

Gamification in Human Resources

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ABSTRACT

Gamification is the application of game elements in a non-game context, such as point systems, badges, leaderboards, and challenges, to make tasks more interesting and challenging. It has emerged as a compelling approach to enhancing employee engagement and workplace productivity. Gamification in HR refers to the strategic application of game-design elements such as points, badges, levels, leaderboards, and challenges within HR processes to enhance engagement, motivation, and performance. It is a transformative concept encapsulating the integration of interactive elements into processes that traditionally lack game-like features. It is how online games are used to engage employees in different activities throughout the employee journey. In this paper, we will explore how gamification in human resources fosters behavior change, strengthens company values, and improves talent retention.

KEYWORDS: *games, gamification, human resources, HR, human resource management, HRM.*

INTRODUCTION

Game is a closed system with set rules. It is a process in which people socialize, have fun, have a good time, communicate, and learn, with certain goals and consequences such as winning and losing. Games are compelling because they tap into both individual and group dynamics. They are built on progress, often involving moving through levels, unlocking new abilities or beating high scores. Game elements can modify nearly any task, process, or procedure to offer a sense of progression and entertainment to make it more engaging. Gamification is about using game components and mechanics to help a company achieve employee engagement and other organizational goals. It is a discipline in which game dynamics, mechanics, and components are added to a real-life process. Figure 1 shows various uses of games. The use of game design elements to enhance motivation, engagement, and performance within the workplace is the most used area of focus [1].

In the modern work environment, companies face increasingly complex challenges in maintaining employee motivation and competence. As digital acceleration meets talent shortages, HR leaders face a

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fundamental question: How do we keep people motivated, continually learning, and aligned in an environment of perpetual change? Traditional engagement tools like compliance training, annual reviews, and top-down feedback cycles are no longer enough. Some of HR processes and the tasks that employees must do can be tedious. To make those tasks fun and achieve higher employee engagement, many HR tech providers offer gamification features.

Gamification is about using game components and mechanics to help a company achieve employee engagement and other organizational goals. It has proven to be a powerful tool in modern HR strategies, enhancing engagement, learning, and performance across various HR functions. When thoughtfully applied in HR, gamification transforms routine processes like onboarding and training into engaging experiences that not only boost participation but also drive measurable improvements in employee performance. Gamification is no longer experimental; global enterprises are implementing it to solve real business challenges across recruitment, learning, and engagement [2]. Gamification technique has started to

be used to increase the participation and motivation of employees in terms of human resources management. Companies such as Starbucks, Nike, and Amazon use gamification at varying levels of their industry.

WHAT IS GAMIFICATION?

The word "gamification" was coined in 2002 by Nick Pelling, a British inventor, but it did not gain popularity until 2010. The idea of gamification came from the fact that the gaming industry was the first to master human-focused design and we are now learning from games. Gamification is not a new concept, but it is deeply rooted in marketing endeavors, such as points cards, grades, and degrees, and workplace productivity [3]. Researchers became interested in gamification because the concept could be implemented in different ways to motivate people. Gamification has become hugely popular in all walks of life, including education. The concept of gamification is illustrated in Figure 2 [4], while the components of gamification are shown in Figure 3 [5].

The gamification can be viewed in two ways: (1) adopting the act of playing a video game into everyday use, (2) the act of using game elements to make non-games more enjoyable. It is applied in education, business, sports, marketing, and finance. It is currently one of the largest trends in education. Traditional education has been found to be ineffective in motivating and engaging many students. Gamification is cutting-edge approach which is producing positive results in every region of the world.

Everyone loves games. Gamification just takes advantage of that innate desire. It can make practice fun. It can make the routine less dull. Online games have become bolder and more diverse. Gamification involves the introduction of gameplay to a traditionally non-game environment. Its goal is to encourage user engagement. There are several organizations that use gamification to engage users. These include US Army, Nike, Hilton Garden, McDonald, and Starbucks. The impact of gamification on employees is demonstrated in Figure 4 [6].

GAMIFICATION IN HUMAN RESOURCES

HR leaders face a growing challenge—keeping employees engaged and motivated while ensuring alignment with company goals. Traditional methods, such as annual performance reviews or passive training programs, often fail to drive lasting behavioral change. This is where gamification in human resources comes in. In HR, gamification is a powerful way to engage and motivate employees. HR gamification would require a lot of resources since it

needs to tie in developers, strategists, HR professionals, and other stakeholders before it. This element of competitiveness drives participation and motivates employees to be better than their peers. Figure 5 shows a typical HR team [7].

