The Hierarchy of an Online Gaming Community: A Study of the Managerial Structure of Syndicate Gamers

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ABSTRACT
Extensive research was conducted amongst a First Person Shooter (FPS) online video game community called Syndicate Gamers. The research focused on their effective use of an organizational structure and managerial hierarchy; implemented and executed via the Internet. The research included studying Syndicate Gamers’ managerial hierarchy as well as the roles and responsibilities of those occupying positions of importance within the online gaming community. From January 2014 – May 2014, the researchers utilized the participant-observer model to gather information about the staff positions of Syndicate Gamers. The results of the study showed clear delineation of roles and responsibilities within the staff structure, which allowed efficient execution of duties and tasks. In the event a staff member was unable to perform a task due to absence, the tasks and responsibilities were temporarily transferred, to an organizational superior, peer, or subordinate until the primary staff member could resume his or her responsibilities full-time.

KEYWORDS
Clan, Counterstrike, First Person Shooter, Online Gaming Community, Organizational Structure, Video Game

INTRODUCTION
First Person Shooters and Counter-Strike
One of the most popular online video games in the world is Counter-Strike (FaceBook, 2012; Blogspot, 2008; Online Gamers Anonymous, 2006; Squidoo, 2011). Counter-Strike was described by its developer, Valve Corporation, as “the world’s number 1 online action game” (Valve, Corporation, 2012). The game Counter-Strike is known as a first-person shooter. A first-person shooter, commonly called an FPS in the gaming arena, is a game in which the player sees the action on the screen as if he or she were looking through the eyes of the main character he or she is playing. As suspected, the shooter section of the term indicates that the majority of game play in these games will require the use of rifle or pistol type weaponry. While first person shooters are widely popular across multiple platforms, there are variations of this type of game, such as tactical first person shooters, where the gameplay is less run and gun and more strategy based via the shooter element (Rybka, 2012).

Although the game play for many first-person shooters is similar, the objectives for the players vary from game to game. This particular type of first-person shooter gives the player the task to:
Engage in an incredibly realistic brand of terrorist warfare in this wildly popular team-based game. Ally with teammates to complete strategic missions. Take out enemy sites. Rescue hostages. Your role affects your team’s success. Your team’s success affects your role. (Valve, Corporation, 2012)

**Online Gaming Communities**

For online video gamers, players might prefer an organized group to maximize their enjoyment of an online game (Lin, Sun, & Tinn, 2003). This community organization of online gamers is known as a clan (Microsoft Corporation, 2006). Although there are several registered clans in existence, the FPS clan is one of the most popular types of online gaming communities (Wagner, Borries, Walz, & Böttger, 2007).

**Syndicate Gamers**

Syndicate Gamers (sG) is a popular online gaming community, which is primarily known it’s for FPS game servers with various themes of Counter-Strike (Syndicate Gamers, 2014; Gametracker, 2014). sG’s population totals over 14,800 people and is comprised of online gamers of different genders, sexual orientations, ages, races, nationalities, and socioeconomic status (Syndicate Gamers, 2014). Although Counter-strike is a FPS game, the various servers which hosted the players had differing themes and functions. The server themes utilized by Syndicate Gamers, ranged from a prison scenario to player controlled characters with supernatural powers (Syndicate Gamers, 2014).

Syndicate Gamers is financially supported by community member donations, which maintain the game servers, website hosting, and other requirements for continued operations (Syndicate Gamers, 2014). In exchange for financially supporting Syndicate Gamers, donating community members are granted elevated and administrative privileges on the game servers and are recognized as financial supports on the community’s website (Syndicate Gamers, 2014). To effectively manage an organization with this size and scope, Syndicate Gamers had to establish a complex managerial hierarchy to maintain its daily functions.

**METHOD**

From January 2014 – May 2014, the researchers utilized the participant-observer model to gather information about the staff positions of Syndicate Gamers. The participant-observer model required the researchers to be deeply entrenched in the clan operation and staff process. This method of study not only required observation, but taking part in the operation of the staff in the studied gaming community (Burroughs, 2014). The number of participant-observers for this study totals at two members. Some of the duties of the participant-observers included, but not limited to, recruitment of new members, voting on clan operational policies, etc. Although immersion into the gaming community was required for an accurate observatory practices, great attention was given to recording data of the organizational structure and the duties performed by the individual staff members. At least one member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Managers, Advisors, and Server Officers were interviewed as part of the study. The staff organization model applied to Syndicate Gamers was Herzberg’s Motivation Hygiene Theory (Kempton, 1980). Since the staff members were all volunteers, this managerial theory suited Syndicate Gamers’ due lack of financial compensation. Motivation Hygiene Theory’s five main motivators: achievement, recognition, the work itself, increased responsibility, and growth and development, were all found in various aspects of the Syndicate Gamers’ staff structure (Kempton, 1980).

All research was conducted via the Internet. The research focused on their effective use of an organizational structure; implemented and executed via the Internet. The research included studying
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