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# The Behavior Pioneers Application: An Intentional Community Prototype

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**Abstract**

This paper describes a fictional questionnaire intended to be completed by applicants to an intentional community devoted to gamifying all aspects of its members' lives. This format was chosen as a plausible alternative to science fiction tropes that include the population of entire worlds or countries. It was also chosen because the historical motivations for creating intentional communities closely match forces affecting modern populations particularly familiar with and attracted to gamification. Its goal is not to make a specific statement or argument about the nature of gamification, but to let readers come to their own conclusions about the repercussions of creating a community based on the ideals embedded in the application's questions.

**Author Keywords**

gamification; design fiction; intentional communities.

**ACM Classification Keywords**

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

## **Application Form**

Thank you for your interest in applying to become a member of the behavior pioneer community. Please answer all questions as accurately as possible.

### *Name.*

Please enter your legal name followed by screen names for any online communities or games you regularly contribute to or are a part of.

### *Behavior pioneers are designers.*

As a behavior pioneer, you will be expected not only to participate in regular community activities and events, but also to help design and balance the feedback mechanisms that shape community behaviors and values. While extensive gaming experience is not a prerequisite, preference will be given to those with gaming and design experience. Please describe your relationship with games, gaming, game development, gamified experiences, and behavior modification. If applicable, upload screenshots of "hours played" statistics (e.g. Steam, XBOX, Playstation, etc.), competitive gaming results, appearances on leaderboards, or published games. If your experience is minimal, feel free to explain why you feel qualified to be part of our community.

### *Free, captured data is actionable data.*

No measurable activity should go uncaptured. Creating data and making it freely accessible benefits everyone. Actionable data is crucial to the design of successful community systems. As a result, creating and contributing data is expected of every citizen. Please share your thoughts on privacy and data, specifically related to our community. Please also share any

previous experiences you have with measuring, sharing or analyzing data from your everyday life or that of others.

### *Unproductive behavior is a design problem.*

It is the responsibility of the community (and ultimately acting behavior pioneer designers) to create systems that encourage behavior that benefits everyone. Design failures are healthy and to be encouraged, but should be considered the result of faulty reward and punishment systems, not faulty citizens. It is essential that all citizens contribute to the process of improving community engagement mechanics. If you were to see a fellow behavior pioneer behaving in a way that might be harmful to the community at large, what would you do? How might you use the experience to improve our community?

### *Influence should be earned.*

If an enlightened citizenry is essential for the proper functioning of a democratic society, then each citizen's voting power should be directly related to how "enlightened" they are (i.e. their contributions to the community and staying educated about the issues it faces). While every citizen has a say in our community, political power is weighted according to a community engagement score. Please explain, as specifically as possible, how you plan on contributing to our community. Explain your thoughts on the relationship between voting power and being an engaged community member.

### *Game over.*

Failure should not only be valued, but also actively encouraged. In order to support this, the community will have a six-month life cycle. At the end of each

sprint, all experience points will be reset and additional applicants will be considered. While a few designer-approved achievements and power ups may carry over to the next iteration of the community, extreme care must be taken to ensure that they do not overpower efforts of new community members. Please explain your commitment to the behavior pioneers community. How many life cycles do you plan on being a part of? Explain your thoughts on balancing accumulating power to motivate veterans and life cycle resets to motivate noobs.

*Mission complete.*

Thank you for submitting an application to become a behavior pioneer! We will be in touch three months before the next iteration begins.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of the following section is to give context to the design fiction presented above. This application form is an attempt to envision what an intentional community dedicated to fully embracing gamification in all aspects of life might look like.

This fiction is intended to be a starting point for discussion, not to support an agenda or make a specific argument about a gamified society. While many of the questions in the application are intended to be provocative, it is left up to the reader how to interpret them. Through the questions asked and the implied goals, the reader can begin to envision the type of society proposed and extrapolate potential outcomes, be they positive, negative or ambiguous. While the impact of this scenario on society is more modest than many other science or design fictions, its aim is to be more plausible and thus less easily dismissed.

An intentional community was chosen not only because of its plausible scale, but also because of how closely the historical motivations for creating intentional societies match modern forces affecting populations potentially attracted to gamification (i.e. technophiles and gamers). These motivations also closely mirror feelings of millennials put off by the modern formal political process [1], another population largely familiar with gamification [3]. In *Intentional Community: An Anthropological Perspective*, Susan Love Brown describes common motivations for creating intentional communities [2]:

When people in mass society face difficulties in making the human connections necessary to sustain them—or when the rules and understandings that once served them well no longer apply they turn away from their existing communities and toward intentional community with an eye toward setting things right in a more intimate setting.

An application form was chosen as the document to present this fiction because of its practical nature. It could be imagined that more could be gleaned from an intentional community's application form, whose primary function is finding people to create a functional society, than its manifesto, whose function is often to attract attention and state unattainable ideals.

### **Future Work**

As stated previously, this fiction is intended to be a starting point for inquiry, to ask questions, and provoke discussion. A few possible questions for further study suggested by this design fiction include:

- If a society were to be gamified, the behavior of its citizens must be measured. What does this collection of data mean to the individuals, designers, and society as a whole?
- In a gamified society where the designer's ultimate goal of incentivizing positive social behavior is taken very seriously, who is responsible when bad behavior occurs?
- How might the measurement of social behavior on a large scale impact existing political structures (e.g. voting power)?

### **References**

- [1] Brown, S. L. (2002). *Intentional community: an anthropological perspective*. SUNY Press.
- [2] Kiesa, A., Orłowski, A. P., Levine, P., Both, D., Kirby, E. H., Lopez, M. H., et al. (2007). Millennials Talk Politics: A Study of College Student Political Engagement. *Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)*.
- [3] Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants part 1. *On the horizon*, 9(5), 1-6.