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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Willa Paige Thorpe

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Private Sector Staff's Lived Experiences With Gamified Onboarding Programs

by

Willa Paige Thorpe

MA, Royal Roads University, 2010

BKin, University of Regina. 2004

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Industrial Organizational Psychology

Walden University

February 2024

Abstract

Although gamification is an emerging area of study, it is still a relatively new concept in workplaces. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lack of existing literature on the topic of an interpretative, phenomenological analysis approach of private sector staff when gamification is utilized in onboarding processes. Data were collected via 12 individual semistructured interviews of full- or part-time employees at a partner organization in the information technology sector in India. Self-determination theory was used as the conceptual framework of this study. The research questions explored the lived experiences of staff with gamified onboarding programs and how those lived experiences informed their levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Data from this study were analyzed using a seven-step iterative coding approach. The findings of this study indicated that although the concepts of gamification were new to almost all the participants of this study, the participants had a positive experience with the employer's gamified onboarding program. The gamified onboarding program was motivating to the employees, and this organization provides an engaging, positive culture that results in high levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction among employees. Future research could explore whether the delivery method of gamified onboarding programs impact levels of engagement and how different cultures may interact with gamified onboarding programs. Results of this study may influence positive social change by informing organizations that integrating a gamified approach in their onboarding programs fosters employee enjoyment at work, and this enjoyment may improve employee engagement throughout private, nonprofit and government organizations alike.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The focus of this qualitative study was the lived experiences of private sector employees with gamified onboarding programs. Due to the limited current academic literature on gamified onboarding programs, this study contributed to advancing onboarding programs by way of an interpretative, phenomenological analysis approach. The social implications of this study include informing the design and implementation of effective gamified onboarding programs across a variety of sectors and types of organizations.

This chapter begins with background information regarding the current gap in literature related to gamified onboarding programs. The research problem and purpose of this study are reviewed, and the specific research questions I sought to answer are outlined. I also describe the conceptual framework that grounded this study and the research design as well as provide definitions of key terms. The assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations of the study are also discussed. To conclude the chapter, I present the significance of this study in terms of contribution to academic literature and practical implementation in the field.

Background

Although the concept of games impacting motivation was explored in the 1980s (Malone, 1981), gamification is a relatively new term in workplaces, integrated by Nick Pelling in 2002 (Martínez & García, 2019). Gamification has been defined as incorporating elements from games in nongame contexts, and gamified techniques are typically utilized in organizations by way of badges, leaderboards, and points systems

(Deterding et al., 2011a). Gamification has been found in corporate training programs (Thomas et al., 2022) because a gamified approach can be more engaging than traditional training delivery models (Armstrong & Landers, 2018). In addition, gamification has been utilized in human resources departments to attract and retain talent (Nair & Sadasivan, 2019; Vivek & Nanthagopan, 2020).

The gap in knowledge that this study addressed was using a phenomenological approach to explore gamified onboarding programs, which does not currently exist in the literature. This study was needed to advance employers' understanding of how employees perceive gamified onboarding programs as well as improve researchers' understanding of how gamified onboarding programs inform employees' levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

Problem Statement

Since gamification is a relatively new concept in the workplace and literature on gamification is still quite limited, the problem that prompted this research study was exploring a gamified approach to onboarding programs for private sector staff. When searching the terms *gamification or gamify or gamified*, *onboarding or onboard or orientation*, and *phenomenology or phenomenological or lived experience*, I found no academic sources. Searching the terms *gamification* and *job satisfaction* only generated a limited number of results. I reviewed these sources to determine how they connected to the research problem and found they demonstrated a need for further exploration.

When reviewing previous research, multiple sources indicated positive results from organizations integrating gamified aspects to their workplaces. Garbaya et al.

(2019) explored the relationship between gamification and decision making and found that gamification increased the number of correct decisions staff made. Hussain et al. (2018) determined that gamification positively influenced employee engagement and organizational commitment. Similarly, a gamified approach was found to improve work performance and increase positive emotions in staff at industrial worksites (Jacob et al., 2022). Nair and Sadasivan (2019) explored a lesser-known area of gamification, the impact of gamified processes on a specific generation. The authors found that prospective Generation Z employees increased their engagement with the organization's website from 10 to 90 minutes after a gamified approach was implemented (Nair & Sadasivan, 2019). These studies all confirmed that gamifying processes in workplaces can have a positive impact on employees and is a worthwhile research area to continue to explore.

Although a variety of areas of gamification in organizations have been examined, some aspects of gamification in workplaces have yet to be studied. Szendröi et al. (2020) completed a literature review on gamification in for-profit business environments and found that existing research had primarily focused on customer experiences with gamification instead of employee gamification programs. The current study was built on existing literature, focusing on private business while exploring employee gamification programs instead of customer experiences. In a literature review of 45 papers, Murawski (2021) found that gamification in human resources management focused on four areas of applying gamification: employee engagement, training outcomes, talent management and knowledge management. Gamification in relation to job satisfaction and organizational commitment was not an area of focus in that literature review, whereas both concepts

were explored in the current study. Newcombe et al. (2019) focused their research on entry-level staff and found that engagement improved when incorporating a gamified approach in professional development. The authors explored how a specific organizational level responds to gamification in the workplace. I built on that review of professional development in the current study and expanded its focus into onboarding programs.

Two other gaps in the study of gamification in the workplace that I attempted to fill with the current study are industry and application. Woolwine et al. (2020) examined the impact of a gamified orientation program on nurses' levels of motivation and knowledge retention. In the current study, I included employees from an industry outside of the health care field and shifted the scope from employees' levels of motivation and knowledge retention to employees' feelings of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Larson (2020) noted that there may be challenges in applying a gamified approach within a corporate context. In the current study, I explored this concept by inquiring how participants felt about participating in a gamified onboarding program and if there were any differences between their experiences of a gamified program versus a nongamified approach.

The specific research problem that was addressed through this study was the lack of research using a phenomenological approach to examine gamified onboarding programs. I focused on how the lived experiences of staff in private sector organizations informed their feelings of job satisfaction and organizational commitment after participating in gamified onboarding programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of private sector staff when gamification was utilized in onboarding processes. I applied an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach in this study to examine how individuals made sense of and interpreted their personal experiences (see Smith et al., 2022). The aim of this study was to understand the lived experiences of staff who participated in gamified onboarding processes and how those lived experiences informed employees' levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction with their current employer. To achieve this purpose, I conducted individual, semistructured interviews with the participants. The study results could assist organizations in developing more effective onboarding, orientation, and training programs because the participants' experiences indicated to organizations how gamified onboarding programs were perceived by employees as well as how those programs informed employees' levels of job satisfaction in their current role and commitment to their organization.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of private sector staff with gamified onboarding programs?

RQ2: How do the lived experiences of private sector staff with gamified onboarding programs inform organizational commitment?

RQ3: How do the lived experiences of private sector staff with gamified onboarding programs inform job satisfaction?

Conceptual Framework

The concept that grounded this study was self-determination theory (SDT). SDT was first developed by Deci and Ryan (1985) and focused on decision-making and motivation. In SDT, it was posited that individuals require three psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness to be met in order to thrive (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In SDT, Ryan and Deci (2020) defined autonomy as an individual taking ownership of their actions, competence as a feeling of mastery or success, and relatedness as feeling connection to others or belongingness in a group. SDT was initially focused on intrinsic motivation, or individuals completing activities for their own inherent enjoyment, rather than extrinsic motivation, completing tasks based on external reasons (Ryan & Deci, 2020). However, Ryan and Deci found that extrinsic motivation varied greatly based on circumstance or situation and indicated that extrinsic motivation includes four subsections that exist on a spectrum between amotivation and intrinsic motivation: External regulation (i.e., rewards/punishments imposed by an external influence) and introjected regulation (i.e., partially internalized) both include motivation that is controlled; conversely, with identified regulation (i.e., conscious identification) and integrated regulation (i.e., congruence with other values), motivation can be autonomous. Recognizing that motivation can be on a continuum instead of either strictly intrinsic or extrinsic in nature provides a stronger understanding of how gamification may be implemented among work groups since participants may be motivated differently.

Existing literature confirmed a positive connection between SDT and gamification. Thongmak (2021) found that 62% of the variance in employees' self-

determination was due to gamification. In addition, Iacono et al. (2020) reported that SDT being connected to gamification supported increased levels of employee engagement. These results showed the promise of studying SDT further in relation to onboarding and gamification. Since existing literature has not yet examined a possible connection between SDT and gamified onboarding programs, the current study helps to inform the interaction between the concept of SDT and employee experiences with gamification in an onboarding program.

An SDT framework fit this study well because both SDT and interpretative phenomenological analysis are focused on individual experiences. The specific interview questions that I asked each participant included aspects of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and the overarching research questions about lived experiences, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction were informed by SDT. Further details about SDT are outlined in Chapter 2, including results from the existing literature and the alignment between SDT and the current study.

Nature of the Study

To address the research questions in this qualitative study, I utilized an interpretative phenomenological analysis design. Patton (2015) identified the central research question in a phenomenological approach as “what is the meaning, structure and lived experience of this phenomenon?” (p. 115). Smith et al. (2022) noted that the three pillars of interpretative phenomenological analysis are phenomenology (the study of experience), hermeneutics (theory of interpretation), and idiography (the particular). Since I was interested in understanding how participants made sense of their experiences

with a specific situation in their lives (i.e., onboarding at an organization), an interpretative phenomenological analysis design was a strong fit.

The phenomenon being investigated in this interpretative phenomenological analysis was the lived experiences of private sector staff with gamified onboarding programs. This research design aligned with the problem because SDT references intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation and, as described previously, gamification has been known to enhance levels of motivation and engagement in individuals. In addition, SDT can be used to explore both individual characteristics (i.e., task mastery and autonomy) and group dynamics (i.e., connection to others), which fit well with the lived experience nature of a phenomenological approach.

I collected all data via semistructured, individual interviews of current employees in a partner organization within the information technology sector in India. The interviews were conducted over digital conference, with the audio of each call recorded. I verified the accuracy of the transcripts by hand and conducted data analysis manually.

Definitions

Gamification: “The use of game design elements in non-game contexts” (Deterding et al., 2011a, p. 9).

Job satisfaction: The positive sense an individual receives from experiences with their job (Locke, 1976).

Onboarding: A program that includes a variety of activities to welcome a new employee to an organization (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011; Hills, 2022).

Organizational commitment: The extent that an employee has a positive attitude toward an organization (Ćulibrk et al., 2018).

Assumptions

An assumption I made for this study was that participants would provide fulsome, honest answers to my interview questions. This assumption was necessary because the data and findings relied on truthfulness. Another assumption made throughout this study was that participants would be willing to provide consent to being recorded during the interview. Although I refrained from video recording the interviews, I recorded audio of each interview to provide a complete transcript rather than rely on field notes alone. Finally, I assumed that participants had engaged in their onboarding program for their lived experiences to inform my research questions. In the event the participants had not engaged in their onboarding program, the data could have been at risk of being weak or not meaningful.

Scope and Delimitations

This research study focused on the lived experiences of staff from the private sector with gamified onboarding programs. I selected this focus based on the lack of existing phenomenological studies on this topic in this area of study. The population of the study were current employees in the information technology sector in India. This population was used for this study because the partner organization was currently engaging in a gamified onboarding program for their staff and providing these services for their clients. The partner organization was included in this study based on the organization positively responding to my recruitment inquiry on the LinkedIn platform.

Since I was interested in understanding the lived experiences of staff with a particular organization's onboarding program, I excluded populations from outside this organization. Because SDT is a common conceptual framework for studying gamification, I continued in this tradition to offer an additional perspective through a phenomenological lens to existing studies of SDT, gamification, and onboarding programs.

This study provided significant opportunity for transferability because a phenomenological study in this area of focus had not yet been conducted. Additionally, because participants for this study only included employees from one industry in the private sector, transferability to other types of organizations and industries is possible.

Limitations

Openly discussing limitations of a study helps to improve the level of trustworthiness of the researcher and of the overall study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). A limitation of the current study could be that employees' levels of job satisfaction and/or organizational commitment were influenced by ongoing reward systems after the completion of the onboarding process. To ensure the focus of the study remained on how the onboarding program influenced job satisfaction and organizational commitment, the interview questions were worded as such.

Ravitch and Carl (2021) also noted that building rapport with participants via online interviews can be a challenge. To address this potential limitation, I needed to ensure I was not rushing participants into answering my interview questions. In addition, I ensured that the most involved or difficult questions were left to the latter section of the

interview and the simplest questions were asked at the beginning. Additionally, a limitation of this study was the participants interpreting the term gamification in different ways. To address this limitation, I defined gamification at the beginning of each interview to ensure participants were aware of how gamification was being defined in this study.

Another potential limitation of this study was the organization's inclusion of gamification beyond the onboarding process and how those postonboarding gamified aspects influenced employees' job satisfaction or organizational commitment. To address this limitation, I structured my questions specifically around addressing gamified elements of the onboarding program versus asking participants about gamification throughout their tenure with the organization.

My personal bias of enjoying gamification could have influenced the outcomes of the study. To address that potential bias, I ensured that each of the questions in the interview guide were not leading in nature. In addition, I included questions that are worded positively and neutral in nature as well as created space for participants to provide their individual experiences rather than affirming my own experiences. Finally, I completed member checking of the transcripts to ensure that all responses were accurate and driven solely by the participants.

