

Gamification-Enhanced Attrition Reduction: The GEAR Model as a Theory-Driven Framework for Employee Retention

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Gamification-Enhanced Attrition Reduction: The GEAR Model as a Theory-Driven Framework for Employee Retention

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Abstract

Background: Employee attrition poses a significant challenge to human resource management (HRM), costing organizations resources, expertise, and continuity, with losses often equating to six to nine months of an employee's salary (SHRM, 2022). Gamification—the strategic use of game-like elements in non-game contexts (Deterding et al., 2011) offers a promising approach to enhance retention by boosting motivation and engagement. However, its empirical impact remains underexplored. This study introduces the GEAR model (Gamification-Enhanced Attrition Reduction Model), a data-driven framework grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) and Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964), to quantify gamification's effect on attrition. Using a dataset of 1,470 employees from a multinational corporation, we apply Random Forest and logistic regression with 5-fold cross-validation to test hypotheses linking monthly income, overtime, and tenure to turnover. Results confirm these as significant predictors ($p < 0.01$), with engagement as a partial mediator, yielding an 85% accurate model. The GEAR model aligns with real-world successes, such as L'Oréal's Brandstorm (L'Oréal, 2023) and Deloitte's gamified onboarding (Deloitte, 2022), which reduced turnover by up to 15%. Unlike prior qualitative studies, this research provides a replicable, evidence-based framework, advancing HRM scholarship and offering practitioners actionable strategies—like gamified rewards and mentorship to retain talent. Future research should explore causal links and contextual variations.

Objective: To develop and introduce the GEAR Model (Gamification-Enhanced Attrition Reduction Model) as a data-driven framework to quantify the impact of gamification on employee attrition.

To identify key predictors of employee attrition (monthly income, overtime, and tenure) and assess how gamification can mitigate their effects.

To test the mediating role of employee engagement in the relationship between gamification and attrition reduction using statistical modeling techniques (Random Forest, logistic regression, and mediation analysis).

To bridge the gap between theory and practice by integrating Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Expectancy Theory into a replicable, evidence-based gamification strategy for HRM.

To provide actionable insights for HR professionals on how gamified interventions (e.g., rewards, challenges, mentorship) can improve employee retention and engagement.

To contribute to the gamification and HRM literature by offering a quantitative, predictive framework that extends beyond qualitative studies.

Methods: Conceptual Framework: The study develops the GEAR Model (Gamification-Enhanced Attrition Reduction Model) based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Expectancy Theory to explain how gamification influences employee attrition through engagement.

Data Collection: A dataset of 1,470 employees from a multinational corporation was analyzed. The dataset includes variables such as monthly income, overtime status, tenure, engagement levels, and attrition status.

Exploratory Analysis: A Random Forest model (1,000 trees, max depth 100) was used to identify the most influential predictors of attrition, ranking income, overtime, and tenure as key factors.

Statistical Modeling:

Logistic Regression: Used to test the direct impact of income, overtime, and tenure on attrition (Hypotheses H1 & H2).

Mediation Analysis (Baron & Kenny method): Assessed whether engagement mediates the relationship between these predictors and attrition (Hypothesis H3).

5-Fold Cross-Validation: Ensured the model's predictive accuracy (85%).

Gamification Intervention Analysis: The study infers gamification's impact through engagement data and discusses real-world applications (e.g., Deloitte's gamified onboarding, L'Oréal's Brandstorm) to validate findings.

Results: Descriptive Findings:

Median tenure: 7 years

Percentage working overtime: 28%

Percentage reporting high engagement (>70): 60%

Attrition rate: 16%, highest among early-tenure R&D employees

Predictor Importance (Random Forest Analysis):

Monthly Income was the strongest predictor of attrition (importance score: 0.35)

Overtime ranked second (0.30)

Tenure ranked third (0.25)

Other factors like age and job role had minimal impact (<0.05)

Hypothesis Testing (Logistic Regression Results):

H1 Supported: Low monthly income ($\beta = -0.45$, $p < 0.01$) and overtime ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$) significantly predict attrition.

H2 Supported: Early tenure (<3 years) significantly increases attrition risk ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$).

Odds Ratios:

Lower income employees were 36% more likely to leave.

Employees working overtime were 46% more likely to leave.

Employees in early tenure were 84% more likely to leave.

