

Gamification and Employee Engagement: Theoretical Review on the Role of HR

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INTRODUCTION

Today's workforce demands strategic processes from HR, with the advent of rapidly changing technology. (Khetarpal, 2016) Gamification takes the principle of games like fun, play, design, competition and even addiction, to apply it various real-time organizational contexts such as talent acquisition and L&D. Game concepts are moving towards attracting, engaging and retaining talent. (Meister, 2015)

Creating engaged employees is a top precedence for any firm. With gamification, the cybernetic world can help resolve real-world issues by making it possible to derive lessons from the copious data being generated in today's digitally-enabled enterprises. (Cognizant, 2013)

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

HISTORY OF GAMIFICATION

"Gamification," has become today's newest business buzzword and is rapidly gaining traction. However the concept of using gamified elements to drive engagement, interest and learning, dates back to almost a century ago. In one of the first evidences of gamification, Kellogg's cereals, in 1910, offered its first "premium," Moving-Pictures book, free with every two boxes, to increase sales.

In 1959, a garment factory in Chicago introduced a daily ritual game in which workers steal a banana to stave off boredom and monotony. Games are believed to elevate satisfaction and productivity, inspiring research into this field.

In 1980's, professors at the Massachusetts institute of Technology began considering the possibility of using gamified elements in the field of education.

The 2000's marked the invention of gaming consoles and in turn, serious games for learning, games training people on social etiquette, etc. Bunchball, a California based company developed game mechanics to help clients improve online engagement. In 2011, Volkswagen divulged a gamified campaign of crowdsourcing in China, where consumers were invited to design vehicles and rate other entries, online, results being tracked on leaderboards. (McCormick, 2013)

The Gamification technique has worked its way into various industries. The purpose of converting gamification into competitive games fulfils multiple training needs. (Millet, 2017)

GAMIFICATION

CONCEPT

Gamification entails the use of gaming-elements in non-game-like settings. These include leader boards, badges, levels, point system, etc.

The concept, when applied, makes the contexts engaging fun, which typically may be monotonous. Gamification can be applied to almost any field such as healthcare, education, business and social or personal training. It brings together amusement, rewards and the power of social networks on a single platform.

The most common example of gamification is the frequent-flier programs that airlines established and in return, benefited from, substantially. Loyalty programs and loyalty cards by various establishments such as hotels and supermarkets are also examples of gamification that encourage customers to spend more, in order to unlock/ access certain things or get certain rewards.

Gamification has made its way into organizations as well. The millennials, who are increasingly growing in number and make up a significant part of the organizational workforce, are always on the lookout for innovative ways to keep themselves engaged and motivated with their work. One way to motivate such employees is by incorporating gamification mechanism into their workplace, predominantly in the performance appraisal and rewards systems.

Gamification combines measurability, rewards, independence and challenges, which makes it ideal for the workplace. It can even boost collaboration and feedback within the organization, if used effectively.

COMPONENTS OF GAMIFICATION

Understanding components of gamification can lead to creating tools that can be employed to incorporate gamification into the environment of learning and training.

Werbach, in his book, "*For the Win: How Game Thinking Can Revolutionize Your Business*", has defined the key components that should be considered while implementing gamification. He says that gamified learning must entail a set of clearly defined objectives, badges that represent achievements of the players, harder challenges arising at every new level, a set of items to accumulate in order to reach closer to the goal, a short-lived battle/ test, unlocking content, that becomes available

only when players attain objectives, opportunities to share resources with other players i.e. gifting, leader boards that display the achievements and progressions of players, clearly defined levels, points to map the numerical progression of players, social graphs that display the social network of the players within the game, teams that work together to attain a common goal and virtual rewards (assets that are perceived to have real monetary value)(Werbach,2012)

Every one of these components must be integrated into the user's journey through the game, making the overall objective of the game, to solve a specific business problem. The game mechanics should then be connected to the players' performance appraisals, which will then drive the employees to be more engaged with the system. (Burke, 2014)

ADVANTAGES OF GAMIFICATION

Gamification allows motivation to be linked to intrinsic rewards that also support organizational goals, as the players feel a sense of accomplishment.

