

Fabian Unger

Stakeholder management in crowdfunded video game development

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ABSTRACT

Fabian Unger: Stakeholder management in crowdfunded video game development

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This case study examines, how stakeholder interests affect reward-based crowdfunded video game development, how managers cope with (potential) stakeholder conflicts, and the similarities and differences between crowdfunding video game projects of different scales. As research on stakeholder interests in the production of crowdfunded video games is scarce, this study thus aims to fill a gap in scholarly literature. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the field of managing crowdfunding projects using a reward-based model, to examine stakeholder-developer interactions and the management of interests in crowdfunded video games, specifically from a manager's point of view. The outcomes of this study should provide valuable insights for media managers, who deal with varying stakeholders as part of the development of a crowdfunded video game.

The study examines seven cases of crowdfunded video games developed by video game companies using a reward-based financing model. It takes a qualitative approach, using semi-structured in-depth interviews with a sample of one employee per company in charge of the overall game development process. The results demonstrate the various ways in which stakeholders influence the development process, similarities and differences of crowdfunding projects of various size, and the impact of crowdfunding on the video game development process in general. Research on developer-stakeholder interaction suggests that stakeholders can affect the development by presenting the prospect of providing more funds, by being a lead user or specialist, or by putting pressure on the developers to change the creative direction by voicing opinions as a crowd, among other reasons. Developers may adopt strategies, that maintain the creative control over the game, but at the same time, be more willing to change project aspects by request or perceived stakeholder interest. In order not to lose a stakeholder group, managers continuously assess the active and passive influence exerted by various stakeholder groups on the overall project. They often try to find common ground in order to satisfy all stakeholder groups and communicate their decisions accordingly. By specifying those strategies, the author presents valuable methods for coping with stakeholder interests in the development of a reward-based crowdfunded video game.

Keywords: crowdfunding, reward-based crowdfunding, crowdfunding campaign, stakeholder, stakeholder management, stakeholder influence, stakeholder interests, video game, video games, video game development

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

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1. Introduction

Statement of the general problem to be studied

Companies in the creative industries today increasingly struggle to merge their own artistic work with the needs and demands of stakeholders. They tend to demand more product value for a better price, while expecting artists to meet their demands. These developments lead to company efforts to actively integrate (potential) stakeholders into the activities of the company. (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Ramaswamy & Guillard, 2010) Gaming companies are no exception to this development. Crowdfunding is one method of including stakeholders into the creative development process that has become increasingly popular among gaming companies in recent years.

Considering the management of crowdfunded video games, little research has been done so far. By explaining how stakeholder interests can influence the game development, and by illustrating the methods that gaming companies apply to balance interests and deal with stakeholder conflict, this study fills a gap in crowdfunding and managerial literature. Thus, this study can contribute towards a better understanding of the mechanisms of crowdfunded video game creation and how managers can cope with aspects of these mechanisms.

Within a crowdfunding model, stakeholders like the crowdfunding community have influence on the game development process in two ways. Firstly, they are funding the game development by providing financial resources. Secondly, because of their role as funders, they also have a voice in the creative direction the game takes during development. (Smith, A. N., 2015) However, as Prystupa-Rządca & Starostka (2015) note, tensions in interests between developers and users follow the engagement of customers into the developing process.

Scholarly literature on how stakeholders influence the development of a crowdfunded video game and how companies develop strategies to cope with these sometimes-contradicting interests, is scarce. A larger body of literature deals with co-creation methods, like modding (Postigo, 2008; Sotamaa, 2010; Coleman & Dyer-Witthford, 2007). A small number of authors have researched the influence of users on the development process of an artistic product in the creative industries (Smith, A. N., 2015; Prystupa-Rządca & Starostka, 2015). A. N. Smith (2015) has examined the connection of backers and developers in crowdfunded video games, while Prystupa-Rządca & Starostka (2015) looked at the involvement and influence of customers on the video game development process. Finally, Hobbs et al. (2016) determined success factors in the management of crowdfunded projects in the creative industries.

However, research on the influence of other stakeholders in the development process of crowdfunded video games is so far absent. In many crowdfunded video game models, interests of additional stakeholders, like large investors, or the broader gaming community, must be taken into consideration. Also, within crowdfunding of video games, varying approaches of how to integrate different stakeholders into the game development exist. By involving various stakeholders in the game development process, adopting differing methods of how to deal with interests and needs of respective stakeholders are necessary to guarantee a successful campaign. Thus, it is important for managers of these companies to develop strategies to be able to balance those needs.

Purpose and significance of the study

The purpose of this case study is on one hand to examine, how stakeholder interests influence the development of reward-based crowdfunded video games. On the other hand, the study illustrates, which strategies managers adopt to cope with the varying interests of involved stakeholders. To understand those influences and the strategies to cope with them, one has to look at the different ways that a varying number of stakeholders can be involved in a crowdfunded video game project.

Crowdfunding models can be classified by the distinction of variables that have an influence on the developing process. For this study, the most important variable is the different types of stakeholders. Schwienbacher & Larralde (2012) identified the entrepreneur and team members, friends and family, business angels, venture capitalists, other companies, stock markets, banks, leasing companies, government agencies, customers/suppliers, and bootstrappers as finance investors of a crowdfunding project.

However, on one hand, not all stakeholders listed by Schwienbacher & Larralde (2012) are relevant to this study. On the other hand, certain stakeholders involved in video game development are categorized in a different way or missing. Through an analysis of the interviews with the professionals in the crowdfunded video game development sector, the study author has identified following stakeholders to be a viable option for inclusion in this study: the manager, the developing team, crowdfunding backers and fans, investors, publishers, license owners, the manager's family and friends, platform holders, external advisors, the larger gaming community and professionals in the game development industry. In all the models, there is a manager, a developing team, and a diverse crowd. However, a wide variety of mixtures of other stakeholders involved can be seen across the seven cases examined in this study.

Considering this diversity of stakeholders, a classification and description of all possible models exceeds the scope of this study. However, a further variable to consider as viable for a rough classification of crowdfunded video game projects is the amount of money pledged through a campaign. In March 23, 2017, Kickstarter reported that up to this date, 10.000 game projects had gathered over \$613 million on their platform (Gallagher, 2017), resulting in average pledges of \$61.300 per crowdfunding campaign. Blohm et al. (2013) consider the “long tail”-phenomenon to be applicable also to crowdfunding, resulting in most projects gathering a relatively short amount of money and a few projects accumulating larger amounts. This study suggests grouping crowdfunding projects according to their total crowdfunding revenues into three groups: Small projects (<\$250.000), Mid-sized projects (\$250.000 - \$1.000.000) and Large projects (>\$1.000.000). Within the framework of this study, the seven examples are also analysed for similarities and differences between the respective cases regarding this suggested classification.

The study aims to contribute to the field of media management in general, and to examine stakeholder-developer interactions, stakeholder influence and the management of interests in crowdfunded video games from a manager’s point of view specifically. The outcomes of this study should provide valuable insights for media managers in video game companies, who deal with varying stakeholders on a regular basis as part of the development of a crowdfunded video game.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that this case study is built upon is the stakeholder theory by Freeman et al. (2010) and the business model canvas introduced by Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) as a set of universally-applicable building blocks to describe business models. The stakeholder theory focuses on questions about value and trade in a global business environment, the relationship between capitalism and various societal institutions, and the mindset of managers in a turbulent, changing and globalized world full of ethical conflicts. As Freeman et al. (2010, p.5-6) put it: “Stakeholder theory suggests that if we adopt as a unit of analysis, the relationship between a business and the groups and individuals who can affect or are affected by it, then we have a better chance to deal with these three problems [...]”.

The stakeholder theory thus is framed around two ideas. The first one is called the integration thesis, which connects ethics with business, stating that most business decisions involve also ethical thinking, and vice versa. As a second idea, Freeman et al. (2010, p.8) formulate the responsibility principle, which states the view that “most people, most of the time, want to, and do, accept

responsibility for the effects of their actions on others”. Those groups of people being affected can be understood as stakeholders. For Freeman et al. (2010, p. 9), “this means paying attention at least to customers, employees, suppliers, communities, and financiers.” Thus, stakeholder theory is about managing businesses effectively through creating value with paying attention to all stakeholders involved in the creation of a product or service. As crowdfunding is a business form that relies to a great extent on stakeholder participation, this theory helps to provide the theoretical basis for this case study.

Since the introduction of the term business model, research on business model theory has been increasingly fragmented and siloed. Scholars have so far failed to agree on a unified theoretical framework for business models and on describing what constitutes a business model (George & Bock, 2011). To this date in scholarly literature, the most commonly used definition of business models is given by Osterwalder (2004, p.15). According to him “a business model is a conceptual tool that contains a set of elements and their relationships and allows expressing a company's logic of earning money. It is a description of the value a company offers to one or several segments of customers and the architecture of the firm and its network of partners for creating, marketing and delivering this value and relationship capital, in order to generate profitable and sustainable revenue streams”.

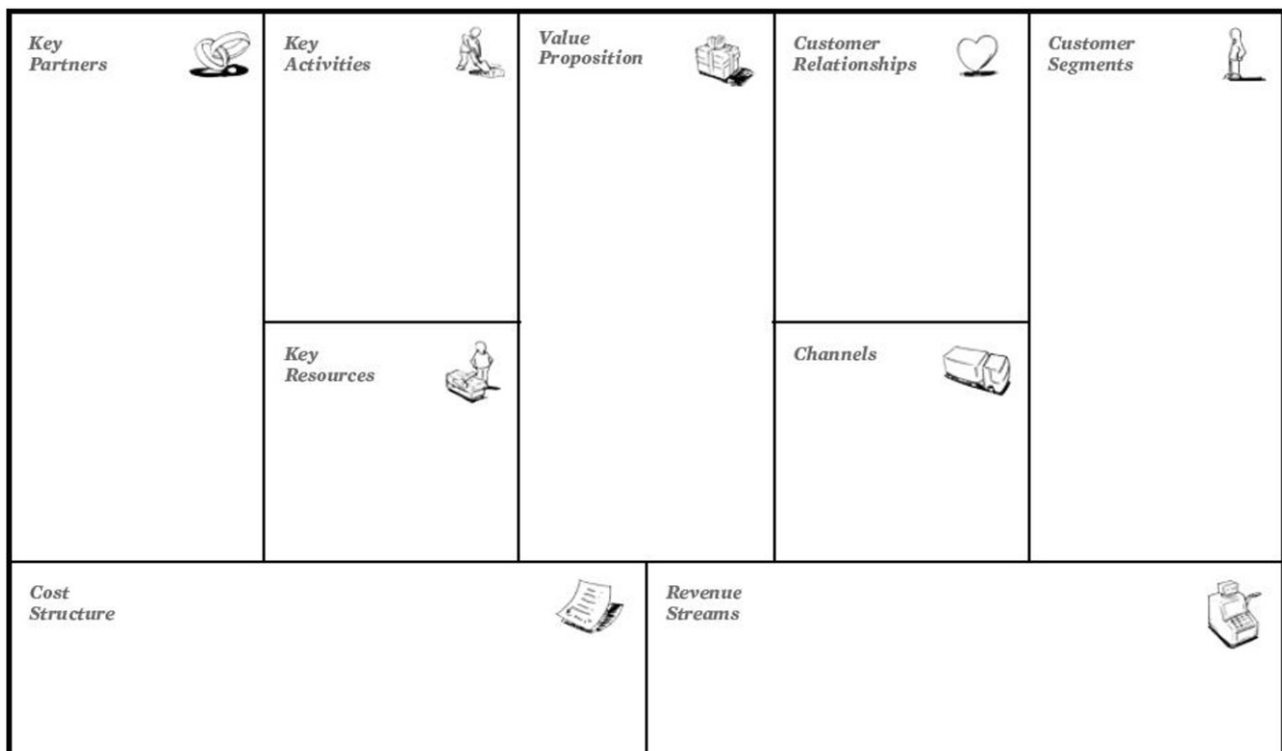


Figure 1. Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010, p.44): Business model canvas

Based on Osterwalder's work of 2004, Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) proposed the business model canvas – a set of nine segments to describe a business model in use. These blocks include key partners, key activities, key resources, value proposition, customer relationships, channels, and customer segments (see Figure 1.).

The seven cases analysed in this study can be applied and compared to the business model canvas, as they differ from each other particularly in the dimensions of customer segments, customer relationships, and key resources, which are of importance in this study. The customer segment can be applied to crowdfunding models in a sense that crowdfunded video game companies do not only produce for the initial crowdfunding community, but also for the wider gaming audience that is not engaged in the development process. Customer relationships applied to the cases analysed, refers to the different forms of engagement between the developing company and the involved stakeholders. Finally, the projects examined in this case study vary widely in terms of financial key resources used in the respective cases. While some projects heavily rely on capital from investors or publishers, others draw capital solely from the crowd.

Thus, Freeman's stakeholder theory that focuses on creating a product or service with paying attention to stakeholders, and the more practical business model canvas as a framework to describe business models in use should provide a sufficient basis for this case study.

2. Literature review

In order to give a holistic overview on the topic, literature concerning crowdfunding, video games and co-creation, and stakeholder management is examined.

2.1. Crowdfunding

Roots, history, and industry numbers

Crowdfunding can be subsumed – along with crowdcreation and crowdvoting – under the term crowdsourcing (Leimeister, 2012). The term crowdsourcing was first coined by Jeff Howe (2006a) and described as “the act of taking a job traditionally performed by a designated agent (usually an employee) and outsourcing it to an undefined, generally large group of people in the form of an open call” (Howe, 2006b). Kleemann et al. (2008, p.6) provide a more holistic definition:

“Crowdsourcing [...] takes place when a profit oriented firm outsources specific tasks essential for the making or sale of its product to the general public (the crowd) in the form of an open call over the Internet, with the intention of animating individuals to make a contribution to the firm's production process for free or for significantly less than that contribution is worth to the firm”.

Crowdsourcers harvest usually a large number of small contributions from a group or individuals in form of ideas, resources, content, and knowledge and aim to incorporate this gained edge of competitive advantage into the development of a product or service. (Brabham, 2008; Hobbs et al., 2016; Hong & Page, 2004; Howe, 2009; Prpić & Shukla, 2013).

The method of gathering funds from a large number of contributors has been around for decades. An early case of such an approach is the funding of the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty in 1885, as publisher Joseph Pulitzer gathered \$102.000 in a period of 5 months from New York's citizens in exchange for printing the names of all contributors in the newspaper (Harris, 1986). Other examples are the funding of the movie *Crocodile Dundee* (Guilliatt, 1988) or Barack Obama's 2008 election campaign (Gierczak et al., 2015).

Several developments in recent years have fostered the emergence of crowdfunding. One of them that goes hand in hand with the transition from offline to digital realms is the emergence of new business models that increasingly focus on the consumer as co-creator of value and decision-maker (Gierczak et al., 2015). With the rapid spread of the Internet and Web 2.0 practices, a phenomenon

described by Henry Jenkins (2006) as convergence culture has emerged. This refers to the formation of online fan communities participating in the creative production of entertainment products and services in various ways. As especially small- and medium-sized enterprises frequently struggled to raise resources for their projects, entrepreneurs in their search for economically viable solutions turned to new online means of building active fan and consumer communities (Hobbs et al., 2016). Fleming & Sorensen (2016) describe the deregulation of receiving equity investments from individuals (“Jumpstart Our Business Startups Act”) as well as increasing user trust in online transactions as main factors for crowdfunding growth.

Crowdfunding as a subset of crowdsourcing began to develop in the USA with the launch of crowdfunding platforms from 2005 onwards. This phenomenon spread to European markets in 2010 and established itself in nowadays large crowdfunding markets like Germany, the UK, or Netherlands (Gierczak et al., 2015). Since then, crowdfunding has been growing rapidly. In Massolution's crowdfunding industry report of 2015, the global fundraising volume was estimated to be more than \$34 billion, having been on the fringe of overtaking traditional venture capital funding in 2016 (Massolution, 2015). On Kickstarter, the world's biggest intermediary platform for running crowdfunding campaigns, a total number of 406.307 have raised \$3.7 billion from a total of 14.789.944 backers (Kickstarter, 2018) However, analysts predict that the crowdfunding market might have reached its ceiling, as they predict a worldwide decline of 17% for the period of 2017-2021 (Research and Markets, 2017). Also, the success rate of crowdfunding is relatively low. The numbers of Kickstarter show that out of 406.307 projects in total (finished and running live) only 145.515 were successfully funded, resulting in a success rate of 36.17%. Out of the 256.810 failed projects, 215.347 or 83.9% reached less than 20% of funds of their goal (Kickstarter, 2018).

Crowdfunding definitions

Crowdfunding as a phenomenon is still relatively new, which is why scholars have started to focus on researching this funding model only in recent years. One of the most commonly cited description of crowdfunding is provided by Belleflamme et al. (2013, p.588), who extend the definition of crowdsourcing by Kleemann et al. (2008):

“Crowdfunding involves an open call, mostly through the Internet, for the provision of financial resources either in the form of donation or in exchange for the future product or some form of reward to support initiatives for specific purposes”.

According to Mollick (2014, p.2),

“Crowdfunding refers to the efforts by entrepreneurial individuals and groups – cultural, social, and for-profit – to fund their ventures by drawing on relatively small contributions from a relatively large number of individuals using the internet, without standard financial intermediaries”.

A more recent description by Lipusch et al. (2018, p.4203) defines crowdfunding as follows:

“Crowdfunding can thereby be defined as a company’s open call to an undefined group of individuals for the provision of financial resources either in form of donations, in exchange for a certain amount of shares, or in exchange for some form of reward or voting rights”.

Classification of crowdfunding models

There are several ways of classifying the various crowdfunding models in use. While this study focuses on the reward-based/hedonistic crowdfunding model (as described below), several model classifications are described to give a comprehensive overview of crowdfunding in general.

Schwienbacher & Larralde (2012) differentiate between projects that rely on donations without giving a reward to the crowd, projects that offer a reward to the crowd, and projects that offer a reward and the chance for active participation in the game development process.

One common approach of classifying crowdfunding today is distinguishing crowdfunding models according to their backer reward system. Within this approach, scholars (Fleming & Sorensen, 2016; Mollick, 2014; Massolution, 2012; 2015; Leimeister, 2012) describe four different models:

1. The donation model, where backers act as philanthropists or patrons who do not get any return for their investment. However, founders would often provide information and updates on the project for their backers (Fleming & Sorensen, 2016).
2. The lending model, where backers offer a loan and expect a rate of return on invested capital. In this model, backers might be interested in the social cause of the project, thus why this approach includes elements of the donation model. These systems however do often not involve actual crowds (Fleming & Sorensen, 2016).
3. The reward-based model, where backers receive a non-monetary reward for their pledge, which can adopt various forms: A better price for the end product, early access, a developer meet-and-greet, being credited by name, having the possibility to actively influence, actively helping to develop the product, or physical goods. Pre-selling in this model is a common

practice (Fleming & Sorensen, 2016).

4. The investment model, where backers are seen as investors, who receive equity stakes in exchange for funds (also known as equity crowdfunding). Backers also may receive for example “shares of future profits or royalties; a portion of returns for a future planned public offering or acquisition; or a share of a real estate investment, among other options” (Mollick, 2014, p.3). This form of crowdfunding was until recently a rare form of crowdfunding, due to legal and practical constraints (Massolution, 2015).

Finally, Haas et al. (2014) propose a different classification model according to a variety of determinants, resulting in three archetypes: Hedonism, Altruism, and For Profit (see Figure 2.).

1. Hedonism refers to mostly creative projects, where backers receive a return in form of a pre-ordered product or a non-monetary reward. They are quite rigid in their funding mechanisms, often feature the all-or-nothing approach (Founders get the backer money only if the target funding goal is met or exceeded within the defined runtime. If the campaign fails to raise the target goal, the founders receive nothing (Cumming et al., 2015)) and set pledge minimum levels. Furthermore, they strive to bring joy in participation to their backers. Typical platforms are Kickstarter and to some extent Indiegogo.
2. Altruism focuses on charity projects that rely on donations and do not offer any compensation. Backers typically support these projects because of altruistic reasons. The mechanisms are loose, there are often no minimum pledge levels and they mostly feature a keep-it-all principle (Founders receive all the money pledged, regardless of campaign success or failure (Cumming et al., 2015)).
3. For Profit is more popular with start-ups and focuses on monetary returns, like interests or profit shares. Backers are motivated to back these projects because of financial causes. Mechanisms are moderately rigid, minimum pledge levels as well as the all-or-nothing principle can be found but are not as common as with Hedonistic types.

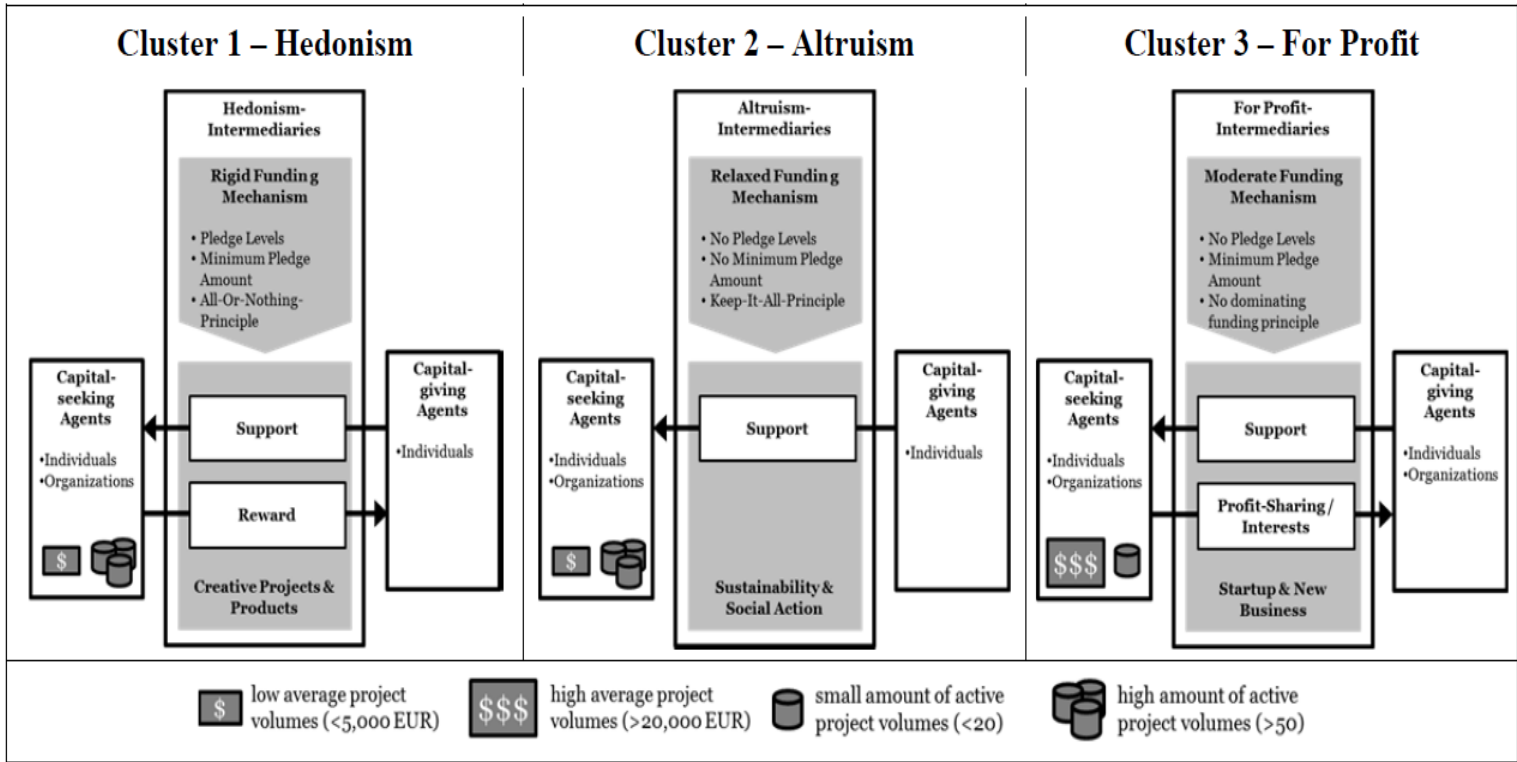


Figure 2. Three crowdfunding types according to Haas et al. (2014, p.13)

Characteristics of crowdfunding

Cosh et al. (2009) define funding in early stages as a major barrier for innovation in smaller ventures, which often fail to attract angel investors, banks or venture capital funds. A lack of proven track record (Stemler, 2013) and information asymmetries in project quality aggravate this problem. Entrepreneurs therefore often turn to external sources, among those within their private networks (family & friends) (Agrawal et al., 2013; Belleflamme et al., 2013). Crowdfunding offers the possibility to bypass these traditional ways of funding. Unlike traditional funding, there are virtually no barriers to participate in crowdfunding (Blohm et al., 2013) – it overcomes informational (Kuppuswamy & Bayus, 2013) and geographical barriers (Agrawal et al., 2010). Also, creators and investors are not separated through middlemen any longer – the only intermediary is the crowdfunding platform, where creators and backers interact.

Advantages and disadvantages of crowdfunding

Crowdfunding from a creator perspective

Fundraising is one of the main advantages of crowdfunding for creators. It can help initiators to overcome funding difficulties in the early stages, provides capital especially to small- or medium-sized companies, and can help to realize various ideas: from innovative approaches and niche interest products/services to charity and regional projects (Belleflamme et al., 2010; Gierczak et al.,

2015). Small start-ups profit largely from crowdfunding as crowdfunding eliminates geographic and societal restraints from entrepreneurial activity – everybody now has the possibility to engage in entrepreneurial activities by running a cost-efficient campaign that reaches backers from around the world (Bates & Bradford, 1992, Fleming & Sorensen, 2016).

Pre-selling, a cornerstone of crowdfunding, refers to the sale of a not yet developed product/service to the crowd. The development of the product/service is made possible through these funds and will usually be delivered to the backers at the end of product/service development as an exchange for the pledges (Gierczak et al., 2015). Pre-selling through crowdfunding enables the developer to either reduce their influence or completely skip partnering with intermediary third parties that usually provide large funds for initial development – like publishers or studios –, thus retaining shares and giving the creator more freedom in the decision-making processes. The product also can be sold directly to the end user (Colistra & Duvall, 2017; Fleming & Sorensen, 2016).

