

Impact of Games on the Performance and Engagement of Employees of the IT Industry

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ABSTRACT

The present study analyzes the impact of video games on productivity at a workplace. A lot of organizations have introduced games during break times of employees. Indoor video game parlors have been created at company sites. Games are said to relieve stress and enthuse fun at the workplace resulting in a happy environment. The authors were interested in understanding employees' feelings after playing these games and their views about these games. They have targeted employees of multinational IT companies asking them in detail about these gaming sessions and their opinions about them. Findings from the data indicate that employees feel more competent and enthusiastic towards their work after playing these online games. These results will definitely help the organizations in developing a strategy for incorporating these games during break-time of employees and leveraging the benefits of games to enhance employee performance and engagement at work.

KEYWORDS

Break, Company, Monotony, Video/Online Games, Work Performance

INTRODUCTION

Advent of internet in the 1980s and invention of personal computers gave rise to the huge industry of electronic entertainment. The first ever created computer game is Pong which was created in 1970s. This led to the popularity of online games and slowly these games found their way at workplaces too (Chikhani, 2015). The obvious reason being, employees like to have fun at workplace to remove their boredom. However, it is worth noting that the concept of employees playing online games during work hours was generally disliked by management, as it was perceived as a potential waste of valuable work time and a detriment to productivity.

There are many evidences to suggest that games stimulate thinking and help in development of social relations. Games keep mind active and attentive while helping people relax. CRM, sales and IT professionals particularly require this as they have to keep their mind active (helping calls) even

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when they are not working (waiting for calls). Professions where the job is monotonous and boring like research, data processing can benefit a lot from introduction of gaming (Sonnentag, 2018).

Employees spend long hours (on an average 8.5 hours a day) at workplace. For some employees working in sectors like IT there is no boundary between work and life. There is no count of the time they spend in office. Work from home during COVID has still led to blurring of these boundaries. Use of mobiles, tablets and laptops further shrank the world. It has changed the way business was done. People carry their work along with them in the form of mobiles and laptops, making work seamless. Internet on mobiles allowed download of many applications. It also paved the way for online games. Continuous work without any break brings tiredness and therefore, employees played games to remove that lethargy (Balci & Aghazadeh, 2004). It not just breaks monotony but also develops competence by bringing a spirit of competitiveness amongst employees (Rupp et al., 2017). Earlier companies were not in favor of employees investing their time in online games as these were believed to distract them from work. However, the positive impact of games on employees' performance has changed this mindset now (Miller, 2005). Introduction of games at workplaces has helped employees' work/life balance, keep a healthy mind and boost performance (Granic et al., 2014). Leveraging on the advantages of games, companies have eventually started utilizing games for training employees in acquiring wide range of skills from cooperation to complex instructions. Games whether played as a pass-time or in a structured way, tickle employees' minds making them learn something new always. Eventually, making employees more creative and competitive. This has removed the age old conflict between work and play. Elimination of this contradiction has led to gamification of lot of processes at workplace. Gamification is the "term for the phenomena of employing game features or mechanics in non-game circumstances." (Boitnott, 2021)

Companies struggle to keep their employees engaged and productive at workplace. Therefore, they try to strike a balance between playing games and work so as to make the staff interested, motivated and healthy without compromising on productivity (Anastasia & Chaplin, 2005). With no restriction on internet it's impossible to stop employees from playing games. Some companies monitor and restrict the use of certain websites on official computers, however, smartphones have changed that too. It's important therefore for the companies to know the amount of time that employees should be allowed to take breaks.

There are many studies that point out the adverse impact of video/online games. Researches also show the positive impact these can have on health of a person. Online games also improve problem-solving skills of an employee (Keith et al., 2018). Organizations can't allow employees to engage in online games during work hours all the time (Lu & Carradini, 2020). However, looking into the benefits of gaming, employees should be allowed to take breaks and play online games (Granic et al., 2014). The present study delves into video games played during break-times by employees and its impact on their performance (Balci & Aghazadeh, 2004).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Several studies have discussed about impact of online games on employees' performance and engagement. Some studies point towards increased productivity, performance and team collaboration among employees after playing online games at workplace whereas some point towards negative impact of these games on employees e.g. fatigue, distraction from work etc.

There are several elements in a game like an element of competence, a sensory and imaginative immersion, a flow, a level of tension or annoyance, a challenge, a positive and negative affect which a player experiences while playing the game. The aim of this study is to know the impact of each of these elements on the performance of employees. Some of the objectives of study are given below:

1. To know the relationship between competence element in video games and employee performance.
2. To understand how the sensory and imaginative immersion in gaming impact employees' performance.

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