How to use game design principles to build your teamwork framework



Laura DeCarli

they/them

I am going to be mainly wearing my producer hat for this lecture

Research Assistant in Game Development

MALMÖ UNIVERSITY

MAU GAME LAB

GAME DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE

Assistant Lecturer in Games

IT UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

- Making games
- Playable Media
- Advanced Topics in Game Studies

Indie Game-Maker in what remains of my time

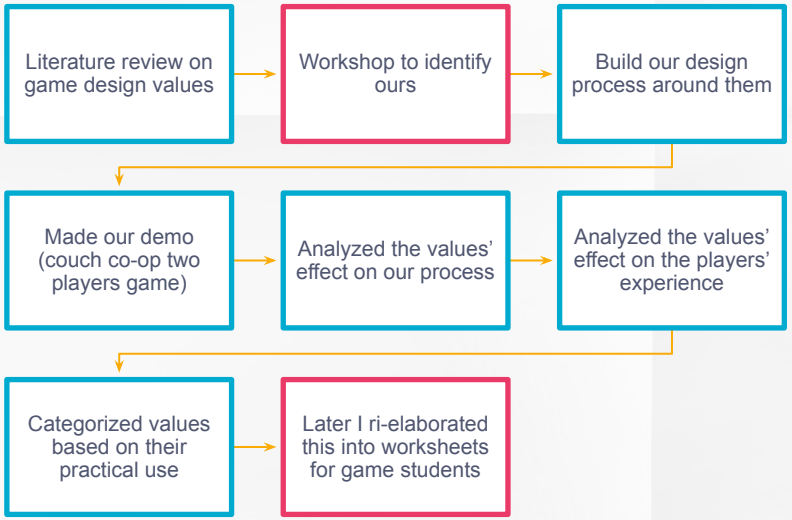
- Lead Game Designer
- Producer
- Gameplay Designer
- Level Designer
- UX Designer

Structure of today's lecture

1. I'll explain how my thesis team and I researched game design values.
2. I'll go over how we recommend using game design values in game design practice.
3. Advice on what to reflect on when starting a group project.
4. Exercise time.

Game Design Principles

For our MSc thesis in Games my team & I researched game design principles by, well, experimenting on ourself (kind of):





The literature we started from

Our main reference when we started reflecting on game design values and principles has been *Game Design Values* (2019) by Annakaisa Kultima & Alyea Sandovar, who describe sets of game design process values that can be seen in contemporary game development and divide them into nine categories:

1. values of player centrism (e.g.: usability, co-creativity, player's advocacy)
2. casual game design values (e.g.: simplicity, accessibility, flexibility)
3. traditional game design values (e.g.: immersion, challenge, competition)
4. values of artistic expression, innovation and experimentation
5. ludological values (e.g.: game mechanics, fun, tech agonisticims)
6. societal impact and cultural values (e.g.: ethics, diversity, impactful)
7. values of production&creation process (e.g.: collaboration, open-source)
8. values of independency (e.g.: autonomy, artistic freedmo, anarchy)
9. values of commercial success or sustainability



Game Design Values

Annakaisa Kultima
University of Tampere
Kanslerinrinne 1
33014 University of Tampere
Finland
Annakaisa.Kultima@uta.fi

Alyea Sandovar
Fielding Graduate University
2020 De La Vina St
Santa Barbara, CA 93105
United States
asandovar@email.fielding.edu

ABSTRACT
In this article, the notion of game design value is proposed and explored utilizing three design theory frameworks: Holin's design values, Lawson's guiding principles and Schön's appreciative systems. Game design, as other design fields, is affected by the designers' personal attitudes, beliefs and values. To gain a deeper understanding of design work by game developers it is imperative to introduce the consistence and development of these design philosophies to the field of game development. The proposed framework assists the organization of future research into game design values.

CCS Concepts
• **Applied computing**–**Computer games**

Keywords
Game design; game design values; design values; design praxeology.

1. INTRODUCTION
Three decades after the debut of Pac-Man, the game industry's success as multibillion dollar industry showcases the influence of digital games as social culture [8]. As the creation of digital games expanded, so have the ways in which different designers contribute to culture. Different designers influenced digital game culture and the development of games in various ways. This has not only informed the ways that game designers think of games today, but has also had a large impact culturally and worldwide. Despite the known influence of game designers in popular culture, reviews of game designers' day-to-day lives are limited [33] as it is difficult for researchers to enter into the inner sanctum of a game studio, due to game studios' hesitancy to share company secrets and the need to protect their intellectual property [14, 25]. It is also an investment in time for the studies to invite outsiders in.

