



Improving employee experience through gamification

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Abstract

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<p>This thesis was conducted together with the case company X and the theme for this thesis was to study employee experience and gamification in order to find out how to enhance the employee experience in the case company with the help of gamification. The aim was to develop a proof of value of a gamification-based employee journey web application. This proof of value would support the future development of an ultimate employee experience for the case company's employees during the first year of their employee journey.</p> <p>The theoretical background of this thesis aimed to discuss the key aspects of employee experience and journey combined with gamification. The goal was to find similarities and connecting components that would support the aim of creating the proof of value for the web application. The theory behind employee experience and gamification are thoroughly presented in the first part of the theoretical background and the second part combines these theoretical areas and thereby presents the theoretical framework of this thesis.</p> <p>The thesis research was conducted in three parts as the data collection was divided in three different data collection methods. In the first part secondary data was analyzed to get the picture of the current status of employee experience in the case company. In order to get a deeper understanding of the findings a company-wide survey was conducted. After these two datasets were analyzed, semi-structured interviews were held to gain a deeper understanding of the employee's views and wishes for an ideal employee experience as well as to learn more about their thoughts on gamification.</p> <p>The results indicated that the case company's employees have so far had a positive experience in the case company. A commonly mentioned theme was that a clear onboarding and learning and development structure was missing. These were also identified as the core factors affecting their motivation and engagement towards the company. Most of the employees wished that there would have been a clearer structure and plan throughout their first year of employment. From the secondary data and survey the main touchpoints of successful employee experience could be identified. Lastly, the proof of value of employee experience web application was created based on the identified main touch points and the findings from the interviews. The research outcome of this thesis is presented by the core features of the web application proof of value.</p>
Keywords Employee Experience, Employee journey, Gamification, Proof of Value

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1 Introduction

This thesis is done in co-operation with a case company X. The topic of interest was defined together with the company based on the company's current needs taking into consideration the thesis authors specializations and personal interests. The aim of the thesis is to develop a proof of value for a gamification-based employee journey web application. The proof of value will support the future development of an ultimate employee experience for the case company employees during the first year of their employee journey. To accomplish the aim, several research questions needed to be answered, which are presented in the chapter 1.1 below.

Background to the topic is that the case company does not currently have a common company-wide onboarding structure in place. As the company is growing at a fast phase a thorough plan and structure would be ideal. Case company's core business is to provide its customers a PaaS-product (Platform as a Service) and therefore the gamification angle was chosen to be combined for the employee journey development.

This thesis studies employee experience as a concept during the first year of employment from the onboarding and learning and development perspective. The company's goal is to keep their employees at the company as long as possible and therefore the first year of employment can be seen as a critical period in the employee journey. Gamification has been seen as a great asset in learning and development and therefore it can be seen as a modern approach in employee development, due to its motivating and engaging characteristics. The case company's culture can be described as a start-up culture that is modern and agile in its working processes and ways. Thereby gamification was identified as a suitable approach, and this was also confirmed by the research end results.

1.1 Objective and research questions

First objective of this thesis was to study what employee journey consist of and what the current state of employee experience in case company X is. The research process began by deep diving into theory and literature of the following main topics: employee experience, employee journey, gamification, and e-learning. The key definitions of the topics were specified, and they are presented in the theoretical chapters of this thesis. Once the key concepts were defined and covered the second objective was to define the current touchpoints of employee journey during the employees first year of employment and this was done by analyzing the secondary data provided by the case company. The touchpoints were discovered by studying the secondary data provided together with a survey conducted in the case company. The third objective was to identify the needed actions and gamification features for the proof of value for the employee journey web

application. The discovered main touchpoints were presented as a part of the proof value ideas representing the factors the case company's current employees valued on their first year of employment. These main touchpoints were used as a base, for understanding the current situations, followed by interviews with a group of employees which provided a wider perspective to the topic.

This thesis answers to the following research questions

Q1 What is the current state of employee experience in the case company?

Q1.1 What are the current main touchpoints in successful employee journey in the case company during the first year of employment?

Q2 What kind of gamified features would enhance employee experience?

Q2.1 How can the employee journey touchpoints be implemented into a gamified employee journey web application?

Below table displays the chapters in which the research questions are covered.

Research question	Secondary data	Survey	Interview
Q 1	7.1	7.2	
Q 1.1		7.2	
Q 2		7.2	7.3
Q 2.1		7.2	7.3

Table 1. Coverage matrix describing the coverage of research questions

1.2 Expected outcomes

The goal for this thesis is to define the proof of value for a gamified employee journey web application. The aim is to collect data from the case company's employees about the current status of employee experience, how the employees define it and what the employees wishes and thoughts about an ideal employee journey are. The key focus areas were defined with theoretical framework, and it was expected that the selected theory would support the aim of the expected outcome. It was decided that the research will include three different data collection methods to gather a deeper understanding of the topic in question. The current status would be defined by secondary data, collected by the case company during the year 2021, then based on the findings a company-wide survey would be conducted. Findings from the survey would then be deepened with semi-

structured interviews. After collecting all the data, it is expected that the main touchpoints in a successful employee journey will be discovered, and thereby understood how the touchpoints can be used in a gamified setting for employee onboarding and development during the first year of employment.

1.3 Abbreviations

EX – Employee Experience

L&D – Learning and development

E-L&D – E-learning and e-development, also known as electronical learning approaches

POV – Proof-of-Value is used for identifying product value

2 Context of this thesis

The case company X is specialized in e-commerce 3PL (third-party logistics) providing their customers a global warehouse network with six warehouses and their own order management system. They help e-commerce business to grow and streamline their business with multiple warehouses to offer global logistics and last-mile delivery. The global logistical supply-chain will allow e-commerce businesses to store their goods close to the end customers, meaning shorter shipping distances and therefore faster and more environmentally friendly shipments. The case company has been on a growth path since 2017 and the company's strategy is to expand by adding 4-5 countries per year to the current warehouse network and with that the aim is to speed up the growth in current markets as well. The multinational team of the company is currently working from across the world with the staff of around 60 employees with headquarters located in Helsinki Finland.

Electronic commerce also known as e-commerce is simply put selling and buying things using the internet or on a wider term all electronically mediated transactions between an organization and any third party. The definition of electronic commerce is not just restricted to buying and selling of items, as it also includes the pre- and post-sales activities across the entire supply chain. In most countries the annual growth rate in e-commerce sales is between 10 to 20 percent per year. (Chaffey, Hemphill & Edmundson-Bird 2019, chapter 5)

Digital business is a wider definition than e-commerce, it is similar to the term e-business, which means "the transformation of key business processes through the use of internet technologies". Third definition that needs to be taken into consideration when talking about e-commerce is e-logistics, meaning electronic logistics. E-logistics is about the usage of information and communication technology to support provision and execution of logistics activities within the entire chain. On a broader scope it is utilizing ITC for managing the supply chains, networks and information flow within them. (Chaffey, Hemphill & Edmundson-Bird 2019, chapter 5 & Wang & Pettit 2021, 3.)

Third party logistics, also known as 3-PL is simply explained outsourcing logistics functions to external organizations. The 3-PL companies use external partners to manage, control and deliver the logistic services and activities to their customers. Some offer value added services, like assembling of goods, software solutions for inventory management and other information related activities like tracking and tracing. Generally, a 3-PL logistics company provides fulfillment services to e-commerce companies. They specialize in different types of warehousing and fulfillments, and many provide additional customized services based on client's needs. (B. S. & Sahay 2006, 5 & Red Stag Fulfillment 2020.)

The case company can be characterized as a start-up company environment that is in its fast growth phase. When referring to a start-up company, the words that are often used are young, scalable, developing, and innovative companies, that except fast growth. Company culture matters in different ways depending on the state of company's evolution, for example in young and rapidly growing company the key is trying to attempt to stabilize the culture in as way so that it becomes the base for its success. The created culture will be the source for company's identity, it is common that young companies more or less reflect the culture from its founder's values and believes. In growing companies, the "culture change" is more reinforcing new cultural elements and evolving. As Dr. Cameron Sepah has stated "Your company culture is who you hire, fire and promote". It is not just the free snacks and arcade games; it is the people the company surrounds themselves with to represent the company and the business that actually defines the company culture. Ones the company has defined the culture, they need to make the decision on what talent to be hired. In start-up companies focusing on the small details is vital, what is company's value proposition, and how to choose people for roles to ensure and support that. (Castaldo 2021, Chapter, part 2, Koskinen 2021 & Schein 2009, Chapter 1.)

3 Employee experience in employee journey

In order to comprehend what employee journey and employee experience can consist of different theoretical aspects of the concepts need to be covered. This chapter combines the core theoretical elements that need to be understood when planning a gamified employee journey web application. The following topics have been chosen to support the main aim of this thesis.

Newly hired employees do not only seek to have a well-paying job, instead what means the most to them is to have a purposeful career path. One of the most important things that companies can do today is to provide their employees with a proper support during the time they are new at the company. Each and every month the employees should have the feeling that the company really cares about them and are willing to push them towards success through creating them a personal plan for the first year. It is important to add that today's employees are not looking to stay within a company for a long-term, instead they are trying to land a job that pays them well but also gives them the acquirements to land the next, even better job. With this said, newly hired employees can be characterized as loyal and that they are willing to give their best to the company, however only when they feel that they get something in return. (Stein & Christiansen, 2010 Chapter 5) One could argue that these before mentioned statements shows the criticalness of a well-designed employee onboarding during the first year. The chosen themes in this this chapter will cover topics that also are closely related to gamification as the aim of this thesis is to identify how employee journey can be enhanced with gamification. These themes must be covered in detail to be able to find the connection between gamification and HR and employee journey.

When studying the topics of employee journey and employee experience, it is essential to understand the definitions and to determine their concept in this thesis. Employee journey can be described as the time an employee spends at a company, starting from the hiring process, including all experiences until offboarding or exit discussion. Whereas employee experience is a broad concept and there are various factors that contribute to the total experience. Simply explained employee experience is a sum of everything that an employee experiences from the start of recruitment until the end of being part of a company. Employee experience can be described as "the overlap between the needs, values, and expectations of employees, and the organization's ability to design for those needs, values, and expectations". (Netsuite 2022, Morgan 2017, 8 & Yohn 2018) In this thesis, employee experience is considered as follows: the overall evaluation of the interaction between the employer and employee but also as individual moments during the employee journey. (Huhta and Myllyntaus 2021 chapter 4.1). Moreover, as the scope of this thesis concentrates on the first year of employment, the definition of employee journey was narrowed down and

thereby when referring to the employee journey, it concerns the employees' journey from signing the employment contract until the first year of employment.

Today consumers are aware of the value they have as customers, it is commonly expected to get rapid answers, tailor-made service, and service that exceeds their expectations. The fact that consumer services have shifted to full customer centricity has influenced how we see the world as customers but also how we perceive our employers and what expectations and desires we have towards employers. In addition to the products and services companies are now concentrating on making experiences part of their business offering. The benefit that businesses gain of the experience centricity is that with experiences you create memorable moments and evoke feelings which in turn keeps the customers coming back and creates a connection to the brand. These same expectations are visible at workplaces as we expect the same things as employees and as smooth tools as we are used to when consuming products and services. That said, it is becoming more and more important that employers are able to meet their employees' expectations as it in a similar way than consumer experiences, have an effect on the competitiveness of the company, satisfaction and retention of employees. (Huhta and Myllyntaus 2021, chapter 4) Downsides of not meeting those expectations are extensive. As when employees leave the company before finishing a year at the company it does not only get costly for the company when it comes to the hiring process and onboarding, but it also affects the employees who stay as they often need to cover the workload (Dávila & Piña-Ramírez 2018 chapter 5).

According to Whitter and Bersin (2019) companies have until recent years been forming employee experience by accident without thinking about what it consists of, and the main focus have been placed on customer experiences. As we know, business is not only about serving customers. More significantly it is about giving customers a memorable experience which keeps them loyal and coming back. As a matter of a fact, three out of four millennials would choose an experience instead of a product. Whitter and Bersin (2019) also describes that this has formed the thinking of customer service towards customer experience, and it was expected that this way of thinking would shift over to workplaces as well, although with a much slower phase than customer experience. As stated by Whitter and Bersin (2019), employees are consumers too and should have as thoroughly planned experiences as the customers of the company. (Whitter & Bersin, 2019, 6)

Although, the importance of a designed employee experience has been a discussed topic in last years, one can say that employee journey, also called employee lifecycle, remains a quite unresearched topic. Gallup.com has pinpointed seven main stages in an employee journey. Starting from attracting candidates, thereafter the stages are hiring, onboarding, engagement, performance, development, and as last exit. (Gallup 2022)

According to Whitter and Bersin (2019) companies can unleash their potential with EX through designing the EX with creating different reference points throughout the employee journey. The reference points can vary from company to company and can for instance be a warm welcoming get together when a new employee joins the company or recognizing employees when there are special events in their lives. There are plenty of possibilities for companies to recognize their employees through defining these type of reference points. However, companies should consider that these defined points must go hand in hand with the customer experience. If a company highlights innovation and speed for its customers and cannot provide the same internally, the experience becomes contradictory and will have an effect on the employee's interaction with the customers. (Whitter and Bersin, 2019, 107-109)

When designing the employee experience the human wants and needs must be taken into account as humans have a tendency to step in if their peers are getting more out of the relationship than themselves. In experiences there is always a deal between the people and the company, and one should keep in mind that organizations and their people develop simultaneously, and thereby customer experience and employee experience should not be considered separately. (Whitter and Bersin, 2019, 109)

Something to also consider is that today's companies operate in an environment that is highly competitive and are competing about who is getting the top talent. One can say that this signals the importance of strong employee experience. Also, endless job opportunities out there give employees a possibility to easily switch jobs and if the turnover of employees is high there are of course continuous hiring and training new employees which gets costly in the long run. As mentioned by Morgan (2017) the competitive market for talents drives companies towards placing focus on the employee experience. (Yohn 2018 & Morgan 2017, 26) When employee experience is designed around the organizations purpose, culture, and leadership it will be impossible for competitors to copy it. This said, employee experience can provide employers a unique competitive advantage (Huhta & Myllyntaus 2021 chapter 4)

Another important aspect to the topic is the changing expectations of employees. In today's world employee expectations have changed and a proof of that is that in a similar way as customers are giving reviews on purchases or restaurant experiences, the employees are increasingly giving reviews about their employee experience on Glassdoor. Considering this, employers need to put effort into the quality of their employees' experiences or otherwise it might have an effect on the company image. (Whitter & Bersin, 2019 14-15)

Whitter and Bersin (2019) has as a result of this created a model as presented on image one below, for a "truthful **HEX** journey" which stands for **holistic employee experience**, it covers the

most important elements within an organization. They describe that companies may be able to design positive employee experiences, but they will reach next level when they are based on the company's strengths and also boosts the truth of business. (Whitter and Bersin, 2019, 126)

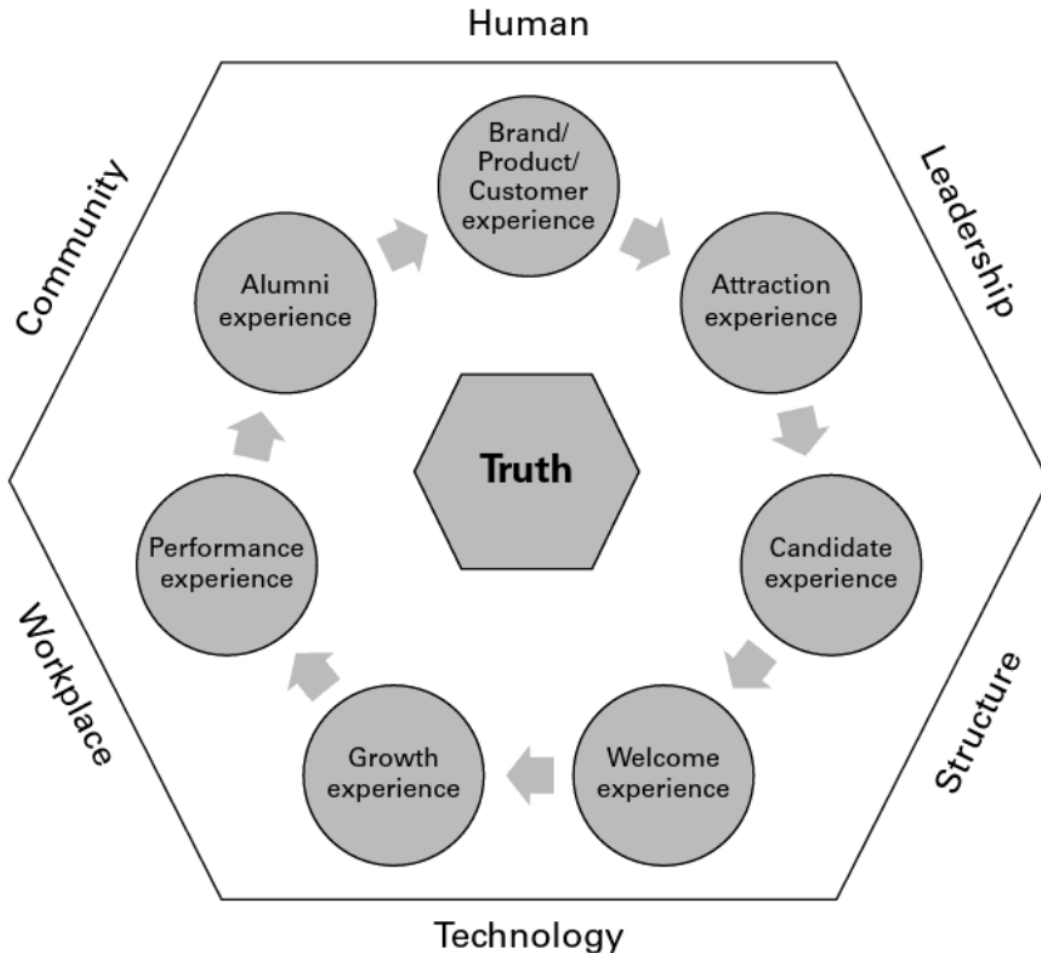


Image 1. The HEX Model (Whitter and Bersin, 2019, 110)

