Leadership Behaviors among Gamers and Student Leaders

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the relationship between leadership in video games and in real-life. The effects of motivation of play, prosocial orientation, and the social context of play on leadership behavior were also investigated. A Game Leadership Behavior questionnaire was constructed to measure game leadership. Other measures included the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire, the Motivation of Play questionnaire, Prosocial Orientation Questionnaire (POQ), and questions identifying the type of game play participants were involved in. A total of 321 students participated in the study. All participants held leadership positions in school. Findings showed that game leadership behavior was positively correlated with real-life leadership and emerged as a predictor of real-life leadership, together with prosocial behavior and social game motivation.

Keywords: Game Leadership, Leadership Behavior, MMOS, Motivation of Play, Prosocial Orientation, School Leaders

INTRODUCTION

Society has been very much concerned with the repercussions of video gaming, particularly on our young people. Most of the studies have focused on the negative effects of video gaming, especially on its effects on aggression (e.g. Anderson, 2004, 2007; Anderson & Dill, 2000; Bartlett, Harris, & Baldassaro, 2006; Bryant & Davies, 2006). However, researchers have also found a myriad of positive effects of video games (for example, Durkin & Barber, 2002; Risenhuber, 2004; Lee & Peng, 2006).

Jackson et al. (2011) found that children who play more videogames tend to be more creative in tasks such as drawing pictures and writing stories. Game mastery and knowledge is gradually becoming an important part of adolescent subculture, forming part of their social capital, allowing them to gain peer approval, and influencing the nature of their subgroups (Raney, Smith & Baker, 2006). Even within video games, social skills are being learnt and practiced. Narvaez, et al. (2008) found that players who played helping games are more likely to describe the game characters in the story as having concern and empathy for others. The Pew researchers found that video games afforded adolescents with rich social interaction and civic learning opportunities where players...
helped each other, made decisions that affect
the larger group, or debated moral, ethical or
social issues (Lenhart et al. 2008). Although
adolescents in the study reported encountering
aggressive behavior in games, most of them
also witnessed many prosocial behaviors, such
as positive social skills, generosity and help-
fulness, creative and task-motivated play, and
self-regulation. In addition, they also develop
social skills as a form of collateral learning
as they interact with others within the game
(Johnson, 2005, Anderson et al, 2010).

In Massively Multi-player Role-playing
Games (or MMOs for short) like World of
Warcraft, character advancement often neces-
sitates increasing levels of collaboration with
other players (Yee, 2006b). This is usually
done through participating in a raiding group
or guild, where teamwork is needed to defeat
the strongest monsters. And where there are
groups, leaders will emerge. A valuable area
of gain is the development of social competen-
cies, such as leadership and communication
skills, as a by-product of game-related social
interaction with other players. This of course
begs the ultimate question of whether video
games may be employed purposefully in the
development of important social skills (in this
case, leadership).

As there are not many studies on the
relationship between video game playing and
leadership, it is the purpose of this paper to
explore the relationship between video game
playing and leadership in both online and real-
life contexts. Only video games played in a
social context are studied in this paper. These
would include both MMOs, and games that are
played in multi-player “Co-op” modes. The first
kind refers to games with huge virtual environ-
ments that support thousands of players at a
time, all involved in completing quests, killing
monsters, acquiring loot, and increasing their
character levels, whilst socializing with each
other and participating in communities within
and outside the game. These include games
such as World of Warcraft, Star Wars The Old
Republic, and Guild Wars. The second kind
refers to role-playing or strategy games which
provide a specific multiplayer mode in which
players – connected online or through the local
area network - cooperate in teams to achieve
specific goals within a limited game environ-
ment – hence the term Co-op Mode used in the
game industry, and in this paper. These may
include the multi-player modes of games like the
Halo, Left 4 Dead and the Resident Evil series.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Much of the research on game leadership has
centered on MMO gaming. One of the main
purposes of MMO gaming is to advance one’s
in-game level and acquire desirable loot that
would make one’s character more powerful.
This requires increased collaboration and
interdependence between players, especially
because in many MMOs, different characters
can complement each other’s strengths and
weaknesses to form a strong group (Yee, 2006a).
Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, & Moore (2006a)
observed that at higher player levels, World of
Warcraft becomes a much more social experi-
cence, as players collaborate more in order
to get the more powerful items in the game. These
strategic collaborations often take place in either
informal small groups or formal guilds, which
are long term social groups where member-
ship is formalized and roles are assigned. It
was estimated that 66% of players in World of
Warcraft are in guilds, and the proportion
jumps to 90% for players at levels 43 and above.
90% of such guilds have 35 or fewer members,
with the largest guild consisting of around 150
members (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell & Moore,
2006b). Guilds are a common means of sharing
resources and manpower, and most consist of
a rank system, where older players can act as
mentors to novice players (Fujimoto, 2005). In
fact, about 15% of players become guild leaders
at one point or another, a large proportion of
these guild leaders become leaders of guilds
they did not create, and these guild leaders also
tend to be older (Yee, 2006a, 2007).

Guild leaders in MMOs are involved in
a large range of tasks and roles. Yee (2006b)
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