

Gamifying emotional labor: A human-centered framework for sustainable workplace emotional intelligence development through interactive learning systems

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Article Info

Abstract

Article History:

Received:

04 Sept 2025

Accepted:

8 Oct 2025

Keywords:

*Emotional Labor,
Gamification,
Emotional Intelligence,
Workplace
Communication,
Human-Centered
Design,
Organizational
Behavior,
Employee Engagement*

This study presents a theoretically-grounded gamification framework designed to address the critical challenge of maintaining emotional labor at sustainable levels within organizational contexts. The research introduces a comprehensive approach that integrates emotional intelligence development with interactive learning methodologies, specifically targeting the enhancement of empathy, communication culture, and collaborative feedback processes among employees and managers. Through the implementation of the "Emotional Journey Mapping with Emotion Cards" game system, this framework addresses three distinct player types: philanthropic, social, and questioning personalities. The methodology employs both intrinsic and extrinsic reward mechanisms while incorporating assessment tools to measure behavioral transformation and skill acquisition. Importantly, this framework represents a conceptual design proposal synthesized from existing empirical literature rather than a tested intervention. Based on meta-analytic evidence from similar interventions in the literature, this framework hypothesizes potential improvements of 10-40% in team collaboration, employee engagement, and conflict resolution effectiveness, pending empirical validation through controlled implementation studies. The study concludes that gamified approaches to emotional labor management offer significant potential for contributing to organizational wellbeing while maintaining productivity standards. Key limitations include the absence of empirical validation and dependency on organizational commitment for successful implementation. Future research should prioritize controlled implementation studies to validate the framework's effectiveness across diverse organizational contexts. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on workplace emotional intelligence and provides practical implications for human resource management practices.

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1. Introduction

Emotional labor has emerged as a critical factor influencing employee wellbeing, productivity, and organizational culture in contemporary organizations [1]. Emotional labor, defined as the regulation of feelings and expressions to fulfill organizational expectations, represents a significant yet often overlooked aspect of workplace dynamics [2]. Organizations increasingly recognize emotional intelligence as critical for collaborative environments. This recognition creates urgent demand for systematic approaches that develop and sustain emotional competencies.

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17515/rede2025-010ga0904rs>

Res. Des. Vol. 2 Iss. 2 (2025) 105-123

The challenge of maintaining emotional labor at sustainable levels while enhancing organizational performance requires innovative solutions that address both individual development and systemic cultural transformation. Traditional training approaches often fail to create lasting behavioral change in emotional and social skills development [3]. Consequently, there is a growing interest in gamification as a methodology for enhancing learning engagement and promoting sustained behavioral modification in professional contexts.

This study introduces a comprehensive gamification framework specifically designed to address the dual objectives of strengthening emotional labor sustainability and creating improved communication cultures within organizations. By systemic cultural transformation, we refer to organization-wide shifts in norms, values, and behavioral patterns that influence how emotions are expressed, managed, and valued in professional contexts—moving beyond individual skill development to reshape collective workplace practices and expectations. The framework incorporates human-centered design principles, targeting the enhancement of emotional intelligence among both employees and managers through interactive, collaborative learning experiences. By examining the intersection of emotional labor theory, gamification principles, and organizational development practices, this research contributes to the understanding of how innovative learning methodologies can address complex workplace challenges.

The primary research question guiding this investigation focuses on how gamified approaches to emotional intelligence development can effectively support sustainable emotional labor practices while fostering improved communication cultures in organizational settings. Additionally, this study explores the differential impacts of gamification on various personality types and examines the long-term sustainability of behavioral changes achieved through game-based interventions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Emotional Labor in Organizational Contexts

Hochschild [1] established the theoretical foundation of emotional labor by examining the commodification of human feelings in service industries. Subsequent research has expanded this concept to encompass the broader organizational context, recognizing emotional labor as a fundamental component of job performance across various sectors [4]. Contemporary studies demonstrate that excessive emotional labor demands lead to burnout, job dissatisfaction, and decreased organizational commitment. Conversely, appropriate emotional regulation enhances team cohesion and customer satisfaction [5].

Recent investigations have highlighted the bidirectional relationship between emotional labor and organizational culture, suggesting that supportive work environments can mitigate the negative effects of emotional demands while enhancing the positive outcomes associated with emotional regulation [6]. This perspective underscores the importance of developing organizational interventions that address both individual emotional competencies and systemic factors that influence emotional labor sustainability.

2.2 Emotional Intelligence and Workplace Performance

Goleman [7] conceptualized emotional intelligence as encompassing four key domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Empirical research has consistently demonstrated positive correlations between emotional intelligence and various organizational outcomes, including leadership effectiveness, team performance, and employee satisfaction [8]. Furthermore, studies have

shown that emotional intelligence can be developed through targeted interventions, making it a viable focus for organizational development initiatives [9].

Meta-analytic reviews reveal that emotional intelligence training programs demonstrate moderate to large effect sizes when implemented with methodological rigor [10]. However, traditional training approaches often struggle with engagement and retention issues, particularly when addressing complex behavioral competencies that require sustained practice and application.

2.3 Gamification in Organizational Learning

Gamification, defined as the application of game design elements in non-game contexts, has emerged as a promising approach for enhancing learning engagement and motivation [11]. The theoretical foundation for gamification effectiveness draws from self-determination theory, which emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in driving intrinsic motivation [12].

Research demonstrates that well-designed gamification interventions significantly improve learning outcomes, engagement levels, and behavioral change sustainability [13]. Recent studies have particularly emphasized the importance of temporal focus and flow theory in gamified environments, where participants' temporal orientation affects their engagement with game-based learning activities [14]. Key design principles include meaningful challenges, immediate feedback, social interaction opportunities, and progress visualization [15]. However, the effectiveness of gamification approaches depends heavily on alignment with learning objectives and careful consideration of individual differences in motivation and engagement preferences.

