

Gamified Talent Development for Gen Z in Global Tourism

Flora Ceyda Knapp

DE240004

28.05.2025

Talent Management

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Understanding Gen Z in the Workplace
3. Gamification as a Talent Development Tool
4. Proposed Gamified Talent Development Program
5. AI-Driven Customization and Inclusivity Tools
6. Internal Communication Strategy
7. Conclusion
8. References

Introduction

The tourism and recreation industry is changing rapidly due to new technology and a new workforce generation entering the workplace. Particularly Generation Z (born 1997 - 2012), who use a digital-first mindset and favor flexible schedules based on social purpose and inclusion. Global tourism businesses seek ways to recover from breakdowns and reimagine their business, and organizations must build innovative talent strategies that address this generational change.

Unlike previous generations, Generation Z has never known a world without technology, social media, or interactive digital environments. Their familiarity with gamified environments, instant feedback loops, and an overall customized digital experience uniquely positions them to request and benefit from modern training and development frameworks. It can no longer be assumed that traditional onboarding or professional development approaches will build and promote engagement and loyalty from this generation. Organizations must create talent development experiences that replicate the interactive, rewarding, and socially connected environments favored by Generation Z.

Tourism organizations are service-based organizations. They will need to address temporal and financial challenges simultaneously in high turnover, bottom-line service performance, and innovation. Understanding gamification (applying game design elements to non-game environments) for talent development is a potential solution. If tourism organizations leverage gamification and its full potential for talent development, employees will be given an engaging way to develop skills and competencies and create environments that foster engagement, motivation, collaboration, and longer-term loyalty.

The report describes developing and implementing a gamified talent development program for Gen Z employees in the global tourism industry. It will be based on academic research, industry reports, and examples of best practices. The report will provide a step-by-step guide to onboarding, skill development, and employee engagement through gamification. It will also consider the use of AI to customize the content and use inclusivity tools to ensure equal access and participation, including those with disabilities,

The objective is to provide a future-ready model that develops individuals and resilience within the organization. Suppose tourism brands recognize, consider, and act on Generation Z's values and expectations. In that case, they will provide an environment conducive to developing a culture of continuous learning and impactful participation that will develop an informed, skilled, and empowered workforce for a fast-changing, customer-focused future.

Understanding Gen Z in the Workplace

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, focuses on purpose-driven work, digital fluency, flexible work arrangements, and continuous feedback and learning cycles (Schroth, 2019). Generation Z will continue to change how talent development is planned and executed within organizations. This generation was raised with smartphones, gamified experiences, social media, and digital technologies, and their life outside of work has shaped expectations about their engagement and development at work. Talent development programs for Generation Z must be dynamic, tech-enabled, and socially responsible to meet their expectations.

Research by Deloitte (2023) shows that Generation Z wants continuous learning opportunities through mentorship, inclusion, and other efforts. Gamified development incorporates their natural motivation, encourages teamwork, and provides a sense of accomplishment through virtual badges, rankings, and rewards (Werbach & Hunter, 2015).

Gamification as a Talent Development Tool

Gamification applies both game mechanics and game elements to non-game contexts, such as corporate learning and training (Deterding et al., 2011), and gamified development programs provide compelling solutions for tourism companies with regards to onboarding new employees with gamified and interactive modules, training staff with simulation-based problem-solving, progress tracking using skill achievements, and engagement using leaderboard elements and rewards. Research shows that gamification is effective in learning environments. A meta-analysis (Hamari et al., 2014) found significant effects of gamification on engagement and retention, especially among younger employees in the workplace.

Proposed Gamified Talent Development Program

The proposed gamified talent development program will involve four tiers, which vary in complexity and seek to improve various skills and competencies at various levels of experience working in tourism. The Explorer Level introduces employees to the company values, tourism ethics, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The Pathfinder Level will consist of role-based training modules using interactive quizzes and branching scenarios to simulate real-world tasks. The Navigator Level will involve crisis management simulations, training across cultures to serve others and sustainability practices. The last tier will be the Trailblazer Level, comprising a leadership challenge, mentorship duties, and innovation projects. Each proposed program ends with a mini-assessment that employees must complete to earn badges and points and contribute to a leaderboard standing.

Leaderboards can motivate participation by ranking employees based on performance, participation, and peer ratings. It will be possible to rank employees inclusively by resetting the leaderboards monthly to give those who start late an equal opportunity to participate. Special recognitions may be additionally integrated, such as soft skills development and "Most Helpful Colleague."

Possible Recognition for high engagement and performance may include certificates, priority scheduling or flexibility opportunities, and experience-related rewards such as free local tours or international training opportunities.

The gamified mobile app will be the primary means of delivering the gamified learning experience. Key features include an interactive dashboard showing score and achievement progress, a leaderboard tab that can be filtered by department or location, chat access to registered mentors, and daily learning challenges that reinforce learning objectives.

AI-Driven Customization and Inclusivity Tools

Artificial intelligence (AI) makes it possible to personalize learning experiences based on an employee's behavior, interests, and performance. For example, adaptive quizzes adjust difficulty based on the user's responses and provide individualized, relevant content based on local or regional needs and learning. Additionally, its predictive analysis can detect evidence of disengagement and offer suggestions to intervene before the employee is lost.

The platform identifies inclusive challenges through the use of language translation, accessibility, voice commands, dyslexia-friendly font type, and bias detection for feedback or peer ratings. Collectively, these items work to ensure that every employee, regardless of background or ability, has equal access to professional learning opportunities.

Internal Communication Strategy

A successful internal communication strategy is critical to the success of the gamified talent development initiative at launch. A rollout campaign should include videos and testimonials from early adopters to help spark curiosity and excitement. A weekly newsletter/email update should also be to communicate program updates, leaderboard updates, learning tips, and other features/events. There should be some feedback loop (like the in-app survey and town halls every two weeks) to feed into the program's evolution based on users' input. Incorporating a friendly tone of voice, visual design, and structured messaging will help ensure the gamified approach is adopted into the corporate culture.

Conclusion

Tourism brands must change their employee development models to EMPOWER employees to thrive with an increasingly Generation Z workforce in the post-digital era. Gamification can create an engaging way for tourism brands to rethink their approach to employee development; it is fun, easy, and scalable. By using a mobile-first approach to learning stages, reward systems, AI personalization, and inclusive design, tourism companies can develop a skilled, productive, motivated, and loyal workforce.

Further, these programs can build a culture of ongoing growth and accomplishment, which is often very important for younger employees. When employees believe they are being invested in and recognized, it promotes morale, decreases turnover, and increases internal mobility for talent. Gamification seeks to meet Gen Z's needs for feedback, community, and a sense of progression; it changes boring training into a positive and impactful journey! If done right, it could disrupt how the tourism industry continues to develop workforce talent in the hyper-competitive global market!

References

Deterding, S., Dixon, D., Khaled, R., & Nacke, L. (2011). From game design elements to gamefulness: Defining "gamification". *Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek Conference: Envisioning Future Media Environments*, 9–15. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2181037.2181040>

Deloitte. (2023). *Understanding Gen Z: What they want from work and life*. <https://www2.deloitte.com>

Hamari, J., Koivisto, J., & Sarsa, H. (2014). Does gamification work? A literature review of empirical studies on gamification. *Proceedings of the 47th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, 3025–3034. <https://doi.org/10.1109/HICSS.2014.377>

Schroth, H. (2019). Are you ready for Gen Z in the workplace? *California Management Review*, 61(3), 5–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0008125619841006>

Werbach, K., & Hunter, D. (2015). *For the win: How game thinking can revolutionize your business*. Wharton Digital Press.