

# Analysis of a Game Type

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## Introduction

Article by Per Lindstrand. This article intends to define, analyze and evaluate a certain *game type*. The game type discussed in this article is “team games”, games which supports and/or consists of a competition or co-operation between one or more teams of playing agents.

## What is a *game type* anyway?

In order to provide a useful definition of a *game type* it is important for one to first and foremost consider the motivation and reason for the definition. To discuss the subject and indeed analyze it one has, or at least attempt, to provide an objective qualitative definition. I will informally aspire to define what a game type is; therefore what qualifies and not qualifies as a game type as a direct or indirect consequence of the definition. Since it is informal I will not attempt to “prove” the accuracy or usefulness nor the inaccuracy of the definition. This implies that terms, concepts and

sentences are, to varying extents, left for the reader to interpret freely and entirely subjectively. The reason for this is that I do not directly reference the definition nor does any arguments in the article derive from or inherit any properties of terms or sections within the definition itself. A disambiguation of it or parts of it would be meaningless.

I argue that a game type is the *way* a game is utilized and played, this does not, however, reduce the space of application very much within this context. Furthermore, a game type is logically not a game *genre* since it is more general and hence not narrow enough to useful as a metric for game content. A game type could potentially evolve into a game genre in certain cases, especially in time, as seen with “platform games” which I would classify as a game type rather than a genre.

Examples of traditional game types, excluding the targeted type for this article, are co-operative games, player versus player competition games and character level-based games. These are all examples of game traits that I, according to my informal definition, would define as game types rather than genres or any similar game element/content term used to categorize games.

## Join us or die!

A game can be classified to be part of the game type category “team games” if it, naturally, adheres to the definition – in this case, my informal attempt at one. Semantically

it must contain a “team” concept and perhaps, to reduce the possible space of application, even consider the “team” concept to be a prominent part of the game. That is, the game must

- contain the concept of a “team”,
- contain one or more common or collaborative goals for a “team” to achieve,
- and implement the “team” concept within a game context.

The common goals might very well be the same in all instances of the game, i.e. consistent with the game context and therefore need not be specialized for “teamplay” nor separated from a context not considered “teamplay mode”. There are several team concept implementations with various properties such as

- Co-operative teams.
- Competing teams.
- Hybrid of co-operative and competing teams.
- Fully independent teams.

## Population and Popularity

How many games uses teams? What games uses teams? That is, implement a feature or an ability to support teams and/or teamplay. There are of course numerous instances of team games in almost all genres, both “historically” and, perhaps even more so

with current trends, on the contemporary market. Online capabilities through Internet technology allows far greater number of players to participate in a game or play session than ever before possible with traditional console apparatus. This, along with several technological achievements and perhaps to some extent social evolution, has spawned and evolved a connected medium that supports an almost unlimited amount of interaction – poetically speaking that is. From this opportunity, a large part of the game developer industry has focused on games encouraging and supporting what I would call teamplay mode and therefore belong to a team game category.

Examples of game titles from different genres that belong to the team game category are, ordered by genre and discussed below.

- *Star Craft*, RTS<sup>1</sup>  
*Blizzard Entertainment*
- *Battlefield 2*, FPS<sup>2</sup>  
*Digital Illusions*
- *Lineage II*, MMORPG<sup>3</sup>  
*NCsoft*

*Star Craft* is a real-time strategy game that supports teams/teamplay mode – worth to note far from the only one nor the first. Participants can play in groups, or teams,

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<sup>1</sup>Real-Time Strategy game genre.

<sup>2</sup>First Person Shooter game genre.

<sup>3</sup>Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game genre.

against other teams. This is a clear example of a hybrid team game where co-operative and competition modes are combined. From an arbitrary participating agent's perspective this can be viewed upon as a co-operative team game due a special case where the opposing team or teams consists entirely of game controlled agents or, by an impractical definition of the term, artificial intelligences.

*Battlefield 2* is primarily a multiplayer game that focus heavily on teamplay mode, two factions or teams compete during a game session. This is also an instance of a hybrid team game sharing the same aspects of teamplay experience by participating agents as the previously mentioned real-time strategy game, *Star Craft*. A fundamental difference in game mechanics and indeed game design is the focus on teamplay mode in this latter title. Being of a more recent generation it, in accordance with my analysis and conclusion, shows clear tendencies to utilize the shared Internet medium further. Although this does not at all contradict that the game *Star Craft* also, especially in later revisions, makes use of the advancements of information technology.

*Lineage II* is a so called massive multiplayer online role playing game, and as the name implies relies solely on the connectivity of the global communication network. The concept originates from the former pen and paper role playing games, but are transformed into continuous game sessions with a far greater number of participants. This genre often contain the concept of a team not only in the underlying game mechanics and design but the game world or environment as well. In *Lineage II* participating agents can

form *guilds*, groups of players contributing to a common, amongst themselves, good. The specific design, targeting teams in this case, contains a vast set of attributes and aspects shared among many massive multiplayer online role playing games. The game supports co-operative, competing as well as independent teamplay modes, which is, as mentioned, common in this genre but compared to others not at all usual and in fact quite rare for obvious reasons.

## Conceptualization

The conceptualization phase, where ideas are spawned, grouped, analyzed and evaluated to finally perhaps contribute to a theoretical product, is not greatly affected by the aspect of teamplay. If sought to conform entirely to and focus solely on the team game type one needs to, perhaps at least in some instances, consider a more complex scenario. Teams implies a co-operation on the entity level, at least one possibly controlled by a human agent, that has numerous implications on the game design, granted that the design aspire to describe a good<sup>4</sup> game.