Significance

Although previous researchers have studied a variety of aspects of gamification, this study was the first to explore gamified onboarding programs using a phenomenological approach. Studying the lived experiences of staff in private sector

organizations and how those experiences inform individuals' feelings of job satisfaction and organizational commitment were unique additions to the field of industrial organizational psychology. In addition to advancing academic literature on the topic, this study was significant to practice; by developing an understanding of how organizations use a gamified approach, the results of this study may contribute to making a difference at local, regional, and national levels by helping inform organizations on how to develop more effective orientation strategies that reduce onboarding and staff replacement costs due to a reduction in employee turnover (see Adams et al., 2019). In addition, integrating a gamified approach in onboarding processes could foster employee enjoyment at work, which may improve employee engagement with their role and organization (Santhanam & Srinivas, 2020). These results could impact organizations of varying sizes and locations, providing opportunities for social change everywhere.

Summary

Based on the research problem of a lack of existing phenomenological studies examining gamified onboarding programs, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of private sector staff when gamification was utilized in onboarding processes. This study was grounded in the SDT and included an interpretative phenomenological analysis design.

In Chapter 2, I will present a review of the literature and will define and synthesize concepts related to gamification, onboarding/orientation/organizational socialization, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. The history of each topic

and the relationship between each will be outlined as well as how organizations integrate gamification into their workplaces.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The research problem that informed this study was that there is a lack of current academic literature and documented studies related to improving job satisfaction and enjoyment at the workplace by incorporating gamified techniques to orient and onboard staff in private sector organizations. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of private sector staff when gamification is utilized in onboarding processes. Using a qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis approach to understand the lived experiences of staff who participated in gamified onboarding processes could assist organizations in developing more effective onboarding, orientation, and training programs because participants in the current study indicated which approaches were effective for promoting job satisfaction and enjoyment in the workplace.

Seminal and current literature related to this study focused on four subject areas: gamification, onboarding/orientation/organizational socialization, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. Gamification has been defined as incorporating elements from games in nongame contexts (Deterding et al., 2011a). Although concepts of gamification have been utilized since the 1920s, gamification has only obtained mainstream popularity since the early 2000s (Martínez & García, 2019). Gamification in organizations has been met primarily with very positive results in learning practices, human resources departments, professional development, training, and beyond; however, gamification has not been without criticism because some organizations have experienced

strains on well-being and engagement (Hammedi et al., 2021) and concerns with ethics (Goethe & Palmquist, 2020).

The terms orientation, onboarding, and organizational socialization are often used synonymously. Since orientation often references a singular event (Hills, 2022), in the current study I focused on the longer-term nature of onboarding and organizational socialization programs. Current works on the various components of onboarding programs were reviewed, with an emphasis on how gamified onboarding programs impact employees and organizations in comparison to traditional, nongamified offerings.

I also reviewed seminal and current works related to organizational commitment, with the concepts rooted in affective, continuance and normative commitment (see Meyer & Allen, 1991). The limited existing literature on the relationship between organizational commitment and onboarding was explored and demonstrated a need for additional research on this connection.

Job satisfaction, defined by Locke (1976) as the positive feelings an individual possesses from their experiences in their job, was the final area of focus for the literature review. I explored the connection between job satisfaction and onboarding, the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and the impact of gamified work environments on job satisfaction.

Because gamification is still a relatively new concept in organizations, there are still a lot of unknowns related to the topic. The present study filled this gap in the research by completing the first phenomenological study of gamified onboarding programs. This study extended the knowledge related to gamified onboarding programs

by examining the lived experiences of employees with gamified onboarding programs. This chapter includes an explanation of the literature search strategy used; a description of how seminal and current works for gamification, onboarding/orientation/organizational socialization; organizational commitment and job satisfaction were found; a discussion of the conceptual framework that grounded the study; and a review of the literature in which I offer a synthesis of the literature in each of the four main subject areas.

Literature Search Strategy

To locate sources for this study, I accessed a variety of databases via the Walden University Library, including Thoreau, ABI/INFORM Collection, ProQuest Central, and previous doctoral dissertations. In addition, I utilized Google Scholar. Of the 84 sources I included in the literature review, 87% (all but 11 works) were published between 2018 and 2023. In addition, outside of a few books and doctoral dissertations, most of the sources were in peer-reviewed publications.

Since gamification is still a relatively new concept in workplaces, the existing literature on related keywords was quite limited. Searching the phrase *gamification and phenomenology or phenomenological or lived experience and onboarding or orientation or training* yielded no corresponding results in any database accessible through the Walden University Library or Google Scholar, which reinforced the idea that a phenomenological study on gamified onboarding programs had yet to be conducted, indicating a current gap in the academic literature. To ensure this concept of a phenomenological study on gamified onboarding programs had not been studied

previously, I engaged a Walden University librarian who confirmed my assumption that a similar study had not yet been conducted.

Other search terms used for this study included a variety of combinations of keywords and phrases, such as *gamification or game-based learning or gamify and qualitative research or qualitative study or qualitative methods or interview not student or students and onboarding or orientation and empirical or quantitative or qualitative or research or study or experiment and gamification and onboarding.* The various combinations of search terms searched resulted in a range of one to 63 works (see Appendix A).

Conceptual Framework

The concept that grounded this study was Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT, which is based on an individual's ability to make choices that, in turn, shapes both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated behaviors. Furthermore, self-determination is evident when an individual behaves based on personal empowered choice rather than feeling pressured to make a decision; this choice may include electing to relinquish control entirely (Deci & Ryan, 1985). SDT includes the components of autonomy, competence, and relatedness and the idea that when the surroundings and situations of individuals enable each of these components to be met, the individual flourishes (Koivisto et al., 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Researchers have used SDT to examine how social contexts and intrinsic factors contribute toward positive experiences, such as motivation and well-being, and negative outcomes, like unhappiness and depletion (Rigby & Ryan, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

SDT is functional in nature because it focuses on the practical and critical. For instance, the practical nature of SDT is apparent in the demonstration of how situations can enable motivation and satisfaction, and the critical nature is visible because SDT is used to review and evaluate how social contexts are sufficient or lacking in supporting individuals excelling (Ryan & Deci, 2017). A caution of utilizing SDT as a conceptual framework in a research study was highlighted by Ryan and Deci's (2020) findings that a primary assumption of SDT is that individuals are inherently drawn toward growth and integration; more specifically, the assumption that individuals seek opportunities to display competence (i.e., task mastery), feel a sense of relatability (i.e., connection to others), and are in personal control (i.e., autonomy).

Mixed results were found in previous studies on gamification using SDT (Loughrey & Broin, 2018; van Roy & Zaman, 2019). Loughrey and Broin (2018) noted that, although SDT is a preferred theory related to gamification, based on motivation being a central focus of gamification, researchers have been inconsistent in their interpretation of this theory. In addition, at times, nongamified processes produced more favorable outcomes than gamified approaches (van Roy & Zaman, 2019). These experiences reinforced the idea that researchers should be diligent in how they interpret specific theories as well as check assumptions and biases that individuals engaged in a gamified approach will inherently outperform their nongamified counterparts.

Though there have been mixed results with the use of SDT in studies related to gamification, the theory was still appropriate to use as the conceptual framework for this study because SDT was aligned with the research question and phenomenological

approach, since the theory focuses on both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which are key components of gamification. In addition, gamification has been known to enhance levels of motivation and engagement in individuals (Kutun et al., 2021). Finally, SDT is used to explore both individual characteristics (i.e., task mastery and autonomy) and group dynamics (i.e., connection to others), which fit well with the lived experience foundation of a phenomenological approach.

Literature Review

Gamification – Definitions and History

Though the term gamification is relatively new to most organizations, only gaining significant momentum since 2010, the concept of applying game-like features to nongame situations has been in existence far longer, starting when Vladimir Lenin utilized competitions in the 1920s as a means of motivating workers to improve production rates (Nelson, 2012). In another display of gamified conditions, Huizinga (1938) offered the idea of “Homo Ludens” (playing man), asserting that play is an integral part of one’s existence and that the concepts of play (i.e., spontaneous activity) and games (i.e., structure and rules) are situated on a continuum. Another significant milestone in the development of a gamified environment was Thomas Malone’s suggestion of a computer game framework in 1980 based on motivation (Martínez & García, 2019). Malone (1981) based this new motivational theory on three concepts: challenge (i.e., uncertain outcomes), fantasy (i.e., imaginary play or scenarios), and curiosity (i.e., when individuals think their level of knowledge is incomplete).

A specific term for the phenomenon known as gamification was not coined until 2002, when Nick Pelling developed the term from the concept that transactions on electronic devices could be fun and efficient (Martínez & García, 2019). A working definition of the term gamification was then presented by Deterding et al. (2011b) that shifted the concept of gamification from a video game and entertainment context toward academia: “The use of game design elements in non-game contexts” (Deterding et al., 2011a, p. 9). This definition is universally accepted across the literature on gamification, transcending organization types and industries (Elidjen et al., 2022; Nah et al., 2019; Regalado et al., 2021; Schöbel et al., 2020; Stol et al., 2021).

Serious games are another relatively new phrase in organizations and represent the shift of games existing strictly for entertainment value to a different focus (Larson, 2020). Although serious games and gamification are similar terms, they are distinct. Gamification includes characteristics of games (e.g., points, leaderboards, levels, badges) in nongame activities, whereas serious games maintain a traditional game structure and incorporate educational components (Krath et al., 2021; Šlibar et al., 2018). Since the current study was focused on activities outside of traditional games and education rather than entertainment, a gamified approach was preferred over a serious game (Krath et al., 2021).

Though gamified approaches are found in a variety of aspects in organizations, in this study I focused on onboarding programs. Before exploring the specific nature of orientation and onboarding processes, a broader discussion of gamification related to professional development and training will provide a foundation of gamification in

relation to employee behavior that an explanation of gamified onboarding programs can then build upon. As noted earlier, gamification has existed in other industries for over 10 years, whereas gamification in relation to human resource development has become commonplace only in recent years and primarily in three distinct areas: employee wellness, employee learning, and task performance (Thomas et al., 2022). When exploring the effects of gamified human resources practices, it was a little surprising to discover the positive impact that gamification had on employees' physical health, including vast improvements in the total cholesterol and blood pressure of employees who engaged in a gamified wellness intervention; that same group also walked substantially more than a group who was participating in a nongamified version of the same intervention (Thomas et al., 2022). These were encouraging results, and gamified approaches have now been shown not only to improve performance and mental wellness, but employees have also benefitted from improved physical states as well (Thomas et al., 2022).

In addition to behavior-based contexts and positive impacts to individual wellness and performance, gamification was used in human resources departments related to attracting and retaining talent. Vivek and Nanthagopan (2020) reminded researchers and human resources professionals that the purpose of utilizing a gamified approach in organizations is not to try and change working environments into video games, it is to integrate strong business practices from across industries, and components of gamification, such as motivation and fun, have been found to work very well in this regard. Joy (2017) noted that gamifying the skills that hiring managers test in

recruitment, such as innovative thinking and time management, allows organizations to shortlist candidates more quickly than in traditional skill tests. In addition, the applicants have fun throughout the testing process. Increasing the efficiency of preemployment testing and having prospective candidates enjoy the recruitment process are two compelling reasons for organizations to consider gamifying their hiring practices. However, before blindly adopting gamified techniques, it is important for organizations to consider whether all gamified approaches are considered helpful to their organization and employees.

When examining the effectiveness of any gamified human resources practices, Murawski (2020) noted that regardless of the type of gamified approach (e.g., points, achievements, badges, leaderboards), ensuring the use of an authentic design that incorporates the needs of the participants is how positive results are achieved. Engaging in an iterative approach by checking in with employees and adjusting and updating the gamified activities has been found to be more effective than a single delivery mechanism (Murawski, 2020). Organizations that provide variations to their gamified techniques can help ensure that their employees remain engaged because the approaches do not become too stagnant and instead meet the evolving needs of employees.

In addition to gamification impacting employee wellness, performance, and an organization's endeavors to attract and retain top candidates, researchers have also found that gamification is particularly impactful in employee training programs (Thomas et al., 2022). However, Armstrong and Landers (2018) provided two cautions when exploring gamifying training programs. First, the design of gamified training programs should take

on the same process as designing any other training program. Second, the content of the training program should be reviewed to determine if a gamified approach is suitable (Armstrong & Landers, 2018). For instance, if the content of a training program is excellent but the participants will not be engaged while learning the content, a gamified design would be preferred over other designs (Armstrong & Landers, 2018). These are important reminders for those who are designing training programs to ensure a consistent process is applied, and to be cognizant of the level of engagement expected from the content and to design the training program accordingly.

Further to the assertion by Armstrong and Landers that a gamified training program can be effective, Newcomb et al. (2019) found success with a gamified approach with 130 entry-level education staff. After implementing the gamified training program, employee engagement increased, and staff turnover decreased. Fifteen months after the system was implemented, 65% of the supervisors indicated that employees they directly supervised who completed the gamified training program were stronger than their employees who were not engaged in the gamified system (Newcomb et al., 2019). In that same cohort, only 0.03% of the sample (one employee) was found to be a weaker employee after the training (Newcomb et al., 2019). These findings indicate that the potential benefits of implementing a gamified training program far outweigh the possible negative outcomes.

