BACHELOR THESIS

How can developing a game change the developer´s life?

Pre-project report

Date: Total number of pages:

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1.0 Introduction

If you ask me why I love video games maybe I would not be able to answer with a short reply or giving you only one or two specific reasons. If you want to hear from me only one reason about it, I would say to you, without doubt: *Because games can move us*.

As the German poet, historian, dramatist, and playwright Friedrich Schiller said: "Man only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man, and he is only completely a man when he plays". Play is an experience itself and this is one of the sources of knowledge and personal growth that human beings have. There are even types and educational techniques based on learning by life experiences (Kolb, 2015)

1.1 Background

As I said before "games can move us", but, why did I say this?

During my short life as a gamer (about 18 years since I got my first console) I have realized the great number of things I have learn from video games. I can say without doubt that I have grown as a person. Maybe, the way I behave today has been influenced by some of the experiences I have lived by playing the stories that some game developers had created. Games have made me feel some emotions that I have experienced in other stages of my life: I have cried out of happiness, I have cried out of frustration and anger, I have smiled and laughed. I have also come up with some life lessons.

Then, if video games have taught me and made me feel all of this, it would be interesting to make a research in this field: What can games make people feel? How games move us? What can games teach people? Or even better: What life lessons can games teach?

There are some research studies about how games affect the brain development, about how to use video games as a way of teaching and making learning easy for kids in schools. Also, about how videogames can become a more dynamic and efficient way to improve professionals' abilities in some specific areas as medicine, military, etc (Novak, 2012).

Videogames can make a lot of good for people as some kind of magic. Videogames are not magic, they can make us feel very special things, but they are not the consequence of a spell. There is people behind those creations: Their effort, their love and their dreams, all put together to create something that can become wonderful.

We used to put a lot of attention on the influence of videogames on people, their life and behaviour. There are some studies about the advantages and disadvantages of playing videogames and studying if they are beneficial or harmful for people.

But, what about the game developers? It would be interesting to know more about the life of those developers involved in bigger and smaller projects and ask them in which ways they have grown as a person during the development of their projects and what kind of things their own games have taught them.

Videogame developers, this is for you!

2.0 Project goal

2.1 Problem statement

How can creating a videogame change a developer´s life?

When we talk about videogames we tend to think about the players, about the games they like, the designs they hate, the stories and characters they love, the number of hours they consider a game must have to make the outlay worth it. We tend to forget about the developers, the ones who make our craziest dreams come true, who create incredible and beautiful worlds, who are in charge of developing unforgettable stories and characters, "creators" of amusement, challenge and even (on purpose), frustration, a delicious feeling for the most hardcore gamers. Developing a game usually becomes an odyssey, so the developers become the Ulises of their own journey.

Long journeys always teach us something, they make us see the world from another point of view and they make us mature and learn. So, it would be interesting to know how developing a video game can make a difference. We could ask: *How can creating a videogame change a developer´s life?*

When I talk about life lessons, I am talking about those principles that can be learned and make people change the way they see the world and the people they share their life with . In my case, I am talking about those things that make us mature, that teach us how to overcome the frustration and difficulties.

2.2 Research questions

- **In which ways can videogames teach us the life lessons that game developers want to share or have learned?**
- **How can creating a videogame changes the way a developer sees the industry?**
- **What kind of life lessons can a developer learn during the creation of their own videogames?**
- **How do videogame developers deal with their day-by-day difficulties thanks to the creation process of a video game?**
- **How can developers mature during the creation process of a video game?**
- **How do developers learn to deal with frustration thanks to the videogame's creation?**

2.3 Evaluation of the problem statement

Finding a good problem statement sometimes can be hard, but if we follow a path and we keep in mind some main points, we can come up with a good one (Kolas, 2018):

Here, we have to think if the topic is interesting and relevant, for us and others, if it is feasible and manageable. We have to keep in mind its magnitude and if our academic abilities can help us achieve our objectives. Also, it has to be clear and as focused as possible. It has to be complex enough to keep the interest but not as much as to overcome our abilities.

I have kept in mind all of those "steps" and patterns to come up with a good problem statement and I think I have achieved my goal.

The topic inspires me, and it seems to be interesting for the people. We think we know a lot about the industry, but we tend to forget the point of view of the developers. For people that love videogames my statement can give more information about the industry and the things that are more hidden. Even the people that do not know much about videogames, can find my topic and research interesting.