As employees or potential employees are the ones in charge of what brings value to them, it is vital to challenge our thinking when it comes to the employee journey and experience. Whitter and Bersin (2019) describe that the employee journey consists of brand/product/customer experience, attraction experience, candidate experience, welcome experience, growth experience, performance experience and alumni experience. (Whitter and Bersin, 2019, 110)

Starting from the **brand experience**, it is said that the potential employee journey starts already with the first direct or indirect experience with the company as that is when you form the first impression. Today it is more important than ever for people to work for a company which values are aligned with their own and this type of reviews proves the significance of having a combined CX and EX approach. With this thinking, the attraction experience becomes about the company brand

instead of only about the employer brand and this in turn contributes to the holistic experience. Candidate experience can be seen as the review of EX meaning that the current or former employees can work as the brand ambassadors of the brand during their employment and a long time after. (Whitter and Bersin, 2019, 112-114)

In this model, the **welcome experience** represents the different reference points companies can create to highlight special moments during the employee journey. For instance, for the welcome experience the psychological, behavioral, and emotional aspect can be considered through planning the touchpoints such as the first meeting, the setup with company services and knowledge, the first conversation with the team and the managers, first team event, first month and quarter. Whilst pointing out the touchpoints one should consider what lifts and creates a positive welcome experience from the employee point of view. In addition to these aspects, the creation of these reference points contemplates the view of holistic employee experience (HEX). In practice it means the actions that should be performed during the welcome experience for example sending an email in prior to the first day, preparing access to all systems needed in prior to the starting day, appointing a mentor for the onboarding, workplace setup, workplace tour etc. As last, reflecting on the emotional employee point of view through thinking what emotions are these reference points preferably supposed to raise. As an example, employees would feel appreciated and valued. (Whitter and Bersin, 2019, 114-115)

Next on the employee journey there is **growth experience**. The growth is not only about development and giving promotions within the company but also about how you support the human life factors during the growth experience. The fact is that if you support the human factors and have understanding that each employee has growth goals in their private life, they will more likely stay loyal and also perform better. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that when designing the EX, the goal is that employees succeed in life and in the career. Besides these points, rather than having an outdated yearly performance review, the **performance experience** should consist of continuous coaching and guidance in order to have a best possible experience (Whitter and Bersin, 2019, 115-116)

As last, the authors highlight the importance of an **alumni experience**. When you have an alumni community that build a powerful connection, you reach a high level of loyalty. It is about creating unique memories for the alumni community through thinking how to build strong relationships between the employees that last a long time after the contract ends. The HEX model challenges the employee journey mapping as it goes against holistic approach and excludes many elements that influence the EX. In conclusion, when the employee journey is built with a holistic employee

experience mindset, people will queue to be part of something special. (Whitter and Bersin, 2019, 116, 118, 126).

Facebook's internal employee experience survey pointed out three main factors that drive their employee's motivation. Based on thousands of answers, the three key factors were **cause**, **community** and **career**. Cause was about meaningfulness in work and furthermore about employees feeling that there is a purpose in what they do, that they identify themselves with the organization's mission and it goes hand in hand with doing something good in a bigger picture. Whereas community is about the people at the company, the employees want to feel heard, respected and noticed. These factors create a sense of belonging and relation. Lastly, career means that the employees feel that they can maximize the usage of their strengths and thereby develop and learn new skills. (Whitter & Bersin, 2019, 15)

New employees and organizations tend to share a common expectation that they have started a committed long-lasting journey together, but this may not follow through due to a poor first year experience. According to research done by Jordan (2017) the first year is the most important in the employee lifecycle as it defines the employee's general productivity, engagement and success within the organization. There are three major reasons why the employees' first year is the most critical. The first one is the speed to productivity, which is about setting clear milestones and goals from the start. The second one is, creating meaningful relationships with their colleagues and managers during the first year is vital as it increases engagement. The third factor is retention. If you have had a successful first year it is more likely that there will be long-term success. In fact, a study shows that 87 % of the employees who were lacking structure in the onboarding were not committed to their jobs after six months at the company proving the importance of the onboarding experience as the poor start can be very hard to overcome. (Jordan 22 February 2017)

3.1 How can companies design an employee experience and journey?

When designing employee experience, it is vital to keep in mind that EX is not only about employee activities. It consists of various parts including strategic and operational actions through different behaviors that highlight the employee's success in any matter. (Whitter & Bersin, 2019, 89)

There are six principles that guide employee experience work for companies. The very first one is that companies should concentrate on deeply understanding the people and their needs. In this perspective, it is suggested that companies focus on gathering data about their employees as it helps to identify key trends experienced by the employees, critical opinions of the employees and really allows employees to get their voices heard. This can be done through collecting data with the help of surveys. A tool that helps companies with getting a deep understanding of their employees

is people analytics. People Analytics provides companies with continuous evidence of the employee's journey with the help of technology. As an example, continuous gathering of data on the employee lifecycle reveals important insights of the employee's experience in the company. (Plaskoff 2017, 138 & CIPD guide, 2018, 4)

The second principle is to embrace expansive and holistic thinking. Design thinking helps companies to understand the whole customer journey through having open discussion about potential ideas and possibilities. Looking at the employee experience from multiple perspectives will help companies to truly understand their employees. In order to embrace the expansive thinking companies must take into consideration that the employee experience starts already before the first contact with the company and may continue even after the employee has left the company. If there is confusion for example in the communication in the early stage of the recruiting process it will most likely have an effect on the total employee experience. Thus, it is critical that the recruiting process is consistent and that there is a proper collaboration between the recruiter and the managers, likewise it is as important that the "offboarding" process is handled well and the employee leaves the company with a positive picture of the company. (Plaskoff 2017, 138-139)

The third principle is about turning the employee experiences intangible factors into tangible factors. Companies can visualize different parts of the employee journey, for example through mapping the employees' journey or creating employee profiles where employees themselves can describe themselves and everyone then can internally view these profiles. Fourth principle focuses on extensive participation. When creating solutions and new processes companies should have participation from various functions of the company as this brings different type expertise together and thereby increases engagement. Next, the fifth principle suggests that companies should plan smaller groups that test new ideas and evaluate them continually. This increases the engagement of the employees, and most likely will result in a positive experience. (Plaskoff 2017, 139-140)

Lastly, Plaskoff (2017) presents the sixth principle of employee experience. Design thinking process can be used to guide the employee experience. The design process includes the following steps: **research**, **define**, **ideate**, **prototype** and **apply**. He emphasizes that the design thinking process starts with an optimistic mindset that tries to solve problems. The process itself is important, and it is stated that when employees are engaged in the process the experience becomes positive and long-lasting. (Plaskoff 2017, 140-141)

Besides the six guiding principles introduced, one should consider other interesting aspects on employee experience, such as seeing employees as the customers. The best customer experience happens when a company can provide their customers successfully with the company's brand values and features. It is suggested that this same applies also to employee experience. For example,

if a company value being personal in their way of working with their customers this should be visible in the employee experience as well. (Plaskoff 2017, 140-141 & Yohn 2016, 3)

In addition, journey mapping is a tool that can be used to form and communicate user experiences on products and service offerings. In journey mapping the service offering is documented from start to end and includes a comparison of the anticipated journey and the actual experience the user has. This tool is used for getting a better understanding of the customer needs and to get an idea of the burden's customers may experience during the journey. Usually journey mapping consist of three stages that are as follows: context of the journey, illustrating the stages of the user experience and lastly the analysis and understanding of the actual journey. In this technique the positive and negative moments are mapped into a visual map that comprises the different stages of the journey. From these defined moments, one will create recommendations for improvements. (McKelvey and L.Frank 2018)

3.2 Employee learning & development

In this next chapter, the importance of employee learning and development (L&D) will be discussed. Having a learning and development strategy helps companies to make sure that they have the educated and skilled people they need for the success of the business. L&D efforts also show employees how the company plan to support them in their personal growth. The principles of Learning and development are learning, training and development. Learning is the process in which an individual gains new knowledge, abilities and behaviors. Training is the planned process of how learning can be achieved and helps employees to gain the knowledge in order to perform their tasks in the best possible way. Whereas development is the growth that the employee achieves from learning. (Armstrong 2016, 199 & 201)

When defining individual learning efforts within organizations it is important to look at the features that contribute to organizational learning. The goal of every organization is to become a learning organization where employees shine through sharing their ideas, are allowed to be creative and are excited to share their knowledge with their peers. There are three building blocks to take into consideration: supportive learning environment, solid learning processes and leadership and behavior that encourage learning. (Garvin, Edmonson & Gino 2008)

Supportive learning environment is achieved when employees are comfortable enough to share their opinions and know that their opinions or questions will not be belittled. Also, another sign is employees initiating their own projects and are fostered to present them openly. Additionally, there is time for reflection and not only from the analytical point of view but also on the behavioral and process level. **Solid learning** processes are all about generating relevant content for the learning,

testing and making sure to update it regularly in order to include recent trends when it comes to technology and customers. Furthermore, it is mentioned that in order to get the best possible effect knowledge must be distributed in an orderly matter. (Garvin, Edmonson & Gino 2008)

It is also vital that the leadership possess a way of listening to the employees and are willing to discuss new opportunities as it influences the learning (Garvin et al. 2008). It is usual that learning happens by being inspired by colleagues or leaders (Kirwan 2013). Once the above-mentioned factors have been taken into consideration, one should define learning strategy for the individual level. The idea with individual learning within organizations is that there are actions that inspire the employees to learn new skills and increase their understanding of different topics, usually in a form of coaching, training, and courses. (Armstrong 2016, 204)

Workplace learning is a method that helps organizations to enhance their performance and assists employees to learn work-related skills. Workplace learning encompasses learning or training efforts that are done in work environment with the ambition to enhance employees' individual and the whole organization learning. According to Wang one should consider individual, organizational, and social perspectives in workplace learning through allowing learning in teams that include the whole origination as well as letting individuals have a say in different practices. (Wang 2018, 15-16)

The individual learning view to workplace learning refers to individuals lifelong learning process to learn skills that are related to their job performance but also the skills related to continuously changing life tasks. The motivating factors in individual learning are aspiration to achieve, getting rewarded or promoted, feeling of satisfaction when developing and accomplishing something. In individual learning it is important that individual learning needs and the implementation is created with expert guidance in a personalized way. Not to mention, the importance of peer interaction, feedback, and the relevant learning resources. **The social view** on the other hand concerns the social interactions such as working in teams, cooperation, and communication with peers and in these interactions new skills and knowledge is learned usually through sharing ideas and thoughts. **The organizational view** is about the expectations between individuals and the organization. Individuals have their expectations that the organization will provide learning opportunities and support whilst the organizations have expectations that skills individuals learn will be put to use to improve the performance on an organizational level. The majority of the knowledge in the workplace is situated within the culture, processes and internal networks. (Wang 2018, 15-16)

Learning and Development is sometimes also called employee training and development. Effective employee training consists of four steps that are **employee orientation**, in-house training, mentoring, and external training. Employee orientation is the very first step in employee training and is

used as the procedure to welcome new employees to the organization. One should consider that the goals of an employee orientation is to make the employee feel as comfortable as possible or in other words reduce anxiety as much as possible. This can be done through showing the employee that they are valued for example being prepared with the needed tools, so that the employee can succeed in their role. Not to mention the significance of setting expectations. The employees who have clear expectations from the start tend to perform better. When it comes to **in-house training** one should see it as the second step after the orientation phase. This type of training is often continuous and can be performed by HR or the line-managers depending on the topic. The training topics can vary from company-wide ethics trainings to job specific skill training. **Hereafter**, a natural step forward is **mentoring employees**. Mentors are managers or colleagues that possess experience and personality that can support and guide employees through processes. However, this type of training requires that the company invests in-house training for new mentors. An example of this is to highlight mentors' expertise for example through creating profiles where mentors' expertise in different topics are described to allow the employees to select a suitable mentor for themselves based on their interests and their desire to develop. Another example of this is to involve the employees who are interested, to take part in the new hire orientation phase as this creates value for everyone who is taking part. External training is a type of training that is also continuous and usually takes place later on in the employee journey. Example of this would be book a seminar that would be useful for the employees to get a deeper understanding on a topic that is related to their tasks or their development aspiration. (Open library 2018, chapter 8.1)

3.3 E-learning

Same way as the digital transformation is shaping businesses and HR traditions it is evolving the learning and development work in organizations as well. International landscapes in organizations create new possibilities for mobile workforce and together with that comes the possibilities and challenges for internal training and learning for company professionals. Learning and development are a huge part in organizations and HR is responsible to add value and deliver results in that area. Learning in organizations has moved from traditional classroom style trainings into more modern forms like electronical learning approaches, called e-L&D, e-learning and development. Its main purpose is to enhance and add value to learning effectiveness and performance with electronic systems. E-learning is described as training initiatives that is supported by different learning materials listed online, these kinds of materials are usually consumed via the internet, or audio and video recordings. E-learning utilizes various other information forms on top of text, such as audio and video, games, online-classes and online libraries. In business-driven learning, the content needs to be tailored based on the company's learning needs. In mandatory internal trainings, the used learning method is contextual learning, in which the company will create and guide the learning in a

specific topic or area. This could be for example something like a mandatory companywide cyber security training. (Thite 2019, 214-215, 220)

One key benefit of e-learning in organizations is its scalability as there is no need for big classrooms at the offices as well as self-directed e-learning can be added as a part of employee's busy schedules, and everyone can take them during the most suitable times. E-learning makes it easier to take into consideration different individual learning styles. Furthermore, e-learning allows immediate feedback for the employees through online assessments, and employers can easily track employees' learning progress and monitor areas that will need deeper instructions or structures. Studies show that people learn more effectively using e-learning rather than using the traditional methods. Content retention rate with e-learning is observed to be from 25% to 50% higher. The higher levels of improved effectiveness are linked to higher level of interactivity that improves learner participation which will lead to higher level of retention and engagement in organizations. (Thite 2019, 221)

E-learning has the characteristics of deep approaches to learning that have been defined by Biggs in 1999, Gibbs 1992 and Ramsden in 1988 and 1992. The learners who will adopt a deep approach for learning are interested in the topic in question and try actively understanding its key concepts and link them together with previous knowledge they have learned. The deep approaches of learning are identified with the following key ideas, "transmission approaches lead to surface learning, depth of learning is determined by the nature of the learning tasks and surface and deep approaches are reactions to teaching environment". As learning activity is interaction between the person learning and the environment, well designed learning tasks play a key role in addition of the key ideas mentioned above. (Phillips, Kennedy, McNaught & Phillips, 2011, 6-10)

Hubbard defines e-learning in his instruction manual as using computers and the linked networks, as support in any kind of way in the learning process. This is a wide and broad definition, as it is not only about learning with a computer as there are various forms of tools that help people to learn. In organizational structures, e-learning provides advantages for both the employee who will need to learn new talents and skills and as well for the employer. For the learner, e-learning provides the possibility to learn in one's own pace, which will make it less stressful, and allows the learner to control the pace and take their time to understand the topic in question. The topic and learning can also be easily divided into smaller chunks, and this way one can focus on the key principles and reflect on learned topics. The key benefits that the employer will gain from e-learning are similar to the ones employees gain, time is saved because large number of employees can be trained at the same time, which will lower the development and training costs as a result, as larger audience will benefit from the same materials. Studies have shown that employees learn faster

with self-study methods and practices, which have been proven to be two times faster than the general class-room style learning. Well-designed e-learning materials are considered to be more clear, concise and richer with structure, as well as they are more adaptable to the needs of different types of learners. (Hubbard, 2013, 5-7)

One of the most used e-learning methods in organizations is the use of different online resources, since interactivity contributes to learning in many factors. It can help the learner to pay more attention, as by working with new developed ideas and information you are encouraged to format new connections for your long-term memory. Through the reinforcement and practice you are more easily able to recall the things you have learned during the experience. Online learning resources are presented in many forms, web articles, videos, PDF files, slide shows, podcasts and many more. One of the best features of these formats is that you do not have to be an expert to be able to put a learning material together on these contexts. (Hubbard, 2013, 10)

3.4 Motivation and rewarding employees

A key element to consider in an employee experience is a reward strategy. With a rewarding strategy companies can provide a sense of purpose and direct the employees to develop and at the same time contribute towards business goals. For a long time, companies have rewarded their employees with salary, insurance, and vacation but these traditional ways of rewarding are no longer enough to retain and motivate employees to stay. Now companies must concentrate on providing personalized rewarding systems in order to create competitive advantage. It has been proven that employees become eight times more engaged when they receive small rewards regularly than the ones who have traditional once a year salary negotiation. These small rewards can be in a form of bonuses or praise and recognition. It is stated that personalized rewards systems that recognize the individuals' needs is the only strategy that works for today's workforce and has provenly increases the employee's performance. (Armstrong 2016, 209-210 & Deloitte 2018)

3.5 Employee engagement, the outcome of positive employee experience

As mentioned in the previous chapter, rewarding employees has a positive effect on the employee's engagement. In order to get a deeper understanding, the concept of engagement will be encompassed in this chapter. Engagement can be seen as the positive outcome of employee experience. Engaged employees can be characterized as interested, have a positive attitude and are willing to put extra effort into their work. (Armstrong 2016, 163) Employee engagement is also said to be something the employee offers to the company and something that cannot be asked from the employee as a part of the employment contract. It can be defined as follows: when employees are certainly present whenever performing their tasks and willing to give extra much to their work while

feeling positive emotions and connection to others within the company. (Bridger 2015, chapter 1) Armstrong also explains that there are seven elements that drive employee engagement. First, the job challenge which is about personal development and growth. When your work is challenging, and you get responsibility it influences the engagement. Second, autonomy is about having flexibility in the work environment. Not only that employees are responsible for their work schedule but are trusted to determine their own way of working. Third, variety which in turn is about having various tasks allowing employees to utilize different skills. Fourth, providing continuous feedback to the employees about their performance. Fifth driver is about fitting to the company and getting along with the managers and colleagues. Sixth driver refers to development opportunities and said to provide employees meaningfulness and individual growth. Finally, the seventh driver is connected to rewarding and recognizing the employees for their good work. (Armstrong 2016, 163-164)

