

Gamified Career Paths: The Talent Tree as a Model for Human Resource Development

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Abstract

This paper introduces a talent tree model from gaming to human resource development, advocating for a gamified approach to professional growth. The model emphasizes scalable career progression, enhances employee engagement, and addresses ethical challenges in gamification. We explore the application of this model in HR practices, demonstrating its potential to modernize employee development and align work with evolving digital competencies. This paper highlights the benefits and obstacles of adopting game-based models for career development, suggesting that such integration can transform traditional talent management into a more dynamic and interactive process.

Keywords: Talent Tree, Human Resource Development, Career Paths, Gameful Learning, Skill Transferability

1. Introduction

In an era marked by unprecedented digital transformation, the rapid evolution of technology has not only reshaped our communicative and work practices but has also necessitated a paradigmatic shift in approaches to skills development and talent management (Tsekeris, 2019). The burgeoning field of video games, evolving beyond its origins as a niche entertainment medium, has emerged at the forefront of this transformation (Taylor, 2012), offering novel insights into the cultivation of competencies that are increasingly valorized in the digital workplace (Bübecker et al., 2024). Traditional human resource (HR) methods are increasingly inadequate in engaging and developing talent for such a dynamic environment, highlighting the need for innovative approaches.

This paper explores the integration of game elements into HR practices, specifically through the adoption of the talent tree model—a concept borrowed from the gaming industry known for enhancing user engage-

ment and skill progression. We propose an original theoretical framework that extends existing learning theories by adapting the structured, strategic elements of game design to the professional development context. This framework aims to provide a novel approach to HR development, aligning employee growth with organizational goals through the strategic application of gamified learning techniques.

The theoretical foundation of this exploration is rooted in the recognition of parallel skill sets between video game players, esports athletes and professionals in the digital working world (Lenke et al., 2023). Especially esports, a phenomenon characterized by its high cognitive demand, strategic depth, and collaborative imperatives, provides a fertile ground for developing a range of transferable skills including but not limited to strategic thinking, teamwork, adaptability, and a continuous learning mindset (Scholz & Nothelfer, 2022).

Expanding on this premise, the paper delves into the conceptualization of the talent tree model within the context of HR development. Drawing analogies to the personalized, nonlinear progression paths offered in gaming, it advocates for a more flexible, individualized approach to employee development. This approach, it is argued, not only enhances motivation through gamification elements such as achievement milestones (Groening & Binnewies, 2019) and progression indicators (Robson et al., 2015) but also aligns with the contemporary ethos of personalized career paths (Kokkodis & Ipeirotis, 2021), lifelong learning (McCombs, 1991), and adaptability to rapid technological and organizational changes (Bustinza et al., 2019).

This discussion extends to the implications of integrating games-derived models into HR practices, addressing potential challenges and opportunities. It examines the balance between gamified engagement and professional development outcomes, and the ethical considerations inherent in gamifying aspects of work life. The paper aims to contribute to the discourse on the intersection of game studies and human resource management (Murawski, 2021).

Therefore, by bridging the worlds of games and HR development, the paper explores the potential of gamified career paths to modernize traditional approaches to talent management and employee development, advocating for a future where work and play converge in the service of mutual growth. The objectives of this study are threefold: firstly, to adapt and analyze the application of the talent tree model in HR development; secondly, to evaluate its effectiveness in fostering employee engagement and growth; and thirdly, to explore the operational challenges and potential benefits of this model in real-world HR settings.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1. Gamified Learning

The concept of gamified learning has gained traction within professional development (Mahat et al., 2023), offering an approach to engage and motivate employees in their learning journeys (Paine, 2021). Rooted in the principles of game design, gamified learning environments leverage elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, and narrative structures to create engaging, interactive experiences that foster deeper learning and retention (Subhash & Cudney, 2018).