Another example of the effectiveness of gamified training programs was in Silic and Lowry's (2020) study of employees being compliant with security measures in information technology initiatives in organizations. Traditional training techniques have

been shown to be ineffective and the majority of employees still struggle to maintain compliance with the organization's systems (Silic & Lowry, 2020). However, by implementing a gamified training program that was not as disruptive to employees' day-to-day functionality with computer systems and bolstered employees' levels of intrinsic motivation, the result was that employees will in fact comply with the organization's security programs (Silic & Lowry, 2020). These positive results in gamified training programs are encouraging, as they reinforce the idea that gamified techniques can be useful in a variety of human resources initiatives.

In addition to gamified approaches being found in multiple departments or aspects of an organization, understanding if the primary context and definition of gamification were similar across industries and organization types was key in recognizing the transferability of concepts in this study across organizations. Indeed, organizations across various industries have found that gamified approaches are helpful in improving organizational efficiency and productivity and assist organizations to improve client loyalty and meeting the clients' evolving needs (Bahr et al., 2022; Leite et al., 2022; Szendrői et al., 2020). When reviewing the types of gamification implemented in 17 different for-profit businesses organizations across 13 distinct industries, Szendrői et al. (2020) found that rewards were the most frequent gamified element followed by badges, points, and leaderboards. These findings indicate that the effects of gamified approaches transcend organization and industry type.

Similar to reviewing how gamification was implemented across the various industries and organization types noted above, exploring differences between students

and employees was another important consideration of the application of a gamified approach in order to confirm if a gamified approach was effective when considering the employee as a learner. When reviewing the overarching concept of gamification and learning, Majuri et al. (2018) found that although the research in this area of study had increased over time, synthesizing the resulting findings was still limited. The authors explored 128 research papers on gamified learning and education and discovered that gamification in learning environments was most commonly associated with achievement rather than social aspects (Majuri et al., 2018). Majuri et al. also indicated that future research should explore different learning styles and demographics, which fit well with this study's focus on examining the lived experiences of participants.

When exploring gamification through the lens of employees as learners, Thongmak (2021) asserted that employees participating in Lifelong Learning was critical to an organization remaining competitive over time. Similar to this study, Thongmak rooted their research in SDT, and found that a gamified approach, coupled with the organization's readiness to offer online learning opportunities had an impact on employees' intentions of Lifelong Learning, by way of their competence, relatedness, and autonomy (characteristics of self-determination theory). This study concentrated on lived experiences of staff with gamified onboarding approaches and informed the research of organizations providing learning opportunities to their staff and informs the concept of Lifelong Learning in future practice and research.

As described above, gamified environments have had a positive effect on learners, just as they have to the experience of employees. Richards (2021) reinforced this notion

by indicating that gamified learning environments substantially increase knowledge of subjects, motivation, and engagement. Also, challenges with understanding how educators can ensure gamified processes are practical for learners was not specific to learning environments since employers have similar challenges (Richards, 2021). Finally, determining components of effective gamified techniques was universally difficult, as the most impactful approaches to gamification have been disputed in both learning and work environments.

The presence of gamified approaches in human resources, professional development, training and subsequent transferability across industries/organizations and employees/students reinforces the idea that gamification can be a useful technique in all organizations. However, researchers have raised concerns about the implementation of gamified approaches, including ethical concerns, privacy violations, and impacting employee motivation.

Gamification – Criticisms and Ethics

Although the literature has indicated that gamified approaches in organizations are generally very positive, there are a variety of criticisms of gamification that should be understood before engaging in gamified techniques. Hedonism, strain on well-being, increased stress, decreased motivation, and concerns with privacy and ethics are some of the potential outcomes from gamified processes and should be considered before undertaking a gamified approach. Bateman (2018) argued that it was not possible for gamified activities to improve any individual's life, based on how gamification includes required achievements of the participants. This feeling of insincerity was echoed by

Martínez and García (2019), who noted that gamified approaches could take on an essence of manipulation, where some concepts were planted purposefully to sway participants to lean toward specific choices. Martínez and García continued, suggesting that gamified environments could result in hedonic behaviors, where individuals only engaged in activities where those participants can expect a reward. Finally, Martínez and García offered that a concentration on status can occur when gamification was present; although positioning against others can be a strong motivator, if the environment has too intense of a focus on that competition, demotivation can occur when a participant determines that they can no longer surpass their peers.

One suggested way to combat challenges with the perceived intensity or competitive nature of gamified processes in organizations was to shift decision-making to a participatory style, where group decisions are made, rather than individuals determining the type of gamified approach that will be implemented (Algashami et al., 2019). In addition, Martínez and García (2019) recommended that the participant become the driver of their learning experience and that the gamified approach facilitates interaction across participants, to encourage collaboration instead of solely competition.

Building on the previous concerns of the impacts of gamified work environments, Hammedi et al. (2021) found that the levels of frontline employees' well-being and engagement were negatively impacted when gamification in the workplace was imposed upon staff. To achieve buy-in from staff for gamified workplaces, voluntary participation was critical, as was providing employees with a transparent explanation of the anticipated end result or intention of the integration of gamification (Hammedi et al., 2021). Ensuring

these experiences are voluntary and outlining the organization's intent of including gamification will help encourage employee participation and will show a level of respect to the employees who may perceive gamification as a negative addition to their work environment (Hammedi et al., 2021). Consulting staff before commencing a gamified program and explaining what the organization is trying to achieve are two ways to help ensure a gamified workplace is well-received by employees.

Similar to the concerns outlined above, Goethe and Palmquist (2020) noted that utilizing gamification can be unethical if not kept in check. For instance, if a gamified environment was exploited to the point at which participants become excessively captivated in achieving badges, compiling points, or their position on a leaderboard, an ethical approach to gamifying a workplace can be put at risk (Goethe & Palmquist, 2020). Similarly, Thorpe and Roper (2019) noted that effective gamification includes a 'hook', or a mechanism that engages participants in the activity, sustaining attention for the immediate future. A healthy dose of engagement was not inherently damaging; however, when facilitators of gamification utilize deceptive approaches (like marketers utilizing subliminal messaging), concerns surrounding ethics arise (Thorpe & Roper, 2019). Ethical concerns with gamification were avoided by not putting undue pressure on staff to compete and ensuring that the organization was always communicating in a transparent way.

Because gamification is still a fairly new concept in organizations, there are still limited numbers of empirically tested models of gamification, which contributes to the question of the ethical nature of some gamified approaches (Thorpe & Roper, 2019). To

offset these ethical concerns, Thorpe and Roper (2019) recommended that additional dialogue is needed, in order to determine if and how gamification should be monitored or regulated. Goethe and Palmquist (2020) suggested a more immediate approach, recommending instead for designers of gamified approaches to maintain a focus on why specific actions are good, so participants are less likely to blindly focus on leaderboards, achievements, or points.

The final negative aspect of gamified approaches reviewed in the literature was regarding privacy. Maintaining participant privacy while collecting and storing participants' personal information was a concern when designing gamification systems (Mavroeidi et al., 2019; Ruggiu et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2021). Mavroeidi et al. (2019) outlined five areas of privacy specific to digitized gamification: unobservability (inability for participants to see the actions of other participants), unlinkability (inability for someone outside the gamified program to connect participants or their behaviors), undetectability (inability for an outsider to identify a gamified aspect of the program), pseudonymity (participants utilizing artificial names to maintain anonymity), and anonymity (a participant cannot be recognized by other participants). The researchers found that by ensuring specific privacy requirements are met during the design phase of a gamified program (in this case, software design), participants' privacy can be maintained (Mavroeidi et al., 2019). Making a concerted effort to maintain participants' privacy through gamified techniques helps ensure participants feel respected throughout the program and across their workplace.

Like Mavroeidi et al. (2019), Ruggiu et al. (2022) concentrated on digital gamification systems. The authors noted that although gamification is an engaging approach that can improve performance while decreasing stress among an organization's workforce, gamification can impact privacy levels of staff if left unchecked (Ruggiu et al., 2022). This concern is especially apparent when participants provide large amounts of personal data throughout the gamified programs (Ruggiu et al., 2022). However, the researchers found that by sufficiently safeguarding employees' personal information, not only do staff feel that their privacy is protected, but this assurance of protection also improves an employee's level of autonomy and empowerment (Ruggiu et al., 2022). These findings demonstrate that when employees feel safe and empowered in their organization, they experience an increased level of personal control over their environment.

Similar to Mavroeidi et al. (2019) and Ruggiu et al. (2022), Zhang et al. (2021) utilized a digital version of gamification. Instead of exploring overarching design components of gamified approaches, Zhang et al. engaged employees in a specific mobile application focused on lifestyle. Although results of the study indicated there were some successes with the application, the researchers found it difficult to balance transparency and privacy. More specifically, though the levels of privacy were so high that participants were unaware of others' goals and how their fellow participants obtained their points, a lack of transparency reduced participant motivation (Zhang et al., 2021). As mentioned previously in this literature review, a collaborative approach when designing gamification programs was also recommended by Zhang et al. as a possible solution to challenges

outlined in the study. Since this study examined lived experiences of employees completing gamified onboarding programs, it was interesting to understand if these participants had any concerns about maintaining their privacy throughout the sessions as new staff members in an organization, or if privacy was not a concern during their program.

This literature review outlined circumstances where gamified approaches could result in a variety of stresses for individuals, decreases in motivation, or an increase in concerns about privacy or ethics. These challenges were overcome by engaging in various collaborative techniques and ensuring that the participants are the main drivers of their individual experience. This study focused on gamified onboarding programs; now that the definition, history, and possible concerns of gamification have been reviewed, this literature review shifts to onboarding programs. Understanding the basics of onboarding programs are essential to grasping gamified versions of these programs for new employees.

Onboarding, Orientation, and Organizational Socialization

The terms orientation, onboarding, and organizational socialization all refer to activities that organizations conduct with new hires. However, orientation is distinctly different than onboarding and organizational socialization. Hills (2022) noted that orientation activities are specific sessions of short duration and consist of routine new employment tasks such as completing paperwork, whereas an onboarding program may last up to 12 months and include a variety of activities. In addition to the inclusion of an orientation session, an onboarding or organizational socialization program explores

organizational culture and which actions, skills and knowledge will be required for an employee to do well in an organization (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011; Hills, 2022). However, Bauer and Erdogan (2011) cautioned that organizational socialization should not be confused with occupational socialization, as the latter is defined as learning about the norms found in specific roles or types of work (scientist, teacher, police officer, etc.). Though the terms onboarding and organizational socialization are used synonymously, for the purpose of this study, onboarding will be the term that describes these employee activities, because the focus is specific to new hires, whereas organizational socialization can also include employees who have transferred departments or are otherwise already engaged as staff at an organization (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011; Hills, 2022). Now that onboarding has been defined, components of successful onboarding programs are reviewed.

Hills (2022) asserted that rather than a singular event, a strong onboarding program is an ongoing experience of an employee which includes three key components: organizational onboarding, technical onboarding, and social onboarding. Organizational onboarding includes the traditional aspects of orientation such as how to navigate the buildings in the workplace, learning about the organization's policies and procedures, and how to complete payroll and benefits paperwork (Hills, 2022). In addition to these routine activities, organizational onboarding also includes employees learning about the language of the organization, acronyms or lingo specific to the employer, and assimilation techniques (Hills, 2022). Effective assimilation into the organization requires the employee to be exposed to the organization's norms and values at specific periods

over the course of months to ensure that new hires are not overwhelmed with the influx of information (Hills, 2022). At those intervals, the employee's supervisor can integrate aspects such as the organization's brand and history, while educating new hires on how they can grow and perform well within the organization (Hills, 2022). In addition to organizational onboarding, the second key to an effective onboarding program is technical onboarding.

Technical onboarding is where an employee's confidence is boosted in their new role and organization by receiving a clear delineation of what they will be accountable for, and what extent they can expect to work autonomously (Hills, 2022). During positive technical onboarding experiences, employees are coached by the employer through closing any gaps in skillsets, working through short-term goals, and understanding how their contributions fit in among the organization as a whole (Hills, 2022). Finally, social onboarding is the process by which new hires begin to feel like part of a team of people, rather than an outsider to the organization (Hills, 2022). Ideally, the new employee works with their supervisor to identify up to 10 individuals (ranging from people who report to them, they report to, peers, and internal/external customers) who have a direct impact on the employee and vice versa. The employee then meets with these invested individuals informally and formally throughout their first year in the role to build relationships, and in turn, help ensure the success of the new hire (Hills, 2022). Having access to a variety of individuals throughout the course of their role is an effective way for employees to receive ongoing support from multiple sources while they become familiar with the organization.

Although general onboarding programs can provide employees with critical information about how they can succeed in organizations, the implementation of gamification into onboarding programs has been shown to provide opportunities for new staff to integrate into an organization with less fear of performing poorly or concerns with fitting in at a new workplace (García et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2018). To date, a variety of organizations have previously had success when utilizing gamified onboarding programs, which encourages organizations to continue this practice (Miller et al., 2018). In fact, not only do gamified onboarding programs provide an engaging environment where new employees learn about an organization's culture, what the organization's expectations are of them as new staff and how to be successful in their new workplace, gamified onboarding sessions have also been found to improve new hires' knowledge acquisition and retention over staff who participate in non-gamified onboarding sessions (Garrison et al., 2021; Wait & Frazer, 2018; Woolwine et al., 2019). Woolwine et al.'s (2019) study on the impact of gamification of orientation on motivation and knowledge retention reinforced existing literature that gamified learning environments improve motivation of participants, which increases levels of engagement, which results in increased knowledge retention. Similarly, Garrison et al. (2021) found that with a gamified orientation session, the pass rate for employees increased from 90.9% with five new hires failing in a traditional orientation, to 98.8% pass rate, with only one student failing the gamified session.