After considering these drivers, it is important to emphasize how leadership plays substantive role in employee engagement. In fact, the key factor that improves employee engagement is leadership provided by line managers. Armstrong further explains that the manager's role is essential when it comes to the previously mentioned seven drivers for engagement. First, management need to be involved in providing the daily challenges making sure that the tasks are challenging enough and offer support in the personal development. There needs to be trust from the management when it comes to autonomy and willingness to involve employees in different projects. Feedback requires that managers continuously monitor the performance and recognizes employees for good work through rewarding and praising. Not to mention that if a manager is sincerely interested in the employee's well-being it influences the engagement. Managers have a central role in the career development as when a manager believes in the employee and is there to push them to develop, it enhances the engagement. (Armstrong 2016, 163-164)

Commonly companies' collect data from employees to measure engagement and retention often without finding answers for why some employees are more engaged than others. It is suggested by Deloitte that companies must start rethinking the concept of engagement and have defined a model for employee engagement that includes aspects that involve the entire organization. (Deloitte 2015)

The simply irresistible organization model, presented in image below consists of 5 key engagement areas. One can see similarities to the previously mentioned factors defined by Armstrong (2016) that drive engagement but in Deloitte's model there are clear indicators that put the talent the in the center. Meaningful work element is about matching the right employees with right tasks as well as providing employees with the right set of tools so that they can successfully perform their tasks. According to Deloitte's studies employees are more likely to perform better in smaller teams' and it

is also important that employees get to recharge their batteries and are allowed to even use some working time to take care of personal matters or just to relax. (Deloitte 2015)



Image 2. The simply irresistible organization (Deloitte 2015)

Whereas Hands-on management is stated as the most important capability within organizations, especially the line managers. The line managers are the ones making sure things happen. Research shows that setting clear short term goals results in improved performance and higher employee retention. Additionally, coaching has been proved to increase engagement. In coaching the managers recognize the individuals' strengths and build the development based on these strengths. With this said, it is as important that the management is provided with development and coaching. (Deloitte 2015)

Positive work environment contains flexibility, recognizes the importance of employees' life outside working and allows a variety of different perspectives from their employees. As engagement can be seen as a goal of a positive employee experience the employee journeys/ experiences touch-points will be partly based on the factors that drive engagement. (Deloitte 2015)

Provided that many companies still strongly focus on customer experience without fully understanding the fact that placing focus on the employee experience has a direct effect on the overall business result and the customer experience improves when the employees are feeling happy and dedicated to what they do. It is defined by Diann et al. that strengthening employee experience influences how engaged employees become. Further explained, being engaged goes hand in hand

with productivity and can save a lot of money from the companies as a positive employee experience affects the absenteeism rates and increases productivity. (Techtarget 2020)

As mentioned above, EX has a direct effect on the employee engagement and designing an employee experience properly can mean that being part of a company becomes so pleasant for the employees that they become personally involved in the success of the business” (Bridger 2015, 7). With this said, EX can be seen as the tool that companies can design and use to make sure that the employee engagement is reached. When looking at the topic from this perspective EX is the input and employee engagement are the output as when the employee experience is positive the best outcome is engaged employees. (Peopleinsight 2021) When employees are engaged, they are willing to share their thoughts on their experiences and these employees are usually the ones less likely to leave the organizations if the experience is positive (Bridger 2021, 31).

4 Gamification

The following chapter will discuss the topic of gamification and the usage of gamification in organizational setting. The term gamification has not been a commonly used term prior its spike in 2011. Gamification is about using rewards and game mechanics in non-game settings to drive desired uses behaviors and increase user engagement. It can be used to increase sharing, content creation and purchases among other things. The core idea behind gamification is to utilize humans inner desire to play games to influence their behavior and actions. Its goal is to find solutions that motivate humans by using variety of different techniques to inspire changes for desired behaviors. These behaviors that are desired to be performed are also recordable, as the provided data will create an opportunity to act on them, which makes the development straight forward. Even if gamification is used to promote certain behaviors that humans might not usually otherwise engage in, its main feature is still to make things more fun by rewarding the users for the wished behavior and performance. The goal of gamification is not creating a game, it is to use those mechanics to recreate exciting experiences by making things more engaging and fun. (Duggan & Shoup 2013, chapter 1)

What gamification can do for employee side of equation for example in regards of onboarding processes, people's willingness to collaborate or share knowledge? The previously mentioned topics can include issues caused by lack of engagement for example. With gamification you can start to measure, drive and reward high-value behaviors by your employees. In business environment, two main game principles that can be used for rewarding and driving specific user behaviors are behavioral psychology principles and leverage design. These combined into smart gamification elements like achievements, levels, leaderboards, points, contests, and missions can be used for driving desired behaviors on virtually any application or website, like company internal webpages. People usually are craving for recognition, approval, rewards and attention and these cravings can be answered with gamification by turning employees into effective collaborators and spokespeople. One could think gamification as a mixture of technology and psychology, in order to implement it successfully some degree of behavioral psychology is needed to be able to understand what really motivates and engages people with the certain elements you have created to your platform or website. By applying behavioral and psychological concepts it will humanize the technology and will therefore increase the likelihood that the technology in question will be used in a way it was designed to. (Duggan & Shoup 2013, chapter 1)

The above definitions are used to describe and understand the concept of gamification. Based on those findings and definitions the core of gamification is linked also mimics the rules and structures of game design. This design follows set rules, first it is crucial to focus on the players journey in the

gamified system, then consider how the onboarding of the new player works, are they motivated to learn more, in order to master the game? (Thite 2019, 162-163)

4.1 Gamification design framework & core drivers

In 2016 Yu-kai Chou has created a complete framework for analyzing and building strategies around different systems that make games engaging. He also identified eight core drivers of gamification that motivates people towards variety of activities and decisions. Additionally, he studied how different types of game techniques push people forward in different ways, some via inspiration and empowerment and others via manipulation and obsession. As a result of his studies, he developed a gamification design framework called Octalysis, it includes the eight core drivers of gamification and those are epic meaning & calling, development & accomplishment, empowerment of creativity & feedback, ownership & possession, social influence & relatedness, scarcity & impatience, unpredictability & curiosity and loss & avoidance. (Yu-kai 2016, chapter 3)

Epic meaning & calling

When person believes that they are chosen for taking the action or doing something greater than themselves it is described as the core drive epic meaning and calling. It is players who contribute and devote substantial amounts of their time to a project. Good example of this is people who commit their time to update Wikipedia, they don't do it to gain money or to get projects added to their resumes, instead they do it because they believe that they are providing and protecting knowledge, something bigger than themselves. (Yu-kai 2016, chapter 3)

Development & accomplishment

People's internal drivers for developing new skills, making progress and overcoming challenges are development and accomplishments. In this scenario, challenge is the key word, as no badge or trophy feels meaningful without a challenge. In gamification this core drive is one of the easiest to develop, as earning points, badges and positions on leaderboards are in majority of peoples focus when accomplishing challenges. (Yu-kai 2016, chapter 3)

Empowerment of creativity & feedback

This core driver is expressed when people are constantly figuring out new things and are engaged in a creative process by trying different combinations. It is a natural need for humans to express their creativity, see results and to receive feedback. Due to this for example art and playing with Legos are so much fun. When these techniques are properly designed and integrated to inspire users to be creative, often the game designer does not need to anymore continuously add more

content to keep the activity engaging, the human brain simply just entertains itself. (Yu-kai 2016, chapter 3)

Ownership & possession

When people feel motivated by to then having the feeling that they are controlling or owning something, it is called the core driver of ownership and possession. Generally, when people feel ownership over something their initial thought is to increase and improve the thing they own. On top of being a key core driver for the desire gain wealth it goes hand in hand with many virtual goods in systems as well. This driver is also seen when people spend more time creating their avatars and profiles for a system, the more time spent correlates to more ownership towards the project. Then the user feels ownership towards the process and even the organization in more depth. (Yu-kai 2016, chapter 3)

Social influence & relatedness

For this core driver the key elements are the social factors that motivate people, like, social acceptance, mentorship, companionship, competition, envy, and social feedback. When your colleague or friend is amazing at some skill or has something extraordinary, people become naturally driven to attain the same things or skills. It relates to human's natural draw to be closer to people, events, and places they feel they can relate to, such as seeing a product that reminds one from their childhood can boost up the sense of nostalgia, that will make it more likely for them to buy that item. (Yu-kai 2016, chapter 3)

Scarcity & impatience

This core driver is simply explained by people wanting something just because that thing is exclusive, immediately unattainable or extremely rare. This is used in many games by having so called dynamics or torture breaks in them, "Come back in two hours to get your reward", when people cannot get something immediately, it motivates them to think about it for the entire day, until it is time to collect the reward. This makes them come back to the product every chance they get. When Facebook was launched, they used this driver to motivate people to join. At first Facebook was only available for certain university students, and slowly more people were allowed to join. After some time when it was open for everyone, people would join purely for the reason that they were not allowed to do that before. (Yu-kai 2016, chapter 3)

Unpredictability & curiosity

Unpredictability is the core driver when you are constantly being engaged to something because you are not aware of what is going to happen and when something is out of its regular pattern recognition cycles, one's brain turns into higher gear and pays more attention to the unexpected. For example, this core driver is a key element behind lottery programs and the primary reason for gambling addictions. Not to mention, this is also a core reason why people read books and watch movies. (Yu-kai 2016, chapter 3)

Loss & avoidance

This core driver is perhaps the most common one, it is motivation towards avoiding something negative to happen. In a larger scale, it can be something like avoiding to admit that work you have been doing up to a certain point would be useless because you would be quitting at this moment. Whereas, on a smaller scale, it would be avoiding to lose your previous work. This core driver is strongly used by opportunities that are fading away, because when people feel that they do not act on a certain thing immediately, they would lose that opportunity to act on it forever. (Yu-kai 2016, chapter 3)

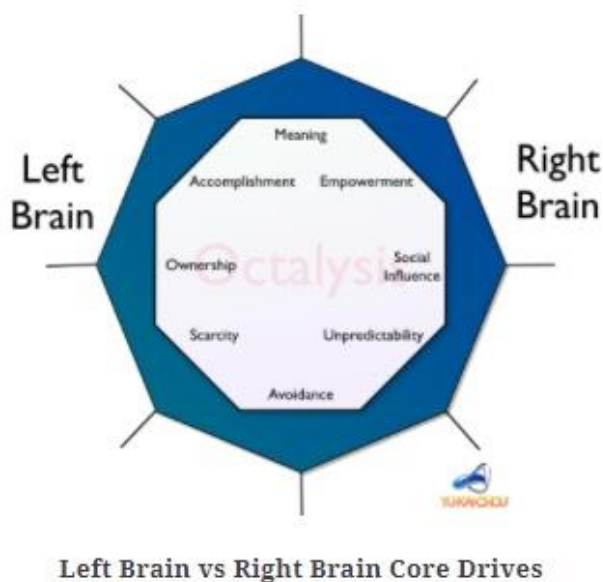


Image 3. Left Brain vs Right Brain Core Drivers presented by Octalysis framework. (Yu-kai 2016, chapter 3)

The Octalysis framework presented in image above image three is divided into right and left-brain core drivers, meaning that the right side represents the drivers that focus on self-expression, social

dynamics, and creativity. The left side represents the drivers that are more associated with analytical thought, ownership, and logic. External motivation is the motivation towards obtaining something like goals, tends to be associated with left brain core drivers. Correspondingly, the right brain core drivers are more associated with internal motivation factors, where the activity itself is rewarding on its own. Another deviation factor in Octalysis framework as seen in image below is that the top core drivers are seen as positive motivations whilst the bottom ones as more negative ones. As an example, if you express your creativity towards an engagement, it gives you a higher sense of meaning as well as makes you feel more powerful. On the other hand, if you always do things not knowing what could happen next and have a feeling of losing something, you may feel bad and struggle even if you are consistently motivated to do these actions. (Yu-kai 2016, chapter 3)

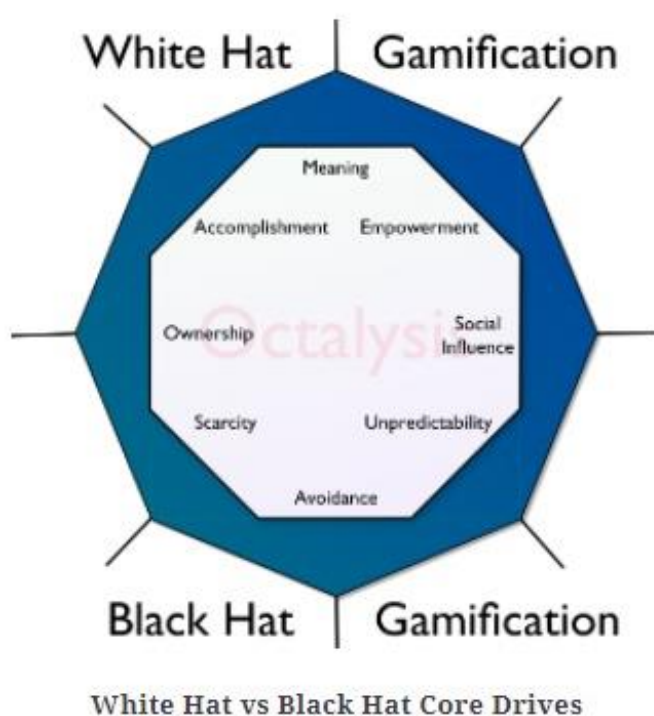


Image 4. White Hat vs Black Hat Core Drivers by Octalysis framework. (Yu-kai 2016, chapter 3)

4.2 Gamification as a source for motivation & engagement

Gamification uses intrinsic rewards, as they sustain engagement by engaging people on an emotional level. Extrinsic rewards can be used for motivation as well, occurring in more transactional level. With extrinsic rewards you may buy short term engagement, but for emotional connection and engagement you will need to have the focus on intrinsic rewards. In gamification the three key elements of motivation mainly used are autonomy, mastery, and purpose. (Bruke 2015, chapter 1)

Human desire to direct their own life is called autonomy. This is used in gamification as an effective solution when players decide to participate and when they do, they make choices about how they wish to proceed through the games challenges to achieve their goals. Players can be given opportunities to learn and discover by using different paths throughout the developed solution. Paths are not used in all gamified solutions, instead in some solutions players are given goals, rules, and tools for achievement without being directed at what steps to take next. The players will then have space to play without pre-given paths. The second motivation element is mastery, people's inner urge to make progress and get better at things that matter. All humans have a natural need to improve in some aspects in their lives, but often lack the needed motivation for taking the first steps. With gamification you can provide positive feedback easily that will motivate people to start performing better in a chosen business area. Mastery is not an attainable end goal; it is rather the journey there. As in general in life, every skill always has another level to be achieved, and that is also what gamification is, it is about getting better at something. Then the third motivation element is purpose. The ambition to act in service of something that is larger than yourself. Gamification is focused on three objectives that are developing skills, driving innovation, or changing behaviors. It needs to start and finish with a set purpose that is focusing on achieving meaningful goals for players. (Bruke 2015, chapter 1)

Humans often tend to fail with achieving their goals usually due to the path for achieving the goal being too hard or it takes too long to get there, or it is not clear where to start the journey. Therefore, in most cases the actual goal is not the problem but rather the path for achieving it. This is where gamification can help to outline the path by breaking it into series of smaller steps and encouraging people on the way to achieve their goals. Therefore, key in gamification is to take the players goals into the center point rather than the business goals aimed to achieve. All design decisions must be focused on motivating the players and enabling them to be successful in achieving their individual goals. To achieve solutions that are built with series of challenges that engage players in an emotional level and as well as motivates them to achieve goals. First, designers need to take into consideration that they understand the needs and ambitions of the players. Making the game focused on the players' motivations and goals does not mean that the organizational objectives should not be met, as that would be unrealistic for organizations to spend time and talent without any return on that investment. Preferably, the goal is to implant the organizations goals with the players goals being the primary objective and organizations goals become the by-product. When the organizations goals are aligned with the players goals, they will be achieved as an after-effect of the individual player achieving their goals. (Bruke 2015, chapter 1)

4.3 Development and innovation through gamification

Learning and development happen every day in our day-to-day life, as humans naturally will allocate experiences and comprehend knowledge. Humans can easily memorize new song lyrics or bus schedules, as motivation is closely tied to captured knowledge or skills. For example, learning the bus schedule can reduce your waiting time at the bus stop, which is a clear linkage between learning and motivation. Considering this, gamification can be a great solution to provide the path and the motivation to learning activities and it is increasingly taken into corporate training as well. Every human has an innate desire to improve, and therefore gamification and learning goes so well hand in hand as we often are inspired to work towards mastering a certain skill or building our knowledge. Thus, the challenge is not to motivate people to learn and grow as we already do. The real challenge is helping to find the path for success. This can be solved through breaking learning into small steps, each step will stretch the players' abilities but still within their reach and once they complete the entire journey the goals will be achieved. There are many ways to apply gamification into learning, but the common key factors are defining the goals, breaking them down into steps, checking dependencies, creating theory and practice engagement loops, recirculating mentors and collaborators and finally celebrating the success. (Bruke 2015, chapter 4)

