

# The Player Manager: Collaboration and Involvement

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**Abstract.** This paper has as its objective to put forward a profile for the ‘manager of the future’. It draws on a review of the literature and on a series of unstructured interviews with 12 trainers, recruiters, directors and young graduates. Research carried out in large global companies in the fields of industry and multimedia confirms the under-exploitation of certain competences and the emergence of new forms of management and recruitment in modern companies. Generation Y is blossoming and, with its practices and its new demands, is jostling against traditional modes of management. This paper first highlights the tensions between individuals, the organization and its environment, plus the lack of recognition regarding these neo-managers’ competences and valuable talents. An analogy between managers and video game players leads us to the analysis of three case studies and to interviews with 12 experts in their individual professional fields: three trainers, three purchasing directors, and three young purchasing graduates. Their contributions, combined with the conclusions drawn from the case studies permit the co-construction of the profile of tomorrow’s manager, the “player manager”.

**Key words:** Manager, video games, Y generation, forecasting, collaboration.

## 1 Introduction

A part of the intellect of today’s young managers is not welcome in those companies where it is considered as of little real business worth. Indeed, this intellect does not fit in with organizational constraints, and does not correspond to the working ways currently in place. It seems too playful and not professional. This intellect is developed though the use of video games. It is characterized by (1) the mastery of information and communication technology (ICT), (2) the ability to find one’s way around virtual environments, (3) the capacity to combine talents, in order to collectively achieve objectives that would be impossible on one’s own, (4) digital communication between different socio-cultural profiles and (5) the ability to undertake several tasks at once and to flit between these, without losing productivity. Young graduates feel themselves to be picked on, constrained, excluded and maladjusted. There is often no measure put in place to value them and to capture the product of this new form of intellect they manifest. In traditional companies, where these young graduates are expected to occupy a very precise function, they do not find community spirit and have to subscribe to a stifling vertical structure. How can they

best be integrated? How can adapter tools be created to allow these young graduates to express their creativity in an optimal way? After having considered the characteristics of generation Y, this article examines several case studies of video games. Here, it highlights the possible transpositions between the practices employed by players and those of managers. The methodology is built around three axes, namely career forecasting, the case study method, and the scenario method, with interviews with 12 experts in their individual professional fields to complete the study. The final section puts forward the profile of a “player manager”, ‘along with recommendations for the welcome and integration of this new profile of manager.

## **2 Anticipating and Reducing Tensions Between Individuals, Organizations and their Environment**

The Y generation is made up of people born between the beginning of the 1980s and the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Also called the “millennium generation”, the “Internet generation”, the “digital generation”, the “Google generation” or “digital Natives”, in five years this generation will represent 40% of all working people (Crampton and Hodge, 2009). Members of the Y generation are “born surfers”, with a perfect knowledge of how to use and optimize their social networks and develop in virtual environments. They communicate thanks to a new language, and are capable of managing several tasks at the same time.

Recruiters find themselves therefore faced with numerous difficulties linked to the gap between the professional environment they offer to young graduates and the world in which these new recruits live and have grown up. How can this new generation be integrated into a system which is largely dominated by highly structured, hierarchical, even state-owned companies? How can we conserve and develop this sense of collaboration, the talent to search for information and the ability to generate community know-how, in a population that refuses to be bullied by a system that it judges outmoded? This new intellect must not be channeled or formatted, as is essentially the case in traditional regulated structures. It must be stimulated and capitalized on, in order to create a new form of value.

Peter Drucker explains that the reason for being of any organization is to allow ordinary people to do extraordinary things. The very essence of an organization is to permit people to achieve a greater level of performance than the one they seem capable of, to reveal the slightest talent among its members, and to use each others’ talents to improve each others’ performances (Drucker, 1973). However, modern organizations do not adopt this approach, and inhibit their managers’ potential for initiative and creativity. Indeed, managers are constrained to focus on realizing their objectives in an environment where the performance race and internal competition are predominant (Shaw, 2008).

The Y generation’s ill-ease seems almost inevitable, faced with the inertia of companies who persist with models which are more and more blatantly out of step with the radical development of modern society (Simard, 2007). Drucker has already observed: “the largest proportion of what we call management consists of making people’s work more difficult” (Drucker, 1973). Based on a study of 17000 Canadian

employees, the sociologist Jean-Pierre Brun demonstrates that people's well-being is closely linked to organizational performance, whilst organizations consider this to be a completely secondary factor. Indeed, "managers often concentrate on financial indicators and complicate life by putting in place ambitious action plans and complex processes" (Brun, 2008).

