
PRESS RELEASE

5 gamification elements that boost IT projects

Play is part of human nature. IT consulting and system integration company msg has examined how the instinct to play can be used in agile software development. Elements of play promote performance, creativity and identification, while strengthening teams and making project work fun and motivating.

Munich, May 29, 2018. Gamers get completely lost in their games. They climb from one level to the next following a so-called “flow”, forgetting time and even their most basic needs. Game developers achieve that state by catering to the forces that drive humans. They lend epic meaning and a higher sense even to games with mediocre plots, while awarding players for their performance and progress and promoting a sense of empowerment. They awaken creativity and use the elements of games to ensure players identify with the goal more and more as they pass each level. These types of elements of play can also be applied in companies as well. The term for doing so is referred to as “gamification”. Using these elements can be a success factor in agile software development and can further strengthen the playful elements already found in SCRUM, for example. According to msg’s experiments with SCRUM projects, there are at least 5 gamification elements that can make work more interesting and exciting, and thus lead to better results.

1. Meaning and mission

The introductory story plays a particularly important role in computer games: It gives the player a sense of higher meaning and, in doing so, an intrinsic reason for playing the game. Employees also look for “meaning” in their work: After all, if an employee can see a reason behind their work and a deeper meaning to their actions, then every challenge becomes a personal mission. In SCRUM projects, motivation can be enhanced by giving teams autonomy or through so-called “sprint vision”, which integrates an individual’s work into the overall project.

2. Performance and progress

Points, levels, prizes and rankings give gamers feedback about their own personal success. Even employees love a good challenge: Feeling up to their tasks and seeing their work progress

motivates them or enhances their existing motivation. Progress displays and countdown timers are already part of agile software projects and SCRUM and show the current state of the project.

3. Self-efficacy and creativity

Giving a gamer the option to choose from different alternatives means they no longer feel like they are meeting external demands. Power-ups also help promote creativity, such as when a gamer is given a new skill or power. Employees like to experiment too and always want to see personal growth as well when working on a task. They want to make their own decisions and see themselves as self-efficient, even when the consequences might be negative.

4. Identification and responsibility

People identify with things. That is why computer games often offer avatars and customized user interfaces, which players can modify and advance as they go. For projects in the work world, it often suffices to give employees something they can identify with or that helps them establish a relationship with what they are doing. That motivates them to assume responsibility for “their” thing, to take care of it and possibly to do even more.

5. Social standing and building relationships

People are social beings who define themselves by things like feedback from other people, including from their colleagues. What do others think, where do they stand socially and among their competition? In games it is one’s clan that allows members to act synergistically, helping solve problems more effectively and work together to beat the opposition. Group quests use social dynamics, allowing people to work in teams to find solutions faster than individuals could. Another incentive is that every member of the clan can be rewarded in the form of better properties and skills for their characters. Interaction and transparency are actually defined goals of SCRUM. The team organizes itself and uses an open work method. This effect can be enhanced by providing additional support, such as mentors and coaches.

Summary: The right way is doing what works

The experimental use of gamification elements in SCRUM projects proved to msg that they can be used to strengthen employee dedication and motivation. However, there are also elements that are not effective at certain times or for certain groups and that could even be counterproductive: Deliberate threat-based scenarios, artificial lack of resources or stoking up impatience may drive gamers to peak performance. However, whether those three elements help IT teams work together is something every company will have to find out for themselves. What is

clear, though, is that any gamification element that works for a company, its teams and its employees is the right one.

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msg holds seventh place in the ranking of IT consulting and system integration companies in Germany.

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