Defining the goal provides clarity and purpose for the journey. Quoting Ralph Waldo Emerson "Life is a journey, not a destination". That journey is filled with smaller waypoints and as we might not always know the end destination, but we do know the next waypoint and setting that as goal will drive you forward to achieving them. Having clearly defined goals is a crucial part of succeeding in learning new skills and knowledge. **Breaking down the steps** with gamification the players are taken into a journey that balances the skills they are developing with the levels of challenges the game provides. This could be thought as a plot for a story. When relevant parts are added over time, the complexity of the material progresses, and the player is developing upon the material learned previously. This progress is then marked with points, periodic badges and levels. **Checking for dependencies** is needed, as learning is a progressive activity, new skills and knowledge learned is building on top of all the previously learned things, and therefore depending on the past. It is important that there are no gaps in prior learning that would prevent the person learning more later on. Basically, like in math studies in schools you start by learning the fundamental concepts first to get a solid foundation to then be able to learn more advanced topics and skills on top of that foundation. **Create the theory and practice engagement loops.** Engagement cycles are used in gamification to provide players with instructions, challenge and feedback on their attempt for completing the challenge in question. It breaks the process of learning into smaller steps that are more easily achievable and provide constant feedback as well as encouragement throughout the game. There are different forms of conceptual learning and experiential learning. Based on them different

kinds of learning theories can be implemented into a gamified solution. However, the most used method is conceptual learning approach. **Recruit mentors and collaborators** as usually learning is achieved best in a collaborative environment since most gamified solutions push players to develop a network of peers or appointed tutors to engage and enhance the process of learning. Lastly but most importantly it is always important to **celebrate success**, as mentioned previously learning is a lifelong process, but smaller achievements come regularly and recognizing them is crucially important for maintaining motivation and engagement. Achievements can be recognized in many ways, the most common one being badges. In gamification they represent the micro credentials that can be used to certify skills attainment, for example. It has been proven that gamification is an effective method to engage learning activities and will in the future become even more important when more learning activities move to digital delivery. (Bruke 2015, chapter 4)

In a work community leveraging the wisdom of employees brings many different perspectives for innovation. Every person has their unique point of view for issues in hand and sees the problem differently. To bring focus, motivation and engagement for innovation activities gamification can be used to provide a great structure and path to the areas. Gamified solutions and platforms provide the space and structure with rules, rewards, and objectives for players to be free to innovate within these guidelines. When it comes to driving innovation, the gamified solutions are usually based on competition, the reason being that organizations are looking for the best innovative ideas and the competitive structure that works well for achieving that. These following approaches can be used as leverage for innovation solutions; enlist players, solicit, selected, and developed ideas and getting to launch. For an organization to be able to leverage the wisdom of their employees, they first need to **enlist the players** by getting the employees engaged, motivated and focused on the topic in question. It is critical to build the player base with the correct amount of people to get the successful innovation solutions achieved. It is vitally important to encourage employees to participate and for that management's support is needed in order to overcome the mindset that participating in innovation would not be part of their job. Often when people get into gamified innovation platform, their goals easily align with participating in innovation. Taking part in change gives them a sense of autonomy and natural want to say and participate on how the organization should evolve. After the right players are selected, the organization will need to **solicit ideas**. Idea submissions are usually highly rewarded in gamified solutions to push and motivate the players to submit bold ideas. Rewards can be anything from a high number of points to badges. Players who submit the ideas are typically seen as the owners of the ideas and they are also the ones driving and supporting the ideas further. Once the bold ideas are gathered, it is the time to **select ideas** that will be taken forward. In this phase the players and community members will evaluate and vote so that the best ideas will bubble to the top. Once the best ideas have been selected it is time to **develop the ideas**. This is then one of the principal challenges that can be faced when the innovators or

investors will need to develop the ideas ready to be launched. Commonly the innovators may lack the set of skills needed for this phase, and in that case the power of the organization's community can assist. They can contribute with their ideas and talents to develop these ideas into the next level. Community based development allows the employees to contribute to development ideas that are not their own and pushes them to build better proposals. The final stage of the innovation process is **getting the ideas launched**. All organizations have different approaches for this phase as real money needs to be invested to take the gathered ideas into the next step. As the winning ideas have been voted and developed by the internal community they then as well have the confidence that this idea should be seriously considered and taken forward to be implemented. From this point the decision-making process needs to still be as transparent as the innovation to be able to keep the confidence of the employees up that their ideas are being considered fairly. Gamification benefits innovation in multiple ways, it engages the employees into idea generating and different development activities and as well as creates a space where innovation can occur in set guidance. (Bruke 2015, chapter 5) The next chapter will dive into gamification in HR and learning environment.

4.4 Gamification in HR & E-learning

In today's digital world, employees need to possess and continuously finetune new set of skills and competences, as the global economy will keep on growing to be more technology intensive. Employees will need to have a set of soft skills and specific technical skills to be able to succeed, even though with all digital tools, innovation economy will always need collaboration and co-operation skills inside the work community. This is where career management and HR will need to keep up with. The digital takeover is fundamentally transforming HR as well as it is changing the business world. As the purpose of HR is to bring value to organizations, employees, and other key stake holders, understanding technology will help to shape both HR's and the businesses digital agenda. The fundamental elements that digital transformation will bring to HR are helping to shift employee's mindset into digital way and to revolutionize the employee experience by transferring systems and processes into new digital platforms, software's, and applications. The digital and virtual platforms and solutions are part of defining the digital HR term, e-HRM, that is configuring computer hardware, software, and electronic resources into human recourse management activities. (Thite 2019, 4-5, 17, 24, 28)

Employees are constantly in a need of learning new things and updating past skills to be able to keep up with the developments within the current business world. This is something where gamification together with HRM can help. The vital aspects of HRM are motivation and training in which gamification can increase their outcomes. Utilizing the game mechanics in corporate training will

help to increase the organizations learning capacity and by that improve the working environment as a whole. The approaches such as playbour and playful work, address the combination of work and play, as playing goes hand in hand with learning and learning is linked to work. These are emerged into the trend of gamification, where game mechanics are used in business context. The potential of using gamification in work environment is huge, as games are known to stimulate, motivate and enable people to learn even more than with traditional methods. The goal of gamification based HRM is to push every employee to their full potential. (Thite 2019, 143-144)

The commercial gamification products are mainly done for supporting businesses, as most gamification tools in business context are focused more on the operational level to fix stand-alone issues and therefore strategic dimensions are often neglected. The operational level uses simple gamification, that is usually quite straightforward and narrow, and the key is to transform that into strategic level, which uses more complex elements. Strategic level of gamification innovates, motivates, and activates organizations. Additionally, it can contribute to business strategies by moving the focus onto stakeholder analysis, core competencies and organizational capabilities. In HR processes gamification can support employees with strategic levels as it transforms the working environment, and it will help to enhance employee performance in organizations. Gamification in organizations need to include a plan for the endgame or at least for its sustainability. It needs to be linked to the organization and should be an essential part of it, linked to the vision and strategy of the organization. When organization has identified the needs for gamification, the gamified system has to be precisely designed for its needs and purposes in the organization and therefore it will be highly beneficial for HRM. (Thite 2019, 144-145)

4.5 Designing and creating a gamified platform

With gamification the player should always be in the center when designing the solution, as personal encounters, and experiences that they will encounter during the set period of time, will build knowledge and direct their actions as well as impact to one's perceptions. With this in mind, the player experience is designed as an entire journey in a play environment that covers both the virtual world as well as the physical world. Rather than focusing on the technical design the experience design plays a more important role, as it will be more challenging part. A key thing to remember when talking about the experience design is that it does not go hand in hand with user experience design, as that focuses more on the human-computer interface and experience design focuses on behavioral science, emergent systems, and design thinking. (Burke 2014, chapter 6)

As seen on below image Burke has identified seven steps for building a gamified application that will help to structure the needed tasks into the right order and form. This approach focuses on reducing time and risks of the design process by making the player goals as the focus point. The first

step is to always define the business outcome and success metrics. What are the business objectives and how to measure that they have been achieved. When organization has defined the business needs and the wished outcomes that the gamified solution will address to, next step would be to identify the target outcomes and success metrics for measuring them. The clearer direction and specified business outcomes the organization makes, the easier it will be to define if that business challenge is suitable topic to be tackled with gamification. The business targets should be realistic, clearly stated and easily measured, like for example to increase online store traffic and visitor amounts by set percentage in six months. After identifying the needed outcomes, the business disruptions that will drive the move towards gamification will need to be defined, these are the changes in business environment. Second step would be to define the target audience, will it be employees or customers or specific teams in organization with shared interest. The goal of defining the audience is to set boundaries around the people that the organization needs to engage with, that will limit the number of needed player types in the solution being developed and thereby guides the way for design decisions. After the target audience has been defined it is expected from the organization to devote time into learning about the audience by observing and collecting data. The data collection should be guided by the selected business objectives to get player objectives aligned with the business objectives. Understanding the needs and motivations of the target audience will help the designers to find solutions to engage the largest possible audience. Once the audience and business targets have been defined it is time to define the individual player goals and motivations. Key here is to find aligned targets where the business outcomes and player goals overlap, as those areas are the sweet spots for gamification, it defines the opportunity to engage the players to achieve their individual goals and at the same time the business goals will be achieved as well. (Burke 2014, chapter 6)

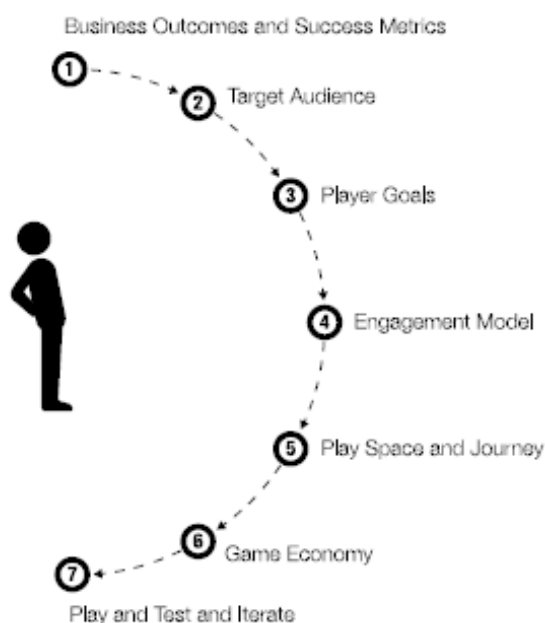


Image 5. Seven steps for building a gamified solution. (Burke 2014, chapter 7)

As the first three steps were to define the scope, perspectives, and goals on player level the fourth step is then to determine the engagement model, how to structure the solution and how the players will interact with it. In other words, engagement parameters could be defined as the choices to be made that will have a major impact on the way player will interact with other players and the solution in question. Each parameter will be a conscious choice of how the experience will be structured. The five most used design phase parameters are briefly defined below. (Burke 2014, chapter 7)

One of the most used parameters in gamified experiences is the fine balance between **collaboration** and **competition**. Usually, games are identified with competition, where winner is the one who takes it all, this is the thing that separates gamification from games, as with gamification the goal usually is not to “win” but rather encourage players to be successful. Collaborative methods are used to drive behaviors aligned with solutions, such as training employees in company policies. Players are often rewarded for helping other players to achieve their goals. The second pair of parameters are related to two different rewarding types, **intrinsic** and **extrinsic** rewarding. In organizations the players are usually rewarded once they are doing something that the organization wants and has set as a goal. Primary rewarding measures used in gamification are intrinsic rewards. The next pair of parameters is **multiplayer** versus **solitary player**, in multiplayer the idea is to interact with the other players whereas within solitary the player only interacts with the game. Often gamified solutions are more designed to be solitary as the solution will be the only thing the players interact with, and this is a decision that the designers will need to think in the beginning. Will the game be designed to support multiplayer interaction or will it just be between the player and the game. The final four parameters are **campaign** versus **endless** and **emergent** versus **scripted**. Generally, it is thought that gamified applications would be endless, but in many cases the objective is to achieve something, a new habit or to learn a new skill. These kinds of gamified solutions will have a natural ending point once the goal is achieved. On the other hand, for example learning management systems are more likely to be an endless game, as training is an ongoing activity that will keep on going in organizations, but the topic and milestone achievements may just vary. Emergent game play is planned in a way where the outcome is unknown, and thus innovation is the key to the game as then the designers focus more on the play space and the structure of the game. When the goal is to change behavior and training the situation is usually already known and scripted game design is more suitable. In that case, the designers need to focus on the player journey rather than the game structure. (Burke 2014, chapter 7)

The fifth step defined by Burke is defining play space and planning the journey, which includes defining the approach, what platforms will be used and most importantly how to engage the players. The play space is a virtual place, but it can be combined with virtual and real environments, that will be the place where the players will engage with the game and other players. Commonly this is a play space with player profiles, leaderboards, and other necessary tools. The player journey is equal to the path defined for the player. For example, in an onboarding set-up the designers need to plan the journey so that the levels will advance on the way with the same ratio that the players' skills grow in order to maintain development and engagement. Second last step is defining the game economy, how to recognize the accomplishments of each player. Badges earned have little value, so it needs to be made sure that the rewards collected will be meaningful for players. For the start there should be some easily achievable rewards like badges, to get started, but once the challenge level increases the top-level batches should be more difficult to achieve, and those need to be made more desirable for the player to motivate them to aim higher. That is what forms the in-game economy; collecting, receiving and giving rewards and incentives by successfully performing tasks and completing challenges. The four basic currencies used in gamified solutions are fun, things, self-esteem, and social capital. Fun is simply just adding elements that are fun to the game, and they are achieved by the time spent on playing. Things can be tangible items that can be exchanged within the solution. Usually then points act as currency that can be gathered throughout the game and at the end exchanged for something physical. When gamified solutions recognize accomplishments, provide challenges, and give feedback on progression with praises, leveling up or badges. These all will build the players self-esteem and thereby maintain the engagement to the game. The last example of currencies to be used is social capital. People feel motivated when they know that others from their community can recognize and see their achievements. This can be achieved with, for example, badges that can be externally presented in social media like Twitter or LinkedIn. The seventh and last step in Bruke's list is to play test and iterate. With gamification the end-product is never finalized since the solution will continue to evolve after launch. In the beginning the solution needs to only include enough features to make it engaging and make sure it meets the business objective. The goal is to learn about the audience throughout the usage and that knowledge will help to develop the solution further. To determine if your designed solution is successful data must be collected and analyzed which parts have worked and to which way it should be developed further. (Burke 2014, chapter 7)

The above mentioned seven steps for building gamified solution correlate strongly with design thinking process. Leitão describes this process in his book about open innovation business modeling, as follows. The design thinking process is based on pioneering models, that cover linear and circular phases. Usually, they are created from three to seven steps that can be gone through in order, but there is always the possibility to return to the starting point to be able to begin a new

iteration. These steps can be also run in parallel as there are various feedback links between them. These process steps were defined by Kelley and Littman in 2001 and they are the following: understand, observe, point of view, ideate, prototyping and test. (Leitão, 2019, 96-97.)

5 Theoretical framework: Gamification in employee journey

In this chapter the key theoretical framework from employee experience and gamification will be covered and the main components will be defined and summarized together. A detailed descriptions of all topics are discussed in the above chapters three and four. These themes work as the foundation through-out this thesis. With the help of the gathered theory, it can be observed that learning and development play a key role in employee experience during the first year of employment, and gamification can be seen as a potential tool to enhance the learning experiences and employee motivation.

One of the most important things that companies can do today is to provide their employees with a proper support during the time they are new at the company. It is crucial that the employees should have the feeling that the company really cares about them and are willing to push them towards success through creating them a personal plan for the first year. (Stein & Christiansen, 2010 chapter 5) Even though, this thesis focuses on the first-year experience, it is important to consider the value and importance of the entire employee journey also known as employee life cycle, while having the seven main stages in an employee journey in mind which are attracting candidates, thereafter the stages are hiring, onboarding, engagement, performance, development, and as last exit. (Gallup 2022) The companies can get the best potential with employee experience through designing the EX with creating different reference points throughout the employee journey, considering the seven stages listed on previously. There are plenty of possibilities for companies to recognize their employees through defining these type of reference points. However, companies should consider that these defined points must go hand in hand with the customer experience. (Whitter and Bersin, 2019, 107-109) Employee experience today is not anymore about being able to offer employees benefits but in addition companies need to recognize touchpoints during the employee journey that are valued by employees in order to be able to offer the best possible employee experience. (Bridger 2021, chapter)

Same way as the digital transformation is shaping businesses and HR traditions it is evolving the learning and development work in organizations (Thite 2019, 214-215, 220). Having a learning and development (L&D) strategy helps companies to make sure that they have the educated and skilled people they need for the success of the business. L&D efforts also show employees how the company plan to support them in their personal growth. When defining individual learning efforts within organizations it is important to look at the features that contribute to organizational learning. The goal of every organization is to become a learning organization where employees shine through sharing their ideas, are allowed to be creative and are excited to share their knowledge with their peers. (Armstrong 2016, 199 & 201, Garvin, Edmonson & Gino 2008)

Learning in organizations has moved from traditional classroom style trainings into more modern forms like electronic learning approaches, called e-L&D, e-learning, and development. Its main purpose is to enhance and add value to learning effectiveness and performance with electronic systems. E-learning is described as training initiatives that is supported by different learning materials listed online, these kinds of materials are usually consumed via the internet, or audio and video recordings. E-learning utilizes various other information forms on top of text, such as audio and video, games, online-classes, and online libraries. (Thite 2019, 214-215, 220)

A key element to consider in an employee experience is a reward strategy. With a rewarding strategy companies can provide a sense of purpose and direct the employees to develop and at the same time contribute towards business goals. For a long time, companies have rewarded their employees with salary, insurance, and vacation but these traditional ways of rewarding are no longer enough to retain and motivate employees to stay. Now companies must concentrate on providing personalized rewarding systems in order to create competitive advantage. It has been proven that employees become eight times more engaged when they receive small rewards regularly than the ones who have traditional once a year salary negotiation. These small rewards can be in a form of bonuses or praise and recognition. (Armstrong 2016, 209-210 & Deloitte 2018) Rewarding and recognition can be easily achieved in organizational setting via gamification techniques. Gamification uses rewards, as they sustain engagement by engaging people on an emotional level, these can be anything from a high number of points to badges. In gamification the three key elements of motivation mainly used are autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Human desire to direct their own life is called autonomy, this is used in gamification as an effective solution when players decide to participate and when they do, they make choices about how they wish to proceed through the games challenges to achieve their goals. The second motivation element is mastery, peoples inner urge to make progress and get better at things that matter. All humans have a natural need to improve in some aspects in their lives, but often lack the needed motivation for taking the first steps. With gamification you can provide positive feedback easily that will motivate people to start performing better in a chosen business area. Mastery is not an attainable end goal; it is rather the journey there. As in general in life, every skill always has another level to be achieved, and that is also what gamification is, it is about getting better at something. Then the third motivation element is purpose. The ambition to act in service of something that is larger than yourself. Gamification is focused on three objectives that are developing skills, driving innovation, or changing behaviors. It needs to start and finish with a set purpose that is focusing on achieving meaningful goals for players. (Bruke 2015, chapter 1 & 5)

Engaged employees can be characterized as interested, have a positive attitude and are willing to put extra effort into their work. It is important to emphasize how leadership plays substantive role in

employee engagement. In fact, the key factor that improves employee engagement is leadership provided by line managers. Feedback requires that managers continuously monitor the performance and recognizes employees for good work through rewarding and praising. Not to mention that if a manager is sincerely interested in the employee's wellbeing it influences the engagement. Managers have a central role in the career development as when a manager believes in the employee and is there to push them to develop, it enhances the engagement. Gamification is about using rewards and game mechanics in non-game settings to drive desired uses behaviors and increase user engagement. (Armstrong 2016, 163-164 & Duggan & Shoup 2013, chapter 1)

6 The research and development methodology

This research process began in January 2022 by planning the thesis proposal and the topic. The goal was to find a topic that would combine the two different specialization areas digital business opportunities and leadership and people management. The research reviews how the employee experience could be enhanced with the help of a gamified employee journey web application. The below figure describes the different stages of the research process, and the used methods are described more in depth in the chapters below.



