The design process of Diplomacy

In designing *Diplomacy* we broke down each of our parent games into their core components, then utilizing those results and the results of our market research into each game we devised a list of AB Testing Questions. We used this data to create our target audience, which then designed our game around. With the help of a few volunteers we subjected our game to a couple public play-tests, as well as many internal play-tests, and used the results from our following questions tweak and hone the game into its present state. All of these data gathering methods affected several of our design choices throughout the design process.

Market research allowed us to come up with a persona which we believe exemplified a marketable audience. This persona, dubbed Steve, provided some clarity and ultimately honed several design decisions, but did not force any outright. Based on Steve being a techie, one of the main markets for *Settlers of Catan*, as well as being a casual board gamer led us to utilize a number of concepts similar to those found in *Catan* and then simplify them. Multiple times while making design iterations we would ask each other “What would Steve like?”

AB testing can allow for concise conclusions, and fortunately it mostly worked out for us. There was some delay in getting some of the results, but in the end they helped us to make some design decisions. Our first result is that many more people prefer dice over a spinner wheel, but there were some that did like a spinner. We use primarily dice in *Diplomacy*, but utilize the spinner as a counter. Many more people prefer an open-world game over a linear game, so we chose to use the *Catan* board instead of the *Life* board. Finally, we had a relatively even split in terms of preferring to lower an opponents’ odds of success or improve there own, so we included a strong interconnecting balance of both of those concepts. There was a strong swing towards competitive game-play, so we included the concept of direct conflict and destruction. Everyone likes receiving tangible items, so we have the ability to exponential gain money.

Our subjective testing was the main factor in actually utilizing the components we determined above. Making and changing rules on the fly, we were able to quickly sort out what was a good idea and what was simply too much. Our in-class vertical slice tests proved the original concept to be desirable, so we decided to keep it and iterate upon it. Our internal testing did wonders to help us hone the design further into a smooth and entertaining game. Finally, our public tests showed us most of the tweaks to work out, but that it was a mostly enjoyable game.

In conjunction these three tools provide an excellent process for designing a game. AB testing was more difficult than expected, but in the end we managed to utilize them to our advantage. The market research was especially difficult, but we were still able to gain some useful information for our efforts. Finally, while our play-testing revealed some great insights, we didn’t document our play-testing sessions as well as we could have. This is a lesson that each of us will carry forward into the final project.