ABSTRACT

Gamification promises to deliver more motivating, engaging, and, ultimately, effective human resource (HR) processes. The following chapter presents an overview of key motivational theories supporting the potential effectiveness of gamifying HR processes. Key motivational theories underpinning the success of gamification include Need Satisfaction Theories, Operant Conditioning, Flow, and Goal Setting Theory. After providing a theoretical framework supporting the effectiveness of gamification, emphasis will shift to an examination of key game elements used to improve four large categories of HR processes: recruitment, selection, training, and performance management. Case studies will be leveraged to provide real-world examples of organizations using gamification to improve HR initiatives. Finally, the chapter will cover key considerations and best practices that should be followed when developing and implementing gamified HR initiatives.

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Gamification of Human Resource Processes

INTRODUCTION

Imagine exploring a company’s career site and being lured into a virtual multi-media adventure where you race against the clock to reach a dream job interview. Along the journey numerous obstacles force you to make choices, such as wearing your ink-stained lucky shirt, risking punctuality by washing it, or donning an obnoxiously colored scarf to hide the stain. Reckitt Benckiser, a multinational consumer goods company, developed such a game-like recruiting experience which they refer to as a character profile test, that invites users to “play [the] interactive experience to reveal who [they] really are.” The recruiting application, termed Insanely Driven, does not contain any content overtly describing the job or company. Instead, users are invited on an adventure and provided with choices to drive their own experience. A series of videos presenting a first-person view of the bizarre virtual world, a progress bar indicating how far into the experience the user has travelled, periodic feedback on time left to the deadline, and a storyline that puts responsibility for advancing on the user’s shoulders are all game elements serving to enhance user motivation to follow through to the end. Upon completion of the experience, the user is provided feedback about what their choices ‘say’ about their personality and potential fit with the company.

The mere existence of this gamified recruitment application serves as a differentiating feature showcasing Reckitt Benckiser’s brand, and also highlights the growing trend of gamified applications in employment contexts. A recent estimate by Gartner (2011), suggests 70% of Global 2000 organizations will employ at least one gamified application in 2014. In addition, industry experts anticipate gamification spending will grow by more than 1,100% in a four year period from $242 million in 2012 to roughly $2.8 billion by 2016 (Burmeister, 2014).

The primary goals of this chapter are threefold: (1) to provide a theoretical basis for gamification in human resource (HR) practices, (2) to highlight case studies and other practical implementations of key game elements across several HR processes, and (3) to offer best practice considerations for HR managers and organizational leaders proposing or implementing gamified processes. This chapter will focus on the HR processes of recruitment, selection, training, and performance management. For each HR area, commonly integrated game elements will be presented, along with examples of gamified interventions from an HR perspective.

While gamification is increasingly referenced, requested, and implemented within organizations as part of HR practices, there still exists a lack of uniformity and clarity surrounding a universal definition. Deterding and colleagues’ (2011) broad definition of gamification, is widely cited; however, this definition fails to fully clarify what should or should not be considered gamification in the realm of HR processes. For example, providing visible rewards for superior performance is a widely cited game element, but this does not help clearly differentiate 21st century HR processes from those of Taylor and Scientific Management (1914). The current chapter narrows the focus on gamification to the definition leveraged by Dominguez and colleagues (2013), such that gamification is defined as “incorporating game elements into a non-gaming software application to increase user experience and engagement” (p. 381). This allows for a more concrete, uniform explanation of what constitutes a gamified HR initiative.

Why Gamify?

As gamification promises to enhance the user experience and increase user engagement, it should come as no surprise that HR contexts have become fertile launching grounds for gamified applications. Many
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