Gamification improves retention of knowledge, team building and collaboration, cultural integration. Scores, ranks and leader boards, when shared throughout the system, create a sense of excitement within employees, as they feel more recognized. This in turn encourages participation and improves performance.

Intrinsic rewards have a far greater impact on levels of engagement, than extrinsic rewards, resulting in better results. Gamification can be used to familiarize employees with business goals and knowledge-sharing with employees. This can lead to the creation of a virtual knowledge database.

Gamification makes learning more interactive and memorable. Each approach to gamifying training keeps players returning to the business goal-oriented content.

Gamification turns the process of learning into a game by apply game-mechanics to existing training content for engagement and motivation of the learners, making passive systems more interactive. The set of tasks are linked to rewards such as points and badges. Leader boards motivate employees to strive for additional perfection. These elements result in a platform with high levels of engagement and a greater rate of return.(Good.Co Team, 2014)

By increasing the employees' willingness to learn and enhancing knowledge retention capabilities, gamification increases the efficiency, social intelligence and conscientiousness of employees, thus aiding the Human resource function by enhancing employee motivation and enabling HR functions to become more strategic.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GAME-BASED-LEARNING AND GAMIFICATION

Gamification and game-based learning are two words that are often used interchangeably but have two very contrasting meanings. Gamification is the concept of adding gaming-elements in non-game-like situations. They reward users for certain achievements.

Whereas, Game based learning, makes use of actual games to enhance the learning experience. Gamification makes use of elements and principles in non-game contexts to encourage involvement, engagement and loyalty. Game-based learning relays introducing games to intensify the learning experience. The outcomes of the two provide very different results, based on the application, however, the goals of the both the approaches are similar: to enhance and improve the learning experience of employees. Introducing fun-elements into the learning process can help improve employees' entertainment, health, motivation and learning thus creating a better work-environment. (Baer, Stephen, Forbes Agency Council, 2017)

EXAMPLES OF GAMIFICATION TECHNIQUES BEING USED IN ORGANIZATIONS

As more and more organizations look for new ways to attract, engage, incentivize and retain people, games have been used both for achieving strategic goals in a work environment that is exciting yet challenging.

DOMINO'S (RECRUITMENT)

Domino's designed a mobile app and website called Pizza Mogul in consultation with Thoughtworks. This technique is responsive as it interacts with thirteen apps and systems inclusive of Domino's internal systems for things like pricing engine, menu etc. and external applications and systems. It provides an opportunity to the customers to virtually make their own pizzas consumers an opportunity to design their own pizza and earn 25 cents to \$4.50 on the sale of each pizza should their pizza sell. Pizza Mogul combines branding concepts (brand awareness) with providing creative freedom, it helps in creating an impression in the minds of potential job candidates that Domino's as an employer looks out for innovation, creativity, fun and novel ideas at workplace.

GOOGLE (RECRUITMENT)

Google conducts a software-writing competition called Google Code Jam every year. In this competition, coders and programmers from over 100 countries participate every year to test their skills and emerge as winners. The contestants have to solve algorithmic puzzles in languages like JavaScript, LOLCODE, C++, INTERCAL and Whitespace. The prize money involved is up to \$50,000. It's fun and challenging and

helps individuals develop their programming and coding skills. Besides, it is used by Google to attract and select the right talent for the job.

DELOITTE (TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT)

Deloitte Leadership Academy is an online platform which offers a sizeable amount of coursework for a wide variety of topics in consulting. The aim is to make training programs more accessible for senior executive staff. With the help of Badgeville Game Mechanics, Deloitte introduces gamified elements like leaderboards, status symbols and badges. They helped in tracking leaderboards and status symbols. This helps to measure how many executives participate and complete course, give instant feedback on their progress and guide them towards completion of the course. This was developed to encourage senior executives to start and finishing the training programs. They were not engaged or intrinsically motivated to do so. After consultation with Badgeville and improvements in the framework, it has lead to 50% faster completion of course, 47% higher rate of daily return by employees and 36% greater retention (weekly).