Crowdfunding enables creators to attract attention of third-party funding sources like venture capitalists and angel investors, as a successful crowdfunding campaign signals potential market interest and thus a promising investment opportunity (Mollick, 2014; Gierczak et al., 2015). Other projects get funded through investors at an early stage and then use crowdfunding to scale up the projects (Lehner et al., 2015). In the same way, a crowdfunding campaign is a potent measuring tool for entrepreneurs to figure out if investing resources in an idea prior to actual development is a viable option or not. If little initial interest is raised, the project can be abandoned without having spent large amounts of funds (Mollick, 2014; The World Bank, 2013; Fleming & Sorensen, 2016). Especially after a crowdfunding campaign, the crowd itself is a valuable advantage for creators. The crowd can be used as a trend and feedback barometer during product development. The possibility to gather large numbers of high-quality feedback in a fast way, for example, is through quick product tests during early development stages (Smith, A. N., 2015; Stanko & Henard, 2016). This enables creators to react and iterate in a dynamic fashion and thus reduce the risk of an unsuccessful product launch (Thies et al., 2016). Positive backer feedback can also act as a motivation boost for the creator (Aitamurto, 2011; Gerber & Hui, 2013).

Including the crowd in the development process has many advantages for the creator. Belleflamme et al. (2012, p.3) note: “Direct involvement – for instance, participation in the decision-making, provision of time and expertise – allows entrepreneurs to extract more easily additional value from crowdfunders”. Projects benefit from backer feedback, which ranges from questions, suggestions

for improvement and criticism, new innovative ideas to active user participation by creating actual content. Crowdfunding thus poses a cost-efficient way of co-creation of valuable content (Callaghan, 2014; Quero & Ventura, 2015; Blohm et al., 2013, Stanko & Henard, 2016).

Crowdfunding is a method to raise awareness and create a hype as the decision to fund a project can be also seen as a recommendation. This awareness can lead to a bandwagon effect: One investment can lead to others (Macht & Weatherston, 2014). Here the crowd is a valuable partner in marketing: Backers often get actively engaged in word-of-mouth and social media promotion activities. Backers are likely to share information about the project as they are financially engaged in the project. Thus, crowdfunding can lead to viral marketing effects without involving additional costs for the initiators (Gierczak et al., 2015), helping to attract wide attention for both product and company (Mollick, 2014; Belleflamme et al., 2012). Further motivating factors for creators include forming new connections and learning new skills in raising money (Gerber & Hui, 2013).

High uncertainty is one of the main risks for crowdfunding creators. Crowdfunding – as most entrepreneurial methods – requires foreknowledge of budgeting and scheduling the project to fulfil the obligation of delivering the product/service once funding has been secured. But contrary to other funding models, where plans can be altered as new knowledge is acquired during the funding process (Delmar & Shane, 2003; Kirsch et al., 2009), crowdfunding does not offer the possibility to alter plans that were set at a very early stage, thus preventing to implement knowledge earned from the learning process (e.g. adjust the funding goals to more realistic numbers) (Mollick, 2014). Consequently, resources for producing and distributing the returns are often scarce due to inexperienced creators resulting in delays, damaged reputation and possible losses in profitability (Gierczak et al., 2015). Well-funded projects can also draw problems, as more complexity results in more interdependencies (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995) and overfunding might also result in higher community expectations for the entrepreneur to create a superior product/service than originally planned (Cooper & Kleinschmidt, 1994).

Another challenge of crowdfunding is the high resource costs of running a campaign (Agrawal et al., 2013), particularly for start-ups and small companies. Intermediary platforms often charge 10% of the total amount pledged and the costs of the returns for the backers takes away another big chunk of the total sum. Crowdfunding campaigns demand a big effort as it is time-consuming to manage a campaign, prepare content for the campaign page, engage in continuous communication with backers or put out frequent updates (Gierczak et al., 2015; Stanko & Henard, 2016).

Further creator risks identified to pose a threat in crowdfunding include intellectual property rights protection and the fear of releasing too much information to a bigger audience too early. Too many external sources involved lead to knowledge redundancy and a reduced learning experience for smaller companies. Also, integrating feedback often takes too long and eats away any additional monetary resources (Stanko & Henard, 2016).

Crowdfunding from a backer perspective

Motivations and risks for backers tend to vary with the crowdfunding model in use (Mollick, 2014). One major motive for backers to contribute to a crowdfunding project is the chance of influencing the outcome of the product or service (Smith, A. N., 2015). Backers enjoy having influence on product development – either by just observing or giving actual input. Particularly backers of reward-based campaigns value being part of it and engagement mostly is a good thing for campaign success. As research shows (Stanko & Henard, 2016), the more advanced the development of a product is when starting a campaign, the fewer backers are attracted. Backer participation thus does not only bring benefits for creators, but it also enhances the experience and the feeling of being part of a community for backers (Belleflamme et al., 2012; Gerber & Hui, 2013).

Research suggests that the perceived project quality and the reward system play another major role in backer pledging decisions. Balnaves (2012) and Ordanini et al. (2011) found that rewards are an important factor in motivating potential backers to back a campaign. Leibovitz et al. (2015) furthermore suggest that perceived project quality influences the decision-making process of choosing a project to support.

Other backer motives include being interested in the product purpose and the ways of how it is used (Bretschneider & Leimeister, 2017), regional identification, also known as “home bias” (Agrawal et al., 2011; Lin & Viswanathan, 2013), getting financial returns (primarily in equity crowdfunding) (Bretschneider et al., 2014), wanting to buy the product (Colistra & Duvall, 2017) or being personally connected to the project founder (Agrawal et al., 2011).

Gierczak et al. (2014) identify bankruptcy of the project initiators leading to not receiving returns, and delays in reward distribution as potential risks for backers. A certain level of distrust in the project creator's ability and willingness to use the funds in an effective way was found to be a major deterrent for backers to pledge money (Gerber & Hui, 2013). Furthermore, to the disadvantage of backers, crowdfunding can be used for fraudulent intentions. Founders can run multiple campaigns

or might intentionally make wrong promises about the timing schedule of the project (Lehner et al., 2015).

Crowdfunding from the perspective of other stakeholders

Venture capitalists, who prefer to invest in latter stages of crowdfunding projects, benefit from crowdfunding in that campaigns reduce information asymmetry considering the value of and potential market interest in a product/service. A successful campaign with high pre-sales numbers thus is regarded as a solid value proposition by potential investors (Fleming & Sorensen, 2016). In terms of investor motivations, Cordova et al. (2015) found that while investors know about the proportional relevance of their contributions in small projects, they also know that in big projects their financial investment would not be the deciding factor of success or fail of the whole project. Thus, investors would not focus on the requested financial goal, but, for example, on how much they like the project personally.

Among those that tend to be left out in crowdfunding are intermediary third parties, like publishers or studios. Crowdfunding enables creators to communicate directly with their potential consumers. By doing so, the developer often either reduces their influence or completely skips partnering with these third parties (Colistra & Duvall, 2017).

Success factors and pitfalls of crowdfunding

Strategies and key factors for running a successful crowdfunding campaign as well as the pitfalls to avoid during this process have been a major focal point of research on crowdfunding.

Success factors

Superordinate success factors that are determined by various components include perceived project quality (Mollick, 2014; Burtch et al., 2011; Hobbs et al., 2016), continuous communication and engagement with the backers (Xu et al., 2014; Hobbs et al., 2016), campaign preparation (Mollick, 2014), reduction of uncertainty (Cha, 2017) and perceived trustworthiness of the creator (Macht, 2014; Gerber & Hui, 2013). These – among others – are explained in detail below.

A foundation of crowdfunding success is thorough campaign preparation. This includes building a crowd beforehand or bringing an existing crowd to the campaign, preparing content, and detailed information on the founder and the organization (Frydrych et al., 2014). Setting a realistic funding goal (Kraus et al., 2016; Mollick, 2014), being aware of the challenges of crowdfunding, not

underestimating the workload (Hobbs et al., 2016) and a realistic assessment of one's own skill set (Schwienbacher & Larralde, 2012) helps to avoid problems in the latter stages of the campaign and during development.

Most researchers suggest that rewards are of especial importance in crowdfunding success (Kuppuswamy & Bayus, 2013) and thus should be thought of in detail, since backers compare the perceived value of rewards when browsing through campaigns (Gerber et al., 2012). Steinberg & DeMaria (2012) note that incentives are the main driver for backers to fund a project, while Colombo et al. (2015) suggest the importance of rewards particularly in early stages. Wheat et al. (2013) point out that backers expect these incentives. However, contrary to these findings, Colistra & Duvall (2017) suggest that rewards are not a major factor for backers to get involved in a particular project, but instead backers would appreciate them as something inherently unique to the crowdfunding experience.

During the campaign, research shows that it is important to keep the audience constantly updated and engage in creator-backer communication (Xu et al., 2014; Hobbs et al., 2016). This should happen continuously and through a multitude of web and social media channels (Lu et al., 2014; Zheng et al., 2014), as it increases the reduction of information asymmetry, which in turn is a factor of success in crowdfunding (Wang et al., 2018). Researchers furthermore suggest that although first-degree networks (family and friends, the gaming industry) are important at the start of the campaign, second- and third-degree networks are crucial in leading the campaign to success in the long run (Ordanini et al., 2011; Kuppuswamy & Bayus, 2013). Running a marketing campaign simultaneously along the crowdfunding campaign can help to access these networks by attracting attention through trusted ambassador endorsements and media coverage (Hui et al., 2014; Hobbs et al., 2016) and word-of-mouth and viral marketing activities by the crowd (Gierczak et al., 2015). Macht (2014) notes that providing ongoing communication with the backing community after the crowdfunding campaign increases backer trust and thus project success.

The environmental framework, the preconditions and the aftermath under which a campaign is carried out can influence the overall project success in various ways. A shared interest in the project field, backer trust (Gerber & Hui, 2013), shared values and beliefs, reducing information asymmetry as well as honesty and transparency in communication (Macht, 2014) are important in building a positive creator-backer relationship and encouraging backers to additionally contribute in other ways than pledging funds (Macht & Weatherston, 2014, Colistra & Duvall, 2017).

Various factors positively influence the level of backer trust in crowdfunding. Cardon et al. (2009a; 2009b) define expertise in the field and a proven track record, while Steinberg & DeMaria (2012) and Ahlers et al. (2012) emphasize that including previous projects or awards in the campaign's information page helps backers to assess the project's potential. Stemming from community marketing, Hobbs et al. (2016) note that previous creator-backer interaction (for example in the context of a previous successful project) can lead to an increased willingness of backers to support a new project. This finding suggests that loyalty of a previously established fanbase can be a positive factor for future campaigns.

Stanko & Henard (2016) suggest that openness to external ideas from sources like customers, suppliers, distributors, and universities generally increases product success. A high number of backers is an indicator of future product success, while the amount of money pledged during the campaign is not a relevant factor to predict market success.

Pitfalls

One of the major risks of crowdfunding are the high transaction costs. Running a crowdfunding campaign is time- and work-intensive yet has a relatively low success rate. Paired with the all-or-nothing model that many crowdfunding platforms incorporate, all creator efforts may be rendered superfluous if the funding goal is not hit (Macht & Weatherston, 2014).

Building and engaging with a crowd can involve a number of challenges. The large number of small investors bares several problems. Macht & Weatherston (2014, p.10) note: "They have an interest in the venture and therefore expect and deserve attention or they may feel unvalued and become disengaged or disinterested". Backers have varying expectations and desires (Schwienbacher & Larralde, 2012), and often have a lack of understanding of how to emotionally support the company (Macht & Weatherston, 2014). Also, the absence of financial rewards can cause an unwillingness for backers to contribute in other ways (Schwienbacher & Larralde, 2012).

Further negative implications of crowdfunding include the possibility of personal attacks directed at the entrepreneur or crowdfunding company, and the misuse of funds on expenses not linked to the actual product/service development (Lehner et al., 2015). Entrepreneurs and platforms also are at risk of loss of reputation, when a project fails. Lehner et al. (2015, p.183) note, "choosing the right platforms and the right projects for both parties will certainly become crucial in order not to tarnish each other's reputation".

Another unforeseen consequence is the risk that the crowd misinterprets the business model and mechanisms of a crowdfunding platform, which leads to wrong assumptions about the risk of pledging funds and thus has a negative impact on the project. Finally, poor business planning can lead to delays or even failure of the project – even if an initial crowdfunding campaign was successful (Lehner et al., 2015).

Wang et al. (2018) suggest that uncertainty and information asymmetry can be risky for both creators and backers. Backers – unlike angel investors and venture capitalists – often lack the resources and the experience to properly assess a crowdfunding campaign's potential. This problem amplifies with the low entry barriers of crowdfunding platforms, making it possible for almost everybody to start a project. For backers, this poses a threat of wasted investments due to project failure. On the other hand, initiators need to deliver credible information about their campaign's potential and their goals. And as Lehner et al. (2015) suggest, this is sometimes not the case, as crowdfunding can be used for fraudulent intentions.

In terms of rewards, as it was already noted before, producing and distributing the backer rewards can be challenging (Stanko & Henard, 2016). The bystander effect observed in crowdfunding by Kuppuswamy and Bayus (2013) describes the decrease of financial contributions due to a diffusion of responsibilities after the initial excitement at the start of a campaign has vanished. This can pose to be a challenge for many projects, especially if they fail to create buzz through social media. Other crowdfunding pitfalls include being forced to release a lot of information about the project upfront, the abundance of crowdfunding platforms that make it hard to choose, and the negative effect of rewards on future sales – backers that already received a reward during or after the campaign might end up not buying the finished product when it launches on the market (Macht & Weatherston, 2014). Mollick (2014) notes the common creator's failure of using the full communicative potential of crowdfunding platforms, while Lehner et al. (2015) point out that projects that might just be simply ahead of their time also are prone to fail as a consequence.

2.2. Video games

Research on video games has been going on for decades, resulting in an extensive field of scholarly literature. For this study, apart from giving a summary on research on the video games industry, the focus will be on one particular field within video game research that has received interest amongst scholars since the emergence of technologies, enabling the gamer to play a more active role within

video game production: Video game co-creation and the emergence of the active “producer”.

Video games industry numbers

The global video game market has been growing steadily in the last years and is forecast to continue doing so. In their quarterly report on

global games market revenues, Newzoo (2018) estimated that 2.3 billion people across the globe spent a total of \$137.9 billion on video games in 2018 (see Figure 3.) Newzoo (2018) forecasts the video game industry

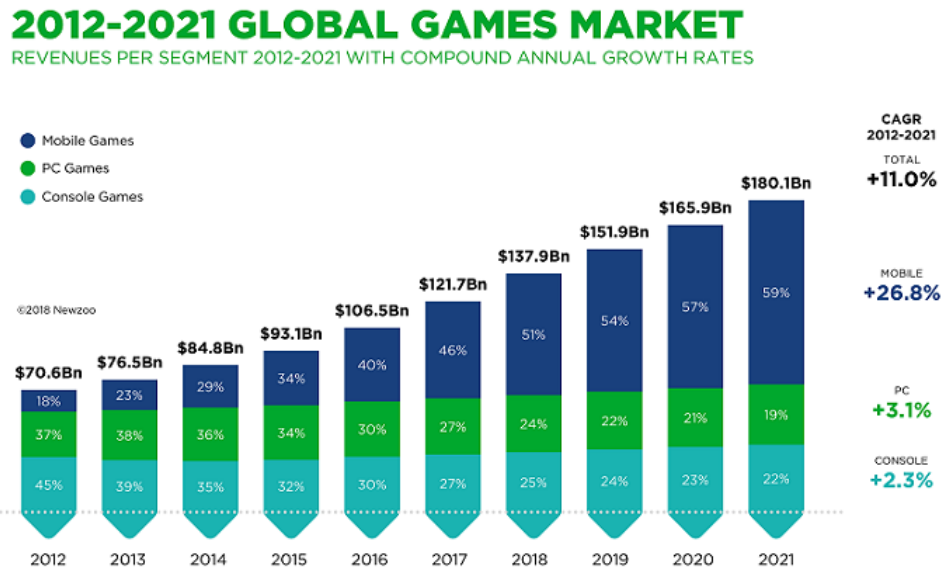


Figure 3. Newzoo (2018): Quarterly report on global games market

revenues to grow to over \$180 billion by 2021, which accounts for an average annual growth rate of 11%. While mobile games continue to grow, they do not eat away significant revenues of console or PC game revenues. The future for the whole industry indeed looks bright (Wijman, 2018).

Video games industry framework

With their conceptual framework of value creation, Marchand & Hennig-Thurau (2013) give a wholesome overview over video game industry value creation processes (see Figure 4.). The vertical channel shows the gaming environment

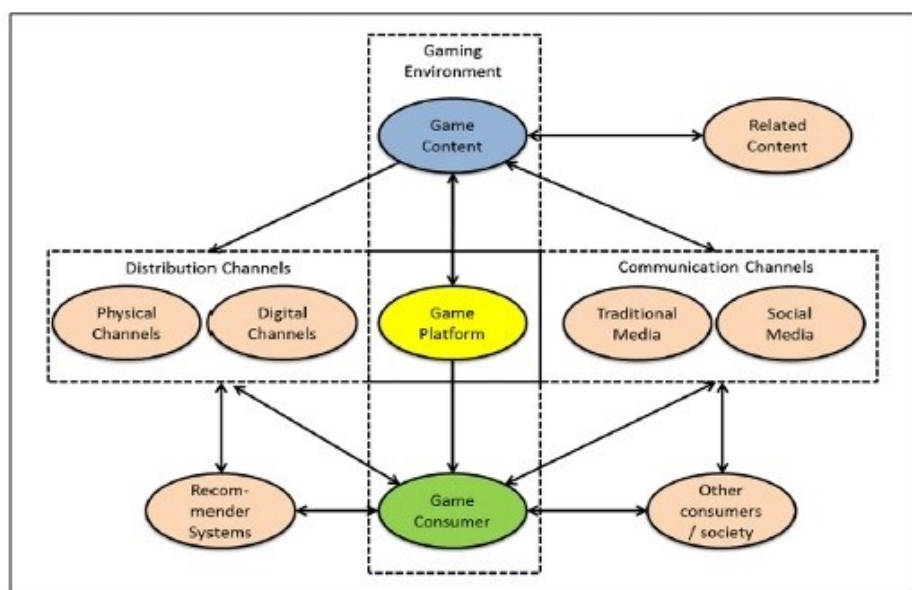


Figure 4. Marchand & Hennig-Thurau (2013, p.142): Conceptual framework

and its actors. The horizontal line represents the distribution and communication channels. Related content refers to other entertainment industries, that can inspire the development of games. Recommender systems have emerged together with the gaming industry. They help consumers find the “right” game among the abundance of available titles.

Furthermore, other consumers can influence decision-making processes of individuals through recommendations or through network effects that encourage adaptation – in order to adapt, the individual must play the game to be part of the network. Furthermore, games can shape personalities and thus have the potential to influence society as a whole (Marchand & Hennig-Thurau, 2013).

Gaming environment

“The market for video games is characterized by an oligopolistic structure and indirect network effects between consumers and content and platform providers” (Marchand & Hennig-Thurau, 2013, p.146). Only a handful of players own a major slice of market shares. The top three players in software (Sony, Microsoft, Nintendo) also are leading in terms of hardware sales (Marchand & Hennig-Thurau, 2013). The game market itself is two-sided (software producers and platform providers) and the indirect network effects connect these two sides, which furthermore influence each other (Rysman, 2009). The market as a whole, has undergone consolidation and the developers within the traditional gaming industry, unlike publishers and platform holders, have been at the receiving end: prices of video games have hardly changed while production costs and salaries have increased (Dovey & Kennedy, 2003). However, as the market changes, new opportunities for developers arise, which will be explained below.

Indirect network effects influence communication as platform providers can signal that they are the superior platform. Customers tend to choose the platform that they perceive is superior to competitors on the market (Dubé et al., 2010). Direct network effects can enhance the utility of video game products (Shankar & Bayus, 2003). Games nowadays offer the service of connecting players with others, thus being able to become part of global online player communities: “For such games, the quantity and the quality of the user network determine the degree of pleasure and satisfaction consumers gain from the gaming experience” (Marchand & Hennig-Thurau, 2013, p.148). Investments tend to be big in these games, although they flop often. How user communities can be built therefore is important for success, as traditional games do not start with an existing community.

Game production: In terms of developing team composition, Dovey & Kennedy (2003) note that designers, artists, and programmers make up most of the staff. Many employees are drawn from game fan communities. The traditional way of funding has become a difficult system for many developers to survive. Production difficulties can lead to significant game quality decreases, a lack of resources to fast bankruptcy. Also, investors often have a tight grip of control over the whole production process. Finally, the production processes are fluid and often need many feedback loops. Ownership and control play a huge factor in all kind of decisions on game production. A publisher-owned company will usually produce for the market that the publisher has stakes in. Game developers can be independent, and partly or fully owned by either publishers or platform manufacturers. “Independent” can mean that the company is registered in the stock market and therefore only needs to report to shareholders. Or it can refer to a small, alternative start-up. Publishers generally take on publishing and marketing roles, while platform manufacturers perform publishing, developing, and hardware production tasks (Dovey & Kennedy, 2003).

Game platforms: Video games production is a cyclical business (Ward, as quoted in White, 2013), depending on hardware performance. Every time more powerful hardware begins to emerge, a new cycle of platforms and games begins. Today players can choose from computers, consoles, handhelds and other mobile devices like smartphones (Marchand & Hennig-Thurau, 2013).

Game content: Video games are experience goods, meaning that consumers only can know if they have enjoyed the product after consumption. This puts a certain financial risk on consumers especially when buying consoles games. Consoles tend to position themselves by focusing on the production of games of a specific genre, thus appealing to certain audiences.

Consumers: Research on video game consumers shows that their motivation to play includes for example categories like fantasy, challenge, curiosity (Malone, 1981), competition, stimulation, fun, interaction (Poels et al., 2012, Sherry et al., 2006), or habits and addiction (Hartmann et al., 2012).

Communication channels

Traditional media communication: Prior to a launch, developers create a buzz by releasing information on the game. Developers tend to spend a significant amount of funds on advertising prior to the launch of a title due to its importance for the overall economic success of the game (Marchand & Hennig-Thurau, 2013).

Social media communication: Social media can reduce the effects of developers creating a buzz prior to a release, as social media users and bloggers can spread their quality-related assessment of a game to a large, global following immediately after or while playing the game in the first few days after its release (Marchand & Hennig-Thurau, 2013). Other games have been integrated into social media, thus helping to keep up with friends and acquaintances while playing the game.

Distribution channels

The industry is quickly moving from physical discs to digital distribution, with broad implications for market actors. Game producers can not only circumvent retail and production intermediaries, resulting in increased profit margins, but also build relationships with their players and reduce the resale market of games by attaching each sold game to a designated individual. Also, it might diversify the market pricing systems (Marchand & Hennig-Thurau, 2013).

Related content

Transmedia links can enhance brand extension. Game-related movies, books, series or comics, result in increased brand awareness and profitable cooperation across entertainment industries (Marchand & Hennig-Thurau, 2013).

Supporting technologies

Based on past user behaviour, recommender systems gather data and then suggest tailor-made results for the individual concerning what game they might like (Bodapati, 2008). These systems also help to find like-minded game partners.

The emerging video gaming value chain

For many years the generation of value within the video gaming industry was tied to a fixed set of stakeholders in the value chain: hardware manufacturers would provide the technological means for developers to create software. Publishers would often have control over the production processes and would pose the main funding source for game development. Retailers would sell hardware and software to consumers, while distributors would assume responsibility for marketing and distribution efforts (Kunnskapsverket, 2017). Online gaming has changed the way in which games are distributed and the roles and interactions of actors involved at each stage of the value chain (see Figure 5.). One of the major changes is the digital distribution of games, where publishers and/or developers take over traditional distributor tasks, thus pushing actors involved in the physical distribution of video games out of the value chain (Kunnskapsverket, 2017). Retailers, who sell the

game to end users have also been impacted negatively by digital distribution. In new funding models like crowdfunding, publishers and studios as third parties can also be completely removed from the value chain, if developers decide to engage with, sell and distribute their software directly to their consumers (Colistra & Duvall, 2017).

As some of the players who were essential constituents of the traditional value chain have begun to retreat from the video game market, others have emerged. Technology providers, particularly those who provide middleware that simplifies the creation of video games, but also hosting providers nowadays play an important role in the value chain.

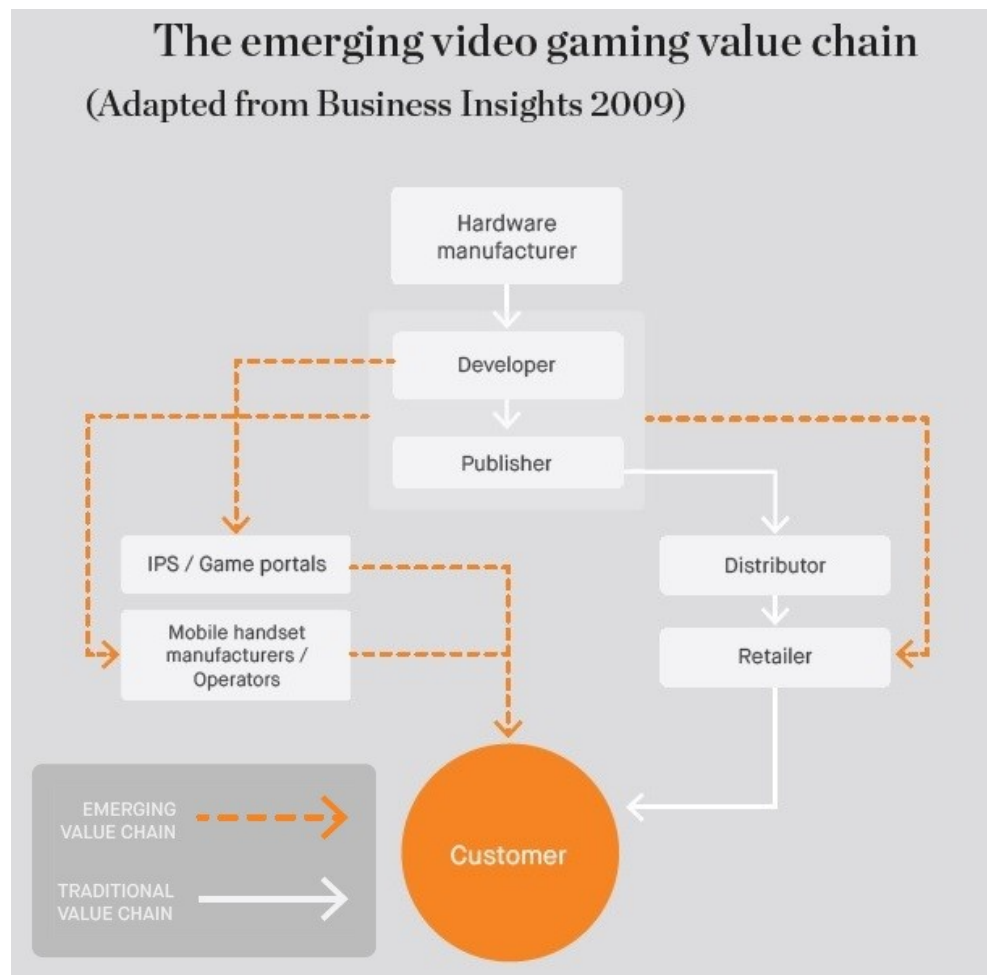


Figure 5. Kunnskapsverket (2017, p.24): The emerging video gaming value chain

Localization professionals who adapt the international products to the local markets have gained increased influence. Community motivators are particularly important nowadays in engaging and keeping up interaction within the player communities. Lastly, online payment services have profited from these developments (Kunnskapsverket, 2017).

