Workshop: Crunch and psychosocial risk factors in game development

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INTRODUCTION

Crunch in the videogame industry is described as long working hours (more than twelve hours per day), generally not rewarded, put in place to finish a project (Cote and Harris 2020). There is growing evidence (Green 2001; Burke and Fiksenbaum 2008) indicating that once established as the norm, exacerbated hours of work harm workers' mental, physical and social health. In addition, organizations with crunch practices or those failing to prevent other harmful work processes are unable to develop their full potential. Workers in these organizations tend to have elevated levels of burnout (Mendes and Queirós 2022) which can lead to reduced performance, high levels of presenteeism, absenteeism and absence from work, high turnover rate, psychosomatic illnesses, fatigue, and cerebrovascular diseases (Eurofound 2003; IGDA 2004; Edholm et al. 2017). Although crunch is a phenomenon related to the game industry (Weststar et al. 2021; Mendes and Queirós 2022), the intensification and extensification of work impacts our lives by increasing work time and workload in different domains (Eurofund 2003).

Beyond crunch, there is also evidence of other types of harmful practices in game development. Situations of misogyny, racism, moral and sexual harassment, as well as precarious working conditions are drawing attention to this work context and prompting investigations to reduce the risks and minimize the damage caused by these behaviors (Ellis et al. 2021). When these indicators are minimized, there is a greater chance that employees will improve their quality of work life; the company will reduce the costs related to time off work, hiring and training new employees, as well as will lower the number of mistakes and accidents. Despite the growing efforts in this regard, there is little scientific evidence on what has been done to avoid or minimize the effects of crunch in game development (Bourscheid and Steil 2023).

Considering this scenario, the objective of this workshop is to describe what is known about crunch and other psychosocial risk factors related to work in game development as well as to provide information and strategies to professionals in the industry to deal with these issues.

In social terms, this workshop is aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[1], specifically the goal of increasing health (SDG 3) and decent work and economic growth (SDG 8). This highlights the importance of discussing crunch and presenting ways of improving work conditions, especially with the aim of promoting health to workers and organizations.

WORKSHOP ITINERARY

The workshop initiates with a presentation of participants and a warm-up activity. After that there will be eight modules. At the end of each module there will be a consolidation activity in which the participants will be invited to solve a problem or discuss the subject in depth with other participants and the organizer. The total duration of the workshop will be 4 to 5 hours with a 15-minute break.

Module 1. Identifying psychosocial risks and crunch. This module will characterize and describe the main psychosocial risks, such as overwork, lack of organizational support, poor working conditions, harassment and crunch. It will also discuss how to identify crunch and other psychosocial risk factors at work at an individual and collective level. From module two onwards, strategies for dealing with risk factors at work will be discussed.

Module 2. Psychosocial risk and personal factors. In the second module the focus will be on the person and the main discussion will be on self-knowledge and self-consciousness related to psychosocial risks at work. Personal characteristics and behavior patterns that associate with risk factors will be presented, as well as the effects of these risks on the individual and what to do when personal characteristics interfere with work.

Module 3. Self-management. The third module focuses on strategies of self-management related to lack of organization of time and project in an individual perspective. As problems with time and projects are a common cause for stress at work and the occurrence of crunch, we aim to develop the ability to recognize the way the participant works and how its colleagues work so that the person may create awareness on different ways of working and new strategies to develop self-management.

Module 4. Teamwork. In this module the participants will learn to recognize risk factors in teamwork and its effects on the team. In addition, protective factors such as social support, non-harassment, good communication, effective leadership and conflict mediation will be discussed.

Module 5. Team management. Just as the third module, this module will focus on management from a group perspective. Topics such as deadlines, projects, work models and teamwork organization will be discussed through practical examples and experience from participants.

Module 6. Module six focuses on the recognition of cultural and organizational factors associated with psychosocial risks at work. Beyond the effects of these risks on the organization it is discussed the assessment and diagnosis of psychosocial risks and the types of intervention at the organizational level.

Module 7. Module seven will look at the effects of crunch and psychosocial risk factors on workers. The impacts on people's mental and physical health will be specified, and coping strategies for those in critical situations at work will be presented and discussed.

Module 8. The final module will discuss causes of crunch and main psychosocial risk factors from a historical and social perspective, will also be presented future prospects for the world of work and

risk factors. Oral feedback will be collected from the participants and the questionnaire will be applied again to check if the workshop's objectives have been met.

It is expected from the participants that they will leave sensitized to the phenomenon of crunch and will be able to identify this and other psychosocial risk factors at work easily. It is hoped that the participants will be able to use this knowledge in their day-to-day work, for themselves, with the teams they work with or in management positions, implementing policies and actions at an organizational level to prevent risks at work and promote health.

Endnotes

[1] United Nations, "The 17 Sustainable Development Goals," United Nations, 2015, https://sdgs.un.org/goals.

Organisers' background

Daeana Paula Bourscheid is Psychologist, Organizational Consultant and Master's Student at Federal University of Santa Catarina. She earned her Bachelor's degree in Psychology from the Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil. Since 2018, Bourscheid has been actively engaged in the field of Organizational and Industrial Psychology. Her early career involved roles in Human Resources, people management, and organizational culture. She currently works as a psychotherapist and organizational consultant, dedicated to studying and working with quantitative and qualitative diagnostics to develop healthier work environments.

Andrea Valéria Steil is an associate professor in the Psychology Department at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), where she coordinates the Interdisciplinary Study Group on Knowledge, Learning and Organizational Memory (KLOM) and the Learning, Knowledge and Management in Organizations and Work Laboratory (LABPOT). She teaches on the Psychology course and in the Psychology Postgraduate Program. She carries out projects in the areas of behavioral intentions in organizations and work, talent retention, social skills development, team learning and organizational learning. Before entering the academic and scientific field, she worked for 10 years in for-profit and non-profit organizations in technical, managerial and executive positions.

Workshop Participants

The maximum number of participants is 30 people. Priority will be given to people who work developing games. Participants will be selected in order of application and we will guarantee 10 places for people working as managers and directors in video game projects, 10 places for leaders working in game development projects and 10 places for people in operational positions. If there are any remaining vacancies, they will be distributed among the people registered.

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