DELOITTE'S MAVERICK (EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT)

Deloitte's US India Offices' Maverick is a quintessential example of employee engagement through gamification. With the help of Maverick, Deloitte has hit the 'sweet spot' as rightly mentioned by (Raghavendran & Kumar, 2015). Started in 2009, The program was created to ensure engagement, experimentation, discovery of talent and creativity by the employees in the organisation to foster an organisation culture rich in innovation through the use of gamification. The sweet spot that Deloitte was able to achieve lies at the centre of three very primary questions pertaining to what employees would like to do, what would they do best and what would add the utmost value to the company.

The employees were divided into teams and each team was assigned a business case, for which they had to submit a written solution. The solutions were to be assessed and scrutinised by judges on the following criteria:

1. Identification of the issues-causes of the problem
2. Quality of the solution-use of facts, figures, inferences, data etc.
3. Recommendations-Practical as well as unconventional processes/ frameworks in deriving the solution
4. Structure of solution-execution of thoughts and ideas in a logical, coherent and clear way which also had to be in an executive summary format.

This contest thoroughly tested the participants' problem solving, logical and critical thinking skills. Once administered, it gathered a huge support and critical acclaim and was applauded by both leaders and professionals. (Raghavendran & Kumar, 2015)

Owing to its huge success in 2009, it was implemented again in 2010 and 2012. In 2012, Deloitte introduced the Maverick program in various universities and management institutions in India. Since then, it has been taking place every year as 'Campus Maverick'.

Apart from a positive tool for employee engagement, Maverick also went a long way in employer branding for Deloitte. It helped in creating a positive image about the brand in the minds of potential candidates by making them believe that the organisation is fully invested in their employees. (Raghavendran & Kumar, 2015)

BLUEWOLF IBM (EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT)

Bluewolf, an IBM company, is a salesforce consulting firm. They started a program called #GoingSocial. With the help of Bunchball's Nitro for Salesforce solution, they have gamified their knowledge sharing and encourage employees to go social. They do this by putting 'Pack Profiles' of employees across the website of the company which are social and focused around knowledge. Each profile is managed by the employee on his own. Bluewolf has incentivized their staff to go social. Employees (from sales force) earn points for external and internal collaboration like publishing a post on website or replying to post etc. They have set up a 'one stop shop' which has all the resources like video tutorials, presentations, pdfs to help the employees to go 'social'. This gamified solution has gone a long way in empowering and engaging the employees at Bluewolf.

PERSISTENT SYSTEMS (EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT)

Persistent systems goes beyond transactions and monetary rewards to create personalised experience with consumers and employees. They do so with the help of 'eMee' which is their gamification platform. Persistent Systems, through eMee reiterate the fact that workplaces can be fun and engaging. They want to convert mundane and routine tasks into something that employees would enjoy to do. eMee has developed a new professional and social networking platform for their employees. They realised that their organisation lacked a structure which enabled the employees connect and reach out to each other. To begin with, with the help of eMee, the managers switched to a continuous performance assessments throughout the year rather than end of the year appraisals and 360 degree feedbacks. (eMee, 2012) The conversations which the employer and the employee have become more transparent, further reinforcing the employees' faith and beliefs in the organisation.

To ensure more engagement, they went a step ahead and introduced the concept of 'virtual gifts' which them an agers and employees can give to each other. Infact, Employees are provided with online profiles where they can flaunt their technical skills and achievements to other employees. Managers can even give virtual certificates, points and badges to employees to provide extrinsic motivation and foster healthy competition. According to a companywide survey done by Persistent, the use of eMee led to reduction in attrition rate and a huge increase in employees' level of satisfaction. Persistent Systems deploy customisedeMee solutions to organisations as well. (eMee, 2012)