Gamified learning is underpinned by several key psychological theories that elucidate why game elements can enhance learning outcomes. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), emphasizes the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in motivating individuals towards optimal performance and well-being. Gamified learning environments address these needs by offering choices (autonomy), challenges matched to individual skill levels (competence), and opportunities for social interaction (relatedness). Furthermore, the concept of flow, a state of complete immersion and focus, as described by Csikszentmihalyi (1992), aligns closely with the engaging nature of gamified learning, suggesting that such environments can foster deep concentration and enjoyment in learning activities (Oliveira et al., 2022).

In the context of professional development, gamified learning can be tailored to a wide range of objectives, from skill acquisition and knowledge enhancement to behavioral change and innovation (Khasawneh et al., 2024). Gamification strategies can be employed to encourage participation in online courses, enhance engagement in training programs, or stimulate collaboration and knowledge sharing within teams (Morschheuser et al., 2017). By integrating game mechanics into learning, organizations can create a more interactive learning experience that not only motivates employees but also promotes the application of new knowledge and skills in the workplace.

The benefits of gamified learning in professional development are multifaceted. Firstly, it increases learner engagement by making the learning process more enjoyable and interactive (Dicheva et al., 2019). Secondly, it can improve retention rates by utilizing repetitive learning and instant feedback mechanisms inherent in game design (Huang et al., 2019). Thirdly, gamified learning fosters a sense of achievement and progression, as learners can see tangible rewards for their efforts, enhancing their motivation to continue learning (Xu et al., 2023). The competitive and collaborative elements of gamified learning can enhance team dynamics and foster a culture of continuous improvement and learning (Bovermann & Bastiaens, 2019).

While the potential benefits of gamified learning are significant, there are also challenges and considerations in its implementation. One concern is that any gamified environment might lead to disengagement among some individuals as well as the possibility of a crowding-out effect (Scholz & Uebach, 2022). Additionally, the competitive aspects of gamification might not appeal to or benefit all learners equally. Therefore, it is crucial for gamified learning initiatives to be thoughtfully designed, with a focus on inclusivity and the alignment of game elements with learning objectives (Smith & Abrams, 2019).

Gamified learning represents an approach to enhancing engagement and efficacy in professional development. By leveraging the motivational power of game design elements, organizations can create learning experiences that not only appeal to a diverse workforce but also support the development of the skills and competencies necessary for success in the digital economy.

2.2. Human Resource Development

In the landscape of management, the field of Human Resource Development (HRD) stands at a critical juncture due to the digital transformation (Sugiarto, 2023). This time demands a reevaluation of traditional HRD paradigms to better align with the evolving competencies required in the digital workforce (Thite, 2022). The integration of digital technologies has not only transformed operational processes but has also influenced the skill sets and learning modalities requisite for organizational success (Akdere & Egan, 2020).

The advent of digital technology has precipitated a paradigm shift in workplace dynamics, necessitating a workforce that is adaptable, technologically proficient, and capable of continuous learning (Oberländer et al. 2020). The digitization of the workplace extends beyond mere technological proficiency; it encompasses a broader spectrum of cognitive, social, and emotional competencies that are increasingly critical in navigating the complexities of the digital economy (Stein & Scholz,

2020). As Van Laar et al. (2020) posits, the skills required in the 21st century workplace—often referred to as '21st-century skills'—include collaboration, digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

In response to these shifts, HRD strategies are evolving from hierarchical models of skill acquisition and development to more fluid, learner-centered approaches. The focus has broadened from the development of specific technical skills to the cultivation of a versatile skill set that focuses on soft skills such as leadership, communication, and emotional intelligence (Tripathy, 2020). This transition underscores the necessity of lifelong learning and adaptability, principles that are central to the game domain, where players continually adapt to new strategies, technologies, and team dynamics (BüBecker et al., 2024).

Drawing on the theoretical foundations of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), this new paradigm of HRD emphasizes the importance of contextual learning environments that foster practical, hands-on learning experiences. Such environments are akin to the immersive, challenging, and collaborative settings found in games, which necessitate rapid learning and adaptation.