Gamification in HR refers to the use of game-like mechanics in human resources initiatives. It blends elements of game design, like scoring systems, rewards and challenges, with everyday HR processes to motivate people in a fun and engaging way. This could mean using points, leaderboards, challenges or rewards within activities like training, performance management or recruitment. Figure 6 depicts gamification in HR [8]. Successful gamification in HR requires more than just adding points or badges; it demands a deliberate strategy that aligns with your organization's talent priorities, culture, and technology landscape. Before implementing gamification, organizations must clearly define their objectives and what specific problem they aim to solve. Launching gamification across all HR functions at once is risky and can dilute its impact. Without measurement, gamification risks becoming a feel-good project with no ROI. When implemented thoughtfully, gamification becomes a scalable tool to reinforce behavior, motivate participation, and generate measurable outcomes [1].

APPLICATIONS OF GAMIFICATION IN HUMAN RESOURCES

When organizations effectively engage employees, they also improve the way they manage performance. Gamification has been found to fit best in corporate activities such as recruiting, training, hiring referrals, growth, and wellness. Gamification in HR is not a one-dimensional tool. Its versatility allows it to support multiple talent functions, each with a direct impact on employee experience, performance, and business agility. Common applications include [1,9,10]:

- *Recruitment:* Recruitment can be one of the toughest challenges for businesses at all levels, especially service businesses. In competitive hiring markets, organizations are using gamification to create engaging candidate experiences and evaluate real-world competencies. Instead of relying solely on resumes or one interview, employers introduce job-specific challenges, simulations, or quizzes that assess skills like problem-solving, situational judgment, and cultural alignment. Probably the greatest example of gamification in recruiting is Google's famous billboard math puzzle. The result led to another mysterious puzzle and eventually to Google's job ad.

- *Employee Onboarding*: First impressions matter. Turning onboarding into a structured, gamified experience helps new hires to learn the ropes quickly and feel like part of the team. Onboarding is often the first real touchpoint new employees have with your organization. It is often where first impressions of company culture and clarity of role are formed. Gamifying this process can help new hires complete tasks like compliance training, introductions, and documentation through level-based modules, checklists, and instant feedback, making the experience more intuitive and less overwhelming. Tom Haak wrote about an interesting onboarding experience at Deloitte. His vision of gamification in human resources during onboarding describes groups of new employees paired with new hires in teams that work together to answer questions on compliance, procedures, and company ethics. This approach to onboarding can also be helpful for employees who will be working remotely.
- *Training and Development*: Training programs can be a tough sell, especially when employees view them as time-consuming or irrelevant. Training periods often involve large groups of staff, all training around roughly the same period. Gamification can be applied to many areas of HR tasks, but it is especially impactful in training and employee development. Gamification transforms training from a static process into an engaging experience. Gamified learning environments use features like badges, experience points, leaderboards, and real-time feedback to boost completion rates, motivation, and retention. Employees are more likely to revisit training when progress is rewarded and visible, especially in self-paced digital programs. For example, Cisco used gamification in its Social Media Training Program by creating three achievement levels: Specialist, Strategist, and Master with badges for each stage.
- *Policy Compliance*: No one enjoys the monotonous task of compliance. Yet, it is essential for the smooth operation of your business. A simple daily compliance raffle, for example, where employees earn entries by answering policy-related questions correctly, could drastically improve engagement with compliance processes. An example from Deloitte shows how their employees completed a cybersecurity awareness training by engaging in an escape room game. They had to solve challenges in a limited amount of time to complete the game, and they learned lessons on

secure device handling, data sharing, passwords, and more. This helped employees to stay compliant with Deloitte's data security policy.

- *Recognition Program*: Employees get motivated to participate in recognition programs because it is fun. Workers can recognize each other for achievements or behavior that is in line with the company's values by sending points and appreciative messages. Moreover, recognition programs can be built to feature different levels of progress and display leaderboards. This element of competitiveness drives participation and motivates employees to be better than their peers. The recognition programs can be non-monetary or monetary. Since the platform also includes social recognition elements, recognition can be seen company-wide, which is great for inspiring even more appreciative behavior.