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There is a current focus in game studies towards understanding game designers and their work. Within the field of production studies, there is growing body of literature that extends beyond the player and game content research [33] to include the production cycle [14] and game development and its respective culture [25, 33]. Most of the professional literature [e.g. 10] focuses on its production processes [25], rather than the internal process of the designer. Literature on production emphasizes the process of creation [5], or on models and technologies for successful game creation.

Key to understanding the ecosystem of production, is not just designers themselves but the wider practice of game design. On their examination of the academic publications of game research within the period of 2000-2014, Meijer et al. [24] identified 'game design' as the most used keyword among the over 20 000 unique keywords presented in 820 articles. While this finding appears significant, it is difficult to interpret. 'Game design' can be connected to a wide variety of research papers. The term could be mentioned within a technical oriented paper of an inventive algorithm as well as that of a study of a game forum discussion. If the authors addressed, even vaguely, the potential impact of the study into practice, the keyword can be found. Kultima [17] argues that if game studies were evaluated based on Crotu's [4] typology of design research: phenomenology, epistemology and praxiology –the multidiscipline of game studies has been unsuccessful in addressing the latter two areas of design research.

2. VALUES AND GAME DESIGN
Since the 1990s, there has been an emphasis to develop frameworks that ensure that moral and ethical values become integrated in the design and development of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Some of these frameworks include Worth Centered Design (WCD) [9] and Value Sensitive Design (VSD) [9]. In game development Values at Play (VAP) is the leading model for inserting values in game design [8]. These frameworks are informed by the study of information ethics (IE), which suggests that technologies include the ethical frameworks, embedded beliefs and values, of those who design them [7]. Each of these frameworks also provide guidelines for the integration of ethical intelligence in technology development [22]. In digital games, moral values and ethical intelligence are addressed through moral play [31], ethical ecosystem of games [35], models and techniques [28], and ethical stewardship in game design [27]. Societal values are also addressed in game design [6] as well as designers' cultural values [26]. However, this paper departs from such explorations about values to propose another set of values, these are values that refer to the process of design itself. Kultima

Before starting our project we sat down and discussed

1. **Our learning objectives, boundaries, expectations, etc.**
   → During today's exercise you will get worksheets for this.
2. Very in general, **what are the game design values of each teammate and which ones are shared between us all?**
   → Example of papers that discuss design values: *Game Design Values* (Kultima&Sandovar, 2016)
3. When coming up with a concept we discussed: **What is the overall concept of the game? What are key features that we want? What are usual design patterns and solutions used in similar games?**
   → Example of papers that look into game design patterns of specific genres: *Understanding and Evaluating Cooperative Video Games* (Aghabeigi, 2010)
4. Additionally, we considered: **What design, development and production methodologies we'd like to use?**
   → Example of papers about design methodologies: *Player-centred game design* (Sykes & Federoff, 2006), *Game Design Praxiology* (Kultima, 2018)

Through our research we observed that:

While following the categorization by Kultima & Sandovar (2019) we mainly sorted our design principles between those that:

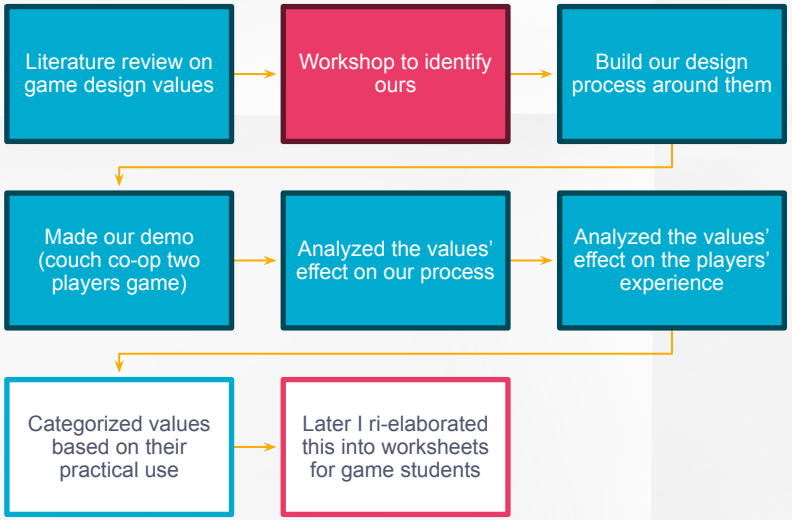
centered on the players and what we want their experience with the game to be like,

those that are centered on the game and what we want it to look and feel like

and those that are centered on the team meaning how we want to work with each other and what we want to learn from the process.