The implications of this digital transformation for HRD practice are profound. Organizations must not only reimagine the content of learning and development programs but also the methodologies through which these programs are delivered (Nicolás-Agustín et al., 2022). Gamified learning platforms, micro-learning modules, and social learning networks are examples of innovative approaches that mirror the interactive, engaging nature of esports and gaming. These methods not only cater to the preferences of a digitally native workforce but also facilitate the development of a broad skill set including technical proficiency, strategic thinking, teamwork, and adaptability.

In conclusion, the intersection of HRD and digital gaming principles thus offers a promising avenue for research and practice, heralding a new era of skill development that is aligned with the complexities and demands of the 21st-century workplace.

2.3. Career Paths

The evolution of career paths in the digital economy represents a departure from linear trajectories to more non-linear journeys characterized by frequent changes, cross-disciplinary moves, and continuous learning (Potter, 2020). This shift is emblematic of a broader transformation in the work landscape, driven by technological advancements, the gig economy, and the changing nature of work itself (Gavin et al., 2022). The digital economy demands not only technical acumen but also

adaptability, lifelong learning, and a proactive approach to career development (Ostmeier & Strobel, 2022).

Historically, career paths were often linear, with individuals progressing through a series of pre-determined stages within a single organization or profession (Japor, 2021). However, the advent of the digital economy has upended this model, giving rise to career paths that are more akin to a web of experiences and opportunities than a straight line. Arthur's (1994) notion of the "boundaryless career" describes this new paradigm, wherein career success is defined not by upward mobility within a single organization but by the ability to navigate across boundaries, whether they be organizational, sectoral, or geographical.

In navigating these boundaryless careers, digital competencies are more and more relevant. Digital literacy, the ability to effectively use digital technologies for communication, collaboration, and problem-solving, is now a foundational skill (Bejaković & Mrnjavac, 2020). This broader understanding of digital competencies as essential to career development is reflected in the European Framework for Digital Competence, which outlines key areas of digital competence for citizens and workers in the digital age (European Commission n.d.).

The non-linear nature of careers in the digital economy places a premium on adaptability and resilience. Savickas (1997) introduces the concept of career adaptability as a psychosocial construct that enables individuals to cope with changing work and career conditions. This adaptability is closely linked to resilience, the capacity to bounce back from setbacks and challenges.

The gamification of learning and development offers approaches to enhancing career adaptability and resilience. By incorporating game design elements into career development programs, organizations can motivate and engage employees in their own career planning and progression. The interactive, feedback-rich environments typical of games can help individuals explore various career paths, develop new skills, and adapt to changes with greater ease and engagement. This gamified approach to career development mirrors the dynamic, player-driven progression systems found in games, offering a more personalized way to navigate career development (Tansley et al., 2016).

The transition to non-linear career paths in the digital economy necessitates a rethinking of traditional concepts of career development and success. The increasing importance of digital competencies, along with the need for adaptability and resilience, highlights the need for innovative approaches to career planning and development. By drawing on the principles of gamification and the insights of career development theory, individuals and organizations can better navigate the complexities of the digital work landscape. This shift towards more flexible, adaptable career paths reflects broader changes

in work and society, signaling a move towards a future where career development is continuous, multifaceted, and deeply intertwined with digital technology.

3. Conceptualization

3.1. Talent Trees

The concept of talent trees, borrowed from the gaming world (Steinkuehler & King, 2009), offers a novel framework for structuring learning and career development in a manner that is personalized, engaging, and strategically aligned with both individual aspirations and organizational goals. In game design, the concept of talent trees is within technology trees in games like *Civilization* (Ghys 2012). In professional development, talent trees can be conceptualized as customizable pathways that allow individuals to navigate through their careers in a way that reflects their unique skills, interests, and professional goals. This section delves into the mechanics of talent trees, their application in professional settings, and the implications for fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptability.

