

Study on Gamification-Based Motivation Mechanisms for Employees in Technology-Based Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Deqin Liang

School of Business Administration, Henan Polytechnic University, Jiaozuo, 454003, China
Email: 2186738458@qq.com

How to cite this paper: Liang, D. Q. (2025). Study on Gamification-Based Motivation Mechanisms for Employees in Technology-Based Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises. *Economics & Business Management*, 1(2), 32–37. ISSN Print: 3079-5214; ISSN Online: 3079-5222. <https://doi.org/10.63313/EBM.9038>
Published: 2025-04-29

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Abstract

With the development of the knowledge economy, many small and medium-sized enterprises have entered the high-tech industry. The work motivation of their employees directly affects corporate performance. Exploring effective motivation mechanisms is crucial for stimulating employees' enthusiasm and creativity, and forming the core competitiveness of enterprises. Under the "people-oriented" management model, when building an employee motivation system, enterprises need to combine various and multi-level non-material motivation methods with traditional material incentives to truly achieve sustainable and long-term motivation.

Keywords

Technology-based small and medium-sized enterprises; Gamification-based motivation; Employee motivation mechanism

1. Introduction

Employee motivation is a timeless topic in enterprise human resource management. Scientific and reasonable motivation mechanisms can fully mobilize employees' enthusiasm, initiative, and creativity, enhance their work enthusiasm, and endow them with a stronger sense of mission and responsibility in their work, thus unleashing their potential [1]. Traditional motivation methods tend to focus on material aspects. However, an increasing number of managers have found in practice that monetary incentives are not the only means, and they are not always effective in many cases. Conventionally, people regard games as purely entertainment activities. However, more and more studies have shown that compared with other entertainment forms, games can better capture players' attention [2]. Integrating game elements into enterprise management organically, and skillfully combining the fun, sense of achievement, and instant rewards of games with work processes and human resource management systems can effectively stimulate employees' work initiative [3].

For technology-based small and medium-sized enterprises, employees often face complex technical problems and high work pressure. The fun of games can help employees relieve work pressure, thereby improving job satisfaction and loyalty.

2. The Concept and Mechanism of Gamification-Based Motivation

2.1. Concept of Gamification-Based Motivation

In recent years, more and more scholars have focused on the impact of gamification on human resource management. However, the academic community has not yet clearly defined gamification-based motivation. Most of the literature on gamification management currently uses the definition of "gamification of work". Therefore, before exploring the concept of gamification-based motivation, it is necessary to briefly review the concept of gamification of work.

Oprescu et al. pointed out that the gamification of work is when organizations selectively implement game design and interaction principles to transform certain work processes into game-like experiences. Its core lies in enhancing interaction among employees through game design to achieve a work experience similar to gaming [4]. Feng Xuan et al. believe that the gamification of work involves designing and applying game mechanisms and elements for specific tasks in the work context, serving the achievement of work goals while enabling employees to obtain a game-like experience [5]. Ferreira et al. argue that organizations using gamification transform employees' work processes into game-like experiences by using specific game design elements and interaction principles, emphasizing the integration of gamification elements into work [6]. Lü Shangze defines the gamification of work as enterprises integrating appropriate game elements and mechanisms into specific work processes according to certain principles, aiming to stimulate employees' enthusiasm, improve work efficiency, strengthen teamwork, and thus enhance the work atmosphere and outcomes through the introduction of gamification elements [7].

Through literature review, it is found that the gamification of work mainly involves integrating game elements into work processes to improve work efficiency and employee satisfaction. Both the gamification of work and gamification-based motivation apply game elements to non-game environments to enhance employee participation and motivation, but they have different focuses. The gamification of work focuses on work process and task design, while gamification-based motivation emphasizes stimulating employees' internal motivation through game elements and enhancing employee motivation and participation. Based on this, this paper defines gamification-based motivation as an incentive method that applies game elements to non-game environments, aiming to improve employee participation, motivation, and performance through game design principles and mechanisms. Its core lies in using gamification elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, and challenge tasks to motivate employees' behaviors and attitudes.

2.2. Mechanism of Gamification-Based Motivation

The Self-Determination Theory, proposed by Deci and Ryan in the 1980s, is a theory about human motivation [8]. This theory emphasizes the importance of individuals' internal motivation and self-determination in behavior and identifies three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness [9]. Rigby et al. believe that games can satisfy these three psychological needs, and this satisfaction is immediate, highly certain, and intensive [10]. By applying gamification mechanisms to work, employees' three basic psychological needs are met, thereby achieving better performance.

The Flow Theory, proposed by Csikszentmihalyi, is a psychological concept. Flow is a mental state of high concentration and full immersion, in which people experience a strong sense of pleasure and satisfaction, and their perception of time also changes. Flow states usually occur during challenging and enjoyable activities that require individuals to be fully focused and have clear goals and instant feedback [11]. In addition to describing gaming experiences, the Flow Theory also emphasizes that when the difficulty of a task matches an individual's skills at a high level, the individual is more likely to have a flow experience. Therefore, this principle is often used in game design to ensure a better experience for game players [12].

