

The Values of Games for Health and Well Being

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Abstract:

The usual context or application of game is one for entertainment. The unusual one is mentioned by Flanagan 2009: use it as “a tool to help examine or work through social issues” [1]. In this paper, we are discussing how we could use the values of game in the context of healthcare. In particular we are trying to understand what are the key values that game experience and mechanism can offer when designing the digital technology platform “Helf - The health Elf” with the scope of achieving health goals through game. Helf - the Health Elf is a platform designed for adolescents to become more independent in self managing their health conditions. Using Helf, we will present one approach in which game values contribute towards solving a social issue.

keywords: Game values, well being, social issue, healthcare.

Introduction

Games, digital or physical kind, are no longer just simple time burning activities off-work for adults, or activities oriented for the little ones in their spare time. Using game thinking is now an emerging technique used in many many fields of research and industries. From the tamagotchi-like dash board computers in cars, that use game theories to make you a more eco-friendly driver, to the health apps on your phone that count your steps throughout the day (with scoreboards and ranks), to maths classes designed using game and play to be more engaging and fun. They are all examples of applying game and play towards improving or solving a problem.

Gamification is the use of game mechanics to engage audiences and solve a problem [2]. The problem could range from the traditional desire to win at a simple relaxation-distraction board

game, to “function as means for creative expression, as instruments for conceptual thinking, or as tools to help examine or work through social issues” [1].

Helf - The Health Elf is an exciting new interactive, multifunctional platform that is using game and play mechanics to help adolescents become more independent in self managing their health conditions.

Helf does this by:

- offering a mechanism to capture the care plan documents and incorporate the data into a personal care support platform .
- providing individualised support to adolescents, guiding them through what they need to accomplish their care plans and health goals, offering reminders, education, amusement with educational games and competitions, and support through close and loose social networks.
- storytelling - dependent on the teenager age group, condition, etc..

For the platform to engage the young person, it also needs to be fun and playful, and this is what play and game values can offer Helf.



Helf the Health Elf facilitates young people to learn the skills they need with the support they require in order to take increasing responsibility for looking after themselves.

Providing adolescents with timely, relevant information, scheduling, appropriate support and learning opportunities, improves their ability to self-care from an earlier age, their likelihood to adopt healthy behaviours, their health outcomes, their productivity and independence, and reduces health costs related to treatment and readmissions.

In turn, the adolescent is able to share information so Helf, their family and their carers can support them to undertake rehabilitation and treatment, prepare for and attend appointments and become more independent. The young person is equipped to help themselves and others within their peer group, they develop good intergenerational relationships with their family, are healthier, have fewer health emergencies, are more productive and require fewer additional services and resources. Helf offers a gamified experience to support young people to develop their health literacy and their confidence. Rewards will include points, tokens, vouchers, building credibility as well as credits towards collectable merchandise including personalised avatars.

Principles in designing a good gamified application

“Games are an ideal medium for reflecting on social, ethical and political questions” [6]. Critical thinking is an important step when designing and applying game mechanics especially within the scope of social change. This is simply because if it goes wrong, it will affect people’s lives, especially in the context healthcare and Helf. Alfie Kohn [3] designed a study which showed that children increase their productivity in drawing when they are paid to do so, however the quality of their work significantly drops. The more important fact is that the children who were paid to draw pictures stop liking to draw as much as before, after they were stopped being paid. This effect is known as “Overjustification”. Lepper et al. verified this effect when intrinsic motivation was shifted towards the extrinsic incentives [4].

As in the example above, the consequences for a bad gamified application sometimes are not immediate, therefore are hard to detect. In case of Helf, it is important to consider the values of game and play, especially when comes to rewards. In the example above, the issue was the shift towards the extrinsic motivation. When designing Helf we will carefully incorporate extrinsic motivators such as gaming-style leaderboards, virtual points, “beat your medical condition” progress bar to support intrinsic motivators, such as sense of achievement, belonging, curiosity, well-being and pleasure. Helf will avoid using extrinsic incentives in a way that potentially makes adolescents less responsible with their medical conditions once they stop receiving certain external feedback.

When it comes to design something that is and will be fun, game designer Ralph Koster said: “Fun from games arises out of mastery. It arises out of comprehension. It is the act of solving puzzles that makes games fun. With games, learning is the drug.” [5]. What he is trying to say is that the fun in video games is learning to become better and better in the next level. If there is no more to learn, you might have a problem. People get bored doing the same thing all over again! Helf will offer a gamified experience, however, the challenge is to always have a next level. The personalised Elf will grow with the adolescent; it will mature with the teenager, as they become more responsible and independent. Moreover, there is potential of having “game of the month”; each month bring a new game, a new scoreboard, a new challenge for Helf.

Conclusion

In this paper we have described how game and play could bring so much to human values in healthcare and wellbeing. We have described a real case attempt to help teenagers become more responsible with their health and medical conditions. In the last part of the paper we have raised and discussed critical issues when comes to designing such a platform.

References

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