Game Design Principles

It was now time to look back on our starting point through the lense of the process we went through:

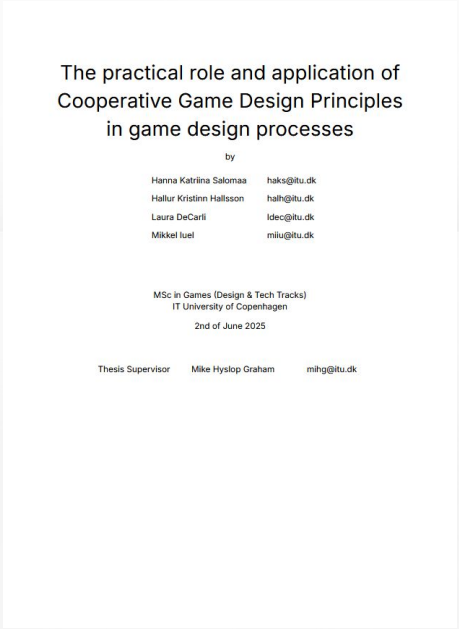




In our analysis we pointed out that:

In the practical application of our design principles a more useful categorization would have between design values that help us set:

- **goals** (for the game, player experience, playtesting, final result etc.): **they tell us what to do**
- **guides** (for ideation, design, development, etc.) - **they tell us how to work**
- **general attitude and approach** - **they inform our teamwork**



The practical role and application of Cooperative Game Design Principles in game design processes

by

Hanna Katriina Salomaa haks@itu.dk
Hallur Kristinn Hallsson halh@itu.dk
Laura DeCarli ldec@itu.dk
Mikkel Iuel miiu@itu.dk

MSc in Games (Design & Tech Tracks)
IT University of Copenhagen

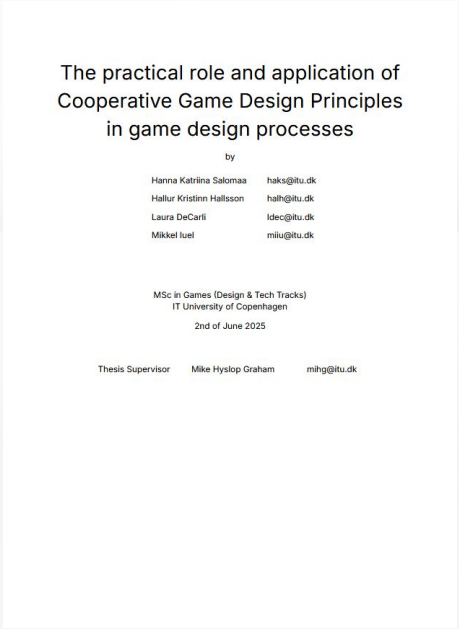
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Thesis Supervisor Mike Hyslop Graham mihg@itu.dk

Before going in detail about goals, guides and attitudes/approaches: are there any questions?

Goals

- The game design principles that fall in this category are the goals that the hand-in version of your game should achieve.
- They are statements that tell you what to do.
- You will use them when playtesting to check if what you are making actually achieves the goals that you set out to do.
- They usually come out of your ideation for the game, your design values and your analysis of similar games. They can also be described as your game's concept (see Alberto's lecture).



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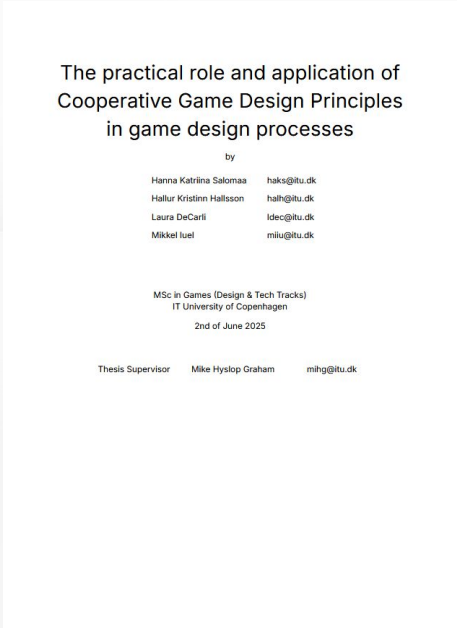
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Goals

- Examples of goals:

  “We want to learn how to make dependency on each other feel positive, balanced and dynamic rather than frustrating”; “designing for a range of skill levels allows players with different experiences levels and accessible to players with disabilities”; “Gameplay should support cooperative play”

  - ➔ They are still too broad to help us make choices during development.
  - ➔ However, they inform enough to know during development if we are achieving these goals. If you are not meeting these principles, evaluate what can be done to shift the design and development of the game towards a better direction.