I have come up with an extent topic, but my statement is focused and clear. I want to do the research on a specific area and with a specific target. It is going to be complex enough to keep my interest on it during the whole process, but manageable and feasible keeping in mind my academic abilities.

3.0 Theory

Nowadays, video games have become a well know entertainment, enjoyed by billions of casuals and more "hardcore" gamers, all around the world. Studies and journals inform about those numbers. We are talking about 91% of children between the ages of 2 and 17 played video games at the United States in 2014 (Granic, Lobel, & Rutger, 2014).

Video games have a huge potential as art and there is no doubt that they move millions of dollars every year: Video games brought in over $25 billion in 2010 only in the United States (Granic,et al 2014). Today those numbers are bigger than before, not only for the increasing number of players, but also for the success of the games as "electronic sports" or eSports

(Nguyen, 2018)) : "In 2018, the eSports industry is projected to generate $905 million in revenue, reaching over $1 billion over the next two years" (Gray, 2018).

Videogames are even more than money and entertainment. The idea of video games only as an entertainment has changed, and the industry is looking further. We find new applications for them: from the educational purposes for kids and the Serious Games for applications on the emotional, psychological, social and cognitive fields.

Educational systems based on educational games or the use of Serious Games are showing they are a good learning technique. Videogames have become an effective way for learning (Novak, 2012) and not only for kids education. They have a lot of applications on the professional sector at medicine, military or business. Nowadays, Serious games are gaining importance, not only in the videogame industry itself, but in those industries in which their application has become useful in the process of teaching professionals and helping them in their specialization (Bergeron, 2006).

It seems that this kind of games meet their goals, not only by the design but also by the mechanics, which play an important role on the player´s experience (Dunniway, 2008).

There are other implications of gaming that have their importance.

"Video games represent a form of play that can be harnessed for serious good", video games can improve the learning process and enhance the brain plasticity (Eichenbaum, Bavelier, & Shawn,2014). Games can be used as an effective teaching tool and they can change for good the perceptual and cognitive processing, which have psychological effects that can help us on the way we see the world and the way we enhance difficulties.

We should keep in mind the psychological and beneficial implications that video games can bring to people: emotional, social and motivational.

Video games can have a motivational effect or, even, teach motivational styles "both in and outside gaming contexts" (Granic, Lobel, & Rutger, 2014).

When we talk about learning and the way we learn life lessons, we should pay attention to the way we come up with those. Life lessons are equal to life experiences, and the experiential learning is, at the end, a good and a valid educational technique or type of learning (Kolb, 2015).

Experiences are important for my research, and the experiences emerging from gaming too. The game is not the experience but the way to come up with it. Indeed, game designers do not really design games, they design experiences: "Games create experiences, and experiences change people" (Schell, 2008).

We can learn much more about the psychological implications of video games and how they can change the way we see the world. Experiences can feel real and designers can use their capacities "to create rich emotional experiences" (Isbister, 2016).

Experiences teach us and change us, games create experiences and evoke emotions. Games can teach us good life lessons, to overcome the frustration, to deal with the day by day problems and enhance the difficulties.

A lot of studies support the benefits of playing videogames, as we have seen. And the industry is growing every day in terms of revenue and customers. But … What about the people "behind the scenes"?

In my case, I want to focus my efforts on the developers, and how working on the game industry has changed them, not only by playing games, but also by creating their own games and taking part on their development process.

Today, we can find books that tell us anecdotes about the development of games from different points of view: the difficult decisions the publishers have to make, the struggles of the ones in charge had to face when cancelling projects, the feeling of the developers when they see the projects in which they have put all their efforts and illusions dying. Also, we can read about game developers talking about the magnificence and pride to see the projects in which they are involve being played and enjoyed by others (Schreier, 2017).

Being a game developer and working on the videogame industry brings moments of failure, success and even frustration. It implies having to make sacrifices to build videogame companies and ensure their success or being able to manage the frustration if they fall.

Also, we know, that even big companies can emerge from the ingenious minds of normal people that love and have dedicated all their lives to create experiences and have found the ways to make people enjoy (Kushner, 2003).

During my life, video games have helped and taught me, so I want to know in which ways video games might have helped or taught others, because in the end, as Isbister, K. says, "Games Move Us".