SOME EXAMPLES OF ORGANIZATIONS (VENDORS) WORKING TOWARDS PROVIDING GAMIFIED SOLUTIONS IN HR

Table 1

Company	Software/Technique	Brief Description	Function of HR
Keas	Keas	Employee Wellness Platform	Employee Welfare and Engagement
Never Grow Up	Happyness Quotient	People Management Tool- measures level of Happiness	Employee Engagement
People Fluent	People Fluent	Talent Management Software	Talent Management
ZAO	Zao	Social Recruiting Platform	Recruitment and Employee Referral
Bunchball	Bunchball Nitro Program	Employee engagement and performance management solution	T &D, employee engagement, performance management, employee collaboration

GAMIFICATION IN HR

Gamification in HR has relayed to stronger relationships amongst the stakeholders of any organisation-customers, employees and partners. Gamification helps is channelizing and re orienting employee goals with business oriented goals. In order to develop and implement gamification strategies effectively, it is crucial that all HR professionals understand the concept and its difference with Game Based learning thoroughly. (Saha & Pandita, 2017) Failing to do so, they will not be able to achieve the organisational goals they were aspiring to through gamification.

Through gamification, employees are encouraged to do more of what they like to do and get better at it or to do the same things in a more attractive, competitive and fun way and be rewarded for the same. Besides better retention, this also leads to better engagement. Gamification is also used in HR to attract, hire, select, induct, train and develop employees.

Role of HR in linking Employee Engagement and Gamification (Rimon, 2014) has introduced a concept called 'Employee Engagement Funnel' and links it with Gamification. The employee engagement funnel is visual representation of the ways in which employees are made aware of their organisational goals, taught about the

company in its entirety, and changes are suggested to employees in terms of how they work. This isn't a filtering process, but a developmental one. It helps in aligning the goals of the company with that of the employees' which in turn reflects in their behaviour. As employees move along this funnel, different tools need to be utilized at each stage to elevate the process.

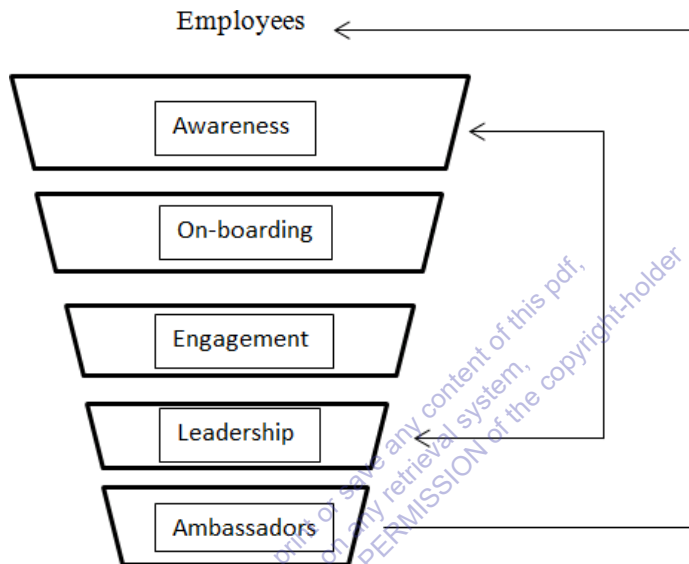


Fig. 1

Source: Gameeffective.com

Awareness (Know)

The first step in this process is to ensure that the employees are made aware of the organisation's goals and how they are relayed into the day to day work of the employees. In order to communicate the goals, especially behavioural goals, organisations can take the help of gamification and set rewards and incentives to drive their behaviour.

Role of HR

It is the HR's job to successfully orient an employee with the vision, mission, and the objectives of the organisation. Doing this through mere classroom learning sessions at the beginning of the employee's journey in an organisation, proves to be futile in most cases. Because the impact fullness of classroom learning is lower as compared to the knowledge retention that happens through gamification. Incentivising awareness gives the employees a reason to keep themselves abreast with personal as

well as the organisations' goals. At the same time taking this aspect of 'awareness' to an online platform serves as a constant reminder to the employee for knowledge updation-not only at the beginning of his life cycle but also throughout his journey in the organisation.