### 3 Research Methodology: Three Complementary Approaches

Research is at the heart career forecasting. It permits greater clarity regarding past changes in a profession, in order to be able to anticipate future transformations (Boyer, Scouarnec, 2009). The objective here is to protect oneself against the dangers inherent in the contradictions which develop between the profiles of new managers and methods of management and recruitment. It is necessary to act and innovate before it is too late. It is a question of building the future according to both desired and non-desired scenarios, and of acting on the present to point changes in a direction that is favorable for us (Thamain, 2009).

A sample of three online role plays was defined, in order to observe specific practices of the Y generation. 12 experts in their individual professional fields were also selected, in order to undertake semi-structured interviews, designed to reveal the different facets of the issue and to offer some recommendations. The pre-formalization stage permitted an initial analysis of the interviews' contents, and an initial structure underpinning the "player manager" phenomenon to be identified, along with to identify the distinction between strong hypotheses and more ambiguous suppositions. The construction stage consisted in confronting the different points of view of these experts to each other by presenting them with their differing visions. The validation stage offers jointly constructed recommendations in order to act positively on this phenomenon (Boyer, Scouarnec, 2009).

This piece of research offers answers to the following questions: Why is there a discrepancy between the Y generation and practices within organizations? Why does this discrepancy constitute both a significant threat and a significant opportunity for companies to make a new start? How can the Y population be integrated, and how can their qualities be put to the service of the organization? In order to obtain the most pertinent answers, the case study method must be validated by a triangulation between the information collected. In other words, data must be compared against itself, and against testimonies and theories, alongside the use of several sources (Yin, 1994). The combination of a literature review, three case studies and interviews with 12 managers from the Y generation therefore constitutes a topographical fieldwork research strategy, designed to compare the information sources.

The data collection proceeds in four phases. The first phase corresponds to an exploratory phase. This stage concerns the discovery of the research field, the identification of opportunities to use and of obstacles which could crop up. The second phase is much more analytical and less descriptive, with exclusively semi-structured interviews with participants, in order to conduct an in depth study of applications. The gathering of documents and the choice of more structured questions brings us closer to our objective. The third phase consists of structured interviews

with questions of a much greater precision asked to a larger number of sources with a more critical view with regards to the way the platform works, and the desire to encourage participants to engage in self-criticism and suggest improvements. The fourth phase consists of presenting the research outcomes of the analysis of these key sources and combining the different opinions.

Interviews will allow us to complete the conclusions from these case studies. Participants will be encouraged to make sense of their practices, to stand back and describe events, actions, values, experiences and the problems they face in everyday life (Thiéart, 2007).

Code	Category	Function / Program	Firm / Sector
A1	Trainer	Expert in E-learning	FNEGE
A2	Trainer	Expert in CVs / Interviews	APEC
A3	Trainer	Lecturer in HRM	Grenoble EM
A4	Recruiter	HR Manager	Nestlé
A5	Recruiter	Profiler / Head hunter	Big Fish
A6	Recruiter	HR Manager	EDF
A7	Director	Departmental Director	HP
A8	Director	Director of a Subsidiary	Nestlé
A9	Director	Purchasing Manager	Total
A10	Young graduate	MAI BEM Bordeaux	Purchasing
A11	Young graduate	DESMA GEM Grenoble	Communication
A12	Young graduate	SKEMA Lille	Sales

Fig. 1 – List of the experts in their individual professional fields

#### 4 MMORPG Players as a Source of Inspiration for Companies

EverQuest (EQ), which is very popular in the United States, and federates hundreds and thousands of members, many of whom are permanently connected. Each server supports a specific and independent version of Norrath, the EQ world which is permanently evolving in real time. This constraint encourages the players to be very active or to abandon the game: they do not want to miss certain events or to see themselves outdistanced by others. The collaboration is facilitated by the interface and recompensed by the completion of tasks which require complementary capacities from different types of characters. Players have to cooperate to accomplish certain quests which they could not complete alone. Playing a MMORPG does not have an end: moreover, certain players have been playing for years and have a particularly good knowledge of the world in which they are still developing and progressing.