2.4 Integration of Emotional Intelligence and Gamification

The intersection of emotional intelligence development and gamification represents a relatively nascent area of research, with limited empirical investigations examining the effectiveness of game-based approaches to emotional competency development [16]. Preliminary studies suggest that gamified emotional intelligence interventions may be particularly effective due to the social and experiential nature of game-based learning, which aligns well with the interpersonal focus of emotional competencies.

Recent advances in escape room design have demonstrated the educational potential of puzzle-based gamification approaches across various learning contexts [17]. The typological classification of mental, physical, and meta-puzzles provides a framework for understanding how different game mechanics can support emotional intelligence development through collaborative problem-solving and narrative engagement.

The theoretical rationale for combining these approaches rests on the assumption that emotional intelligence development requires safe spaces for practice, immediate feedback, and opportunities for reflection—all elements that can be effectively incorporated into game-based learning environments [18]. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of many emotional intelligence competencies aligns well with multiplayer game formats that emphasize teamwork and communication.

3. Methodology

3.1 Framework Development Approach

It is crucial to establish at the outset that this study adopts a theoretical framework development methodology, explicitly positioning the research as a conceptual contribution rather than an empirical investigation involving primary data collection from organizational settings. This methodological positioning aligns with design science

research principles, wherein the primary objective is to create and specify innovative artifacts—in this case, a gamification framework—that address identified practical problems through theory-informed design decisions. Consequently, the framework presented herein represents a theoretically-grounded design proposal synthesized from existing research evidence, rather than a framework validated through empirical testing in actual workplace environments. This approach suits nascent research areas where limited validated tools exist, such as gamified emotional intelligence development in organizational contexts.

The gamification framework development followed human-centered design methodology through iterative cycles and stakeholder feedback. The approach integrated principles from instructional design theory, game design best practices, and organizational development methodologies to create a comprehensive intervention framework.

The framework emerged through an iterative, cyclical process rather than linear development. This process consisted of four interconnected phases: (1) systematic literature review and theoretical foundation establishment, (2) framework conceptualization and design specification, (3) player typology development based on motivational theory, and (4) assessment mechanism design informed by evaluation frameworks in organizational learning. Each of these phases is described in detail in the subsequent sections to enhance methodological transparency, enable potential replication or adaptation by other researchers and practitioners, and clearly communicate the evidence-based rationale underlying each design decision.

The framework development process consisted of five primary phases: problem definition, goal setting, target audience analysis, mechanics design, and assessment planning. Each phase incorporated evidence-based design principles and drew from established theoretical frameworks in emotional intelligence, gamification, and organizational learning.

The first phase involved a comprehensive, structured review of the peer-reviewed literature in three key areas: (a) emotional labor and emotional intelligence in organizational settings, (b) gamification theory and application in professional learning contexts, and (c) instructional design principles for behavioral competency development. Systematic database searches employed Boolean strategies across Google, Scholar and ResearchGate. Keyword combinations included: "emotional labor", "emotional intelligence training", "workplace gamification", "organizational learning", "behavior change interventions", "game-based learning", and "employee development." The search strategy specifically prioritized systematic reviews and high-impact empirical research to ensure both current validity and the inclusion of key theoretical work that has shaped the field. Inclusion criteria required that studies address organizational or workplace contexts, explicitly focus on behavioral or competency development outcomes, and provide empirical evidence or robust theoretical frameworks relevant to intervention design.

From this comprehensive literature synthesis, several key evidence-based design principles were extracted and integrated into the framework development process. These principles included: (a) the demonstrated necessity of addressing both surface-level emotional display and deep-acting emotional regulation strategies to achieve sustainable emotional labor management, as evidenced by Mesmer-Magnus et al.'s [6] discordance-congruence perspective; (b) the centrality of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in sustaining intrinsic motivation within learning interventions, as articulated in Ryan and Deci's [12] self-determination theory; (c) the proven effectiveness of collaborative, team-based learning formats in developing interpersonal and emotional competencies, as demonstrated by research on group emotional intelligence; and (d) the critical

requirement for immediate feedback, progress visualization, and meaningful challenge progression in gamified learning environments to maintain long-term engagement, as established by Kapp [15] and Deterding et al. [11]. These synthesized principles served as the theoretical foundation and primary design criteria for all subsequent framework development decisions, thereby ensuring that the proposed intervention was firmly grounded in established empirical evidence rather than untested assumptions or unexamined intuitions. The hierarchical structure of this framework is illustrated in Figure 1, which demonstrates the progression from theoretical foundations through design components to expected outcomes at individual, team, and organizational levels.