4.0 Research method

It would be a good point to make this approach by interviewing developers to get first-hand answers, anecdotes and life lessons learned during the building of their own projects.

If I think about the best way to achieve information on my topic, the interview seems a suitable method. Indeed, we are facing a complex topic and the best way to know more about this is to get in contact with people that is living or has lived the experience of developing a video game. When we are looking for people's opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences and in my case, developer´s sensitives issues and, why not, privileged information, interviews become, without doubt, the best research method (Descombe, 2007).

The research interviews are a qualitative research technique which final approach is to explore the different perspectives that people have about the questions.

There are two different types of research interviews:

- Structured interviews: the interviewer asks people a set of pre-determined questions that will be answered in the same order (Boyce & Neale, 2006).
- Unstructured interviews: there are no pre-determined questions and the interviewer must adapt the interview to the interviewee's nature and priorities.

Research interviews are useful to collect detailed information about research questions.

The main advantages of the structured ones are that the interviewer can compare the different answers to the same questions, which increases the reliability. Also, they do not take so much time. This can allow the interviewer to obtain a big sample by being able to generalize to a large population.

If we think about the disadvantages of those kind of interviews: they are not flexible, so the interviewer can't add new questions during the conversations and it is common that the answers lack detail.

When we talk about the advantages of the unstructured interviews, we should keep in mind they are more flexible, allowing the interviewer to add questions during the interview.

Nevertheless, the disadvantages are that the data collected from these interviews are less reliable due to the different ways the questions were asked to people. They consume a lot of time and requires some skills by the interviewer, like establishing rapport and knowing when to probe (McLeod, 2014).

4.1 Interviews, the best research method for my research plan:

I want to make an in-depth interview, I need the interviewee to feel comfortable with me. Planning a guide with a strong structure can make the process seem artificial. I do not want a guide or a draft full of closed answers that can make the developers, who are being interviewed, uncomfortable.

This is why I think the best way to go through the interviews is by an unstructured or informal interview. This way, I have to be careful with this, an interview of this nature can be confused with a conversation if I do not follow a path. I have to avoid falling in a simple, superficial and with no interest conversation, the questions I have to make should emerge from the interview itself, but those have to be related, of course, with the topic.

I am going to make two kind of interviews: One-to-one interview and focus groups.

It will be interesting to have the view of the developer´s life with a more personal and closer interview. It is also going to be very interesting to have the opinions and thoughts that can flow from the interaction between developers on the focus groups.

As I said before, I am going to use unstructured interviews, for this reason I have to be careful. This kind of interviews can fall in a simple, superficial and with no interest conversation, and we must avoid that by reconducting the interview to our topic again.

I will try to create a fluid interaction with questions with open answers. The objective is to try to know as much as possible about the experience of the developers and let them talk about their feelings and points of view.

It can be a god starting point to request some basic information, age, years working on the industry, the development areas that they have joined on their professional life, the years the developer has spent in those areas and the projects in which they have taken part (if they are allowed and want to do it). Then, I can start going deeper asking which of those projects they have enjoyed the most or in which of them they did not have the best experience.

I want them to open, so there can be new questions emerging during the interview. We can take advantage of the things they are talking about in order to get more information and go even deeper.

For focus group interviews the proceeding way is very similar. In addition, we are going to have the interaction between the different developers, that is going to be a great resource of information. Telling each other their own experiences and the way they lived and are living the game developer's life is going to be very enriching. We are going to let them talk and interact, in order to achieve a more relaxed and friendlier atmosphere. My task here is going to be reconducting the interview if necessary.

4.2 The target group:

My target group is going to be developers from 24 to 50 years old from different areas of the industry (art, design, programming, managing, multitasking). In this case, I will count on the participation of more experimented developers and the ones that are beginners of the game development industry.

It is going to be very interesting to have these different (or not) points of view based on the time they have been in the industry, from more novel developers to more experienced ones.

We have to have in mind that, nowadays, it is possible that some of the younger developers have spent a good amount of years developing little projects or even have joined bigger ones. In this case, age is not going to be a decisive factor (the time spent working on the industry is going to be the important one here).

4.3 Recruiting informants:

In the case of novel developers, universities are going to be a good source of those that are getting their firsts steps into the industry. University grades or courses specialised on game development are going to be my main target. Specially those ones coursing the last years and with previous experience. For example, Master´s degree students that have already been part of little projects. Maybe, their vision is not as extent as the most professional developers, but it will be enriching to know their point of view and see if they feel that their life or if their way of seeing the world is changing.

