

Chapter 7

The Computer Games Industry: Women's Experiences of Work Role in a Male Dominated Environment

Julie Prescott

The University of Liverpool, UK

Jan Bogg

The University of Liverpool, UK

ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the current position and experiences of women working within the computer games industry, the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector and the wider context of the Science, Engineering and Technology industry (SET). Global data collected as part of a larger quantitative study on women who are currently working in the male dominated computer games industry is reviewed, in relation to the long hour's culture associated with the sector. In addition, the lack of females, especially females with families in the gaming industry, skills shortages, work life balance and flexible working will be discussed in the games industry context. The research discussed will be related to the question of attracting and retaining women, in the games development workforce of the future. The issues discussed will be of relevance to employers, professional bodies, policy makers and researchers of the games industry and the wider ICT and SET industries. Recommendations from the findings and future research directions are provided.

INTRODUCTION

There is a need to recruit and retain more women as women are leaving the ICT industry in large numbers (Burns et al, 2007). This is despite the adoption of equal opportunities policies and various campaigns worldwide to attract women into ICT. Information, communication and technology

(ICT) occupations represents a classic example of occupational gendered segregation and includes both vertical and horizontal segregation. The sector has been active in increasing women's participation through a number of government strategies with the aim of increasing the appeal and the image of the sector to young females. One initiative in the United Kingdom (UK) is a government scheme 'Computer Club for Girls' that aims to combat the image problem of computers by emphasizing the

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61520-657-5.ch007

fun aspect. The aim of this is to maintain interest, in order that they may begin to consider a career within the industry. The games industry itself has also been active in recent years, in promoting the appeal and accessibility of a career in games to females. In 2009, 'Gamasutra' an online publication named the top 20 game writers (Ruberg, 2009), two women made this list (at number 15 and 19). Interestingly, one of the women Susan O'Connor was reported to be "*recognized as one of the most original and influential game writers currently working in the industry.*" Yet this woman appeared at number 15 in the list!

At a recent UK conference (2008 Women in Games), a number of these recent initiatives were discussed. Recent initiatives since 2007 have included:

- Microsoft 'Digigirls' workshop - 200 female participants aged 12-15 with focus on ICT and games.
- The University of Teesside, UK 'Girls and gadgets' conference - Females aged 13-16 with focus on the games industry and technology.
- University of Denver, USA 'P4Games' summer camp - Females with focus on game development

The widening women's work in ICT (Valenduc et al, 2004) project conducted in 2002-2004, in seven European countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, Ireland, Portugal and the UK) found a number of factors contributing to the lack of women's participation in ICT. Findings from interviews and case studies with women working in ICT professions indicated that issues included the long hour's culture associated with the sector, the lack of females, especially females with families. In addition, there was a perception of the industry as masculine, 'geeky' and unsocial. Many of these factors have also been associated with the computer games industry as reasons as to why women are a minority within the industry

(Haines, 2004, IDGA, 2004). The aim of the current chapter is to discuss these issues further and include findings from a larger qualitative study of over 450 women currently working internationally in the games industry (Prescott, forthcoming). The chapter aims to provide a brief overview of women's position within the wider ICT and SET industries, an overview of the games industries within the current economic climate and look at the position of women within the industries current workforce. The chapter will also discuss issues of work life balance; long hours and flexible working with the aim of providing the industry with an increased understanding and knowledge of how it may attract and retain a more diverse workforce in the future. The chapter contributes to the paucity of literature surrounding women working in the games industry in the UK and internationally as well as to provide a deeper understanding of women working under the umbrella of the ICT sector.

BACKGROUND

Women Working in the Science Engineering and Technology Industries (SET)

Data from the UK, 2007 Labour Force Survey indicates that women comprise almost a fifth of all SET workers (19% women and 81% men), the percentage of total women in SET occupations is the same as in 2002. In terms of proportional growth, overall, the number of SET women workers has increased by 12%, between 2002 and 2007 (representing 59,017 additional women in SET occupations). However, men in SET occupations also increased in the same period by 8.5% (representing 199,000 additional men in 2007). Women SET managers have increased by 2% since 2002 (14% in 2007).

In 2007 males represented; 86% of SET managers, 61% of science professionals, 95% engineer-

19 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/computer-games-industry/43206

Related Content

Flexible Educational Program for Managerial Engineering Personnel in Innovation

Anna Maltseva (2019). *Handbook of Research on Engineering Education in a Global Context* (pp. 477-487).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/flexible-educational-program-for-managerial-engineering-personnel-in-innovation/210345

A Brief History of Networked Classrooms to 2013: Effects, Cases, Pedagogy, and Implications with New Developments

Louis Abrahamson and Corey Brady (2014). *International Journal of Quality Assurance in Engineering and Technology Education* (pp. 1-54).

www.irma-international.org/article/a-brief-history-of-networked-classrooms-to-2013/117557

New Literacies in the Intellectual Field of Education: Mapping Theoretical Perspectives in Scientific Publications

Adriana Gewerc Barujel and Joel Armando (2016). *Handbook of Research on Applied E-Learning in Engineering and Architecture Education* (pp. 88-113).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/new-literacies-in-the-intellectual-field-of-education/142745

Internationalization of Technology Education in National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University

Lisa Soon, Galina V. Kashkan, Olga V. Marukhina and Sergey V. Axyonov (2015). *International Journal of Quality Assurance in Engineering and Technology Education* (pp. 47-60).

www.irma-international.org/article/internationalization-of-technology-education-in-national-research-tomsk-polytechnic-university/159201

Evaluation of Students' Satisfaction with Instructional Facilitation of a Technology Management Programme

Ibebie Temple Offor, Gordon Monday Bubou, Festa Ndujimi Okrigwe and Abubakar Sadiq Bappah (2015). *International Journal of Quality Assurance in Engineering and Technology Education* (pp. 26-36).

www.irma-international.org/article/evaluation-of-students-satisfaction-with-instructional-facilitation-of-a-technology-management-programme/134875