Also, some of the existing players have been thriving under these new conditions. As opposed to the traditional model, where developers usually had to pay the price for continuously increasing wages and production costs, they now find themselves in an environment that gives them various possibilities of commercialization of their products, up to the point where no third parties are

involved any longer. The other stakeholder group that has profited from these developments are the customers – developers try to develop in order to cater to the customer's needs, offering increasingly individualized and customized features and services (Kunnskapsverket, 2017).

The shift to the new value chain paired with changed player expectations has also impacted the production cycle: new concepts like DLCs (downloadable content that builds on existing games) that have their origin in the player modding communities have emerged (Kunnskapsverket, 2017). The continuous flow of these DLCs, patches and add-ons is a new development as part of the evolution of franchising and serialization. Players nowadays expect ongoing upgrades, and this also shows, as the most successful games are those that are constantly improved. Developers can also build a stronger connection with their audience through continuous updates, keeping their community engaged with new content (Stenros & Sotamaa, 2009).

However, one of the biggest changes in the industry is the incorporation of users in the developing process. Davidovici-Nora (2009, p.48) notes that “a traditional way of involving players participation is in the development of the game before its marketing. For example, while developing the gameplay, Blizzard shares the game with its fans in the testing phase via open and closed betas. This enables debugging and balancing the game for the fans. It is also a means motivating fans to participate in the launching of the game”. This revolutionizing approach within the video game industry is examined in detail in the next chapter, as it bears significance for crowdfunding and influence-taking of consumers in video game development processes.

2.3. Co-creation and user participation in video game development

The way customers are seen in the industrial system has changed – they have transformed into connected, informed and active communities. Nearly unlimited information access, not constrained by geographical borders, gives customers the possibility to make informed decisions, build networks that enhance their independence from companies and disrupt the traditional top-down communication model in marketing communication (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004, p.5) note: “Companies can no longer act autonomously, designing products, developing production processes, crafting marketing messages, and controlling sales channels with little or no interference from consumers. Consumers now seek to exercise their influence in every part of the business system. Armed with new tools and dissatisfied with available

choices, consumers want to interact with firms and thereby co-create value". This user-generated content- and user-led innovation-approach has emerged only in recent years and has already become a key factor in producing value when creating products/services (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Benkler 2006; Bruns 2008; Jenkins 2009).

Co-creation and co-creativity definitions

Co-creation of value can happen

“through personalized interactions that are meaningful and sensitive to a specific consumer. The co-creation experience (not the offering) is the basis of unique value for each individual” (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p.6).

Banks (2013, p.1) defines co-creativity as follows:

“Co-creativity occurs when consumers contribute a non-trivial component of the design, development, production, marketing and distribution of a new or existing product”.

Participatory culture

The concept of co-creation is embedded within a larger communicative phenomenon commonly referred to as participatory culture. Innovation in media production technologies and platforms have led to the expansion of participatory culture, where everyone with Internet access can become a content creator, thus reshaping the notion of audience and producer (Hong & Chen, 2013).

According to Jenkins (2006, p.3), “participatory culture contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship. Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands”.

Jenkins (2006) points out that consumers are neither totally free nor totally extradited from creative industries' influence. He instead argues that these consumers form alliances with creators within commercial networks. By forming these alliances, new problems of accessibility and negotiations of the terms and conditions of these relationships between the involved groups might arise. In general, professional game developers, as designers, producers, managers, programmers, or community managers all contribute to the emergence of participatory culture and co-creation. So, do also the players, which means that players and professionals here are in a “co-constitutive relationship” (Banks, 2013, p.22).

A framework of co-creation

Co-creativity is closely related to the concept of innovation-enabling creative destruction by Schumpeter (1950). These changes rise from the capitalistic market and are often unforeseen, disruptive and unstable, yet create new *modi operandi* and relations within the respective industry and market. They happen within the dynamic interchange between amateurs and professionals, on bottom-up, peer-to-peer and top-down level (Banks, 2013).

Traditionally, companies would see customers as a source of information, for example as participants in market research. A more advanced system is to treat consumers as co-creators, as companies nowadays tend to look for new technology and innovation input from external sources (Prystupa-Rządca & Starostka, 2015). Scholars have identified different ways of classifying consumer involvement. Kaulio (1998) identifies three stages of co-creation: design for, design with, and design by. Design for refers to customer data being the only source of customer-feedback for developers. At the design with-level, customers are involved in the production process by extracting feedback on various solutions or concept options from them as part of market research. Finally, the design by-level refers to active participation in production process.

From a company's perspective, co-creation brings along several consequences. Both the company and suppliers learn about consumers and their ideas for various areas in the company and production processes. Through ongoing communication, employees get insights into consumer behaviours, wants and needs, and motivations and thus can tailor their production efforts around the consumer. Co-creation also decreases uncertainty related to financial commitments (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). An even more co-creative approach is to provide customers with tools so that they can carry out the iterations necessary for product development. By giving away user-friendly toolkits, consumers have the freedom to create innovative content. (Thomke & Hippel, 2002). Users can create design, carry out prototype testing and generally improve the product to their satisfaction. This shift of responsibility of product creation and testing towards the user helps companies to bypass guessing what the consumers want (Prystupa-Rządca & Starostka, 2015).

However, it also means that companies and their employees, also in the video games sector, must give up a certain amount of control over and influence on production to their fans. The developer-fan relationship becomes less hierarchical and less top-down. For companies and professionals in the field of cultural production, these changes have a major impact on daily working life (Malaby, 2009, in Banks, 2013) as well as on the professionals' self-conception as producers of content.

Particularly the emergence of the “produser”, a term coined by Bruns (2008), disrupts the professional media production industry. Produsers are users creating and sharing their own produced content amongst each other, breaking from the traditional modes of organizing production. Media users thus can be users and producers at the same time. These forms of production still predominantly happen on commercial platforms.

Implications of co-creative approaches

Participation of users is often referred to as work. Questions have to be asked about motivations and incentives for these consumer-creators. Co-creative work as labor can be understood as situations where the surplus value is extracted while reducing costs. Companies have begun to shift their labor practices from a closed to an open collaborative system. This can lead to the transformation of business and consumer practices towards innovative networks, which have the capability of reshaping workplaces and professional identities. Extracting value from these relationships has the potential to transform work practices as a whole (Banks, 2013).

Considering exploitative elements of co-creative work, in most cases both developers and player-producers are aware of the conditions under which fans are producing. Labor that would normally be paid is increasingly outsourced to the user which in turn results in increased pressure for professionals (Ross, 2009) Co-creative approaches are often adopted in the context of problematic work situations, where professionals struggle to “maintain equitable conditions” (Banks & Humphreys, 2013, p.100).

To successfully adopt a co-creative approach, the integration of distributed networks between professional and amateurs, experts and non-experts is needed. This change in producer-consumer relationships has an impact on the expertise of professionals which is associated with authority and dominance within an organization (Weinberger, 2007; Hartley, 2009). The blurring of the boundaries between professionals and amateurs signals an increasing interdependence between producers and users in the media field (Jenkins, 2006; Bruns, 2008). Consumer participation plays an increasing part in the work environment of professionals and unsettles their routines and practices, which in turn has influenced on the identities of professionals in co-creative media networks (Deuze, 2007; 2009).

The integration of professional and amateur expertise demands the respect of the knowledge of consumers (Burgess & Green; 2009) and thus poses a significant challenge for management in

terms of coordination within these emerging networks: “The challenge in all of this is how do we now develop frameworks or models of expertise and knowledge production that situate the expertise of co-creative consumers in proper perspective alongside professional creatives’ expertise in the fields of media production” (Banks, 2013, p.114).

The major problems of co-creation and extended fan influence on game production thus are: the failure to provide the network, support, and coordination that an active crowd demands; the reluctance or refusal of professional developers to accept fan expertise and user input; the erosion of the professional domain of media production and professional's self-image; a general lack of communication and updates; the decrease of developer control and power over production processes; the reliance on fan-created content for economic success; potential interest conflicts with other stakeholders (high-profile investors) and questions about intellectual property rights (Banks, 2013; Prystupa-Rządca & Starostka, 2015).

2.4. Stakeholders and the organization

Scientific research on the management of internal and external stakeholders of an organization, stakeholder influence on the organization and stakeholder-organization relationships in general is closely tied to stakeholder theory by R. Edward Freeman (1984), which is also used as a theoretical basis for this study. This chapter will shed light on stakeholder-organization relationships, stakeholder management and stakeholder influence. We will then take a closer look at stakeholder characteristics in the crowdfunded video gaming sector and will end this chapter with A. N. Smith's (2015) case study – the only study up until today that examines stakeholder-developer relationships in crowdfunded video game production.

The stakeholder-organization relationship

Research on organizations highlights the importance of stakeholder-organization relationships (Freeman et al., 2007). Freeman (1984) emphasizes the reciprocity between groups or individuals and organizations in terms of taking influence and being influenced. Fostering an alliance with stakeholders can help organizations to survive or succeed due to the often-high level of interdependence (Bosse & Coughlan, 2016; Penner et al., 2005).

Both stakeholders and organizations pursue their individual goals. They try to form relationships with other entities that they believe can help them in reaching these goals based on indicators that

signal a potential partner. Bundy et al. (2018) use the concept of the organization-stakeholder fit to explore behaviour and communication between organizations and stakeholders. The organization-stakeholder fit is a term that describes how compatible organizations and stakeholders are in terms of similar values and beliefs. On an individual level there are two types of fit: the supplementary fit (person and environment have the same traits) and the complementary fit (individual and environment have traits that complete each other when working together) (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011). The supplementary fit enhances cooperative behaviour through trust and coordination, the complementary fit helps to fulfil needs of the involved parties (Edwards & Cable, 2009).

Bundy et al. (2018) point out that the relationship between organizations and stakeholders is determined by how fitting their values and strategic needs are: “We define O–S [Organization-Stakeholder] fit as the compatibility that exists between an organization and a stakeholder when their characteristics are well matched. Consistent with the distinction between supplementary and complementary fit, we distinguish between two major dimensions of O–S fit: (a) value congruence, or the similarity between an organization and stakeholder in terms of values, principles, or core beliefs, and (b) strategic complementarity, or the ability of an organization and stakeholder to provide for each other’s strategic needs (i.e., provide resources)” (Bundy et al., 2018, p.480).

According to Deci & Ryan (2000) and Penner et al. (2005), there are two types of motivation to cooperate in an organization-stakeholder relationship: intrinsically motivated cooperation (becomes valuable through the inherent meaning of the relationship – usually fostered by value congruence) and extrinsically motivated cooperation (the material output that comes with the relationship – usually fostered by the provision of strategic needs).

Stemming from the above described findings on stakeholder-organization relationships, Bundy et al. (2018, p.482) compiled a theoretical framework for the organization-stakeholder fit (see Figure 6.).

Dimension of fit	Basis of fit	Primary motivation for cooperation	Relational factors that facilitate cooperation
Value congruence	Values and principles	Intrinsically motivated cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Character-based trust ● Relational predictability ● Mutual liking and affinity ● Socioemotional communication
Strategic complementarity	Strategic resources and needs	Extrinsically motivated cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Competence-based trust ● Environmental predictability ● Material exchange and reciprocity ● Instrumental communication

Figure 6. Bundy et al. (2018, p.482): Theoretical framework of organization-stakeholder fit

Supplementary organization–stakeholder fit: value congruence

Bundy et al. (2018, p.482) note that “value congruence exists when the primary values, principles, or beliefs of an organization match the values, principles, or beliefs of a stakeholder”. Cooperation results when stakeholders and organizations act in a way that builds on shared values and beliefs (Harrison & Wicks, 2013), possibly even at the expense of strategic needs and resources. There are four relational factors that are associated with enhanced intrinsically motivated cooperation: Trust based on similar character (Bosse et al., 2009; Harris & Wicks, 2010), relational predictability that helps partners to know what kind of behaviour they can expect from each other in certain situations and thus reduces uncertainty (Kalliath et al., 1999), a mutual understanding based on identification and values (Bosse & Coughlan, 2016), and relationship-reinforcing communication (Peña & Hancock, 2006).

Complementary organization–stakeholder fit: strategic complementarity

If stakeholders possess the resources and/or skills that a project is missing to become successful and vice versa, this is a complementary organization-stakeholder fit. Cooperation is fuelled by extrinsic motivations or tangible results as an outcome of the cooperation (Bundy et al., 2013). There are various factors that enhance cooperation based on extrinsic motivation: the trust in each other to have the sufficient means and competences to fulfil a desired goal or commitments (Mayer et al., 1995), the formation of alliances and combination of resources to reduce environmental dependency and uncertainty (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), the satisfaction of needs and resource exchange (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and feedback, sharing information, expertise, know-how and general correspondence related to reaching the shared goal (Cummings, 2004).

The initial impetus to collaborate can be either more intrinsically or extrinsically motivated.

However, these initial reasons to collaborate can influence other factors described above. All the factors listed above can in some way be interrelated and one can lead to another.

Organization-stakeholder misfit

Generally, low levels of value congruence and strategic complementarity result in a lesser likelihood to cooperate. Most entities are apathic towards each other, meaning that they neither cooperate with, nor avoid each other. However, there can also be an incongruence in values (opposing values) or actions that disrupt the other party, leading to a misfit. High levels of misfit result in active avoidance or even combative behaviour (Bundy et al., 2018) (see Figure 7.).

Scholars argue that moderate levels of misfit do not necessarily result in harmful behaviour, however, if a certain point is reached and the opposing party is perceived as a threat, the relationship can turn sharply in a negative way, as the opposing party cannot be just ignored anymore, but needs to be combated (Edwards, 2008). A compromise or negotiating behaviour is the most likely outcome in the case of a high fit on one axis and a high misfit on the other (Bundy et al., 2018).

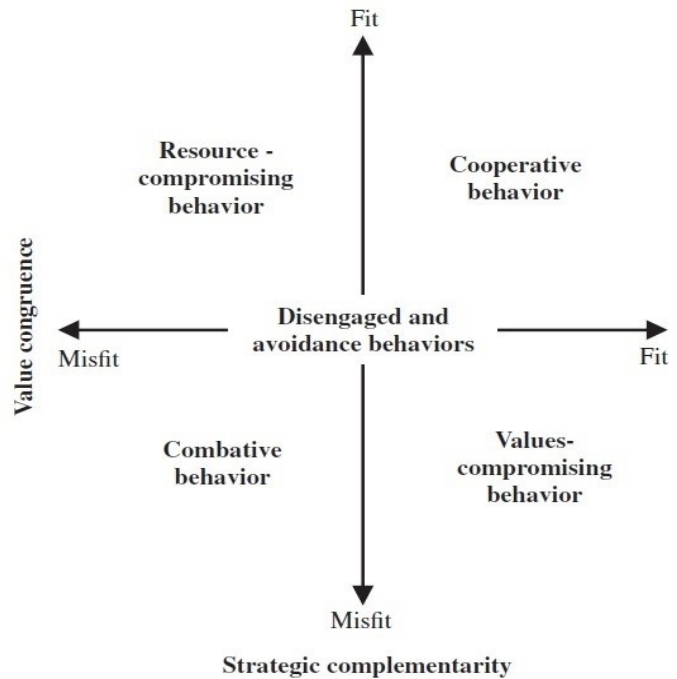


Figure 7. Bundy et al. (2018): Organization-stakeholder fit framework for relational behaviors

Power and influence in a stakeholder-organization relationship

In his study, Frooman (1999) examined power relations and influence strategies between stakeholders and organizations from a resource dependence theory point of view. According to resource dependence theory, a resource is characterized by value being attributed to it by an individual or a group of people. The term dependence refers to an individual or a group of people relying on another individual or group of people.

Power is an important factor that

may decide over the outcome of a situation where an organization and an external stakeholder are in disagreement (Pfeffer, 1992). Who has the power is determined by who is dependent on whom and to what degree. In resource dependence theory, player A has power over player B if the relationship is asymmetrical – meaning that one has to verify that player A is not (or less) dependent on player B, but player B depends (more) on player A (Frooman, 1999). According to Frooman (1999, p.199; based on Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) there are four types of stakeholder-firm relationships based on resource dependence theory (see Figure 8.).

Typology of Resource Relationships

		Is the stakeholder dependent on the firm?	
		No	Yes
Is the firm dependent on the stakeholder?	No	Low interdependence	Firm power
	Yes	Stakeholder power	High interdependence

Figure 8. Frooman (1999, p.199; based on Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978): Resource Relationship Typology

Forms of power

Exerted influence always is related to the power that respective individuals have (Bourne & Walker, 2005). Greene & Elfers (1999) identify seven forms of power: coercive (based on fear, failure results in punishment), connection (networks of people in and outside the organization), reward (providing rewards or resources), legitimate (organizational/hierarchical position), referent (personality traits), information (possession of valuable information), and expertise (visible possession of expert skills/knowledge).

How stakeholders influence organizations

Stemming from resource dependence theory and the resource relationships formulated by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), Frooman (1999) describes two types of resource control strategies for external stakeholders to influence organizations: They can decide whether organizations get the resources in the first place, but also if organizations may use the resources as they please. He furthermore describes pathway strategies, as stakeholders can either influence an organization directly, or indirectly via another stakeholder.

Resource control strategies

Stakeholders can exert power if withholding of valuable resources is a threat to an organization. Different stakeholders have various ways of withholding resources for the sake of getting organizations to change their behaviour (e.g. employees withholding labour by striking; investors withholding money). The threat of resource withholding can be as effective as actual withholding. However, stakeholders also can exert power by providing resources with certain conditions attached. For stakeholders, employing the withholding approach means that the stakeholder has the power to walk away from the relationship. The usage approach implies that the stakeholder is also in some form dependent on the organization, implying a mutually dependent relationship. Changes enforced through withholding strategies generally cost more for an organization, as stakeholders providing resources have greater independence (the power to just leave), are less dependent on the organization than the organization is on them and thus expect the organization to pay for the changes requested. With usage strategies, the economic impact of changes is more shared, as the resources of stakeholders are still used by the organization (Frooman, 1999).

Influence pathways

Influence pathways refer to the way of exerting influence over organizations. Stakeholders can either directly exert influence, or through an ally of the organization that has influence on the

organization. Gargiulo (1993) distinguishes here between direct strategies (stakeholders directly manipulate the resource flows to the company) and indirect strategies (stakeholders take influence through an influential ally who can steer the resource flow to the company in the desired direction).

How resource strategies and influence pathways are used

If the firm dependence on the stakeholder is low, the firm will be less responsive to requests from this stakeholder than towards requests of powerful stakeholders (see Figure 9.). Therefore, stakeholders with less power tend to try to influence the firm through an influential ally (Frooman, 1999).

Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) note that the higher the interdependence-level between stakeholder and firm, the more the stakeholder is interested in

the welfare of the firm, as the stakeholder's welfare depends on it. Therefore, the stakeholder is more likely to use the usage approach over the withholding approach (as

the latter one can threaten the company financially). Especially in high dependence relationships, the stakeholder and the firm will negotiate to find a mutually acceptable solution for both and try to avoid mutual disaster. In case the stakeholders are not (or in a limited way) dependent on the firm, stakeholders will most likely adopt a withholding approach (Frooman, 1999).

Levels of stakeholder influence

Spitzeck & Hansen (2010) define different levels of power and scope that a stakeholder can exert over a firm's decision-making. In terms of power, stakeholders can have no decision power at all to having the full control over decision-making processes. Scope describes the range of areas that are in the influence sphere of stakeholders – from single isolated issues to decisions affecting the organization as a whole (Kaptein & Van Tulder, 2003).

Typology of Influence Strategies

		Is the stakeholder dependent on the firm?	
		No	Yes
Is the firm dependent on the stakeholder?	No	Indirect/withholding (low interdependence)	Indirect/usage (firm power)
	Yes	Direct/withholding (stakeholder power)	Direct/usage (high interdependence)

Figure 9. Frooman (1999, p.200): Typology of Influence Strategies

Spitzeck & Hansen (2010) found five levels of power and three levels of scope:

Power:

1. No evidence of stakeholder power: Some corporations would engage in efforts to increase stakeholder dialogue without explaining, if or how these measurements would influence decision-making processes.
2. Listening to stakeholders' voice: Engagement with stakeholders could lead to a learning experience that has influence on organizational decision-making.
3. Intermediary impact: Stakeholders have an impact on limited or intermediary processes in the organization, such as reporting, or have the power to enforce minor changes in some areas due to feedback.
4. Impact on policies and key performance indicators: Stakeholder feedback leads to certain changes in policies and key performance indicators (e.g. removing palm oil from cosmetics products due to feedback from users, governments, regulators, NGOs, etc).
5. Stakeholder power – substantiated impact: This refers to significant stakeholder decision-making power concerning aspects like design and content of products and services. A buzzword for this level is “active stakeholder participation” and involves for example the customization of products and services towards customer wants and needs, or polling customers to not only get feedback but to actually get a decision on certain issues.

Scope:

1. Operational issues: This refers to local communities representing their interests through forming groups that get consulted by organizations on issues related to community interests.
2. Managerial issues: Stakeholders being involved in managerial topics “such as reporting, identifying key performance indicators, issue and risk management, spotting opportunities, as well as reputation management” (Spitzeck & Hansen, 2010, p.383) fall into this category. The issues covered in this area refer to stakeholder-relevant topics and not the overall company strategy or business development.
3. Strategic issues: When stakeholders are asked about business development, innovation or scenario planning, we talk about strategic issues. It also covers feedback and stakeholder influence on innovation and expansion to potential future markets.

Clusters

By combining power and scope levels, Spitzreck & Hansen (2010) form four major clusters of stakeholder influence levels (see Figure 10.).

<p><u>Low/intermediate scope and low/intermediate power:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 60% of stakeholder engagement • Diverse range of stakeholder types • Major instruments: formal stakeholder dialogue and stakeholder advisory boards 	<p><u>High scope and low or intermediate power:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About 13% of stakeholder engagement • Moderately diverse range of stakeholder types • Major instruments: stakeholder advisory boards with an expanded area of work
<p><u>Low or intermediate scope and high power:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About 12% of stakeholder engagement • Moderately diverse range of stakeholder types • High power in specific areas, also called issue collaboration 	<p><u>High scope and high power:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About 14% of stakeholder engagement • Stakeholder type: (typically) customers • Major instruments (among others): surveys, customer representative meetings, consumer involvement in brand management, advisory board, voting mechanisms

Figure 10. Clusters of stakeholder influence levels (based on Spitzreck & Hansen, 2010)

As Burchell & Cook (2006) point out, dialogue without tangible impact of stakeholders can lead to frustration on the stakeholder's side. Spitzreck & Hansen (2010) note that the more powerful and broad the engagement mechanisms are, the less diverse the stakeholder groups involved get.

How organizations manage stakeholders

How organizations deal with stakeholders and their interests depends on stakeholder characteristics, the nature of their interests and the context. However, in their study on instrumental stakeholder theory, Bridoux & Stoelhorst (2014) define two general ways of dealing with stakeholders that can equally lead to sustainable value creation with involved stakeholders – the fairness approach that aims to treat stakeholders in a fair way, and the arms-length approach that aims to engage with stakeholders on a bargaining power basis. Bridoux & Stoelhorst (2014) describe two general types of stakeholders: self-regarding stakeholders that only care about their individual benefits (Fehr & Falk, 2002) and reciprocal stakeholders, who value fairness and punish unfair behaviour of themselves and others even at their own cost (Engelmann & Strobel, 2004).

An organization or firm constitutes of a network of primary stakeholders (e.g. investors, customers, employees, suppliers, etc...) with the goal of value creation (Freeman, 1984; Freeman et al., 2010). Primary stakeholders can contribute to the value creation process (Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2014) by

providing resources and/or engaging in value-creating activities. Managers take a unique role, as they are primary stakeholders, but also the center of the network, embracing the power to influence network relationships (Freeman, 1984; Hill & Jones, 1992) and influencing how stakeholders create value by deciding on how they are treated by the organization (Harrison et al., 2010).

The fairness approach

The fairness approach shows following characteristics: Organizations interact with primary stakeholders in a fair way, which firstly means that there is an aim to divide the value created by the network among all stakeholders (Cropanzano et al., 2001), which in practice leads to exchanging information and a willingness to collaborate (Dyer & Singh, 1998). Secondly, there is a lack of formal contracts regulating performance and requirements between organizations and primary stakeholders, as the relationships are based on trust (Dyer & Singh, 1998). Thirdly, these relationships tend to last longer (Dyer, 1996).

The arms-length approach

When an arms-length approach is used, primary stakeholders receive their share of the value created according to their bargaining power. When this approach is used, organizations tend to withhold information from primary stakeholders. In case of disagreement, confrontation is the preferred way to deal with problems. Organizations furthermore try to fuel conflicts between primary stakeholders in order to decrease their power (Nesheim, 2001). Performance standards and requirements are defined in detail and enforced through legal sanctions, if necessary (Dyer & Singh, 1998). These relationships tend to be short-term (Dyer, 1996).

Both approaches can lead to success, depending on the personalities and motives of the stakeholders involved. Reciprocal stakeholders tend to create more value when confronted with a fairness approach, while self-regarding stakeholders perform better when organizations adopt an arms-length approach (Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2014).

The backer-developer connection (Smith, A. N., 2015)

The case study of Anthony N. Smith (2015) is the only study that has been done so far on stakeholder impact on crowdfunded video game development. It focuses exclusively on the connection between developers and backers, thus having a smaller scope in terms of examined stakeholders than this study. Nevertheless, A. N. Smith's study (2015) is described in detail below, as it gives insights on the topic of stakeholder influence in crowdfunded video game development.