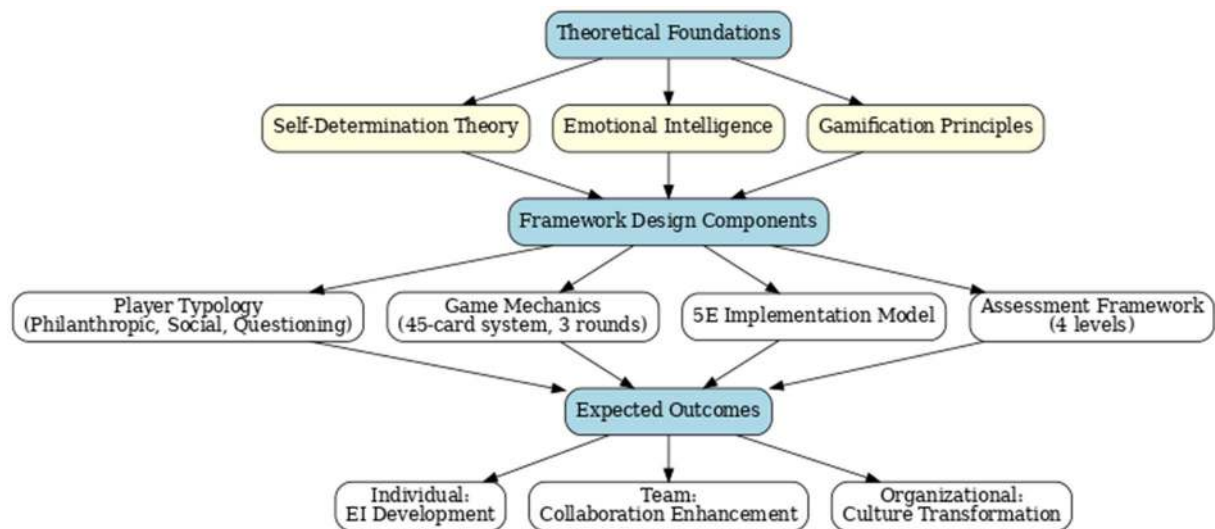


Figure 1. Total economic losses from earthquakes as % of national GDP

Note: Figure 1 illustrates the hierarchical structure of the gamification framework, showing the progression from theoretical foundations through design components to expected outcomes at individual, team, and organizational levels. This hierarchical architecture demonstrates how self-determination theory and emotional intelligence theory inform design decisions, which subsequently shape implementation strategies and multilevel outcomes.

3.2 Game Design: Emotional Journey Mapping with Emotion Cards

Building upon the theoretical foundations established through the literature review, the second phase systematically translated abstract principles into concrete, actionable design features for the gamification framework. This translation process drew extensively on established instructional design models, particularly the ADDIE framework (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation) and the 5E instructional model (Entice, Enter, Engage, Exit, Extend), which together provided both structural rigor and learner-centered implementation guidance.

The core intervention, "Emotional Journey Mapping with Emotion Cards," is a collaborative card-based game targeting emotional recognition, communication skills, and empathy development. The game utilizes 45 specially designed cards, including 30 cards featuring emotion words paired with symbolic representations and 15 blank cards for participant customization. The game structure consists of three distinct phases, as detailed in Table 1, which outlines the duration, primary learning objectives, and assessment methods for each round.

Table 1. Game Structure and Learning Objectives

Game Round	Duration	Primary Learning Objective	Assessment Method
Round 1: Emotion Recognition	5 minutes	Accurate emotion identification and communication	Correct guesses (10 points each)
Round 2: Emotion Mapping	2 minutes	Emotional categorization and decision-making	Proper emotion placement (10 points each)
Reflection Phase	10 minutes	Application to workplace contexts	Qualitative feedback and discussion

Note: Table 1 was created by the author based on the game framework specifications.

The game mechanics operationalize Goleman's [7] four emotional intelligence domains, ensuring direct alignment between game activities and learning objectives. As shown in Table 1, Round 1 (Emotion Recognition, 5 minutes) explicitly targets the self-awareness and social awareness domains by requiring participants to accurately identify and communicate emotional states through multiple modalities—specifically, verbal description, visual representation, and physical action. This multimodal approach accommodates different communication preferences and learning styles while developing emotion recognition accuracy, which represents a foundational emotional intelligence skill upon which other competencies are built. Round 2 (Emotion Mapping, 2 minutes) addresses the self-management domain by necessitating rapid categorization decisions based on emotional valence (positive/negative continuum) and energy dimensions (high/low arousal levels), activities that directly mirror the cognitive processing and evaluative decision-making required for effective emotional regulation in complex workplace contexts. The Reflection Phase (10 minutes) integrates the relationship management domain by facilitating structured discussions about workplace application scenarios, collaborative problem-solving exercises, and peer feedback exchanges—activities that directly develop the interpersonal emotional competencies essential for effective team functioning and organizational citizenship.

The game incorporates multiple communication modalities, including verbal description, visual representation, and physical action, to accommodate different learning preferences and communication styles. Participants work in teams to identify emotions, categorize them according to valence and energy dimensions, and apply their insights to workplace scenarios.

3.3 Player Type Classification System

The third phase developed a theoretically-grounded player typology by synthesizing motivational theory and existing player classification frameworks in gamification research. The theoretical foundation drew primarily from Ryan and Deci's [12] self-determination theory, which identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as fundamental psychological needs driving human motivation across diverse contexts. Additionally, the typology incorporated insights from Bartle's [19] taxonomy of player types in gaming contexts (achievers, explorers, socializers, killers), while deliberately adapting these categories for organizational learning environments where motivational dynamics differ substantially from recreational gaming contexts due to factors such as organizational authority structures, professional identity concerns, and instrumental versus intrinsic participation motivations.

The three-category classification system was derived through systematic integration of Bartle's [19] player taxonomy, Ryan and Deci's [12] self-determination theory, and organizational motivation research, specifically adapting these frameworks for workplace

emotional intelligence contexts. Bartle's [19] taxonomy identified four player types: achievers, explorers, socializers, and killers. This framework excludes the "killer" archetype—characterized by competitive dominance and disruption—as incompatible with collaborative emotional intelligence development. The remaining three types were reconceptualized through the lens of workplace motivation research. The philanthropic type emerged from synthesizing Bartle's "socializer" with organizational citizenship behavior theory [20], emphasizing prosocial contribution over mere social interaction. The social type retained Bartle's relational emphasis while incorporating principles from social learning theory [21]. The questioning type was developed by merging Bartle's "achiever" and "explorer" characteristics with competence-oriented motivational research and continuous improvement literature, reflecting analytically-oriented employees who seek systematic understanding and optimization opportunities. HR practitioners and organizational psychologists validated this adapted typology to ensure ecological validity in workplace contexts.

The framework incorporates a three-category player typology designed to address different motivational orientations and engagement preferences within the organizational context: Table 2 presents the comprehensive characteristics of each player type, including their primary motivations, onboarding strategies, scaffolding approaches, and anticipated mastery outcomes.

