

Chapter 34

Hacking Well-Being: Can Serious Games Fit Positive Technology Framework?

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ABSTRACT

Serious Games (SGs) have been able to shape new opportunities for human training and empowerment, imparting knowledge or skills in an engaging and motivating way to a new generation of learners. Further, they can be used to improve the quality of both individual and collective experience. In particular, SGs can nurture positive emotions promote engagement, as well as enhance social integration and connectedness. An in-depth analysis of each of these aspects will be presented in the chapter, with the support of concrete examples and case-analysis. Eventually, a game design practice will be discussed. Knowledge and awareness of hedonic, eudaimonic and social principles improve user-centered design models can be both fundamental to enhance learning effectiveness and retention and to improve players' well-being, contributing to the development of sustainable communities of practices.

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INTRODUCTION

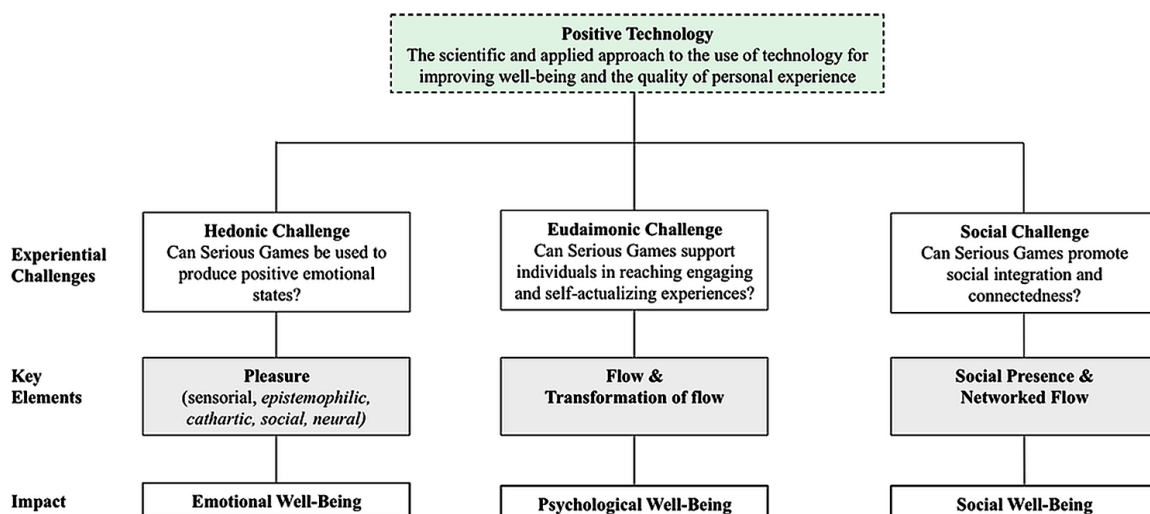
Serious Games (SGs) are digital games used for purposes other than mere entertainment (Susi et al., 2007). By fostering continuous learning experiences blended with entertaining affordances, SGs have been able to shape opportunities for human training and empowerment. They have in fact supported the creation of socio-technical environments (Fisher et al., 2005), where the interconnection between humans and technology encourages the emergence of innovative ways of thinking, creative practices, and both individual and collective development. SGs are able to match real and virtual experiences building contexts that impart knowledge or skills in an engaging and motivating way (Zyda, 2005; Michael & Chen, 2006) to a new generation of learners grown up in a fully digitalized society. The use and effectiveness of SGs have been acknowledged in different areas, such as education, health, business and military both by the scientific literature and the concrete experience of players (Connolly et al., 2013; Wouters et al., 2013).

Further, SGs are able to address another important issue for the actual society: promoting health, wellness and happiness among individuals. As other technologies presented in the book, SGs have proven to be strongly related to maintaining and restoring good health (Brox et al., 2011; McCallum, 2012; Stapleton, 2004; Wattanasoontorn et al., 2013). For example, according to the taxonomy of Wattanasoontorn and colleagues (2013), SGs can support patients by monitoring health, detecting irregular symptoms, treating physical and mental issues and contributing to the rehabilitation process. Further, SGs can assist people to increase their well-being, physically, mentally and socially (Brooks et al., 2014).

That is why they can be considered as “Positive Technologies” (Argenton et al., 2014). This assumption opens a totally new perspective in the traditional digital gaming literature that has deeply investigated the negative impact of gaming, with respect to violence (Anderson et al., 2003; Gentile & Anderson, 2003; Wouters et al., 2013), addiction (Van Rooij et al., 2010; 2011) or social isolation (Colwell & Payne, 2000; Pezzeca, 2009).

Within this context, the aim of this chapter is to offer a theoretical framework about SGs as Positive Technologies, discussing how they can empower the quality of personal experience (Figure 1). In particular, we will discuss how SGs influence individual and interpersonal experiences by fostering posi-

Figure 1. SGs as positive technologies



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