The time spent in the conception and development of characters, plus learning the very elaborate rules and in discovering a complex world which is constantly evolving, encourages players to pursue their adventures and therefore to pay each month to access the site. At the launch of EQ, the principal was that each player would try to make him or herself as different as possible from other players. He or she would consider other players as potential enemies, likely to be surpassed during quests or from whom he or she could take one of a number of objects for use in combat or

magic. It was almost against the will of the designers of these online role play games that players formed themselves into communities which, from then on, even constituted the foundation of MMORPGs (Fuger, 2003).

In DAOC, as explained on this game's website ([www.daoc-europe.com](http://www.daoc-europe.com)), the player can join three different kingdoms: Albion – the kingdom of the late King Arthur, which is suffering from the absence of his authority and is in prey to multiple offensives – Hibernia – a primitive western hemisphere island inhabited by Celts – or Midgard – icy lands peopled by Vikings. The three nations have a choice of races (Trolls, Elves, Kobolds, Dwarfs...) and of single classes (disciple, apprentice, druid, sentry...) as well as different capacities and forms of specific magic. Players can adopt very different behaviors, but always in a team: there can be clashes between kingdoms (player versus player), a player can try to take possession of his adversaries' relics by attacking their reliquary fortresses. He or she can conquer territories, and accomplish quests (the player versus his environment) for his or her personal account or that of his or her guild. A MMORPG player launches him or herself into a virtual world by means of his avatar, a performance which combines both illusion and reality, in other words elements which are the player's own and others which are unfamiliar to him or her.

"Players attach a great deal of importance to their status because they know, perhaps unconsciously, that this will influence the relationships that they will enter into with other members" (Fuger, 2003). Indeed, the interpersonal aspect is extremely significant in MMORPG. Players seek, therefore, to improve their characteristics in order to progress through the levels of development and to become a legendary figure in their kingdom. "Climbing up the rungs of the virtual social ladder is one of the most important objectives for the majority of participants" (Fuger, 2003). In DAOC, there are a multitude of objects which make it possible to associate a character to his status and his level. As a result, players have to behave in the same way as managers in companies and act on according to these gauges and variables, in order to improve and work in partnerships to complete project or achieve objectives. Certain advantages can be associated with a good reputation as much as a player in a MMORPG as in a company: "the notions of good and bad reputations exist and have an influence on the status accorded to members of the community to which they attach a great importance" (Fuger, 2003).

Second Life, the best-known virtual world in the world with 15 million fans, has had to deal with a serious financial crisis which perfectly reflects the real crisis and has provided us precisely with information on how to manage crises in general" (Kaplan, 2009). Indeed, this game has its own currency, with a floating interest rate of 270 lindens dollars (\$L) for one American dollar and its own banks which offer to place money with interest rates which can go as high as 40%. Real banks, such as the French national banks Crédit Agricole and the Caisse d'Épargne, have opened agencies in this virtual world and certain brands carry out virtual marketing there, examples include Toyota, which surveys avatars regarding its prototypes, or L'Oréal which organizes fashion parades in Second Life. Ailin Graef has become the "Rockefeller of Second Life" (Sloan, 2009) thanks to her avatar Anshe Chung through whom in 2006 she earned her first real million dollars as a virtual estate agent. Today she employs one hundred programmers and designers and has invested in several multimedia companies.

## **5 Tomorrow's Manager's New Competences: To be the Best Player so his Company Wins**

A game is fully characterised by four elements: (1) a list of players, (2) a list of possible strategies or actions for each player, (3) a description of the rewards allotted to players according to their strategic profile and (4) the rules of the game (Fisher and Waschik, 2002). In a similar way, company managers, competitors, clients, suppliers and other partners, all evolve in an environment where they know each other, where they have to make choices which are contingent on the others, where each decision can have serious consequences and where a certain number of rules need to be respected. Consequently, managers chose their strategies according to their competitors' former strategies, based on an anticipation of their future actions, on shape of the market, and the potential financial repercussions taking into account the rules of the economic game. "Our backdrop has changed and we are now probably entering into a veritable tempest of changes without precedence (...).

The waves of changes are tighter and tighter and closer and closer together. From now on, they overlap and we scarcely have the time to come to terms with the wave that has just arrived, than another one starts to gather force" (Saussereau, 2007). This instability is already present, and in a way even more intense in MMORPGs. Players are completely used to this. For them, this is no anomaly: it is natural. They have adopted the necessary reflexes to know how to act according to shifting parameters, so as to optimise personal and collective development and performance. In management, "momentum is precisely the moment at which the decision to act must have an impact" (Saussereau, 2007). Managers need to have the capacity to recognise this moment to put into place the right actions, in order to maximise their effects. They also need to play collectively and take their internal and external partners into account when taking this decision. Indeed, the performances of an organisation depend on the capacity of its employees to work collaboratively with each other and with their external partners.

