Chapter LXIX
Interaction with MMOGs and Implications for E-Learning Design

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ABSTRACT

E-learning is emerging as one of the fastest organizational uses of the Internet as a supplementary or alternative mode for corporate training. However its effectiveness is questioned and most of e-learning courses and applications have been accused of being quite static, non-authentic and superficial, poorly designed, and thus non-motivating. Their philosophical assumption views learning as an isolated phenomenon, a static knowledge in a can that could be transmitted to the learners. In this chapter it is argued that many useful lessons for e-learning designers can be learned from game design and especially from the design of massive multi-player online games (MMOGs). A review on instructional quality of games and design elements of MMOGs is conducted under the perspective of adult learning, in order to identify, adapt, and propose design implications for e-learning design.

INTRODUCTION

Games have long provided a structured environment for rich learning experiences. Besides some typical definitions, games can be defined in terms of their learning and/or instructional nature. For instance, Aldrich (2004) defines games as, "interactive and entertaining sources of play which can be used to learn a lesson". It should be noted that games support the development of

procedural rather than prescriptive knowledge: Learning activities such as observation, conversation, trial-and-error efforts are very common. Such practices help gamers while interacting with the game world to solve a task, reach a goal, and implement a certain strategy. Computer games can also facilitate adult learning in a great extent. Computer-based role-playing games can help adults explore skills, methods, and concepts rapidly within an engaging non-threatening environment ripe with experiential and behavioral learning components.

On the other hand e-learning technology and applications provide exciting possibilities for supporting students in educational settings (schools and universities) and adult learners, professionals, and employees in organizational settings seeking new training and learning innovations. Especially for the latter, e-learning is emerging as one of the fastest organizational uses of the Internet as a supplementary or alternative mode for corporate training. The problem is that much of its quality is questionable. Poor e-learning design and usability problems cause frustration and create many barriers in learners' interaction with e-learning courses. Additionally the pedagogical foundations of most e-learning designs are not stable and e-learning courses—as the cornerstone of e-learning—fail to provide authentic learning environments. These problems are even harder in contexts such as business settings, organisations, and so forth, where adult professionals and employees interact with e-learning applications as part of corporate training and development initiatives. Adult learners need to feel responsible for their own learning and seek to find applicable knowledge that will help them out with their daily work activities and tasks.

The authors support that many useful lessons for e-learning designers can be learned from game design and especially from the design of massive multi-player online games (MMOGs). There is much research evidence that learning takes place in the immersive worlds of MMOGs,

which are mostly based on problem-based and project-based learning assumptions (Lee, Eustace, Fellows, Bytheway, & Irving, 2005). New gamers of MMOGs are immersed into the socio-cultural practices of the community and master new skills through the interaction with "experts".

In this chapter, the focus is to delineate the learning-instructional quality of games, especially the respective quality of MMOGs. As a consequence the objective is to explore what and how gamers learn within an MMOG setting that can be successfully transferred to different situations especially in the context of e-learning design. There is a growing interest and demand for designing immersive e-learning experiences, therefore it is critical to systematically extract the best design practices from MMOGs and adapt them for e-learning design.

E-LEARNING DESIGN AND THE NEW CHALLENGES

Design issues directly affect e-learning adoption and sustainability. The problem thus far is that focus is being placed more on technology issues and not on quality of learning. In many cases poor pedagogical design of e-learning applications has been accused of being the main determinant for the high dropout rates in e-learning courses. Non-interactive learning content, poor instructional assessment and instructional feedback, distractive use of media along with issues such as lack of control and navigational disorientation are the most commonly reported nuisances in several studies (ASTD, 2001; Bonk, 2002; Massy, 2002). As already mentioned e-learning courses are the cornerstone of e-learning initiatives nowadays. The majority of e-learning courses support asynchronous self-paced interactivity. The use of instructional design in e-learning has mainly been concerned with designing online training materials and applications for individual learners. According to Clark and Mayer (2003) most

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