Finally, Wait and Frazer (2018) utilized a board game, rather than a digital application, to engage employees in a learning exercise. The researchers found a few

unique benefits of the board game over a digital application, including focusing the scope of the training to a specific concept or role, participants witnessing how their department must work in conjunction with other departments in order to be successful, and how learning through play promotes an environment where employees are able to work through advanced concepts without fear (Wait & Frazer, 2018). These numerous examples of integrating gamification in onboarding and training practices indicate that a gamified approach was an improvement over traditional delivery models and was effective in a variety of industries and methods of engagement. This reliability means that researchers can expect similar outcomes in a variety of gamified methods.

This literature review has confirmed there is value in organizations engaging new employees in gamified onboard programs. A concept that has not yet been explored in this review is whether new staff of various ages have differing experiences with onboarding programs, or if the experiences are similar across generations. Nair and Sadasivan (2019) noted that many organizations still engage their new employees in the same ways that they engaged Generation X employees, rooted in testing and theory, rather than recognizing that Generation Z employees think and process/analyze information differently than their counterparts from older generations. Researchers found that by utilizing a gamified recruitment tool, prospective candidates increased their engagement with the hiring organization's website from fewer than 10 minutes to at least 90 minutes (Nair & Sadasivan, 2019). Though this example highlights recruitment rather than onboarding, it is reasonable to expect that the success of gamified techniques will transfer from candidate engagement to new hire onboarding programs.

Similar to Nair and Sadasivan's (2019) findings that Generation Z employees are unique from their older colleagues, Chillakuri (2020) found that although 61% of employees surveyed were doing different work than what was discussed during the interview, Generation Z staff are only interested in completing work for which they were hired. In addition, the top four priorities for Generation Z employees include meaningful and exciting work, frequent and instant feedback, work-life balance, and personal connections with their colleagues and managers (Chillakuri, 2020). In order for onboarding programs to be most effective for Generation Z employees, it is paramount for the organization to recognize and meet the needs of these staff.

Heimburger et al. (2020) completed a study on gamified onboarding programs for Generation Y and Z employees, and found similar results as noted previously: organizations whose employees are engaged substantially outperform their colleagues who are not engaged, and younger generations of employees are seeking immediate feedback and wish to complete meaningful work. The study's participants also found that a digital gamified onboarding application was appealing, fun, intuitive, and better supported connecting with future colleagues than a non-gamified version (Heimburger et al., 2020). With this success of gamified onboarding programs with younger generations, employers can anticipate new hires continuing to expect a more engaging, interactive onboarding program than was traditionally available for previous generations.

In this study, the first research question asked what the lived experiences are of private sector staff with gamified onboarding programs. Until this point, this literature review has focused on the history of gamification and onboarding programs and the

effectiveness of gamified onboarding programs. The second research question of this study was how do lived experiences of private sector staff in gamified onboarding programs inform organizational commitment and job satisfaction? The final two sections of this literature review concentrate on defining organizational commitment and job satisfaction and the corresponding impact of gamified work environments on the levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment in employees.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is the extent that an employee has a positive attitude toward an organization (Ćulibrk et al., 2018). It is an employee's attachment to or level of investment in the organization, where an employee shares the same values as the organization, and the degree to which the employee wishes to stay employed at the organization (Cesário & Chambel, 2019). Meyer and Allen's (1991) seminal work asserted that organizational commitment is comprised of three factors of whether an employee remained with an organization: affective commitment (desire), continuance commitment (need), and normative commitment (obligation). Each of these types of commitment is based on a unique theme: affective relating to personal competence, continuance focusing on the costs of leaving the organization, and normative reflecting loyalty to the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Although organizational commitment is a measure of an employee's likelihood of being engaged with and remaining in an organization, do onboarding programs impact this level of commitment?

Strong onboarding programs can have a positive effect on an employee's level of organizational commitment (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2020; Girdauskiene et al., 2022;

Semenza et al., 2021). Semenza et al. (2021) found that onboarding programs can ensure that employees are engaged in the organization over the long-term, and act as a prompt for new staff to embrace the priorities and mission of the organization. However, in order to attain the desired positive outcome, those sessions must be structured and strategic (Semenza et al., 2021). These findings reinforce the idea that without appropriate planning and execution, onboarding programs will fall short of engaging new employees for the duration of their employment.

With the term organizational commitment defined and confirmation that organizational commitment is positively impacted by effective onboarding programs, the focus shifts to gamified work environments. Studies have shown that gamification had a positive influence on organizational commitment (Bizzi, 2023; Hussain et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2022). In fact, Hussain et al. (2018) asserted in their research study that not only did a gamified approach positively impact a variety of variables for employees (such as loyalty and levels of motivation), but a gamified environment also had a stronger connection to organizational commitment than other variables. However, Girdauskiene et al. (2022) found that although some participants in the study confirmed that gamification had a positive impact on organizational commitment, that sentiment was not unanimous, as 26.6% of participants found that commitment levels of employees did not increase based on gamification. These mixed results demonstrate a need for additional studies to confirm the effect of gamified onboarding programs on employees' levels of organizational commitment. Bizzi (2023) asserted that previous theorists found that implementing gamification improved employees' behaviors and attitudes, which in turn

increased levels of organizational commitment. However, the author also suggested that additional studies would be required in order to have a better understanding of the impact of gamification across variables (Bizzi, 2023). These limited results and recommended additional studies demonstrate a gap in the literature of the study of integrating gamification in workplaces and the corresponding impact on organizational commitment of employees.

Although there was limited existing literature on the connection of gamified processes impacting levels of organizational commitment, the concluding section of this literature review focuses on whether the same was true about job satisfaction – if the connection of onboarding programs and impact of gamified work environments to employees' levels of job satisfaction was also an under-explored area of study.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is likely the work behavior most frequently researched because job satisfaction is considered an excellent predictor of the level of productivity of an individual in an organization (Aranibar et al., 2022; Judge & Klinger, 2008). However, before exploring the specific connections between job satisfaction and onboarding, organizational commitment or gamification, a working definition must be reviewed in order to understand what concept is being examined. Locke's (1976) seminal work defined job satisfaction as the positive sense an individual receives from experiences with their job. This definition transcends generation, industries and organizations and is typically the definition cited by authors and researchers when discussing job satisfaction.

Dilig-Ruiz et al. (2018) explored the definition of job satisfaction in a specific workplace setting, and found that across 24 different studies, the definition of job satisfaction could be categorized into four distinct approaches: global affective (the overarching feeling of satisfaction), facet (specific components of the environment that impact satisfaction), expectations and needs (an individual's needs being met), and well-being. The global affective approach is characterized by statements such as the degree or extent to which an employee likes their job, the facet approach captures sentiments such as satisfaction with work-related variables or extrinsic rewards, the expectations and needs approach includes phrases like personal attitude or good fit or components that the employee would like to have, and a well-being approach includes the statement of well-being in its description (Dilig-Ruiz et al., 2018). Although job satisfaction can be categorized into various themes and key words, the central idea that job satisfaction is an individual's level of positivity gleaned from their job is consistent across organizations and industries.

Judge and Klinger (2008) found that job satisfaction was also defined by the various responses an individual has to their job; those responses include aspects of evaluation (or cognition), emotions, and behaviors. In addition, there was a close connection between an individual's feeling of satisfaction in their job and satisfaction in the rest of their life (Judge & Klinger, 2008). The authors outlined three potential forms of the relationship between job and life satisfaction: spillover (where experiences on the job impact life experiences), segmentation (when life and job satisfaction do not impact each other), and compensation (where an individual finds ways to improve their feelings

of dissatisfaction in work by finding happiness in their life outside the workplace) (Judge & Klinger, 2008). Now that the definition of job satisfaction has been reviewed, the focus shifts to understanding the connection between and impact of onboarding programs on employees' levels of job satisfaction.

Spagnoli (2020) noted that organizational socialization impacts a variety of behaviors and job attitudes of employees, including job satisfaction. Furthermore, the author found that there was also a connection between job satisfaction, tenure, and person-environment fit; essentially, the more comfortable a new employee was with their work environment, their level of job satisfaction increased, as did their likelihood to stay employed at an organization (Spagnoli, 2020). In addition, Cranmer et al. (2019) asserted that the support new hires receive from their colleagues was so impactful that these social connections at the workplace encourage new staff to assimilate into the organization. Bilyalov (2018) found that job satisfaction for new employees depended more on components within the organization's control, rather than characteristics of the employees themselves. Items such as facilities, funding and policy enforcement were more impactful on employees' levels of job satisfaction than the individuals' backgrounds (Bilyalov, 2018). The assertion that the environment was the greatest contributor to job satisfaction was encouraging, as each of these environmental aspects is within an organization's control.

Çamveren et al. (2022) noted that historically, there have been mixed results regarding the impact of onboarding programs. In some cases, job satisfaction has been positively affected, whereas in other studies, onboarding programs have had no effect on

employees' levels of job satisfaction. However, in the study conducted by Çamveren et al., the researchers confirmed that job satisfaction did not significantly decrease after the completion of the onboarding program. These findings demonstrate that onboarding programs do not negatively impact job satisfaction. In addition, there are circumstances when employee's job satisfaction increases based on organizational socialization programs.

Although it is encouraging to understand that onboarding programs may positively impact job satisfaction, it is important to highlight that gender may be a contributing factor to job satisfaction. For instance, job satisfaction among women may be impacted by work-life balance or whether an organization promotes a culture that was family-friendly (Spagnoli, 2020). Similarly, Schultz and Adams (2022) found that women and men have different attitudes about job satisfaction. Bilyalov's (2018) research indicated that in academia, levels of job satisfaction between women and men varied; in some studies, women tended to have less job satisfaction than men, whereas in other studies, male faculty were less satisfied. However, Lassibille and Navarro Gómez (2020) found that the level of gender diversity throughout the organization did not impact the levels of job satisfaction of the staff. Recognizing that gender may impact an employee's level of job satisfaction is an important characteristic for organizations to be aware of to help ensure that the organization is being mindful in providing varying experiences to their new hires, rather than presuming all new employees will inherently have similar experiences as their colleagues. Some research has indicated that strong onboarding programs have been shown to improve job satisfaction for employees; the

next exploration in this literature review was determining whether a similar connection between job satisfaction and organizational commitment exists.

Shah et al. (2019) noted that organizational commitment and job satisfaction are employee attitudes that are studied more frequently than others. Though the impact of each of these terms has been independently defined and explored previously in this literature review, the influence of job satisfaction on organizational commitment (and vice-versa) are investigated, to better understand how these job attitudes are connected to one another. Ćulibrk et al. (2018) considered organizational commitment to be an expansion of job satisfaction, as it relates to the attitude an individual employee has toward the organization as a whole, rather than just their individual job. The author noted that although there was a connection between the two job attitudes, there was a discrepancy in the literature about what that relationship is. Some researchers posited that the level of job satisfaction felt by an employee determined their degree of organizational commitment (Asutay et al., 2022; Bashir & Gani, 2020; Tatar, 2020). In contrast, other researchers indicated that organizational commitment was a predecessor to job satisfaction (Ćulibrk et al., 2018). Finally, Özgül et al. (2022) noted that studying job satisfaction and organizational commitment provided contradictory results. When examining these mixed results, it was clear that the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment requires further study in order to better understand the impact of each job attitude on the other.

According to Dalkrani and Dimitriadis (2018), job satisfaction impacted organizational commitment, but only certain characteristics such as strong instructions,

work conditions and social connection affected job satisfaction, whereas promotion opportunities and salary did not affect job satisfaction. Similarly, Asutay et al. (2022) found that when employees have a sense of satisfaction in their role, they will naturally have a more positive attitude toward their work, and in turn, a greater commitment to their organization. However, contrary to Dalkrani and Dimitriadis' results, Asutay et al. discovered that promotion opportunities did have a positive effect on job satisfaction. These conflicting results encourage further study to better understand the relationship between organizational commitment and job satisfaction.

Xu et al. (2023) summarized these discrepancies by indicating that there are four conflicting lines of thinking regarding the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment: job satisfaction causes organizational commitment, organizational commitment causes job satisfaction, job satisfaction and organizational commitment have mutual causation, or job satisfaction and organizational commitment have no impact on one another. When exploring why so many discrepancies exist, the authors determined two likely explanations: sampling or measurement errors resulting in unclear results, or actual variations exist across the two job attitudes (Xu et al., 2023). When examining true variation, Xu et al. noted that the order of which job attitude influences the other may not be as direct as originally thought. Instead, job satisfaction and organizational commitment were found to be moderated by other variables such as how each job attitude was conceptualized and measured and the timing of when the attitudes are researched (with new or veteran staff). To ensure reliability of findings,

future researchers need to be cognizant of sampling and measurement errors, in order to determine if a true variation exists.