New information technologies give us the illusion of equality between managers who participate in a community: they no longer have an age, a skin colour, beauty, a gender, qualifications, accents etc. They can create a new identity, sheltered from prejudices behind their computer screen, using their mastery of tools as a way of asserting themselves. The balance of power no longer relies on the same criteria. The power of having spent a long time studying is less significant than that of the mastery of virtual worlds and new qualification and evaluation codes. Communication with a "geek" is very different from traditional communication. In fact, young people group themselves into communities, clubs and tribes. Indeed, young people who play online and spend large amounts of time on forums, communities and networks have an intelligence which is structured differently from that of the traditional manager.

The serious games, which are already used in medicine and aviation in the United States, make for new modes of recruitment, training, evaluation and management of organizations based on virtualization and a heightened reality. The languages are encoded, symbolic, based on grading grids, scores or levels. In and of itself, knowing how to read is no longer even essential: like a child of six years who manages to complete an extremely complicated video game more rapidly than an adult, it is no

longer the graduate who is the best equipped to understand these languages and to find his way in the socio-economic environment, modeled here in order to bring in the best business for his company. Managers are connected in socio-professional networks to each other, to the company, to their knowledge base, to their artificial intelligence, to forums and messaging services, as well as to different tools with applications which are specific to their individual professions.

Google is a Y company. It was created by the Y generation. At Google, the average age is 29 years old. Employees have the possibility to work in different company offices all over the world: Google sends them to New York, Atlanta, San Francisco, Paris, Dublin, Brussels, Milan, Oslo, Moscow, Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo, Mexico or Dubai. Every week, employees have appraisals with their managers. 20% of work time is consecrated to personal projects, from which Gmail is a fruit. Work spaces are divided between three or four people. The equipment includes all the new information and communication technologies, but also video games, musical instruments, athletic fields, a swimming pool or a climbing wall. The creation of associations and clubs is welcomed. Brainstorming sessions take place around the coffee machine or in the canteen where everything is free. Management development is participative, ethical, sustainable, collaborative, and the virtual is on the march, as is illustrated by the account of our expert in his professional field A7. Before, it was a real war to become a manager. Now, most of those who have the right predisposition and who could become a manager, do not want to do so. They work at all hours, day and night, they are constantly connecting and disconnecting and without losing efficacy, as a result. They adapt spontaneously to colleagues' demands, and need to maintain an extremely high level of motivation. They expect fewer constraints and less monitoring, with more autonomy and a greater level of ease at work.

Companies need to manage the collision between generations. Indeed, the gap between the competences of the "new recruits" and those of "older" ones is widening, and it is becoming bigger between smaller and smaller age gaps. This observation holds true in almost all activity sectors in the race for innovation and the necessity to be agile which are omnipresent. In certain companies, the average age, for that matter, is significant of the "freshness" of human resources, which can pose a problem, as in the case of the company Google who had a lawsuit brought against them for discrimination against older generations. It is possible to ask oneself questions about the desire to keep the average age of employees under the age of 30 and the ways of doing so.

New technologies make information, resources and interlocutors accessible anywhere in the world and at any time of the day or night. A colleague or partner who is on the opposite side of the world communicates with you as if her were in the office next door: You see him, you speak to him, you share the same documents, and you work on the same media. Managers can therefore find themselves working at home, in public transport, or in the middle of the night, according to constraints, either alone or with other people elsewhere in the world. There is no longer a notion of "early" or of "late" in this globalised world where the place where you are is no longer really of importance: everything comes down to opportunity and pro-activity. Respecting deadlines and anticipation are absolute priorities, regardless of conditions. It is the presence or absence of need which governs interactions between individuals. As a result, the amount of time something will take has become more and more difficult to

comprehend. It is the tasks, the missions and the projects which determine employees' performance and remuneration.

## 6 Conclusion

The tensions between organizations, their environment and individual behaviors have become more and more difficult to manage. The situation is progressively getting worse and risks becoming very quickly decisive for a significant number of companies. This paper has shown how play can be the source of a regained humanity for companies, if they accept to study it with all the potential that it contains. In order to integrate the Y generation, practices associated with play need to be transposed, and in particularly those associated with MMORPGs, which can also bring with them effective solutions. Play makes up an integral part of the profile, which still remains atypical, of the "player manager" which will spread progressively.

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