

Gamification of Task Force Meetings: An Innovative Governance Mechanism for Mega-Project Delivery

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Abstract

Mega-projects frequently struggle with ineffective governance mechanisms, particularly in the execution of cross-disciplinary meetings. Traditional status meetings often result in disengagement, lack of accountability, and limited decision-making impact. This paper introduces a novel governance innovation: the gamification of Task Force Team (TFT) meetings. Developed within the context of mega-project delivery, the approach integrates agile ceremonies, peer-driven accountability, and a scoring system that motivates participation and transparency. Using an action research methodology, the paper demonstrates how daily gamified evaluation (+3 to -3 scoring) transformed underperforming meetings into high-performing governance rituals. The findings advance the theory of agile governance and provide practitioners with a scalable model for enhancing engagement, accountability, and continuous improvement in complex project environments. The study's contribution is twofold. Theoretically, it advances understanding of how behavioral mechanisms and gamified incentives can be systematically embedded in project governance structures. Practically, it offers a replicable framework for managers to reinvigorate traditional meeting cultures. Through iterative testing and reflection across multiple mega-projects, the research highlights that gamification, when designed for fairness, transparency, and intrinsic motivation, can serve as a powerful driver of team alignment and collective performance.

Keywords

Projects, Gamification, Task Force Team, Scoring

1. Introduction

Mega-projects are notorious for cost overruns, schedule delays, and governance

breakdowns (Flyvbjerg, 2014; Merrow, 2011). Among the root causes is the ineffectiveness of traditional meeting structures, which often fail to foster accountability, collaboration, or timely decision-making (Turner, 2009). In practice, project teams frequently report meetings as being time-consuming yet unproductive, leading to disengagement and further risks to delivery (Kerzner, 2019).

These challenges are not isolated incidents but represent systemic flaws in the ways large organizations coordinate complex work. The governance systems of mega-projects often rely on bureaucratic routines that emphasize reporting over dialogue, compliance over collaboration, and process over purpose. Such systems tend to produce disengaged participants who view meetings as obligatory formalities rather than as spaces for problem-solving or value creation. The result is a breakdown of communication between disciplines, duplication of effort, and a gradual erosion of accountability chains.

These recurring governance failures reveal a critical gap between formal project control systems and the behavioral realities of large project teams. While sophisticated tools exist for risk management, scheduling, and cost control, the soft governance mechanisms—those that shape culture, motivation, and communication—often remain underdeveloped. In mega-projects involving multiple disciplines, contractors, and stakeholders, the problem becomes even more acute, as information silos, power dynamics, and unclear accountability erode trust and decision quality.

This paper introduces gamification of Task Force Team (TFT) meetings as an innovative governance mechanism. A Task Force Team (TFT), as used in this study, refers to a temporary, cross-functional group assembled to resolve critical issues on the project's critical path. TFTs typically consist of discipline leads, subject-matter experts, and project controls personnel, and are mandated to accelerate decision-making, remove roadblocks, and ensure coordinated execution across organizational boundaries. By applying concepts from agile project management (PMI, 2017), behavioral psychology (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and gamification theory (Deterding et al., 2011), the TFT approach re-engineers governance rituals to embed accountability and intrinsic motivation. The innovation lies in the use of peer-scoring systems, transparency of contribution, and leader-driven cultural reinforcement.

By framing meetings as structured “games” with clear rules, measurable outcomes, and immediate feedback, this system transforms routine administrative events into engaging governance experiences. The TFT model creates a sense of progress and shared ownership that traditional project governance lacks. Moreover, it aligns with emerging trends in organizational design that emphasize self-management, participatory decision-making, and real-time feedback mechanisms.

In an era where digital transformation and agile thinking are reshaping project delivery, the gamified TFT approach reflects a broader movement toward adaptive and human-centered governance. Rather than imposing control through hierarchy, it achieves alignment through visibility, motivation, and trust.