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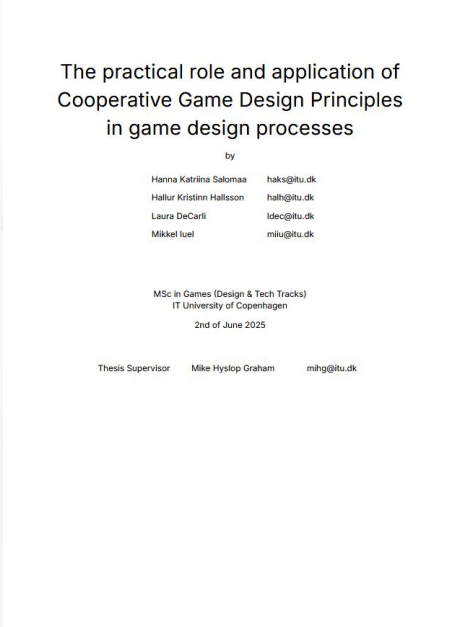
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Guides

- The game design principles that fall in this category are the guides that you will use when you make decisions during the design and development of your game.
- They are statements that tell you how to do what you want to do in a more concrete way.
- They usually come out of your ideation for the game and your analysis of similar games.



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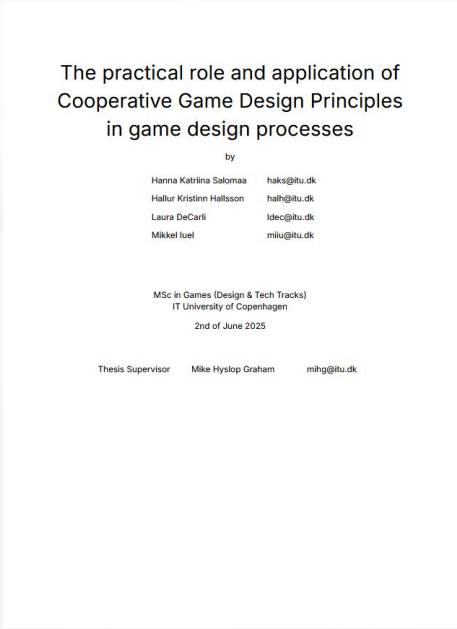
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Guides

- Examples of guides:

  “*Having both players interacting with the same object*”; “*Encouraging communication and teamwork by allowing players to make choices together and complementing each other*”; “*Shared goals that give a reason for the players to work together*”

  - ➔ They can guide the process of ideation, design and/or development.
  - ➔ If an idea or choice went against these design principles, or did not contribute to them or other principles, we would change it or discard it, which allowed us to stay focused in our work.



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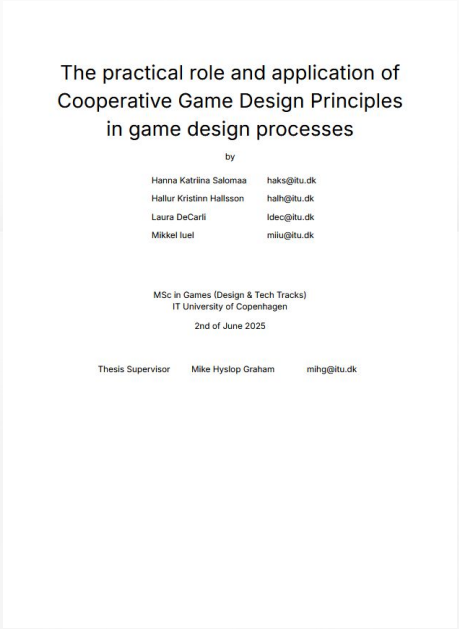
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Attitude and approaches

- The game design principles that fall in this category are the set the ground rules of how you work.
- They usually come out of your production values, your personal goals, your boundaries and expectations.
- Today's exercise will focus on this!