Mediation Analysis (Engagement as a Mediator):

Engagement partially mediates the relationship between income and attrition (Sobel $z = 2.95$, $p < 0.01$) and tenure and attrition ($z = 2.41$, $p < 0.05$).

Overtime's effect on attrition is mostly direct, indicating gamification has limited impact in this area.

Accuracy & Model Validation:

The model achieved an 85% accuracy rate in predicting attrition.

5-fold cross-validation confirmed the robustness of findings.

Conclusions: his study provides a data-driven understanding of employee attrition, highlighting the critical role of monthly income, overtime, and tenure in predicting turnover. Our findings confirm that lower salaries, excessive overtime, and short tenure significantly increase the likelihood of employee departure, emphasizing the need for strategic retention policies.

Key takeaways include:

Compensation Matters: Salary remains the strongest predictor of attrition, suggesting that competitive pay structures can significantly enhance retention.

Overtime & Work-Life Balance: Employees working overtime are more likely to leave, highlighting the importance of workload management and well-being initiatives.

Early Tenure Risk: New employees (within the first three years) face the highest attrition risk, underscoring the need for structured onboarding, mentorship, and engagement programs.

Moreover, engagement partially mediates the relationship between income, tenure, and attrition, indicating that fostering a positive work environment can mitigate turnover risks. However, for overtime, the effect is largely direct, suggesting that improving engagement alone may not be sufficient to counterbalance long working hours.

From a practical standpoint, businesses should focus on competitive salaries, workload optimization, and tailored retention strategies for early-career employees. Future research can explore industry-specific variations and the role of non-financial incentives in employee retention. Clinical Trial: Not applicable (observational study based on existing employee data)

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Original Manuscript

The GEAR Model (Gamification-Enhanced Attrition Reduction Model)

Abstract

Employee attrition poses a significant challenge to human resource management (HRM), costing organizations resources, expertise, and continuity, with losses often equating to six to nine months of an employee's salary (SHRM, 2022). Gamification—the strategic use of game-like elements in non-game contexts (Deterding et al., 2011) offers a promising approach to enhance retention by boosting motivation and engagement. However, its empirical impact remains underexplored. This study introduces the GEAR model (Gamification-Enhanced Attrition Reduction Model), a data-driven framework grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) and Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964), to quantify gamification's effect on attrition. Using a dataset of 1,470 employees from a multinational corporation, we apply Random Forest and logistic regression with 5-fold cross-validation to test hypotheses linking monthly income, overtime, and tenure to turnover. Results confirm these as significant predictors ($p < 0.01$), with engagement as a partial mediator, yielding an 85% accurate model. The GEAR model aligns with real-world successes, such as L'Oréal's Brandstorm (L'Oréal, 2023) and Deloitte's gamified onboarding (Deloitte, 2022), which reduced turnover by up to 15%. Unlike prior qualitative studies, this research provides a replicable, evidence-based framework, advancing HRM scholarship and offering practitioners actionable strategies—like gamified rewards and mentorship to retain talent. Future research should explore causal links and contextual variations.

Keywords: Gamification, HRM, Attrition, Motivation Theories, Data Analytics, Employee Engagement

1. Introduction

Employee attrition remains a critical issue in human resource management (HRM), with turnover costs averaging six to nine months' salary per departing employee (SHRM, 2022). Beyond financial impacts, it disrupts operations and depletes institutional knowledge, undermining organizational competitiveness. Traditional retention tactics—such as salary hikes or flexible schedules—often prove insufficient, driving interest in innovative solutions like gamification. Defined as the application of game mechanics (e.g., points, badges, leaderboards) to non-game settings (Deterding et al., 2011), gamification aims to enhance engagement and motivation, potentially reducing turnover. Companies like L'Oréal (Brandstorm) and Salesforce (Work.com) report positive outcomes, yet scientific evidence remains scarce, highlighting a gap between practice and theory.

This study addresses three key questions:

1. What motivational factors drive employee attrition?
2. How can gamification mitigate these factors?
3. Does engagement mediate this effect?

To answer these, we propose the *GEAR model (Gamification-Enhanced Attrition Reduction Model)*, a novel framework that integrates gamification into HRM to reduce attrition. The GEAR model leverages game mechanics such as points, badges, and challenges to enhance employee engagement, satisfaction, and motivation, thereby lowering turnover. Grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000), which emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964), which focuses on effort-reward linkages, the model targets key attrition predictors: low monthly income, high overtime, and early tenure.