2. Literature Review

Project governance research emphasizes the importance of structured decision-making and accountability mechanisms (Turner, 2009; PMI, 2017). However, scholars such as Hackman (2002) highlight that team effectiveness is not merely a function of structure but also of motivation, norms, and behavioral dynamics. Gamification, defined as the use of game elements in non-game contexts (Deterding et al., 2011), has been widely adopted in fields such as education (Hamari et al., 2014) and management (Seaborn & Fels, 2015), yet its application to mega-project governance remains underexplored.

The governance of mega-projects typically relies on hierarchical and bureaucratic control mechanisms, including stage-gate reviews, steering committees, and formal reporting structures. While these instruments ensure compliance, they rarely address engagement or behavioral accountability. In contrast, gamification offers a mechanism to influence behavior through motivation, feedback, and social dynamics. By creating visible incentives for collaboration, it can complement traditional project management controls and foster a culture of shared ownership.

Agile frameworks emphasize ceremonies such as daily stand-ups, sprint reviews, and retrospectives to maintain momentum (Rigby et al., 2016). These ceremonies leverage transparency and accountability but rarely integrate formalized gamified elements. Lean construction principles (Koskela, 1992) similarly stress flow and waste reduction but leave behavioral governance largely unaddressed. The TFT gamification model represents a novel hybrid that applies gamified accountability to project governance, contributing to both agile governance theory (Luna et al., 2015) and practice.

The literature also suggests that gamification's effectiveness depends on how it satisfies core psychological needs. According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), motivation is strongest when individuals experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In mega-projects, these needs are often frustrated by rigid hierarchies and diffused accountability. A gamified governance model can counteract this by providing autonomy in scoring, recognition of competence through visible performance, and relatedness through team-level transparency.

Furthermore, recent studies in organizational behavior have highlighted the importance of "micro-governance" mechanisms—small, routine interactions that cumulatively shape team culture and trust. The TFT model can be viewed as such a mechanism: a structured, recurring practice that embeds behavioral accountability into the daily rhythm of project execution.

Gamification research in organizational contexts has shown that when game mechanics—such as scoring, ranking, and rewards—are introduced thoughtfully, they can increase engagement and knowledge sharing. However, poorly designed systems risk superficial participation or competition that undermines collaboration. Therefore, the TFT system's careful balance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators ensures it strengthens, rather than distorts, team cohesion. Nonetheless, scholars caution that gamification can introduce risks such as unhealthy compe-

tition, superficial engagement, or incentive structures that inadvertently undermine collaboration. The TFT model mitigates these risks through randomized peer scoring, full transparency of results, and the absence of material rewards—mechanisms designed to maintain cooperative norms and prevent competitive escalation.

This integration of gamification into mega-project governance also aligns with broader shifts in management philosophy toward evidence-based behavioral design. Rather than relying solely on incentives or control, modern governance increasingly incorporates insights from psychology and behavioral economics to shape decision environments that nudge desired behaviors. The TFT model stands as an operational embodiment of this principle.

3. Methodology

Before This study employs an action research methodology (Reason & Bradbury, 2001), capturing reflective practice across mega-projects in the energy, infrastructure, and transportation sectors. The action research covered 2 mega-projects each action research cycle lasted approximately 8-12 weeks, and TFT groups ranged from 10 to 15 members per cycle. All project identifiers were anonymized, but each represented multi-billion-dollar capital programs exceeding three years in duration. Data was gathered from governance meeting records, peer-scoring logs, and qualitative feedback from participants. The iterative cycles of design, implementation, observation, and reflection allowed refinement of the gamified TFT model over time. The methodology positions the researcher as both practitioner and analyst, consistent with action research traditions.

Action research was selected because it allows direct intervention in real organizational settings while simultaneously generating practical and theoretical insights. This dual role of intervention and reflection was essential for testing the gamification framework under the complex, politically sensitive, and high-pressure conditions typical of mega-projects.

Each action research cycle followed four stages: diagnosis, to identify issues in governance performance; planning, to design the gamified meeting structure; action, to implement it in a live project environment; and reflection, to analyze outcomes and refine the model. This cyclical process ensured continuous learning and adaptation.

