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Disruption and Harms in Online Gaming Framework

Assessing the Behaviour Landscape

ADL Center for Technology & Society

In a world riddled with cyberhate, online harassment and misuses of technology, the Center for Technology & Society (CTS) serves as a resource to tech platforms and develops proactive solutions. Launched in 2017 and headquartered in Silicon Valley, CTS aims for global impacts and applications in an increasingly borderless space.

It is a force for innovation, producing cutting-edge research to enable online civility, protect vulnerable populations, support digital citizenship and engage youth. CTS builds on ADL's experience over more than a century building a world without hate and supplies the tools to make that a possibility both online and offline.

Fair Play Alliance

The Fair Play Alliance is a global coalition of gaming professionals and companies committed to developing quality games. We provide a forum for gaming professionals and companies to work together to develop and share best practices in encouraging healthy communities and awesome player interactions in online gaming.

We envision a world where games are free of harassment, discrimination, and abuse, and where players can express themselves through play.

Where to Learn More

Please visit our resource hub for more resources:

fairplayalliance.org/resources

For developers, by developers. The FPA is an industry-lead alliance here to help. Visit www.fairplayalliance.org if you would like to access any of our resources, or reach out to info@fairplayalliance.org for support from any of our resident experts in player dynamics or to learn more about how you can help.

**Disruption and Harms in
Online Gaming Framework**

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A key aspect of addressing disruptive behavior is understanding your game's **behavior landscape**, a profile that helps define its areas of interaction and influence. By mapping out these areas, we developers can see how the choices we make, and the broader gaming context, influence our game as a social space.

Every game's experience will create a different behavior landscape. Identifying what is important to you and your game will allow you to operationalize a path to better behavior that takes nothing away from the atmosphere of your game. Understanding the nature of a disruption will help you determine if it is affecting the experience you intended or player well-being, and how you might address it, including better managing expectations of what is acceptable or not.

The broad series of activities that follow helps a developer build out a behavior landscape for any online multiplayer game, which informs decision making, design, planning and more.

Step 1: Define your vision.

First, identify the values you want to see expressed in your games, regardless of whether you are in the beginning stages of designing a game or your game is live. Communicate your vision clearly and regularly. Maintain consistency in your values and how you uphold them if you have multiple games. If your game is already live, first nail down your long-term vision, and then work to close the gap between your aspirations for the game and its reality.

Example of Workshop Process

Setup. Identify the participants for a workshop comprising 15 to 20 people with breakout groups to facilitate more direct interaction. The workshop could run as a series of exercises for a larger company and the resulting discussions synthesized later for leadership.

Workshop format. Set aside a comfortable space for small-group discussions. Assign at least one person to synthesize the discussion and take notes to be shared afterward. Set aside two to three hours for talking and reflection, with short breaks.

1. **(10 minutes)** An icebreaker of your choice to suit the group you have assembled
2. **(10 minutes)** As an individual activity, answer the following question:
 - a. When did you have a great experience playing a game?
 - b. When did you have a great experience playing an online game with your friends? With strangers?
 - c. What made those experiences great? What would have made them better? How did other players in the game influence your experience?
3. **(20 minutes) The entire group revisits (2):**
 - a. Invite those who are comfortable to share their experiences.
 - b. Invite participants to share their reactions.
 - c. Discuss: Do we feel equipped to understand what it means to feel safe on behalf of players? Why or why not? This is a growth opportunity to revisit as a studio (see Step 4: Identify the Disproportionately Affected of this guide for additional guidance).
4. **(20 minutes) As small breakout groups:**
 - a. First, ask the group to generate two lists, with a goal of being comprehensive:
 - i. List 1: Examples of behavior that exemplify what you want to see in the game or gaming community
 - ii. List 2: Examples of behavior that troubled you in the past
 - b. Second, invite teams to consider the state of players' behavior in games today—if you could wave a wand, what would you want to be true of games in 10 years?
5. **(30 minutes) The entire group revisits (4) and the breakout groups take turns sharing. Then come back together again to discuss:**
 - a. What trends are apparent?
 - b. Generate separate lists as the full group:
 - i. Where is there strong agreement? These are good indications of values you already share.
 - ii. Where is there disagreement? These are areas worth discussing further, potentially in a separate session so that participants have time to reflect.
6. **(20 minutes) As small groups:**
 - a. What challenges do we face because of the kinds of games we make?
 - b. What aspects make things easier?
7. **(Remaining time) The full group revisits (6) and breakout groups take turns sharing. Then, gather again to talk:**
 - a. What trends are apparent?
 - b. What could we do differently based on the discussion today?
8. **Conclusion.** Based on the outcomes above, identify a group to synthesize the learnings into a list of values (you may wish to give ample time for feedback and iteration).