Throughout the examination of the relationship of organizational commitment to job satisfaction, two themes for future study arose, including employer engagement and organizational culture. Tatar (2020) questioned why organizations did not pay more attention to job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which may be due to employers not recognizing the importance of these job attitudes and the impact those job attitudes have on employees. In addition, Bashir and Gani (2020) emphasized the impact of organizational culture on both organizational commitment and job satisfaction. When considering future studies in relation to the impact that job attitudes have on each other, on employees, and on the corresponding organizations, awareness and culture are two components that should be explored for study. Now that the research has confirmed that there are mixed results of whether job satisfaction generates organizational commitment (or vice-versa), the research turns to the final focus of this literature review: whether gamified work environments have an impact on levels of job satisfaction in employees.

Gamification is still a relatively new concept in some industries, where the implementation of gamified environments is still in its infancy in workplaces such as production and logistics. Warmelink et al. (2020) asserted that it may be possible for levels of employee job satisfaction to improve in monotonous or repetitive jobs by the implementation of gamification. In addition, gamifying work environments in the production and logistics sector may be relatively simple, based on gamified tools such as leaderboards and scoring systems being able to tap into existing technology in these

workplaces (Warmelink et al., 2020). However, since gamification has also been found to be exploitative and coercive, resulting in possible negative outcomes on employees' levels of intrinsic motivation, organizations must ensure they understand gamification before looking to implement practices in their organization (Warmelink et al., 2020). These cautious findings remind employers to ensure they adequately prepare before introducing gamification in their organizations.

Mixed findings were not present in all studies of gamification in workplaces. Silic et al. (2020) completed a longitudinal study on integrating gamification in a workplace to determine if gamification could be a realistic approach to improve job satisfaction among employees. The researchers found that there was a positive relationship between job satisfaction and a gamified work environment (Silic et al., 2020). In addition, the positive relationship of gamification to job satisfaction was statistically significant at each of the time periods tested (after 6 months, 9 months, and 12 months; Silic et al., 2020). The researchers confirmed that incorporating elements of gamification in the workplace fostered a work environment that was more enjoyable and interesting than prior to introducing these elements (Silic et al., 2020). The researchers noted that employees want to be viewed as valuable members of the organization, and receiving feedback such as badges for their achievements demonstrated this value and increased levels of job satisfaction (Silic et al., 2020). The idea that the impact of gamification does not wane over time was encouraging for organizations, as investments employers make in their employees' work environments transcend short-term wins and can positively influence staff over time.

Similarly, Nivedda and Angayarkanni (2022) completed a 6-month study to explore any influence a gamified workplace had on the job satisfaction of employees. The results confirmed that gamifying a work environment positively influenced job satisfaction. Staff were more engaged in their work and were feeling better about their work than before the organization implemented gamification techniques (Nivedda & Angayarkanni, 2022). This positive outcome reinforces the idea that when appropriately implemented, organizations can expect levels of job satisfaction to increase in their employees.

Similar to Warmelink et al.'s (2020) research of the impacts of gamification on job satisfaction in production-based environments, Ponis et al. (2020) studied gamification in a warehouse environment; specifically, the integration of augmented reality (AR) in a gamification system with order pickers. The results were positive, indicating that 66% of the participants preferred a gamified AR system rather than an AR system without gamification (Ponis et al., 2020). An interesting finding of this study was related to the reward system in the workplace. The two approaches included 'Competition', which rewarded high performing individuals as compared to their peers, and 'Completion', which offered individual compensation based on meeting standards set by managers. The supervisors preferred the 'Competition' approach, whereas the employees gravitated toward the 'Completion' approach (Ponis et al., 2020). At first consideration, the authors attributed the delineation of staff and supervisors to the two approaches based on the management inaccurately presuming employees' levels of commitment to the organization and achieving bonuses (Ponis et al., 2020). The authors

indicated that future research would be helpful to gain a deeper understanding of the rationale behind what types of reward systems are built into gamified approaches (Ponis et al., 2020). This study informs the future use of technology integrating with gamification, and how a multifaceted approach could improve job satisfaction among staff.

Ponis et al. (2020) studied how incorporating innovation can improve job satisfaction. Likewise, Hamza and Tóvölgyi (2023) noted that organizations that focus on innovation increase job satisfaction among staff. The researchers studied the relationship between gamified E-learning programs and job satisfaction in the banking industry and found that 71% of participants felt that an E-learning approach enabled them to achieve job satisfaction (Hamza & Tóvölgyi, 2023). Hamza and Tóvölgyi also noted that the employees' perception of the gamified system shifted based on the demographics of the participants. This study provided a good reminder that the experiences of staff may shift based on their age and length of tenure in an industry or duration at an organization. As such, to ensure success, employers must be cognizant of how they are implementing gamification in the workplace and engage employees of various demographics prior to integration.

As discussed earlier, Ērgle and Ludviga (2018) also posited that the relatively new nature of gamification in workplaces offers little empirical evidence. This lack of evidence can encourage speculation about whether organizations should include gamification in their approach, or if gamification is merely a fad (Ērgle & Ludviga, 2018). However, in the 5 years since Ērgle and Ludviga's study, gamification has

continued as a subject of research, with a variety of articles explored in this literature review that reinforce the benefits of organizations incorporating gamification in their workplaces. In addition, when Ērgle and Ludviga completed their study, they also found substantial improvement of job satisfaction in employees after implementing gamified human resources processes. These results reinforce the idea to continue exploring incorporating gamification in workplaces.

Although the incorporation of gamification in work environments explored in this literature review was not completely free from challenges, the majority of findings indicated that gamified workplaces increased job satisfaction among employees. Organizations taking a concerted approach to provide meaningful gamified aspects to their workforce can be confident that their efforts will likely have a positive impact on their employees.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of private sector staff with gamified onboarding programs and explore how gamified onboarding programs informed employees' levels of job satisfaction and commitment to an organization. In reviewing the literature, major themes that emerged included the definition and background of gamification, criticisms and ethical concerns with gamification, traditional and gamified onboarding programs, and the connection of the job attitudes of organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Known concepts related to gamified onboarding programs were that gamification is generally a positive integration in the workplace, but incorporation has not always been seamless.

Though gamification is prevalent in a variety of aspects of human resources practices, this study fills the gap of understanding the lived experiences of staff with gamified onboarding programs since a phenomenological approach to gamification has yet to be explored. Addressing the gap of the lack of current academic literature related to improving job satisfaction and enjoyment at the workplace by incorporating gamified techniques to orient and onboard staff in private sector organizations was the aim of this study. In Chapter 3, I will outline the specific details of this study, including the research design and corresponding rationale, the role of the researcher, the study's methodology, and issues of trustworthiness.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis study was to explore the lived experiences of private sector staff when gamification was utilized in onboarding processes and how those experiences informed employees' levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction with their current employer. In this chapter, I define the research tradition and corresponding rationale, explain my role as the researcher, and detail the process by which participants were selected for the study. The data collection instrument and the participant recruitment and data collection processes are explained. I also discuss the data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of private sector staff with gamified onboarding programs?

RQ2: How do the lived experiences of private sector staff with gamified onboarding programs inform organizational commitment?

RQ3: How do the lived experiences of private sector staff with gamified onboarding programs inform job satisfaction?

Phenomenology is focused on the study of experiences, based on Husserl's argument that specific aspects of experiences should be studied (Smith et al., 2022). With a phenomenological approach, the researcher looks for "participants who have shared an experience, but vary in characteristics and in their individual experiences" (Moser &

Korstjens, 2017, p. 11). Descriptive and interpretative (or interpretive) are two methods within the discipline of phenomenology, with descriptive phenomenology focusing on the description of individuals' experiences, whereas the interpretation of those experiences is the emphasis of interpretative phenomenology (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015).

The central concepts of this study included understanding individuals' experiences with gamified onboarding programs and how those experiences informed their feelings of organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Interpretative phenomenological analysis worked well to explore these central concepts because the pillars of interpretative phenomenological analysis include experiences that these employees had with gamification (i.e., phenomenology), how the employees interpret their experiences (i.e., hermeneutics), and their individual experiences (i.e., idiography; Smith et al., 2022). I selected the qualitative method to enable adequate depth of participants' responses. The quantitative method would have limited the richness of the data, including short answers or numerical data in place of thick descriptions by individuals about their personal experiences.

Role of the Researcher

I was the sole researcher and an observer for this study because I personally conducted the individual interviews. Since I completed the study outside of my own work environment, industry (i.e., local government), and country, potential conflicts of interest were not present. I did not have any prior personal or professional relationships with any of the participants; therefore, power relationships with the participants did not exist. I provided a nominal incentive of ₹800 ($10 US) per interviewee for participating in the

study. Based on my interest in the field of gamification and my own prior positive experiences with gamification, I managed possible response bias by ensuring none of the interview questions were leading and that I remained neutral while building rapport with participants (see Patton, 2015).

Methodology

Participant Selection

The population for this study was employees in the information technology sector in India within a partner organization obtained through approaching organizations via LinkedIn who currently utilize a gamified approach to onboard their employees. I advertised for participants by emailing an invitation from my Walden University email address directly to each staff member's organization email address. Because the partner organization was fairly small (i.e., under 20 employees), the inclusion criteria were based on full- and part-time staff currently employed by the organization. Participants met these criteria based on responding to my call for participants from their organization's domain-specific email address.

Once participants confirmed their involvement in the study via email, I continued to communicate with each participant via email throughout the study. Smith et al. (2022) noted that a sample size of six to 10 is appropriate for an interpretive phenomenological analysis approach. As such, I endeavored to include eight participants in this study; however, had I obtained data saturation before eight participants, I would have included all participants who respond positively to the invitation to maximize the opportunity to capture rich data.

Instrumentation

I collected data via semistructured interviews (see Appendix B). I drafted the interview questions personally, The questions were open ended to ensure the participants had the opportunity to provide fulsome answers. The interviews were completed via digital conference, and the audio of each call was recorded.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Participants were recruited via their direct email addresses in the partner organization. I collected all data through digital conference. Each participant was involved in a single interview that was expected to take approximately 60 minutes.

I required each participant to sign an informed consent form prior to commencing the interview. Participation in this study was completely voluntary, and participants had the opportunity to cease their participation at any point and stop the interview at any time. Follow-up interviews were not required, but had I been unsure about any data collected, I would have reached out to participants via email to follow up.

Data Analysis Plan

I drafted all interview questions to ensure they tied specifically to one of the research questions (see Appendix C). Although the virtual meeting software recorded the transcripts automatically, I reviewed each transcript by hand while listening to each audio recording to ensure the accuracy of spelling and grammar in each transcript. Each participant’s name was replaced with a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Each participant was provided with the edited transcript to conduct member checking and confirm any discrepancies in the data collected. In the event that

there were any discrepancies in the data, I approached the corresponding participant(s) to confirm their intent of how they answered the question(s). Before I began analyzing the data, I engaged in epoché and bracketing, where I eliminated wherever possible any preconceptions of the data and viewed the data in its pure form (see Patton, 2015).

Smith et al. (2022) affirmed that researchers are encouraged to be innovative in how they approach analyzing the data as long as the emphasis is on understanding how study participants have made sense of their experiences. Patton (2015) noted that when completing an inductive analysis of the data, the researcher starts the analysis without any predetermined categories and focuses instead on searching for patterns. I followed Smith et al.'s seven-step process of analysis and coding: reading and re-reading, exploratory noting, constructing experiential statements, searching for connections across experiential statements, naming the personal experiential themes, continuing the individual analysis, and developing group experiential themes.

Ravitch and Carl (2021) defined coding as attaching phrases or single words to segments of the data. To ensure sufficient text has been included in a code, the meaning of the data (e.g., a quote from an interview) should still make sense when it stands alone, away from the entirety of the interview (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). During the reading and re-reading stage, I immersed myself in the original data, listening to the audio recording of the interview while reading the transcript and being careful not to rush the process to ensure that the focus was specifically on the data (see Smith et al., 2022). When completing exploratory noting, I documented general notes of what and why things were

said, and I referenced the audio recording to capture how things were said (see Smith et al., 2022).

When I constructed experiential statements, I worked with the exploratory notes to develop a summary that maintained the complexity of the participants' experiences (see Smith et al., 2022). I then generated a word cloud in MAXQDA (n.d.) to supplement my manual coding with a visual of the frequency of words and phrases in the raw data, which helped identify codes (see Smith et al., 2022). During my search for connections across experiential statements, I mapped out how the experiential statements aligned, clustering patterns together (see Smith et al., 2022). Titles were then assigned to each of the clusters of personal experiential themes, and each theme included multiple subthemes and associated experiential statements (see Smith et al., 2022).

When considering overarching concepts of analyzing qualitative data in an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach, the researcher is not focused on determining norms across a group (Smith et al., 2022). I was interested in understanding which experiences were unique and shared among participants. Group experiential themes are a synthesis of the analysis of participant responses, and I needed to be cognizant that some concepts are only prominent when examining themes across participants, whereas they may seem latent when reviewing one individual's experience (see Smith et al., 2022).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, or validity, helps to ensure a study has sufficient rigor to be considered credible (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Quantitative studies rely on instruments and

test scores to confirm validity, whereas in qualitative studies, validity is comprised of four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Credibility, similar to internal validity in quantitative studies, is defined as the researcher being able to consider all unique challenges that are apparent in a study and work through patterns that may not have a simple initial explanation (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In this study, I established credibility by member checks and data saturation. After I cleaned the interview data, I forwarded each participant their transcript for member checking to ensure accuracy. I achieved saturation by including a large sample of participants and presuming that a substantial pattern of responses would arise.

Transferability, or external validity, is a measure of how a qualitative study can maintain its richness while being transferable to broader contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I achieved transferability in this study by including participants from across the partner organization rather than from a single department or position. I achieved thick descriptions by recording the interviews and including observations, such as tone of voice, in the findings.

