Engines of Play

Jason VandenBerghe
Creative Director
The Situation

• I make games.

• Games engage with people’s motivations.

• People’s motivations are hard to understand.
The Problem

• I need to choose which motivations our game will attempt to engage

• I need a way to communicate those choices to my team.
The puzzle of motivation

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Subtitles available in 41 languages

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As investment increases...

...the motivating effectiveness of extrinsic payoffs decreases.
The Problem

• I need to choose which motivations our game will attempt to engage
  – ...across their entire experience with the game

• I need a way to communicate those choices to my team.
  – ...in a way that makes sense to them.
The Solution

• ‘Play Engines’:

A clear expression of the essential motivations and satisfactions that your game will attempt to engage.
Destiny

**Competence**
- Core Shooting
- PvP Ranking

**Autonomy**
- Gear Hunting
- Mission Loops

**Relatedness**
- Strikes & Raids
- PvP Ranking
Cautions

• This is a top-down technique.

• It won’t work well alone.
  – Use with other, more bottom-up techniques.

• Do not apply strictly. Stay loose.
The Big 5 (OCEAN) (Gamer)

- Openness to Experience
- Conscientiousness
- Extraversion
- Agreeableness
- Neuroticism

5 Domains of Play (Game)

- Novelty
- Challenge
- Stimulation
- Harmony
- Threat

Diagram shows the correlation between personality traits and game domains.
“Have you used it on your own project?”
5 DOMAINS OF PLAY (THE BIG 5)
The Big 5 (O.C.E.A.N.)

- Openness to Experience
- Conscientiousness
- Extraversion
- Agreeableness
- Neuroticism

Closedness-Openness
Un-Conscientiousness-Conscientiousness
Introversion-Extraversion
Disagreeableness-Agreeableness
Stability-Neuroticism
Openness

Conscientiousness

Extraversion

Agreeableness
Imagination vs. Fact-Orientation

Prefer Fantasy
Prefer Realism
Novelty

Challenge

Harmony

Stimulation
Novelty
Explores
Fantasy
Realism
Builds

Challenge
Not Work
Skilled
Work
Less Skilled

Harmony
Team
Context
Mechanics

Stimulation
Calm
Multiplayer
Thrill
Solo
PvP
What Worked

• Predicts gaming “taste” decisions

• Predicts certain types of in-game behavior

• Describes variation among players nicely...
What Didn’t Work

• Teams care about groups, not individuals

• Need a way to talk about “our players”
Investment Layers

Realism — Fantasy

- Care a lot
- Care
- Meh
- Care
- Care a lot
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explores</th>
<th>Builds</th>
<th>Realism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Care a lot</td>
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</table>
Coop Combat Context Mechanics

Skilled Less Skilled

Work Not Work

Explores Builds

Fantasy Realism

Thrill Calm

Multiplayer Solo

Builds Explores

Realism

Coop Mechanics Context

Combat

Fantasy

Skilled

Not Work

Less Skilled

Work

Calm

Solo

Multiplayer

Thrill
What Else Didn’t Work?

• Long-term satisfaction is missing

• “Quality” or “Value” is missing
Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

• “Intrinsic motivation”

• “Extrinsic motivation”
SDT (PENS)
**Competence**
The universal want to seek to control outcomes and experience mastery
Competence
The universal want to seek to control outcomes and experience mastery

Autonomy
The universal urge to be causal agents of one's own life and act in harmony with one's integrated self
**Competence**
The universal want to seek to control outcomes and experience mastery

**Autonomy**
The universal urge to be causal agents of one's own life and act in harmony with one's integrated self

**Relatedness**
The universal want to interact, be connected to, and experience caring for others
**Competence**  
The universal want to seek to control outcomes and experience mastery

**Autonomy**  
The universal urge to be causal agents of one's own life and act in harmony with one's integrated self

**Relatedness**  
The universal want to interact, be connected to, and experience caring for others
The Motivational Pull of Video Games: A Self-Determination Theory Approach

Richard M. Ryan · C. Scott Rigby · Andrew Przybylski

Published online: 29 November 2006
© Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2006

Abstract Four studies apply self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) in investigating motivation for computer game play and the effects of game play on well-being, power, coupled with the integration of "real" and "virtual" worlds.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Easy to learn, difficult to master</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Customization, agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatedness</td>
<td>Social grouping, status feedback systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Core Shooting PvP</td>
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<td>Autonomy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mission Loops</td>
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<td>Strikes &amp; Raids</td>
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<td></td>
<td>PvP Ranking</td>
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THE STANLEY PARABLE
# The Stanley Parable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Illusion of challenge IT IS A LIE (Hard-to-find endings?)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competence</strong></td>
<td>Illusion of freedom IT IS A LIE (World responsiveness?)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Autonomy</strong></td>
<td>YOU ARE ALONE (Direct relationship with the narrator?)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relatedness</strong></td>
<td></td>
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## Don’t Starve

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Core Survival Loop “Challenge” worlds</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Construction / Loop Characters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relatedness</td>
<td>Watercooler Sharing (?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
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What Else Didn’t Work?

• Motivation changes over time are missing.
CONSUMER JOURNEY
The Journey

Discovery

“I’ve heard of it”

“I tried it”

Affinity

“I play it”

“I played it”

Evaluation

Use
The 3 Models

• Players motives and needs change in a predictable way over time
  – (Consumer’s Journey)

• All players *start* to play for *different* reasons
  – (Big 5)

• But they tend to *stay* for the *same* reasons
  – (Self-Determination Theory)
GAME

PSYCHOLOGY

VOLTRON!!
THE ENGINE OF PLAY
Big 5 (5 Domains)

Discovery
“’I’ve heard of it’"

Evaluation
“’I tried it’"

SDT (PENS)

Affinity
“’I play it’"

Use
“’I played it’”
Play Engine 1.0

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Yep This Slide Is Still Terrible

• As investment increases...

• ...the motivating effectiveness of extrinsic payoffs decreases.
Destiny

Competence

- Core Shooting
- PvP

Autonomy

- Gear Hunting
- Mission Loops

Relatedness

- Strikes & Raids
- PvP Ranking

Features:
- Skilled
- Less Skilled
- Work
- Not Work
- Fantasy
- Realism
- Coop
- Solo
- Mechanics
- Context
- Combat
- Calm
- Thrill
The Stanley Parable

- Mastery: IT IS A LIE
- Autonomy: IT IS A LIE
- Relatedness: YOU ARE ALONE

- Skilled vs. Less Skilled
- Work vs. Not Work
- Fantasy vs. Realism
- Builds vs. Explores
- Coop vs. Solo
- Multiplayer vs. Solo
- Combat vs. Context
- Thrill vs. Calm
- Mastery
- Autonomy
- Relatedness
Don’t Starve

- Combat
- Mechansics
- Context
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- Solo
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- Exploring
- Builds

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• I need to choose which motivations our game will attempt to engage.
  – ...across their entire game experience

• I need a way to communicate those choices to my team.
  – ...in a way that makes sense to them.
Problems

• Kinda messy 😞
  – Will fix

• “Drives” are poorly represented
  – 4 Fun Keys? Something else?

• Complicated
  – “YP”
In Closing

• Don’t fuck it up.

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