Step 2: Analyze your game.

Using your vision as a starting point for what you want players to experience, walk through your game to identify all examples of conduct that could be disruptive to your goal. Also, list what you would like to see happen instead as you perform your assessment. Be comprehensive. How are you falling short of reaching your vision? Where do you see success? Identifying successful examples informs how you design for these behaviors and provide feedback to players who are penalized.

[1]Identify the values you want to see expressed in your games, regardless of whether you are in the beginning stages of designing a game or your game is live.

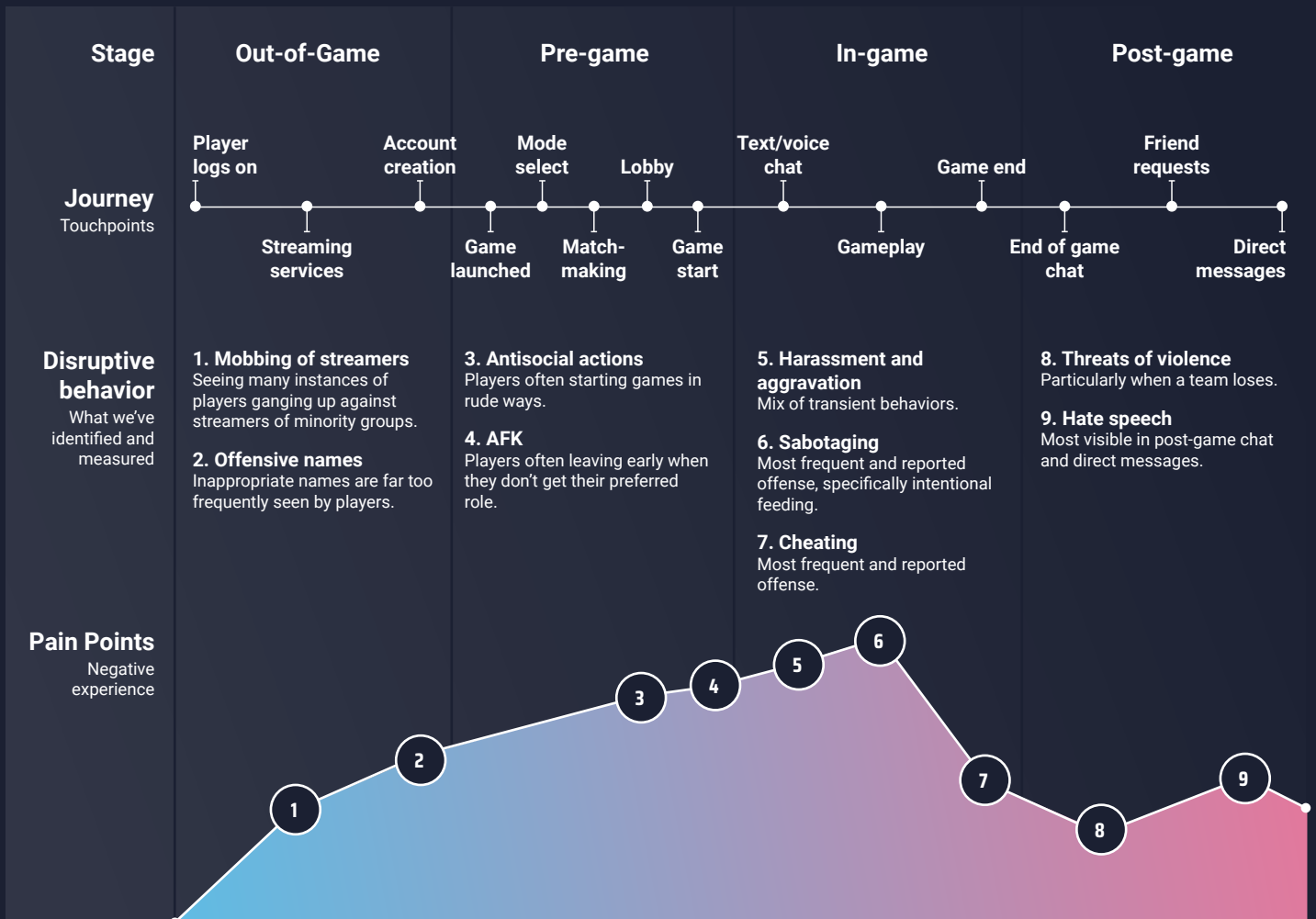


Diagram 1. Example of disruptive conduct analysis.