Table 2: Player Type Characteristics and Journey Stages

Player Type	Primary Motivation	Onboarding Strategy	Scaffolding Approach	Mastery Outcome
Philanthropic	Supporting others and creating harmonious environments	HR-organized training announcement	Team-based communication channels and peer motivation	Knowledge transfer to colleagues needing assistance
Social	Building relationships and sharing knowledge	Voluntary participation in HRM-announced training	Efficient interpersonal communication and teammate insight	Human relations awareness-raising with others
Questioning	Systematic improvement and innovative solutions	HRM selection and process inclusion	Perspective sharing through enhanced social relations	Process deficiency identification and correction

Note: Table 2 was created by the author based on the player type analysis in the framework. The motivational underpinnings of these three player types are visually represented in Figure 2, which maps each type to the core psychological needs identified in Self-Determination Theory [12].

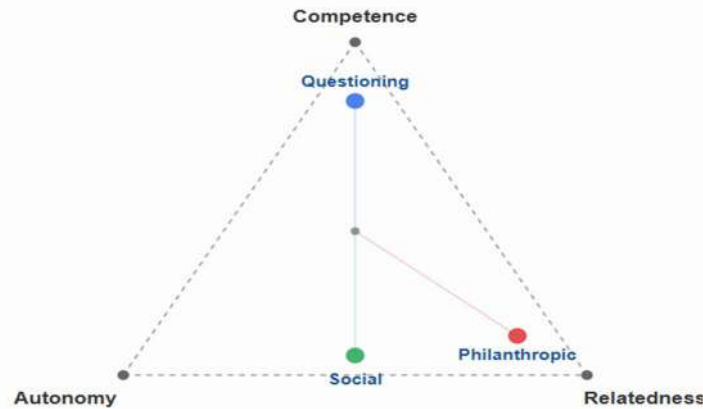


Figure 2: Player Type Motivational Profiles

Note: Table 2 maps the three player types to the core psychological needs identified in Self-Determination Theory [12]. The philanthropic type primarily aligns with relatedness (supporting others and creating harmonious environments), the social type balances relatedness with autonomy (building relationships while maintaining voluntary engagement), and the questioning type predominantly aligns with competence (systematic understanding and optimization). The triangular structure illustrates that while each type has a dominant motivational driver, all three types remain connected to all three psychological needs, reflecting the integrated nature of human motivation in organizational contexts.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the philanthropic player type was conceptualized based on prosocial motivation theory and research on organizational citizenship behavior, thereby recognizing individuals who are driven primarily by contribution to collective welfare, supporting others' success, and creating harmonious work environments that benefit all members. This type aligns closely with the "relatedness" component of self-determination theory and resonates with the "socializer" element of Bartle's taxonomy, though it is specifically adapted to emphasize workplace helping behaviors and collective benefit orientation rather than purely social interaction for its own sake. The social player type, as depicted in Figure 2, draws more directly from social learning theory [21] and research demonstrating the importance of interpersonal connection, knowledge sharing, and collaborative learning in workplace satisfaction and learning effectiveness. This type is particularly relevant in organizational gamification contexts because workplace learning is inherently social and collaborative, occurring primarily through interaction with colleagues rather than through individual study.

The questioning player type incorporates characteristics from innovation literature, problem-solving orientation research, and studies of workplace learning preferences that emphasize systematic improvement, analytical approaches, and evidence-based decision-making. This type resonates strongly with the "competence" component of self-determination theory and specifically addresses the needs of analytically-oriented employees who engage most effectively when they understand underlying mechanisms, can identify improvement opportunities, and perceive learning activities as contributing to process optimization. While these three categories necessarily simplify the full complexity of human motivation and represent ideal types rather than discrete, mutually exclusive groups into which all individuals perfectly fit, they nevertheless provide a practically useful framework for customizing implementation strategies based on workforce composition and organizational culture characteristics without requiring extensive individual psychological assessment.

Each player type was systematically characterized across four dimensions to enable practical application, as comprehensively outlined in Table 2: (a) primary motivational drivers that energize engagement and sustained participation, (b) optimal onboarding strategies for generating initial interest and facilitating entry into the learning experience, (c) scaffolding approaches that support progressive skill development and maintain motivation through challenge calibration, and (d) anticipated mastery outcomes representing the distinctive contribution each type makes to organizational learning culture. This multidimensional characterization enables organizations to design differentiated implementation pathways while maintaining a coherent overall framework structure, thereby addressing individual differences without fragmenting the intervention into disconnected components.

3.4 Assessment and Evaluation Framework

The fourth and final phase involved designing a comprehensive assessment framework to enable multi-level evaluation of intervention effectiveness, explicitly aligned with Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's [3] four-level training evaluation model, which remains the predominant and most widely accepted framework for assessing organizational learning interventions. This model evaluates interventions hierarchically across four levels: Level 1 (Reaction—participant satisfaction, engagement, and affective responses), Level 2 (Learning—knowledge acquisition, skill development, and competency improvement), Level 3 (Behavior—workplace application, behavioral transfer, and sustained behavioral change), and Level 4 (Results—organizational outcomes, performance impacts, and return on investment). The framework specifies both quantitative metrics and qualitative feedback mechanisms for each level, thereby reflecting best practices in mixed-methods evaluation design that captures both measurable outcomes and nuanced insights into participant experiences.

The assessment methodology incorporates both quantitative metrics and qualitative feedback mechanisms to evaluate intervention effectiveness. Key performance indicators include badge acquisition rates, correct response frequencies, behavioral change indicators, and participant engagement levels.

At Level 1 (Reaction), assessment focuses on measuring immediate participant responses through participation rates (indicating initial appeal and accessibility), engagement indicators observed during sessions (such as active discussion, question-asking, and collaborative behavior), and satisfaction scores collected through post-session questionnaires employing Likert-scale items. At Level 2 (Learning), quantitative metrics include badge acquisition rates indicating successful completion of specific learning objectives, correct response frequencies during game rounds measuring emotion recognition accuracy and categorization skill, and pre-post comparisons using standardized emotional intelligence assessments such as the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI) or the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue). At Level 3 (Behavior), assessment employs behavioral observation protocols implemented by trained observers, peer and supervisor ratings of emotional intelligence competencies using 360-degree feedback approaches, and frequency counts of specific target behaviors such as constructive conflict resolution attempts, empathetic communication instances, or emotional support provision to colleagues. At Level 4 (Results), organizational-level outcomes are assessed through longitudinal tracking of employee engagement survey scores, voluntary turnover statistics, team performance metrics on collaborative tasks, and organizational climate measures administered at regular intervals.