The researcher documented meeting behavior, decision outcomes, and shifts in team dynamics, complemented by structured interviews and participant observation. Over time, patterns emerged that enabled the refinement of scoring mechanisms, leadership behaviors, and feedback loops.

To ensure reliability, quantitative data from peer-scoring records were analyzed for trends in engagement and performance over time. Qualitative data, including participant reflections and facilitator notes, were coded thematically to identify recurrent insights. This combination of mixed methods provided a robust understanding of both behavioral change and governance impact.

The methodological rigor was reinforced through triangulation—cross-checking multiple data sources and perspectives to validate findings. The outcome was not a static model but an evolving governance framework shaped by continuous practice and reflection.

4. Findings: Gamification of Task Force Meetings

Across the projects studied, the gamified TFT system produced consistent behavioral and operational effects. To present these results clearly, the findings are structured around the major mechanisms that emerged as most influential in shaping team performance. The following subsections outline each mechanism and the evidence supporting its contribution to improved governance outcomes.

4.1. Daily Peer-Scoring Mechanism

At the close of each TFT meeting, participants scored each other on contribution and accountability, using a scale from -3 (lowest performance) to $+3$ (exceptional). A random participant was assigned to evaluate another, ensuring fairness and diversity of judgment. The aggregated team score was displayed openly, creating transparency and reinforcing team accountability. To further standardize scoring, participants received an initial briefing on evaluation criteria, including examples of what constituted “exceptional,” “expected,” and “insufficient” contributions. During the first week, brief calibration exercises aligned interpretations of the -3 to $+3$ scale, reducing subjective variance and improving scoring reliability.

This scoring ritual became a central governance anchor, transforming meetings from passive reporting sessions into interactive feedback platforms. Over time, participants reported that the visibility of scores encouraged more thoughtful preparation, concise communication, and proactive issue-solving. The random allocation of evaluators also mitigated bias and prevented the formation of rigid hierarchies. The data revealed that teams with consistent peer-scoring practices exhibited higher consistency in meeting attendance and follow-through on action items.

Moreover, the transparency of results turned accountability into a shared experience rather than a managerial imposition. When everyone could see the collective performance trajectory, meetings evolved into spaces of mutual reinforcement rather than blame. Some teams even began experimenting with “team challenges” to collectively improve their aggregate score over the course of a week.

4.2. Leadership by Example

The TFT lead was expected to contribute beyond peers, modeling commitment and reinforcing a culture of accountability. This aligns with transformational leadership theory, where leaders inspire through example and effort (Bass, 1999).

Leaders who actively embraced the scoring process set the tone for openness and trust. When discipline leads willingly accepted low scores and used them as learning moments, team members mirrored the behavior. This leadership ap-

proach replaced fear-based compliance with constructive accountability, fostering a psychologically safe yet high-expectation culture.

In cases where leaders resisted participation, treating scoring as symbolic rather than substantive, the motivational effect dissipated. The findings emphasize that leader authenticity is critical for sustaining gamified governance. Leadership by example thus functioned as a social signal, legitimizing the game's seriousness and aligning authority with fairness.

4.3. Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

The gamification system leveraged intrinsic motivation by appealing to personal pride, recognition, and peer respect (Deci & Ryan, 2000). At the same time, it enabled extrinsic motivation through tangible recognition of high scores and public reinforcement of contributions.

Participants noted that the peer-recognition aspect was particularly motivating, as acknowledgment came directly from colleagues rather than formal hierarchy. The balance of intrinsic and extrinsic drivers proved essential: while public recognition motivated visible effort, intrinsic satisfaction from competence and contribution sustained long-term engagement.

High-scoring individuals were sometimes invited to facilitate sessions or mentor others, further reinforcing positive behavioral cycles. By linking game results to developmental opportunities rather than material rewards, the system preserved authenticity and avoided the pitfalls of gamified manipulation.

4.4. Agility and Backlog Integration

The scoring was combined with backlog-driven agendas and daily stand-ups, echoing agile ceremonies (PMI, 2017). This hybrid system ensured that meeting outcomes were directly tied to prioritized deliverables, accelerating decision-making and scope removal from the critical path.