Figure 1. Research stages

6.1 Constructive research

Research method used in this thesis is constructive research, in which the goal is solving a problem in practice by creating a new construction as the result, this could be for example a product, method, plan or a guidebook. Within constructive research the purpose of change means changing the concrete target and it is key to link the change with previous theory. Other central elements of this type of research are the integration between theory and practice, as well as evaluating the functionalities of the end solution and implementing the solution into action. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2021, chapter 2.5) The end result solutions are usually suggested through problem-solving techniques with constructed models, plans and diagrams. The research question in constructive research can be a theory driven one, a phenomenon driven or a combination of both of them. The goal is to identify and solve real practical problems. (Oyegoke, A. 2012.)

6.2 Design thinking and digital service design

In its core value, **design thinking** could be described as creative problem-solving approach, or in more depth a “a systematic and collaborative approach for identifying and creatively solving problems”. Simply but it is approaching problems and solutions for them as a designer would, they will explore and solve them through iteration. In design thinking you create possible solutions and develop simple prototypes. These will be then iterated, and the initial solutions will be developed with external feedback. This process is called NPD new product development process, where prototyping is done towards the end of the process to reflect the development phase. Commonly design thinking is applied when the problem or the opportunity is not well defined or when a breakthrough

idea or concept, which will have a positive impact is needed. (Luchs, Griffin, Swan, Swan & Luchs 2015, chapter 1)

In design thinking the customer is put in the center through making sure their experiences are as smooth as possible. Commonly, consumer experiences are enhanced with new techniques to deliver a satisfying experience. This way of thinking can be applied to HR practices. Often in HR practices there is a process driven approach to employee experience meaning that puts focus on the things that the employees need to complete for instance before their first working day instead of thinking about what things do, we want the employee to have done before joining. This type of experience thinking helps HR to look at the different parts of the employee experience through the eyes of the employee. (Deloitte 2017)

In services the used approached that is adopted from design thinking is called service design. As the aim of this thesis was to design and create a POV for employee journey application, service design and specifically digital service design was chosen as an approach.

Service design is an approach that boosts value created by companies and companies can use it to enhance their current service offering as well as develop new value propositions. In service design the way of thinking and workflow is adopted from design worlds processes. The tools that are used in service design are tools borrowed from user experiences and marketing etcetera. The approach concentrates on solving the true problems as in this technique the process often starts with exploring the needs of the users and thereafter it uses different methods from qualitative research to be able to answer the questions how and why. In service design it is typical that there is repeated testing, prototyping, and experimenting. Further explained, service design approach takes into account the customer needs while concentrating on the overall business needs. There are several different tools that can be used in service design and one of them is journey mapping. Journey mapping is a tool that visualizes an experience that customer has with a service. It is a helpful tool for defining the needs and understanding the usage of services. In addition to these parts, journey map also uncovers the different parts of experiences. (Stickdorn 2018, chapter 1 & 2)

In **digital** transformation, **service design** has become an important tool for promoting consumption upgrading and transforming business models. It can affect every step on a product life cycle all the way from production to consumption. Design thinking and its co-operation with service design has gotten increased amount of attention these past years, especially when it comes to solving tricky problems. With that in mind its importance has even grown in digital transformation. The major advantages when combining service design with information and communication technology (ICT) is the ability to track. For example, it is possible to follow how people interact with companies and

their services, and that will lead to combining physical products with digital services. Digital infrastructure adds its own twist to design processes. Core design dimensions for digital design are service delivery & maturity, malleability for provider & user and lastly pricing & funding. Service maturity is based on the adoption level, malleability is the speed for the digital service to become influential and then pricing & funding are related to value proposition and the users pay for perceived value. (Williams, Chatterjee & Rossi & Xiaolin, J. 2020)

6.3 Methods of data collection

For this thesis three different methods of data collection were used. First, secondary data was collected from the case company's pulse survey platform from March 2021 to December 2021. The collected data was analyzed per quarter and per categories related to the thesis topic. After analyzing the secondary data, a companywide survey was developed and the findings from it worked as a base for the developed questions. The survey was conducted by using an online survey tool. The survey was distributed on company's internal Slack channel and the employees were given one week's response time (8.-14.4.2022). Third method used then were semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were created based on the survey findings and the research questions of this thesis, with the goal to seek for ideas and touchpoints needed for a creative, supportive, fun, and functional employee journey web application. Interviews were held on second of May via Google Meet video communication service platform.

6.3.1 Secondary data

Secondary data can be both raw data and published summaries but the core definition for it is that the data that will be further analyzed has been initially collected for some other purpose. This data can then be analyzed to provide further knowledge, interpretations, and conclusions of the researched topic. Analysis of secondary data has been thought to be a key aspect in social sciences and therefore it has been central for the research agenda since the 1940s. Using secondary data and sources cannot be unified as a single methodological approach but is rather defined as a valuable orientation to research. Secondary analysis is argued to be "an alternative to undertaking primary research" which then can provide a wide range of research possibilities depending on the research questions demands. (Goodwin 2012, chapter Introduction & 1 & Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2019, chapter 8.1.)

The used secondary data collected for this thesis was from the case company's Officevibe survey platform that has been in use within the company since March 2021. Case company has integrated the Officevibe platform into their Slack, instant messaging application used by companies, to provide easy access for employees to ensure the high participation levels. Officevibe is a simple

software developed to improve work, created by a company called GSoft from idea that was created by their own need of a tool to keep company culture strong within the fast-growing teams. Officevibe offers managers an online employee experience solution platform for building better relationships with the people in the company as well as creating better working conditions. The key feature of the platform is to create anonymous employee pulse surveys, gather anonymous feedback, inspire team engagement and to offer an easy tool for one-on-one meetings. Officevibe can be easily integrated with different application and tools, such as Slack, Teams or Google to get it smoothly into the workflow. This makes it easy for employees to access the pulse surveys without the need of login into a different platform. (Officevibe 2022a, Officevibe 2022b & Officevibe 2022c.) The secondary data collected from the Officevibe pulse survey platform, is divided in quarters and to ten main categories. The used data is collected and analyzed for this thesis from the time span of 01.03.-31.12.2022. The pulse surveys are done ones a week and the anonymous questions are same for the entire company.

First secondary data was analyzed to get an understanding of the current situation in the case company on a general level. Quantitative data is referring to secondary and primary data that can vary from simple counts like frequency to occurrences of a topic such as test scores or prices. This data can then be analyzed in quantitative analysis techniques, like graphs and table that showcase the frequency of occurrence and indicate comparisons between variables. To be able to analyze data quantitatively it needs to be recorded as numbers, this means that prior analyzing the different forms of data like text or voice need to be transformed into sets or categories giving each of them a numerical code or value. In quantitative analysis the graphs and charts are usually undertaken using different analysis software's like SSPS Statistics or Excel. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2019, chapter 12.1) In this thesis the survey platform provided pre-made figures already from the data, as it is only accessible pre analyzed and summarized. This data was then more in detail analyzed with qualitative methods by the thesis writers and end conclusions and assumptions were made.

6.3.2 Survey

Surveys are to be used when the subject matter is already known well, and the goal is to ensure that the gotten information is true. In development work, surveys are the best fit for finding out a starting point or to evaluate results in a final stage of a project. When creating a survey there are several steps for the planning of the questionnaire, but as well the analysis of it will need to be carefully planned before starting the actual survey. Key points are that the questions will need to be easy to answer, it should be based on the respondent's current knowledge base and the concepts will need to be changeable to measurable variables. In surveys the participants are asked to

respond to the same set of questions in a pre-set order and form. Due to this it is an effective way of collecting even large samples of data. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2021, chapter 4.4. & Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2019, chapter 11.1.)

For this thesis, the survey was created with an enterprise survey platform called SurveySparrow. This platform let users to create surveys in swift matter with the provided intuitive interface, which can be used to collect feedback with chat-like solutions. The platform offers advanced reporting and analysis with different filter options based on the questions in a separate reporting module. (SurveySparrow 2022) The survey was shared via company general Slack channel, where in total of 56 employees had the access to the survey. The employees were given a one week to reply to the survey during 8.-14.4.2022. A reminder was sent out once during the answering period.

A companywide survey was conducted in order to gain deeper understanding of the current state of the case company's employee experience and what the journey consists of. The survey was focused on employee experience from onboarding point of view from the first day of joining the company up until the first year of employment. It also covered topics related to personal development, training, employees learning habits and their use of digital tools for it. Topics were divided into 26 questions with both structured answer options and as well with questions with open comment fields.

This survey data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively as it contained both countable variables and then open comment field questions. For Qualitative data there are a wide variety of different analytical techniques to be used, for example thematic analysis, template analysis or explanation building. Depending on the research in question the most suitable techniques can as well be used together as a combination. This analysis is an interactive and gradual process as it is thoughtful and reflective. Approaches and techniques used for analyzing qualitative data in this research are theory development and thematic analysis. In theory development, you start your research process with a deductive approach, in which you use existing theory to shape out the research and analysis process with qualitative approach. In this research the theoretical background was first conducted, and the research created based on the theoretical findings. Thematic analysis was also used, in this approach the main goal is to find themes and patterns that occur across the collected data. The researchers code the qualitative data into themes and patterns that will then be further analyzed based on the research questions. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2019, chapter 12.1, 13.1, 13.3 & 13.8)

6.3.3 Interview

One of the most commonly used data collection methods in both development work and research is interviewing. These are a good way to collect in-depth data fast and is therefore appropriate to be used in development projects. Many times, it is useful to use interviews together with other methods as they usually reinforce each other. There are different interview methods, choosing the correct one to use, will require planning of what kind of interview is to be done and what kind of information is needed. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2021, chapter 4.2, Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2020, 10 & Simply Psychology 2022.)

In situations where the research target is not entirely known, semi-structured interviews are often the most suitable option. In this interviewing technique the theme is carefully planned, but formulation and order of the asked questions might change. Open questions are used, and that creates flexibility to the interview, sometimes more interesting things can come up that the researcher has not taken into consideration before. Semi-structured interviews can be defined to be non-standardized, as they aim to begin with a list of themes and then key questions related to themes are presented. When researchers believe there is a truth to be discovered, a more structured and consistent approach can be used. This will allow the comparison among the participants' responses. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2021, chapter 6 & Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2019, chapter 10.3.)

Based on the survey findings 12 interview questions (appendix 2) were constructed for the themed semi-structured interviews that were held for a group of employees in order to identify the main touchpoints for successful employee journey. The interviews were conducted with five of the case company's employees on the second of May 2022 by using Google Meet video communication service platform. Both thesis writers took part in the interviews, one of them asked the questions whilst the other one took written notes, also the interviews were recorded to facilitate the analysis. The interviewees represented four different departments and two different countries. All data was handled anonymously, and it was analyzed by using qualitative methods such as thematic interview analysis. The questions were first divided into themes and then all responses were gathered in written format under each question, then the answers were analyzed and combined with the most common themes and responses that were raised. First the interview questions were divided into the following four main themes defining the key concepts, experiences within the company, and employee's own motivation and learning and development. In the next step the interview recordings were thoroughly transcribed under the previously decided themes. Then the similarities and common suggestions and thoughts were gathered together and then the possible differences were acknowledged. These gatherings were then mirrored to the research questions and previously collected data results and then a summarized analysis was conducted.

6.4 Reliability and validity

Every research work needs critical assessment for data acquisition as well as source criticism that includes validating different sources, using variety of ways for acquiring data, critically evaluating the collected data and information, and making a clear difference between opinions and facts. This assessment should also include reflection on different perspectives, weaknesses, and strengths, by analyzing the reliability of the provided information. When the research reliability is assessed and the reasoning behind it is evaluated and reflected in critical ways, it creates the possibility to create new knowledge. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2021, chapter 2.2.)

Reliability concerns the topic which is either an experiment, test or any other measurable procedure that gives out the same results on repeated trials and experiments. In any kind of measurement, the phenomenon always has a certain number of changes for errors. (Carmines & Zeller 1979.) In 1986 Kirks and Miller identified three types of reliability that can be referred to in quantitative research, which are the following:

1. The degree to which a measurement, given repeatedly, remains the same
2. The stability of a measurement over time
3. The similarity of measurements within a given time period to be able to ensure research reliability (Golafshani 2003)

Validity is when something is to provide an accurate representation of some abstract topic or concept. It is not enough that the indicator is reliable, as it will need to be valid as well. In general sense validity means that if the thing that it measures is valid if it measures the thing that its purpose is to measure. Validity is the relationship between concept and its indicator. (Carmines & Zeller 1979.)

The reliability of this thesis can be assessed by the theoretical source quality and accuracy, survey and interview data unbiasedness and critical assessment. All data used data such as secondary data and data collected with surveys was collected anonymously and handled discreetly analyzed by the thesis authors only. During the entire process collected data was kept private. Theoretical criticism was used when sources were collected for the framework, mainly published book and research were used. When internet sources such as webpages were used the authors critically selected the ones to be used, so that the sources included the original sources, authors and publication dates. The collected data from secondary data analysis, survey and interviews were all separately analyzed and then compared together to view similarities to prove data validity. The results were also reflected on the theoretical findings. As the collected data repetitively mentions similar themes and topics among all data forms collected, one can say that the reliability of this thesis can be distinguished by it to some extent. The secondary data used was collected in 2021 and survey

and interviews were conducted in 2022 which as well proves that the measurement over time have stayed somewhat stable. The validity can be proven by the successful results, as the research data collection methods such as the survey and interview questions were created based on the theoretical framework. The research questions were answered so thereby the aimed research goal was reached. This provides proof of validity in a sense the results that were desired to be discovered were achieved.

7 Research outcomes

In this thesis data was collected in three different stages and forms. Secondary data was analyzed, company-wide survey was conducted, and themed interviews were held for a group of employees. First secondary data was analyzed to get an understanding of the current situation in the case company on a general level. Thereafter, a company-wide survey was conducted to get a deeper understanding on the current employee experience within the company. The interview questions were created based on these survey findings. Thereafter the interviews were conducted for a group of employees in order to be able to identify the main touchpoints in a successful employee journey. The findings from these data collection methods are described more in detail in the chapters below.

7.1 Secondary data

This chapter will discuss the research results from the secondary data collected from the case company X's weekly pulse surveys. The data was in pre-analyzed format as of the figures and metrics are automatically created by the pulse survey tool used in case company X.

The overall participation for the survey is high on companywide level, the participation score for overall period is 86% taken into consideration the annual leaves and public holiday periods that lower the weekly participation levels as can be seen on the figure below. For quarter one (1.-21.3.2021) the participation average was 28/32 participants, for Q2 (1.4.-30.6.2021) there were 29/36 participants, for Q3 (1.7.-30.9.2021) there was 42/46 participants and for the last quarter (1.10.-31.12.2021) the participation rate was 43/50 participants. The vertical axis showcases the participation in a scale from zero to ten, ten being 100% participation.



Figure 1. Overall participation score for pulse survey 01.03.2021-31.12.2021. (Officevibe case Company X 2022)

The ten categories that the collected data is divided in are relationship with manager, relationship with peers, alignment, recognition, feedback, personal growth, satisfaction, ambassadorship, wellness, and happiness. Under each main category there are additional subcategories that narrows down the results into more precise segments. The questions in the pulse survey were answered on a scale from one to ten or one to five, one being totally disagreeing on the question topic and ten or five being total agreement with the question. Some questions are answered also with yes, I agree or no I do not agree answer. The overall average score for the measured period for all questions was 7,67/10 and one can note some seasonal and quarterly exceptions when the data divided into shorter time periods. Also, a significant factor to take into consideration is the fact that the case company hired multiple new employees to the company during the second half of the year. This thesis focuses on employee experience and journey and therefore the analysis scrutinizes the following categories, relationship with manager, relationship with peers, recognition, feedback, personal growth, satisfaction, ambassadorship.

From an employee journey perspective, the relationships inside the company are crucial, this is measured both on the manager to employee level as well as with peers. On the figure below the early statistics for the employee relationships with the managers. This category has the subcategories for collaboration, trust, and communication. The same subcategories are used also on when measuring the relationship with peers. On a quarterly level the manager relationship has evolved back on to the higher satisfaction levels after the drop that can be seen during the second quartal. Similar trend can be seen with the peer-to-peer relationships, as that data shows positive development towards the end of the year.