These projections serve multiple important methodological and practical purposes within the research design: (a) they provide theoretically-justified benchmarks against which

future empirical implementations can be systematically evaluated, enabling researchers to determine whether actual outcomes align with, exceed, or fall short of evidence-based expectations; (b) they offer organizations considering adoption of the framework reasonable, research-grounded expectations for potential outcomes, thereby facilitating informed decision-making about resource allocation and implementation investment; and (c) they establish explicit hypotheses that can be formally tested through controlled implementation studies, quasi-experimental designs, or randomized controlled trials. Consequently, future research implementing this framework should systematically track actual outcomes against these theoretically-grounded projections using appropriate statistical methods to validate the framework's effectiveness, identify necessary design refinements or contextual adaptations, and contribute substantively to the evidence base on gamified emotional intelligence interventions in organizational settings.

To ensure methodological clarity, it is essential to acknowledge both the strengths and limitations of this theoretical framework development approach. The primary strength lies in the systematic, evidence-based design specification, wherein all decisions are traceable to established theoretical frameworks, empirical research findings, and meta-analytic syntheses, ensuring the framework represents a rigorous synthesis of best practices rather than untested innovation. However, this study does not present empirical data from actual organizational implementations, pilot testing, or field trials; consequently, the effectiveness claims and projected outcomes are based on extrapolation from related research rather than direct observation of this specific framework's impact. Actual implementation outcomes may vary significantly from theoretical projections due to contextual factors including organizational culture, implementation fidelity, participant characteristics, leadership support, and environmental conditions. This methodological positioning is both appropriate and valuable within intervention development research, as theoretical framework development represents an essential preliminary stage that provides the foundation for subsequent empirical investigation. Future research should build upon this theoretical foundation through controlled implementation studies, quasi-experimental designs, or randomized controlled trials to empirically validate the framework's effectiveness, identify boundary conditions, and determine necessary modifications for diverse organizational contexts.

The evaluation framework addresses five primary outcome areas: game element statistics, player level distribution, improvement metrics, permanent behavioral change indicators, and interaction frequency measures. Pre- and post-intervention assessments utilize validated emotional intelligence instruments and organizational climate surveys to measure systemic changes.

4. Implementation Framework

4.1 The 5E Model Application

The implementation strategy follows the 5E instructional model (Entice, Enter, Engage, Exit, Extend), originally developed for science education but adapted here for organizational gamification. This structured five-stage approach was selected based on its proven effectiveness in facilitating systematic participant progression through sequential learning stages while simultaneously maintaining engagement and motivation throughout the intervention lifecycle. The model's alignment with both constructivist learning principles and self-determination theory makes it particularly suitable for emotional intelligence development, where learners must actively construct understanding through experience rather than passively receive information.

Each 5E stage serves distinct pedagogical and motivational functions supporting comprehensive learning and behavioral change. The Entice stage addresses the critical challenge of initial participant recruitment and interest generation in organizational settings where training participation may be perceived as mandatory or burdensome rather than genuinely valuable. The Enter stage facilitates the transition from awareness to active participation, recognizing that initial engagement requires careful scaffolding and social support. The Engage stage represents the core learning experience where participants actively develop targeted competencies through structured game-based activities. The Exit stage ensures appropriate closure, recognition, and assessment that validate participant effort and achievement. Finally, The Extend stage addresses the crucial challenge of transfer and sustainability, ensuring that learning translates into lasting workplace behavioral change rather than remaining confined to the training context. These five stages are operationalized through specific employee actions, HR actions, and expected outcomes, as detailed in Table 3.

Table 3: 5E Model Implementation Strategy

Stage	Employee Actions	HR Actions	Expected Outcomes
Entice	Awareness of HR activities through workplace channels	Information dissemination via email and internal communications	Initial interest and curiosity generation
Enter	Participation in emotional mapping competition	Team formation ensuring emotional awareness development	Active engagement initiation
Engage	Active participation in Emotional Journey Mapping game	Team management and game facilitation	Skill development and learning reinforcement
Exit	Game completion and performance assessment	Badge, reward, and progress indicator determination	Achievement recognition and validation
Extend	Feedback provision and system personalization	Performance comparison and motivation analysis	Sustained behavioral change and transfer

Note: Table 3 was created by the author based on the 5E implementation framework. The iterative and cyclical nature of this implementation process is visually represented in Figure 3, which emphasizes how the Extend phase connects back to renewed engagement cycles.

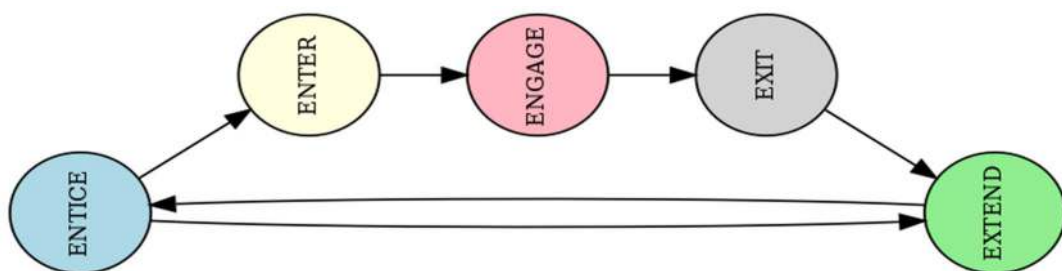


Figure 3: The 5E Implementation Cycle

Note: Figure 3 illustrates the iterative nature of the 5E implementation model, emphasizing that the Extend phase can lead to renewed engagement cycles through continuous improvement and personalization.