In games, talent trees are used as a mechanism for players to develop their characters' abilities in specific directions, often tailored to their preferred playstyle or to complement the team's overall strategy (e.g. Larsen, 2022). This concept can be analogously applied to professional development, where individuals select from a variety of skills and competencies they wish to acquire, with each choice leading to further specialization or the unlocking of advanced skills. This non-linear approach not only accommodates diverse learning styles and career aspirations but also empowers employees to take charge of their professional growth.

Implementing talent trees in a professional context involves creating a structured yet flexible framework that outlines potential skills, competencies, and learning activities aligned with various career paths within the organization. Employees can navigate through these paths, making strategic decisions about their learning and development based on their career goals, the needs of the organization, and emerging trends in the industry. This approach requires a dynamic system that can be regularly updated to reflect new skills and learning opportunities, as well as a mentoring or coaching component to guide employees through their development journey.

The adoption of talent trees as a model for professional development has profound implications for fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptability within organizations. First, it places a strong emphasis on personal agency and intrinsic motivation, as employees have the autonomy to shape their development in ways that are meaningful and relevant to them. Second,

it encourages a mindset of continuous improvement and lifelong learning, as the model inherently involves progression, exploration, and the accumulation of new skills over time. Finally, by providing a clear framework for development that is aligned with organizational objectives, talent trees can help ensure that the workforce remains agile and capable of adapting to changing business needs and technological advancements.

While the talent tree model presents numerous opportunities for enhancing professional development, it also poses challenges. These include the need for a robust infrastructure to support the customization and tracking of learning pathways, the potential complexity of creating and maintaining a comprehensive talent tree system that accurately reflects the evolving needs of the organization and its employees and ensuring equitable access to development opportunities. Despite these challenges, the potential benefits of increased engagement, motivation, and alignment with organizational goals make the exploration and implementation of talent trees a compelling proposition for organizations.

Talent trees inherently promote continuous learning and adaptability. Their non-linear, choice-driven progression paths enable employees to tailor their development trajectories, enhancing engagement and motivation. This model supports diverse learning styles and adapts to the evolving skill demands of dynamic business environments. Additionally, by fostering resilience, talent trees encourage employees to navigate challenges effectively, enhancing their ability to cope with the unpredictable nature of modern work.

The concept of transferable skills bridges the gap between seemingly disparate domains, such as the realms of digital games and esports, and the professional workplace (Daniau, 2016). By examining analytical thinking, adaptability, teamwork, emotional resilience, and cultural sensitivity as core competencies, we highlight the potential of games and esports for professional development (Andersen et al., 2023).

The strategic depth and complexity inherent in many games demand a robust analytical mindset, where players assess situations, anticipate outcomes, and formulate strategies. This cognitive exercise mirrors the problem-solving and strategic planning required in various professional contexts. The ability to analyze data, identify trends, and develop strategies is invaluable in business decision-making, project management, and innovation. Thus, the analytical competencies honed in gaming can directly contribute to enhanced decision-making and strategic insight (Simons et al., 2021).

Digital games and esports are characterized by their dynamic environments, where constant up-dates, new strategies, and evolving gameplay mechanics require players to continually learn and adapt. This mirrors the

modern professional landscape, marked by rapid technological advancements and shifting market dynamics. The capacity for continuous learning and adaptability, fostered within gaming contexts, is critical for professionals navigating the complexities of the 21st-century workplace, enabling them to remain relevant and competitive (Scholz & Nothelfer, 2022).

Team-based games and esports emphasize collaborative skills, requiring players to communicate effectively, coordinate strategies, and leverage individual strengths for collective success. These collaborative experiences offer parallels to teamwork in professional environments, where cross-functional collaboration, effective communication, and teamwork are pivotal for achieving organizational goals. The teamwork and communication skills refined in gaming contexts are directly transferable to enhancing team dynamics and collaborative success in the workplace.