For the professional ones, social networks can be the best way to get in contact with them. We can also count on the participation of some teachers who have been working or are still working on the industry (I am very lucky, because I have been studying in another country and some of my teachers and some of their collages are part of the industry).

I will focus the one-to-one interviews on more professional profiles (having appointments with them may be easy if I choose to have them by video call, for example). I will also have one-to-one interviews with the novel developers.

For the groups I will focus on novel developers, but it would be interesting to have at least one focus group interview of professional developers.

4.4 The equipment and necessary tools:

Something I cannot forget is the equipment for the interviews: Pencil and paper for the field notes and, in the case that interviewees agree, an audio recorder (mobile with some recording app would be enough).

It would be very interesting to have the full interviews recorded in order to analyse the ones I believe are more interesting or if I want to hear to them again.

Also, for the cases in which a videocall will be needed, a computer is going to be necessary (and an internet connexion of course). If I have the possibility and the permission of the interviewees, I will record the audio of those video calls.

4.5 The data analysis plan:

First, I have to define how I am going to recollect the data. As I have mentioned field notes and audio recording are going to be the methods in which I am going to focus. The second one, of course, with the agreement of the interviewee.

After each interview I am going to have a big amount of data that needs to be stored and prepared for the future analysis.

Also, I will write down some conclusions and I will store and digitalize the data in order to have it all together and organized. I have not planned to transcribe the interviews. Keeping in mind the nature of them, it will be more useful to limit ourselves to field notes during the interviews (in the case I had the consent of the informant, I will have the audio recording of the interview that is going to be even more useful for the analysis process).

At this point, we should think of a procedure to analyse our data:

It will be interesting to analyse the data categorizing it in groups and then making a deeper analysis within each category, depending on the results collected during the interviews.

 It will be interesting to analyse one by one the developers who have joined different development areas, to see the different points of view depending on the area. Here, when I talk about points of view, I am talking about those things that have changed the way they see the world or the life lessons they have learnt. Also, the feelings and sensations they have experimented on their life as developers.

By the time I have gone through all the interviews and have all the categories stablished, I may have other perspective to my topic and the conclusions I could get form each interview, could change. It will be interesting trying to come up with new conclusions if I think it is appropriate.

4.6 Ethical considerations[1]

Thinking about making an interview makes me think about ethical considerations. I always must count on the consent of the interviewee. I must inform them about the research method and the way the information they are going to give me is going to be used. I must make sure they know all about the process of recollecting data and the role they have on the research. I also must give them access to the results at the end of the research.

It is also important to protect the interviewee´s rights and welfares and keep private everything they do not want to share with the big public, like names or other things that can identify them in the case they do not want to be recognized.

In my case, I want to record the audio of the interviews, so I am going to need the strict consent of the interviewees and inform them properly that I am going to do it and if they agree on this process of recollecting data. In the case they do not want to be recorded I will use only the field notes to collect the information.

We are going to hear, maybe, very personal reflections. There are some possibilities of finding depression, anxiety or other psychological problems as a result of a life dedicated to the videogames industry. In those cases, I must be understanding and remind them that I am not going to share personal information that can identify them and that if they want to take some time to continue, have a rest, leave the interview or keep between them and I some information, it will be guaranteed.

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[1] A Consent Document has been prepared and it is attached to this document.

4.7 Validity of the research plan:

Thinking about validity is thinking about trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004):

When we make a research plan, we must keep in mind the importance of some aspects or follow some strategies that are going to ensure the trustworthiness of our research project. We are talking about credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

We want to show the true face of the phenomenon, that is credibility.

In my case I have searched for credibility by using research methods as interviews, that have shown success in previous investigations. I have chosen a "random" sample of informants and we will use a good variety and number of them, so we are using triangulation.

The informants selected are going to be true lovers of the video games world and their job. They have been dedicating a lot of time on it, so there is no reason to not trust their words. Just in case, I will encourage them to be frank. I will also look after creating a comfortable atmosphere, to make it easy to them to answer the questions with frankness.

I will be checking the data while being collected to make sure it has sense, and I will keep it well structured, all of this to ensure the credibility before I put my hands on the data analysis.