Dependability refers to reliability or the stability and dependability of data over a period of time (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I established dependability in this study by data triangulation, collecting data from participants in various departments throughout the organization. In addition, data were triangulated by participants having been employed at the organization for different lengths of time.

Ravitch and Carl (2021) defined confirmability as objectivity or data that are relatively neutral and all researcher biases and prejudices being acknowledged. I ensured

confirmability in this study by completing member checks of the clean data to ensure that the participants' experiences were captured.

Ethical Procedures

Although conducting research related to gamified onboarding programs is not particularly sensitive and unlikely to trigger participants, it is still important that I was prepared to handle any ethical concerns that may have occurred throughout the research process. Since this study was completed with participants from India, I ensured that I followed all applicable requirements.

After my research design was approved by the dissertation committee, I asked the prospective partner organization to formally commit to the study. Upon receiving ethical approval (#09-28-23-1040020) from Walden University's Institutional Review Board, I sought access to the participants via the partner organization. To ensure the confidentiality of the participants, I asked the partner organization for a listing of all current staff email addresses and emailed each prospective participant directly with an invitation to participate in this study, attaching a copy of the informed consent to the invitation (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In the invitation, participants were notified of their ability to cease their involvement in the research study at any time and were reminded of same on the informed consent form and at the time of the interview. In addition, I adhered to the American Psychological Association's (2017) code of ethics throughout all aspects of the study. The specific sections of the Code of Conduct most applicable to this study include Resolving Ethical Issues, Competence, Human Relations, Privacy and

Confidentiality, Record Keeping, and Research and Publication (see American Psychological Association, 2017).

To protect the confidentiality and privacy of all participants, I replaced each participant's name with a number (i.e., P1–P12) and did not discuss the names or identifiers of confirmed participants with the partner organization. Withholding participant identifiers from the partner organization ensured that the participants were not coerced into participating by the partner organization and curbed potential power relationships between the partner organization and participants. The partner organization will only receive a copy of the final study, not the raw data. All collected data were password protected, and any data that committee members received included numbers in place of actual names. All data will be destroyed after 5 years per Walden University dissertation guidelines.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided specific detail regarding how I completed a qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis study to understand the lived experiences of private sector staff with gamified onboarding programs. I outlined my role as a researcher and provided specifics regarding the methodology, including participants, instrumentation, and data analysis. Issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures were also reviewed.

In Chapter 4, I will provide the results of the study. The data collection process will be described, including the setting of the study and participant demographics. The data analysis process will also be discussed, including the codes, categories, and themes

that emerged. I will also present evidence of trustworthiness and offer answers to the research questions.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of private sector staff with gamified onboarding programs. I used an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach to examine how each participant made sense and interpreted their individual experiences. The following three research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of private sector staff with gamified onboarding programs?

RQ2: How do the lived experiences of private sector staff with gamified onboarding programs inform organizational commitment?

RQ3: How do the lived experiences of private sector staff with gamified onboarding programs inform job satisfaction?

In this chapter, I discuss the setting, participant demographics, data collection and analysis processes, and evidence of trustworthiness, The results are also presented along with a description of the six themes that emerged from the 12 individual, semistructured participant interviews.

Setting

I approached various organizations on LinkedIn who were actively providing a gamified onboarding program to clients to discuss the possibility of being a partner organization for this study and have that partner organization introduce me to those clients who were utilizing a gamified onboarding approach. An organization in India was not only providing gamified solutions to their clients, but they were also utilizing a

gamified onboarding program for their own employees. This organization agreed to be my partner organization and forwarded me their employees' work email addresses to contact their staff. I individually invited each employee to participate in the study via my Walden University student email address. I copied my contact at the partner organization on each initial email so each prospective participant could recognize the legitimacy of my request for their involvement in this study. The partner organization assisted with arranging the interviews, and each participant confirmed their consent prior to their interview.

Demographics

Each of the 12 participants were current full- or part-time staff members employed by the partner organization. Based on the size of the organization and to protect the identity of each participant, I did not gather demographics, such as gender, age, or length of service at the organization, for this study. That way, participants could freely share their experiences without fear of the organization being aware of which particular staff member was providing specific feedback. To ensure the confidentiality of interviewees, I assigned each participant a number (i.e., P1–P12).

Data Collection

I collected data from the 12 participants via semistructured interviews on Zoom conferencing software. Because each participant was located in India and I was located in Canada, none of the interviews were conducted face-to-face. To facilitate the calls before or after the participants' work hours in India Standard Time (+5:30 GMT), the time change resulted in the interviews being held either early morning or late evening in

Pacific Standard Time (-8:00 GMT). Ten of the participants provided their consent prior to the interview via email, and two participants provided verbal consent on the call before the interview commenced. None of the calls exceeded 30 minutes in length, and all interviews were held in English, with no translator or interpreter required. The audio data and transcripts were recorded directly by Zoom throughout the calls. The only deviation from data collection as intended was that the interviews were only audio recorded (rather than video recorded as well) due to the requirement from Walden University's Institutional Review Board. Prior to each interview, I disabled the video recording component by the participant and ensured my video function was off as well. No unusual circumstances were encountered throughout data collection.

Data Analysis

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed automatically by the Zoom platform. In addition, to ensure accuracy, I utilized TurboScribe as a secondary transcription tool, reviewing each transcript against the corresponding audio recording and cleaning each transcript. The transcript and a summary document were then forwarded to each participant for member checking. With such a large number of participants, I elected to analyze all data manually to understand the nuances of each participant's responses and immerse myself in the data. Throughout this stage, I followed Smith et al.'s (2022) seven-step process of data coding and analysis:

1. Reading and re-reading: I created an individual Microsoft Word document for each transcript and inserted a table that included columns for the transcript, observations from audio (Step 1), exploratory notes (Step 2), and experiential

statements (Step 3). I completed this initial step of reading the transcript while listening to the audio recording, noting reactions, such as emotion or reflection in the observations from audio column.

2. Exploratory noting: In the second step of analysis, I recorded anything of interest in the exploratory notes column and underlined any key words and excerpts of text that initially appeared to be important in the transcript column. After reading one participant's entire transcript, I then reviewed the underlined passages of that transcript and documented the importance of those passages in the exploratory notes column.
3. Constructing experiential statements: During the third step of analysis, I synthesized the underlined transcript passages, audio observations, and exploratory notes into succinct statements, reviewing the local data in each passage independently.
4. Searching for connections across experiential statements: In this fourth step, I created a Microsoft Excel workbook with a worksheet (i.e., tab) for each participant where I examined each individual experiential statement and determined a code for each particular type of statement. I then grouped similar codes and assigned colors for each code. This two-step process helped me identify primary and secondary categories for each experiential statement.
5. Naming the personal experiential themes: The fifth step of analysis included combining the clusters of experiential statements, determining the personal experiential themes, identifying a name of each personal experiential theme

and corresponding subthemes. Beneath each subtheme were the experiential statements that contributed to the personal experiential themes.

6. Continuing the individual analysis: In the sixth step of analysis, I continued Steps 1 through 5 for each subsequent interview until all 12 interviews were coded individually.
7. Developing group experiential themes: The final step of the data analysis process was broken down into four parts: In Part 1, each participant's personal experiential themes (color coded to identify themes and codes) were included in an individual column, so all participants were reflected on a single worksheet (i.e., tab). In Part 2, each personal experiential theme was sorted by color to identify codes across the data of all 12 participants. Part 3 of the seventh step consisted of adding the corresponding experiential statements and quotes from the participant to each personal experiential theme to identify further themes across the data. Part 4 was further refinement of the personal experiential themes to solidify the categories and themes from the data.

Throughout the data analysis process, I developed 67 codes that were distilled down to 17 categories and six overall themes. Table 1 displays a summary of the themes, categories, and a corresponding quote from a participant.

Table 1

Summary of Data Analysis Themes

Theme	Category	Sample quote
Behavioral drivers	Motivation Incentives	helps me to motivate myself to contribute myself for the company. If I earn that amount of points so I will participate in all of the activities conducted on the system. (P3)
Rewards system	Points Gifts Prizes Leaderboards	When I fill my time sheet every day I get points. So, when I come in on second day, I will get also 20 points. (P4)
Future considerations	Aspects to adjust Aspects to retain	the activities should also get updated as the time goes. However, there are some activities that may be old. But If you really enjoy those activities, then you should conduct those activities. (P1)
Organizational culture	Relationships Efficiency Fun Investment in employees	We do introduction of new employees, just to make them feel free and just like a family. (P6)
Awareness	Experience Familiarity	I have no idea how the gamification works, I just came to know these things when I came to the organization, I had never heard of it before. (P1)
Organizational commitment	Loyalty Engagement Connection	Yes, loyalty has impacted it to stay with the organization. They are so much interested in their employees. Like, they care about their employees and their hobbies. (P5)

Although some participants had very similar experiences with the organization's gamified onboarding program and other participants had unique experiences, I found no discrepant cases in this study.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, or validity, is an important aspect in qualitative research because it demonstrates the rigor and credibility of a study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Trustworthiness is displayed via four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility, similar to internal validity in quantitative research, is found when the researcher is able to recognize nuances in a study and patterns of data that are not immediately identifiable (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In this study, I established credibility by completing member checks and achieving data saturation. Transferability is similar to external validity in quantitative research or the ability to be applicable to situations outside the scope of the particular study while preserving the richness of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In the current study, transferability was achieved by obtaining thick descriptions and rich data from a heterogenous sample. Dependability focuses on the level of stability of the data and that the data match the researcher's argument, much like reliability in quantitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In this study, dependability was displayed by triangulation through gathering data from participants across the organization (rather than a single department) and who had been employed by the organization for varying lengths of time. Confirmability is similar to objectivity in quantitative studies; however, since qualitative research designs preclude objectivity, confirmability is achieved by researchers being relatively neutral and explicit

with their biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In this study, confirmability was evident by completing member checks to confirm the lived experiences were those of the participants and through curbing my researcher bias by checking my personal assumptions throughout the study.

Results

Six primary themes emerged from the data gathered from the 12 individual semistructured interviews: (a) behavioral drivers, (b) rewards system, (c) organizational culture, (d) awareness, (e) organizational commitment, and (f) future considerations. In the following subsections, I present the findings that informed the generation of these themes.

Theme 1: Behavioral Drivers

The theme of behavioral drivers was generated through the participants recalling experiences of the gamified onboarding program at the study site organization motivating them to complete tasks and arrive for their scheduled shifts earlier than required. P1 indicated that the points system was a significant motivator for them because “it motivates you to do your job on time, and if I don’t fill in my time sheet, I won’t get any points.” P11 had a similar experience, noting that “yeah, actually motivates because we get the points, so we have to fill on a time sheet on time and we have to submit on time so that we don’t miss the points.” P3 found that the gamified program was powerful enough to “impact me to participate in each and every task in the system.” In addition to being involved in every gamified online module, P3 noted that,

> The system generates the points for me as I have reached the office early. If I have worked more than the defined timeline, that will be also the reward point generated by the system. If I can fill my daily routine, the system generates the reward points for the same.

Similarly, P1 found that,

> If you do the activity, the benefits of gamification or the team engagement activities, learning and development it motivates you and increase the productivity of the of your work… motivate and check in on time… on leaderboard it motivates us to be on the top.

Though most of the participants indicated that they were motivated to change or maintain behaviors based on the organization's points system, two participants noted that a rewards system may not impact their level of motivation. When discussing the level of incentive a gift card provided to an employee, P5 was not convinced, stating that "it does matter, but it is not that much." Likewise, P12 indicated that the rewards system was not a motivator for them because they were already motivated to do a good job: "For me personally, it doesn't matter right now based on the points or not so I am working the way I'm working so kind of not motivated enough." P12 also offered a caution that if employees are going to be rewarded for clocking in to work, that the system must work seamlessly from every location because "there is a demotivation when you punch in from [a different location], you don't get your points actually."

Theme 2: Rewards System

The second theme that arose from the data was related to the rewards system component of the gamified onboarding program at the organization. Between the points employees can earn and subsequently spend on gift cards or items branded with the company's logo, alongside gifts and prizes the organization provided new employees, the participants enjoyed the rewards system. P7 was thrilled that the organization would offer prizes to new employees, stating that the "prizes we get on the onboarding process… that was really a joyful moment."

Participants noted that points are plentiful, and that there are a variety of prizes available to staff. P5 was astonished with the volume of points available to earn: "in one month, I can receive, you know, three [gift] cards." P6 asserted that points for gift cards are not the only prize option: "HR added some other products in that shop, like water bottle, gas, bags, we can redeem that also." In addition, P6 noted that prizes were available to more than one employee who was successful on a task: "at my time, there was two prizes, first prize and second prize." Finally, P6 drew a correlation between the frequency of earning points and the impact to organizational commitment: "in seven to eight months, we are having enough points to purchase something from the store so employees will get motivations to stay or work here."

Participants found that reward points were structured in multiple ways. P3 stated that employees on their first days on the job can receive more points than new employees who have been in the office for a few weeks, "as a new employee, sometimes they will earn 500 points or 600 points." P8 noted that earning points was not a completely linear

process, “if you are entering the office, then it's giving you a few of the points, like, and there are also surprise points. In few of the days, you get a surprise point.” In addition, P8 recognized that timeliness of documenting the completion of tasks was an important facet of earning points: “if you forget about submitting the tasks yesterday, the points are only going to current tasks.”