As shown in Figure 3, the Entice stage strategically leverages multiple organizational communication channels to generate initial awareness and curiosity among potential participants. Rather than relying solely on top-down mandates, this stage emphasizes

informational messaging that highlights the personal and professional benefits of participation, thereby appealing to intrinsic motivation. Employee actions at this stage are primarily passive (awareness building), while HR actions focus on strategic information dissemination through emails, internal communications platforms, team meetings, and informal networks. The expected outcome—initial interest and curiosity generation—establishes the motivational foundation necessary for subsequent engagement.

The Enter stage, as detailed in Figure 3, facilitates the critical transition from passive awareness to active participation through carefully designed entry mechanisms. The framing of participation as involvement in an "emotional mapping competition" serves multiple strategic purposes: it introduces game-like elements that reduce anxiety associated with formal training, creates social motivation through team-based participation, and positions the activity as an opportunity for achievement rather than a remedial intervention. HR actions during this stage focus on team formation that ensures diverse composition and emotional awareness development potential, recognizing that team dynamics significantly influence learning outcomes. The expected outcome—active engagement initiation—represents successful onboarding into the learning experience.

According to Figure 3, the Engage stage constitutes the primary learning experience where participants actively develop emotional intelligence competencies through structured gameplay. Employee actions involve full participation in the Emotional Journey Mapping game, including emotion recognition activities, categorization exercises, and collaborative discussions. HR actions shift to facilitation roles that involve team management, game administration, conflict resolution, and ensuring adherence to game rules while maintaining psychological safety. The expected outcomes—skill development and learning reinforcement—represent the core pedagogical objectives of the intervention, with learning occurring through experiential practice, immediate feedback, and social interaction.

Figure 3 outlines how the Exit stage provides appropriate closure to the game experience while ensuring recognition and validation of participant achievement. Employee actions include game completion and participation in performance assessment activities that may involve self-reflection, peer evaluation, or formal testing. HR actions focus on determining and distributing badges, rewards, and progress indicators that recognize different levels of achievement and competency development. The expected outcome—achievement recognition and validation—addresses fundamental psychological needs for competence acknowledgment and social recognition, which are essential for sustaining motivation and reinforcing the value of participation.

As indicated in Figure 3, the Extend stage addresses the crucial challenge of ensuring that learning transfers to actual workplace contexts and produces sustained behavioral change rather than temporary engagement spikes. Employee actions include providing feedback on the intervention experience, identifying opportunities for personalization based on role-specific needs, and committing to specific behavioral goals for workplace application. HR actions involve conducting performance comparisons across teams or departments, analyzing engagement patterns and learning outcomes, and developing strategies to maintain motivation beyond the initial intervention. The expected outcome—sustained behavioral change and transfer—represents the ultimate success criterion, as emotional intelligence development only generates organizational value when it translates into improved workplace behaviors, enhanced communication patterns, and more effective emotional labor management.

This structured implementation approach offers several advantages over less systematic intervention strategies. First, it provides clear role definition for both employees and HR

professionals at each stage, reducing ambiguity and facilitating coordinated action. Second, it ensures that critical implementation elements are not overlooked or inadequately addressed, as each stage has explicit action requirements and outcome expectations. Third, it enables systematic evaluation of intervention effectiveness at each stage, allowing organizations to identify and address implementation challenges before they compound. Finally, it aligns implementation strategy with established learning theory and instructional design principles, increasing the likelihood of achieving intended outcomes. However, successful implementation requires adequate HR capacity, organizational support, and flexibility to adapt the model to specific organizational contexts while maintaining its core structural elements.

4.2 Reward System Architecture

The reward system incorporates both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational elements, designed to address different player preferences and sustain long-term engagement. Intrinsic rewards focus on recognition, access privileges, and status indicators, while extrinsic rewards include tangible benefits such as vouchers and holiday opportunities.

The achievement progression system includes three levels: novice (first-time participants), expert (minimum three departmental participations), and master (inter-departmental competition promotion). This tiered approach provides clear advancement pathways while maintaining motivation across different experience levels.

5. Results & Discussion

5.1 Projected Performance Improvements

Based on established research, the framework projects significant improvements across multiple organizational metrics. Employee engagement and satisfaction improvements are estimated at 10-30%, reflecting the enhanced sense of recognition and competency development that typically accompany successful emotional intelligence interventions.

Team collaboration and performance metrics demonstrate projected improvements of 15-40%, attributable to enhanced communication skills, empathy development, and conflict resolution capabilities. These estimates align with existing research demonstrating the positive correlation between emotional intelligence and team effectiveness [22].

Turnover reduction projections of 10-25% reflect the anticipated improvement in workplace satisfaction and employee connection that typically result from enhanced emotional intelligence and communication culture. Additionally, innovation and creativity increases of 10-30% are projected based on the improved psychological safety and open communication fostered by the intervention.

5.2 Framework Strengths and Limitations

The framework demonstrates several notable strengths, including its comprehensive approach to both individual skill development and organizational culture transformation. The integration of multiple learning modalities accommodates diverse learning preferences, while the team-based format addresses the inherently social nature of emotional intelligence competencies. Furthermore, the theoretically-grounded design synthesizes established principles from self-determination theory, emotional intelligence research, and gamification science, providing a robust conceptual foundation. The framework's flexibility in accommodating different player types (philanthropic, social, and questioning) enables customization based on workforce characteristics, while the structured 5E implementation model offers clear procedural guidance for systematic deployment across varied organizational contexts.

However, several substantial limitations require acknowledgment for appropriate interpretation and realistic implementation. First and fundamentally, this framework represents a theoretical design proposal that has not undergone empirical validation through organizational implementation. The projected outcome improvements are derived from meta-analytic evidence on related interventions rather than direct empirical observation of this specific framework's effectiveness. Consequently, actual implementation results may vary significantly from theoretical projections based on contextual factors, organizational culture characteristics, implementation fidelity, and participant demographics.