BENEFITS

Gamification in HR brings several benefits, including increased employee engagement, enhanced learning, and development outcomes, improved recruitment processes, and a more positive and collaborative workplace culture. The benefits of gamification in HR can be seen across engagement, learning, performance, and culture. HR gamification has the benefit of refreshing existing processes, making them more motivational. Gamification mechanisms have been shown to enhance employee satisfaction and commitment through immediate feedback and task-based incentives. Gamified HRM has been regarded as an effective pathway to enhance employee engagement. Other benefits include the following [1,2,9,11]

- *Increases Productivity*: We all know that pushing for productivity too hard can backfire. It leads to burnout, disengagement, and ultimately, higher turnover. The magic of gamification lies in making everyday tasks feel more rewarding. The example of the Todoist app that allocates points for every task that employees resolve is a great example of how gamification positively affects employee performance and productivity. The logic behind it is simple: gamification allows employees to get instant "rewards" for their actions, like points. This releases dopamine, the feel-good hormone, which makes employees want to get more of it. Therefore, they are productive, earn more points, and do not give up.
- *Supports Employee Growth*: Gamification is mostly used in training modules to drive participants' engagement, teamwork, and course completion. Employees' development and growth are essential to companies that want to stay

competitive in the market. By introducing gamification elements to employee experience, employees complete their training more easily, and employees are inclined to partake in similar activities in the future.

- *Improves Employee Wellness:* Gamified wellness platforms allow organizations to support holistic employee well-being by tracking health behaviors like physical activity, mindfulness, or sleep, rewarding participation with points, streaks, or team-based challenges. The combination of a sedentary lifestyle and rising healthcare costs is a nightmare for organizations. Some examples of HR gamification to improve employees' wellness include collecting points or badges, individually or as a team, for being physically active. For example, employees can solve quizzes, participate in company challenges, and finish games that contribute to a healthy workplace culture. This motivates employees to move more, which can help them preserve their mental and physical health.
- *Engages Employee:* When employees feel engaged, they are more likely to be productive, loyal, and proactive. In the digital transformation era, maintaining employee work engagement has become a persistent challenge, as traditional incentive systems often fail to satisfy younger employees' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Gamification can be used to reinforce organizational values through recognition programs, social learning challenges, or culture-building quests. These activities create shared milestones, deepen connection among distributed teams, and align individual behavior with broader company goals. Together with turnover, increased employee engagement is the number one thing on every HR's mind. Gamification helps employers raise their employees' engagement by making tedious tasks fun.
- *Promotes Learning:* Employees are more likely to retain information when learning is interactive and incremental. Gamification is ideal for training programmes. By using quizzes, challenges or digital badges, gamification supports continuous learning. This approach encourages curiosity and turns professional development into a rewarding experience. The goal of gamification in learning and development is to promote both enjoyment and commitment by capturing the attention of learners and encouraging them to continue learning through the learning experience. Because of the assumption that it helps and motivates

students, gamification often begins with education and can therefore contribute to improved learning processes and performance.

- *Reduces Absenteeism:* Absenteeism is another costly element that employers have to deal with. Absenteeism refers to a frequent lack of work attendance. It is caused by employee burnout, low engagement, poor employee health, and other factors. Gamification in various HR processes activates employees and changes their perception of work.
- *Job Satisfaction:* Job satisfaction has been defined as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experience. The enjoyment of gaming is regarded as the degree to which people enjoy using a gamified service or system, and this refers to the individual experience of pleasure and happiness in using the gamified HRM system. If an employee's participation in the gamified HRM system is an enjoyable and playful experience, it will likely translate into a joyful and satisfactory work experience.

CHALLENGES

In spite of the considerable potential of gamification in HR management, many companies still face challenges in implementing it effectively. Without a defined outcome, gamification risks becoming entertainment without impact. Not all employees respond to the same motivational triggers, and a one-size-fits-all gamification approach often alienates more people than it engages. Gamified training, on the other hand, can distract the attention of employees from more significant tasks. The implementation of gamification in hiring should not be a choice, but instead should become a norm for companies to select employees who will be most suitable for the organization. Other challenges include the following [1,12]:

- *Behavior Change:* Changing employee behavior is one of the toughest challenges HR professionals face. Whether it is encouraging collaboration, increasing productivity, or improving compliance with policies, employees need continuous reinforcement. The use of gamification to encourage behavior change in various contexts is supported.
- *Flexibility:* Many of the developed tools are focused on issuing badges and do not allow the use of different components. There is a need for ready-made tools that provide flexibility that educators can design without the need for programming knowledge.