The competitive nature of gaming and esports environments cultivates emotional resilience, as players learn to cope with failure, manage stress, and maintain focus under pressure. These skills are directly applicable to professional contexts, where resilience and stress management are essential for navigating challenges, meeting deadlines, and maintaining productivity. The emotional regulation and resilience developed through gaming can thus contribute to more robust stress management strategies in professional settings (Menendez-Ferreira, et al. 2022).

Gaming and esports often involve interacting with a diverse, global community, fostering cultural sensitivity and global competence. Players engage with individuals from various cultural backgrounds, enhancing their ability to communicate across cultural divides and appreciate global perspectives. This exposure to cultural diversity is invaluable in today's globalized professional world, where businesses operate across international borders and multicultural teamwork is increasingly common. The cultural competence developed through gaming can enhance professionals' ability to navigate multicultural environments and contribute to global business strategies (Scholz, 2012).

The transferability of skills from the domains of games and esports to professional contexts highlights the potential of these digital environments as platforms for developing valuable professional competencies. By recognizing the skills cultivated through gaming and esports, organizations can harness these competencies to enrich their talent development strategies, thereby aligning with the evolving demands of the digital economy. This approach acknowledges the relevance of gaming experiences in professional development.

3.2. Conceptualizing the Talent Tree Model for the Workplace

The talent tree model, inspired by the structured and strategic skill development seen in games, presents a novel approach to navigating and enhancing career development within professional contexts. This model reimagines traditional career progression frameworks, offering a personalized, dynamic, and engaging pathway for employee development. This section explores the conceptualization of the talent tree model for the workplace, emphasizing its design, implementation, and strategic alignment with organizational objectives.

At the core of the talent tree model is its adaptability across different professional fields. By delineating career paths into branches representing specialized areas of expertise or skill sets, the model accommodates the diverse aspirations and capabilities of the workforce. For instance, in a finance-oriented talent tree, branches might include accounting, controlling, and financial analysis, each with levels denoting proficiency and mastery. This structure encourages employees to pursue depth in specific areas while also offering the flexibility to branch out and acquire a broad skill set, catering to both specialists and generalists.

A pivotal feature of the talent tree model is its emphasis on individualized career development. Employees, in consultation with their line managers and HR managers, can select paths that align with their skills, interests, and career aspirations. This personalization fosters a sense of ownership and motivation, as employees see a direct correlation between their development efforts and career progression. The model's visual representation of career paths and progress further enhances this effect, making career development tangible and motivating.

For the talent tree model to effectively support career development, its integration into existing HR practices is paramount. This involves aligning the model with the organization's strategic objectives, ensuring it supports not only individual growth but also organizational needs. Incorporating the talent tree into performance management processes, succession planning, and talent acquisition strategies can enhance its effectiveness. For example, during recruitment, showcasing the talent tree model can demonstrate the organization's commitment to employee development, serving as a powerful tool for attracting talent.

Implementing the talent tree model in a professional setting involves several challenges, including the creation of a comprehensive yet flexible framework that accurately reflects the evolving needs of the organization and its workforce. Ensuring the model remains relevant and engaging over time requires regular updates and adaptations, informed by ongoing feedback from

employees and changes in industry standards. Moreover, the success of the talent tree model depends on its acceptance and adoption by employees, necessitating clear communication about its benefits and how it operates.

The conceptualization of the talent tree model for the workplace represents an innovative approach to career development, reflecting a shift towards more personalized, dynamic, and engaging employee development strategies. By providing a structured yet flexible framework for skill acquisition and career progression, the talent tree model aligns individual aspirations with organizational goals, fostering a motivated, skilled, and adaptable workforce. As organizations continue to navigate the complexities of the digitalization, the talent tree model could be a solution to cultivating the diverse talents and capabilities needed for success.

3.3. Implementing the Talent Tree Model in HR Development

Implementing the talent tree model within HR development is a strategic innovation aimed at fostering a comprehensive and dynamic approach to employee skill and career development. This process requires meticulous planning and customization to organizational needs, involving both HR professionals and employees actively.

