

Gamification and Human Resources: an overview

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in their most recent Hype Cycle of Emerging Technologies in 2014. By understanding more about gamification organisations are more likely to achieve their objectives.

There is evidence of gamification concepts being utilised in such diverse contexts as retail, education, health and wellbeing. Already SAP uses games to educate its employees on sustainability, Unilever uses games for training, Hays uses it for hiring recruiters and the Khan Academy uses it for online education. Organisations that use gamification see better outcomes such as performance, engagement and retention, according to the Aberdeen Group (2013).

We consider that gamification is a concept that offers significant opportunities for HR professionals to demonstrate added value to businesses in numerous ways, some of which will be explained later in this overview.

Gamification theories

The concept of gamification is based on, and links with, a range of theories including those of behavioural economics, human psychology, learning and development, motivation, fun, performance, communication, team-working, problem-solving, risk-taking, decision-making, job design, trust and flow. Designed well, gamification of real world objectives can connect with untapped player potential to increase performance and engage employees in ways that can create an exponential win:win for employees and organisations.

Why use gamification in HR?

Gamification is not about virtually recreating an immersive experience, it is about using game elements and mechanics to help an organisation to achieve employee engagement and ott 1 A 1 480.22uhie1T1 0 0(s

Induction

Game elements can be very effective for getting people on board quickly with what they need to be doing by giving early guidance and feedback. The use of game elements can encourage learning in small steps to develop competence and eventual mastery of concepts by mapping out learning pathways and giving feedback on progress. Using game-concepts in induction processes you are more likely to be able to get people on board and being productive and in a more enjoyable way for the new starter.

Learning and development

The use of games concepts to facilitate learning and development moves us away from generally outdated ideas of knowledge amassing to notions of challenging the bounds of employees' capabilities and capacities for learning. Gamification of learning and development can help support an employee on their journey to mastery. Considerately designed, gamification can help an employee to develop their competence and allow risk taking and failure within a safe context. Examples of learning and training that are already very successfully using concepts of gamification include Health and Safety training, leadership development (e.g. Deloitte Leadership Academy).

Engaging

Gamification may provide ways to engage employees in ways not previously seen. "Games create an emotionally compelling context for the player and build on nostalgia, curiosity, visual appeal and employees' interest. They connect with the player emotionally and are an invitation into a world that is to be learned" (CIPD, 2012a). Utilising these concepts within the internal organisational environment may enhance engagement by appealing to the employees' sense of fun (which can take various forms – e.g. see Lazzaro, 2004). A simple example of a game-like tool aimed at getting people to further engage in a concept is the use of the profile completeness tool on LinkedIn. Within an organisational business environment it might be about the application of game elements (e.g. points for cross-departmental project teams) to encourage team-working and collaboration assuming those are key business imperatives.

Retaining

Gamification may aid retention of employees through the encouragement of engagement in activity that the employee considers to be meaningful (at least at that particular time). According to Burke (2014b) the key to sustainable gamification is to architect behaviour change "primarily with intrinsic rewards rather than extrinsic rewards - that we are able to sustain momentum by ensuring that, as people engage in a game, the challenge matches the skill level and we are able to provide people with meaningful incentives". This means understanding what meaningful intrinsic incentives are for those employees who are playing as opposed to more standardised traditional extrinsic rewards (for example cash prizes). While in gamification you are trying to focus on the intrinsic motivators for the longer term, that does not mean there is no place for extrinsic motivators. Extrinsic motivators, for example, are very good in the short term for getting people introduced to, and on-board with, the desired concept. Meaningfulness might mean the application of game-concepts for the completion of more routine, but essential, administrative tasks such as points and leader-boards for speedy chargeable time reporting for consultants. It could also mean gamification of a more transparent career development process with virtual mentoring and badges for activity completion and progression. On a more personal level, for some employees, a more meaningful longer term goal may relate to their own health and well-being (e.g. Mindbloom's Life Game).

The importance of design

It is the design of the gameful approaches that makes the game and the learning “meaningful” (CIPD, 2012a). Like many areas of HR the idea is only as good as its implementation. To introduce game concepts within an organisation, as HR we need to be aware of good game design. That does not necessarily mean the technical programming but understanding of game concepts. Bersin (2012) proposed that ‘gamification’ is built on six dimensions: progression, achievement and rewards, cascading information, countdown, levels and quest. We consider there to be 9Ps of gamification design as follows.

Purpose – What is the purpose? What is the organisation trying to achieve and how can the application of game elements facilitate this achievement? How will there be alignment of player and business objectives and a contribution to bottom-line business results? In game terms what is the “quest”, the goals, the rules, the challenges etc?

Personal motivation – How can you tap into players’ intrinsic motivators in order to make it meaningful? This may include design of game rewards and recognition such as points, badges, leader-boards and other incentives e.g. Badgeville for Yammer.

Performance – What is successful performance e.g. are you aiming for behaviour change, skill development, performance management mastery? How will you give people feedback on their performance so that they know how well they are doing?

Progression – How can you ensure an appropriate level of challenge (e.g. progression up

Inclusion/exclusion

It has been suggested by some that gamification will only appeal to certain personality types and so the concept could be organisationally divisive. Moreno-Ger et al (2009), however, suggest that game concepts (related to learning anyhow) actually encourage more individualised and tailored environments. This would suggest that the gamification could lead to more inclusivity rather than exclusivity - again it comes down to design.

Raising awareness

There appears to be rising awareness and understanding of the potential of gamification in HR. As applied to learning, for example, the CIPD's 2012 Learning and Training and Development survey (CIPD, 2012b) showed while approximately 12% of respondents had awareness of game-based learning and utilised it, 20% were aware but did not use it, 27% were aware but did not understand it, 39% were not aware of the concept and a further 2% did not see it as relevant. By the 2013 survey (CIPD, 2013), the concept of games was embedded within the survey as a potential method of e-learning supporting learning and talent development. Now, gamification is included within "emerging learning methods" on their publication on Learning Methods (CIPD, 2014). Whether or not game concepts are utilised within your business, for HR professionals having a general awareness of gamification can only be another string to the bow in the HR professional's toolkit.

Summary view

We believe that that gamification is much more than just a fad – that it can be a key part of an organisation's Strategic

