


To Nudge or to Gamify – How to Repair Reality?

Simulation & Gaming
2022, Vol. 0(0) 1–2
© The Author(s) 2022
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/10468781221127480
journals.sagepub.com/home/sag


Marlies P. Schijven^{1,2,3} and Toshiko Kikkawa⁴

Dear readers and authors of Simulation and Gaming,

We may say that reality these days is broken. According to Jane McGonigal, that is no news, as that was the title of her groundbreaking and a must-read book back in 2011 ([McGonigal, 2011](#)). Jane extensively elaborated on escapism from reality, why games may make us better and succeed in life, and how games can change the world. A book a decade old, but is relevant to date as ever. As gaming may inspire us to cooperate and collaborate to repair what reality has broken, and gameplay may become a way of thinking and solving problems, rather than tinkering with a gadget.

Now how to get people into a flow-zone, freely thinking how to solve everyday problems? Many theories about that, and in our thinking, we may find different games to play. Moving from playing a game, towards gamification and then shifting into nudging may be a very interesting concept. But little is to be found about the delicate, but important differences between gamification and nudging. Indeed, it is relevant to understand what sets them apart to maximize benefits.

Gamification is a concept that has largely arisen from marketing. Behavior is believed to be the outcome from direct or indirect interaction with one's surroundings, resulting from feedback in the form of rewards and/or punishments. Behavior is thus largely conditioned, having the player choose between options that are set out by the architect of the game. Setting out a game using game mechanics such as competition, rewards, accomplishments and often also punishments may activate people, engage them and when well done, help people make better informed decisions for better outcomes in reality.

Nudging, on the other hand, is all about free choice architecture. The master of the game, the game architect, provides players (aren't we all?) in real life with framed options, providing choice. And s/he can make one option more appealing than the other

¹Department of Surgery, Amsterdam UMC, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

²Amsterdam Gastroenterology and Metabolism, Amsterdam UMC, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

³Amsterdam Public Health, Digital Health, Amsterdam UMC, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

⁴Faculty of Business and Commerce, Keio University, Tokyo, Japan

without restrictions or punishment, hoping this will be chosen as the preferred one. The user simply evaluates the options, chooses one that is believed to offer greatest benefits, gets no feedback from the architect on outcome and lives with the consequences.

Now to repair reality, we believe we need both. Nudging may point us gently in the right direction, almost without knowing, whereas gamification may teach us by trial and error, and user feedback what works best.

Almost like in real life! We can't help but thinking: if only we would play a bit more, with set and inclusive rules and boundaries to learn from, and an architect that would nudge us in the right direction every once in a while, would that not repair today's broken reality the best? We bet (and that is no game) Jane would agree!

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Reference

McGonigal, J. (2011). *Reality is broken: Why games make us better and how they can change the world*. Random House.

Author Biographies

Marlies P. Schijven, MD PhD MHSc, is a professor of surgery with vast expertise in the simulation and gaming field for medical education. She is the former president of the Dutch Society for Simulation in Healthcare (DSSH), longtime member of SSH (Society for Simulation in Healthcare) and SESAM (European Society for Simulation) and president of the WATCH society (wearable technology in healthcare). She is the former Chief Medical Information Officer of the Dutch Government, and national lead on eHealth. Contact: m.p.schijven@amsterdamumc.nl

Toshiko Kikkawa, PhD, is a professor at Keio University social psychologist and specializes in S&G and risk communication. She has been in the position of a vice-chair of Japanese Association of Simulation and Gaming (JASAG) since 2015 and was the Executive Board member of the International Simulation and Gaming Association (ISAGA) from 2012 to 2016. Contact: toshiko.sg@gmail.com