

Foreword: Towards a Science of Gamification and its Relationship to Governance and Democracy

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Every century poses its own challenges, but those of the twenty-first are already shaping up to be uniquely complex and intractable. From climate change to economic inequality to terrorism and migration, countries around the world face problems that have no easy solutions. Compounding the difficulty is a crisis in governance. This crisis is one of both effectiveness and legitimacy. The two issues are mutually reinforcing; as a result, our problems grow worse, and solutions seem ever further out of reach.

It is increasingly clear that we not only need new ideas but also new methods for arriving at, implementing and experimenting with new approaches.

This book explores one possible method that can help mitigate some of today's governance problems: gamification.

Gamification, as Gianluca Sgueo shows in the following chapters, is not, in fact, a completely new approach to governance. Its use (in a widely varying form) can be traced at least as far back as Plato. But the use of gamified elements for problem-solving—

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beyond the traditional connotation of games as entertainment—has reached new prominence in recent years with the rise of digital platforms, and especially the near-universal adoption of social media.

Gamification is certainly not a panacea for all our societal ills, and it poses various challenges of its own (notably those linked to privacy, design and inclusion). But, combined with other innovations and methods—such as behavioural economics and collective intelligence—it offers a valuable, fascinating and under-explored approach to governance in the twenty-first century.

The governance potential offered by gamification stems primarily from the avenues it offers for greater (motivation towards) participation, inclusion and, consequently, transparency across the full policy life cycle—from agenda setting to solution ideation, policy development, implementation, enforcement and review of effectiveness. For instance:

- **Agenda setting:** By incentivising and encouraging citizen interaction on various platforms and portals, gamification can help public and civic actors indicate preferences or experiences to set the agenda and define problems and priorities.
- **Ideation and design of solutions:** Greater user interaction also allows policy-makers to draw on a wider and more dispersed range of expertise, thus helping identify and co-create new approaches to so-called ‘wicked problems’.
- **Enforcement and feedback:** In addition, gamification can play a role in ensuring accountability: citizens have a valuable part to play in enforcement and implementation of government schemes, and gamified methods can help manifest this potential by, for example, incentivising citizens to rate or otherwise provide feedback on government schemes.

By encouraging greater citizen participation in the processes and institutions of governance, and in the process strengthening the effectiveness of governance, gamification can help address the previously mentioned legitimacy and effectiveness deficit facing democracies around the world.

It is important to note, however, that gamification on its own is an incomplete solution, and might be most effective as a complementary tool to other approaches that are directed at increasing citizen participation and interaction. Such tools can include nudging or crowdsourcing mechanisms that are more generally directed at gathering citizen feedback (with or without gaming aspects).

In addition, the effectiveness of gamification can be enhanced through greater use of rapid experimentation and feedback loops, both of which provide opportunities for quick iteration and policy refinement; the use of these feedback loops (and, more generally, an agile approach to gamification) are an essential component of the innovation toolkit that can and should be deployed by policy-makers alongside gamification.

The complementary and holistic use of these various approaches is critical in order to address one of the perceived shortcomings of gamification, namely its limited approach to representativeness. As with any strategy designed to elicit greater citizen responsiveness, the effectiveness of gamification will depend to a significant degree on how wide a net it casts in reaching citizens. Tools or platforms that gather feedback from only a narrow range of society will inevitably also impact the perceived legitimacy of governance outcomes. For this reason, it is essential that a gamification approach is also accompanied by strategies to ensure participation by the widest possible selection of stakeholders and interest groups. Such strategies can include outreach efforts, including education and awareness building; and a design approach that is focused on inclusiveness, for example by taking into account different technical capacities and languages in a given country or society.

All these topics—and many more—are covered in far greater detail in the subsequent chapters. Overall, this book provides a comprehensive overview of a generally under-examined policy innovation that nonetheless holds significant promise. It helps consider how—and, indeed, if—society can benefit from motivations and actions that may also be fun—not usually associated with the often dry topics of governance and policy-making. It also expands the existing literature of gamification, beyond how to use game features for health and wellness, education and customer satisfaction, to include governing.

Ultimately, this book is a call for a much deeper examination of how we innovate and improve the way we solve public problems, and for a dedicated science of gamification and its relationship to governance and democracy.