- **Communication:** Employees need to know why gamification is being introduced, how it benefits them, and how progress will be tracked. Clear communication builds trust and increases adoption. Instead of announcing “We’re adding points to onboarding,” say: “Complete each onboarding mission to unlock personalized training modules and accelerate your path to full productivity, plus earn recognition as you go.”
- **Collaboration:** Introducing a sense of competition through leaderboards or encouraging collaboration through team challenges can increase motivation and social interaction. Whether it is a healthy rivalry between departments or team-based problem solving, gamified systems support natural, informal communication between colleagues, which is key to building trust and connection.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Gamification should never feel forced. Employees must have the choice to participate and the ability to engage in ways that suit their preferences and abilities. For instance, an employee wellness program might allow participants to choose between solo step challenges, team-based fitness goals, or mindfulness streaks, ensuring inclusivity while maintaining engagement.
- **Low Involvement:** One of the main problems faced is the low involvement of employees, which has a direct impact on their productivity and loyalty to the company. Conventional training systems are often perceived as less interesting and monotonous, so their effectiveness in improving employee competence is limited. Traditional reward mechanisms sometimes do not motivate employees enough, especially for younger generations who are more responsive to game-based and interactive systems. Gamification can create a more dynamic and competitive work environment, encouraging employees to be more involved in their tasks.
- **Next Generation:** Currently, the characteristics of learners have changed, and the approach of educators to gamification has emerged in relation to the learning mechanisms of the next generation. Gamification is an innovative approach that increases learners' participation and motivation in the learning process. It needs to be made relevant to the next generation of users, where increase in intrinsic motivation is required.

CONCLUSION

The use of gamification in human resources management is a new field. Gamification in HR

involves integrating game elements, such as rewards, challenges, and interactive features, into various human resources processes. It is not a passing trend or a superficial add-on; it is a strategically validated method for driving measurable improvement in employee engagement, learning outcomes, and overall workforce performance. By applying game-design elements to HR processes, organizations are turning routine tasks into exciting challenges, boosting employee motivation and productivity. When implemented effectively, gamification can serve as a powerful tool for improving morale, increasing efficiency, and motivating employees.

Gamification in HR is quickly becoming a go-to strategy for businesses that want to improve the employee experience, drive better outcomes, and retain top talent.

Just as gamification has become a hot topic for customer relations, gamification offers an equal potential to reshape the relationship between businesses and their employees. Further research is worth your time in discovering how to elevate the rewarding interactivity between your employees and their workflow. More information on the integration of gamification in human resources is available from the books in [13,14] and the following related journals:

- *Journal of Human Resource Management Perspectives*
- *International Journal of Research in Human Resource Management*
- *German Journal of Human Resource Management*

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Figure 1 Different uses of games.



Figure 2 The concept of gamification [4].



Figure 3 Components of gamification [5].

The Impact of Gamification

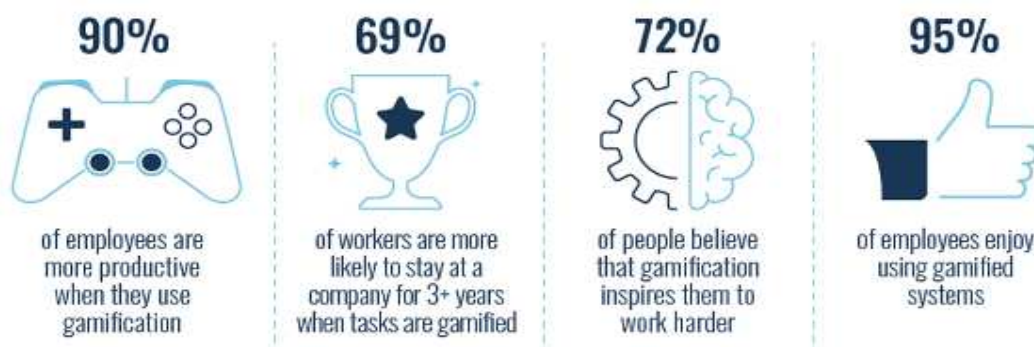


Figure 4 The impact of gamification on employees [6].



Figure 5 A typical HR team [7].



Figure 6 Gamification in HR [8].