I also realized that my research plan follows the transferability. I am doing a research in which my findings can be extent and apply to other studies, maybe related with the importance of the people behind the developments or maybe the effects of the game industry on other areas, like education, rehabilitation and therapies, etcetera.

In terms of dependability, when it refers to achieving similar results by using in different occasions the same methods and participants, I can say my research will be achieving this objective. It is very likely, I can say reliable, to obtain the same feedback if I repeat the process with the same informants.

In order to ensure the confirmability, I will try to avoid my bias as much as possible and try to be as objective as I can. Also, following triangulation, I will be having informants from different areas of the development field, different companies and developers with different grads of experience on the industry. Tracing a path step-by-step for my research can be very useful, which is reliable. At the end this pre-project report is a way of introducing these methods.

5.0 Project plan

Milestones - Actions	When	Due date	Responsible	Status
Supervisor meeting	07-01-2019		Aaron Reboredo Vázquez	
Draft of thesis structure	07-01-2019	13-01-2019		
Supervisor meeting	14-01-2019			
Intro Chapter	14-01-2019	20-01-2019		
Project Goal Chapter	14-01-2019	20-01-2019		
Theory chapter	21-01-2019	28-01-2019		
Research Method Chapter	21-01-2019	28-01-2019		
Supervisor meeting	28-01-2019			
Project Plan Chapter	28-01-2019	10-02-2019		
Recruiting informants process	28-01-2019	03-02-2019		
Recruiting informants process	04-02-2019	10-02-2019		
Supervisor meeting	11-02-2019			
Data collection	11-02-2019			
1 & 2 one-to-one interviews.	11-02-2019	17-02-2019		
3 & 4 one-to-one interviews.	18-02-2019	24-02-2019		
5 & 6 one-to-one interviews.	25-02-2019	03-03-2019		
Supervisor meeting	4-03			
7 & 8 one-to-one interviews.	4-03-2019	10-03-2019		
9 & 10 one-to-one interviews.	11-03-2019	17-03-2019		
Supervisor meeting	18-03-2019			
1st focus group interview.	18-03-2019	24-03-2019		
2nd focus group interview.	25-03-2019	31-03-2019		
3rd focus group interview.	1-04-2019	07-04-2019		
Supervisor meeting	01-04-2019			
Data analysis	01-04-2019	07-04-2019		
Data analysis	08-04-2019	14-04-2019		
Supervisor meeting	15-04-2019			
Findings chapter	15-04-2019	28-04-2019		
Conclusions chapter	22-04-2019	28-04-2019		
Supervisor meeting	29-04-2019			
Last details/changes	29-04-2019	05-05-2019		
Finish thesis	6-05-2019	10-05-2019		
Deliver project	**10-05-2019**	**10-05-2019**		

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Atachments :

Informed consent form

Participation Consent

In which ways creating a videogame can change a developer´s life?

When we talk about videogames we tend to think about the players, about the games they like, the designs they hate, the stories and characters they love, the number of hours they consider a game must have to make the outlay worth it. We tend to forget about the developers, the ones who make our craziest dreams come true, who create incredible and beautiful worlds, who are in charge of developing unforgettable stories and characters, "creators" of amusement, challenge and even (on purpose), frustration, a delicious feeling for the most hardcore gamers. Developing a game usually becomes an odyssey, so the developers become the Ulises of their own journey.

Long journeys always teach us something, they make us see the world from another point of view and they make us mature and learn. So, it would be interesting to know how developing a video game can make a difference. We could ask: ***In which ways creating a videogame can change a developer´s life?***

In order to research about this question, I want to make some interviews, and I would appreciate your help as a game developer:

1. I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Aaron Reboredo Vázquez from Nord University.

2. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about videogames developer´s experiences and professional life. I will be one of approximately 16 people being interviewed for this research.

   - My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation.

   - I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate, no one will be told.

3. If I am participating on a focus group and if I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview and leave the session at any moment.

4. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview will be make. If I don't want to be recorded I will have the right to decline the audio recording, in this case only notes will be written.

5. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.

   Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

6. Faculty and administrators from my campus will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

7. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by Nord University.

8. I understand that I am going to have access to my data and to the final research.

9. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I have been given a copy of this consent form.

_____   _____

 My Signature Date

_____   _____

My Printed Name Signature of the Investigator

_____   _____

For further information, please contact:

 Dr. Aaron Reboredo Vázquez

 arebored@ucm.es