On Boarding Employees (Learn)

It is in the on boarding process in which the new employees are integrated into their organisations, are familiarized with their jobs in terms of clients or customers, products or services etc. Gamification can be used during this process to focus on completion and on competition. This will inculcate a sense of achievement within the employees and enhance their self esteem. Gal Rimon discourages the use of unnecessary competition to push employees to perform better. Rather feels that it has the potential to alienate employees.

Role of HR

On boarding is paramount when it comes to familiarising the employees with their responsibilities and job roles. At this stage, the HR must ensure that the employee is given the right amount of guidance, assigned a mentor/buddy who can ease the process of settling in. The HR must also ensure that each employee should learn the A to Z of carrying out his everyday tasks. At this stage, competitiveness should take a backseat because unless a balance is struck between completion and competition, the employee may feel inadequate to carry out his tasks successfully. Through gamification, transfer of knowledge pertaining to job responsibilities can be made more effective. Incentivising the quality of output and highlighting the training needs on the basis of quality of work are some of the uses of gamification.

Engagement (Act/ Do)

This combines the features of gamification and engagement. With the help of meaningful and effective gamification strategies, employee-employer relationships are strengthened and employees are encouraged to improve their performance and fulfil their individual goals.

Role of HR

A Gallup study revealed that millennials are the generation that is least engaged as they don't find opportunities to display their best and to contribute their ideas and suggestions. HR can make use of the synergies of employee engagement and gamification by devising gamification strategies and solutions by keeping employee engagement at its core. Designing an effective gamification platform can be done

through feedbacks and surveys that reflect the interests, voices and opinions of the employees. HR must ensure that the already existing disengaged employees in the system are converted to engaged employees and the new employees which enter the system, are fully engaged with the help of gamification strategies.

Internal Leadership Development (Lead)

By the time employees reach this stage, they know their jobs and roles in the organisations well. They know the expectations that their employers have from them. They strive towards meeting them and are rewarded for the same. This is reward is different from what they would get if they met say a sales goal. They are equipped enough to be leaders and help others improve their performances. Leadership programs can be developed with the help of gamification for effective leadership development.

Role of HR

As an employee progresses along his career path, HR must be proactive in identifying the high performers and pave a career path which includes leadership roles for them. Succession Planning is another important function that HR needs to keep in mind. HR must use gamification right from identifying the high performers to training and developing them into leaders successfully by gamifying leadership development programs and assessment centres.

Corporate Ambassadors (Viralexpansion)

These employees act as the greatest assets to the organisations in which they work. They transform into corporate ambassadors and act upon the mission and vision both within and outside the organisation. They become the faces of the organisation. This obviously leads to better business for the companies. These ambassadors attract new employees into the employee engagement funnel.

Role of HR

Gamification increases engagement in employees and creates a sense of ownership towards the company. The ultimate goal of HR is fulfilled when an employee is nurtured to the point where they advocate the brand to other candidates outside the organization. The innovativeness of the gamification process also creates a niche for the organization and a stronghold as an employer-brand.

The employee engagement funnel talks about usage of gamification techniques at various steps of the employees' journey within the organization. Using key takeaways from this model, a similar model for the role of HR has been formed:

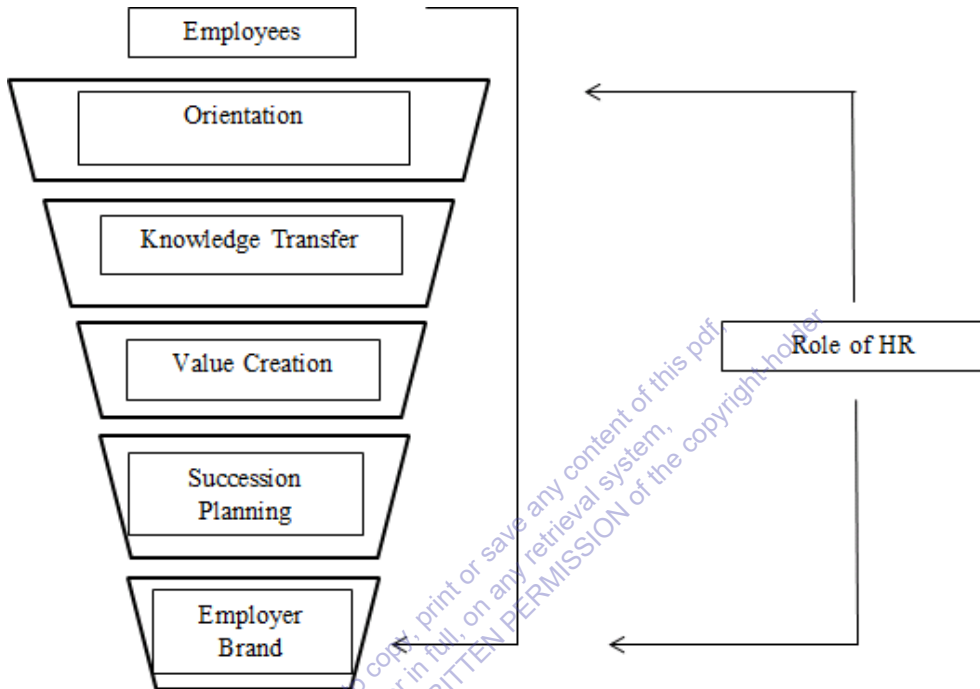


Fig. 2

CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING GAMIFICATION

Gamification ultimately results in engagement and modification of behaviour. The most common challenges linked with bringing gamification to the organization is acceptance by the firm's leaders, since associating work with 'play' is a hard pill to swallow. Another big challenge for designing gamified teaching is matching players with game types.

Bringing gamified elements into learning is most often associated with teaching young children. Bringing the concept into adult-learning is often perceived as a hurdle. Yet another challenge is the question of whether it is financially viable for games developers to focus on pedagogy in developing products.

Among other the trepidations about gamification are distraction it may cause among employees, managers being unaccustomed with the modern behavioural methods implanted within existing technology, systems and processes, cheating and

dissatisfaction arising from non-performance among participants involved, using a single component in the process resulting in under-utilization of the same with sub-optimal results and creation of a system of dependence and stress among the players. (Sengupta, 2015)

DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS

In order to assess the extent of use of Gamification in various sectors and discern whether gamification truly impacts employee engagement, a questionnaire was circulated to selected respondents from different organizations, within several sectors.

The questionnaire consisted of a mix of demographic questions, Dichotomous questions and Likert questions.

The Sampling technique used was Convenience sampling along with Judgement sampling. A total of 16 responses were collected.

The respondents belonged to the Analytics, Banking, Consulting, FMCG, Handicrafts, Internet, Sales & Marketing and the Telecom sectors, placed in different departments of their organizations, such as HR, CBD, Marketing Finance, Operations, etc.

Mid-level and senior-level employees formed a majority of the respondents.

RESULTS

66.7% of the respondents selected Employee Engagement as the primary function of Gamification, used in their respective companies. (Figure 3)

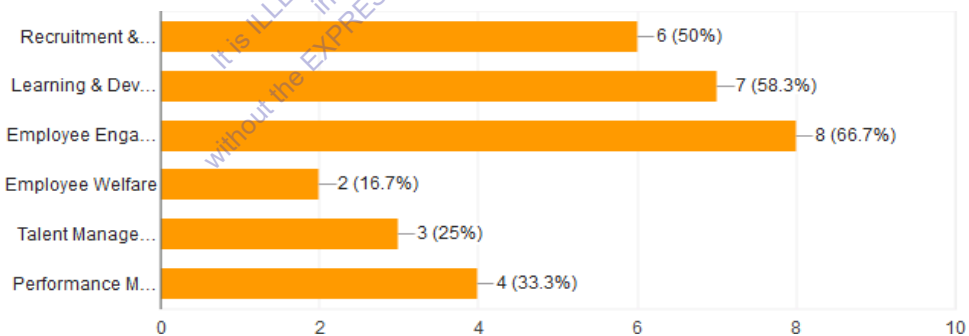


Fig. 3

56.3% of the respondents were aware of the incentives offered through gamification, while 37.5% were unaware. (Figure 4)