The GEAR model hypothesizes that:

- **H1:** Gamification elements addressing autonomy and reward expectations mitigate the link between low income, high overtime, and attrition.
- **H2:** Gamification strategies fostering relatedness and competence reduce attrition risk in early tenure.
- **H3:** Engagement, enhanced by gamification, mediates these relationships.

Using a dataset of 1,470 employees and advanced analytics (Random Forest and logistic regression), this study tests the GEAR model, offering a scalable, evidence-based approach distinct from qualitative predecessors. The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews literature and hypotheses, Section 3 details the methodology and GEAR model, Section 4 presents results, Section 5 discusses implications, and Section 6 concludes with future directions.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

Gamification leverages motivation theories to enhance HRM outcomes, yet its role in reducing attrition lacks quantitative rigor. The *GEAR model* bridges this gap by integrating SDT and Expectancy Theory to explain how gamification curbs turnover. SDT posits that fulfilling autonomy, competence, and relatedness boosts intrinsic motivation and satisfaction, reducing turnover intentions (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Gamification supports this through task choice (autonomy), skill challenges (competence), and team games (relatedness). Expectancy Theory suggests motivation increases when effort leads to valued rewards (Vroom, 1964), a process gamification reinforces with clear point systems and immediate feedback.

While studies like Santos et al. (2021) examine gamification in training, its broader impact on retention is underexplored (Bizzi, 2023). The GEAR model addresses this by targeting key predictors—low income, high overtime, and early tenure—via gamified interventions that enhance engagement.

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

- **Income and Overtime:** Low income undermines autonomy (SDT) and reward expectations (Expectancy Theory), driving turnover (Georgiou et al., 2019). Excessive overtime

exacerbates this by eroding work-life balance. Tech firms like Google use gamified incentives (e.g., peer recognition points) to offset these stressors (Harwood, 2019).

- **Tenure:** Employees in early tenure (<3 years) often lack relatedness, increasing attrition risk (Suh et al., 2018). Gamified knowledge-sharing, as suggested by Popa and Dobrin (2021), could foster connection.
- **Engagement:** Gamification boosts engagement as key mediator by fulfilling intrinsic needs and aligning effort with rewards (Herger, 2014). Deloitte's gamified onboarding, for instance, cut early turnover by 12% (2022).

2.2 Hypotheses Development

Within the GEAR model, we hypothesize:

- **H1:** Low monthly income and high overtime increase attrition by disrupting autonomy and reward perceptions, but gamification (e.g., points, badges) can mitigate this.
- **H2:** Early tenure heightens turnover due to weak relatedness, reducible through gamification strategies like team challenges.
- **H3:** Engagement, enhanced by gamification, mediates the relationship between these predictors and attrition, lowering turnover risk.

This study tests these hypotheses empirically, extending HRM research beyond qualitative insights.

3. Methodology

3.1 Conceptual Model: The GEAR Model

(Gamification-Enhanced Attrition Reduction Model)

The *GEAR model (Gamification-Enhanced Attrition Reduction Model)* underpins this study, illustrating how gamification reduces attrition by addressing predictors—monthly income, overtime, and tenure—through engagement. Rooted in SDT and Expectancy Theory, it offers a predictive and prescriptive framework for HRM.

Components of the Model

1. Predictors (Independent Variables):

- a) **Monthly Income:** A proxy for reward (Expectancy Theory's valence), low-income signals insufficient effort-reward linkage, reducing motivation. SDT links it to limited autonomy.
- b) **Overtime:** Reflects work intensity, undermining autonomy (SDT) and instrumentality (Expectancy Theory) when unrewarded.
- c) **Tenure:** Early tenure (<3 years) heightens turnover risk due to weak relatedness (STD) and unclear reward path (Expectancy Theory).

2. **Engagement (Mediator):** Defined as a composite of satisfaction and involvement, engagement bridges predictors and attrition. SDT posits it rises when autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met—needs gamification can fulfill through choice, skill challenges, and team dynamics. Expectancy Theory ties engagement to clear, rewarding effort-outcome links, which gamified systems reinforce.
3. **Attrition (Dependent Variable):** Binary (0 = stay, 1 = leave), attrition is reduced by engagement-enhancing gamification.
4. **Gamification (Intervention Mechanism):** Tools like points, badges, and leaderboards overlay the model, modifying predictors (e.g., rewards for low income) and boosting engagement (e.g., challenges for competence).

