Gamification of New Employee Orientation

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Executive Summary

Bright Horizons Family Solutions (BHFS) is an early care and education solution that provides quality care and education for young children, with a focus on corporate childcare. Bright Horizons operates over one thousand child care and early education centers across the globe, serving more than one hundred thousand children. In order to maintain the status of high quality, well trained and prepared classroom teachers are vital to the business operations of BHFS. Aside from ensuring quality hires through verifying education and experience, Bright Horizons also utilizes an extensive New Employee Orientation (NEO) to prepare new hires for their roles in the classroom.

While the NEO is extensive and provides more than adequate performance instruction for a new hire, it is presented in a format that is not conducive for retention or future classroom application. To remedy this problem, NEO should be gamified to alleviate the issues that lead to the problem. Gamification of NEO will take some time to be developed from the conceptual stages, however it will allow for new hires to enter the classroom more confident in their abilities to perform the functions of their role.

Gamification, not to be confused with game-based learning, is defined as “using game design elements in non-game environments.” (Ceker & Ozamli, 2017, p. 222). In the case of a gamified NEO, game elements, such as badges and leveling up, will be incorporated into the onboarding process, specifically orientation, for new employees. According to Ceker and Ozamli (2017) “Using gamification generally focuses on increasing students [learners] interest to the lessons and motivating them to participate in the learning process via tools such as points, badges, levels, and league tables…etc.” (p. 223). Orientation, a traditionally non-game activity, will be reconfigured and
reestablished using gaming principles mixed with traditional learning principles in order to accomplish the complex task of orientation.

**Background Context**

New Employee Orientation regarding performance expectations as a classroom teacher with Bright Horizons consists of several parts: a brief orientation with the Education Coordinator to discuss an overview of job performance expectations, an observation of a model classroom, and a web based orientation. During the brief orientation with the Education Coordinator, the employee is made aware of the general role of the classroom teacher as well as any center specific expectations such as client requirements for the program. For example, at the BH centers that serve Georgia Tech, classroom teachers are expected to place an emphasis on math and science in the classroom. The observation of the model classroom allows the new hire to witness Bright Horizons’ standard of high quality care and education in a real setting. The web based portion of the orientation is the bulk of the process. During the web based orientation, the new hire is fed performance information and expectations on almost everything regarding the role of a classroom teacher. The orientation includes topics ranging from correctly filling out forms (such as an occurrence report or the tracking sheet) to the Supervision Policy and appropriate supervision techniques. This web based NEO typically lasts one to two weeks, depending on how quickly the new hire moves through the program.

**Problem/Opportunity**

While the web based portion of NEO provides ample information and tutelage regarding the role of a classroom teacher, the method in which it is presented allows for little retention of performance instruction. There is also often a lack of learner engagement during the web based
orientation, which can be attributed to the long hours sitting in front of a screen as large masses of information are presented to the learner. This leads to confusion and subpar classroom performance by new hires despite completing the orientation. Ormrod (2016) defines learning as “a long term-change in mental representations or associations as a result of experience. It isn’t just a brief, transitory use of information- such as remembering a phone number long enough to call someone and then forget it.” (p. 4). The current method of delivery and engagement of NEO at Bright Horizons is not conducive to authentic learning. In that same vein, the web based orientation allows no opportunities for learners to apply performance instruction as they learn it. “Sometimes learning is a very passive process: It happens simply by virtue of something happening to a leaner. More often, however, it requires the learner to do something- something physical, something mental, or, ideally, something both physical and mental.” (Ormrod, 2016, p. 4)

Market/Audience

The market for gamification in New Employee Orientation is all Bright Horizons centers. The audience is Bright Horizons Center Directors and Education Coordinators who oversee hiring for the center and the NEO process.

Attributes that Influenced Innovation

Gamification of a concept entails “Changing the way of thinking and using some ‘gaming rules’ in order to increase the interest of learners and to solve problems” (Ceker & Ozamli, 2017, p. 221). Further, “work gamification is about applying game features in the work context to improve worker performance.” (Cardador, Northcraft, & Whicker, 2016, 353). Gamification of NEO at Bright Horizons will take some elements of a game and apply it to an orientation, which currently
has no game elements applied, with the goals of increasing employee engagement, increasing performance instruction retention, and reducing wasted time.

The gamified NEO will break the current web based NEO into sections by topic. New hires will watch and participate in each NEO section one at a time. After viewing each section, the new hire will take the performance instruction from the topic and apply it in the classroom. During classroom application, the Education Coordinator will observe the new hire and assess whether the job performance met or performance expectations. If the new hire has met performance expectations she will earn the topic badge, which will then unlock the next topic of NEO. According to Garg (2017), this concept is known as “leveling up,” which is a gaming term using to indicate that “the player has to accomplish a certain number of tasks before additional steps can be taken.” (https://www.mindtickle.com/blog/3-examples-of-gamification-in-new-employee-onboarding-and-why-this-works/). If the new hire has not met performance expectations she will have the opportunity to review her performance with the education coordinator, review the NEO topic if necessary, and try again. Once the new hire has earned all topic badges, she will earn her classroom ready certificate, which will endorse her qualifications to be a classroom teacher in a Bright Horizons center.

How will the innovation be used?

