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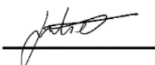
ASSIGNMENT NUMBER AND NAME: Assignment 1: Data Design MDA Analysis

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In this essay, *Pokémon Trading Card Game Online* (Dire Wolf Digital LLC., 2011) will be analysed through the lens of Data Design and with reference to the MDA analysis by Hunicke, LeBlanc and Zubek. Firstly, the mechanics of this game will be discussed. Thereafter the Dynamics and the Aesthetics that these create will be analysed.

Mechanics

Mechanics are defined as the different actions the player is able to execute within the game (Hunicke, Le Blanc & Zubek, 2004: 3). *Pokémon TCG Online* is an online trading card game where the player builds a deck and plays it against online opponents. There are 60 cards in a deck. Apart from energy cards, a player cannot have more than 4 cards in their deck with the same name.

There are several types of cards in this game. Pokémon cards, energy cards and trainer cards. The Pokémon cards display the statistics of a Pokémon. These include the Hit Points (HP) of the Pokémon, its abilities, attacks, and how much energy needs to be attached to perform these. Seven cards are drawn at the beginning of the game. Each player takes six cards from their deck to use as prize cards. They will receive one each time they defeat an enemy Pokémon. The player must choose a Pokémon from their hand to be their active Pokémon, meaning it can be attacked by the opposing player and attack in return. Each turn, the player draws a card. During their turn, the player may perform actions such as playing any basic Pokémon card in their hand, evolving a Pokémon and attaching an energy card. A player can retreat an active Pokémon and choose another from the inactive benched Pokémon. Trainer cards can also be played, which perform actions such as healing Pokémon or drawing cards. To control the pacing of the game only one energy card and one supporter card (a powerful trainer card) can be played per turn. Game pacing is also controlled by the fact that evolved Pokémon are more powerful and have better abilities. These Pokémon can only be accessed later in the game after its basic form has been played and the player has played its evolution card. Different types of Pokémon have certain weaknesses (meaning they will take double the damage from this type) and strengths (where they will take 20 HP less damage from this type). The first player to claim all their prize cards wins the game.

Dynamics

The dynamics of the game are created as the player interacts with the mechanics (Hunicke et al., 2004: 2). In building their deck the player is given the opportunity to strategically manipulate their chances of drawing specific cards by either adding more cards of a specific

type to the deck or by adding cards which enable them to fetch these cards from their deck. The chance of drawing a card may increase or decrease depending on how many copies of this card are drawn as well as how many cards are drawn overall. There are abilities which let the player control the probability of drawing a card by letting them search for cards in their deck and place them at the top so that they will be drawn first.

During the game, a player is given limited information about the opponent's deck based on what cards they have been shown. This is used together with their knowledge of the game to play their cards in a certain way. A player may partake in card counting to calculate the odds that they will draw a certain card. For example, a card which will heal a Pokémon may be kept for later if most of the healing cards have already been played and the chance that they will draw another is low. Some attacks are based on coin flips. If the coin flip succeeds, an additional effect will take place, such as paralysing the opposing Pokémon. Depending on their situation, a player may choose to take this chance over performing a higher damage attack.

The player will also have to decide which Pokémon they should place their energy on, as there are a finite number of energy cards within their deck. This is especially prevalent when there are Pokémon which require multiple energy types. Cards which synergise can be added to a deck to make it work efficiently. An example is the Pokémon Gallade and its ability "Premonition" which lets the player choose five cards from their deck and place them on top of their deck in any order. This can be played with a Pokémon called Octillery which has an ability called "Abyssal Hand". This lets the player draw five cards before their attack. This means a player can place any five cards of their choice from their deck into their hand.

Aesthetics

The aesthetics are the emotions evoked within the player as they experience the dynamics of the game (Hunicke et al., 2004: 2). Challenge and competition are the two main aesthetics evoked in *Pokémon TCG Online*. The aesthetic of challenge is evoked as both players interpret the limited information they have and strive to make the best decisions based on this. This would include an activity such as card counting. Furthermore, the aesthetic of Competition would be created as each player attempts to knock out six of their opponent's Pokémon so that they can be the first to claim their prize cards.

Pokémon TCG Online is a game where mechanics and data design are used effectively in the creation of dynamics, which is particularly evident in the deck building portion of this game. Overall, this results in aesthetics which create an engaging experience.

References:

Dire Wolf Digital LLC. (2011). *Pokémon TCG Online* [Video game]. Microsoft Windows. The Pokémon Company.

Hunicke, R., Le Blanc, M., Zubek, R. (2004). MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research. In Proceedings of the AAAI Workshop on Challenges in Game AI. Available from <https://users.cs.northwestern.edu/~hunicke/MDA.pdf>