By aligning gamified evaluation with the agile backlog, teams could directly connect behavioral accountability to tangible project outcomes. Discussions shifted from abstract progress updates to concrete deliverable tracking. The gamification layer amplified focus on outcomes and fostered faster iteration cycles.

In several case studies, the TFT process reduced decision latency by as much as 40%, as issues were surfaced and resolved in near-real time. Decision latency was defined as the elapsed time between issue identification and formal closure recorded in governance logs. The reduction was quantified by comparing the average issue cycle time in the six weeks prior to TFT implementation with the average cycle time after six weeks of stabilized usage of the gamified process. The hybridization of agile and gamified governance created a structure that combined rigor with responsiveness—a key requirement for modern mega-project execution.

4.5. Cultural Transformation and Engagement

Feedback indicated that the gamified system transformed perceptions of meet-

ings. Participants reported higher engagement, greater psychological safety, and stronger team cohesion. The mechanism created a safe yet accountable space where contributions were valued and underperformance was constructively surfaced.

Qualitative data from participant interviews underscored that the system fostered a shift from compliance-oriented governance to ownership-driven collaboration. The open scoring process cultivated transparency and fairness, while the repetition of the ritual established new social norms around preparation and participation.

In several projects, engagement surveys conducted after the implementation of the gamified TFT model showed marked improvements in perceived fairness and trust. Teams reported that meetings became “energizing” rather than “draining,” suggesting that the gamified approach not only improved governance performance but also contributed to organizational well-being.

5. Discussion

The gamified TFT governance model extends the literature on agile governance (Luna et al., 2015) by embedding behavioral accountability into governance rituals. It operationalizes Hackman’s (2002) dimensions of team effectiveness—clear direction, enabling structure, and supportive context—through daily gamified scoring. The model also resonates with Deci and Ryan’s (2000) self-determination theory, as it fosters autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

The findings suggest that gamification can serve as a bridge between formal governance systems and informal team dynamics. While traditional governance provides structure and control, the gamified TFT process introduces motivation and feedback—elements often missing in bureaucratic systems. By making performance visible and collective, it transforms accountability from a top-down enforcement mechanism into a peer-driven social contract.

Gamification in this context should not be seen as superficial but as a structured reinforcement mechanism. By quantifying behavior and making performance transparent, the TFT system created a self-regulating environment. This represents an innovation in project governance, with potential scalability beyond mega-projects into other complex organizational environments.

In practice, the model reduced the gap between planning and execution by integrating behavioral metrics into daily work rhythms. The transparent scoring process promoted dialogue, surfaced hidden issues, and encouraged mutual support. Moreover, it created a governance culture that was simultaneously rigorous and human-centered—a rare combination in large-scale project environments.

Limitations: This study is subject to several constraints. The researcher’s dual role as practitioner and analyst may have influenced participant behavior and interpretation despite triangulation efforts. Moreover, the transferability of the TFT model may depend on contextual factors such as leadership style, organizational culture, or baseline levels of psychological safety. Future research should examine the model across more varied environments and incorporate independent evalu-

ators to reduce potential researcher-role bias.

6. Conclusion

This paper has presented the gamification of Task Force Team meetings as a novel governance innovation for mega-project delivery. By integrating peer-scoring, leadership by example, and agile ceremonies, the model transformed governance meetings from disengaged rituals into performance-driving practices. The implications for practice are significant: gamification can enhance accountability, intrinsic motivation, and cultural transformation. Future research should examine longitudinal impacts of gamified governance systems, as well as their adaptability across industries and cultural contexts.

Beyond its immediate application, the TFT model points toward a broader evolution in project governance—from rigid control to adaptive engagement. As organizations grapple with complexity, volatility, and cross-functional collaboration, mechanisms that fuse behavioral psychology with agile structures will become increasingly valuable. The gamification of governance thus represents not only a tool for performance improvement but a paradigm shift toward more participatory and resilient forms of project management.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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