Step 3: Craft behavior profiles.

Behavior profiles are fictional representations of interaction patterns among groups you create and based on your research to illustrate the different personality types you might encounter in your game. Profiles are helpful for capturing the underlying intentions and desires of a wide variety of players. They can be used to anticipate how players might relate to each other at key moments in your game or meta-game. Please note, however, that players do not always fit neatly within one label or another; their relational style can change depending on the interaction. Each of the touchpoints you identified in step 2, for instance, will rely in part on the assumptions and intentions of the players who encounter them.

Social Need	Relational Style	Motivation
Socially demanding Expects social features	Antagonizer Intentionally disruptive	Win at all costs Goes to great lengths to win. Very upset by losses
Socially curious Not seeking, but would engage	Rager Low resilience. Prone to losing cool	Min-max Enjoys optimizing for a win. Detail-oriented
Socially indifferent Does not care. Might be ignored or seen as a distraction	Inconsistent/Average Normal ups and downs	Just for fun/social Here primarily to hang out. May play seriously, but not the main goal
Socially aversive Resists socially demanding features	Follower Mimics or reflects others' behavior	Life of the party Loves to be the center of attention, enjoys showing off
Socially disruptive Abuses social features	Sunny solid Exceptionally high resilience	Populist Champions the common, popular goal
	Defuser Attempts to improve situations	

Diagram 2. Example behavior profiles focusing on different areas of design, such as social need, relational style or motivation.



The example above applies broad labels to players regarding their level of sociability, style of conflict management and reason for playing games. The “Social Need” profiles provide a lens through which we can understand the impact of adding social features or incentivizing social interaction. We can ask useful questions, such as how we anticipate players reacting to the introduction of voice chat, party tools or getting matched with strangers. Focusing on each profile group’s anticipated reactions to a new feature helps identify risks and opportunities, and creates more in-depth discussions about your goals.

The goal for creating behavior profiles is to come up with a framework to think about your game and potential player interactions. You are likely to identify several different sets of profiles to fit your product needs/questions, or as you learn more about your game and players. These will create handy references for making design decisions. While not necessary, these profiles could be quantified to help you understand how you are identifying your target audience and determining which features will appeal to certain players.

Step 4: Identify the disproportionately affected.

Not all behavior or features affect everyone equally. Some players are targeted because of how they identify. Taking steps to spot the potential for harassment early on helps create a more inclusive environment and reduces the chance of minimizing another player’s lived experience.

The purpose of the Disruption and Harms in Online Gaming Framework is to help you detect these behaviors as they arise. Once you recognize them, your designs can become more inclusive, and you ensure that those who are harassed have the tools to report problematic players and shield themselves from further abuse.

Note: It is important for studios to recognize perspectives that get left out and seek out additional guidance. Try not to overburden team members who are members of a minority group.

Doing this assessment is an excellent opportunity to build a partnership with your DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) staff, if you have one. It is also an opportunity to reach out to civil society organizations representing vulnerable and marginalized communities to bring their perspective into your product development process.

Consider ways to amplify underrepresented voices and lift up those who set a positive example of the values you want to see in your game. These voices include existing influencers, or in the case of a soon-to-launch game, finding influencers who already demonstrate these values and working with them to promote your game.

Step 5: Decide an action plan.

Once you have built out your game's behavior landscape, put it to good use in your regular design and development work. If you are creating a new game, the behavior landscape can inform a larger discussion around potential risks and when you need to intervene, such as adding a reporting feature, or making different design decisions to reduce conflict between players.

If you're looking at an existing title, a behavior landscape informs where the problems are occurring, helps assess the feasibility of interventions, and exposes new opportunities to improve the player experience. Do not forget to use a behavior landscape during the pre-release, as you start to see patterns emerge among your play testers or early community.

In summary, behavior profiles can provide a simple and effective way to anticipate how players may react to changes, and to communicate expected change. For both live and new games, a comprehensive landscape can help you discover gaps in your coverage or understanding, build alignment or lay bear hidden assumptions you may have been making.




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