The initial phase in deploying the talent tree model involves a thorough analysis of the organization's strategic objectives, existing skill gaps, and future competency requirements. The talent tree model should be customized to fit the specific needs of the company and its diverse departments ensuring relevance and alignment with business goals. For example, in IT departments, the talent tree might include branches such as software development, network engineering, or cybersecurity, with each node representing specific skills or certifications required for progression.

The development and refinement of the talent tree model necessitate close collaboration between HR managers, departmental leaders, and employees. This collaborative process ensures that the model accurately reflects the varied career paths within the organization and incorporates feedback from those it aims to serve. Engaging employees in the creation of their personal career plans within the talent tree framework fosters a sense of ownership and motivation towards their professional development.

A critical component of implementing the talent tree model is the provision of targeted training and development of programs that support the acquisition of skills identified within the talent tree. These programs, ranging from internal workshops to online courses, should be designed to meet the learning preferences and

schedules of employees, facilitating their progression through the talent tree levels. Tailoring these programs to the competencies outlined in the talent tree guarantees a direct and measurable impact on skill development and career progression.

The gamification elements inherent in the talent tree model, such as earning badges, unlocking new levels, and visual progression indicators, play a pivotal role in enhancing employee engagement and motivation. Associating advancements within the talent tree with tangible recognition and rewards, such as bonuses, certifications, or new responsibilities, further incentivizes employees to engage with their development actively. This approach not only motivates individual progression but also contributes to a culture of continuous learning and achievement.

The talent tree model's dynamic nature requires ongoing evaluation and adaptation to remain effective and relevant. Regularly reviewing the model against changing industry standards, technological advancements, and organizational needs ensures that the talent tree continues to offer valuable and up-to-date pathways for employee development. Incorporating feedback from employees and managers alike allows for iterative improvements, ensuring the model evolves in alignment with both employee aspirations and business strategies.

The implementation of the talent tree model within HR development signifies a forward-thinking approach to employee growth and organizational competency building. By drawing inspiration from the engaging and strategic nature of gaming, particularly esports, this model offers a structured yet flexible framework for personal and professional development. The successful integration of the talent tree model hinges on its customization to organizational needs, collaborative development, integration with targeted training programs, motivation and recognition mechanisms, and a commitment to continuous evaluation and adaptation. Through these strategies, organizations can cultivate a highly skilled, motivated, and adaptable workforce, poised to meet the challenges of the rapidly evolving professional landscape.

Proposition 1: Implementing talent trees in HR development significantly enhances employee engagement and personalizes learning trajectories.

3.4. Strategic Use of the Talent Tree Model

The strategic deployment of the talent tree model within HR development aligns individual career progression with overarching organizational goals, optimizing performance and contributing to long-term strategic objectives.

The adaptation of talent trees to mirror an organization's strategic imperatives is paramount. This alignment involves identifying and prioritizing skills pivotal for achieving strategic objectives, thereby ensuring that employee development is directly contributing to the company's vision and goals. For instance, in industries characterized by rapid technological advancement, talent trees might prioritize digital literacy, innovation, and agile methodologies. By structuring development paths around these strategic competencies, the talent tree model serves as a scaffold for future-proofing the workforce and fostering an environment of proactive skill acquisition.

The talent tree model fosters an ecosystem where individual strengths are not only recognized but also strategically harnessed to bolster team performance. By mapping out diverse career paths and skills within the talent tree, HR can effectively identify and cultivate complementary skill sets across team members, promoting a culture of collaboration and mutual growth. This approach encourages a holistic view of team development, where the sum of individual advancements translates into a formidable collective capability, ready to tackle complex, multi-faceted projects with agility and creativity.

