



# Chapter 12

## Next-Gen Learning: Gamification Strategies for Engaging Diverse Workforces and Advancing DEI

**Hazel Gruenewald**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2044-3696>  
*Reutlingen University, Germany*

**Lena Riha**

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1018-363X>  
*Reutlingen University, Germany*

### ABSTRACT

*Despite widespread efforts, traditional Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training often falls short of driving meaningful change. This chapter explores how gamification can improve DEI initiatives by integrating features like interactivity, feedback loops, and tailored challenges into workplace learning. A transformative tool, gamification offers engaging and scalable learning experiences. However, its success hinges on thoughtful contextual design, leadership commitment, and measurable outcomes. Building on Meiman et al.'s (2019) framework, which integrates Universal Design for Learning (UDL), growth mindset, and design thinking, this chapter provides insights for designing gamified training that advance DEI. UDL ensures accessibility through multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression, while a growth mindset fosters continuous learning. Design thinking prioritizes user experience. The chapter draws on research and practical examples to illustrate how gamification can create equitable learning environments and outlines strategies for effective implementation.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving work environment, the demand for effective workplace learning has skyrocketed as industries grapple with pervasive skills shortages driven by factors like climate change, digitalization, artificial intelligence, and demographic shifts (Li, 2022; Müller & Gruenewald, 2024; World Economic Forum, 2020). These challenges have prompted a significant push for upskilling and reskilling initiatives to help employees continuously adapt to new technological, economic, and social developments (Autor et al., 2022; Bersin, 2022; Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2018; Krath et al. 2021; Müller & Gruenewald, 2024; World Economic Forum, 2020). At the same time, organizations face mounting pressure to ensure that their learning strategies not only meet these challenges but also embody the tenets of **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)**.<sup>1</sup>

This situation presents learning and development (L&D) professionals with a complex dual mandate. Rather than treating DEI as a separate initiative, there is a growing call to integrate DEI principles into the design, delivery, and accessibility of broader training frameworks. This requires that learning programs provide marginalized employees with equal opportunities for development and success, on par with their peers. As DEI becomes a cornerstone of sustainable organizational growth, it is essential that training programs are not only inclusive and equitable but also actively respond to the diverse needs of participants (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018, 2022; Roberson et al., 2020; Vardeman, 2024; Zheng, 2022). In addition, there is increasing momentum to align training efforts more closely with overarching DEI initiatives and to rigorously measure their true impact in driving meaningful and enduring change (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018; Paluck et al., 2021; Roberson et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022).

Still, significant challenges persist, particularly in the realm of DEI training. Pamela Newkirk (2019), in her book *Diversity, Inc: The Failed Promise of a Billion-Dollar Business*, argues that despite the widespread implementation of DEI training programs, they often fall short of achieving their intended objectives and have minimal impact on creating lasting workplace transformation—an argument supported by numerous researchers (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Dobbin & Kalev, 2018, 2022; Kulik & Roberson, 2008; Nathoo, 2021; Paluck & Green, 2009; Paluck et al., 2021; Read, 2021; Roberson et al., 2020; Zheng, 2022).

The challenges with DEI training have been further compounded by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced many organizations to shift to online training. Although digital solutions offer timely, flexible, and scalable options for reaching large numbers of learners across various devices, they also introduce new complexities. L&D professionals now face the added difficulty of delivering effective online training that resonates with employees who are geographically dispersed and

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