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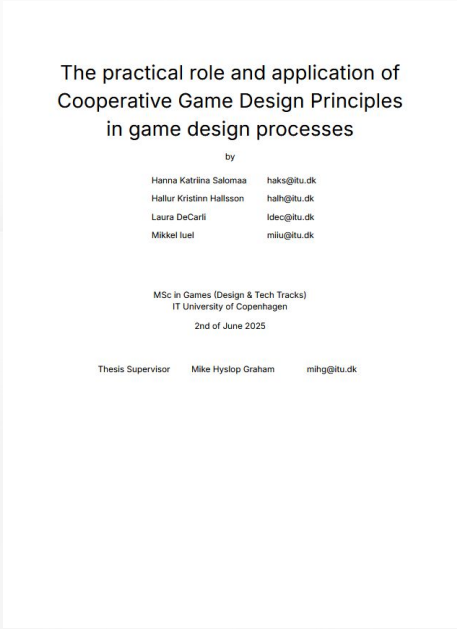
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Attitude and approaches

- Examples of attitudes and approach:

  “Direct, honest, calm and respectful communication: don't hesitate to say when you're encountering problems, need help or when something another team member’s work has flaws to work on”; “Communicate how your work is progressing to minimize issues with dependencies”; “Respect boundaries about how much and when other team members can and want to work”

  - ➔ They set ground rules and boundaries that allow us to work more effectively and respectfully.
  - ➔ This indirectly allowed us to pursue more efficiently the other design goals and guides.



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Do you have any questions so far?



Which leads us to
YOU and this exercise!



Take a step back from talking about the game and instead discuss how to have a good professional relationship with each other.

Work Boundaries & Expectations

What are the work boundaries that you want to set <u>for yourself</u>? Examples:

- When are you not available to work on the project?
- What type of role and tasks are you comfortable covering? Which ones do you want and do not want?
- “I want separation between group work and hang-outs (friends in addition to teammates)”
- "I will leave the meeting if it has no agenda and it goes on for more than 1h =P”

What do you expect <u>from others</u> in a professional setting? Examples from my thesis team:

- “My teammates will communicate when my work has problems (and when it’s good)”
- “Don’t promise things you can’t do, don’t wait too long to ask for help when you’re stuck”
- “Update others about your tasks’ progress”
- “No arguments during meetings, keep calm and stay respectful when disagreeing”
- “Don’t do meetings without an agenda”

Do some self-reflection and know your limits

What are the constraints that you need to keep in mind while planning the scope of your project? For example:

- What are the people in your team good at? What do they need to learn and how long would it take?
- Time and effort spent on the game needs to be fair, not necessarily equal. Be direct about what you can give, so that you can scope the project accordingly.
- Who in your team already had experiences in game development or similar interdisciplinary creative work?

Do some self-reflection and be honest

Is there anything that you usually struggle with in group projects that the other teammates should be aware of to help each other out?

Examples from Laura's thesis team:

- *Teammate A tends to become passive and contribute less when they start losing the "Vision", this was solved by having frequent conversations about staying in the loop.*
- *Teammate B struggles with preventing themselves from working past-midnight, with negative consequences to their mood and ability to contribute later. This was helped by having other team members have respectful conversations about how this could affect everyone's work and work environment.*
- *Teammate C tends to procrastinate and struggles to speak up when unsure about tasks. Clear task assignment and frequent communication helps this.*

Reflect on your creative/learning/professional goals

What are your goals for this project? Reflect on that both individually and as a group:

Examples of individual team members goals:

- Learning objectives
- Something you're interested in about game development (art objective, mechanics, theme, etc.)
- Doing something specific for the portfolio

Examples of shared goals:

- How do you want to work with each other?
- Is what you learn from the process more important to you than the end game's end-result or vice versa?
- What is the game that you're trying to create? What is the intended player's experience? etc.

How to communicate with each other

Examples:

- Decide on channels of communication that the team will *actually* use.
- How often do you want to up date each other on work progress?
- Where do you keep the documentation about your game project?
- How do you want to handle disagreements and conflicts?

Remember

- Never make assumptions: you come from different backgrounds regarding how to communicate, what is “normal” for you is not necessarily normal for everyone else.
- Put your thoughts out in the open so that you can handle them with your team.

Exercise Structure

Phase 1: Individual work

Materials needed:

- You
- Worksheet 1 and materials to compile it (pen&paper or digital)

What to do:

Take 10 minutes to answer the questions on the worksheet on your own.

Phase 1: Individual work

Materials needed:

- You and your team
- Worksheet 1, Worksheet 2 and materials to compile it (pen&paper or digital)

What to do:

Take 30 minutes to explain the results of worksheet 1 and then answer the questions on worksheet 2 together.