In an ever-evolving business landscape, the capacity for continuous adaptation is a critical determinant of organizational resilience and success. The talent tree model, with its inherent flexibility, allows for the dynamic adjustment of development paths in response to emerging trends, technological shifts, and changes in business strategy. Regular reassessment and refinement of the talent tree ensure that the workforce remains at the forefront of industry developments, equipped with the skills and knowledge to navigate future challenges. This adaptive approach underscores a commitment to lifelong learning, encouraging employees to perpetually expand their skill sets and adapt to new roles and responsibilities.

To illustrate the strategic use of the talent tree model, case studies of organizations that have successfully integrated this framework into their HR development strategies can provide valuable insights. These examples should detail the process of aligning talent trees with corporate goals, the impact on team performance and organizational culture, and the mechanisms for ensuring the model's ongoing relevance and efficacy. Practical applications highlight the model's versatility across different industries and organizational sizes, offering a blueprint for others looking to implement similar strategies.

The strategic application of the talent tree model within HR development represents a significant leap towards aligning individual aspirations with organizational needs, thereby fostering a mutually beneficial

growth trajectory. By prioritizing skills critical to corporate strategy, enhancing team synergies, and promoting an ethos of continuous adaptation, organizations can cultivate a high-performing, motivated workforce. The talent tree model not only facilitates personalized, strategic career development but also positions organizations to thrive amidst the complexities of the modern business environment.

Proposition 2: Strategic application of the talent tree model in HR development aligns employee growth with organizational objectives, fostering a resilient and adaptive workforce.

4. Discussion

The adaptation of the talent tree model within HR development, inspired by principles from gaming, marks a transformative shift toward personalized and strategic career growth. This evolution reflects a historical continuum where games have facilitated strategic thinking and skill acquisition, as exemplified by the Preußische Kriegsspiel's influence on military training and its conceptual link to modern pen-and-paper role-playing games (Wintjes, 2019). This section revisits the talent tree model's potential by juxtaposing it with historical precedents and exploring its implications for contemporary HR practices, employee engagement, and organizational strategy.

The Preußische Kriegsspiel, a 19th-century war game, exemplifies how game mechanics were applied to develop strategic thinking and decision-making skills (Nitzl et al., 2023). This early integration of gameplay and professional development underscores the fluidity between play and work, particularly in skill development and strategic planning. The evolution from the Kriegsspiel to role-playing games, and later to frameworks proposed by scholars like Huizinga (1949) and Caillois (1961), highlights the enduring potential of games to enhance real-world capabilities and strategies.

This historical lineage reinforces the idea that integrating game-based elements into professional development is not just innovative but deeply rooted in established practice. The talent tree model, inspired by the engaging and strategic mechanics of video games, represents a contemporary embodiment of this tradition. Much like the structured yet dynamic exploration of military tactics in the Kriegsspiel, the talent tree model offers a personalized framework for career progression, showcasing the viability of leveraging game mechanics for professional growth.

Key advantages of the talent tree model include:

- **Personalized Development Paths:** The model provides individualized career pathways, echoing the strategic and adaptive learning environments of

both historical and modern games. This personalization fosters intrinsic motivation, aligning employee development with organizational goals while catering to individual strengths and preferences.

- **Strategic Alignment:** The model's ability to align personal career aspirations with broader organizational objectives mirrors the strategic deployment of resources in the Kriegsspiel. This alignment optimizes resource use while enhancing organizational coherence and agility.
- **Engagement Through Gamification:** By incorporating gamified elements into career development, drawing on the motivational aspects of gameplay, the model introduces engagement and competition. This fosters continuous learning and achievement, paralleling how games have historically been used to simulate and solve real-world challenges.