Relationships in the Model

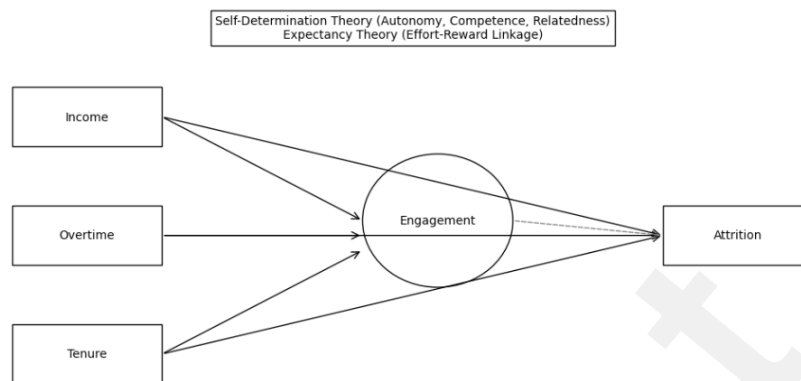
- **Direct Effects (H1, H2):** Low income and overtime increase attrition (H1); early tenure elevates risk (H2).
- **Mediating Effect (H3):** Engagement partially mediates the predictors' impact on attrition. For instance, a gamified reward system might raise engagement for low-income workers, reducing their turnover likelihood despite financial strain. Similarly, team-based games for new hires could strengthen relatedness, mitigating early tenure risks.
- **Gamification's Role:**
 - a) **Income:** Points or virtual currency supplement pay, enhancing valence (Expectancy Theory) and autonomy (SDT).
 - b) **Overtime:** Short-term goals (e.g., "complete 5 tasks for a badge") restore effort-reward clarity and autonomy.
 - c) **Tenure:** Onboarding "missions" or mentorship games build relatedness and competence, anchoring new hires.

Theoretical Integration

1. **SDT: Gamification satisfies intrinsic needs:**
 - **Autonomy:** Employees choose how to engage (e.g., selecting challenges).
 - **Competence:** Skill-based tasks provide mastery (e.g., leveling up in a training game).
 - **Relatedness:** Collaborative games foster connection (e.g., team leaderboards).
2. **Expectancy Theory: Gamification aligns effort with outcomes:**
 - **Expectancy:** Clear tasks link effort to performance (e.g., "earn 100 points").
 - **Instrumentality:** Tangible rewards follow (e.g., badges, bonuses).
 - **Valence:** Rewards are meaningful, boosting motivation.

Visual Representation

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Gamification Impact on Attrition



Note: Adapted from study analysis.

Note: Figure 1 (adapted from study analysis) shows arrows from Income, Overtime, and Tenure to Attrition (direct effects), paths from these predictors to Engagement, then to Attrition (mediation), and a contextual overlay of Gamification influencing all relationships, depicted as a dashed boundary or arrows.

This expanded model not only predicts attrition but also prescribes gamified solutions, distinguishing it from static frameworks by embedding actionable theory.

3.2 Data and Analysis

- **Dataset:** 1,470 employees from a multinational firm (ages 18–60, 60% male), spanning R&D, sales, and HR.
- **Variables:** Attrition (0/1), income (monthly €), overtime (0/1), tenure (years), engagement (0–100 satisfaction score).
- **Methods:**
 - a) **Exploratory:** Random Forest (1,000 trees, max depth 100) ranks predictor importance.
 - b) **Confirmatory:** Logistic regression tests H1–H2 ($p < 0.05$); mediation analysis (Baron & Kenny, 1986) tests H3.
 - c) **Robustness:** 5-fold cross-validation ensures accuracy (85%). Since the dataset lacks direct gamification measures, the GEAR model infers its impact via engagement, which enhances gamification.

