Chapter 7
Gamifying Recruitment, Selection, Training, and Performance Management: Game-Thinking in Human Resource Management

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ABSTRACT

Game-thinking is beginning to appear in a wide variety of non-game contexts, including organizational support settings like human resource management (HRM). The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: 1) to explore the opportunities for game-thinking via gamification and serious games in HRM based on current and previous HRM literature and 2) to identify future research areas at the intersection of game-thinking and HRM. Prevailing HRM theories will be applied to the use of game-thinking in different sub-fields of HRM, including recruitment, selection, training, and performance management.

INTRODUCTION

Game-thinking is beginning to appear in a wide variety of non-game contexts. Game-thinking has been described as an umbrella term encompassing gamification, serious games, game-inspired design, and play that can be used to solve some sort of problem (Marczewski, 2014). For the purposes of this chapter, the two major forms of game-thinking are gamification, defined as the use of game elements in non-game
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contexts (Deterding, Sicart, Nacke, O’Hara, & Dixon, 2011) and serious games, defined as games used for a primary goal other than entertainment (Michael & Chen, 2005). Gartner Inc. (2011) predicted that by 2014, 70 percent of Global 2000 organizations would have at least one gamified application and that by 2014, 80 percent of all gamified applications would fail (Gartner Inc., 2012). Considering the rising trend in gamified applications and the stakes at hand for businesses, organizations, and government, it is crucial to research game-thinking in organizational contexts.

Gamification has often been used in marketing (see, e.g., Sarner, 2013) and sales (see, e.g., Chapman, 2014). For example, online advertisements in the past decade and beyond employed simple point-and-click games (e.g. clicking a moving target on screen) to push marketing content onto consumers. The field of sales appears to be the simplest field to gamify, as many sales teams have employed points and leaderboard game mechanics to inspire competition among salespersons (e.g., Bunchball, 2013). Although these areas may see the most ubiquitous gamification, serious games and game elements can also be used in organizational support settings – namely, human resource management (HRM; DuVernet & Popp, 2014). Recent reports by organizations studying and applying HRM theory have identified gamification as a top trend in the field (Munson, 2013; Society for Human Resource Management, 2014), with research beginning to appear at professional conferences in the past two years (Landers, 2013; Bauer, Callan, Cavanaugh & Landers, 2014; Callan, Bauer, Armstrong, & Landers, 2014; Chow & Chapman, 2014; Geimer & O’Shea, 2014; Kubisiak, Stewart, Thornbury, & Moye, 2014; Popp, 2014; Sydell & Brodbeck, 2014).

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: 1) to explore the opportunities for gamification and serious games in HRM based on current and previous HRM literature and 2) to identify future research areas at the intersection of game-thinking and HRM. Prevailing HRM theories will be applied to the use of game-thinking in different sub-fields of HRM. Empirical research will be considered when available, although the current empirical literature on gamification is sparse (Hamari, Koivisto, & Sarsa, 2014). Where empirical studies of game-thinking in HRM are absent, case studies of organizations using serious games and game elements will be discussed.

An important consideration in the gamification of HRM is to identify which game elements might be applied to non-game contexts whether individually or in combination up to a complete serious game. Bedwell, Pavlas, Heyne, Lazzara, and Salas (2012) developed a taxonomy of game elements used in learning contexts. These elements are broad in scope, incorporating larger more detailed taxonomies of game elements within it (Wilson et al., 2009). Although these taxonomies were developed with serious games in mind, the elements can be applied to gamified contexts broadly. By understanding what elements can be applied to HRM contexts, game-thinking can be better leveraged to improve HRM outcomes. The game elements identified by Bedwell and colleagues and referenced by this chapter include action language, assessment, conflict/challenge, control, environment, game fiction, human interaction, immersion, and rules/goals.

This chapter will explore four major areas of HRM where serious games and gamification have already seen some success. These areas include recruitment, selection, training, and performance management. The first of these areas, recruitment, is defined as “those organizational activities that (1) influence the number and/or types of applicants who apply for a position and/or (2) affect whether a job offer is accepted” (Breaugh, 1992, p. 4). In the second area, selection, organizations provide psychological assessments to applicants in order to use their scores to predict later job performance and thus aid in hiring decisions. Such assessments might include tests of cognitive ability, assessments of personality, work samples, interviews, application blanks, and more. The third area, training, is defined as “activi-
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