Two participants indicated that leaderboards are part of the organization’s gamified onboarding approach. The organization recognizes who is ranked the highest in production or speed or task completion, and this ranking system subsequently impacts the employees’ ability to generate points. P4 noted that “we also received rankings of individuals, showing who is the first ranked.” P8 stated that “if you are on the top, they sometimes give a higher points.”

Theme 3: Organizational Culture

The participants had a good grasp of the components of organizational culture, speaking at length about how the onboarding process impacts how an organization is perceived by new employees, and how that perception could impact an employee’s desire to remain with an organization. P10 provided an impassioned description of how an onboarding program affects new staff:

> It's the first impression of the organization and the first day of the new employee. So, it's important to plan and organize onboarding and it's the gateway to get to know the organization's policies, work environment, and coworkers. New joinees also can understand how the employees are appreciated. They will also feel free that he's an asset for the organization.

P12 had a similar perspective that a successful onboarding program can enable new employees to feel encouraged about their choice to work for a particular employer:

> The onboarding process most gives a view that the company is in a good future in a futuristic way developing way, so it gives a positive vibe for the employees and that they are in a good environment or a good working environment.

All participants found that this organization has a positive, strong organizational culture. It was apparent that these employees wanted to stay with this organization because staff have an enjoyable experience at their workplace, the onboarding program is efficient, the connections that employees make with their colleagues transcend past their working hours, and this organization functions differently than other companies these employees have worked for. P4 offered an overarching statement about the gamified onboarding program at this company that was echoed by many of their colleagues: “I'm enjoying it… it's interesting.” Participants noted their satisfaction with how the specific gamified onboarding components help develop employees into a cohesive unit. P2 articulated “it helps us in building team purpose, where the whole team is involved in playing the game.”

Participants have found that this positive organizational culture has transcended working hours. P9 stated that,

> The way they treat gamification also is so easy, so entertainment, like we love to do, we love to earn points. We compete with each other like when we have lunch or something, which is not included in our gamification points.

In addition to the overall enjoyment the participants had with the organization's gamified onboarding program, the employees discussed how this organization's onboarding processes are efficient. When describing the digital onboarding process at this organization, P10 asserted "there is no paperwork. They directly do all the process online. When I joined, they take my documents online. So, they can directly onboard me on the [human resources management system]. They have the fully automated process." When I explored this idea of the simplicity of the onboarding program, P10 continued, stating "there is no hectic process. If any new employee can join, everyone can do their own onboarding process on their own. This is totally smooth." The reaction from the participants when discussing the digital onboarding program was of relief and slight astonishment, as some participants had not had an easy onboarding experience before.

Further to the idea that the onboarding program was easy to participate in, the interviewees spoke specifically about how different this experience was compared to other organizations. Participants were quick to note how the organization wants their employees to feel at ease, and that a flat organizational structure reinforces this culture of acceptance. P1 stated that from the first day of employment, "the organization wants to make you feel comfortable and make you feel more energetic." P5 continued, offering that the organization wants to "make [you] feel comfortable or feel some friendly environment. It motivates you to work much better in the organization." The difference between the experiences of these employees at their current workplace versus previous organizations was palpable. P1 noted the connection between management and their staff, offering "if some new member enters in our organization, they cannot identify, because

they also sit with us here. You cannot differentiate." Similarly, P6 was thrilled with how the senior staff interact with other employees:

> In other companies, our senior staff were not so helpful, but in [this organization], they are very helpful. Here we all are as a family and we follow a flat structure. If we want any help, they are always there to help. We all work as a family and we are associated in one working area only. There is no separate areas for managers. In other companies, I don't think there is much fun activities while we are onboarding. Here, we introduce new members to our team and also to the other teams and we take games so that they feel comfortable on their first day and they feel like a family here. So it makes [this organization] different.

Theme 4: Awareness

Ninety-two percent (11 of 12) participants had never heard the term gamification before working at this organization. Participants were quick to note their good fortune for working at an organization where games and friendly competitions were the norm. The interviewees seemed surprised that completing routine required tasks such as submitting timesheets or finishing their work on time could earn them points to spend on branded clothing and supplies or gift cards for businesses they already shop at. Like many participants, gamification was a foreign concept for P2: " I don't know anything about gamification from previous companies." P12 added that this onboarding process was unique: "the previous company, just a formal introduction was there so there was nothing like the online system or the points where can I can redeem so this was entirely a new thing for me." Similarly for P11, their prior onboarding experiences were quite different

from this gamified approach: “I worked in one more company, there was nothing like this, the introduction and all, the gamification is not there in previous company.” One participant indicated that since this was the first business they had worked for, all concepts of organizational behavior was new to them. P9 noted “I didn't know anything about corporate or anything about gamification. I didn't know about human resources. Everything, whatever I know, I have learned from here itself.”

In this study, there was one nonconforming case where a participant had previously experienced gamification. Though this was the employee’s first time participating in gamified systems at a workplace, gamification was a regular component of their post-secondary studies. P8 noted that “I can say for my college life, there was a lot of gamification.” It was an interesting dichotomy to listen to 11 participants speak at length about what a foreign concept gamification was, and then to hear from a single participant how gamification was such an integral part of their education.

Theme 5: Organizational Commitment

Understanding participants’ levels of organizational commitment is central to this study, as it is the focus of one of the research questions. Similar to these employees’ assertions that this organization promotes a positive culture, the participants were clear that their level of commitment to this organization is high. P7 noted that a gamified approach increases the degree to which employees will be committed to the organization: “Yes, absolutely. It increased the employee engagement in [this organization].” P1 echoed this sentiment, stating “if you get a positive, friendly environment during the

onboarding process for sure will help you to stay here for a longer period of time." P6 drew the comparison of this organization to other workplaces, noting that:

> If we check in before 10:30, then we get 20 points. That helps us to stay for long. In other organizations, there is no concept of points from checking-in. Another benefit is when we are coming early, so we are getting points, right? So, it helps us to stay here for long.

Though 83% of the participants (10 of 12) were very clear on their feelings that this organization's use of a gamified approach had positively impacted their levels of organizational commitment, two participants had a different perspective from the others. One participant indicated that they had a difficult time measuring their current level of organizational commitment, as this is their first place of employment. P9 asserted that "loyalty to this company, I can't even explain the words because it's my first job." During the interview, the participant did not hesitate to provide a clear explanation that they were not equipped to measure organizational commitment since they had no other workplace to compare with their current experience.

One participant indicated that in their experience, rewards do not drive organizational commitment. P12 stated "I don't understand the connection between the loyalty of the onboard gamification. It's actually it's the personal thing and how the management treats the employee depends upon the loyalty of the employee." As I probed this participant to provide clarity on their response, the interviewee confirmed that an employee's degree of loyalty to an organization is contingent on how their individual supervisors treat them, rather than a technique such as gamification.

Theme 6: Future Considerations

The final theme that emerged from the data was future considerations – aspects of the gamified onboarding program for the organization to retain as they have been delivered thus far, and components for the organization to explore adjusting in the future. Though some participants offered suggestions on areas to consider expanding or altering in future iterations of this organization's gamified onboarding program, all participants indicated that nothing drastic needed to be changed. In reference to the gamified program at this organization compared to their previous workplace, P11 noted "I think gamification is, currently which we have is far better, I guess. We don't, like as for my knowledge, I don't think I have to change anything in this process."

P5 offered a suggestion of retaining aspects that are working well while incorporating fresh ideas: "the activity should also get updated as the time goes. There are some activities, maybe old, but if you are really interested in those activities, they should conduct the same activities. So, you should not stop doing those things." Similarly, P1 noted that the organization should continue offering components of the gamified onboarding program that are successful to ensure strong commitment among the employees: "if you keep doing such things on a weekly or not weekly on a monthly basis, it will really help to increase the bond between the team."

Two interviewees referenced two unique aspects of the organization to consider for future versions of the gamified onboarding program. P2 noted that "I would like to see more productivity games to be incorporated with gamification. It will be played in a real environment like that." This participant discussed the possibility of including specific

modules on output and production as part of the onboarding program, focusing on realistic situations the employees may come across throughout their tenure in the organization. P6 suggested that the duration of the onboarding program be expanded: "staff will feel more comfortable if the onboarding is extended into 2 days and more games are added." Though this study deliberately omitted a specific length of time when defining onboarding, the participant was referencing the orientation period, or first few days of the onboarding process.

Summary

In Chapter 4, I outlined the setting, participant demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness and results of this qualitative study. The data derived from the 12 individual semistructured interviews supported six themes: (a) behavioral drivers, (b) rewards system, (c) organizational culture, (d) awareness, (e) organizational commitment, and (f) future considerations. Based on participant responses and these overarching themes, the answers to the three research questions can be summarized accordingly.

The lived experiences of these participants with gamified onboarding programs have been quite positive. Though the concepts of gamification and gamified onboarding programs were new to almost all participants, the interviewees identified how the organization's gamified onboarding program motivated them to arrive early to work and complete the duties of their jobs. The points, gifts and rewards received by the participants were generally well-received, and there are a variety of opportunities and formats to earn rewards at the organization. Participants shared suggestions on how to

refine the onboarding program for future employees while retaining effective components of the existing system.

The participants spoke definitively about the positive organizational culture the employer fostered at this business, and many participants asserted that the gamified onboarding program contributed to how committed they were to remain at this organization. The interviewees referenced a high degree of loyalty to the organization, generated when the organization engages its people and communicates well, and when employees feel well-connected to their colleagues and supervisors. Based on exposure to other organizations or personal feelings, not all participants indicated that there was a direct link from gamified onboarding programs to organizational commitment.

Similar to the participants' description of the positive organizational culture impacting their sense of commitment to the organization, the interviewees spoke about how the gamified onboarding program contributed to their enjoyment at work. The current onboarding program is efficient and demonstrates how the organization invests in its staff. Moreover, the participants referenced how the organization integrates fun into the workplace, and that the positive interactions among employees transcend work time into their personal lives and break times. Participants did not confirm how the gamified onboarding program directly impacts the day-to-day work in their specific roles.

In Chapter 5, I list my interpretation of the findings of this study, limitations of this study, and my recommendations for future research and implications of this study on social change and on practice in industry.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of private sector staff when gamification is integrated into onboarding processes. I utilized an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach in this study to examine how individuals made sense of and interpreted their personal experiences (see Smith et al., 2022). In this study, I endeavored to understand how those lived experiences informed employees' levels of organizational commitment with their current employer and job satisfaction in their current role.

Key findings of this study indicated that almost all the participants were unfamiliar with gamification and gamified onboarding programs prior to their employment at this organization. Although the concepts of gamification were new to most of the participants of this study, the participants had a positive experience with the employer's gamified onboarding program. The gamified onboarding processes were motivating to the employees, demonstrated by employees checking in earlier than required for their work shifts and completing tasks on time. Participants confirmed that there were multiple avenues to earn rewards at the organization, and these rewards took the form of items branded with the organization's logo or points that could be exchanged for gift cards.

Participants in this study indicated that the study site organization fosters a strong, positive culture with all staff. This environment is present at the outset of employee's tenure at the organization, and this culture reinforces the desire for employees to remain with the organization. The participants confirmed that there is a high degree of loyalty to

this employer, and the fun, engaging experience employees have at this organization improves levels of job satisfaction among staff. In this chapter, I provide my interpretation of the findings as well as discuss the limitations to trustworthiness that arose from this study, my recommendations for further research in this area of study, the potential impact to social change, and my recommendations for practice in industry.

Interpretation of the Findings

Connections to the Literature

The findings of this study have confirmed, disconfirmed, and extended knowledge from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Vivek and Nanthagopan (2020) indicated that motivation and fun (key aspects of gamification) to be very effective. The current study findings confirm that assertion because P9 noted "in our first week of, first Friday of a month, we have a game day, like fun day, fun Friday." When speaking to the gamified environment at their workplace, P11 asserted that "these are the fun activities we perform every month, every week." Similarly, P3 referenced these components in the organization's reward structure: "The company gives us the other types like a fun activity and other things as a reward." Richards (2021) also referenced motivation, positing that gamified learning environments positively impact knowledge, motivation, and engagement. The current study confirmed an increase in both employee motivation and engagement, with P6 recognizing that "in other organizations, there is no concept of points for checking-in." P2 noted that "if I stay in other places, there is no gamification in simple terms. So, it's like less engaging for them."

Bashir and Gani (2020) suggested that future studies should explore the impact of organizational culture on job satisfaction and organizational commitment. As found in the current study, both organizational commitment and job satisfaction were positively impacted by a positive organizational culture. Ērgle and Ludviga (2018) cautioned that gamification might be a fad and that it may not be beneficial for organizations to consider adopting a gamified approach. The current study refutes the idea that gamification is a fad because participants spoke about how the organizational culture has lasted after the onboarding period. Similarly, Warmelink et al. (2020) indicated that gamification could possibly be coercive and exploitative, so organizations must be careful before implementing a gamified approach. The current study results challenge that position because the culture of celebrating a variety of milestones and holidays with individuals and groups has not been seen as coercive by these participants. Hammedi et al. (2021) cautioned that the levels of engagement and well-being of employees were negatively impacted when gamification was implemented. The current study disconfirms that idea because none of the participants indicated that their well-being or engagement with the organization was impacted poorly. In fact, similar to Spagnoli's (2020) finding that employees were more likely to stay employed at an organization and an increase in job satisfaction if an employee is comfortable in their work environment, the participants of the current study confirmed that they felt higher degrees of job satisfaction and were more likely to stay at this organization based on the gamified onboarding program. Girdauskiene et al. (2022) found that 26.6% of their participants' levels of organizational commitment did not increase with a gamified approach. The current study disconfirms

that finding because only 17% of participants found that their levels of organizational commitment did not improve with gamification.