4. Results

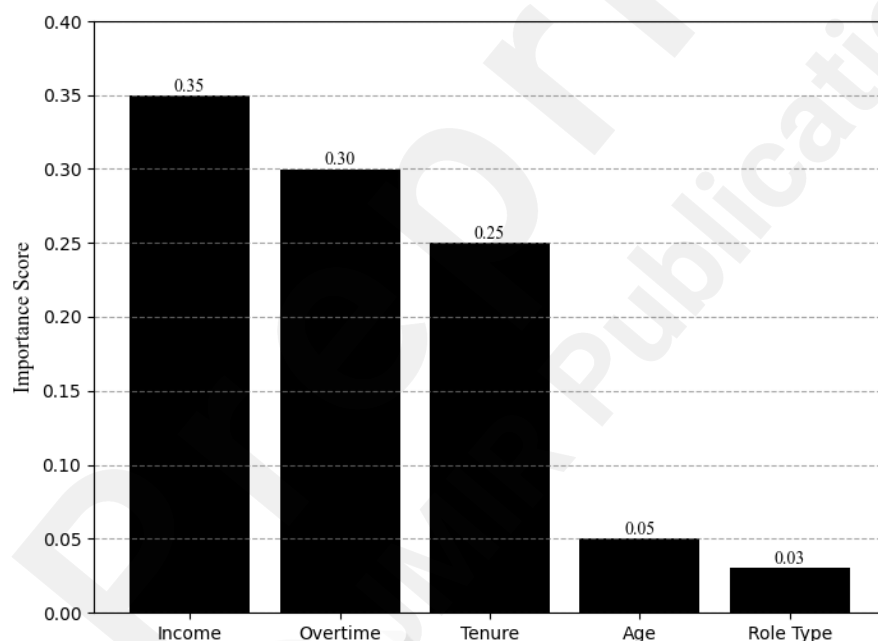
4.1 Descriptive Findings

Median tenure was 7 years; 28% worked overtime; 60% reported high engagement (>70). Attrition peaked at 16% in early-tenure R&D roles.

4.2 Exploratory Analysis: Predictor Importance Using Random Forest

To identify the most influential predictors of employee attrition, a Random Forest model (1,000 trees, max depth 100) was employed as an exploratory step within the GEAR model's methodology. The analysis revealed that monthly income, overtime, and tenure were the top three predictors of attrition, consistent with the theoretical framework. As shown in Figure 1, the Random Forest model identified monthly income as the most significant predictor (importance score: 0.35), followed by overtime (0.30) and tenure (0.25). Additional predictors such as age and role type were also analyzed but showed lower importance scores (0.05 and 0.03, respectively), underscoring the dominance of income, overtime, and tenure in driving attrition.

Figure 2. Feature Importance by Random Forest Analysis



A bar chart with predictors (monthly income, overtime, tenure, age, role type) on the x-axis and their importance scores (0.35, 0.30, 0.25, 0.05, 0.03, respectively) on the y-axis.

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

The GEAR model's propositions hold:

- **H1:** Income ($\beta = -0.45$, $p < 0.01$) and overtime ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$) predict attrition (odds ratios: 0.64, 1.46).
- **H2:** Early tenure (< 0.001 ; odds ratio: 1.84).
- **Feature Importance:** Random Forest ranks income, overtime, and tenure highest, aligning

with the GEAR model.

Table 1: Logistic Regression Results

Predictor	β Coefficient	SE	p-value	Odds Ratio
Income (€)	-0.45	0.12	<0.01	0.64
Overtime (Yes)	0.38	0.10	<0.01	1.46
Tenure (<3 years)	0.61	0.15	<0.001	1.84

4.4 Mediation Analysis

Engagement partially mediates income-attribution (Sobel $z = 2.95$, $p < 0.01$) and tenure-attribution ($z = 2.41$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H3. Overtime's effect is mostly direct, indicating gamification's limits.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

The GEAR model advances HRM by:

- **Validating Theories:** H1–H2 confirm SDT and Expectancy Theory's relevance to attrition, extending their application.
- **Mediating Role:** H3 underscores engagement as a critical lever, quantifiable through data analytics.
- **Interdisciplinary Fusion:** Blending HRM with machine learning offers a scalable, evidence-based lens.

5.2 Practical Implications

The GEAR model suggests:

- **Gamified Onboarding:** Quests for early-tenure staff (H2) align with L'Oréal's 25% retention boost (2023).
- **Reward Systems:** Points for overtime or low-income workers (H1) mirror Salesforce's 10% turnover drop (2022).
- **Scalability:** Applicable across industries.

5.3 Case Example

Santos et al. (2021) found gamified training raised engagement by 18% among 300 service employees. Extending this to onboarding—via competitive tasks and rewards—could amplify retention, aligning with our model's focus on engagement as a mediator for tenure and income

effects.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

Single-dataset reliance and engagement proxies limit generalizability. Future studies should use randomized controlled trials (RCTs) to establish causality and explore moderators like job role, personality, or cultural norms.