Second, the framework's effectiveness depends heavily on sustained organizational commitment, adequate resource allocation, and supportive leadership. Organizations lacking robust human resource infrastructure, dedicated training budgets, or leadership buy-in may encounter significant implementation challenges. The requirement for 40-60 hours of HR facilitation time per intervention cycle, combined with participant time away from regular duties, necessitates substantial organizational investment that may not be feasible in resource-constrained environments.

Third, gamification approaches carry inherent risks that require careful management. The competitive elements embedded within the framework (point systems, badges, inter-team comparisons) may inadvertently generate performance anxiety, interpersonal conflict, or unhealthy competitive dynamics. These risks are particularly salient in high power-distance cultures or organizationally anxious environments, potentially undermining the collaborative spirit essential for emotional intelligence development. Participants who perceive themselves as "losing" or performing poorly relative to peers may experience reduced psychological safety, potentially triggering disengagement or defensive behaviors that contradict the intervention's core objectives. Additionally, gamification systems are vulnerable to gaming behaviors, wherein participants focus on maximizing scores through strategic manipulation rather than genuinely developing emotional competencies. For instance, participants might prioritize rapid correct responses over thoughtful reflection, or engage in performative empathy displays to earn recognition rather than cultivating authentic emotional understanding.

Fourth, cultural factors significantly influence the framework's applicability and effectiveness across diverse organizational contexts. Emotional expression norms, display rules, and the acceptability of discussing feelings in professional settings vary substantially across cultures. The framework was conceptualized primarily within Western organizational paradigms that emphasize individualism, direct emotional communication, and egalitarian team structures. Organizations operating in high power-distance cultures, collectivist societies, or contexts where emotional restraint is professionally valued may require substantial adaptations. For example, the framework's emphasis on openly sharing emotional experiences and providing peer feedback may conflict with cultural norms favoring hierarchical deference, emotional reserve, or indirect communication. Similarly, the player typology's emphasis on individual motivational profiles may inadequately capture collectivist orientations wherein group harmony supersedes personal preferences. Cross-cultural implementations would necessitate careful examination of emotional labor conceptualizations, appropriate emotional display expectations, and culturally-congruent facilitation approaches.

Fifth, the framework's focus on emotionally-intensive content necessitates adequately trained facilitators capable of managing complex group dynamics and supporting participants through potentially vulnerable experiences. Facilitators require specialized competencies beyond standard training delivery skills, including emotional attunement,

conflict de-escalation capabilities, trauma-informed approaches, and ethical sensitivity regarding emotional disclosure boundaries. Discussing workplace emotional experiences may surface unresolved conflicts, trigger distressing memories, or expose interpersonal tensions that require skillful navigation. Facilitators lacking appropriate training may inadvertently create unsafe learning environments, mismanage emotional disclosures, or fail to recognize participants experiencing psychological distress. Consequently, organizations must invest in comprehensive facilitator training programs that address psychological safety creation, ethical boundaries in emotional work, crisis response protocols, and culturally-responsive facilitation techniques. This training requirement represents an additional implementation cost and prerequisite that organizations must address before deployment.

Finally, the long-term sustainability of behavioral changes achieved through gamification remains an open empirical question. While the framework incorporates design elements intended to promote transfer and maintenance—such as workplace application exercises, reflection phases, and extended follow-up activities—the extent to which game-based emotional intelligence development translates into sustained workplace behavioral modification requires longitudinal investigation. Organizations should anticipate the need for reinforcement strategies, periodic refresher interventions, and environmental supports that maintain and strengthen initial learning gains beyond the immediate intervention period.

5.3 Implications for Practice

The practical implications of this framework extend beyond immediate training applications to encompass broader organizational development strategies. The human-centered design approach provides a replicable methodology for developing gamified interventions targeting other organizational competencies.

When compared to existing emotional intelligence training models, this framework offers several distinctive advantages. Traditional classroom-based emotional intelligence programs, such as those described by Cherniss and Goleman [8], typically employ lecture-based instruction, role-playing exercises, and individual reflection activities. While effective for knowledge transfer, these approaches often struggle with sustained engagement and workplace application. Digital emotional intelligence platforms, such as competency-based e-learning modules, provide scalability and self-paced learning but frequently lack the social interaction essential for developing interpersonal emotional competencies. In contrast, this gamified framework combines the engagement benefits of game mechanics with the collaborative learning advantages of team-based formats, while maintaining cost-effectiveness through physical rather than technological infrastructure. Unlike purely competitive gamification systems used in some sales training contexts—which can generate anxiety and undermine psychological safety—this framework balances competitive elements with collaborative objectives, explicitly addressing multiple player motivations through typological differentiation. Compared to experiential learning interventions such as outdoor team-building exercises or simulation-based training, the card-based format offers greater accessibility, lower logistical complexity, and more direct alignment with workplace emotional intelligence competencies. The structured 5E implementation model provides clearer procedural guidance than many existing interventions, facilitating consistent deployment across organizational units while maintaining fidelity to theoretical principles.

Furthermore, the player type classification system offers insights into how different personality orientations respond to gamified learning environments, potentially informing future intervention design decisions. The integration of assessment mechanisms provides

organizations with data-driven approaches to measuring intervention effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement.

6. Future Research Directions

Future research should empirically validate the framework through controlled organizational interventions examining both short-term learning outcomes and long-term behavioral sustainability. Longitudinal studies investigating the durability of emotional intelligence improvements and their impact on organizational climate would provide valuable insights into intervention effectiveness.

Comparative studies should examine gamified versus traditional emotional intelligence interventions to strengthen the evidence base for game-based professional development. Cross-cultural investigations could explore the applicability of the framework across different organizational contexts and cultural settings.

