

Leadership emerges spontaneously during games

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(Phys.org) —Video game and augmented-reality game players can spontaneously build virtual teams and leadership structures without special tools or guidance, according to researchers.

Players in a [game](#) that mixed real and online worlds organized and operated in teams that resembled a military organization with only rudimentary online tools available and almost no military background, said Tamara Peyton, doctoral student in information sciences and technology, Penn State.

"The fact that they formed teams and interacted as well as they did may mean that [game designers](#) should resist over-designing the leadership structures," said Peyton. "If you don't design the leadership structures well, you shouldn't design them at all and, instead, let the players figure it out."

Peyton, who worked with Alyson Young, graduate student in information systems, and Wayne Lutters, associate professor of information systems, both at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, said that the players quickly adopted a [leadership structure](#) that resembled the U.S. military's leadership hierarchy.

"One of the surprising things is that although the people in the game were not related in any way to the military, many of the teams organized along military lines, from designations to filing situation reports," said Peyton.

The researchers, who presented their findings at the 2013 Annual Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems in Paris today (April 29), examined 54,000 posts of 2,500 players who took part in the I Love Bees game. Microsoft released the game in 2004 as part of a viral marketing campaign to promote the release of the company's Halo 2 video game. The object of the I Love Bees game was to decode messages from a beekeeper's website that was supposedly hacked by aliens. The coded messages revealed [geographic coordinates](#) of real pay telephones situated throughout the United States. Players then waited at those payphones for calls that contained more clues.

Because the game did not have a leadership infrastructure, players established their own websites and online forums on other websites to discuss structure, strategy and tactics.

A group of gamers from Washington, D.C., one of the most successful groups in the game, established an organization with a general and groups of lieutenants and privates. The numbers of members in each rank were roughly proportional to the amount of soldiers who fill out ranks in the U.S. military, Peyton said.

The [players](#) assigned their own ranks, rather than have ranks dictated to them. The general oversaw the strategy, while lieutenants mostly handled specific tactics for accomplishing the strategy. The privates carried out orders from the lieutenants.

As the game progressed, members researched military terminology and frequently used terms, such as armies, platoons and companies, in their message board posts. Peyton said that the increased militarization after 9/11 may have influenced this choice in terminology.

"The concept of militarization is more of a part of the collective imagination now, post 9/11," Peyton said.

Peyton said the study also shows the power of games to inspire people to work.

"These people did all of this work with no tangible reward, no promise of a free game, or anything," said Peyton. "The strict line between work and leisure is disappearing."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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