibo.

As a volunteer I can join different communities, when I join this community I got more points for participate the activities of these communities. And I get news about the communities. And there are some activities that on members of certain communities can take part in.

As a volunteer I wish to have a leader board, showing my current rank among my friends and my community.

As volunteer I wish sometimes I get rewarded for my participation in activities.

## Organizer

As an organizer I want to have an organizer homepage, so I can edit it to show volunteers about the organizer. It also shows the statistics of this organizer like activities thrown by it the impact it has.

As an organizer I want to create activities. When I create an activity, I can set the date time and place of this activity; set the number limit of it; set the required numbers; write an article to describe it; set points for each participant.

As an organizer I have a point and impact budget for all activities in a month, they cannot be acuminated between months. These budgets are changeable according to the organizers activeness.

As an organizer, I want to give each of my activity themes so that volunteers can find activities they like. Themes are given as tag.

As an organizer I want to set special limits to an activity. I can set minimum levels, required badges or membership of a community.

As an organizer I want that beside the normal activities have two more types or activities. One is called repeatable one is called scattered.

As an organizer I want that when one event of a repeatable activity is finished, I can easily schedule another with different date time. The title, theme, and the discretion cannot be changed event by event. But I do have a brief description for each event. Participants can rate each event. The activity rating is the average rating of all events.

As an organizer I want to have scattered activities. These activities have not strict date time or volunteer number limit. It is on for many time slots. If the slot is on, you can sign up for it. During that time slot you can go check in for that activity and give it your hands. It is as if it always there and you just go and show you help. You can go even without sign in.

As an organizer I want to create badges. Badges need to be approved by administrator to be available. A badge has a trigger and a description and an image (animated gif ok) representing it.

As an organizer I want to create communities. I can approve volunteers to join the community.

As an organizer I can set the affinity of the activity. This means I can assign activity to communities.

As organizer I can set the attribute of the activities. They describe the attribute the activity required, like: strength, endurance, intelligence, sympathy and something.

## Communities

As a member of a community I can get latest news and activities feeds of the community.

As a member of a community I can enter a discussion room, where I can use it like a forum. Non-member cannot post anything, but may read (according to the community’s policy).

As a volunteer, when I participate communities affinity activities the points I got has community affinity. This is how I gain loyalty to a community. Is I am a member I got extra points. The extra points do not count in the point’s budget of the organizer. This will encourage the use of community.

# Operation

The operation of this system is even more important than the design.

First we will cooperate with local volunteer communities, to do the first few rounds of product iteration. After that we will make the system public. More organization will join us. Eventually we will try to rise funding from the government.