Research into the optimal balance between intrinsic and extrinsic reward systems within gamified emotional intelligence interventions would provide practical guidance for implementation decisions. Finally, investigations into the scalability of such interventions across different organizational sizes and structures would inform broader adoption strategies.

7. Conclusion

This study presents a theoretically-grounded gamification framework addressing sustainable emotional labor maintenance while enhancing workplace communication culture and emotional intelligence competencies. The "Emotional Journey Mapping with Emotion Cards" intervention represents an innovative synthesis of emotional intelligence theory, gamification principles, and human-centered design methodologies, offering organizations a structured, evidence-based approach to developing emotional competencies through engaging, collaborative learning experiences. Drawing upon established theoretical foundations in self-determination theory, instructional design models, and emotional intelligence research, the framework provides a comprehensive blueprint for organizations seeking to address the complex interplay between emotional labor demands and employee wellbeing.

The framework's primary contribution lies in simultaneously addressing individual competency development and systemic organizational transformation. By integrating Goleman's four emotional intelligence domains with evidence-based gamification design principles, the intervention moves beyond traditional, often ineffective training approaches that fail to produce lasting behavioral change. Moreover, the incorporation of player type differentiation—encompassing philanthropic, social, and questioning personalities—recognizes the heterogeneity of organizational populations and provides practical guidance for customizing implementation strategies to accommodate diverse motivational profiles. The structured 5E implementation model (Entice, Enter, Engage, Exit, Extend) further enhances practical applicability by offering clear procedural guidance that facilitates systematic deployment across different organizational contexts while maintaining theoretical integrity.

Nevertheless, several critical considerations must inform potential implementation efforts. Fundamentally, organizations considering adoption must recognize that this framework represents a theoretical proposal requiring rigorous empirical validation before definitive effectiveness claims can be substantiated. The projected outcome improvements, while grounded in meta-analytic evidence from related interventions, remain hypothetical for

this specific design. Consequently, early adopters should approach implementation with appropriate measurement strategies to document actual outcomes and identify necessary refinements. Additionally, the framework's success depends critically on organizational readiness factors, including leadership support, resource availability, cultural alignment, and existing communication infrastructure.

From a practical implementation perspective, organizations must carefully consider scalability and resource requirements when evaluating the feasibility of adopting this framework. Based on current market research and industry benchmarks in Turkey, the initial material investment for the 45-card game set (30 emotion cards with professionally designed symbolic representations and 15 customizable blank cards) represents a relatively modest one-time cost. According to 2024-2025 custom game card printing data, professional-quality card sets with premium cardstock (280-310 GSM) range from approximately 250-400 TL per complete deck when ordered in quantities of 500-1,000 units, translating to an initial material investment of approximately 125,000-400,000 TL for organizations planning to equip multiple facilitators or departments simultaneously. However, the more substantial and ongoing investment involves human resource allocation, particularly for HR professionals who must facilitate game sessions, coordinate team formations, manage assessment processes, and analyze intervention outcomes. For a medium-sized organization (200-500 employees), comprehensive implementation requires approximately 40-60 hours of dedicated HR facilitation time per complete intervention cycle, including preparation, delivery, and follow-up activities. When accounting for average HR professional compensation rates—according to Eleman.net [23] data, HR specialists earn an average salary of 36,000 TL monthly, equivalent to approximately 160 TL per hour—this translates to roughly 6,400-9,600 TL in direct personnel costs per cycle. Additionally, organizations must budget for participant time away from regular duties; a typical 90-minute intervention session with 20 participants represents approximately 30 person-hours of opportunity cost, estimated at 2,940-5,880 TL depending on average employee compensation levels—as of 2025, the net minimum wage is 22,104.67 TL/month, equivalent to approximately 98 TL per hour [24]. Therefore, the total cost per comprehensive intervention cycle ranges from approximately 134,000-415,000 TL for medium-sized organizations, positioning this framework as a cost-effective alternative to traditional training programs. Importantly, the framework's scalability characteristics strongly favor larger organizations, as material costs remain relatively fixed while per-participant costs decrease substantially with scale. Organizations implementing the framework across multiple departments can achieve significant economies of scale by training internal facilitators rather than relying exclusively on external consultants, thereby reducing ongoing facilitation costs by an estimated 40-60% after initial implementation. Furthermore, the card-based physical format enables simultaneous sessions across geographically dispersed locations without requiring technological infrastructure, platform subscriptions, or ongoing software licensing fees, making the framework particularly cost-effective compared to digital gamification solutions. When evaluating return on investment, organizations should consider that employee turnover rates in Turkey are substantial and departures create significant costs. As noted by İdenfit [25], high turnover rates generate direct costs through recruitment, training, and orientation processes, while also producing indirect costs such as productivity losses and quality deterioration. According to Kolay İK [26] data, in 2025 the employer cost for a minimum wage employee is 30,555.53 TL, with this cost increasing when recruitment, orientation, and training expenses are included. If the framework achieves even conservative estimates of 10-15% reductions in voluntary turnover- a realistic projection based on meta-analytic evidence- the intervention costs could be recovered within 6-12

months exclusively through decreased recruitment, onboarding, and replacement training expenses, without accounting for additional substantial benefits in productivity enhancement, collaborative effectiveness, and employee satisfaction improvements.

The theoretical and practical implications extend beyond immediate emotional labor management to encompass broader questions about innovative learning methodologies in addressing complex organizational challenges. As organizations increasingly recognize that technical competencies alone are insufficient for contemporary work environments, frameworks that systematically develop interpersonal and emotional capabilities become increasingly valuable. Future research endeavors should prioritize empirical validation through carefully designed implementation studies that track both proximal learning outcomes and distal organizational impacts. Longitudinal investigations are particularly crucial for understanding whether game-based emotional intelligence development produces lasting behavioral changes. Ultimately, the success of such initiatives will depend not only on design quality but also on organizational commitment, sustained implementation support, and continuous refinement based on empirical feedback and participant experiences.

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