Figure 2. Overall score for relationship with manager 01.03.2021-31.12.2021. (Officevibe case Company X 2022)

The three categories that reflect on employee's personal interaction within the company are recognition, feedback, and satisfaction. These categories measure the employee's satisfaction on the feedback and recognition received from peers and managers as well as how their happy they are about the acknowledgement of their feedback about the company. These categories also consist of subcategories. Under recognition and feedback, the subcategories are quality and frequency. For feedback, the happiness level for suggestions from employee to the company are also measured. For employee satisfaction the subcategories are specified to fairness, role within organization and work environment. These are all important categories that reflect the employee satisfaction and experience within the company. The below figure displays the overall satisfaction score for the company, this includes the average from the three subcategories. The score for fairness has been 6,4/10 as the role within the organization has gotten 7,7/10 and the most important subcategory work environment has gotten 7,7/10 and this score has had a positive development during the year.



Figure 3. Overall score for satisfaction 01.03.2021-31.12.2021. (Officevibe case company X 2022)

Final two categories to be analyzed for this thesis are personal growth and ambassadorship, these are to measure how does the employee feel about their position and how do they feel about working for the company. The subcategories for personal growth are autonomy, mastery and purpose and for ambassadorship they are championing and pride. The entire data from the viewed time period shows that each employee feel a lot of pride in working in this company, the score for pride has been steadily going up and is on average an 8,1/10 and same can be noted from the championing score that was on average 8,0/10. Similar trend can be seen in personal growth, overall happiness is there, however notable drop can be noticed on the mastery level that is 7,5/10. Purpose

has the average score of 8,1/10 and autonomy 7,9/10. That can be seen as slight drop on the overall score that is visualized in the figure below. Nonetheless the average total score for personal growth is 7,8/10 which can be still classified as positive.



Figure 4. Overall score for personal growth 01.03.2021-31.12.2021. (Officevibe case company X 2022)

Key findings

Pulse survey overall participation rates are high among the company employees, which indicates high engagement for company related matters from the employees. The relationships between managers and peers were considered as crucial. When speaking about relationships the aspects of collaboration, trust and communication are taking into consideration. On these aspects the data showed positive development towards the end of the year 2021. In addition, categories that measure employee satisfaction on employee's personal interaction within the company are feedback, recognition, and satisfaction. These categories reflect the employee experiences in the company and that shows a median satisfaction average. Personal growth and ambassadorship measures how employees feel about their position and what their feelings are about working at the company. This category is data show that employees experience pride in working at the company. Also, overall happiness can be noted in the collected data in personal growth. These were measured in categories championship and autonomy that have received consistently good scores throughout the year.

7.2 Survey

Companywide survey was shared with all the company's employees, which were in total of 56 employees that had the access to the survey. The survey resulted in total of 25 responses, with

participants from six different countries within Europe. The survey results are analyzed in the chapter below.

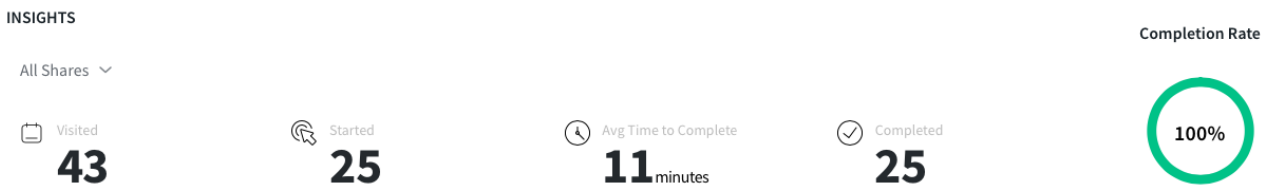


Image 6. Insights on the survey results.

The survey consisted of one general background question to determine the length of the respondent's employment at the time of response at the case company (Figure 5). Most of the respondents 36% have been working at the case company for 6-12 months. The second largest segment was 1-2 years with 28%, followed by more than 2 years with 20% and then the rest 16% have been working at the case company for less than 6 months. This question provides a deeper perspective on the current state and includes both employees that have been employed by the company for years as well with the ones that have joined recently. This gives a good comparison of the possible differences or similarities from current state and previous years.

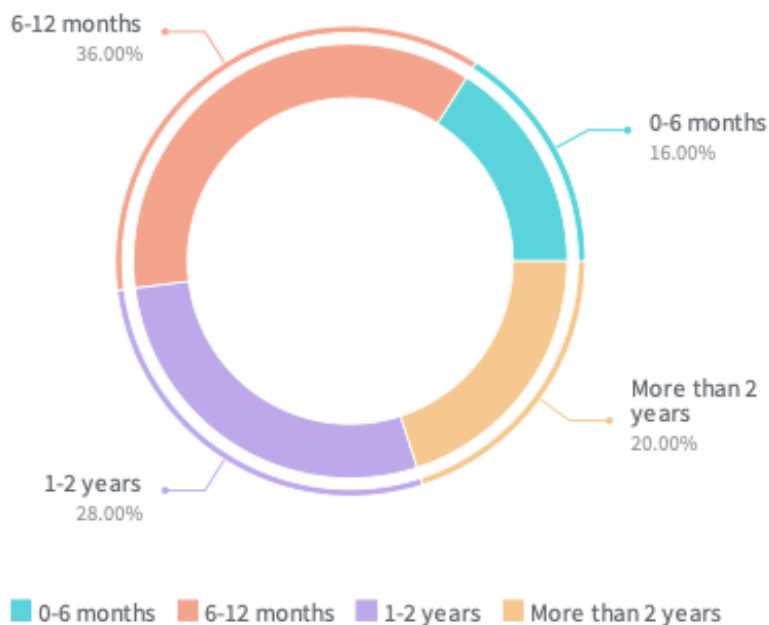


Figure 5. The length of employment in case company X.

The first year in case company X

One of the themes in this survey was to get a better understanding of how the respondents felt about their first day at the company and to find out a broader perspective of their highlights from first year of employment. The respondents were asked to rate their first day from a scale one to five, five being the highest. 64% of the respondents rated their first day with as a five, whereas 20% answered four and the rest 16% rated their first day as a three. Thereafter respondents were asked to name highlights from the first year. Common themes or touchpoints that were mentioned several times were learning and personal development, new friends & colleagues, achievements, goals & targets, autonomy, and growth. These themes are related to internal motivation and employee engagement. The feeling of autonomy and flexibility is one of the key components for positive employee experience and these factors are said to lead to employees that have a positive attitude and are willing to put extra effort to their work. In the first question respondents were asked to describe their first day at the company. As can be seen on the below word cloud most of the respondents felt that the employee journey and experience started positively, and they felt welcomed. Words that got the most mentions were exciting, overwhelming, and welcoming.



Figure 6. Word cloud for “List one word that would describe your first day at the case company X?”

With the next set of questions, the aim was to find out how the respondents felt about the company’s preparations for their employment and what were their thoughts about the support given by peers and direct managers. The respondents were asked to give a rating from one to five on how well the company was prepared for their first day, more specifically meaning internal systems, tools etcetera. The responses were varied across all scales. 36% of respondents rated the question as a

five, 24% rated their response as a three, whilst rest 20% had rated their reply either with one or two.

Furthermore, respondents were asked how they experienced the tools and materials used for their onboarding. A clear common theme in all responses were that the onboarding was lacking structure, materials, appropriate tools and in some cases time from hiring managers or team members. Due to this 76% of the respondents felt a need for something more. When they were asked to specify what was missing the themes that came up in most of the answers were, clear onboarding structure, plan, or guidelines, needed materials and clear learning and development processes and plans. Due to the managers and team's important role the respondents were asked about their opinion on the support they received from their direct managers and peers. As can be seen on the figure below, the majority with 52% were extremely happy with the support they received from their direct manager and 40% were extremely happy about the team's support. Even though, the overall support was rated high, the next question showed clear differences in opinions, both positive and negative. In this question respondents were asked to openly to specify their thoughts about the support they received. Comments included for example topics such as lack of time and support, but also great team spirit, amazing managers and colleagues were mentioned. In addition, employees rated humanistic and flexible workplace as valued component in a positive workplace.

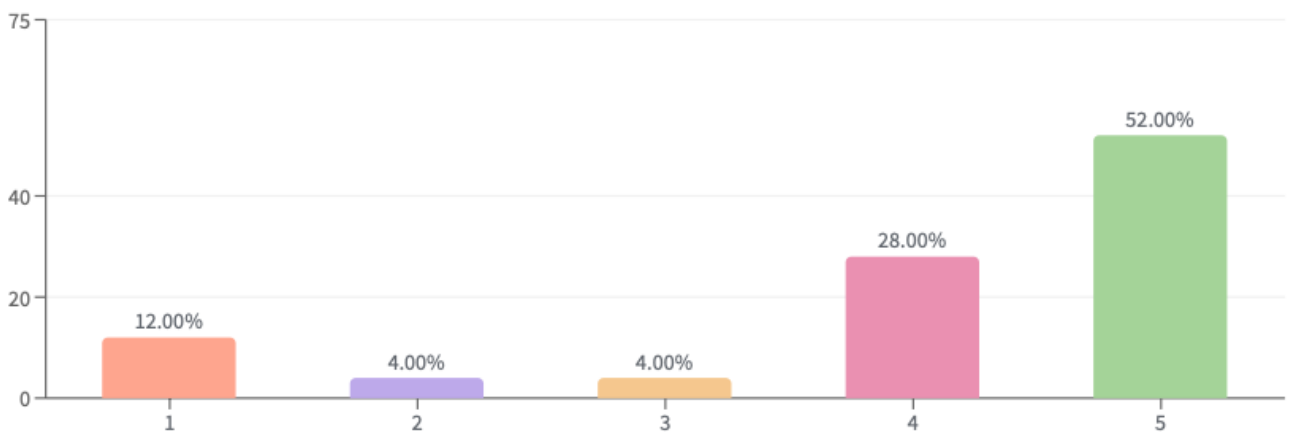


Figure 7. Support by direct manager from scale one to five

Employee motivation and learning & development

96% of the respondents say that they get motivated by receiving feedback, but on the contrary only 44% think that recognition is important for them. When asked if receiving diplomas and recognition for learning new skills that benefit their job performance would motivate them, absolute majority responded that they think it would have a positive effect on learning motivation.

In the next parts the respondents were given questions about their use of applications or software's for learning. The answers were nearly divided 50/50, however 52% said they are not using any applications or software's for leaning purposes. The ones who answered yes, were asked to specify what kind they use and why. Many mentioned learning applications like Duolingo and LinkedIn learning. From the answers you can note that the applications are mainly used for personal development and learning purposes, with both work related and private goals.

After understanding the usage of applications on a high level the next theme concentrated on learning methods and using different applications and software's in learning, more in depth. As can be seen on the figure below employee's value digital learning styles, as e-learning and videos are the most favorite amongst the options provided. Articles, quizzes, and games were also valued to some extent, while the least valued option was plain text.

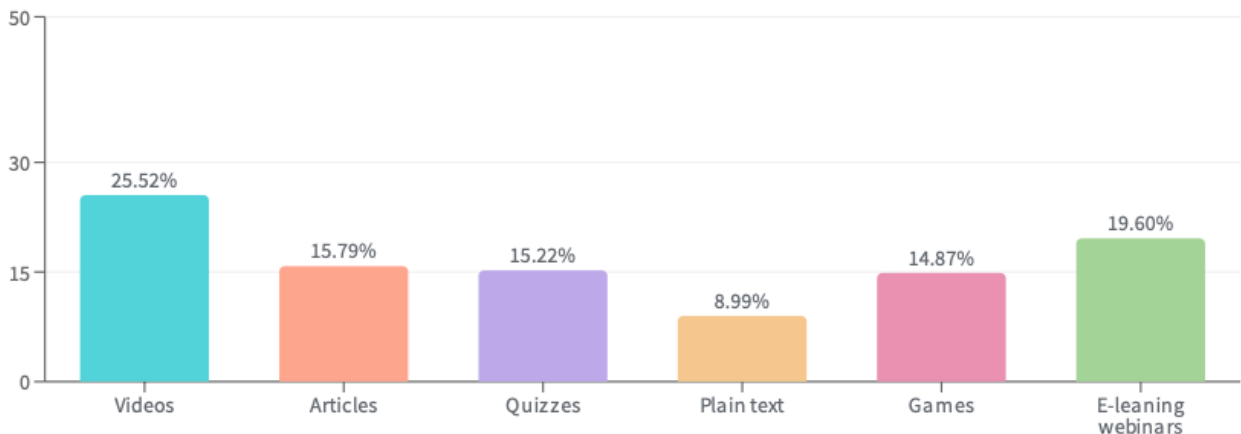


Figure 8. Learning styles organized from favorite to the least favorite.

Moreover, the respondents were asked to categorize different learning styles according to their own learning preferences. As can be seen on the figure below videos were the only option that was merely categorized to be useful, as all other styles had split preferences. The figure shows that digital methods overrule the classic textbooks and articles. Peer-to-peer coaching was highly valued as well. Besides the learning style preferences respondents were asked about how often they like to learn something new related to their role. The answers were equally divided between every day and one a month, many also wished to learn something new on a weekly basis.



Figure 9. Categorized learning style preferences.

Once respondents' thoughts on learning styles and the use of digital tools were gathered more insights were asked about motivation, usage and drive in regards to personal development and training. All responded that a digital onboarding and training structure would be helpful to get onboard with the company. Reasons listed for the benefits were to be able to access learning materials on demand, rewatch and read needed topics, clear learning path and goals, individual progress and scheduling of trainings, and the fact that all employees would receive the same level of onboarding and training that would not depend on the person training them. Respondents were asked to list out key features in an ideal application for onboarding and internal training. Videos, scoreboards, quizzes and articles got many mentions. Feedback solutions, exercises and competitions were also frequently mentioned. With these in mind respondents were asked if they would prefer to test their learning by taking a quiz after a learning session. More than half of the respondents thought that taking a test or quiz after learning session would be beneficial to test their development and understanding on the topic in question. When the respondents were asked how they feel about sharing the results, approximately half of the respondents would be happy to share the results but on the other hand the rest would prefer not to. Still, many raised the fear of getting incorrect answers and would only be willing to share the positive results. Notably, more than half of the respondents would get motivated by competing and receiving points from learning experiences in an application designed for internal learning.

Key findings

From the company-wide survey results the following findings were discovered from the received 25 responses. The respondents working time at the case company varied, 48% had worked in the case company more than one year and then rest 52% had worked there less than one year. One of

the main themes in the survey was to get a good picture of the respondents first year experience in the case company, through understanding the highlights from the respondents first year. The common themes that came up were learning and personal development, new friends and colleagues, achievements, goals and targets, autonomy, and growth. The survey questions asked were divided on related time periods such as first day of employment, first months and the entire first year all together. The respondents were asked to rate how successfully the company was prepared for the new employees, this question got a lot of mixed replies. Support received got both positive and negative mentions as it was stated that colleagues and managers did not have enough time to support new employees as they would have hoped. On a positive note, many mentioned also things like great team spirit and amazing managers and colleagues. Words that respondents used to describe their first day at the case company were welcoming, excited, and overwhelming, among other things.

Next themes covered in the survey were about employee motivation and learning and development. Receiving feedback was ranked highly and the majority of the respondents stated that receiving recognition from learning would motivate them and benefit their job performance. Whereas, recognition was not important for all respondents, in fact only 44% considered it to be vital. After this, respondents were asked about their learning preferences, more than half had no experience on using any applications for learning purposes, but all respondents said that they would see a benefit from a digital onboarding and training structure. In detail e-learning and videos were the preferred learning styles but articles, quizzes and games were also seen as valuable ways of learning. The majority of respondents stated that they would like to learn something new frequently. As mentioned previously digital way of learning was perceived positively. The following benefits were listed when it comes to digital onboarding and training structure: ability to access learning materials on demand, clear learning path and goals, and the ability to follow progress. Lastly respondents were asked about their opinions on sharing achievements and learning results. This theme got divided responses, as approximately half said that they would not feel comfortable sharing their results whilst the other half saw that as a positive feature.

7.3 Interviews

This chapter covers the results gained from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted in the case company. In the beginning of each interview the interviewers explained the themes in question as well as gave a background introduction of the research topic. The interviewees were first asked to explain the two key words which were employee experience and gamification. Thereafter nine semi-structured interview questions were presented. As the final part the interviewees were given the opportunity to bring up additional comments related to the questions, they had just

answered. Three out of five interviews were partly conducted in Finnish, as that was the interviewees native language, they were also given the opportunity to respond in Finnish. Therefore, some parts of the interview questions were explained in Finnish.

Defining the employee experience & gamification

The first section of the interviews was to describe the theme of the research as well as to define the key concepts. The first concept that the interviews were asked to describe with their own words was employee experience, they were also asked to state the first impressions that came to their mind from these concepts. Commonly employee experience was a known concept. Most of the interviewees associated the term with onboarding, first weeks and months in the company, support received, company's first impressions to new employees, employee's development, and wellbeing within the company. The next key concept was asked to be described was gamification, this on the other hand was more unfamiliar topic for the interviewees, but everyone had some kind of high-level idea of the concept. The interpretations included the following thoughts: videogame concept that has been translated into some other context, achievements, and tasks, competing, use games for learning, fun way to understand new knowledge, and game effects like quizzes.

Experiences during the first year of employment

The next part of the interviews consisted of the semi-structured questions on the research themes. In the first questions the interviewees were asked to describe if they were missing something from their first year of employment and as a comparison in the second question, they were asked to describe things that company should take into consideration to be able to provide the ideal first year of employment. Both questions received similar responses from all of the interviewees. First of all, the things that interviewees listed as missing, were support from their direct managers and team members, training materials, training about the product, clear and structured materials or documents, more clear description of teams and individual responsibilities to understand who to ask for support on certain topics and it was also mentioned that there was no clear knowledge where to find needed information. Next, the interviewees were asked to think about what the company should take into consideration to provided ideal first year experience. Most of the topics mentioned were concentrated on materials, needed work tools and structure. More in details they wished that the company would have a plan for the first weeks of new employment with assigned support, development plan with small achievable steps that can be measured, easier self-learning and presentation of different teams and employees, including their job descriptions to be able to know who to ask for help.