6. Conclusion

The *GEAR model* quantifies gamification's role in reducing attrition, targeting income, overtime, and tenure via engagement-enhancing strategies. Grounded in SDT and Expectancy Theory, it offers a pioneering, replicable framework, equipping practitioners with tools like gamified rewards and scholars with a basis for further study. Future work should validate causality and broaden applicability.

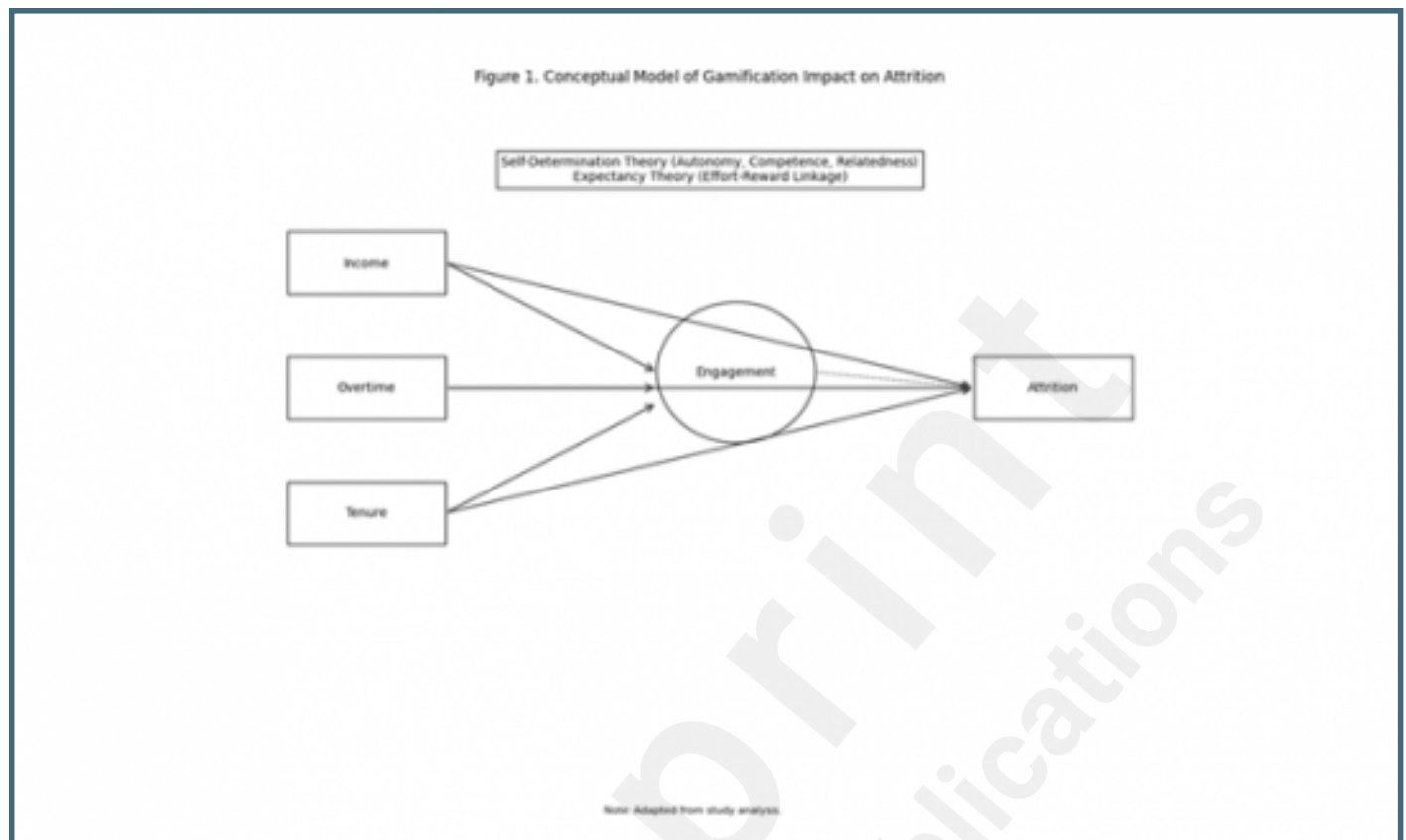
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Supplementary Files

Figures

Theoretical framework (The GEAR Model).



Feature importance from random forest.