3. Feasibility of Introducing Gamification-Based Motivation Mechanisms in Technology-Based Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

3.1. Organic Integration with Existing Employee Motivation Systems to Form Synergy

Under the traditional salary motivation mechanism, employees aim to complete individual performance and often adopt an indifferent attitude towards matters outside their individual tasks, resulting in a relatively serious work atmosphere. Gamification thinking emphasizes applying game elements to non-game scenarios [13]. It is different from pure entertainment games but possesses game characteristics, which greatly increases the fun of motivation and the timeliness of feedback. This enables employees to experience high immersion, participation, and playability in work and enhances cooperation among employees [14].

3.2. Meeting the Diverse Needs of New-Generation Employees as the Mainstay of the Workplace

New-generation employees have been exposed to the Internet at an early age and are greatly influenced by online games and social media during their growth. Most employees in technology-based small and medium-sized enterprises are from this group of post-90s and post-00s new-generation employees. They like change and challenges, pursue self-expression and freedom, and regard work not only as a means of survival but also as a way of life. Therefore, traditional motivation methods dominated by salary incentives can no longer meet their motivational needs [15]. New-generation employees are more likely to accept quantifiable hierarchical

management models similar to game rules.

3.3. Having the Environmental Foundation for Introducing Gamification-Based Motivation as an Effective Tool for Employee Motivation

Technology-based small and medium-sized enterprises focus on knowledge and R&D investment, with relatively high product added value. Although they have a small personnel and asset scale, and their operating income may not be high, they develop rapidly and are mostly in the startup or growth stage. They have a simple organizational structure, few management levels, and flexible management mechanisms [16], which enable them to respond quickly and adjust rapidly to changes, providing a good management environment for introducing gamification-based motivation. In addition, many technology-based small and medium-sized enterprises have included equity incentives in their salary systems to create a more market-competitive salary level. The gamification-based employee motivation mechanism should be built on the basis of this "incremental reform". Only by better meeting employees' material needs can such spiritual motivation tools be successfully implemented [17].

4. Framework of Gamification-Based Motivation Mechanisms for Employees in Technology-Based Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

4.1. Selection of Gamification Motivation Elements

To introduce a gamification-based motivation mechanism, the first step is to select appropriate motivation elements. Different people have different motivational needs, and even the same person may have different needs in different periods and scenarios. Employee motivation methods can generally be divided into two aspects: "material motivation" and "non-material motivation". Material motivation mainly stimulates employees' behaviors and performance, while non-material motivation mainly targets employees' inner motivations. Non-material motivation can better mobilize employees' work enthusiasm and increase their sense of immersion, experience, and achievement in work [18].

4.2. Determination of Gamification Motivation Elements

Designing an effective and applicable gamification-based motivation mechanism requires not only selecting appropriate motivation elements but also determining corresponding gamification elements. In practice, a rich variety of gamification elements are currently used, mainly including points, badges, levels, leaderboards, challenges, etc. [19]. For simplicity of operation, technology-based small and medium-sized enterprises can adopt gamification elements such as levels, badges, leaderboards, comments, and privileges based on points. Employees obtain corresponding points according to specific game rules, levels are set based on point ranges, rankings are made according to actual points, badges are awarded to em-

ployees at the top of the leaderboard, certain privileges are granted, and a section is set for employees to comment on each other.

4.3. Design of Gamification Motivation Programs

When designing gamification motivation programs, technology-based small and medium-sized enterprises should target motivation elements such as career development, social relationships, and the nature of work itself, and strive to achieve "full-process" motivation [20]. In terms of specific application scenario design, a method based on "points" with other gamification elements as supplements can be adopted to motivate employees' attitudes and behaviors in the "input" and "transformation" stages through gamification, and connect with the enterprise's management system and business scenarios to maximize the role of gamification-based motivation.

4.4. Formulation of Gamification Motivation Rules

In the process of introducing gamification-based motivation mechanisms, technology-based small and medium-sized enterprises also need a set of clear operating rules to ensure that each employee can obtain points fairly and reasonably based on clear criteria. When formulating gamification motivation rules, the specific point values for each event or result should be reasonably determined through research and discussion, without excessive differences, especially avoiding arbitrary assignment of point values based on subjective judgment. When employees produce the events or results expected by the enterprise, points should be calculated for them in a timely manner based on the implementation, to achieve prompt recognition.

5. Conclusion

The employee motivation mechanism is an open and complex system that should continuously evolve with changes in the environment. Gamification-based motivation is indeed an effective measure for employee motivation. Making work interesting and enabling employees to show enthusiasm for work similar to playing games, "fun" work can not only stimulate employees' potential but also create a healthy work pressure for them, allowing them to release enormous productivity while having fun. For technology-based small and medium-sized enterprises, gamification-based employee motivation does not replace specific human resource management functions such as job management, performance management, and salary management. Instead, it is an incentive mechanism design from the perspectives of work itself, employee development, and social relationships, relying on content such as job roles, task goals, performance evaluation results, and employee training. By optimizing the employee motivation mechanism of technology-based small and medium-sized enterprises, employee enthusiasm and initiative can be further enhanced, and a win-win situation between the enterprise and employees can be achieved.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Mr. Wang, whose expertise was invaluable in formulating the research questions and methodology.

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