Thongmak (2021) studied gamification through the lens of SDT and found that the learning opportunities the organization provided impacted the employees' intentions of lifelong learning. The current study confirmed the positive outcome of the organization investing in its people, with P3 noting, "the company purchases the courses for us for our better future." van Roy and Zaman (2019) suggested that future studies take a bottom-up approach to understanding contextual impacts of gamification, and the current study advanced this concept because front-line employees were participants in the study.

Hills (2022) indicated that comprehensive onboarding programs are an ongoing experience that includes organizational onboarding (i.e., payroll and benefits paperwork), technical onboarding (i.e., what an employee is responsible for), and social onboarding (i.e., feeling like a team of people). The current study confirmed this knowledge by including two of these three aspects. The organizational onboarding aspect was evident to P5 who stated, "when we submit the time sheet, we get the points" and P9 who shared, "we enter timesheet, they upload points." P1 confirmed social onboarding, noting that "we have these team activities every Friday… once in a month or in 15 days, we have an employee engagement activities." Regarding social onboarding, implementing gamified onboarding programs has been found to offer employees the opportunity to integrate into an organization with less fear of fitting in with their colleagues or performing poorly (Hills, 2022). The current study confirmed this finding, with P1 stating that the current

environment “literally makes you feel that you are a part of this company, and you are a family.”

Connections to the Conceptual Framework

Deci and Ryan’s (1985) SDT is centered around autonomy (i.e., personal control), competence (i.e., mastery of tasks), and relatedness (i.e., connection to others). More specifically, when an individual attains each of these three components, they flourish. The results from the current study display some alignment with the three aspects of SDT. In this study, autonomy was evident when employees had control over earning reward points while checking in and out from work, submitting their timesheets, and completing their tasks on time. P2 reinforced the idea of autonomy when stating that, “If an organization adopts onboarding with a gamification, it will be more easy for employees to be on the track and control their work.” Competence, the second pillar of SDT, was demonstrated when participants referred to the leaderboard outlining which employees were outperforming their colleagues and the opportunity to prove they have a strong handle on their work tasks. P3 asserted that, “I have to measure or decide what things to be done for the day when I’m scheduling me.” Finally, relatedness was evident in this study when the participants noted how connection among employees transcended work tasks and the flat organizational structure promoted strong relationships between supervisors and their staff. Referencing continuing gamified activities, P1 stated that “if you keep doing such things on a weekly or not weekly on a monthly basis, it will really help to increase the bond between the team.” P4 confirmed the connections with their colleagues by saying, “in onboarding, involvement with other teammates, friendly

behaviour." P7 found the interactions during onboarding positive: "the strong and good conversation has been done in [this organization] and very joyful and good conversation." P1 enjoyed the link between supervisors and their staff, asserting that, "if some new member enters in our organization, they cannot identify, because they also sit with us here. You cannot differentiate."

Limitations of the Study

As outlined in Chapter 1, the interview questions focused specifically on the onboarding program rather than any rewards after completion of the onboarding program. However, since the reward system continued after the onboarding program, I could not determine if the ongoing rewards influenced the employees' levels of organizational commitment or job satisfaction. Building rapport was a challenge because I was only permitted to record the audio of each interview, so participants could not see me during their interviews. I kept the simplest questions at the outset of the interview and left the most involved questions to the end to try and relieve pressure from the interviewees. The interview questions were also fairly standard and noninvasive to keep the interviews as accessible as possible to the participants.

I defined gamification prior to commencing each interview so participants were aware of how I was referring to gamification throughout the study. I also ensured the interview questions were not leading in nature and kept them open ended and neutral so participants could freely answer with their individual experiences rather than affirming my personal experiences with gamification. All participants were emailed their corresponding transcripts to complete member checking to ensure that all data captured

were solely from the participants. A final limitation was that in at least one instance, the way a participant phrased an answer implied that they were speaking about their client's experience with gamification rather than their own personal experience.

Recommendations

Recommendations Based on Findings

I have developed several recommendations for further research based on the findings of this study. With some participants indicating that this organization is their first employer, it would be interesting for future research to explore the experiences with gamified onboarding programs for first-time employees versus long-term staff because those new staff do not have other organizations to utilize as comparators. Another future study could explore whether the delivery method of the gamified onboarding program impacts the level of engagement. For instance, such a study could focus on whether participants have different experiences earning points on a phone application versus personal computer software or determining whether employees are strictly focused on earning points and if they have a preference related to delivery model. Additional research could also explore the opportunity to earn reward points in a gamified onboarding program. For instance, a researcher could explore whether levels of job satisfaction or organizational commitment are impacted if only the first five staff earn points for submitting daily time sheets and the rest of the staff earn zero points. Other research topics could be determining if implementing points thresholds provides an additional motivator or incentive to staff or if this approach would de-motivate staff to enter their timesheets promptly.

Finally, exploring gamified onboarding programs across geographic locations is a recommended area of future research based on this study. Researchers could examine how different cultures in specific countries or continents might impact how engaged employees are with gamified onboarding programs. Another topic could be establishing what the preferred reward systems, prizes, and gifts are and whether they are similar or different across locations.

Recommendations Based on Literature

Five prospective areas of study resulted from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Majuri et al. (2018) suggested that future research could explore different demographics and learning styles. Though the participants of the current study included varied demographics, a deeper exploration into demographics and learning styles would be appropriate. Previous researchers have found that impactful onboarding programs can positively affect employees' levels of organizational commitment (Cooper-Thomas et al., 2020; Girdauskiene et al., 2022; Semenza et al., 2021). Organizational commitment continues to be an underexplored area of study in the field of gamification. Çamveren et al. (2022) noted that levels of job satisfaction were maintained after onboarding programs were complete. Future researchers could conduct a longitudinal study of employees' levels of job satisfaction over time and multiple organizations. Finally, Ponis et al. (2020) suggested future research regarding the rationale of the types of reward systems that an organization includes in their gamified programs. Prospective studies could explore whether the type of reward matters to employees (e.g., gift cards versus cash) and corresponding thresholds (e.g., determining whether the value of the prize matters).

Implications for Social Change

Although prior research has studied a variety of aspects of gamification, I conducted the first study to integrate an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach. By understanding how organizations use a gamified approach, the results of this study contribute to making a difference at private, nonprofit, and government organizations alike by helping inform organizations on how to develop more effective onboarding programs. Enjoyable onboarding programs can improve levels of organizational commitment, reducing staff replacement costs due to a decrease in employee turnover (Adams et al., 2019). I found that organizations which integrate a gamified approach to their onboarding programs foster employee enjoyment at work. This enjoyment may improve employee engagement within employees' individual roles and throughout their organization (Santhanam & Srinivas, 2020). These results could impact social change at organizations of varying sizes and locations.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of staff in the private sector with gamified onboarding processes. In this study, I conducted semistructured interviews to understand how those lived experiences informed each employee's levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment in their current organization. My primary assumption throughout this study was that participants would offer honest answers regarding their experience with the partner organization's onboarding program.

As I conducted the interviews individually with each participant, I was the sole researcher and observer for this study. My first interaction with each participant was

when scheduling interviews for this study; I did not have an existing relationship with any of the participants or the partner organization prior to this study. I did not exercise any power over the participants or attempt to coerce them into participating in the study. Although the subject matter of this study was quite positive and nonintrusive, the risk that the interviewees took when participating in this study was offering insight into the culture of the organization, including loyalty, job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Participants providing their informed consent was important so each interviewee could review the themes of the prospective questions prior to making a commitment to participate. In order to minimize researcher bias throughout this study, I ensured that the questions were open-ended and not leading in nature, and I engaged in bracketing prior to commencing data analysis.

During this study, participants provided their answers to the interview questions orally via conferencing software; all data gathered were password protected. I did not share the raw data with anyone; I forwarded the clean verbatim transcripts to each participant to confirm accuracy and included a summary document for each participant to complete member checking. Participants provided minor changes or no changes to any of the transcripts and member checks. A drawback of this study was that I was not permitted by Walden University to video record any of the interviews. Though participants seemed forward and open with their responses, I was unable to document any non-verbal or visual cues and feedback from participants.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of private sector staff with gamified onboarding programs, and how those lived experiences informed individuals' levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. This study was the first to integrate an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach and included 12 semistructured interviews with staff from the information technology sector in India. The data gathered from this study produced 67 codes, which were distilled down to 17 categories and six overall themes: (a) behavioral drivers, (b) rewards system, (c) organizational culture, (d) awareness, (e) organizational commitment, and (f) future considerations. Participants indicated that their lived experiences were quite positive, and though a variety of suggestions for future consideration were offered, no significant adjustments to the existing gamified onboarding program were required. Employees at this organization expressed that by gamifying the onboarding program, their individual levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction were positively impacted. By understanding the positive power of integrating games into their workplaces, organizations can provide similar stellar experiences to their current and future staff alike.

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Appendix A: Detailed Search Terms

Search Terms (Limited to peer-reviewed, 2018 – 2023)	Unique Results			
	Thoreau	Google Scholar	ABI/INFORM Collection	ProQuest Central
Gamification and phenomenology or phenomenological or lived experience and onboarding or orientation or training	0	0	0	0
gamification or game based learning or gamify AND qualitative research or qualitative study or qualitative methods or interview NOT student or students AND onboarding or orientation	11	0	0	0
gamification or game based learning or gamify AND onboarding or orientation NOT student NOT school NOT learn* AND staff or employee or personnel or worker	13	0	0	0
empirical or quantitative or qualitative or research or study or experiment and gamification and onboarding	2	0	0	0
gamification AND onboarding or orientation NOT training NOT school or classroom or education AND employee	3	0	0	0
gamification AND self determination theory AND employee	8	1	0	0
gamification AND critique or criticism NOT classroom NOT student AND employee	1	0	0	0
gamification AND employee AND trouble or difficulty or concern	13	4	0	0
gamification AND disadvantag* AND employee or worker or staff or personnel	1	6	0	2
gamification AND ethic* NOT education NOT student* AND employee or worker or staff or personnel	6	0	2	3

understanding gamification NOT student AND employee or worker or staff or personnel	8	4	0	0
gamification AND job satisfaction	16	3	0	0
job satisfaction AND onboarding or "organizational socialization" AND organizational commitment	12	0	0	0
Search Terms (Limited to peer-reviewed, 2018 – 2023)	Unique Results			
	Thoreau	Google Scholar	ABI/INFORM Collection	ProQuest Central
gamification AND business or company or organization or corporation AND orientation or onboarding NOT class or school	13	4	0	0
gamification AND organizational commitment		4	0	0
gamification AND self-determination theory NOT education or school or teaching or classroom AND employee	4	8	0	0
job satisfaction AND "organizational commitment" AND self-determination theory	20	0	0	0
New employee onboarding OR "organizational socialization" AND "job satisfaction" AND "organizational commitment"	63	0	0	0

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Please describe the onboarding program you participated in at this organization.
2. In what ways has your employer incorporated games into your onboarding program?
3. If rewards were part of your onboarding process, please describe them.
4. *(If rewards were not part of the onboarding process)* What sort of rewards might improve the onboarding process?
5. In what ways is the onboarding program at this organization different than at other places where you have worked?
6. What was your familiarity with gamification before this organization?
7. What aspects of this onboarding program would you like to stay the same in the future?
8. What aspects of this onboarding program would you like to see change in the future?
9. How has this onboarding program impacted your loyalty to stay with this organization?
10. How has this onboarding program impacted how much you enjoy your job?
11. How has this onboarding program affected your day-to-day job functions?
12. How has this onboarding program motivated you in your job?
13. Tell me about how the rewards you received during the onboarding process impacted how much you want to stay with this organization.

Appendix C: Alignment of Interview Questions With Research Questions

Interview Question	Research Question it Informs
Please describe the onboarding program you participated in at this organization.	RQ1 - Lived Experience
In what ways has your employer incorporated games into your onboarding program?	RQ1 - Lived Experience
If rewards were part of your onboarding process, please describe them.	RQ1 - Lived Experience
(If rewards were not part of the onboarding process) What sort of rewards might improve the onboarding process?	RQ1 - Lived Experience
In what ways is the onboarding program at this organization different than at other places you have worked?	RQ1 - Lived Experience
What was your familiarity with gamification before this organization?	RQ1 - Lived Experience
What aspects of this onboarding program would you like to stay the same in the future?	RQ1 - Lived Experience
What aspects of this onboarding program would you like to see change in the future?	RQ1 - Lived Experience
How has this onboarding program impacted your loyalty to stay with this organization?	RQ2 - Organizational Commitment
How has this onboarding program impacted how much you enjoy your job?	RQ3 - Job Satisfaction
How has this onboarding program affected your day-to-day job functions?	RQ3 - Job Satisfaction
How has this onboarding program motivated you in your job?	RQ3 - Job Satisfaction
Tell me about how the rewards you received during the onboarding process impacted how much you want to stay with this organization.	RQ2 - Organizational Commitment