Studies on developer-player interaction are scarce because of the lack of interaction in the traditional model within the developing phase prior to beta testing (Kerr, 2002), as communication gets mostly mediated by publishers (Kerr, 2013). Communication practices in crowdfunded video games differ from this approach. Many developers embrace the possibility of backer feedback having a constructive influence on game development (Zellmer, 2013; van Lierop, 2013, personal communication, cited in: Smith, A. N., 2015). A. N. Smith's (2015) research question therefore reads as follows: “[...] precisely how does the involvement of crowdfunding communities within development contribute, as claimed, to the ‘making’, ‘shaping’ and ‘creating’ of video games?” (Smith, A. N., 2015, p.203)

A. N. Smith (2015) begins his study by giving an example of how backers can influence the game development of a crowdfunded video game. The studio Camouflaj was using Kickstarter to fund the development of their game République. Camouflaj had planned to release their title solely on Apple mobile and portable hardware, which resulted in reactions of disappointment from fans due to an absence of a desktop version (Payton, 2012). Camouflaj significantly altered their plans, promising their fans a desktop and Mac version and even released a separate version of the game altered to fit the strengths of these platforms (Berghammer, 2012). The lessons learned from this example are twofold: First, the backers have a significant influence on the game development through their pledges – the game would probably not exist without them. Second, the community showed that it has the capability to have a major influence on the creative development itself (Smith, A. N., 2015).

These interactions and the backer impact going hand-in-hand with them are common within the crowdfunding model, as developers need to communicate with backers either to attract new backers or satisfy existing backers. Backers nowadays expect that their feedback is heard and that developers keep them informed about the development process in a transparent way. This transparent production process of crowdfunded games is different to the traditional, publisher-led developing model, where information for the crowd is limited (Smith, A. N., 2015). Smith distinguishes between communication during the campaign phase and the post-campaign phase.

Campaign phase

As details of the game are released and a funding goal is set, developer-backer communication in the typically 30 day-long campaign phase is continuous. A detailed outline of the game is usually found on the Kickstarter page, additional information is continuously drip-fed to the fans to keep them interested as well as to the press. Developers also usually answer to backer feedback and

questions on the campaign page, via social media and emails. Backers can articulate praise and concerns or pose questions and give feedback through these channels as developers would react by elaborating on their strategy/decisions, or even change certain campaign/game aspects.

The developer's motivation of disrupting previous plans because of backer feedback can be understood in several ways: they like to embrace the developer-backer connection that comes along with crowdfunding and is not part of the traditional publisher model. Another explanation is of a pragmatic economic nature: Developers can position themselves open for backer feedback, which in turn increases the appeal of the game for players, who like to be actively involved in game development. According to A. N. Smith (2015), co-creation is after all a key motivator for players to invest. Furthermore, the changes themselves can be a key factor in reaching the funding goal.

The case of République shows that backers can have a significant influence on the direction of the project, particularly when the project is struggling and thus is more dependent on backer support. In the traditional model players do not have this kind of influence, as publishers would decide on revenue models or hardware platforms by consulting sales data. This high degree of influence/agency of players is not typical for co-created video games, as publishers often have control over and set limits to the creative influence of consumers (Kerr, 2013; Mactavish, 2008).

The interaction on crowdfunding platforms and the type of interaction continues into the post-campaign phase, as developers still are obliged to interact via emails, social media and the campaign page for updates and backer rewards. Backers furthermore continue to give feedback through these channels after the campaign (Smith, A. N., 2015).

Post-campaign phase

After the campaign, developers often switch to gather large scale data, typically by polling their users on game features both on small- and in-depth-scale. An example of this is Cloud Imperium Games (Star Citizen), who polled their backers during early development on preferred roles within an open-world game separated by activities. Cloud Imperium Games assumed that players would prefer combat-related content but exploring turned out to be the most favoured activity for backers. Thus, Cloud Imperium Games changed their approach and included much more exploring content than they previously planned. Founder Chris Roberts realised they would never have gotten this information had they settled for the traditional publisher model (Nutt, 2013). Contrary to Roberts' remark, publishers often do engage in similar activities, often carried out by third-party companies.

Roberts points out that due to the large size of their community, feedback from this community turned out to be much more accurate and useful than the focus groups that publishers would have otherwise put together (Nutt, 2013). Apart from backers acting as a barometer, developers can also decide to provide them with alpha and beta test builds as a reward for their pledges. Backers in turn give feedback stemming from their experiences with the test builds, which developers can use to iterate on the game. Giving backers access to alpha and beta versions also helps in quality assurance by finding bugs and glitches. In a traditional publisher-led production, a dedicated testing team would be formed. In crowdfunding, especially smaller studios that lack the resources for setting up a testing team and that do not have the time to adequately test the game often heavily rely on their backer communities to find bugs.

In the post-campaign phase backers can, as described above, act as volunteer playtesters and a barometer. Backers thus take over tasks for free that otherwise typically would require payment. Crowdfunding is not just appealing for developers because of the funding aspect, but also because of an audience willing to engage in the game development on a voluntary basis, often resulting in valuable input.

However, not all studios do keep a two-sided communication relationship with their backers in the post-campaign phase. Camouflaj (République) did not set up forums for direct developer-backer communication, but rather adopted a one-way communication approach. They would still reply to direct messages, but otherwise refused to take backer feedback into consideration in this phase for two reasons: “First, the studio did not view République, which was in part conceived as a carefully structured narrative experience, as being a type of game that would especially benefit from a co-creative process; second, the studio did not regard the co-creative process as being compatible with the studio aim of maintaining a strong degree of institutional authorship over this narrative experience”. (Smith, A. N., 2015, p.208) Furthermore, the post-campaign challenges were typically problems that backers would not have been able to assist with.

Conclusion

Direct communication between developers and backers is often limited to the traditional model due to the publisher interference. In crowdfunding, however, these interactions take place from an early stage. During the campaign, developers gather a community, try to get funded and use the crowd to negotiate the parameters of the game. Thus, backers can have a significant influence on game aspects in this phase of production. In the post-campaign phase, developers often try to channel backer feedback in highly structured ways, engaging them in active game testing or asking them for

their opinions via polls. Backers, therefore, often get integrated into all stages of the production process (Smith, A. N., 2015).

Stakeholder influence in crowdfunded video game development

In this final chapter of the literature review, stemming from the little body of literature on crowdfunded video game development, stakeholders involved in the development of crowdfunded video games as well as their impact are described. While literature reviewed in earlier chapters had a focus on general crowdfunding projects and in most cases (but not necessarily in all) it can be applied to crowdfunded video game development as well. The content gathered and reviewed in the following chapter was researched with an explicit focus on crowdfunded video game development, thus bearing a higher significance for this study.

Developers

Crowdfunding has many advantages for game developers: it makes it easier to reach people, it is less expensive than traditional developing and a welcomed alternative for developers of niche market games (Guillaud et al., 2013). Developers can set their own rules, as in many cases no publisher who might exert a tight grip of control over game development is involved. This void of power is often filled by backers, as crowdfunding developers communicate directly with their fans (Roberts, 2013, personal communication, cited in: Bertz, 2013).

Backers

Backers as potential players/consumers of the games they support have won influence on game development compared to fans of games developed under the traditional model. Planells (2015) argues that crowdfunding backers in video gaming can be thought of as “prosumer-investors”. This so-called prosumer-investor “as a consumer, expects to enjoy the outcome of the project; as a producer, aims to determine, through the financial contribution, part of the content and structure of the project; and, finally, as an investor, hopes that the support will materialize in the success of the proposal with the expected return” (Planells, 2015, p.627-628). Though limited influence as an individual, they have tremendous power as a crowd, as they are often the main source of funds for developers engaging in crowdfunding (Smith, A. N., 2015). Crowdfunding furthermore lets them get in touch with the developers directly, thus having the chance to influence the developer by giving feedback. According to Smith (2015), co-creation is after all a key motivator for players to invest. Some developers let their backers vote on major decisions during the game development process (Roberts, 2013, personal communication, cited in: Bertz, 2013). Others open the developing

process for their backers by outsourcing certain development aspects to their crowds or by testing Alpha- or Beta-versions of the game with their backers (Smith, A. N., 2015). Some developers, however, would stop accepting post-campaign backer feedback due to perceived incompatibility and lack of usefulness of the co-creative approach to the studio's approach (Smith, A. N., 2015).

Publishers

As opposed to the traditional funding model, publishers tend to have either limited impact on the production process, or get left out completely (Planells, 2015) as many developers resent a (too) powerful publisher that will make all major decisions (Planells, 2015; Roberts, 2013, personal communication, cited in: Bertz, 2013). As crowdfunding connects developers with users directly, the value of a project is no longer estimated by publishers, but by the user (Planells, 2015).

Platform holders

Crowdfunding platforms help especially smaller gaming ventures to find an existing infrastructure that allows the developers to expose their projects to many potential backers. It furthermore helps to build brand awareness and to generate more feedback (Cha, 2017).

Media

Social media platforms can provide advantages for crowdfunding developers: they serve as communication platforms for individual users and with each other within the community. Furthermore, they give the developers the opportunity to present their project to the crowd and help to reduce any uncertainty among the community; they allow developers to communicate with their followers in an effective, frequent and timely fashion (Cha, 2017).

3. Research questions

Based on theory and literature findings, this study aims to answer following research questions:

Research question #1

How do stakeholder interests influence the development process of crowdfunded video games in differently sized projects...

- (1) ...in terms of game development?
- (2) ...in terms of the crowdfunding campaign?
- (3) ...in terms of the funding?

Research question #2

Which stakeholder groups involved have which interests?

Research question #3

What are the conflicts of interests between the involved stakeholders in the cases examined?

Research question #4

What strategies do managers employ to prevent conflict situations between stakeholder groups?
And what strategies do they employ in acute conflict situations?

Research question #5

What are the similarities and differences of the different sizes of the respective projects in terms of stakeholder influence in the project developing process?

4. Presentation of the cases

In this section, the key terms are defined by the author, and the seven cases are presented. This includes a short introduction to the game and its history, company data and history, and interviewee data.

Definition of key terms

Stakeholder

According to Freeman (1984, p.46), the term stakeholder refers to “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives”. As for this case study, stakeholders that can have an influence on the creative process of a crowdfunded video game, are employees of the developing company (managers, developing team), the crowdfunding community, investors, publishers, platform holders, members of the larger gaming community, members of the game development industry, license owners, family and friends, and external advisors.

Stretch goal

Stretch goals are additional funding stages defined by a studio running a crowdfunding campaign that become relevant once the initial funding goal is reached before the end of the crowdfunding campaign. Stretch goals are meant to encourage (potential) backers to continue funding the game after the initial funding goals are reached by promising additional features being added to the game when a stretch goal is reached. Stretch goals help the studio to allocate further funds by keeping the interest high after the funding goal has been reached, while (potential) backers are incentivised to spend further money in case they are interested in a specific stretch goal feature to be included in the game. Stretch goal content typically involves additional levels, additional characters and tools, additional game modes like multiplayer, or language localization.

Manager

The stakeholder group subsumed under the term manager refers to people overseeing the whole development of a video game. They typically have the last word in any decision-making processes during the game production and have a big influence on the game as a whole. All the people interviewed for this study belong to this stakeholder group.

Developing team

The stakeholder term developing team refers to people that are employees of the developing

company and actively play a part in the development of a game. Developers that are hired on a contract basis and thus are not full-time employees of the company also fall into this category.

Backers and fans

Backers and fans are people that accompany the development of the game throughout the production process. They typically (but not necessarily) “back” the developing company by supporting the crowdfunding campaign through financial pledges. Furthermore, they are a source of feedback, criticism and praise: they can actively give feedback during the production process, but also act as a sounding board when presented with new game features. The production company may actively integrate backers and fans as testers in Alpha- and Beta-phases of the development cycle.

Larger gaming community

The larger gaming community is the entirety of all video gamers. Unlike backers and fans, the larger gaming community is not directly involved in the production of the video game. However, they become direct stakeholders after the game is officially released. They can also act as indirect influencers in the sense that the game developers try to guess what appeals to a wider audience and thus include game elements that potentially are attractive to large parts of this stakeholder group.

Investors

Investors are either individuals or third-party companies that provide typically large amounts of funds to help the game getting developed. They always have an influence on the funding of the game but do not necessarily get involved in the creative production or the crowdfunding campaign.

Publishers

Publishers are third-party companies that help the game development company by providing the necessary means to publish a game. They usually provide monetary funds but can also give feedback or help with matters like licencing, distribution, localization. They can be distinguished from the investor stakeholder group in that they typically have a large influence on the project in the end phase of the development or once the game is launched. Unlike investors, who usually help with funding and may give feedback on the game, the publishers’ direct involvement typically encompasses a greater variety in the areas of operation.

Game development industry

The term game development industry refers to other video game companies and their

representatives that are not directly involved in the actual developing processes of the game. They can influence a game by giving feedback and advice.

License owners

License owners are companies, or individuals, that have the right to publish a game under a trademark they own or permit other companies to do so. They can have monetary and creative influence on developing companies that produce games under a franchise agreement.

Platform holders

The term platform holders in this study refers to gaming, distribution, event, and crowdfunding platforms as well as their representatives. Gaming platforms are, for example, Windows PC, Mac and consoles like the Xbox One or the Sony Playstation 4. An example of distribution platforms is the online game selling platform Steam. Event platforms are, for example, game conventions. Popular crowdfunding platforms are, for example, Kickstarter, Indiegogo, or Fig.

Family and friends

In this study, the stakeholder group of family and friends includes people in the immediate social environment of the manager and possibly the developing team. They can have monetary influence but can also help by providing feedback or encouragement. Family and friends that are part of the game development industry are counted to the game development industry stakeholder group.

External advisors

External advisors are individuals or institutions that give feedback or advice to the manager and the developing team but are not part of any other stakeholder group mentioned above. This term can, for example, refer to members of the academic field (e.g. university professors), in which the manager and possibly members of the developing team have been educated.

Case characteristics table

all numbers as of April 14, 2017, if not stated otherwise	ArtCraft Entertainment (Walton, 2017, if not stated otherwise)	Harebrained Schemes (Weisman, 2017, if not stated otherwise)	Descendent Studios (Peterson, 2017, if not stated otherwise)	Warhorse Studios (Klima, 2017, if not stated otherwise)	Flying Mollusk (Reynolds, 2017, if not stated otherwise)	The Deep End Games (Gardner, 2017, if not stated otherwise)	The Molasses Flood (Dowling, 2017, if not stated otherwise)
Game	Crowfall	BattleTech	Descent	Kingdom Come: Deliverance	Nevermind	Perception	The Flame in the Flood
Interview partner	Gordon Walton, 61 (<i>President, Executive Producer</i>)	Jordan Weisman, 57 (<i>CEO, Game Designer</i>)	Eric Peterson, 52 (<i>CEO, Game Director</i>)	Martin Klima, 48 (<i>Co-founder, Part Owner, Executive Producer</i>)	Erin Reynolds, 33 (<i>Founder, Owner, Creative Director</i>)	Bill Gardner, 38 (<i>Founder, Creative Director</i>)	Forrest Dowling, 36 (<i>President, Designer</i>)
Company founding date	2013	2011	2015	2011	2013	2015	2014
Number of employees	33	~40	6 full-time, 4 part-time	~110	4 full-time, a few contractors	1 full-time, several contractors	5
Games published	Pre-published: 1	Published: 7 Planned: 1	Pre-published: 1	Pre-published: 1	Published: 1	Published: 1	Published: 1
Crowdfunding campaigns	1	4	1	1	4	1	1
Crowdfunding platform for examined title	Kickstarter, own website	Kickstarter, own website	Kickstarter	Kickstarter, own website	Indiegogo, Kickstarter	Kickstarter	Kickstarter
Campaign runtime	Kickstarter: 24 February 2015 – 26 March 2015 (Kickstarter: Crowfall, 2015) Own website: 26 March 2015 – onwards (Crowfall, 2018)	Kickstarter: 29 September 2015 – 3 November 2015 (Kickstarter: BattleTech, 2015) Own website: 3 November 2015 – 24 April 2018 (BattleTech, 2018)	Kickstarter: 10 March 2015 – 11 April 2015 (Kickstarter: Descent: Underground, 2015)	Kickstarter: 22 January 2014 – 20 February 2014 (Kickstarter: Kingdom Come: Deliverance, 2014) Own website: 20 February 2014 – onwards (Kingdom Come: Deliverance, 2018)	Indiegogo 1: 5 March 2012 – 6 April 2012 (Indiegogo: Nevermind, 2012) Indiegogo 2: 5 October 2012 – 29 November 2012 (Indiegogo: Nevermind: Round 2, 2012) Kickstarter 1: 5 February 2014 – 7 March 2014 (Kickstarter: Nevermind, 2014a) Kickstarter 2: 8 October 2014 – 3 November 2014 (Kickstarter: Nevermind, 2014b)	Kickstarter: 26 May 2015 – 25 June 2015 (Kickstarter: Perception, 2017a)	Kickstarter: 7 October 2014 – 7 November 2014 (Kickstarter: The Flame in the Flood, 2014)

<p>Campaign revenues</p>	<p>Kickstarter: \$1.766.204 (successful) (Kickstarter: Crowfall, 2015)</p> <p>Own website (total, as of February, 2017): ~\$1.650.000 (Crowfall, 2018)</p>	<p>Kickstarter: \$2.785.537 (successful) (Kickstarter: BattleTech, 2015)</p> <p>Own website (total, as of March 13, 2017): \$458.102 (BattleTech, 2018)</p>	<p>Kickstarter: \$601.773 (successful) (Kickstarter: Descent: Underground, 2015)</p>	<p>Kickstarter: £1.106.371 (= ~\$1.452.000) (successful) (Kickstarter: Kingdom Come: Deliverance, 2014)</p> <p>Own website (total, as of October 1, 2014): \$550.547 (Kingdom Come: Deliverance, 2018)</p>	<p>Indiegogo 1: \$1324 (unsuccessful) (Indiegogo: Nevermind, 2012)</p> <p>Indiegogo 2: \$1161 (unsuccessful) (Indiegogo: Nevermind: Round 2, 2012)</p> <p>Kickstarter 1: \$129.615 (unsuccessful) (Kickstarter: Nevermind, 2014a)</p> <p>Kickstarter 2: \$76.525 (successful) (Kickstarter: Nevermind, 2014b)</p>	<p>Kickstarter: \$168.041 (successful) (Kickstarter: Perception, 2017a)</p>	<p>Kickstarter: \$251.647 (successful) (Kickstarter: The Flame in the Flood, 2014)</p>
<p>Previous titles (game is part of a franchise)</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>Involved stakeholders (as of April 14, 2017)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager • Developing team • Backers and fans • (Larger gaming community) • Investors • Game development industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager • Developing team • Backers and fans • Larger gaming community • Game development industry • License owners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager • Developing team • Backers and fans • Larger gaming community • Game development industry • License owners • Platform holders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager • Developing team • Backers and fans • Larger gaming community • Investors • Publishers • (Platform holders) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager • Developing team • Backers and fans • Larger gaming community • Investors • Platform holders • Family and friends • External advisors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager • Developing team • Backers and fans • Larger gaming community • Publishers • Game development industry • Platform holders • Family and friends • External advisors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager • Developing team • Backers and fans • Larger gaming community • Investors • Publishers • Platform holders

Figure 11. Case characteristics table

4.1. Large-scale projects

Case 1 – Crowfall (ArtCraft Entertainment)

This interview was conducted on March 31, 2017 with Gordon Walton, president and executive producer at ArtCraft Entertainment.

Crowfall is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG), which is described by the production company ArtCraft Entertainment as a “throne war simulator” and is available for Windows PC. Its genre can be described as a fantasy MMO game with survival, strategy and political simulation elements. Players can create their own game characters and decide, in which of the five available system worlds (“campaign world”) they would like to play in. In a third-person view, players can control their character in a campaign world within a shared environment with other players, fight against monsters or other players, gather resources and equipment, build their own or attack other players' bases and discover the procedurally generated world (Crowfall, 2018).

Crowfall was announced on its webpage on January 16, 2015 with a 40-day countdown timer. On February 24, 2015, ArtCraft Entertainment revealed and launched the crowdfunding campaign on Kickstarter along with information on the game and gameplay footage. With a goal of reaching \$800.000 in pledges until March 26, 2015, the game reached half of its goal in a matter of hours (MMOGames.com, 2015). Potential backers were able to support the campaign through backer tiers, ranging from \$5 to \$10.000. After the successful funding of the initial campaign goal, ArtCraft Entertainment gradually added stretch goals. At the end of the campaign on March 26, 2015, Crowfall had gathered \$1.766.204 from 16.936 backers (Kickstarter: Crowfall, 2015). After the campaign, backing with added stretch goals continued on the Crowfall-webpage. As of September 2018, the game has gathered a total of over \$21 million in funds, out of which \$4.9 million amounted from pledges of over 49.000 backers. Open testing began in late 2015, as of September 2018, the game is in its Pre-Alpha 5 testing phase. Players can join the open testing phase by purchasing early access-bundles (Crowfall, 2018).

ArtCraft Entertainment, Inc. is an independent game development studio based in Austin, Texas and was founded by J. Todd Coleman (Creative Director) and Gordon Walton (Executive Producer) in early 2013. At the time of the interview, the company had 33 employees and Crowfall was the first game to be developed by the company. Its crowdfunding campaign therefore was also the first crowdfunding campaign for the studio (Walton, 2017).

Gordon Walton, born on March 2, 1956, has been in the game development industry for over 35 years. Starting with his first game published in 1978, he has been involved in over 200 single player games and online games. Walton has over 20 years of experience in developing and managing massively multiplayer online games, with games like Ultima Online, Sims Online, or Star Wars Galaxies. Walton became general manager at BioWare Austin for the title Star Wars: The Old Republic, before he became vice president and executive producer at Disney Playdom in 2011. In 2013, he co-founded ArtCraft Entertainment with J. Todd Coleman and has since then been working as president and executive producer on its first title Crowfall (Crowfall, 2018; Walton 2017).

Case 2 – BattleTech (Harebrained Schemes)

This interview was conducted on April 4, 2017 with Jordan Weisman, CEO and game designer at Harebrained Schemes.

BattleTech is a strategy video game developed by Seattle-based studio Harebrained Schemes. It was published by Paradox Interactive and launched on April 24, 2018. The studio describes it as follows: “The year is 3025 and the galaxy is trapped in a cycle of perpetual war, fought by noble houses with enormous, mechanized combat vehicles called BattleMechs. Take command of your own mercenary outfit of `Mechs and the MechWarriors that pilot them, struggling to stay afloat as you find yourself drawn into a brutal interstellar civil war. Upgrade your starfaring base of operations, negotiate mercenary contracts with feudal lords, repair and maintain your stable of aging BattleMechs, and execute devastating combat tactics to defeat your enemies on the battlefield” (BattleTech, 2018).

The game is part of a long-established franchise BattleTech originally created by Jordan Weisman and his company FASA as a tabletop game roughly 35 years ago. The BattleTech franchise license rights are nowadays owned by Microsoft (Weisman, 2017).

Harebrained Schemes revealed working on BattleTech and preparing the Kickstarter campaign on July 29, 2015 (Smith, A., 2015). The developers invested \$1 million upfront – mostly earnings gathered through sales of successful game Shadowrun Returns – to secure development of a basic skirmish mode. The Kickstarter campaign was then specifically designed for financing all the additional features (Weisman, 2017). The campaign with an initial goal of \$250,000 ran between September 29 and November 3, 2015. Backers were able to back through pledges ranging from \$1 to \$10,000. (Kickstarter: BattleTech, 2015). The funding goal was reached within an hour

(Orphanides, 2015). Stretch goals were set up on financial landmarks, including \$1 million, \$1.85 million and \$2.5 million. Stretch goals included a single player campaign, several extensions for the campaign or an online PVP-mode. In total, the campaign gathered \$2.785.537 from 41.733 backers (Kickstarter: BattleTech, 2015). After the campaign, the backing process was continued through the BattleTech-website, which as of March 13, 2017, generated \$458.102. Further backer funding through PayPal generated \$79.850 (Kickstarter: BattleTech, 2015). The backer beta was launched on June 1, 2017. At this time, Harebrained Schemes had also secured a partnership with publisher Paradox Interactive (Frank, 2017). As of October 9, 2018, the game was available for Windows and Mac OS X and with a Linux release to follow on various digital distribution platforms such as Steam, Gog and Humble Bundle (BattleTech, 2018).

Harebrained Schemes is a Seattle-based software company that produces primarily PC games. It has about 40 employees and was founded in 2011 by Jordan Weisman and Mitch Gitelman. As of October 14, 2018, it has published eight games and run four crowdfunding campaigns (Weisman, 2017). In June 2018, Harebrained Schemes was acquired by publisher Paradox Interactive for \$7.5 million (Hall, 2018).

Jordan Weisman, born in 1960, is an American game designer and CEO at Harebrained Schemes. Over the course of his +35 years lasting career, he helped create various tabletop and video games. In 1980, Weisman founded FASA Corporation and was the leading force in creating the BattleTech and Shadowrun franchises. In 2011, he founded Harebrained Schemes together with Mitch Gitelman. Under Weisman's guidance, the studio ran several crowdfunding campaigns and successfully released titles like Shadowrun Returns and BattleTech (Weisman, 2017). As of October 14, 2018, Weisman remains game designer and CEO at Harebrained Schemes.

Case 3 – Kingdom Come: Deliverance (Warhorse Studios)

This interview was conducted in two parts on March 24 and March 30, 2017 with Martin Klima, executive producer, founder, and part owner of Prague-based Warhorse Studios.

Kingdom Come: Deliverance (KC:D) is a first-person action role-playing video game set in medieval Central Europe. It was developed by Czech studio Warhorse Studios and published by German publisher Deep Silver. The game was released on February 13, 2018 for Microsoft Windows, Playstation 4 and Xbox One (Kain, 2018). Warhorse Studios describe it as follows: “Kingdom Come: Deliverance is a story-driven open-world RPG that immerses you in an epic

adventure in the Holy Roman Empire” (Kingdom Come: Deliverance, 2018). The player slips into the role of a knight and has to fulfil various tasks set in an open world-environment located in 15th century Bohemia (Klima, 2017).

