Chapter sixteen

Indirect Control Method #1: Constraints

This method of indirect control by constraint is used in games all the time. If a game puts a player in an empty room with two doors, the player will almost certainly go through one of them. Which one, we don’t necessarily know, but they will surely go through one, since a door is a message that says “open me,” and players are naturally curious. After all, there is nowhere else to go. If you ask the player if they had choices, they will say they did, for even two options is a choice. Compare this to putting a player in an open field, out on a city street, or in a shop- ping mall. In those cases, where they go and what they do is far more open-ended and difficult to predict — unless you use other methods of indirect control.

Indirect Control Method #2: Goals

The most common and straightforward use of indirect control in game design is through goals. If a player has two doors they can go through, I don’t really know which one they are going to enter. But if I give them a goal of “go find all the bananas,” and one of the doors clearly has bananas behind it, I can make a pretty good guess about where they are going to go.

Indirect Control Method #3: Interface

We’ve already talked about feedback, transparency, juiciness, and important aspects of a good interface. But there is something else to consider about your interface: indirect control. Because players want interfaces to be transparent, they don’t really think about the interface if they can help it. In other words, they set up their expectations about what they can and cannot do in a game based on the interface.

Indirect Control Method #4: Visual Design

Anyone who works in an area of the visual arts knows that layout affects where the guest will look. This becomes very important in an interactive experience, since guests tend to go to what draws their attention

Indirect Control Method #5: Characters

One very straightforward method of indirectly controlling the player is through computer-controlled characters in the game. If you can use your storytelling ability to make the player care about the characters — that is, willingly wanting to obey them, protect them, help them, or destroy them — you suddenly have an excellent tool to control what the player will and will not try to do.

Indirect Control Method #6: Music

When most designers think of adding music to a game, they usually think of the mood they want to create, and the atmosphere of the game. But music can also have a significant effect on what players do.

*Lens #71: The Lens of Freedom*

A feeling of freedom is one of the things that separates games from other forms of entertainment. To make sure your players feel as free as possible, ask yourself these questions:

●  When do my players have freedom of action? Do they feel free at these times?  ●  When are they constrained? Do they feel constrained at these times?

●  Are there any places I can let them feel more free than they do now?

●  Are there any places where they are overwhelmed by too much freedom?

*Lens #72: The Lens of Indirect Control*

Every designer has a vision of what they would like the players to do to have an ideal play experience. To help ensure the players do these things of their own free will, ask yourself these questions:

●  Ideally, what would I like the players to do?

●  Can I set constraints to get players to do it?

●  Can I set goals to get players to do it?

●  Can I design my interface to get players to do it?

●  Can I use visual design to get players to do it?

●  Can I use in-game characters to get players to do it?

●  Can I use music or sound to get players to do it?

●  Is there some other method I can use to coerce players toward ideal behavior without impinging on their feeling of freedom?

*Lens #73: The Lens of Collusion*

Characters should fulfill their roles in the game world, but when possible, also serve as the many minions of the game designer, working toward the designer’s ultimate aim, which is to ensure an engaging experience for the player. To make sure your characters are living up to this responsibility, ask yourself these questions:

●  What do I want the player to experience?

●  How can the characters help fulfill this experience, without compromising their goals in the game world?