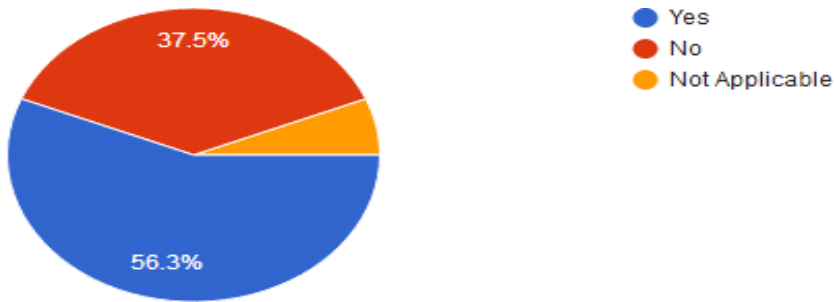


Fig. 4

42.9% of the respondents believed that using gamification had a highly positive effect on an employee's engagement towards his/her job and the overall organization (Figure 5)

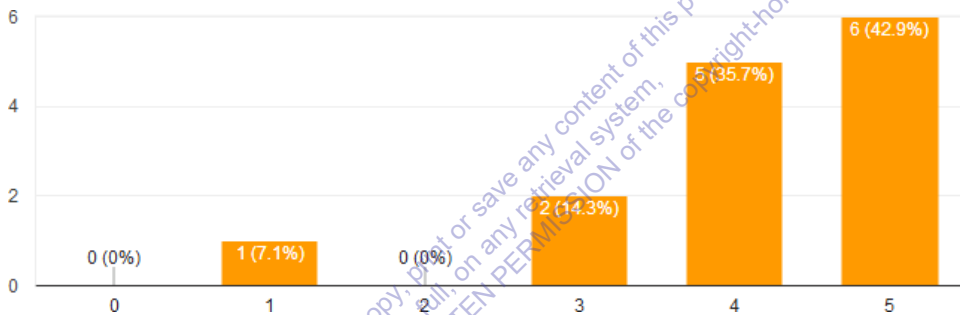


Fig. 5

42.9% of the respondents believed that using gamification was effective in accurate performance measurement of employees (Figure 6)

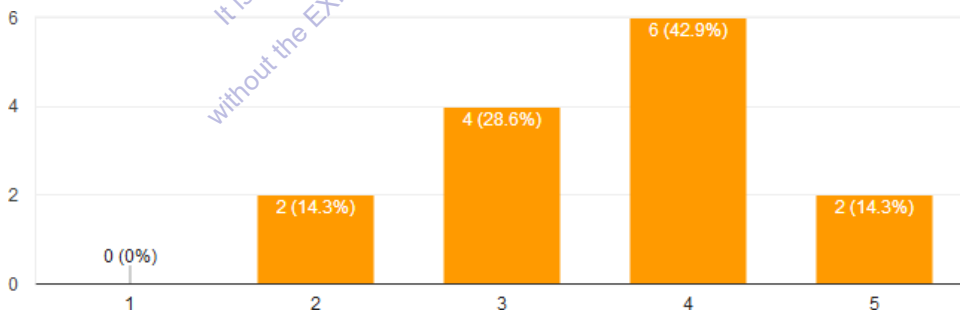


Fig. 6

50% of the respondents believed that using gamification had a positive effect on Flexibility of learning. (Figure 7)