Employee motivation and learning & development

In the third questions interviewees were asked to describe their experiences with learning tech tools such as applications. Language learning applications were mentioned by many, and the experiences were described as fun, positive, addictive and motivating. The usage of applications for leaning were said to be convenient, fast, flexible with time and place, and that it is great that the topics can be revisited when needed. To summarize, 80% of the interviewees experienced using tech tools in leaning as a positive concept and effective way of learning.

The following two question concentrated on receiving credit for achievements, how would the interviewees feel about receiving and sharing the results. All interviewees raised a point that they like receiving positive feedback in general, and when the results are good it feels pleasant to receive credit for it. Most of the interviewees also mentioned that receiving positive and nice feedback as well with credits makes them feel motivated, especially when they can see progress compared to achievements. Competition against your colleagues was seen both as a stressful and an exciting concept. It was expressed that it could make you feel more stressed to learn about a topic if your score is openly compared to your colleagues. On the other hand, some interviewees mentioned that they would enjoy the competition, especially when they succeed, as in this way they would be able to show their best. Some said as well that with sharing the results they would get the change to highlight their professional skills on a specific area. This would demonstrate that your colleagues can trust your expertise in that area. Some mentioned that they could share results to inspire others and to get inspired by others results. Interestingly it was also brought up that the employees would like the sharing to be automated and would not share the results themselves manually.

The next question was about career development and more specifically the interviewees were asked to share their thoughts on a digital learning path, where they could follow and review their progress on. This was seen as a valuable asset, as it is good to have measurable goals, that you can later on reflect on and to have a clear visibility on your career path. It was mentioned that it would be nice, if you could add your own goals there to your plan, so that you would be able list your achievements that you would personally wish to reach and those would not be shared with others. When asked what motivates the interviewees to push harder towards their goals a variety of different topics were mentioned. Many conveyed that getting the feeling of success for the work you do, both internally and externally is a key factor for motivation. Additionally, exceeding your own expectations and becoming a better professional in your role were seen as factors contributing to motivation. The common topics that were also raised were solving issues, salary, rewards, flexibility, and power.

The last questions were about creating own learning materials to be shared with the company and how would doing that make the interviewees feel. This received a lot of positive and enthusiastic reactions; all responded that they would feel happy to share their knowledge. It was also portrayed that making materials, would give them the feeling of accomplishment when others would benefit from the materials. It was said that sharing knowledge is key to successful learning in a company, as more you share the knowledge the more it benefits everyone. One idea that came up was that teams would share their expertise in a way that they would take turns in creating learning materials that would benefit the rest of the company. The feelings that this brought up among the interviewees were that it would enhance their professional self-esteem and would be a positive experience. However, this could make them feel more nervous and stressed once the materials would need to be presented or shared.

At the end of the interview session each interviewee was given the chance to provide any additional thoughts on the topic. Mentions that were given were that the topic is interesting and relevant, some additional thoughts were that it would be important that the company is prepared for the new hires, also that employees and teams should be introduced to new employees better. Furthermore, it was pointed out that the global aspect and remote work possibilities should be taken into consideration more, with this in mind it would be beneficial to get to know your colleagues at a more personal level. Would also be good to know your colleague's communication preferences and other personal details for creating closer relationships.

Key findings

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with five case company employees representing four different departments and two different countries. Main themes of the interview were defining the concepts of employee experience and gamification, interviewees experiences during the first year of employment and employee motivation and learning and development. Interviews were conducted via Google meets video communication service platform. In the first part of the interview, the interviewees were asked to describe the concepts of employee journey and gamification in their own words. Employee experience was more commonly known concept whilst gamification was more unknown for some of the interviewees. Next, interviewees were asked if they were missing something from their first year of employment as well as if they would have wished for something to be added to gain the ideal first year of employment. Topics that were raised were support from managers and peers, training materials, more information about different teams and guidance where to find needed information. The interviewees would like to have a clear plan for the first weeks of new employment, with assigned support and structured self-learning materials. After these questions the interviewees were asked to describe their experiences with learning with tech

tools such as applications. Repeatedly language learning applications were mentioned and the using them was described as positive, convenient, and flexible. Interviewees were asked to share their feelings towards receiving feedback and sharing the achieved results. Some raised the feeling of stress about sharing the results, as they did not prefer to compete against their colleagues, on the contrary some said they would enjoy the competition part as well as would like to share the achieved results. In the following question interviewees were asked about their opinion on a digital learning path where they could follow their progress on. All the interviewees said that they would prefer to have a clear and structured plan that it would be a valuable asset to their employee experience and a key factor to their motivation. All interviewees mentioned they would prefer to learn new thing as well as share their knowledge by creating learning materials to their colleagues within the company. As a last question of the interviews, interviewees were given the chance to freely add their own thoughts to the topic, that were not covered with the interview questions. Some things that were raised were that the topic is highly interesting and valuable, they see onboarding of new employees as a highly important topic in general and think that all new higher should get a proper introduction to the teams internally.

8 Finding and conclusions

In this chapter the data from the different data collections were put together and structured to provide findings and answers to the research questions of this thesis. First the current state of employee journey and experience in case company is described and structured. As the end result a proof of value of an employee journey application will be assembled from the findings. At the end of this chapter future research suggestions will be provided based on the research results and conclusions.

8.1 Description of the current state of employee experience in case company x

In this thesis the first research question is to find out the current state of employee experience in the case company. This was determined by the secondary data and survey conducted in the company. In this chapter the main touchpoints of current employee journey in the case company will be displayed from the findings. In addition, the chapter will cover what contributes currently to a successful employee experience in the case company. This will answer the second research question of this thesis: what are the current main touchpoints in successful employee journey in the case company during the first year of employment.

The analysis of the secondary data highlights that the employees of the case company are highly engaged to give feedback and are happily sharing their opinions and views on different topics regarding their employment, collaborating and organizational views. The data shows that collaboration, trust and communication between the peers and managers are ranked highly and therefore the relationships in the company can be seen as a crucial factor. This assumption was confirmed in the data collected with the survey, as peer-to-peer and manager level support and relationships received multiple positive mentions in different scenarios. It was even mentioned that the relationships were not only built on a professional level but have actually become friendships. The personal interaction within the company was measured through categories such as recognition, feedback and satisfaction. The data indicates dissatisfaction to some extent in these categories above as the ratings are clearly below average. Whereas the conducted survey indicates that half of the employees appreciate and highlight feedback and recognition as important factors, while the other half did not see these factors as important. Currently the employees feel quite positive about their personal growth opportunities but feel that there is a need for a structured development and training plan. Many employees highlighted in the survey that they would like to learn new skills related to their role more often and frequently.

The survey results reveal that most of the employees felt welcomed on their first day of employment, which contributed to a positive start to their employee journey and experience in the

company. The company has clearly succeeded in creating a good first impression and one can say that this is a good base for the employee experience. However, the survey shows that there are some areas in which the company lacks structure, and this have had a slightly negative effect on the total experience for employees.

In the survey the employees described their highlights of their first year of employment with the following touchpoints and thoughts. Learning and development were mentioned in almost all of the answers as well with achieving goals and having victories, especially the first completed projects and tasks were highlighted. The importance of great colleagues, autonomy and flexibility were praised on many occasions as well. The importance of social events like celebrating holidays with team and spending time together was one of mentioned highlighted moments of their first year.

The first research question for this thesis was to understand the current main touchpoints in employee journey in the case company. From the collected answers you can clearly see a silver lining as most of the answers mentioned similar topics. These were moments and topics such as flexibility, co-operation, development, achieving goals, learning, getting responsibility and receiving feedback and praise both internally and externally. Sub questions for the main research question were, what does the employee experience consist of in the case company and what factors contribute to a positive employee experience. Findings from the collected data suggests that these include, giving and receiving feedback, collaboration with peers and managers on both personal and professional level, personal development, and growth. The below figure 10 displays the touchpoints in successful employee journey in the case company during the first year, which could be identified from the collected data described in above chapters.

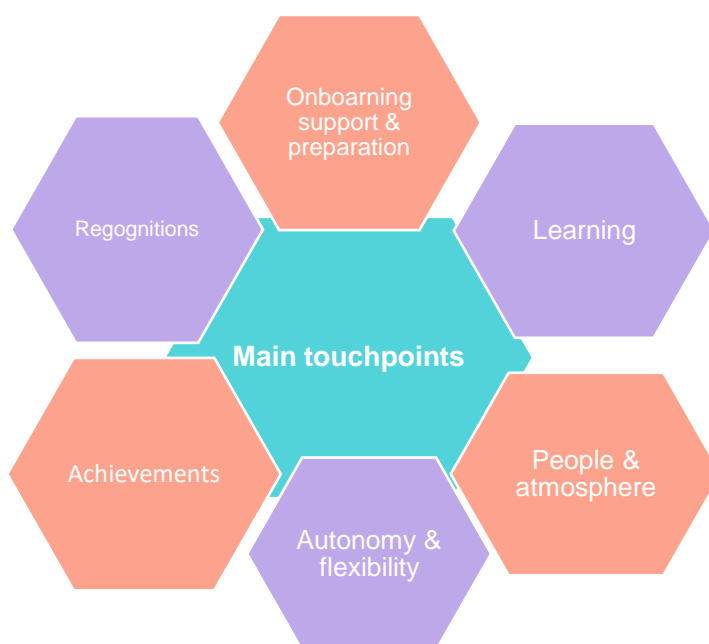


Figure 10. The current main touchpoints in successful employee journey in the case company during the first year of employment.

8.2 Proof of Value for a gamified employee journey web application

Proof-of-Value also known as POC means a presentation of the proposed product and its viability. In a defined POC there is usually visualization that authenticates possible potential of an idea for a service or application. With proof of concept the idea and core functionalities of proposed application are presented, the needed features and methods are listed to give out an idea and glimpse of how the product would be like. (The Blueprint 2021) Commonly, POV shortened from Proof of Value, is described as a lighter version of PoC (Proof of Concept) and it is usually performed in a more regulated environment. This is due to the fact that POV has its focus on showing and proving the value rather than the functionalities of a concept. The creating process of POV is faster in comparison to POC, as it does not require as extensive environment. This is a concept that usually works well with SaaS products that can be easily demonstrated and in which a sandbox can be created for a light version of POC. Proof of Value is usually used for identifying product value based on customer use cases. (Success app 2020.) In this thesis the end result of the research is described as a POV for an employee journey web application for the case company X. The created proof of value will answer the second research question of this thesis: what kind of gamified features would enhance employee experience. The POV presented on the chapter below, will include the central features for the application, the concept is visualized by a few landing page photos designed by the case company's Head of Global Marketing from the ideas and plans described by the thesis authors based on the research made.

8.2.1 Central features

The central features for the employee journey web application are based on the main touchpoints that were identified by the research results gathered in this thesis. Thus, by this will provide an answer the final research question: how can the employee journey touchpoints be implemented into a gamified employee journey solution. The aim was to find out the features that would be the most beneficial and important for the case company's employees and their usage. This chapter will describe the central features such as quizzes, development plan, leaderboard and high-five board in more detail, visual layout ideas are presented in images on below paragraphs. As can be seen on the image below (image 7), each employee will have their personalized front page in the application, where they can find among other things navigation bar with all key areas, their own progress bar for their development plan and things like leaderboards and latest activities.

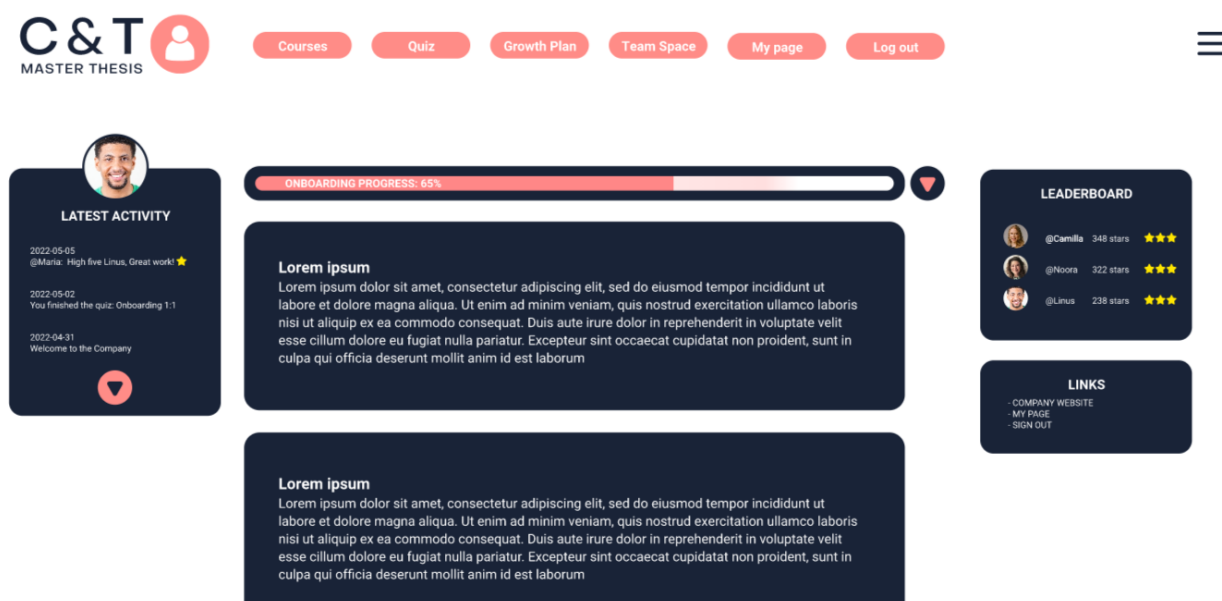


Image 7. Visualization of POV for case company X employee journey web application. (Linus Johansson 2022)

Quizzes and learning materials

Three of the recognized touchpoints of successful employee journey in the case company were learning, achievements and autonomy & flexibility. These are applied as a part of the employee journey web application POV, as they are also part the core characteristics of successful gamified employee experience. As stated in the theoretical framework learning and development helps companies to make sure they maximize their own success by having the most skilled and educated employees at the company. Gamification will bring game mechanics into non-game setting to drive desired behaviors which can be for instance learning new professional skills. Yu-kai Chou's gamification framework describes one of the core drivers of gamification as development and accomplishment. People have an internal drive for developing new skills, overcoming challenges, making progress, and receiving accomplishments. These drivers are used in gamified solutions for example as leaderboards and badges. As a matter of a fact, these drivers occurred throughout the research process in all of the data sets collected. Starting from the secondary data, learning and development were highlighted as important factor, this assumption was confirmed by the survey results, from survey that was conducted for the entire company as the employees stated that they wish to have the opportunity to learn and develop constantly. Learning and development and gamification were brought up as important factors in a successful employee experience.

In this gamified employee journey web application, the employees are motivated to learn by using the above-mentioned drivers as part of the learning experience. First of all, the application will provide employees with a structured onboarding plan with easily accessible learning materials such as

courses, quizzes, articles and videos. Each employee will have their own personalized development plan in which achievements and progress can be easily followed. Achieving small milestones will reward the employee with points and praise from managers and the team. By collecting the rewards employee can reach different levels while receive batches from these reached milestones. Another way to receive batches is to create learning materials of your own choice based on your expertise for others in the company. The application will make sharing knowledge and learning new skills effortless, fun, and convenient. The convenience reflects on the touchpoint flexibility, as learning materials and quizzes are available on demand, whenever the employee has the time or the place for it (Image 8)

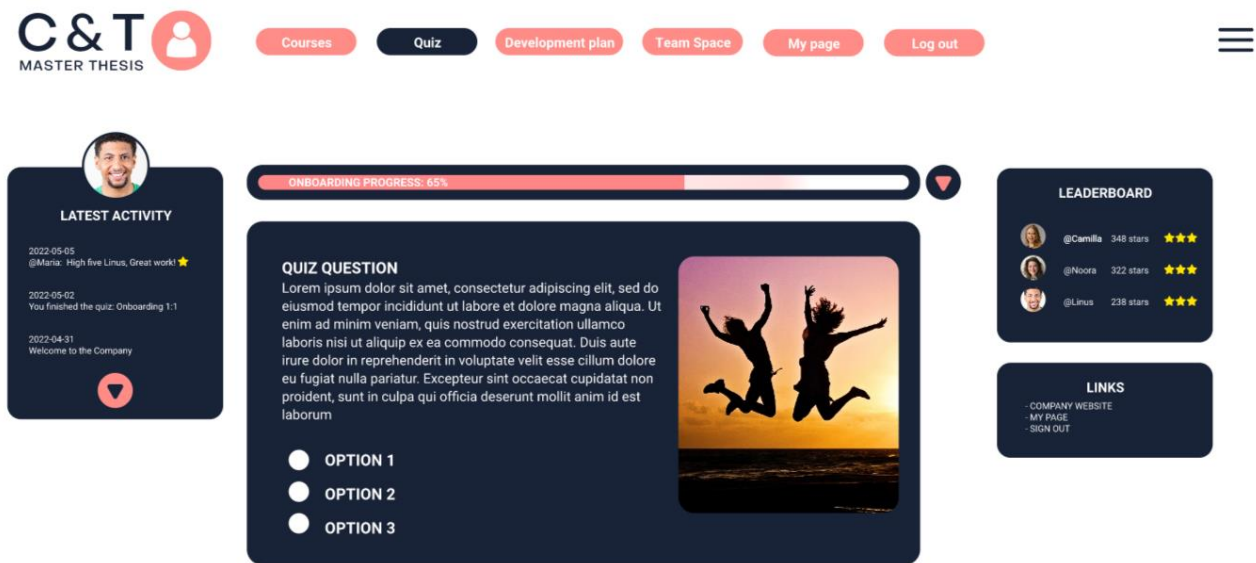


Image 8. Quiz feature in the employee journey web application (Linus Johansson 2022)

Leaderboard

Nowadays companies need to provide personalized rewarding systems in order to have competitive advantage. It has been proven that employees appreciate small regular rewards such as recognition and praise. These can be provided by gamification as it uses rewards to sustain engagement on an emotional level. One of the motivation elements in gamification is called mastery meaning peoples inner urge to get better at things that matter. Through gamification you can provide positive feedback that will motivate people to perform better, as mastery is not attainable end goal rather the journey. The application will have a leaderboard that includes various topics on a weekly basis to highlight the best achievers. The leaderboard will create positive internal competition and will push the employees to reach their goals. What will be shown on the leaderboard will vary based on different themes that can be anything from the most supportive employee of the week to the most enthusiastic learner of the month. As the collected research data indicated, that

all employees enjoy receiving praise, it was seen also as a source of motivation. Competition was not everyone's cup of tea and therefore the leaderboard results are based on different variables, not only based on points received from learning achievement.