New hires will engage with a web based NEO by learning topic. After each topic, the new hire will be tasked with applying performance instruction in the classroom setting. The new hires performance will be observed and analyzed by the Education Coordinator. If the performance met expectations, the new hire earns a badge for the topic, which unlocks the next orientation topic. After all topic badges are collected, the new hire will be awarded an endorsement (certificate), which qualifies her as job ready.
Who will use the innovation?

The innovation of a gamified NEO will be used by Center Directors for their new hires.

Benefits

There are several benefits to a gamified NEO. One of the most pertinent benefits includes increased learner engagement in the orientation process. Puckett, 2015, states: “Gamified employee training software works well for onboarding because it drives higher productivity and performance, as well as engagement and retention.” (http://trainingstation.walkme.com/gamification-works-well-onboarding/). Other short-term benefits include the opportunity for learners to apply performance instruction and the reduction of wasteful time in front of the computer. There are also long-term benefits to using a gamified approach to NEO. One of these benefits include closing the gap between job performance and performance expectations. Gamification of NEO allows for performance feedback to be readily available to a new hire. This allows the new hire to better understand how her performance is relative to the company and center expectations. “When workers have clarity about their performance and whether it needs to be improved, that should motivate them to reduce the discrepancy between actual and desired performance.” (Cardador, Northcraft, & Whicker, 2016, 353). Another long term benefit is increasing the likelihood of employee retention. According to research, onboarding and retention are directly linked; “Formal onboarding increases the chance of keeping a new employee for at least three years by 69 percent.” (Puckett, 2015, http://trainingstation.walkme.com/ gamification-works-well-onboarding/).

Early Adopters

The early adopters of a gamified NEO will be Center Directors, Assistant Directors, and Education Coordinators, who are the direct supervisors of teachers in the center. These three roles
are highly invested in placing prepared teachers into the classrooms in order to maintain a high-quality program and environment and to cut down on employee frustration and turnover.

Description of Consequences

According to Rogers, 2003, “Consequences are the changes that occur to an individual or social system as a result of the adoption or rejection of an innovation.” (p.436). Consequences of an innovation are unpredictable and often hard to measure, however the adoption if innovation is often done so with a desired consequence in mind. In regard to the gamification of NEO at Bright Horizons, the desired consequence is for a more engaging and purposeful orientation, which better prepares new hires to be successful as classroom teachers. As with any adoption of innovation though, consequences are not predictable nor are they always beneficial, as change agents often assume. A non-advantageous consequence of the gamification of NEO is the potential negative impact on the short term on the budget. Having new hires complete NEO in a gamified manner has the potential to lengthen the NEO time frame. This would mean that more of the budget would need to be allocated for NEO in order to cover the cost of supplemental support in the classroom, such as a substitute, until the new hire unlocks and earns all NEO game badges.

Before consequences can be ascertained, before the innovation can be adopted, there needs to be a plan for the gamification of NEO and a successful trial (pilot program). Since this is not a corporate mandate, adoption and implementation would potentially only occur company-wide based on the previewed success of the program. The idea of gamification of NEO must essentially prove itself from the bottom up. While Bright Horizons Corporate does elicit best practices from the center level as company-wide initiatives, it is not often done.
Strategies for Successful Implementation

In order for the successful adoption of the innovation of a gamified NEO there must be a sound plan for the program. The current web based orientation will need to be appropriately segmented by topic with a decided progression, as successful completion of a topic unlocks the next. The Education Coordinator will need to ensure that there is adequate time set aside in her daily schedule to conduct observations of the new hire during the application portion of NEO.

Strategies for Successful Diffusion

Prior to running the pilot program, the Education Coordinator will share the plan for the gamification of NEO with the Center Director as well as the Regional Manager. The plan will include the gamified NEO product as well as an analysis of the anticipated consequences. Throughout the life of the orientation, the Center Director and Regional Manager will be given progress reports of the program, namely performance observations of the new hire in the classroom as well as the new hire’s opinion of the program as she moves through it. Upon completion of the pilot program, the Center Director and the Regional Manager will be updated to the consequences of the program.

Strategies for Acceptance

In order for the program to gain acceptance, the primary desirable, anticipated consequence must be highlighted: a more engaging and purposeful NEO experience for new hires that prepares them for their role in the classroom. The path to making this achievable must be well planned and executed efficiently. Corporate acceptance will depend on cost benefit as well as the success of the pilot program.
Conclusion

Theories of learning have pointed to the need for learners to be able to physically and mentally apply instruction for authentic learning to occur. The web based orientation utilized by Bright Horizons Family Solutions, while containing adequate information for the learner, does not allow for the implementation of that information. Additionally, the method in which NEO is conducted allows for little learner engagement and wasted time behind a computer screen with minimal retention. This leaves new hires feeling confused and ill-prepared in the classroom post their NEO experience. Gamification of NEO could be the solution needed to more successfully and efficiently prepare new hires for their role in the classroom. By applying some gaming elements, such as unlocking new learning topics, earning badges, and leveling up, NEO would be more engaging to the learner. Also, by editing the method of delivery of NEO and allowing the learner to implement performance instruction, the learner will gain more confidence in her abilities in the classroom and thus be more successful in her role after the NEO experience. This desirable and anticipated consequence of a gamified NEO will have a positive effect on Bright Horizons business objective to create and maintain high quality programs for care and education in their centers by having high quality teachers to implement the program.
References