The most prominent issue, implied as a direct consequence of the team game type, is that features are to be able to be realized for a group of participating agents, either

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<sup>4</sup>The author would like to note that “good” is indeed a highly subjective word and that the reader may interpret the meaning of this freely within the context of the article, this to avoid tedious elaborations regarding semantics and philosophy.

collectively and/or individually, and may therefore not enforce nor inherit any properties that may break the overall system. This is obvious though and, perhaps to provide the sheer illusion of a complete reasoning, worth to mention.

## Prototyping

The prototyping phase of game design is perhaps mostly affected, compared to other development stages, by the choice of a team game type. The construction of prototypes will greatly differ in team games, a single entity is no longer the primary aspect of the prototype nor indeed the final game experience.

When creating physical models for the prototyping stage, these need to support a set of participating agents in a qualitative way. Achieving this in a, as mentioned, qualitative manner using the physical prototype creation approach is questionable. Arguably contrary, board games may support teams and teamplay effectively but differ in several areas.

- Board games have a pre-defined context.
- Board games have inherently a mode of play<sup>5</sup>.
- Board games are bound to a single medium.

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<sup>5</sup>Arguable point to say the least but the author reserves this discussion due to lack of importance for demonstration.

A disambiguation of context and medium is necessary to further illustrate the difference between teamplay in board games and teamplay in physical model prototypes of (video) games. Context refers to the environment in which the game is set, its properties and their implications on the how the game is played and most importantly perceived by the participating agents. The medium is the environment in which the game itself is played, the physical realization of the board game, or in other words reality. Reality enforces certain rules and implies inherent attributes for any board game such as, for instance, being a physical entity the game may not distort *real* information in any way, it is in a consistent state at any given time. This in mind while designing and constructing the game mechanics the elements of the game are often emergent – something quite rare in video games where properties (especially visual but also “audial”) are seldom emergent.

The constructed prototype might, however, succeed in the evaluation of a vast majority of game design aspects. The possibility of game elements being perceived as positive in a teamplay context though not at all intended to be is of course conceivable and quite likely – there are even numerous examples<sup>6</sup> of this.

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<sup>6</sup>The author reserves himself from divulging this subject with respect to relevance.

## Play testing

The most apparent inherited property of games supporting or consisting entirely of teamplay is perhaps that several participating agents are involved at any given time. Otherwise, it would contradict the very basic axiom of teamplay based games, the team itself. This affects play testing greatly as several human agents, in most cases at least, are needed to evaluate and qualitatively measure playability, usability and accessibility.

A direct consequence of the complexity of a teamplay based game type, one might argue that play testing such a game is inherently difficult or at least requires a greater amount of resources. Logically, the evaluation of a play testing session for a game focusing on teamplay requires more measuring resources, namely people recording and registering the acts of the participating agents and resulting or otherwise prominent events that occurs.

## Functionality, Completeness, and Balance

This section or development phase is relatively unchanged by the team game type category with the exception of *balance*. This is, in most applications and instances of the team game type, one of the key features as well as the most important – perhaps even pivot attribute in certain cases – element of the game. This must be evaluated with great caution

and methodology, especially if the game design relies on this feature – as in previous examples of titles, notably the MMORPG genre.

A larger set of interaction possibility in team games naturally implies greater complexity and hence requires further attention during this first verification and validation phase. What are we testing for? Is the test set relevant to the final product?

## Fun and Accessibility

This section is perhaps least affected by the team game type, measuring the entertainment value and accessibility can be done in almost exactly the same way as with other game types. Teams do not, as a direct or indirect consequence, imply any extended or modifications to existing accessibility issues. The quality measurement is perhaps re-evaluated and is affected as previously described.

## Controls and Interfaces

Designing controls and interaction interfaces for a game supporting and/or being fully based on teamplay mode is important. Human agents are likely to interact or at least desire to interact very differently, limited customization of controls<sup>7</sup> and/or a poorly designed user interfaces may indeed damage the

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<sup>7</sup>As well as being more or less fixed, being counterintuitive and/or unnaturally bound for the vast majority of users.

final product's usability fatally and, in rare cases supposedly, render the game virtually<sup>8</sup> unusable.

The massive multiplayer online game genre – term with increasing popularity and usage as a result of necessity as well as applications – is highly dependent on the aspects of the user interface. An almost unlimited range of players and player types, in most cases, need to be supported and satisfied. The user interface being the window or view port into the game world environment as well as the meta-game elements and game system software control mechanisms.

## Conclusion

The team game type affects to a varying extent all stages of game design and development and challenges the process both technically and narratively. The complexity might, arguably of course, increase somewhat proportional to the interactivity. Team games implicitly inherits the property of high interactivity through quantity, but not necessarily quality. Online capabilities are increasing and evolving in almost every field, country and market which yields a greater demand for connectivity in all parts of the digital entertainment industry, while indeed not limited to nor excluding the video game industry. Massive multiplayer online games is becoming a genre, no longer confined to imitations of former role playing games.

Understanding the concept of team games and targeting key features of this game type

allows almost any game in any genre to increase its entertainment value and quality. There are a great amount of clear examples of the lack of this insight which results in a less prosperous outcome, the unconscious fortunate support for this game type and finally, of course, the awareness of its possible effect and fully conscious support and implementation which yields a favorable result.

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<sup>8</sup>Pun intended.