Profile

In gamification design framework by Yu-kai Chou, another core driver is ownership and possession. People feel motivated by having control and ownership of things and this correlates to when people spend more time creating their avatars and profiles in an application. This increases their ownership towards the project and the organization. In this web application each employee will have their own profile where they will list their skills, job description, team, and personal details such as communication preferences. In the profile employees can set their own goals and the managers can post development ideas and goals there too. The profile will include overall history of all activities employee has engaged in the application.

Onboarding progress & personal development plan

Based on the collected data employees currently feel the lack of structure with regards to onboarding and development. When employees were asked to list ideal features, they would like to have in an onboarding and development application, many mentioned structured onboarding and development plans as well as clear visualization of the expectations and the development progress. The theoretical framework presents reasons why employees first year is the most critical part of the employee experience. One of the milestones being, the speed to productivity, which is about setting clear goals and milestones with the employee from the beginning. This can easily be created with a progressive progress bar that will be visible on the landing page of the application. The bar will present all of the small milestones, goals and the employees' level of progress. It will begin from the first day of employment and end to the one-year anniversary. After the first year, the employees can together with their managers create new progress bars with new milestones and goals for the next time period. Onboarding support and preparations were identified to be one of the most important touchpoints of the successful first year of employment, and therefore the onboarding process is located centrally in the web application, as can be seen on the image below.

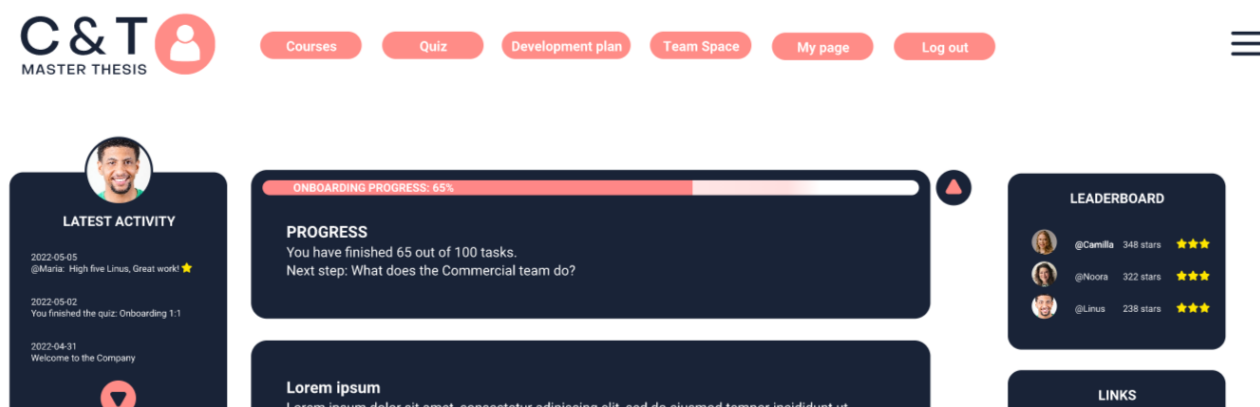


Image 9. Onboarding progress bar (Linus Johansson 2022)

Team space / Get to know the team

People and atmosphere were identified as part of the main touchpoints of successful employee journey in the case. Theoretical framework highlights that the new employees of the company and the organization itself usually share common expectations about the long-lasting journey together. One of the reasons why the first year at a company is critical for the employees is the fact that this is the time when creating meaningful relationships with colleagues and managers are made and these relationships will increase engagement. The collected data indicates that this is a crucial part of employee experience in the case company, as already from the collected secondary data the value of peer-to-peer and manager relationships could be interpreted as superior. The topic of relationships and support received from managers and teams got numerous mentions on the survey as well as on the interviews. The idea in the application is to have a team space, where all teams can list out their members, their tasks, and specification areas as well with other important or fun information. Team spaces can be visited by each employee to get a good understanding of the company structure and to get to know your colleagues even if they would work abroad or remotely. This is a key source of information for new employees as they would be also able to book “coffee breaks” or small get to know sessions with anyone in the company. Team spaces can be also used for team building exercises through the quizzes and other games that can be created to the space. These can be created by the company or by any employee.

High Five board

Indicated in the theoretical framework engaged employees can be described with the words interested, having a positive attitude, and giving their all to their work. One of the main drivers for engagement is connected to rewarding and recognizing the employees for their achievements and also providing frequent feedback to the employees. One additional gamification driver in Yu-Kai Chou's framework is empowerment of creativity and feedback, it is natural for humans to

demonstrate their creativity, see results and acquire feedback. Additionally, when you see a colleague doing an amazing job with something or having a special skill, people will naturally crave to accomplish the same. In the employee journey application, the employees are given the chance to praise their colleagues with small notes and memes or GIFs to showcase their appreciation. These will be gathered to the employees landing page and once received the employee is given the option to publish it to their profile or to keep it as private. These small efforts of kindness will create positivity in the employee relationships and will boost the internal spirit. This is one of the central features on the web application, due to the fact that this type of recognition was highlighted as one of the main touchpoints of successful employee journey in the case company during employees first year of employment.

8.3 Feedback from case company regarding the Proof of Value

The developed POV ideas were presented to the interviewees, Head of Global Customer Success & Tech, People Manager, and the Head of Global marketing of the case company X. The overall feedback was highly positive. The POV was seen as a critical asset that could benefit the company and many of the employees stated that it would be a great functionality to be implemented. Most of the employees would love to use the application on daily basis.

Some thoughts that were presented were, that a live environment that would allow you to follow your journey would be really useful. The employees felt that the application would create value for them especially through the development plan and team spaces. The more knowledge you would have access to on daily basis would enable the employees more personal growth opportunities. Many mentioned this type of learning would make it fun and therefore they would be more likely to do it more often. Also, the sharing and challenging features were seen as an advantage, you can challenge yourself as well as complete challenges together with your colleagues. Some team managers pointed out that the structured development plan would not only be beneficial for the employee getting onboard with the company, but it would also help the manager to get a clear view on the ongoing status. Both manager and employee would have a clear and structured view on expectations and achievements.

The profile was seen as a great personal aspect that once could create their own way. Some visualized that they would love to create their own avatars into the profile, which would make them more engaged to the application from the start. Features that were mentioned as an additional wish or suggestion were for example the possibility to share the achieved goals from your personal development plan to your profile. The employee could toggle this setting on if they wish to share the results with their colleagues. Team space was seen as a feature that would bring value specifically if there was the possibility to view the employees with specific expertise as this would be

helpful in cases where you need to seek for help from your colleagues, but you would not know who to ask. Giving and receiving recognition both from your colleagues and from challenges were seen as motivating aspect. Many mentioned that they would like to receive points from their activities and that achieving something will add value to the learned topics.

On the contrary, some questions were raised for example of the validity of the learning materials and quizzes created to the application by the employees. Who would validate that the given information would be 100% accurate? The risk of providing misinformation is always possible when the materials can be created by anyone. Some of the employees also expressed worry about the competition side of the application as they felt that they would not enjoy competing against colleagues.

One employee who has been working at the case company for more than two years, gave a real-life example of the HEX model by Whitter and Bersin (2019), in regard to onboarding and first year employee experience at the case company. Employee A was recruited to the case company. During the recruiting period the employee was uncertain of joining, due to company brand being unknown. The employee A had a great personal onboarding experience in the case company and then talks positively about the company and recruit's new employee B for the company.

New employee B gets in also in a good situation and good onboarding. Structured via documentation, meet & greets etc. to highlight the great experience. Employee B gets in customers Y to the case company. The employee B presents the great company culture and values forward.

Company Y can see and hear the great company values trough the interaction with the company and the employees B and A. Therefore, company Y recommends the case company X to others via mouth to mouth and forums and highlights the great experience and high value company they are working with.

New employee C gets hired, with no structured onboarding journey, which causes them with high stress levels due to missing information and that leads to negative start. When employee C talks about the case company to the customers the image is not nearly as positive as with employees A and B. This will lead to no additional value to the company X's reputation and most likely the negative image created about the company will spread among future customers and possible potential candidates. Negative employee experience would most likely lead to employee C leaving the company at an early stage due to lack of trust and culture.

8.4 Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was to map out how an ultimate employee experience can be achieved with the help of a gamified employee journey web application in the case company. The idea for this

thesis was generated when the need for a structured employee journey plan was discovered. Different research ideas were discussed together with the case company and from the discussions an idea for the topic of the thesis was identified. This topic was chosen due to its relevancy and importance, as the case company has been growing rapidly and thereby there was a need for a better structure. The research aim was thoroughly planned bearing in mind the thesis writers' specialization programs of digital business opportunities and leadership and people management, and this is how the goal was specified for this thesis. The end goal was to develop a proof of value of a gamified web application focused on employee journey.

The research questions that were covered in this thesis were based on concepts such as employee experience, employee journey, gamification, learning and development and first year of employment. With the chosen research questions the goal was first to understand the current status of the employee experience in the case company and thereafter identify the main touchpoints of successful employee journey during the first year of employment. The second part of the research questions aimed to find out how gamification could enhance employee experience and how those found touchpoints could be implemented in the employee journey web application.

Once the research aim and topic was determined the next step was to define the data collection and research methods to be used. The chosen research method was constructive research as in this method the key is to link the change with previous theory. For the data collection three different methods were selected to be able to get as detailed view to the topic as possible. First the background and current situation in the case company was defined by the secondary data collected throughout the year 2021 through pulse surveys conducted in the case company on a weekly basis. The findings from the secondary data were confirmed when a company-wide survey was conducted in which the employees were asked to describe their current feelings and thoughts on the topics such as first year's employee experience in the case company, learning and development, and use of gamification. Once the current situation was perceived through collected data, semi-structured interviews were constructed and held to a group of employees of the case company. Interviews were held to figure out the employee's conceptions in general on employee experience and gamification. The goal was to identify the idea behind their comprehension of successful first year of employee experience and to understand how gamification can support the experience and employees learning and development during that time.

Next phase was to analyze all the collected data and to conclude the findings. The response rate on the secondary data was good through out the year 2021. It was around 86% whereas the response rate for the survey was only 44%. Although the employees were reminded about the survey the response rate remained quite low. Nevertheless, this seemed not to have a big effect on

the quality of responses as a clear theme and similarities could be recognized throughout all the responses. Then the interview questions were created based on the collected data and as well as the need to identify and understand the ideal employee experience during the first year of employment. The interview responses confirmed the original results gathered from the secondary data and survey and a clear picture of the employees wishes towards the ultimate employee experience could be mapped out. From this the **main touchpoints** of a successful employee experience in the case company were determined. These were **onboarding support and preparations, learning, people and atmosphere, autonomy and flexibility, achievements, and recognitions.**

As the result of the analyzed data a POV, proof of value, was created for a gamified employee journey web application. The application consists of the main touchpoints that were defined through the collected data, and they were combined together with the theoretical findings on the main topics of gamification and employee experience. The proof of value consists of clear description of the needed core features such as quizzes and learning materials, leaderboard, profile, onboarding progress and personal development plan, and team space. The features are described and visualized in above chapter 8.2.

After studying the theory, collecting the data, creating the POV as well as analyzing the feedback received from the case company, the research outcome can be seen as successful. The research aim was achieved and the final result of creating a functional proof of value for a gamified employee journey web application was successful and the concept was approved by the case company employees who were involved in the research process. The different touchpoints of successful employee journey during the first year of employment in the case company were defined, described, and applied as the base when creating the proof of value.

Case company involvement

From the start the case company was enthusiastic about the thesis topic since the company has been growing rapidly and the need for understanding the company's current employee experience was current. The case company was also interested in finding out ways to improve the current processes for new employee onboarding to be able to provide an ideal experience. Due to the company's business area the gamification aspect was seen as beneficial as it would be a good fit with the company's way of working. During the thesis process company feedback was collected and the topic and process was reviewed with company representatives frequently. The feedback was generally positive and the received improvement ideas and feedback were taken into consideration and received feedback helped to improve and finalize the POV presented in this thesis to match the case company's needs and wishes in the most suitable way.

Transferability of the proof of value

The created proof of concepts represents the finding of case company's employees wishes for an ultimate employee experience and the tools that can be used for improving that. Throughout the research process and with the gained feedback it can be clearly stated the created proof of value would bring the value for case company's employee journey and thereby enhance the employee experience of employees. One can say that the proof of value provides a solution to the case company's needs that were identified during the research process.

As employee journey and experience are topic that all companies need to take into consideration in order to keep employees engaged and retain the best employees, this proof of value could benefit other companies in a similar situation as well. This proof of value can be used as a base which can easily be modified and applied to any company's needs as the concept is flexible but includes the main areas that can be identified as the core of employee experience and journey. With this said the proof of value created can benefit other companies in a similar situations and it can be used as a base for future development ideas.

8.5 Further research suggestions & recommendations

This chapter will discuss the future recommendations and further research suggestions regarding the topic. After conducting this research and writing this thesis the future recommendations for the case company include the next steps towards creating a POC, proof of concept, and as well as the actual web application. The next step from here would be to introduce the created proof of value to the entire case company and to collect feedback and ideas regarding it. After this, it would be recommended that the case company would create a more in-depth proof of concept to be able to test the theories and features in action. This would allow the case company to test the utilization and engagement of employees and whether the employees would be willing to use the application created. Based on these findings the development of the web application could be then started. The development could start with creating a base that will include couple of the mentioned main features. Later on, if the engagement towards usage of the application has increased, more features could be added based on the discovered needs and wishes of that time. This will create an agile approach for the application development meaning that the improvements and additional features will be always up to date with the needs of the employees. The usage of the application should be measured continuously to be able to maintain its value for the company and the employees.

Another angle that could be taken into consideration would be to research and bench mark the application that are currently present in the market. There are currently different kinds of onboarding applications available. These should be investigated and ideas from them should be gathered and

considered when creating the features of the employee journey application for the case company. Idea of integrating company's own ideas with another readymade platform could also be seen as a possibility and may be an easier way to start the development as it might not require as much resources from the company.

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Attachments

Appendix 1. Companywide survey

1. How long have you been working at [redacted] ?

- 0-6 months
 - 6-12 months
 - 1-2 years
 - More than 2 years
-

2. List one word that would describe your first day at OGOship?

3. How welcome did you feel on your first day?

1 being the lowest and 5 highest

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

4. How well was the company prepared for your first day (passwords, systems, tools etc)?

1 being the lowest and 5 highest

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

5. How did you experience the tools and materials used in your onboarding? Were they appropriate for your needs?

6. Was there something you would have added or needed during your onboarding?

Yes
 No

7. Please specify what was missing?

8. How supported did you feel by your direct manager during your onboarding?

1 being the lowest and 5 highest

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

9. How would you rate the support you got from your teammates during the onboarding?

1 being the lowest and 5 highest

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

10. Any thoughts on the support you received during your first months?

11. Do you use apps or softwares to learn new things in your free time?

For example Duolingo, LinkedIn learning etc?

Yes

No

12. What kind and why?

13. Does receiving feedback motivate you?

Yes

No

14. When learning a new topic or skill do you prefer taking a quiz afterwards to test your learning?

15. How often would you like to learn something new related to your role?

16. Would it feel motivating to receive diplomas and recognition for learning new skills that would benefit your job performance?

17. How would feel about sharing those results about your learning achievements on work-related topics within the organization?

For example in Slack or LinkedIn learning etc

18. How important is recognition for you?

1 being the lowest and 5 highest

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

19. How important is flexible work environment for you?

1 being the lowest and 5 highest

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆
□ □ □ □ □

20. How important is humanistic workplace in your opinion?

Such as having an understanding for private life, work-life balance, and getting to know your colleagues more than on a professional level. 1 being the lowest and 5 highest

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆
□ □ □ □ □

21. Describe the highlights (moments / topics / things) of your first year with a few key words:

22. Organize the following learning styles from your favourite to the least favorite

1 being the highest

- a. Videos
 - b. Articles
 - c. Quizzes
 - d. Plain text
 - e. Games
 - f. E-learning webinars
-

23. Do you think that a digital onboarding structure and training would be helpful to get onboard with the company?

- Yes
 - No
-

24. Why would you find them helpful / not helpful?

25. What features would you like to have in an ideal app for onboarding and internal training?

For example videos, quizzes, games, articles etc.

26. Please drag the following learning styles to the most suitable category

Categorize the following learning styles based on your own learning preferences

Games

Videos

Articles

Quiz

Stories

Text books

Audio materials

E-learning webinars

Group work

Peer-to-Peer coaching

Not my cup of tee

Useful

Neutral

27. Does competing motivate you to aim higher if you receive points from your learning experiences in an app?

Appendix 2. Semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interview script for interviews conducted in the case company.

Please describe the following terms in your own words employee experience & gamification?

- What comes to your mind from the concept of employee experience?
 - What comes to your mind from the concept of gamification?
1. Could you describe if you were missing something important to you during the first year of employment?
 2. Could you describe what the company should take into consideration to be able to provide an ideal first year of employment?
 3. Can you tell us about your experiences on using tech tools for learning purposes? for example Apps
 4. How do you feel about receiving credit for achieving learning goals?
 5. How would you feel about sharing your achievements within the company, for example on Slack?
 6. What are your thoughts on having a digital learning path for your career development in which you can follow and review your progress on?
 7. What motivates you to push harder towards goals?
 8. If you were given the opportunity to create learning materials based on your own expertise to others in your company, what would you think about that?
 9. How would this make you feel?

Do you have any additional thoughts on the themes and topics discussed?