Video game writer, director and designer Daniel Vavra had the original idea for KC:D. Together with Martin Klima and other developers, he sought to find an investor for the game. However, the search remained unsuccessful and just before Vavra and Klima wanted to abandon the project, Czech investor Zdenek Bakala was persuaded to invest in the development of a prototype, with the prospect of further investments in case the prototype would spark significant interest among gamers (Klima, 2017). The Warhorse Studios was founded in 2011 (Rossignol, 2011). After creating a prototype and several unsuccessful pitches to further investors, the team decided to set up a crowdfunding campaign on Kickstarter. The campaign ran from January 22 to February 20, 2014. The funding goal was £300.000 with funding tiers ranging from £3 to £5000. On February 20, 2014, the campaign came to a closure, generating a total of £1.106.371 from 35.384 backers (Kickstarter: Kingdom Come: Deliverance, 2014). While the successful crowdfunding campaign had convinced Zdenek Bakala to pledge further funds, the crowdfunding continued on Warhorse Studio's own website, generating \$550.547 until October 1, 2014. A public alpha was launched on October 23, 2014 through Steam (Mantel, 2014), a beta followed on March 3, 2016 (Bartsch, 2016). In 2016, Warhorse Studios partnered with German publisher Deep Silver for releases of the retail PC version as well as console versions for the Xbox One and PlayStation 4 (Makuch, 2016). The final game was released on February 13, 2018.

Former 2K Czech designer Daniel Vavra and Altar Games founder Martin Klima formed Prague-based Warhorse Studios in the autumn of 2011 after securing the funds for creating a prototype of KC:D. The studio ran its first crowdfunding campaign between January and February 2014 and released its first game – KC:D – in February 2018 for Xbox One and PlayStation 4. As of April 14, 2017, Warhorse Studios had about 110 employees (Klima, 2017).

Martin Klima is a Czech game developer mainly known for his role as co-founder, part owner, and executive producer at Czech game developing studio Warhorse Studios. He had previously founded Altar Games and worked as producer at Codemasters and Bohemia Interactive (Klima, 2017).

4.2. Medium-scale projects

Case 4 – Descent (Descendent Studios)

This interview was conducted on March 17, 2017 with Eric Peterson, CEO and game director at Descendent Studios.

Descent (formerly Descent: Underground) is an upcoming first-person spaceship shooter developed by Austin-based Descendent Studios and scheduled for release on Windows, OS X and Linux in 2019 (Peterson, 2017; Tarason, 2018). The studio describes the game as follows: “Fight through twisting tunnels and vast caverns where the concepts of up and down mean nothing and danger lurks around every corner. We’re blasting the original full-freedom shooter Descent into the 21st Century with next-generation gaming technology built on Unreal Engine 4! Earth starves and pilots like you are the only source of vital resources. Face off against the best rock jocks in the solar system to capture asteroids and minerals, challenge your friends in private multiplayer matches, or dive into the mines to fight hordes of bots in this prequel to the original trilogy” (Descendent Studios, 2018). A license agreement was made with license holder Interplay. As such, the game has been developed under the Descent franchise (Hutchinson, 2015).

The development of Descent (then working title: Ships That Fight Underground) was announced in late 2014 by former Star Citizen developers led by Eric Peterson. Peterson formed Descendent Studios, hired developing staff and eventually set up a Kickstarter campaign with an initial funding goal of \$600,000 in early 2015 (Hutchinson, 2015). Peterson and the team made some investments upfront to set up the campaign and develop early game concepts that could be shown to potential backers (Peterson, 2017). The campaign ran from March 10 until April 11, 2015. Backer tiers for pledges ranged from \$5 to \$10,000. There were some stretch goals, but not many were hit. At the end of the campaign, Descendent Studios had raised \$601,773 from 8164 backers (Kickstarter: Descent: Underground, 2015). An Early Access version was released on Steam on October 22, 2015. The Early Access release also helped to fund further development (Peterson, 2017). On September 29, 2017, Descendent Studios announced to delist Descent from Steam to overhaul the game and focus on the single player campaign (McCormic, 2017). At the same time, Descendent Studios also signed a deal with publisher Little Orbit to secure funding for the next development period (Tarason, 2018). Originally scheduled to be released in March 2016 as Descent: Underground, as of October 17, 2018, the game is set to launch in 2019 under the new title Descent (Kickstarter: Descent: Underground, 2015; Tarason, 2018).

Descendent Studios is a game developing studio based in Austin, Texas and was founded in early 2015 by former Star Citizen president of production and studio director Eric Peterson. As of March 17, 2017, it has six full-time and four part-time employees. After acquiring licencing rights for a new title within the Descent franchise, a Kickstarter campaign for their first title Descent was set up in March 10, 2015. As of October 22, 2018, Descendent Studios is yet to publish its first game Descent (Peterson, 2017).

Eric Peterson is the CEO and game director at Austin-based Descendent Studios. Peterson has been developing video games since 1984. He worked for game developer Origin Systems, where he helped developing Wing Commander 3 and 4, before he switched to Chris Roberts' then newly-founded studio Digital Anvil. There he was involved in the development of games like Starlancer, Conquest: Frontier Wars and Freelancer (Peterson, 2017). He then left to join Chris Roberts in the development of Star Citizen, which went on to become the most successful game in crowdfunding history (October 22, 2018: \$198 million (Star Citizen: Funding Stats, 2018)). For family reasons, Peterson founded his own company, Descendent Studios, to work on the upcoming title Descent. Including Descent, Peterson has been part of three crowdfunding campaigns during his career in the gaming industry, with varying success (Peterson, 2017).

Case 5 – The Flame in the Flood (The Molasses Flood)

This interview was conducted on April 14, 2017 with Forrest Dowling, president and designer at video game studio The Molasses Flood.

The Flame in the Flood (TFitF) is a survival adventure video game developed by Boston-based video game developing studio The Molasses Flood. The game was released on February 24, 2016 for Microsoft Windows, MacOS and Xbox One, with further releases for PlayStation 4 and Nintendo Switch to follow in 2017 (Metacritic: The Flame in the Flood, 2018). The game is described by The Molasses Flood as follows: “A rogue-like river journey through the backwaters of a forgotten post-societal America. Forage, craft, evade predators. [...] From the Art Director of BioShock and a team of veterans of the BioShock, Halo, Guitar Hero and Rock Band series comes The Flame in the Flood. Travel by foot and by raft down a procedurally-generated river as you scrounge for resources, craft tools, remedy afflictions, evade the vicious wildlife, and most importantly, stay ahead of the coming rains” (The Molasses Flood, 2017a).

The idea for TFitF was born after The Molasses Flood was founded in June 2014. Dowling wanted

to create a survival game and the studio's art director had an idea for a game where one could explore “tiny worlds”. They put these two ideas together and started working on TFitF. After the studio was founded, Dowling and his team over the following months put together a prototype which could be presented as part of a Kickstarter campaign and during demos (Dowling, 2017). The Kickstarter campaign for TFitF was launched on October 7, 2014, with a funding goal of \$150.000 and backer tiers ranging from \$1 to \$4000. On November 7, 2014, the campaign came to a successful closure, raising \$251.647 from 7420 backers. After the initial campaign, additional funding for stretch goals was raised through PayPal. Stretch goals included language localizations, and endless mode or a PlayStation 4-release, which was initially not reached (Kickstarter: The Flame in the Flood, 2014). Further money was also raised through a timed exclusivity deal with Microsoft. A backer beta was released in late spring 2015 and an early access version in late summer 2015 (Dowling, 2017). The game was released on February 24, 2016 for Microsoft Windows, MacOS and Xbox One. In late 2016, The Molasses Flood partnered with UK publisher Curve Digital to bring the game to PlayStation 4 (The Molasses Flood, 2017b). The PlayStation 4 version was released on January 17, 2017, followed by a Nintendo Switch release on October 12, 2017 (Metacritic: The Flame in the Flood, 2018).

The Molasses Flood was founded in June 2014 in Boston by former Irrational Games game developers and designers, led by designer Forrest Dowling. As of April 14, 2017, The Molasses Flood had five employees. They have run one Kickstarter campaign and released one game – TFitF in 2016 – so far (Dowling, 2017). The Molasses Flood is: “An independent game studio committed to creating games with heart. [...] The Molasses Flood is made up of a team of former AAA developers who decided to take our own path. Our debut title is The Flame in the Flood, an acclaimed survival journey about forging a river with only your dog by your side” (The Molasses Flood, 2017a).

Forrest Dowling is an American game designer. He worked as a designer at Kaos Studios and then at Irrational Games, where he was part of the team that developed BioShock. After Irrational Games closed down, Dowling together with some of his colleagues decided to found The Molasses Flood, where they developed the survival adventure game TFitF. Dowling is designer and president at The Molasses Flood (Dowling, 2017).

4.3. Small-scale projects

Case 6 – Nevermind (Flying Mollusk)

This interview was conducted on March 21, 2017 with Erin Reynolds, creative director, founder, and owner of video game studio Flying Mollusk.

Nevermind is an adventure game developed by studio Flying Mollusk, based in Glendale, California. It was released on September 29, 2015 and as of November 4, 2018 is available for Windows, Mac, Xbox One, HTC Vive and Oculus Rift. The game is described by Flying Mollusk as follows: “Nevermind is a biofeedback-enhanced adventure thriller game that takes you into the dark and twisted world of the subconscious. As you explore surreal labyrinths and solve the puzzles of the mind, Nevermind’s biofeedback algorithm will monitor how scared or stressed you may be feeling moment-to-moment. If you let your fears get the best of you, the game will become harder. If you’re able to calm yourself in the face of terror, the game will be more forgiving. Nevermind strives to create a haunting gameplay experience that also teaches you how to be more aware of your internal responses to stressful situations. If you can learn to control your feelings of anxiety within the disturbing realm of Nevermind, just imagine what you can do when it comes to those inevitable stressful moments in the real world...” (Nevermind, 2018).

The game was first developed as part of a student project in 2012. Reynolds and her team ran two crowdfunding campaigns on Indiegogo. The first campaign ran from March 5 to April 6, 2012 and raised \$1325 from 19 backers, missing its target sum of \$2000. The second campaign ran from October 5 to November 29, 2012, raising \$1161 from 41 backers and thus also missing its target of \$3000 (Indiegogo: Nevermind, 2012; Indiegogo: Nevermind: Round 2, 2012). After the campaigns, Reynolds took a break from working on the game, but eventually was encouraged by family, friends and fans to continue working on the game. Reynolds and the team decided to elevate the game from a student project to a commercial game (Reynolds, 2017). A third campaign on Kickstarter ran from February 5 to March 7, 2014 with tiers from \$5 to \$10,000 and raised \$129,615 from 2466 backers, missing its funding goal of \$250,000 (Kickstarter: Nevermind, 2014a). Through the campaign Intel became aware of the project and formed a financial, technological and creative partnership with Flying Mollusk (Reynolds, 2017). A fourth campaign was set up on Kickstarter with backer tiers ranging from \$5 to \$750 and a funding goal of \$75,000. The goal was reached, raising \$76,525 from 1526 backers between October 8 and November 3, 2014 (Kickstarter: Nevermind, 2014b). An early access version was released on March 31, 2015 and the final version launched on September

29, 2015 (Nevermind Wiki, 2015) for Windows, Mac and Oculus Rift. HTC Vive support (Graham, 2016) and a version for Xbox One (Metacritic: Nevermind, 2017) were added in October 2016 and January 2017 subsequently.

Flying Mollusk is a video game developing studio from Glendale, California. It was founded at the end of the 2013, has published one game (Nevermind) and run two crowdfunding campaigns. As of April 14, 2017, Flying Mollusk has four full-time employees and a few contractors (Reynolds, 2017). The studio describes itself as follows: “Flying Mollusk is an IP and game-focused independent studio built to create engaging, uniquely impactful experiences that leverage emerging technology and leave a lasting impression on those who play them. We craft games that adults want to play while also surreptitiously helping them become the person they want to be” (Flying Mollusk, 2018).

Erin Reynolds is the creative director, founder and owner of video game developing studio Flying Mollusk. She has been working in the game development industry for over ten years in various positions such as developer, publisher and academic. In 2013 she founded Flying Mollusk to develop the then-student project Nevermind into a commercial title (Flying Mollusk, 2018).

Case 7 – Perception (The Deep End Games)

This interview was conducted on April 6, 2017 with Bill Gardner, founder and creative director of video game studio The Deep End Games.

Perception is a survival horror adventure game developed by Boston-based video game developing studio The Deep End Games and published by Feardemic. It was released first on Steam and GOG.com for Microsoft Windows on May 30, 2017, and later that year also for Xbox One and PlayStation 4 (June 6, 2017) and Nintendo Switch (October 31, 2017) (Kickstarter: Perception, 2017b). The Deep End Games describes the game as follows: “Perception is a thriller that tells the story of Cassie, a blind heroine who uses her extraordinary hearing and razor-sharp wits to unravel the mysteries of an abandoned estate that haunts her dreams” (The Deep End Games, 2018a).

Bill Gardner came up with the idea for Perception during a student project in 2015. After prototyping with a few of his friends and former work colleagues, Gardner and his team began to look into viable financing options. As the game was set to be a very narrative-driven game, they felt that Kickstarter would give them the best option to gather fan feedback (Gardner, 2017). The 30-day Kickstarter campaign was launched on May 26, 2015 with a funding goal of \$150,000. The

backer tiers ranged from \$5 to \$5000. On June 25, 2015, the campaign was successfully funded with a total amount of \$168,041 from 4357 backers (Kickstarter: Perception, 2017a). The studio The Deep End Games was founded in June 2015. In February 2016, a partnership with publisher Feardemic was announced in order to bring the game to consoles (Gardner, 2017). The final game was then released for Microsoft Windows in May 30, 2017 and subsequently the same year also for Xbox One, PlayStation 4 and Nintendo Switch (Kickstarter: Perception, 2017b).

The Deep End Games is a Boston-based game developer founded by Bill and Amanda Gardner in June 2015. As of November 2018, it has run one crowdfunding campaign and published one game – Perception. In April 2017, the studio consisted of one full-time employee and several contractors (Gardner, 2017). The Deep End Games describe themselves as follows: “The Deep End Games is an indie video game developer with AAA pedigree. Amanda and Bill Gardner started the studio out of their basement and the couple's debut title Perception garnered several awards, including The Bit Awards' Game of the Year and Boston FIG's Best in Show.” (The Deep End Games, 2018b).

Bill Gardner is the founder and creative director of Boston-based The Deep End Games. Gardner has been in the video game industry for over ten years, working also for now-closed Irrational Games, the studio behind BioShock and a number of other games. During his degree studies in Human Factors and Information Design, Gardner came up with the idea of developing a horror game where one could play as a blind person. He then founded The Deep End Games and, together with his wife and several friends and contractors, developed Perception, which eventually was released in May 30, 2017 (Gardner, 2017).

5. Methodology

This research was conducted as a qualitative case study, focusing on seven different video game developing studios that at the time of the data collection, were either in the latter project stages of developing a crowdfunded video game or had gone through the full process of developing and releasing a crowdfunded video game. In every case, a full crowdfunding campaign had already been run prior to the time the data was collected. Within crowdfunding, there are a multitude of approaches in use. For this study, the composition of influential stakeholders involved in the project development process and the size of the funding goal are the defining variables for the different models examined. As this study is a qualitative case study, Robert K. Yin's seminal work "Case study research: Design and methods" (2014) was used as a guideline for conducting the research. Data collection was carried out through interviews with studio employees. The participants had been purposefully selected, as the employees interviewed were media managers who were at the time of or prior to the data collection, in charge of managing the developmental process of a video game project. The participants were contacted through private messages with a detailed explanation of the purpose of the research and an invitation to a telephone interview. Prior to the interviews, an interview sheet was prepared with a set of open-ended interview questions that were then asked to all of participants during the interviews. Furthermore, additional research on each case was carried out to prepare further case-related questions.

A commonly accepted limitation of qualitative interviews as a data collection tool is the bias of the interviewee – the views on developing a crowdfunded video game presented by the interview partners are filtered through how they were subjectively perceived in their everyday work as a manager on the project. Other stakeholders might experience same situations and processes in different ways. The study author therefore would like to emphasize that this research focuses on how different stakeholders influence the development of a crowdfunded video game from a manager's perspective, as including further perspectives from other involved stakeholders would exceed the scope of this study. Further limitations of qualitative interviews include the setting of data collection in a designated area rather than in natural surroundings; the researcher's presence and the differences in the interviewee's abilities to perceive and articulate situations.

The interviews were conducted between 17 March and 14 April 2017 and lasted between 32:19 and 51:29 minutes. The interview partners were CEOs, presidents, executive producers, founders, creative directors or company owners of seven different video game studios located in Austin, Boston, Los Angeles, Seattle (all USA) and Prague (Czech Republic). The interviews were

conducted via Skype and before the start of the data collection process, the interviewed partners were informed about the interviews being recorded. All interviewed partners agreed on the interviews being recorded, to be quoted with their full name in this study, and for the interview material to be published in this study.

After data collection had been finished, the interviews were transcribed. A qualitative list of codes was created based on the information collected from the participants. Each code consisted of a short description that would trigger the code if found in the interview transcript. This ensured consistency of code as well as comparability across all seven cases. Based on the research questions, the material was then analyzed to answer questions about the ways of influence exerted by stakeholders, the varying interests of stakeholders concerning the game, stakeholder conflicts and strategies of managers to resolve these conflicts, as well as similarities and differences between and anomalies in large-, medium-, and small-scale projects in terms of stakeholder influence.

6. Findings

6.1. Large-scale projects

Case 1 – Crowfall (ArtCraft Entertainment)¹ - Interview with Walton (2017)

Stakeholders with at least a small amount of influence on the game are the manager, the developing team, backers and fans, investors, and the game development industry.²

Considering the importance of the respective stakeholders involved, Walton sees backers as very influential for the funding of the game as a whole. Gordon Walton and his team take the stance that it is their duty to work primarily for the crowdfunding backers. Investors are not seen as influential in the game development. The developing team are the most influential group considering the development of the game, as many of them are players themselves. The game was not primarily developed to target future audiences, hence why the larger gaming community is not defined as influential by Walton.

Game development

The idea for Crowfall was developed by Gordon Walton and his business partner Todd Coleman (CEO and creative director) after realizing that a lot of players were unhappy with the state of the MMO-market. The general premise was to make the game fun, compelling and interesting, finding the sweet spot to hit the gamer's interests. Particularly from a design point of view, Walton and Coleman had clear ideas from the start about how the game should look like, which they communicated to the crowd of backers at the start. They adopted a general stance of not changing too much of their original ideas of how the game should look like, feeling that too much change to what was originally promised would lead to unhappy backers. They did not want to expand the scope of the game, change it dramatically or follow the crowd to other possible directions, but at the same time develop the game mainly for their backers – and to some extent for their investors. The developing team members were carefully selected in order to have a team that has a clear idea of how the game should look like and that would be willing to invest their energy and time into the development of the game.

1 Keywords: Appendices – A1

2 The larger gaming industry, although not defined as a stakeholder by Gordon Walton, did exert a degree of influence on the development. In June 2016, ArtCraft Entertainment announced to work together with publisher Travian Games. However, as the game was still in development during the time of the interview, Walton did not feel back then that the publisher had any form of influence on the game at that stage (Stöffel, 2016).

Walton and Coleman saw the crowdfunding campaign not only as a source of financial aid, but also as a validation mechanism. They were keen on getting in feedback from potential customers prior to actual development. Peers from the MMO-industry were also contacted with the intent of gathering feedback to the studio's ideas. The concept was met with scepticism (“You guys are crazy, this will not work with the customers.”). Walton and the team were then surprised about the overwhelmingly positive feedback gathered through the campaign, which was also a signal for them that they were on the right track.

The Crowfall team received a lot of backer feedback, particularly on the continuous developmental upgrades that were published twice per week and announced in news updates on the Kickstarter page and the official webpage. Walton points out that these updates were primarily done to satisfy the backers' demands for news. While Walton and the team always listened and some of the feedback could add different perspectives on a certain matter, most feedback either emphasized individual taste (“I like/ don't like that.”) or did not fit the game that ArtCraft Entertainment was trying to make. In the latter case, Walton would reply: “Hey, that's a great idea! Too bad, we're not making a game like that! We're not making a game that's right for that idea. That would be a great idea for another game, but not for this game!” Walton sees all feedback as valuable. He feels that listening to the customers in the game business is a necessary thing to do. However, that does not mean that he would always follow the backers' advices. Most of the time, Walton wanted to hear what customers want – and not so much what the customers thought needed to be done to solve the problem. The reason for this is that mostly, customers do not know what actually needs to be done. The team listened to their problems and found the solutions themselves.

Walton emphasizes that because ArtCraft Entertainment knew from the very beginning which kind of audience they wanted to target, they accepted to exclude a large portion of the whole gaming community by willingly not making a game that would please as many gamers as possible. Therefore, Walton says, the larger gaming community did not have any influence on the game development.

Considering the testing, the backers and fans were involved straight from the beginning – the testing phase was not conducted just before the release but was rather going on continuously in cooperation with the backers and fans. An example is the case with the combat system. ArtCraft had planned to work two or three months on the combat system but ended up spending nearly ten months refining and iterating due to valuable backer feedback: “We started with an idea for how we were going to

do our combat. And when we implemented that idea and put it in front of the backers, we found that, you know, it wasn't working. It wasn't working for us and it wasn't working for them. [...] We got a lot of feedback from players about it [...] it threw our schedule way behind, but it was worth it, because we needed to get it where we liked it and they liked it.”

There were around 30 professional investors involved in Crowfall, out of which maybe two cared about the game development, thus having little to no influence on the creative development. The project was set up on purpose to have a larger number of smaller investors rather than one big investor in order to avoid giving one person too much influence on the project.

In addition to the investors there were backers that had pledged \$2500 or more (high-level backers), mostly experienced gamers themselves who liked to give feedback. ArtCraft Entertainment would set up an exclusive chatroom for these backers with direct contact to the developers (and bigger influence on the team) as a reward. Here, the team would gather feedback and questions to then confront all the other backers with these suggestions to get a reaction. These chatrooms therefore had a filter function aiming to bring only the most interesting topics up for general discussion.

Among the team, all matters were discussed on a frequent basis. Todd Coleman, the CEO and creative director usually had the last word. The team would try to figure out the best way to solve an issue regarding the circumstances. As Walton puts it: “If there is an easier way to do it, we may compromise to get something out sooner, or to get it out to where it works faster. So, game development is a very cooperative team sport. It is not just one person typically dictating everything and everybody else just being willing to get it done.” Because of the developers' approach to stick to the original game idea, some backers who tried to influence the direction of the game in their desired direction via feedback ultimately decided to stop following the game's developing process.

The twofold possibilities of how the game could be played – fighting monsters, gathering resources, building fortresses and trading or focusing on PvP (Player versus Player) – was also a source for conflicts, as the game attracted two different kinds of crowds. This led to interest conflicts between the developer and the two backer groups as well as within the backer community. Walton describes that “[...] there is a whole series of people, who totally, you know, don't give a crap about the other half of the game. They just say, ‘Why are you even building that part, I don't care about that part’.” Walton and the developers would be very straightforward about their intentions of building both parts and vocal minorities would not get any decision-making power in the production of the game.

Walton notes that these players would feel like the developers had betrayed them when they were not working on their desired part. However, he acknowledges that this is part of everyday community management: “That is just normal community management, crazy people who we love. You know, we love the crazy people, but they are crazy.” Walton and the team would usually tell them to either accept the direction of the game that the developers had planned to take, or leave: “Hey, that's it, we're making this game and if you don't like this game, fine. You know, if you can find what you want in another game – more power to you. But we're not making a different game just because you're whining.” Walton points out that there were not any other conflicts between stakeholder groups.

Crowdfunding campaign

As noted above, the crowdfunding campaign did not only act as a means for financing the project, but also as validation and feedback mechanism – any forms of scepticism among developing team members about the potential success of the game vanished after the vast success of the campaign. Walton and the team had the campaign's stretch goals already planned prior to campaign launch. These stretch goals were mostly extra components that the developers wanted to add piece by piece, depending on the amount of funds gathered. However, some stretch goals were influenced by stakeholder requests, particularly by the backers and fans. If requests for a certain stretch goal were consistent, Walton and the team included it. However, these stretch goals turned out to be the worst ones. For example, a lot of backers kept asking for including VR-technology. The team included this stretch goal, but in the end, including VR into the game in a way that would make sense was not possible and led to both the developers and the backers and fans being unhappy. The developing team eventually discarded the idea, which did not resonate well with parts of the backer community.

Funding

The game was first funded through own investments and some early angel investors. Then the crowdfunding campaign and the backers made a difference by helping the game financially to take off and get developed. This was reflected by the studio's stance to develop primarily for the backers, as they mainly were the ones who funded the development. During the latter stages additional money was raised through investors and licensing (a license to publish the game exclusively on the European market was sold to a publisher), as well as through individuals buying stock in the company (equity funding). The investors expected the company to be successful and viable and thus used the game as a vehicle for earning money.

Case 2 – BattleTech (Harebrained Schemes)³ - Interview with Weisman (2017)

Stakeholders with at least a small amount of influence on the game are the manager, the developing team, backers and fans, a license owner in form of Microsoft, the larger gaming community, and members of the game development industry. During the time the interview was conducted, investors did not play any role in the game development process. A few months after the interview had been conducted, Harebrained Schemes partnered with publisher Paradox Interactive (Frank, 2017), which eventually acquired Harebrained Schemes in June 2018 (Hall, 2018). As these developments occurred after the interview with Jordan Weisman had been conducted, they are not considered part of this research.

In terms of importance of certain stakeholders on the project process, Weisman singles out the larger gaming community.

Game development

BattleTech became conceived when developing studio Harebrained Schemes managed to secure the rights to produce a turn-based (players take turns during combat mode) game under the license owned by Microsoft. According to Weisman there had not been a turn-based strategy Mech video game in the last 30 years. The idea was to make the classic tabletop version of BattleTech more accessible to the gaming community. The game and its story lines were set in the context of the BattleTech universe, thus making it appealing to fans of the old tabletop game.

In the early stages of development and prior to the crowdfunding campaign, the company worked on visualizations and design conceptualizations for about half a year in order to give the crowdfunding community a first impression about the look of the game.

In terms of stakeholder influence, Weisman and the team viewed the backers as stakeholders that they had promised to satisfy and to achieve their expectations. A lot of fans, particularly those that had been playing the tabletop game for over 30 years had certain imaginations about what the perfect BattleTech video game should include. They would present their ideas and suggestions through forum posts, e-mails, and Facebook. However, it would be the studio to make the decisions in terms of game development: “And we definitely value their input in the design process. But we [...] never let them drive the bus. And we're very clear with that. [...] They want to contribute, but they recognize that, you know, a 30.000-person committee is not the best way to get a piece of

3 Keywords: Appendices – A2

creative work done.” The studio therefore would listen to backer feedback but would not put the backers in a position of making decisions.

Weisman points out that some backers had great ideas and if these ideas seemed feasible to put in the game, the developing team considered doing so. However, they would actively let the backers and fans know that “it's our job to pretend to be the adult.” One example of a backer request was the inclusion of infantry: “It's one that people really want, infantry running around. And we really wanted it too, because it's great for scale and it gives you really small units to deal with. But as we got further in the development, we just realized, we could not add it to this project.” The team in the end wanted to stick to the scope that they had committed to and thus rejected to include the infantry feature.