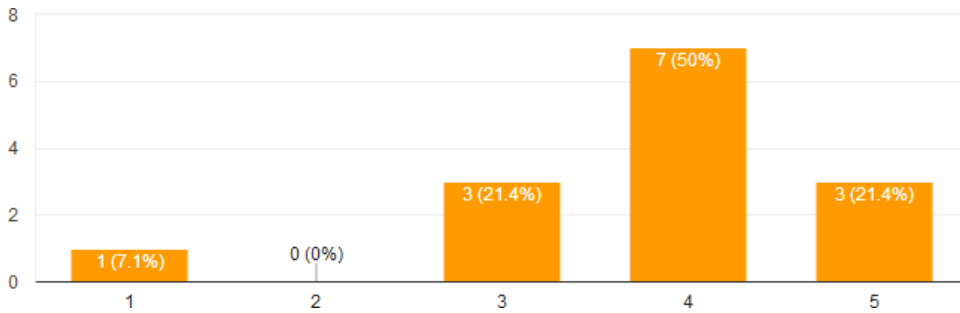


Fig. 7

28.6% respondents believed that using gamification had a positive effect on the knowledge retention of employees, while 21.6% believed that it was highly effective in knowledge retention. 35.7 believed that gamification had no effect on knowledge retention. (Figure 8)

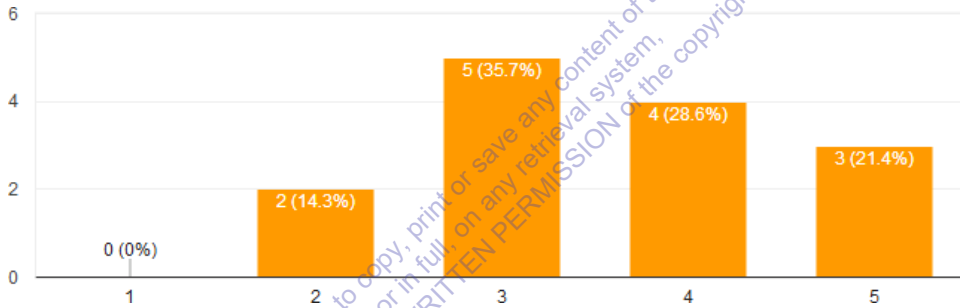


Fig. 8

33.3% respondents believed that using gamification had a positive effect and 33.3% believed it had a highly positive effect on giving the employee a sense of achievement and recognition at work. (Figure 9)

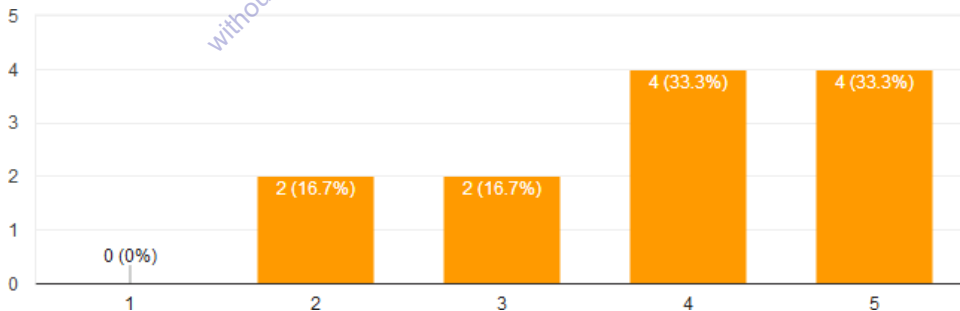


Fig. 9

CONCLUSION

When applied strategically to be integrated in the complete organizational structure, Gamification can manifest into an influential tactical tool, for enhancing the performance results of firms. The Role of HR in policy making and execution of employee engagement is of paramount importance in the business context. The researchers believe that 'Gamification' can be used to drive employee engagement and hence, create a more strategic role for itself in the organisation.

One of the key reasons the HR struggles to keep employees engaged is the lack of creation of new learning experiences on a regular basis. This challenge can be overcome through gamification. Hence, the role of HR would be to evolve into an employee champion and harness the innate potential of the employees in the organisation. This role could be based on the fundamentals of gamification and game based learning.

(Raghavendran & Kumar, 2015) In their illustration of Deloitte showcase how gamification can be successfully used in fostering creativity and employee engagement in a firm. Gamification can act as an innovative tool to drive employee engagement and commitment amongst employees, in large as well as small organisations.

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