Implementing the talent tree model within HR development involves several structured yet adaptable steps:

- **Initial Analysis and Customization:** The process starts with a thorough analysis of organizational goals and skill gaps, ensuring the talent tree is tailored to fit various departmental needs. Engaging stakeholders across is key to achieving alignment and relevance. Balancing diverse departmental requirements with overarching corporate strategies can be challenging, but stakeholder engagement and iterative feedback are essential.
- **Collaborative Development:** Collaboration between HR managers, department heads, and employees is critical to securing buy-in and ensuring the model's usability. Challenges such as resistance to new methods and communication gaps can be addressed through workshops and pilot testing.
- **Provision of Resources:** Adequate resources for training and development tied to the talent tree are essential. Budget constraints and resource allocation challenges can be mitigated by phased implementation and leveraging existing digital platforms.
- **Ongoing Evaluation and Adaptation:** Implementing the talent tree model involves balancing evolving business needs with resource constraints and employee expectations. Regular feedback loops and agile adaptation strategies are key to maintaining the model's flexibility and relevance without disrupting ongoing processes.

This paper extends the application of gamification in HR by adapting the concept of talent trees from gaming to corporate professional development. The novelty of this model lies in its strategic integration of gamified elements to create dynamic, personalized career development pathways. Unlike traditional frameworks, this

model promotes sustained engagement and skill acquisition, offering significant potential to enhance employee motivation and better align career growth with strategic business goals.

A comparative analysis of existing studies reveals that while gamification has been applied in educational and training contexts, its use in HR via talent trees is innovative, providing a structured yet flexible approach to career development. This study paves the way for future empirical research to test the talent tree model in various organizational settings. Future studies should aim to measure its impact on employee retention, satisfaction, and productivity, offering deeper insights into its benefits and limitations.

However, the conceptual nature of this study presents a limitation, as the model has yet to be empirically tested. Future research should focus on validating the effectiveness of the talent tree model through real-world applications. Examining the socio-economic impacts of gamifying HR processes will be crucial in understanding how these strategies affect employee well-being and organizational culture.

5. Conclusion

The exploration of the talent tree model, inspired by the dynamic and competitive realm of esports, heralds a paradigm shift in personnel development strategies. This model presents a novel approach that transcends traditional methods by offering a framework that is inherently more individualized, motivating, and strategically oriented. The utility of transferring skills from the intricate ecosystem of esports to professional settings has underscored the profound impact that playful elements and a competitive ethos can have on fostering significant advancements in employee development.

The talent tree model provides a structured gamified framework, which businesses can directly implement to create more engaging, flexible career development paths. By aligning personal aspirations with organizational objectives, HR professionals can craft individualized development plans that cater to both employees' strengths and the evolving needs of the organization. The incorporation of gamified elements such as progression tracking and skill trees can significantly boost employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention. Organizations adopting this model will likely see improvements in strategic agility as they develop a more adaptable workforce capable of navigating the complexities of the modern business environment.

The alignment of game-style career paths through the talent tree model with professional HR development is not merely an innovative experiment but reflects a deeper historical interconnection between games and strategic thinking. The Preußische Kriegsspiel and its

influence on pen-and-paper role-playing games underscore the longstanding tradition of using game mechanics for strategic planning and decision-making skills. This historical perspective enriches our understanding of the talent tree model's potential.

While the model promises numerous benefits, organizations must manage the ethical responsibility and long-term sustainability of integrating gamified elements into HR processes. Balancing the motivational aspects of gamification with potential risks, such as overcontrol or creating disincentives, is crucial. Organizations must ensure that the drive for innovation does not overshadow the need to foster a supportive, inclusive, and equitable work environment. Thoughtful implementation, with regular feedback from employees, will be essential to maintaining an ethical approach.

Empirical research is needed to validate the talent tree model across diverse organizational settings. Future studies should focus on measuring its long-term impact on employee retention, satisfaction, and productivity, while exploring its applicability across industries. Additionally, exploring its application across different industries and organizational sizes will help refine the model and broaden its applicability. Investigating how emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, can further enhance the adaptability and personalization of the talent tree model.

In conclusion, the talent tree model represents a forward-looking approach that not only redefines employee learning and development but also strengthens strategic agility and organizational resilience. By aligning individual growth with corporate goals, HR professionals can leverage the talent tree model to build a more adaptable and future-ready workforce.

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