If backers requested unfeasible features to be included, Harebrained Schemes would communicate this in a clear, respectful and transparent fashion. They would always try: “To be responsible about the scale of the project and not just keep taking more and more on. So, we said ‘No, there is no more’.” In the beginning, Weisman and the team feared that this approach could lead people to stop backing the game. However, this was not the case: “Actually, they responded very positively, being mature about it and for us watching out for the risk of the project. [...] We've always had this kind of relationship with our fans.”

The larger gaming community had major indirect influence on the game development. Producing a game only for the backers would turn out to be financially not viable: “You have to understand that economically, if our game is only sold to the people who back us via crowdfunding, we've lost a huge amount of money. [...] You have to design a game for a larger audience that you believe exists. Of which the crowdfunding audience is a subset. And you have to do that in a way that honours your commitments and what you've said what you're going to do for the crowdfunding audience. But also, making it accessible for the wider audience that is required for being able to just keep all your people in the studio.” Furthermore, members of the game development industry, particularly designers and writers that had been working in the BattleTech universe for a long time, were asked to provide input and guidance in order to being able to live up to the standards of the franchise.

According to Weisman, there were constant debates among backers and fans on the internal forums and on the Kickstarter page. Weisman and the team had made it clear to the fans that they would

follow these debates and listen, but not actively participate: “Once we get involved now, it can get ugly. You know what I mean? It's like mom or dad choosing sides between kids. We don't want to get into that. But we do watch and listen to the debates, because good information gets exchanged and good points get made. And those can influence what we're doing.”

In terms of debate among the developing team, Weisman points out that most of the team members are just as passionate about the game as the backers: “We're all playing BattleTech. They've come to work with me over the years partially because of their attraction and emotional connection to the games I had created in the past.” The environment at Harebrained Schemes is open and collaborative – everyone can comment and participate in discussions. The project managers in the team try to keep these discussions to reasonable periods of time. If a consensus cannot be found, the project managers would have the last word: “[...] we bring it either to a consensus or if we can't get to a consensus, we make a decision. Based on everything we've heard from all of our passionate contributors. Just because, you know, you have got to move along, just for any realities.” Weisman and the other team leads then would expect all developers to act professional, trust the judgement of the leads and accept the final decision.

BattleTech being part of an over 30-year-old franchise had certain advantages and disadvantages, according to Weisman. One advantage was that fans of the franchise already knew the characters and stories that appear in the game. This helped to reduce the risk of the game flopping because of unlikeable characters and/or stories. Weisman believes that for a new franchise, the risks to fail are both high in terms of story/character likeability and game implementation. However, he also points out the pitfalls of having a lot of followers on board, who already have a strong emotional connection to the franchise. These fans have a clear and long-lasting idea of how the BattleTech universe and its mechanisms look like – changing too much in the game would result in these fans becoming frustrated. Developers thus are limited in what they can put into a new game within an existing franchise. Furthermore, they have to deal with high expectations of existing fans which results in higher pressure for developers than with new projects: “I don't have liberty to try to improve it in ways which would upset those memories. And so, it does become this interesting balancing act of finding ways to update without invalidating or creating a negative experience for the fans of the original property.”

Crowdfunding campaign

In preparation of the crowdfunding campaign, the team worked about half a year to get enough

material together that they could show to potential backers. This included design concepts and visualizations; the budgeting and planning the structuration of the campaign (e.g. release timing of different kinds of content, definition of stretch goals, definition of reward tiers and allocation of the budget).

Experiences gained through previous campaigns had a big impact on the BattleTech crowdfunding campaign. Harebrained Schemes had previously run three successful campaigns that had earned them the trust and respect of backers and fans: “If we had not met or exceeded people's expectations on the first three, I don't think, we would have been able to do this one. [...] I think, [it is] partially because of the reputation that we had built over the previous years in crowdfunding for how we treat our audience and how we respect their input and how we deliver for them.” Particularly the experiences gathered from the very successful Shadowrun Returns campaign helped in the preparation of the BattleTech campaign: “The very first one we did for Shadowrun Returns. This one was very much in the infancy of crowdfunding for video games. So, we went into it kind of half-cocked, we nor anybody else [knew], since we were kind of the second big video game to be done. And we learned quickly, that we were needing to make commitments before we really understood. And we went on this crazy wild ride. I mean, we met our funding expectations in the first 24 hours and the money came pouring in [...].” Weisman and his team made new promises on the spot, which would turn out to be a bad decision: “And then the next morning, Mitch and I just were looking at each other going ‘We can't do that. That's just way too big of a project, we don't have the team to do it’.” These experiences helped them to avoid mistakes akin to making too many promises or insufficient preparation for international shipping of the physical backer rewards during the BattleTech campaign.

The stretch goals were defined before the start of the Kickstarter campaign. This included detailed research and budget planning for every single stretch goal: “A stretch goal is a commitment to produce a set of features or content, right? And as such, it needs to be budgeted. You need to know, what is it going to cost you to do that. So, you need to have done a little bit of a design phase and then sat down with the engineering teams, the art teams and design teams and gotten at least some good estimates of what it costs you to execute it.” Soon, the top stretch goals were reached, and backers and fans started to ask for new stretch goals. However, Harebrained Schemes declined to introduce new stretch goals, as they wanted to keep the scope on the originally agreed upon level. The fans reacted to their honest and transparent approach in a positive way and accepted the developer's refusal to include certain features as long as a comprehensible explanation was offered.

Weisman also notes that there are striking differences between running a campaign a few years ago and nowadays. While their Shadowrun Returns-campaign was one of the first crowdfunding campaigns for a big title and thus marketed itself, nowadays a campaign needs a significant marketing effort in order to attract a large crowd prior to the campaign: “That's part of that months of preparation, it's how you are going to market your campaign. There is such a crowded marketplace of campaigns, that you really have to have laid the foundation with existing fans or with people, who you think are likely to become fans of what you're doing. So that when you start your campaign, you have a large audience primed to be there on day one.”

Funding

The game budget was planned in detail during the six month-preparation phase prior to the start of the Kickstarter campaign. The costs of making the game, adding extra features like stretch goals, and producing and shipping rewards were estimated before the campaign kick-off by the team. About \$1 million was invested upfront by the Harebrained Schemes owners to fund the development of a prototype and secure the development of a basic skirmish mode. At the time of the interview, Weisman noted that the funds put in the game development by Harebrained Schemes would exceed the funds collected from backers by far once the game would be finished. So not only was the money collected through the crowdfunding campaign considered to be additional funds, but Weisman also targeted the larger gaming community, rather than solely the backers – mainly for financial reasons: “You have to understand that economically, if our game is only sold to the people who back us via crowdfunding, we've lost a huge amount of money. Because, they already paid for the game. We have invested millions of dollars more in the game. And so, if we only sell it to them, we lose millions of dollars.”

Weisman also compares the crowdfunding environment today to five years ago. Crowdfunding campaigns nowadays have the pressure to reach their funding goals within a few days in order to count as successful campaign. Hence, developers set their funding target at an unrealistically low level to make sure that the goal is reached. However, as broad backer funding often slows down dramatically after the funding target is reached, many developers often end up with too little funds and too many promises made to their fan communities. Weisman gives an example: “So, if your game will cost two million dollars to do, but you know you can't get two million dollars on day one. So, you put it up at, like, 500.000, because you can achieve that on day one, right? Well now, where are you going to get the other million and a half? Let's say you get your 500.000 and then things slow down, and you end up with only 750.000 at the end of the campaign. You're 1.25 million short

for making your game. But yet you've made this commitment to all these people that you're going to give them a game. So, this is a very negative issue. A kind of mental economic environment that's been created in crowdfunding over the recent years. I think that's a very big challenge to crowdfunding overall as an approach.”

Case 3 – Kingdom Come: Deliverance (Warhorse Studios)⁴ - Interview with Klima (2017)

Involved stakeholders include the manager, the developing team, backers and fans, the larger gaming community, an investor, and a publisher. Kickstarter as a platform holder is not defined by Martin Klima as a stakeholder, although he points out that the platform was important as a mechanic for running the crowdfunding campaign.

The most important stakeholders before the campaign started were the developing team and investor Zdenek Bakala, who was the main reason for the developing studio to run a campaign. During and after the campaign, Klima acknowledges the fans and backers as well as future players from the larger gaming community as the most important stakeholders. The publisher Deep Silver was also considered to be an important stakeholder due to their experiences in game publishing and their funds provided.

Game development

KC:D is the brainchild of Daniel Vavra, who founded Warhorse Studios together with Martin Klima to develop the game. He had a clear idea about how the game should look like from the beginning: “When we were founding the company, we already had the idea. Dan Vávra, who is known for his work on Mafia series, he was the lead designer of the original Mafia – he had this idea of an RPG-game that is set in medieval Europe.” One general stance of Vavra was to develop a historically accurate game, completely leaving out elements of fantasy and fiction: “So, we thought from the beginning, this would be the strong point of the game and we actually didn't change this idea at all from the beginning.”

Investor Zdenek Bakala, who came on board at the time of the crowdfunding campaign, did not have any creative influence on the game: “[...] for him it was [...] purely an investment opportunity. [...] he is not particularly interested in the kind of game that we are making. Of course, he trusts us that we don't create a game that would be offensive or somehow, like, make him a bad name. But other than this, he is fairly relaxed about what kind of game we are making.”

4 Keywords: Appendices – A3

Publisher Deep Silver came on board after the crowdfunding campaign had ended. Deep Silver had a very good idea about how the game should look like from the very beginning. They are an experienced publisher from Germany and Klima points out that, although they did not ask to make significant changes in the game, their experience was particularly helpful in the creation of the game: “We get some feedback from their focus groups and from their own testing of the game. And the feedback is very reasonable, and we believe, it actually improves the game. I would be very surprised, if they come with some principle changes, like ‘You have to include that’ or ‘You have to drop this’, because as I say, they know what they are going to be in.”

Warhorse Studios targeted a specific type of player with their game – players who would have an interest in the medieval times and who would appreciate historical accuracy. Warhorse never intended to deliver a game for the broad mass of the larger gaming community: “So, of course, eventually the game will be played by more people and we have to think about them too. And I believe that in most ways, they will be similar to our existing backers, because it is a specific type of game and it attracts a specific kind of gamer. So, these people will be in many ways similar to our backers. If we satisfy our backers, we will be satisfying these gamers as well.” Furthermore, he notes that it is not “possible and even desirable to try to create a game that's for everyone. So, we don't intentionally create a hardcore experience for some really hardcore players. But our vision for the game is a little bit more hardcore or less mainstream than perhaps some other games that are being published today. And at the same time our game is not really an indie game [...] We think, we can appeal to a broad slice of gamers. And we are quite ok with the fact that we won't be able to appeal to everyone.”

According to Klima, the crowdfunding approach bore significant differences to the publisher-approach: “[...] working on this Kickstarter project was interesting, because it really forced us to go public with certain parts of the game much sooner than we otherwise would want to. And [...] also it forced us to spend some time and effort on actually finalizing stuff for the release of this Alpha and Beta versions.” However, Klima points out that this was also a strong point of crowdfunding, as it was the best way to constantly gather feedback. Going on Kickstarter helped them to build an audience, who in turn helped in the development of the game by providing feedback and doing historic research. Klima and the team felt a responsibility to deliver the game for their backers and fans: “[...] we are very grateful to the people, who decided to support us, before they even had a chance to play the game or read a review and who just trust us that we can deliver a good game to them. So, that's really great obligation on our part that these people trusted us. And the first and

foremost need to work to deliver on our promise.”

Warhorse would set up forums to gather this feedback – this would be the place where most of the exchange between the developers, the backers and fans would happen: “We read these forums. I personally read them at least once per week. And then of course, we have dedicated community managers here, that read it every day and reply to the questions and comment on those suggestions.” If there was a decision to be made, Klima and the developing team would often ask the community. But most of the feedback came in once the Alpha and Beta versions were released. The feedback coming after the Alpha and Beta releases caused several minor changes that would influence the overall direction of the game: “[...] there were some specific questions, which we were discussing, like the kind of language we want to use in the game. And there was a lot of feedback on the combat system, which we are using.” Even though one of the cornerstones of KC:D was its realism and historical accuracy, Klima and the team often had to deal with backer requests to include fantastic elements. They would respectfully decline such requests: “So, even if this person that would suggest such a thing, was part of our community, we would very politely suggest that [...] the game we are making is perhaps not the kind of game that he will be happy playing and that's alright with us.” In terms of the game design, a lot of feedback came from the backers and fans. Backers would, for example, point out that a particular shape of a sword had not been in use during the period of time the game was set: “And if this claim comes, we usually investigate it. And we did a lot of additional research based on the feedback from the community. And there were occasions, where we changed the content, so we dropped certain weapons or included more weapons.”

Klima and the team would therefore listen to all feedback – but only think of applying feedback to the game that would fit with their general game idea. As the game was focusing on melee battles, developing a complex and fun, yet realistic combat system was important for the success of the game. The feedback of the fans helped in this case: “So, if somebody suggests that they would like to have some kind of superpowers, then that falls in the first category – like, something that we don't want to do. But if somebody says: ‘Ok, this combat, I understand, what you are doing. You are using the right weapons and you are using right techniques, but it feels clunky and unresponsive, or unintuitive. I don't know, what I'm doing, I don't know, what my opponent is doing. I don't understand, what these strange coloured bars on the screen mean’. That's very valid feedback. And we got some feedback like that. And that really makes us rethink the design and do changes in the system that reflect the feedback from the community.”

According to Klima, feedback from outside was not necessarily treated differently than feedback from within the team. The process of content inclusion based on feedback depended on the nature of the feedback. If feedback was considered valuable, it mostly resulted in minor changes – hardly any feedback caused major changes. Most of the changes were done without the majority of the team even being aware of them. Klima gives an example: “So, somebody points out on our forum that this particular house has some unperiodic features. We would forward it to our internal researcher and she would research it and maybe confirm it. Then she would go back to the concept artists and say ‘Ok, now we made a mistake. We have this wrong shape of a roof [...]’ and they say ‘Ok, yeah, thank you for telling us’ and they will draw a new concept art and then the 3-D artist will fix the model. So, there might be five or six people involved in such a change and the rest of the team will not even notice or will not even know about it. [...] And changes like that, there are hundreds of changes like that every week. And they come from our internal testing as well.”

Klima notes that there were no major conflicts with or between the stakeholders. However, there were significant differences between KC:D's backers and the general gaming community. When speaking about backers and fans, he points out that the backers that were actively involved in the forums, and who liked to give feedback, were more forgiving towards developer decisions as they felt a certain kind of attachment to the game. Klima does not think that other players had that same kind of attachment: “They supported it early, [...] they feel a certain attachment to it and they are to an extent, loyal to the game, which we are really grateful for. So, and it's also a kind of an obligation, we feel that we have to fulfil. And the general players don't have that kind of attachment. So, [...] our backers are a bit more forgiving, because if you like something, you can put up with certain things you wouldn't put up with, if you didn't like it.” However, these fans were also more demanding: “They came to this game for the features that make it unique. That's focus on reality, focus on melee combat, focus on European history. So, they want more of it, they want it to be more historical, more accurate, more focused on combat, this melee combat. And these are good things, I mean, all of these things we have in the game already. So, it's not contrary to what we are doing. But maybe the general gaming public is slightly more mainstream.” For this mainstream public (the larger gaming community), Warhorse had to be more detailed in explaining the historic and sociocultural environment of Middle Age-Central Europe. Typical KC:D backers had already been interested in the Medieval period before the game was created: “[...] they don't need us to explain to them how the feudal world works, who is a knight, and what does it mean to be a knight and things like that. And obviously, it's not necessarily true for a mainstream player. [...] for the sake of the mainstream public, we have to be more detailed. We have to go to greater lengths to explain it.”

Crowdfunding campaign

It was difficult for Warhorse Studios to find a publisher for their prototype, but they eventually persuaded Czech entrepreneur and investor Zdenek Bakala to invest a significant amount of money in the game if Warhorse could prove the gaming community's interest in the game. Therefore, the crowdfunding campaign acted as a validation mechanism for financially strong stakeholders, like the investor.

Doing a crowdfunding campaign forced Warhorse to release certain parts of the game much sooner than they would have done without running a campaign, as they had to give their backers continuous updates on the developing process. The campaign feedback did neither influence the campaign, nor the stretch goals, as the Kickstarter campaign was simply too short to include backer feedback in the set-up of additional stretch goals. However, Warhorse replied to all backer inquiries and had their own communication team, as especially during the campaign, the amount of feedback was very big: “So, we had really four, five people on Kickstarter permanently just replying to questions and inquiries from the backers and would-be backers. So, there was a lot of communication going on. But it was really too fast to get some coherent picture.” Due to the success of the campaign, the originally defined stretch goals were reached very quickly. Warhorse began to improvise, which had a negative impact on the newly defined stretch goals: “[...] our Kickstarter was, fortunately for us, very successful and we ran out of the stretch goals fairly quickly because they were too low. So, then we had to improvise, and we created some new stretch goals basically on the spot. And to be very honest, we will not be able to meet some of these stretch goals exactly because we put so little effort in preparing them.”

In terms of stakeholders, Kickstarter as a platform holder was defined as an important mechanism by Klima to set up and run their crowdfunding campaign. However, Klima does not see the platform as a stakeholder of the game, but rather as a means to success.

Funding

The original idea for Warhorse was to fund the game with the help of a publisher, while investor Zdenek Bakala would fund the creation of a vertical slice. As the search for a publisher was unsuccessful, Warhorse turned to crowdfunding: “Our original idea was to find a publisher for the game, who would be funding the rest of the development and for Mr. Bakala to only fund the creating of a vertical slice. But then we were not able to find a publisher. They were too risk-aware. So, we went to Kickstarter and we were able to [...] run a successful campaign that raised us a

substantial amount of money. And moreover, it persuaded our investor that this is a sound project and that he can fund even more of the development.”

Zdenek Bakala worked together with Warhorse from the very beginning (2011) – however, he was purely interested in the game as an investment opportunity. Therefore, he mostly had an influence funding-wise, once the development of the game was secured. However, Klima points out that Warhorse would not have been created without having an investor on board: “[...] we only founded the company, when we knew we had the investor. Because before the beginning, we knew it would be an expensive project.”

In terms of funding after the Kickstarter campaign, backers and fans continued to have financial influence on the game, as Warhorse continued the crowdfunding campaign on their own webpage. Members of the larger gaming community would buy the Alpha and Beta version bundles. Furthermore, publisher Deep Silver came on board to help with the game development and game publishing.

6.2. Medium-scale projects

Case 4 – Descent (Descendent Studios)⁵ - Interview with Peterson (2017)

Stakeholders that had at least a minor influence on the game are the manager, the developing team, backers and fans, the larger gaming community, the game development industry, a license owner and a platform holder. Descendent Studios started to collaborate with publisher Little Orbit after this interview had been conducted, hence why this stakeholder is not part of this research.

In terms of stakeholder importance, Peterson did not single out any particular stakeholder group that was more important in the development of the game in comparison to the other groups.

Game development

In 2015, several employees of Cloud Imperium Games (the studio behind highly-successful Star Citizen) left the studio at the same time and – under the guidance of Eric Peterson – formed Descendent Studios. The idea for the game was born when these developers analyzed the video game market and concluded that the market lacked games similar to the widely popular 90s video game series called Descent. The plan was to recreate and adapt this first-person space ship shooter for today's audiences and thus also try to revive the genre. However, as Descendent did not have the

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rights to the franchise, they decided to develop a “Descent light” game, named Ships That Fight Underground. Through media coverage and word-of-mouth, Descent license holders became aware of Ships That Fight Underground and, as a result, offered Descendent Studios to develop their game under the Descent license. Descendent started to work on then-named Descent: Underground in May 2015. They developed the multiplayer mode first to properly balance all available ship types in combat. Then the singleplayer campaign followed.

In terms of backer involvement, Descendent tried to include the backers particularly for testing activities. As part of an early access release in October 2015, the multiplayer mode was tested thoroughly with the help of the crowd: “[...] we decided to take the early access road, because, you know, with six people it's really hard to balance the game, so we thought, let's give it to the backers to test.” Peterson points out that not all fans realized that early access does not equal a finished game: “It's a double-edged sword, being on early access, because some people forget that it's early access and expect a completed game.”

Peterson emphasizes that backer feedback is very important to Descendent and, because as they tested and played the game together with the fans, they dealt with backer feedback on a daily basis: “Our game is live, you can play it, we play with them. [...] today, in fact, we have a developer play at 11:30am. So, we play with the fans, we talk to them and say, ‘What do you like, what do you not like?’ [...] everybody has feedback to give and again, we listen to feedback. We don't necessarily always agree.” Peterson notes that although the backer feedback is valuable, he and the developers always kept in mind that the backers often provided feedback based on an incomplete set of information due to not having full access to all information about the game's development at all time: “Well, so have you ever played poker? You have your hand and you're playing against other people and you're guessing what they have. So, you are dealing with incomplete information. You have an understanding a little bit, but you don't really know what's around the table. So, that's like making games. So, everybody's got their poker hand, but they don't know what the developers across the table have been planning for the whole thing. So, they only can see what's in front of them. This is their thing, this is what they want. And you're like ‘Well, but that really doesn't fit into the whole thing’.”

Peterson and the team included feedback that aligned with their game idea. They would listen to the fans, but never let them have a final say in developmental matters. As a game developer, one has to be able to read what the majority of the players want, instead of listening to “loud” individuals.

Peterson furthermore sees a gap in experience between developers and backers: “So, we want the crowd's feedback, but we've been in development for 30 years, 20, 30 years. So, we know what we want. [...] We take their feedback and the bits that help the game, we use. The bits [...] that are more conducive to what they personally want, rather than what the game needs, we toss out. You know, so we listen to people, but we want the final say. [...] the final say still resides with us, with Rob and myself. So, it's not like we're reaching out, saying ‘Hey, what do you guys want to see here?’ At times, we actually do that though, we're saying: ‘Here's what we're doing, what do you guys like about this and what do you dislike?’ So, we do want their feedback.”

Peterson also emphasizes the importance of user-generated content: “We got some fan-created maps. Our biggest thing we want to create, is a big mod-community that creates stuff for our game. We made some changes based on their feedback. [...] There have been changes like our hitbox sizes have gotten a little bigger, based on their suggestions. They changed weapon speeds. These are all balance questions.”

An important part of the backer feedback was provided by a subset of fans called the undergrounders: “[...] they pay a small fee per month to get early builds. They get the earliest stuff, they get maps that are grayboxed, they get the newest weapons, they get all the stuff. More than anybody, they help us balance the game. So, they have more say, so to speak, because they are in earlier.” For these undergrounders, Descendent did livestream design meetings and had set up an advisory board: “[...] we've got an advisory board of people from the community, [...] that have been the more prominent stakeholders. The ones that have come in and helped more than others. It's easy to bitch and complain! But there are certain types of people that will say ‘How about you try this?’ And then they give an example there.” Peterson gives an example: “We have an interface, where one can tune the variety of game types. And one of our users, I think, it was DeathConX, suggested that we do a certain type of interface. [...] And it was like ‘Oh my god, that's much better than what we're doing.’ So, we have literally changed based on his feedback.” A further part of Descendent's community-oriented approach was to choose interns from within the community to work at the studio and help with modelling and creating ships and maps.

In terms of conflicts, Peterson points out that when dealing with unhappy fans, one has to communicate to the fans in a clear fashion: “You have to explain what you're doing. If there is the kind of people that don't like what you're doing, [...] you explain ‘Look, we get that's what you want. But this is the direction, we're going. This is the direction, we have chosen to take’.”

A big potential for conflict was the existing fanbase that had often very different ideas about how the game should look like: “The original game had every ship in the same size, they are basically blocks. They look like blocks, they are eight boxes of blocks, they are very easy to hit. Our game is a modern take, we contend that it's 20 years in the future – people want to be able to hit what they see. So, some of the ships are harder to hit than others. We want you to attack from angles rather than straight on. So, you know, there are a few people, some old school people, who would like to have the original gameplay.” As a compromise, Peterson and the team communicated to these fans that they would keep the ship sizes as they are, but at the same time would release a classic mode where every ship would be the same size. Peterson recognizes that many old-school fans would like the classic Descent for different reasons – some would like it multiplayer, some others puzzle-solving, some just want to destroy boxes. This fractioned fanbase was something that Peterson and the team did not anticipate in the beginning: “When we first started, and this is something, I don't think we really recognized getting, was how fractioned the community itself was. So, when we started, we had some people over here screaming ‘It's got to be this way, that's Descent!’. Other people over here were saying ‘It's got to be this way, that's Descent!’ And they weren't actually agreeing with each other.” There were no direct conflicts between the fractions, albeit different interests. Peterson notes that on one hand, the fanbase of people who would still play the old game was not very big yet was quite vocal at the same time. On the other hand, modern audiences have different standards when it comes to first-person shooters. They expect to see depth in the gameplay, a complex multiplayer mode, leveling up and unlocking extra content – something that the original game did not feature. Therefore, a big task for Peterson and the team was how to appeal to both old-school and modern players.

Peterson notes that if hardcore players would ask for more and more elements of the original game to be included, he would tell them to just play the original game. Him and the team would not let these fans exert too much control over the direction of the game: “[...] there is a really loud, very small group, that wants to have it just like the original So, they are constantly changing the argument a little bit, but it all goes down to, you know, wanting it exactly like the original. And that's fine. And we're trying. Again, classic mode is coming for that, but we are committed to the course we have set out. Finished. So, some things that are said, are valuable and they help us, but some things are just personal opinions that don't really fit into what we're trying to make.” Peterson believes that adopting an honest and transparent approach with backers works best: “So, I always found that if you are honest with people, they may not like the answer, but at least they're going to respect that you're honest with them. [...] It's managing the expectations of people and listening. I'd

tell the biggest thing in crowdfunding you can do, is listening. And people don't mind. They may not be happy that you don't agree with what they want. But as long as you give a reasonable explanation, like 'This is why we are doing it, this is what we've chosen. Thank you for your feedback.' They're fine! They appreciate it."

An example for a backer request not being granted was the inclusion of original maps and ships. Peterson and the team made it clear to the backers, that they were not holding the rights to reuse old maps and ships. Furthermore, *Descent: Underground* would be set before the events of the original *Descent*: "So, they're asking for that and we explained it 'Look, we can't. We're doing a prequel anyway, so, we're telling our story'."

