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► To cite this version:

Bruno Vétel, Laura Espinasse. Putting video game practices to work: an overview of gaming integration to working environments. Simulation and Gaming for social and environmental transitions, International Simulation and Gaming Conference (ISAGA), Jul 2023, La Rochelle, France. hal-04137886

HAL Id: hal-04137886

<https://hal.science/hal-04137886>

Submitted on 22 Jun 2023

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Putting video game practices to work: an overview of gaming integration to working environments

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Abstract

Lockdowns during the 2020-2022 Covid pandemic period popularized new video games and trivialized remote working. We hypothesize it has since then fostered video game practices during working hours, gaming at the office as well as remotely from residence. For many years, researchers have been studying video game skills profitable for professional activities.

Our exploratory research focuses on a slightly different scope: an investigation of the video game practices occurring in typical working environments and during working times. Its sociological purpose is to sketch the main determinant of those emerging gaming practices. To this end, we present a mapping of the integration of video games in five non-exclusive modalities which highlight smartphone uses during slack times at the office and the use of home gaming devices during remote work.

Our methodology is based on a survey of 33 interviews sampled as follow: the interviewees' age ranged from 21 to 42, they play for at least one year on video games, and they are employees working in France, representative of the main socioprofessional categories.

Data collection and processing were conducted in two phases, during the spring 2022 (n=20) and the late winter 2023 (n=13). The first one dealt with the gaming habits of employees with a special emphasis on their practices during the 2020-2022 period, including lockdowns and massive remote work sessions. The second is extending our investigation to the second half of 2022 and to early 2023, where remote work has known a slight reduction in frequency.

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Acknowledgement: We wish to thank our former Master student Capucine Chicault for its investigation of videogame practices during the Covid pandemic. Her work conducted under the supervision of Bruno Vétel is used as a source for the 2022 collected data used in this extended abstract.

1 Scope of the research

1.1 Video game skills and professional activities : a literature review

For many years, researchers of various disciplines, mainly sociology, education sciences, media studies, game studies and management, have been working on video games practices for skills development. Those researches on so called “positive effects” of gaming are often promoted as a counter reaction to previous media coverage and researches. This previous studies were often limited to “negative effects” of gaming, such as moral panics dealing with violence and addiction.

Some identified “positive effects” point at skills directly profitable for professional activities. These researches investigate daily video game entertainment contexts experienced at home, looking for social skills (Auray, 2007; Berry, 2012; Chollet, 2020) and psychological skills and resources (Wilkinson et al., 2008; Gaon & Stora, 2008; Stora, 2009; Tisseron, 2009; Granic et al., 2014; Barr & Copeland-Stewart, 2022).

Other researchers focus on video games voluntarily used for specific field of skill development. Schools (Gee, 2007; Simões et al., 2013; Dezuanni et al., 2015; Kahila et al., 2020), museums (Jutant, 2011; Gentès & Jutant, 2012; Lelièvre, 2012; Coville, 2015, 2016) and universities (Coville et al., 2022) have used them to transmit knowledge or develop learning skills among their publics.

In professional context, video game is used for simulation trainings, for instance in contexts such as military ones (Zyda & Sheehan, 1997; Sparrow et al., 2018), or mental healthcare ones (Kato, 2010). Several investigations also focus on cognitive and information processing skills for professionals (Powel, 2005; Lisk et al., 2012; Nuyens et al., 2019; Reynaldo et al., 2021). And finally, the literature on serious games emphasize on fundamental education processes (Lavigne, 2013, 2016b), or on management and recruiting skills in corporate contexts (Michaud & Alvarez, 2008; Allal-Chérif et al., 2014; Chollet, 2015).

Finally, some contributions tackle the frontier between working and gaming by investigating serious gaming (Lavigne, 2016a), computer web based social gaming practices at work (Boutet, 2011), the social skills used for online gaming servers management (Vétel, 2017) and the socioeconomical organization of player’s game assets (Vétel, 2018, 2020).

1.2 An exploratory study of video game integration in the working environment

Lockdowns during the covid pandemic popularized new online video games practices and trivialized remote working. We hypothesize it has since then fostered video game practices during working hours. Thus, we propose to focus our research on a neglected subject of investigation: an overview of the main contexts of video game practices occurring during working hours.

Our study aims at identifying video game practices’ integration during employees’ working hours. To this end, we propose to test a mapping of the integration of video games in five non-exclusive modalities:

- No integration : employees use video game outside of working hours (e.g. during transportation, in the morning or evening, during weekend or vacations)
- Legal work break integration: employees use video games during legal work breaks (e.g. lunch, coffee break)
- Multi-activities integration: employees use video games during their working time (e.g. simultaneously during a remote meeting, or discretely between two professional tasks)
- Promoted company integration: the management encourages employees video gaming (e.g. serious games, coworker team play to promote team building)
- Business integration: video game is an integral part of the company's business and employees have to use them for some core working tasks (e.g. video game programming and testing)

2 Research methodology

For this study, we are carrying out a survey based on thirty three semi structured interviews, sampled as follow: 21 to 42 years old gamers-employees working in France and representative of the main socioprofessional categories.

Our sample was selected according to two requirements: the interviewees had gaming habits during working hours for at least one year, and they had currently a work contract, with one to ten years of professional experience.

Recruitments were performed for 50% by public demands on the gaming social network like Discord and for 50% in private circles. Data collection and processing were conducted in two phases, during the spring 2022 and the late winter 2023.

The first one conducted during a master thesis under the supervision of Bruno Vétel dealt with the gaming habits of employees, with a special emphasis on their practices during the 2020-2022 period, including lockdowns and massive remote work sessions. It aimed in particular at circumventing variations of practices when teleworking take place on more than 2 days per week. Due to the pandemic context, 10 interviews were conducted as video conferences, and 10 consisted of prolonged text exchanges initiated on Discord and followed by emails with each interviewee during 2 to 3 months.

The second investigation is extending our testimonies to the second half of 2022 and to the early 2023, where remote work has known a slight regulation and a reduction in frequency. 5 interviews were conducted in copresence, 7 in video conferences.

3 Analysis and results

Our data analysis reveals distributions of worker profiles according to the following modalities. In work break integration, after mid-2022 we find an overrepresentation of people performing professional activities with faster pace jobs that are less compatible with simultaneous gaming, like hairdressers or nurses. Those people play

mainly on smartphone, during short periods of time, typically 5 to 30 minutes, scattered during working and transportation hours. Gendered biases are also noticed with an overrepresentation of women in heterosexual pairs and women in charge of children.

In multi-activities integration, we find three different profiles. The first one matches with gaming activities on smartphone during slack time. The second one corresponds to personal computer or console gamers, practicing exclusively during their teleworking hours. The third one illustrates people who dynamically select a diversity of games and gaming devices, depending on the actual organization of their work.

This survey highlights two important results. Firstly, the gaming device used by workers on their workplace is mainly their smartphone, reducing the variety of available games, especially for women above 29. Secondly, due to the ease of hiding home gaming activities from remote work colleagues, remote work at the residence emphasizes the use of static gaming devices, like gaming consoles and personal computers that can be used to play games designed for longer gaming sessions.

4 Conclusion and perspectives

This exploratory study is a first step towards a refined knowledge of video game practices during working hours, showing in the background how quality of work life is evolving in a post-covid era. Our mapping was successfully tested to highlight gaming practices that depend mainly on gaming devices, working contexts and gendered positions. Further research perspectives would consist of focuses on a particularly popular video game, or widespread professional activities.

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