

Gamification in sales teams management: a case study

Silva, D. L.¹, Dores, A. R.² & Martins, H.^{3,4}

¹ *Instituto de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto - Instituto Politécnico do Porto*

² *Escola Superior de Saúde do Porto - Instituto Politécnico do Porto*

³ *Instituto Universitário da Maia*

⁴ *Faculdade de Economia do Porto*

The efficient management of human capital has become paramount for organizational success, since people are the only competitive factor that cannot be imitated or duplicated by competitors (Saha & Pandita, 2017). The workplace is no longer just a transactional scenario where business is carried out, it is expected that employees are proactively involved in activities of improvement, innovation and knowledge sharing (Kumar & Raghavendran, 2015). Gamification has emerged as a strategy capable of providing adequate incentives to create value in this new paradigm of work, increasingly digital, distributed, creative and driven by intrinsic and social motivations (Morschheuser & Hamari, 2019). Although the concept is known by multiple definitions, it can be summarized as the use of video game design elements in other contexts (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011). Even though the application of game elements in the corporate environment is not recent, the convergence of technological progress with the prevalence of gaming in today's society has allowed gamification to be more easily, ubiquitously and socially accepted in the workplace (Kim, 2015).

The taste for games has led to great, worldwide expectations of gamification (IEEE, 2014), to take advantage of the more positive characteristics of players such as creativity, perseverance, learning, optimism and curiosity for non-active activities (McGonigal, 2014). If human motivations were once based on survival, today the motivational paradigm is based on motivations related to the pleasure of experiences (Schell, 2008). The dichotomy between work and play is increasingly tenuous, with the expectation that work will be as engaging and motivating as games (Prensky, 2002). This, is worthy of consideration by professionals in the people-management sector, particularly as the younger generations (Y and Z), who are very close to videogames and technology in general, and characterized by distinct work motivations from the past, begin to represent a considerable part of the workforce (Zichermann & Linder, 2013).

Thus, gamification has been diffused as a new approach to recruitment and selection processes, for training and development, as well as to stimulate employee performance and engagement (Sousa, 2018).

Even though gamification is intended to provide game-like experiences, it is not a magic solution and presupposes corporate commitment. Given that a process of value co-creation is in its genesis (Huotari & Hamari, 2017), it is crucial that companies have well defined objectives to achieve and know their employees in depth, so that the elements of games such as dynamics, mechanics and aesthetics are effective and lessen the adverse effects of “one size fits all” solutions (Nicholson, 2015).

Taking into account the revolution that has marked the retail sector in the last decades (Moncrief, Marshall, & Rudd, 2015), we propose to study how gamification influences salesforce motivation and engagement. A case study was conducted, with a Portuguese company active in the retail market of appliances, consumer electronics and entertainment. We organized 5 Focus Groups, with 5 salesmen each and the obtained data were analyzed through content analysis.

The results suggest that gamification provides effective extrinsic motives, mainly rewards, competition and cooperation. However, we consider that, if in the best scenario gamification does not promote self-determined behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000), in the worst-case scenario inhibits its occurrence, possibly due to different situations, but which may be concomitant: 1) prescription of gamification (Mollick & Rothbard, 2014); 2) “overjustification” effect (Lepper & Greene, 1973). The results also point out that gamification does not promote salespeople engagement. We believe that the inexperience in the development of the “sweet spot” of gamification, explains the obstacles perceived by vendors (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014), namely injustice, lack of resources, and others.

Admitting gamification stimulates behavior and is a tool valued by sellers; the system, however, must be transactional, in line with different organizational specificities, as well as anticipate the side effects of competition and provide more opportunities for fun, so that more positive and entertaining work experiences are ensured. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the potential, along with the limitations of gamification, so that people management practitioners can effectively use it, as a valuable weapon to win the war of talent in the contemporary world.

Keywords: Gamification, Motivation, Engagement, Sellers, People Management.

References

- Bakker, A., & Demerouti, E. (2014). Job demands-resources theory. In P. Y. Chen & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Wellbeing: A complete reference guide, work and wellbeing* (Vol. III, pp. 37–64). Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Deterding, S., Dixon, D., Khaled, R., & Nacke, L. (2011). From game design elements to gamefulness: Defining “gamification”. *Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek Conference: Envisioning Future Media Environments*, 9–15. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2181037.2181040>
- Huotari, K., & Hamari, J. (2017). A definition for gamification: Anchoring gamification in the service marketing literature. *Electron Markets*, 27, 21–31. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12525-015-0212-z>
- IEEE. (2014). Everyone’s a gamer - IEEE experts predict gaming will be integrated into more than 85 percent of daily tasks by 2020. Retrieved May 15, 2018, from PR Newswire website: <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/everyones-a-gamer---ieee-experts-predict-gaming-will-be-integrated-into-more-than-85-percent-of-daily-tasks-by-2020-247100431.html>
- Kim, B. (2015). Understanding gamification. *Library Technology Reports: Expert Guides to Library Systems and Services*, 51(2), 1–36. <https://doi.org/10.5860/ltr.51n2>
- Kumar, H., & Raghavendran, S. (2015). Gamification, the finer art: Fostering creativity and employee engagement. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 36(6), 3–12. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBS-10-2014-0119>
- Lepper, M. R., & Greene, D. (1973). Undermining children’s intrinsic interest with extrinsic reward: A test of the “overjustification” hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 28(1), 129–137. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0035519>
- McGonigal, J. (2014). I’m not payful, I’m gameful. In S. Walz & S. Deterding (Eds.), *The gameful world: Approaches, issues, applications* (pp. 653–657). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Mollick, E., & Rothbard, N. (2014). Mandatory fun: Gamification and the impact of games at work. *The Wharton School Research Paper Series*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2277103>
- Moncrief, W. C., Marshall, G. W., & Rudd, J. M. (2015). Social media and related

- technology: Drivers of change in managing the contemporary sales force. *Business Horizons*, 58(1), 45–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2014.09.009>
- Morschheuser, B., & Hamari, J. (2019). The gamification of work: Lessons from crowdsourcing. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 28(2), 145–148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492618790921>
- Nicholson, S. (2015). A recipe for meaningful gamification. In T. Reiners & L. C. Wood (Eds.), *Gamification in education and business* (pp. 1–20). Cham, Switzerland: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-10208-5_1
- Prensky, M. (2002). The motivation of gameplay: The real twenty- first century learning revolution. *On the Horizon*, 10(1), 5–11. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10748120210431349>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68>
- Saha, D., & Pandita, D. (2017). Digitalizing human resources through gamification for employee engagement. *ELK Asia Pacific Journals*. Retrieved from <http://www.elkjournals.com/microadmin/UploadFolder/830DIGITALIZING HUMAN RESOURCES THROUGH GAMIFICATION FOR EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT.pdf>
- Schell, J. (2008). *The art of game design: A book of lenses*. Burlington, MA: Morgan Kaufmann.
- Sousa, R. (2018). *A gamification como ferramenta de gestão de recursos humanos*. (Master's thesis. Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração do Porto, Porto, Portugal). Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10400.22/12639>
- Zichermann, G., & Linder, J. (2013). *The gamification revolution: How leaders leverage game mechanics to crush the competition*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education.