Peterson had been an avid player of the original game himself. He liked the fun and competitive elements of the game and the light story fit the game back then. However, he and the team wanted to create a deep story for the new title and Peterson felt that 90 percent of the players would want to see that from the new game as well. However, he was aware of the hardcore players from the original game and that it would be extremely difficult to please this group. He sees it as a balancing act: "I think, to please a hardcore-player is a very, very difficult thing to do. Because if you try to go straight to hardcore only, you are going to fail. There are not enough hardcore people to make the game worthy of making money so that you can sustain yourself. So, [...] you have to make the game you think is going to be popular for the larger group and then give the subset of the hardcore players something that they're happy with. [...] It's a fine line!"

The decision to go on early access led to further unhappy fans as a lot of players expected to get a finished game when buying the early access version: "Well, early access is interesting, because I don't think, a lot of people that buy early access realize, what early access means. I think, a lot of them expect the full game. So, I think, we've gotten beat up a little bit about not having a singleplayer campaign in yet. But that's because we did the multiplayer first, so that we could balance things out. So, I think, 70 percent of our negative reviews have been 'Where the hell is singleplayer?'" With the expectations of the fans to have a playable and bug-free game to play in early access, Peterson estimates that early access slowed down the development by about 30 percent.

Peterson and the team expected some players to be unhappy, especially, as another game closer to the original *Descent* emerged at the same time as *Descent: Underground*: "So, some of the audience

are going to be like ‘Screw these guys, they're not making Descent!’ You know, and we got some of that. There is a competing product called Overload that original Descent-players made and they're trying to be true to that model of making a nice arena shooter. And that is a nice game, and we're fans of that.” At the end, Peterson and the team accepted that they could not please every player, as they had the modern audience in mind as their primary target group for their game: “So, yeah, at the end of the day, probably some people are not going to like what we're doing. But, you know, the 15-year-olds that are playing Descent for the first time – the modern audience – they are not going to know anything about the original, and they're not going to care. [...] We'll be defining, what Descent is for the next generation.”

Arguing about the game's direction is also a big part of everyday work at Descendent Studios: “Oh, we argue all the time. That's our job. [...] everybody in our company is a little different. You know, there are people that are more hardcore. We have people that are more fun-oriented. I follow the fun side. [...] and honestly, it doesn't mean that I'm right. It's all subjective, you know what I mean? So, I'm making the game that I want to make, you know? [...] So, we argue every single day about what's good and what's bad in the game and we don't always agree. Then I usually make the final call based on the arguments we've had. So, it's a game development process. [...] But at the end of the day, we agree probably 95 percent of the time.”

Crowdfunding campaign

The infrastructure for the crowdfunding campaign was set up during the prototype-development of Ships That Fight Underground. Peterson emphasizes that it is important to bring a previously gathered crowd to a campaign in order to be successful: “While we were working on that, we created the forums, because when you are going to do a crowdfund, you have to bring a crowd to the first time you're on Kickstarter when you want to have success.” When Interplay approached Descendent, they had already a campaign ready for Ships That Fight Underground: “So, we literally had two Kickstarter pages ready to go. One was Ships That Fight Underground and one was Descent: Underground. So, we signed the Descent name the day before we launched our Kickstarter campaign. So, they're the same campaign [...]”

The campaign was set up with the help of people from the gaming industry. Peterson and the team also looked at other campaigns: “All the campaign was done internally, for the most part, with a few friends in the industry. That we would let them view the campaign and make suggestions. [...] We looked at Crowfall and how they were doing theirs and all the lessons I had learned from previous

campaigns. And we knew, where we want to take the game.”

Descendent added stretch goals to the campaign, but they did not hit many of them. Hitting stretch goals was not a priority: “We did stretch goals on Kickstarter, but we didn't hit many of them. So, we just kind of blew those up. [...] it really doesn't work for our game, so to speak. [...] We want to make sure, we can accomplish what we're saying, so we're going to make sure we get the game done first. We've got a whole seven-year plan, mind you. [...] If we did another Kickstarter, say, for a bigger storyline, or more ships, or phase two, then we'd have stretch goals.”

Funding

The funds gathered through the crowdfunding campaign was vital to finance the game development. Peterson and the team relied on these funds and still struggled financially: “We [...] financed through Kickstarter and through my pocket. So, we raised 600.000 dollars on Kickstarter, of which you don't get all of that. You get probably around 500 [thousand], once all the fees and everything else are gone, and then the rest would be financed through early access and myself. [...] and it's tough, because we're a very small team, you know. We are now not making a lot of money here. I haven't paid myself in 14 months, so it's kind of like, we're all bootstrapping.” The developing team was involved financially as shareholders: “[...] the CTO is a shareholder; the chief creative officer is a shareholder. Actually, every single person in my company owns part of it. So, we're all taking some bit of risk.”

Outside investors were not involved at the time the interview was conducted. Peterson and the team would have liked to have investors for the game, as they were all aware that developing a gaming mostly through funds from crowdfunding was a risky task.

Case 5 – The Flame in the Flood (The Molasses Flood)⁶ - Interview with Dowling (2017)

The following groups had an influence as stakeholders on the overall creation of TFitF: the manager, the developing team, backers and fans, the larger gaming community, investors, a publisher and platform holders.

In terms of stakes, Dowling considers the manager and the developing team to be the most important stakeholder for the game, followed by the investors. The backers, while having a creative and financial impact as a group, they have relatively low stakes on an individual level. Members of

6 Keywords: Appendices – A5

the larger gaming community have an even less impact than individual backers, as they pledge a one-time sum of money to play the game but have little (early access buyer) to no (buyer of the finished game) creative impact anymore.

Game development

The game's idea originated from combining interests of Dowling and The Molasses Flood's art director Scott Sinclair. After The Molasses Flood was formed in June 2014, Dowling and Sinclair worked out a concept for TFitF: “I was really interested in working on a survival game and the art director really was interested in working on a game, where you explore, as he put it, tiny worlds. The idea being that you have third person top-down cameras on avatars [...] [and] little spaces, that you can explore. And we combined those two ideas into what became The Flame in the Flood. So, it started out there and then just grew and changed and formed as we started to think about the tone that we wanted to explore.”

Dowling describes the process of game development as fast and natural. The company was founded in June 2014, the Kickstarter campaign launched in September 2014. Dowling and the team just had a few months to create a game concept and a prototype. The game's core ideas were defined during this time and would not change for the rest of the development phase: “[...] we really just had a few months to put it together. And really, the ideas from that point didn't change a whole lot. [...] So, [...] we always kind of had builds that we were making, that were going public in one way or another, almost from the inception of the company. So, we were pretty fast and natural about building stuff and making it work.”

In terms of influence of other stakeholder groups, Dowling notes that investor and platform holder Microsoft mainly wanted the studio to show the game at events and to be released on time. They would never interfere in the creative development of the game: “Microsoft just wanted us to, like, show the game at events and release on time. That's about it. They thought, the game looked cool, they wanted it to be on their platform. [...] they had pretty basic expectations there, but it was not unusual or invasive, or anything like that.”

Working together with the backer community was a pleasant experience for Dowling – the backer-developer connection was uncomplicated and based on mutual respect: “I know some people, who have developed kind of contentious relationships or problems with their backer community. But we never really had any issues. I found our community to be very pleasant, very supportive. I think,

expectations were that we communicated regularly, which we did.” Dowling released a backer update on the game every month: “Just letting people know about progress and I think, people wanted to see the game delivered in a timely fashion. And I think we were able to do that as well. We just didn't really step on a lot of landmines that people tend to step on or have a tendency to step on.”

A few backers were heavily involved in the game. Dowling and the team launched a backer beta for Kickstarter backers, where backers could leave feedback. Furthermore, there was a private Google group for backers, where developers would actively ask for feedback: “We had a private Google group for our backers and there was a lot of feedback and stuff there, and what not. And specifically, we asked for it. Some of it was useful, some of it was not.” Most of the backer feedback dealt with game difficulty and “game feel”: “There were a lot of comments about difficulty and clarity and stuff early on that we worked out. Like, a lot of ‘This doesn't make sense to me’ or ‘This is too hard’ or ‘This doesn't feel good.’ [...]. Feedback that certain aspects of the game were frustrating or not clearly communicated.”

This consistent player feedback resulted in a major UI-overhaul. Furthermore, some features that were added had not been planned to be integrated originally. Due to player feedback, the studio added combat tools, an additional difficulty mode and checkpoints. Overall, Dowling thinks that the player feedback had a big impact on the game.

However, Dowling notes that backers and fans often do not know what they want exactly as they usually do not have the insights and experience of a developer: “[...] the end user will often tell you a solution and what you need to do is ignore the solution that they're telling you, identify the problem that they're trying to solve and then try and find the best solution to that problem. Which isn't to say that people never present a good solution to a problem, but they often don't have the perspective or understanding of what the problems base is even. [...] So there are lots of team meetings, where we look at everybody's feedback and we're like ‘Well, here is what people are saying, here is what we think they mean. How should we solve this?’.”

If backers would be unhappy about something, Dowling would communicate with them in a transparent and honest way: “I try to handle them by being as forthright as I can within the confines of non-disclosure agreements and confidentiality agreements [...]. My strategy is always address things, where they occur. So, if somebody is complaining on Twitter, I'll reply via Twitter. If

somebody is complaining on Steam discussions, I'll reply via that. If somebody e-mails us, I'll reply via that. [...] I've generally found that in communicating with people, whether they're Kickstarter backers or just customers or whomever, if you're just straightforward and honest about things, they at least appreciate the honesty, even if they don't like the answer.”

Within the team, there were arguments about player feedback and content in general, but they always found consensus: “There wasn't really a lot of conflict on the team about that. I mean, there was disagreement, but we generally hit consensus. Part of any creative process is going to be arguing with people about stuff periodically.” There were no conflict situations with any other stakeholder groups concerning game development.

Crowdfunding campaign

Dowling notes that when running a crowdfunding campaign, developers have more freedom than when operating under a traditional developer-publisher model.

The campaign stretch goals were all mapped out from the beginning and reflected the interests of the developing team to make a better game once given more resources. Dowling emphasizes that the stretch goals were honest goals in terms of effort – Dowling and the team had learned from other campaigns that overpromising on stretch goals could pose a risk for the project. However, a lot of backers complained that the stretch goals were boring: “One complaint that we had, that people levered against us during the campaign, was that our stretch goals weren't all that exciting. You know, our first one was German, French and Spanish localization and then the third one was Russian, Portuguese and Polish. The reason for that was, they were honest goals. [...] It wasn't like a lot of stretch goals that you'll see in campaigns, and for another 10.000 dollars you're volunteering to do another 100.000 dollars' worth of work. Which is kind of bananas.”

Dowling points out that many people responded positively to the stretch goals, as they recognized that the studio did not want to overpromise: “I think some people responded positively in that they recognized that. They recognized that a lot of times, stretch goals are kind of created in the mania of the moment of running a Kickstarter, in which you're like ‘Oh God, now I need to do something to get more juice into this campaign and get people excited about it!’ So, then they kind of overpromise in stretch goals.”

Funding

Sources of funding during and after the campaign included funds gathered from the Kickstarter

campaign, a timed exclusivity partnership with platform holder and investor Microsoft, as well as funds from larger investors and a third-party publisher, who helped bring the game to PlayStation 4. The company in the beginning was self-funded. Dowling argues that the investments made by the developing team were high. The team would often work without receiving a pay check in expectancy of reaping the benefits of a finished game once it was released.

In terms of funding conflicts, some backers were unhappy when The Molasses Flood announced an Xbox One release for TFitF. Kickstarter backers who had received a key for the Steam version wanted to get Xbox One keys. However, this was financially not viable for the studio, hence why had to reject these requests: “Maybe one of the biggest issues we had in terms of backer upset, was when we announced that the game was coming to Xbox One. People that had backed the Kickstarter wanted Xbox One keys. [...] Basically, the cost to us for providing Xbox keys is very, very different than the cost of providing Steam keys and it just was not financially viable for us to do that. But you know, that does not really matter to people, they want what they want. So, there was some level of upset there that needed some communication from me to kind of get people on board with. I think, there was a handful of backers that just decided that we're human garbage and checked out at that point. But I think, most people understood.”

Another example was some backers asking for a Linux-version. The studio declined the request and Dowling explained the reasons behind this decision to the backers: “The Linux thing, I just broke down and said ‘This is the percentage of people that are Steam users that use Linux. This is approximately how many units we sold. This is how many we'd think we'd sell, if we added Linux. Here's what that would earn us. And here are our projected costs.’ Essentially, it would cost us tens of thousands of dollars to make a Linux port that would make us hundreds of dollars. So, I just sort of laid out the map and my thinking.”

Dowling compares the crowdfunding model with the traditional developer-publisher model. He points out that the stakes are not as high for the people investing as part of a crowdfunding campaign as for traditional publishers: “So, you get a lot more freedom with crowdfunding. You're going directly to people that are making relatively small contributions. There is a lot of them, but there is not an ownership transfer. [...] When I was talking about stakes, if a company or publisher is spending millions of dollars on a project, they want to see a return on their investment. So, for them, the stakes are very high, whereas most people that back a Kickstarter project don't even read the updates.”

Working solely with a publisher involves an ownership transfer, which means that the publisher will receive a percentage of sales. This is not the case when depending solely on platforms like Kickstarter. However, Dowling also sees advantages in working with a publisher: “[...] a publisher is a partner and an investor. So, say, your budget overruns and you really need more money, you can't go back to Kickstarter and be like ‘Hey, you know, we need some more.’ But you can go to a publisher and make the case, that [...] ‘We need another half million to finish it. You can either just say no and leave the money on the table and write it off as a loss, or you just cough up the extra cash and we can actually get it done and you have the chance of making your money back.’ So, there are opportunities like going back to the publisher, if needed. Also, publishers tend to offer a lot more services. They might handle a lot of things like getting a certification or getting ratings or dealing with handling PR or providing Q&A services and all that sort of stuff.” Dowling points out that crowdfunding projects rarely receive the funds they would genuinely need to complete a game solely based on the funds from a campaign. Publishers, on the other hand, would know how much it costs to develop a game: “And then the other thing too is, that a publisher knows what it costs to make a game and they'll fund the game for what it costs to make a game. Crowdfunding – no project ever gets, what they actually need to make that project, unless people are basically willing to do like we did. Like volunteer their time essentially to make the project happen.”

Dowling feels that the crowdfunding market has groomed backers to have unrealistic funding expectations. He points out that backers rarely see the actual funding effort that needs to be put into a game. This has negative consequences for the developer as well, more often than before they have to deliver what the backers want, instead of having the freedom to make their own game. Dowling thinks that this is also the reason why even high-profile projects receive less and less funds compared to a few years earlier: “If your game costs a million bucks to make and then people look at it on Kickstarter and they're like ‘Oh, this is a hundred-thousand-dollar game’ because that's what they've been trained, you can't get the million. So, asking for that is just a waste of your time. You know, you can get the hundred thousand, but then you need to have some other means of actually funding the thing and making it happen. But people that are Kickstarter-backers don't want to hear that either. They're like ‘Oh, we're doing this, you don't need to deal with a publisher. You can make the game you want to make!’ and so on. But the reality is, you just can't. There is an economic problem with the viability of what one can raise versus what it actually costs to make things and the [gap] there is pretty huge.”

6.3. Small-scale projects

Case 6 – Nevermind (Flying Mollusk)⁷ - Interview with Reynolds (2017)

Stakeholders influencing the development of Nevermind according to Erin Reynolds were the manager, the developing team, the backers and fans, the larger gaming community, an investor, platform holders, family and friends, and external advisors.

In terms of stakeholder importance, Reynolds gives a detailed overview over when which stakeholders became important during the development of Nevermind. In the beginning, Reynolds, the team, and external advisors, as well as platform holders were important stakeholders: “I guess, in the beginning, it started out as my master's thesis in graduate school. So, the stakeholders there were pretty much the academia. So, my thesis advisors, my thesis chair certainly were very influential stakeholders fortunately. [...] As well as the team. I had the privilege of working with a student team and so a lot of them obviously had a lot of influence on the game as well.” After Reynolds put the project several months on ice, Reynolds and the team began to submit the game to festivals, so the festival organizers as platform holders also played a role in influencing the game. Taking part in these festivals was successful, which in turn motivated Reynolds to found Flying Mollusk with the help of the developing team as well as family and friends in mid-2013.

The crowdfunding platforms as platform holders provided the perfect fit for each stage of the game. The first two campaigns at Indiegogo were tailored to small Indie-games, which Nevermind was at that time. The last two campaigns were held on Kickstarter, which provided the infrastructure for funding a commercially more viable title. During that time, the backers and fans and the family and friends helped to motivate Reynolds and the developers to continue, despite failing crowdfunding attempts. The faith of these stakeholders helped Flying Mollusk to keep going. After the first Kickstarter campaign, another stakeholder came on board in the form of investor Intel. Their guidance, input and funds helped take the game to the next level.

Game development

The game started off as a student project. Reynolds then worked together with a student group as well as members of the academia. It went through two Indiegogo-campaigns in its beginnings and after Reynolds and the developing team had taken a break from working on the game, they decided in mid-2013 to make the title commercially available. Flying Mollusk was set up with the help of the developing team as well as family and friends. After the company was founded, the first

⁷ Keywords: Appendices – A6

Kickstarter campaign was launched, which brought in a lot of backers.

The backers were seen by Flying Mollusk as a stakeholder group to whom they wanted to deliver a good game. Throughout the game development, they offered feedback and encouragement, the latter of which was helpful when Reynolds and the developing team started to have doubts about continuing the development after failed campaigns. Backers would often reach out to Flying Mollusk about various features they wanted to see included. Although Reynolds notes that no feedback was prioritized over another and all feedback was helpful, she emphasizes the “crowdsourced research” that was carried out by the backers: “But one thing that was really interesting and helpful was a lot of our backers would send us articles or imagery as inspiration. They were like ‘Hey, I read this interesting thing about nightmares. Here is a really interesting article.’ You know, that was really interesting to kind of get that crowdsourced research [...]” A lot of backer feedback after the launch of Early Access emphasized the puzzle design and difficulty: “There is a lot of puzzles in Nevermind and puzzles are so hard to design, because you need to find that perfect balance of it being challenging but also solvable as well. You don't want it to be too frustrating. And so, we got a lot of really great insight into which puzzles needed better tuning. That they're either too easy or too frustrating. Or areas that didn't make sense. Or how could we clarify the story a bit better? And that feedback came to us through e-mails and tweets. You know, people reaching out to us directly about it.” Further (indirect) feedback came in through Let's Play-videos on YouTube, where people would record themselves play the game.

Most of the other feedback from backers dealt with what technology Nevermind should support. In the latter stages of development – particularly in between the two Kickstarter campaigns -, the backers had a lot of influence on the game development: “From our backers, we learned a lot from that campaign in terms of what people were most interested in. For example, for the first campaign, we had a lot of focus on the content and so we were really saying that our stretch goals [were to have] more levels. And we learned that people were actually more interested in more platforms. People were more interested in bringing the game to VR and Xbox One than they were maybe in having more additional levels.” Backers would actively draw Flying Mollusk's attention to new VR-technology. After receiving this feedback, Reynolds and the team thus switched the prioritization for the further steps in terms of game development. They would focus on bringing the game to more platforms and include more supported VR-technology and sensors, rather than adding more actual game content. This was also due to the partnership with Intel, which financed the development of the basic game from the end of the first campaign onwards.

Reynolds and team would read all feedback and try to respond to every message in a transparent way. Backer feedback was collected in a document. If many backers would give the same or similar feedback to one feature, Reynolds and the developing team would start checking on this feature. If the feedback aligned with Flying Mollusk's interests, the team would implement it. Some backer feedback received by Flying Mollusk was often out of scope: “[...] people would like a new system in the game that we agree would be very cool but would need like another six months of development. We put it in document in case we can do it at some point in time. But, you know, we just say like ‘That's great. Hopefully we will get to it someday, but no promises’.”

Flying Mollusk would regularly keep their backers and fans updated with news. They would also establish so-called Screenshot Thursdays, “where we would put an in-progress screenshot of Nevermind in development, to show folks what was going on and all that behind-the-scenes stuff. And so, we got a lot of feedback like ‘Oh, that looks cool’ or ‘I don't know what's going on there.’ Kind of a real-time feedback on the actual development of the game, which was really helpful.”

Intel's influence helped to take the game to another level. Under Intel's guidance, Flying Mollusk started to use their RealSense-technology. Intel was mainly interested in seeing what Flying Mollusk could do with their technology: “Intel found us through the Kickstarter campaign. They had heard about us because of the Kickstarter. And they reached out to us and said: ‘Hey, we saw that you have this project that uses heart rate and you have this amazing technology that is a camera that can detect heart rate. Do you want to work with us?’.”

In terms of stakeholder conflicts, Reynolds notes that they were lucky not to deal with any conflict situations during game development. However, Reynolds points out that there were two stakeholder groups with different focus points of interest in the game: “We had some stakeholders, like, the thesis advisors for example. They were really involved with the theoretical development of Nevermind. [...] That's very different from the commercial development of Nevermind. [...] But they are not mutually exclusive things. And the people who are more interested in the commercial side also believed in the therapeutic gain and the philosophical side. And the people from the therapeutical and philosophical side also believed in the commercial side. So really, we are very fortunate that a lot of the stakeholders' interests, although they may have different focus, were still mostly in alignment.”

Within the team, there often were disagreements on certain features. Reynolds believes that these discussions were helpful for the game development – it was important for her to have a developing environment where everybody could freely express their thoughts. This kind of “productive conflict” made the game better in the end: “[...] we certainly had our disagreements about our priorities. Like ‘Should we fix this one feature or add this new feature?’ or ‘Is this puzzle too easy or is it too hard?’. We had lots of cases where there are puzzles and like half the team thinks it is way too easy and the other half thinks it is too hard. And I think that was very good.” Because of these disagreements, the team would often test the feature that was up for debate. They would either test internally and see, if the feature worked, or allow the players to do so and thus gather immediate feedback that would influence the decision: “You know, we would either test something. So, especially in the early access days of the game, if we had a conflict, we'd be like ‘Ok, let's just try this in the game, release a patch and see what players think.’ And so, that was very helpful, as we would get immediate feedback whether something worked or not. And then we would decide based on that. We would sometimes just prototype it in the game and test it internally.” If the feature in question could not be tested, Reynolds as the game director would have the final say.

Reynolds also offers thoughts on developing crowdfunded video games in general. She feels that there are more stakeholder conflicts due to the inclusion of publishers: “I guess, this is more of an observation I've had on crowdfunding. Because we did our crowdfunding over three years ago for this game. But nowadays, it's a very different landscape. And I think, there is more conflict of stakeholders, because I see a lot of cases where development studios will partner with a publisher, for example.” Publishers would often present the prospect of future funds, if a campaign could reach a certain amount of funds through crowdfunding, essentially using crowdfunding as a validation mechanism. This would put additional pressure on developing studios to succeed and cater to the interests of a publisher, who may or may not partner with the studio, all depending on the success of the campaign.

Crowdfunding campaign

Flying Mollusk ran a total of four crowdfunding campaigns, out of which only the last one on Kickstarter reached its financial goal. The two first campaigns were held on Indiegogo and had comparatively low financing goals than the two latter campaigns on Kickstarter.

A big influence on the campaigns was exerted by the backers. The encouragement from the backers especially after a failed campaign helped the developers stay motivated to keep going. The backers

furthermore influenced the emphasis of the last Kickstarter campaign. While the first Kickstarter campaign tried to draw new backers to the game by focusing on content, Flying Mollusk soon learned through backer feedback that most backers were actually interested in platform diversity – getting the game on more VR platforms and consoles. Partly this was the reason why Flying Mollusk changed their focal point for the second Kickstarter campaign. According to Reynolds, this change in prioritization was also acceptable to the developers and herself.

The platforms were important mechanisms for the studio during different stages of development. Indiegogo was very helpful in running the two small campaigns from the beginning: “I really liked working with Indiegogo and I liked working with Kickstarter. They are both great platforms. In my experience, Indiegogo is really great for smaller projects. Projects where you don't need a certain amount to get it off the ground. So, when we first ran Nevermind, Indiegogo was perfect because it was a student project. So, really any bit of funding would help. So, Indiegogo's flexibility in terms of not having to reach a goal [in order] to get the funding was a good fit for us back then.”

Kickstarter, as Reynolds notes, was a better fit for running a big campaign. This was the reason for the switch between Indiegogo to Kickstarter: “We went to Kickstarter because when we wanted to take Nevermind from the student project to a commercial project, we knew we needed a minimum of a pretty high amount of money in order to just even attempt to get the project off the ground. Because making a game is very expensive. And so, we knew that even if we got half of our goal, there wouldn't be enough for us to make a game. So, we knew we needed to hit the whole goal, if we were going to do this at all. [...] Kickstarter has just infrastructure and a kind of notoriety, which is also very helpful, when you're trying to run a large-scale campaign. [...] Kickstarter felt better for us at that point of time.”

The first Kickstarter campaign furthermore acted as a marketing tool, as it grabbed investor Intel's attention after missing its financial goal at the end of the campaign. Reynolds now sees the failure of the first Kickstarter campaign in another light: “That was something really important to us and very important to the project. And I think the whole game was better as a whole with Intel's support and guidance than it would have been if the first Kickstarter was funded and we never really met Intel. So, actually, it even went better that way in the end.” Although Intel as an investor did not have any creative influence on the second Kickstarter campaign, they had an indirect influence. The decision to prioritize platform diversity for the second Kickstarter campaign was also partly due to Intel's funds. It therefore became possible for Flying Mollusk to use the second Kickstarter

campaign to add features that Intel would not support financially: “Instead of having to fund the entire project, we just had to find enough funding in the Kickstarter campaign to [...] fund platforms, like, bringing it to Apple or bringing it to Xbox One or Oculus Rift. Things that Intel's technology [...] wasn't related to.”

Funding

In the beginning, Nevermind was financed through two Indiegogo campaigns and out of Reynolds' own pocket. After going to Kickstarter, the major funding sources were Intel and the backers investing in the second Kickstarter campaign: “Crowdfunding was certainly a big part of the funding source for it. But we also had that partnership with Intel and a few other companies that also kind of helped supplement that, so that we could really take Nevermind as far as we wanted to.”

The biggest influence on Nevermind in terms of funding was exerted by investor Intel. After the first failed Kickstarter campaign, Intel partnered with Flying Mollusk and funded major parts of the development of the game. Flying Mollusk then ran a second Kickstarter campaign to add additional features, like bringing the game to more platforms. The first Kickstarter campaign, although while not reaching its funding goal, is regarded by Reynolds as success, as it drew Intel's attention to the game. Intel then invested more funds than what would have been otherwise collected through a successful first Kickstarter campaign.

The backers influenced the game financially through the Indiegogo campaigns, the second Kickstarter campaign and through PayPal donations in between and after the campaigns: “A lot of people wrote us ‘Is there any way we can help?’ You know, a lot of people asked us to start a PayPal donation fund, so that they can still give us money to get off the ground.”

Case 7 – Perception (The Deep End Games)⁸ - Interview with Gardner (2017)

Influential stakeholders were the manager, the developing team, the backers and fans, the larger gaming community, a publisher, the game development industry, platform holders, family and friends, and external advisors.

Gardner defines the developing team and the backers and fans as key stakeholders, who both had to be fully convinced by the game idea in order to dedicate time and money to its development. He

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furthermore notes that the creative and financial influence of publisher Feardemic, as well as the opinions of former colleagues and friends in the game development industry had a major impact on the game. Platform holders like Steam, Sony, and Microsoft had a minor influence.

Game development

Bill Gardner had the idea for Perception in his master's degree class, when he was given the task to think about how to "inject new blood" to a game genre. He started prototyping with previous colleagues from Irrational Games and eventually founded The Deep End Games in June 2015. The first stakeholders apart from Gardner to exert major influence on the game were the developing team: "I think, the first stakeholders that [...] we had to hit were the developers."

From his earlier days at Irrational Games, Gardner had a lot of friends in the game developing industry, who he regularly asked for feedback and advice: "I had a number of people that I've worked with in the past. People, whose opinion I really value. [...] People who are supremely talented and who I really look up to. [...] And there wasn't a whole lot of stake there other than the fact that they wanted to see someone they cared about succeed. You know, pitch the game and they got on board and they became almost like cheerleaders and a source of feedback and moral support and whatever kind of support they could offer." These friends from the gaming industry, as well as the family members would often be a test audience for the pitches: "I think that when you are pitching the game to colleagues and friends and family, that's sort of warming you up for the greater audience and for the gamers."

Publisher Feardemic proved to be a valuable partner for The Deep End Games. Gardner felt that Feardemic – although having developed horror games by themselves before – was very careful in their role as publisher to not exert too much creative influence on game development: "So, they've been really, really good partners. I think that it's always tricky, when you're working on a creative endeavour, you know, obviously, since they're investing in the game, they want to make sure that [...] they have the best chances to success. But they are also new to publishing and new to this sort of partnership and I think that as developers themselves, they understand how valuable it is as a creative, [...] that you love to create your work. So, in this regard, they've been very careful not to overstep. But they've also had a lot of really great feedback." Gardner gives an example of Feardemic's feedback: "We had these sort of horror flashes. Because Cassie is blind, a lot of the things that she is 'seeing' in the world, are entirely inaccurate. On top of that, the house messes with your perception. And so, we have these little flashes that pop in and out as you're walking around. I

was surprised that a number of people found that they kind of felt like bugs. And so, we had to do some [iterations to] those things to make it clear that they weren't." Further feedback from Feardemic included questions about the storyline and about players getting lost too easily. Gardner and the team would react to this feedback by adding additional features: "And so, we added this system we called the sixth sense, which will point you in the direction of where you're supposed to go next. It doesn't show you exactly the path to get there, but at least where you're supposed to be going. And so, this has played a huge role in helping alleviate any pain points [...]."

A major impact on the game was exerted by the backers and fans. Gardner believes in and values user feedback, which crowdfunding allowed him to gather throughout the game development process. Even though he would not always listen to every fan feedback, he would take down every feedback and stay aware of it in case he would be confronted with the same kind of feedback on a more regular basis: "Among the most commonly asked questions from backers and fans was the question about which platforms and consoles would support the game."

From his previous work at Irrational, Gardner knew the problems of fan feedback coming in too late in traditional video game developing. The decision to rely on crowdfunding as a funding mechanism was in large parts due to the possibility of getting crowd feedback from an early stage: "So, [...] then I moved ahead by experience on SWAT 4 and BioShock. A lot of the feedback working on those games came very late in the cycle. About six months or so before you shift, you start doing usability testing and focus testing and getting feedback from people as to how the games are working and the core mechanics and all that. Which is great, but at the same time in a lot of games, that's way too late."

Gardner feels that it is important for backers to know that they get the game they originally had backed. At the same time, they want to feel included in the developing process: "[...] people want to feel that they're getting a product that they backed. But they also want to feel like they're having an impact and have a voice. Which makes perfect sense."

Gardner gives one example of backers having an impact on the game development: "So, one tangible example was, a few days into our Kickstarter, there were quite a few people – both backers and just sort of people who had been viewing our trailer – who were saying 'Hey, the main character talks an awful lot. This is a horror game; horror characters don't talk this much. What the hell is going on?'" As Gardner and the team had roots in developing very story-driven games, they

first were convinced with the amount of the main character's talking. However, seeing this kind of feedback on a regular basis made the developers doubt about this game aspect. They eventually came up with a solution that would work for both proponents and opponents of a talkative main character: “I was like ‘Wait a minute. To change voice-over, to change the lines, doesn't take a whole lot of work’, because we're also getting a lot of really positive feedback, like ‘Oh, I love this character, she's so sassy. Kind of reminds me of Buffy, the Vampire Slayer’ and all that sort of thing. So, we got really a lot of positive feedback and some negative feedback and it occurred to me, like ‘Well, let's empower the user. Let's let people decide, how they want to play the game.’ [...] and so, a couple of weeks into the campaign, we were able to come up with a system that allowed people to choose between two different modes. You could play the game, as we intended, as we wrote it. We called it Chatty Cassie – the main character's name was Cassie - Chatty Cassie or Silent Night mode. And Silent Night mode would essentially make it so that Cassie would only talk for plot-critical sections of the game. And, you know, I created a goofy, little video that said ‘Hey, you know, we heard your feedback and it's important to us and we found an opportunity to improve the game’.” This feature was then tested with backers and fans while presenting it at large-scale gaming events and the fans responded in a very positive fashion. Gardner believes that adding features like these can be very helpful from a marketing perspective, as they give the developer the possibility to make backers and fans feel heard and understood.

The backers and fans would generally not ask for a specific feature to be included but would just give their opinion on new content or trailers. Stemming from these comments, Gardner would then formulate potential aspects for improvement. The team and Gardner would specifically look for consistent reactions, as they were much more valuable than individual's reactions: “Obviously, you have got to be careful with [...] how valuable the data point is and a single opinion is obviously not as valuable as a consistent reaction. So, there were a lot of moments in the stuff that we've released that got very consistent reactions. So, we were trying to react accordingly. So, it really has been a case-by-case thing. Just monitoring very closely, what's working and what's not.” Gardner and his team would have regular play sessions where they would adjust the game according to the feedback gathered: “[...] we would play through the game. We had regular play sessions, where we would go through and we would take very careful notes [...]” On some occasions, Gardner and the team would reject feedback when they felt that it would not suit the overall experience of the game. They would explain their viewpoints in a transparent and understandable fashion.

The platform holders – Steam, Sony, and Microsoft – had an indirect influence on the game:

“Steam, the platform that we're going to release on, and Microsoft and Sony – they obviously need to protect their platforms and make sure that the releasing quality of the product [is fine].” Hence why the team was determined to develop a product that these stakeholder groups would allow to be released on their platforms. Kickstarter was the only platform holder that had direct influence on the game. Before running the campaign, Gardner had met a Kickstarter employee, who helped him get the campaign on track: “I was lucky enough to have met someone who [...] helps broaden the video game section of Kickstarter. So, I went to pitch the game early to him and try to get him familiar with the product. So, we had an ally there.”

The larger gaming community would have a constant indirect influence on the game development. Gardner and the team would continuously monitor (social) media channels to get a general feel about what the larger gaming community wants and expects: “That's something that you're aware of from the very beginning. [...] I think, if you're doing development right, you're constantly going back to, like ‘How are people going to play this? Why are people going to care about this sequence? How does this stack up against their expectations? And what else is in the market? What are the games that people are playing?’ and that sort of thing. And so, it becomes this check and balance system that follows you throughout development. And so, we are constantly monitoring social media.”

Gardner and the team communicated with their backers and fans through social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter and through email – with some of the fans, there was communication on a daily basis. The Deep End Games wanted to include forums originally but lacked the resources. Gardner feels that having extended conversations and the tracking of feedback would have worked out better, if they would have had forums. Although Gardner notes that even though the developers and himself were able to engage with their backers and fans on an adequate level, he also feels that if he could run the campaign again, he would do it differently and find a way to include forums.

In terms of conflicts, Gardner notes that there have not been any major conflicts between stakeholder groups: “The Silent Night mode. I think that was probably the most contentious bits. You know, thankfully it was all very easy. But honestly, generally speaking, the sort of feedback and the interactions we've had, and everything has been fairly consistent. Not everyone agrees on every little thing, of course. But I think, generally speaking, there hasn't been a whole lot of contention at all.” Gardner feels that giving the backers and fans a choice is the best way of dealing with differing

wants and needs: “Generally speaking, in my experience, I found that if you give gamers the choice, they're happy. If you allow people to play the way that they like, that's a big win. I think games are all about choice, right? And so, if you give people the choice, they react positively.” He notes, however, that the situation with the talkative main character made him realize that everyone is reading and experiencing a game differently. For Gardner, developing games in a crowdfunding setting is a balancing act between hanging on to your own vision as developer, but at the same time trying to find compromises in order to make it right for the crowd: “But when you put it in front of the audience like this, especially early on, and you get the immediate reaction from the people, then you're like ‘Oh, ok. Well, I was trying to make a very different game’ and this woke me up to the fact that people are reading it differently. And so how can we adjust accordingly. You always have to hang on to your vision and [...] the intent that you set off to meet and to achieve that vision. But at the same time, you have to look for opportunities to align and bring other people into that vision.”

Crowdfunding campaign

Gardner and his team were influenced by friends from the gaming industry to run a Kickstarter campaign: “I had some friends, who had gone to Kickstarter previously. And I was like “‘This seems like the perfect thing for me.’ So, I pursued that.” As the game was also planned to be narrative-driven, Gardner felt that having backer and fan feedback from the very beginning was a major advantage of crowdfunding.

Members of the game development industry had a major impact on Perception's crowdfunding campaign. Gardner and the team had never run a campaign before. Therefore, they would analyze other campaigns or ask crowdfunding-experienced developers for advice: “But a big driving force here was also looking at other campaigns and, in some cases, talking to other Kickstarter campaigns. You know, reaching out, being like ‘Hey, do you have any tips? What would you have for both rewards but also for stretch goals?’ And we got a really good response. I was really, really impressed with how supportive the community was. If someone did a Kickstarter campaign, generally speaking, they would be happy to spill the beans. To tell you everything you want to know about the do's and don'ts. And so, that was a driving force, sort of getting people's opinion.”

The stretch goals were formulated based on what the studio thought would be best for the audience. They actively sought the feedback from family and friends in this process: “So this was [...] what we thought would be best for the audience. So, a lot of that was based on polling informally friends and family and others and that sort of thing.” Gardner and the team also made sure to not include

too ambitious stretch goals. They had learned from other campaigns that had failed because of overcommitment: “[...] we wanted to make sure that we didn't overcommit with anything. I have seen, you know, a few campaigns that did overpromise. [...] this is our first title out, we want to make sure that this is as good as possible. And so, ultimately, we didn't make those higher tier goals, that would cost a little bit more.”

One example of consistent feedback regarding the campaign was to include physical goods as backer rewards. Members of the game development industry frequently advised him to include physical goods. Gardner at first rejected this advice, but eventually changed his opinion during the campaign when he saw that a lot of people were disappointed about the lack of physical rewards: “One of the most consistent pieces of feedback I got about setting up the campaign was that ‘You have to make sure your campaign has physical goods. People want the swag.’ [...] and I was like ‘Well, we are a small team, we are not asking for a whole lot.’ And having a lot of physical goods, there are fulfilment costs and a lot of extra time and money and all that sort of stuff. So, I ultimately held off. And it was a mistake. Despite all the feedback that I had, I held off and about two weeks into the campaign we were scrambling, and we found a way to add some additional rewards that actually had physical goods and collector's edition and t-shirts and all of that. But I think, we probably lost some sales, we probably lost some supporters. Because we didn't have that right off the bat. So big mistake there. So definitely listen to the feedback.”

Looking back at the campaign, Gardner notes that asking for help and advice and relying on experienced developer's opinions is crucial for developers who are new to crowdfunding: “I was fortunate to have a lot of people I could reach out to. Who either kickstarted their own projects or had developed games and understand marketing and PR. I think, the biggest thing is, you really shouldn't go in alone. You really should rely on as many people as you can.”

Funding

At the beginning, Gardner and the team considered several ways of funding the game development: “[...] a few weeks later, we were like ‘Ok, we absolutely need to make sure that this happens.’ And so, we looked into a bunch of options, and Kickstarter seemed like the most obvious choice. We had looked into crowdfunding in general. But we also looked into the traditional publisher-developer model. We had looked into self-funding.” Crowdfunding turned out to be the best option, as it would provide the studio with backer feedback from the beginning.

There were three main funding sources for Perception: Self-funding from Gardner and the team, the funds gathered through the Kickstarter campaign and the investments of publisher Feardemic. During the campaign, Gardner and the team were looking for further funding options. They eventually found publisher Feardemic, who were willing to fund parts of the game (e.g. bringing it to other platforms), as well as to help with the marketing and publishing of the game: “We were going around to various partners to see, if we could find a way to get some additional funding or some additional help to bring it to consoles. We found Feardemic, the folks behind Layers of Fear, another game that came out a year before us, earlier last year, in February last year. And they were great. They [gave us] support to make it, so that we could come out on Xbox One and PS4.”

7. Discussion

In this section, the results are discussed to answer the previously defined research questions and to see if knowledge from existing literature can be confirmed.

Comparison with literature review results

Several aspects of the business model canvas by Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010) can be applied to the examined cases. In terms of customer segments, this study found that studios would develop not only for backers and fans, but also for the larger gaming community – in two cases, this stakeholder group was the primary target group. Considering the aspect customer relationships, the managers and the developing teams engaged in a variety of forms with different kinds of stakeholders. They would communicate to backers and fans via social media, the campaign page, forums or email (Smith, A. N., 2015), involve them in testing activities (an advantage to traditional funding models commonly used in the examined cases, thus supporting findings of A. N. Smith (2015)) or even let them create game content. High-end backers and investors would often get the privilege of direct communication channels (private message boards to interact directly with the manager and the developing team, feedback sessions). Publishers, members of the game development industry, family and friends, and external advisors would often assume an advisory role. In terms of financial key resources, a variety of money sources, such as gathering funds through crowdfunding, funds from investors and publishers, equity funding and selling stock, money gathered through licencing, self-funding, or donations was found.

Co-creative practices like testing and playing the game together with backers and fans as well as giving fans the opportunity to create game content was common in the examined cases, thus helping the studios to bypass guessing backer and fans wants and needs (Prystupa-Rządca & Starostka, 2015). Although listening to backer feedback generally increased backer satisfaction, changes resulting from backer feedback did not always lead to an increased likelihood of reaching the funding goal (as seen in the case of Crowfall) (Smith, A. N., 2015).

All cases examined can be classified as adopting a reward-based crowdfunding model (Fleming & Sorensen, 2016); giving non-monetary returns to backers and fans in exchange for small monetary pledges. Considering the classification of Haas et al. (2014), the examined projects belong to the hedonistic crowdfunding type, with some cases implementing elements of the for profit-type (equity funding and stock).

As existing research suggests (Belleflamme et al., 2010; Gierczak et al., 2015), crowdfunding is especially helpful for small- and medium-scale projects to get funds in the early stages of development and to provide capital throughout the developmental process. The results of this study support the importance of crowdfunding capital for small- and medium-scale projects.

In the cases examined, the crowd acted as an important source of feedback, enabling studios to react to stakeholder opinions in timely fashion, thus backing the results of previous studies on crowdfunding advantages (Smith, A. N., 2015; Stanko & Henard, 2016; Thies et al., 2016).

Colistra & Duvall (2017) found that intermediary parties like publishers tend to get left out in the crowdfunding process. In the cases examined, however, most studios adopted a hybrid crowdfunding model by partnering with publishers, platform holders or investing companies.

In terms of stakeholder relationships, this study found that in all cases, the relationship between the studio and external stakeholders was mainly characterized by aspects found on the complementary organization-stakeholder fit dimension, where cooperation was fuelled by a defined and shared goal (Bundy et al., 2013) and accompanied by a combination of resources, information, expertise, and feedback (Cummings, 2004). Furthermore, in all cases the organization-stakeholder relationship was characterized by favouring a fairness approach, thus leading to cooperation, trust, and the creation of shared value (Cropanzano et al., 2001; Dyer & Singh, 1998).

Further findings concerning existing literature are included in the discussion below.

Research question #1: How do stakeholder interests influence the development process of crowdfunded video games in differently sized projects...

- (1) ...in terms of game development?
- (2) ...in terms of the crowdfunding campaign?
- (3) ...in terms of the funding?

Research question #2: Which stakeholder groups involved have which interests?

Game development

Manager

Managers shared various means of taking influence and dealing with other stakeholders' ways of influencing the project. All managers either founded or co-founded the developing company and (co-)developed the original game idea. Regular communication with backers and fans through social media, e-mails or in forums in a transparent and honest way was the general way for managers to deal with this stakeholder group on a day-by-day basis, supporting findings of Xu et al.

(2014) and Hobbs et al. (2016) about the importance of ongoing backer-company communication. Most managers would be always open to feedback and would even actively pursue feedback through asking questions on chatrooms and forums, social media posts and news updates or during testing sessions. In the case of Descent, backers and fans would even be able to add own content, adding value to the project as described by Belleflamme et al. (2012). All managers exerted a major influence on the creative game development.

The overall findings suggest that while all managers to a certain extent appreciate backer and fan feedback, managers of large-scale projects would be less likely to give weight to the backers and fans' wants and needs. They would be less likely to include feedback or let any type of external stakeholder influence the creative development of the game – on the other hand, managers of small- and medium-scale projects would sometimes include feedback that would go against the original game idea or change major aspects of the game due to backer feedback. Large-scale title managers would generally also be less fearful of declining backer and fan requests or to get into a conflict with backers and fans – however, only one manager (Peterson: Descent) had major conflicts with backers and fans. Most managers actively tried to set up a cooperative, appreciative atmosphere within the studio. There were also no major problems between managers and developing teams in any of the seven cases. Small- and middle-scale project managers were more likely to appeal to all types of backer and fan groups and to make compromises due to external influence. In terms of decision-making and overall influence on all aspects of the game, managers of small- and medium-scale projects would generally be more involved in various aspects of the game – or, differently put, the larger the project, the more distributed the decision-making processes among top managers on equal level and down to middle managers became. Crowdfunding as a means to influence the game development through feedback, to build an audience, to gather fan-created content, and to use it as a marketing tool was in most cases used by small- and medium-scale project managers.

Lastly, Weisman (BattleTech) pointed out that development under a well-established franchise brings along developmental limitations (e.g. not being able to renounce from the preceding titles in terms of storytelling and design without upsetting the established fanbase). The findings suggest that Peterson (Descent) also suffered from developmental constraints due to the high standards of the vocal minority group of fans of the original titles would apply to Descendent Studio's new title.

Developing Team

In many aspects, the developing teams adopted the same stance as the manager(s) towards external

stakeholders. In all cases, the developing team exerted a major influence on the creative development of the game. While in all large-scale projects the developing team posed to be the primary force in doing the developmental work, in small-scale projects the managers were more involved in these aspects of the game. The developing team would generally back the game idea set by the manager(s) – in some cases (medium- and small-scale projects) they would help to refine or even co-develop the idea with the manager(s). In small- and medium-scale projects, members of the developing team would also follow the manager from a previous employer to the manager's new company. In both small-scale projects, the developing team would help found the company. However, also in large- and medium-scale projects, the developing team had a major impact on the game development planning (BattleTech), and the prototype and game concept creation (TFitF).

In all cases, the developing team would communicate on a regular basis with backers and fans through channels such as e-mail, social media or forums – in two cases (Crowfall, Descent), high-level backers were granted more communication time with the developing team than low-level backers. Most developing teams would communicate in a transparent and honest fashion with backers and fans. In large-, medium- and small-scale projects the developing team would actively ask for backers' feedback, would include them for testing and would feel the need to fulfil backer expectations. They would generally adopt the same stance as the manager(s) in terms of including feedback in the game: features derived from backer feedback would mostly be included if they fit the general game idea. Only in two cases (Perception, TFitF), the developing team would agree to implement features that would go against the original game idea. At Flying Mollusk (Nevermind), they would also generally be more open for considering backer feedback in team-internal discussions, supporting the findings of Roberts (2013, personal communication, cited in: Bertz, 2013).

In terms of decision-making, the developing team would particularly in large-scale games not have any major decision-making power. However, in the case of KC:D, developing team members occasionally were allowed to follow their own judgement in minor decisions. Developing team members would generally always have the chance to influence the game through feedback given during internal meetings and discussions. Martin Klima (KC:D) notes that the developing team shaped the creation of the game content and the decision-making processes in a major way through feedback (although the last word still belonged to the managers). In none of the cases, members of the developing team would behave uncooperatively towards the manager(s) – they would mostly try to find compromises.

Concerning conflict behaviour, the results vary widely. In one case, the relationship between developers and backers and fans would be harmonic throughout the whole development (TFitF), in the other cases, the developing team would avoid conflicts (Perception), not participate in conflicts (BattleTech), not back down in conflict situations (Crowfall) or have a lot of backer-developer conflicts in general (Descent).

Backers and fans

Backers and fans had in all but one case (BattleTech) a major influence on the game development. They all gave a lot of feedback through social media, forum posts, e-mail or during testing sessions, which was always appreciated by the studio. In only one case (BattleTech) the studio did not actively look for getting backer and fan feedback and would not include backers and fans for testing. BattleTech manager Weisman furthermore pointed out that the backers and fans were a secondary stakeholder group for which the game was developed, with the larger gaming community being the primary group. In two large-scale projects (Crowfall, KC:D), the backers and fans were pre-defined as the target audience.

In general, managers of large-scale projects would adopt a firm stance by holding onto the general game idea: changes stemming from backer and fan feedback were only implemented, if they aligned with the original game idea. Backers and fans of small-scale projects would have more power in influencing the game development through feedback, as these managers would sometimes include changes going against the original game idea (Perception, TFitF). In one case (Nevermind), the backers and fans were partly responsible for triggering a (studio-supported) game development re-prioritization. In the cases of Crowfall (combat mode) and TFitF (difficulty), backers and fans had major influence on certain aspects of the game. The findings of A. N. Smith (2015) and Roberts (2013, personal communication, cited in: Bertz, 2013) about fans having a major impact on game development through decision-making influence and testing thus are more applicable for small- and medium-scale projects. They also correlate with findings of Spitzbeck & Hansen (2010) on substantiated stakeholder power as a result of project changes based on stakeholder feedback, stakeholder impact on decision-making processes.

ArtCraft (Crowfall) and Harebrained Schemes (BattleTech) made a promise to the backers and fans to not change the original game idea, while other projects focused on delivering a game that fulfilled the backer and fan wishes. In two cases (Crowfall, Descent), high-level backers were provided with exclusive channels to make communication between developers and these backers

easier and frequent, resulting in more chances for these backers to influence the developing team. Feedback from backers and fans furthermore validated the game development. In the case of Nevermind, the backer and fan feedback was a major motivation for the studio to keep going despite previously failed crowdfunding campaigns, supporting findings about positive backer feedback acting as a motivation boost (Aitamurto, 2011; Gerber & Hui, 2013).

In terms of decision-making processes, especially large-scale projects would not grant backers and fans any decision-making power. However, in two cases (KC:D, Nevermind) the backers and fans were asked for their opinions. Minor game changes because of backer feedback were reached on large-, medium-, and small-scale projects.

Backers and fans particularly of the large-scale projects saw conflicts either with other stakeholders (Descent: Backers and fans vs. the manager and the developing team) or within their own group (Crowfall: Two major fan fractions in conflict). Conflicts between the manager/developing team and backers and fans were mostly won by the former groups. Backers and fans of Nevermind, Perception and TFitF had a very good relationship with other major stakeholder groups (particularly with the manager and the developers). However, in four cases, vocal minorities were actively told to accept the general game direction or leave the project entirely – which some of them did in two cases (Crowfall, Descent). This stakeholder frustration was mentioned by Lehner et al. (2015) as a possible negative implication of crowdfunding. Only in one case (Descent), a vocal minority group was able to influence the studio to implement their requests for game features.

In two cases, an existing fanbase of previous titles exerted influence on the respective game (BattleTech, Descent). While both groups were perceived as more demanding than new fans by the managers, there were significant differences between the relationship of existing fans and studios. Original BattleTech-fans were perceived as more forgiving and accepting to negative studio-responses towards their feedback, while original Descent-fans were very fractioned and had a lot of conflict with the studio, with some vocal minorities leaving the game, and thus confirming the findings of Macht & Weatherston (2014) about the possible negative impact of having a large number of small backer groups with varying interests. Descent-fans were more involved in the game development, as they were asked by the studio to actively create fan content. However, both original fan-groups caused developmental limits for the studios, as they expected from the studio to keep to the narrative and look of the previous games within the franchise.

Larger gaming community

The degree of influence of the larger gaming community on game development varies widely between the cases. However, in most cases, the larger gaming community exerted an indirect influence on the game development, meaning that they did not actively influence the development of the game, but that managers attributed a strong influence on game development to the larger gaming community and adjusted their behaviour accordingly.

While the larger gaming community was indirectly influential on the creative development of BattleTech, Descent, KC:D, and Perception, they played little to no role during the development of Crowfall, Nevermind and TFitF. For BattleTech-manager Weisman and Descent-manager Peterson, the larger gaming community was the primary stakeholder group, for which the game was produced. KC:D-manager Klima also considered the larger gaming community as one of the two major customer groups for his game. On the other hand, Crowfall-manager Walton considered this stakeholder group not to be a target group at all – although Walton also stated that the reason for developing Crowfall partly was the unhappiness of the gaming community with the broken MMO-market, which indicates an indirect influence. In medium- and small-scale projects, Early Access buyers would have an influence on the game development through giving feedback – in the case of Descent, the larger gaming community had a big influence on the development of a single player mode. In the case of Nevermind, members of the larger gaming community were also invited to test the game.

Concerning the wishes of the larger gaming community, Warhorse Studios (KC:D) tried to go greater lengths to appeal to this stakeholder group. The manager and developing team of Perception would always keep the perceived wishes of the larger gaming community in mind during development.

Investors

In terms of game development, investors either had minor direct influence or a major indirect influence. In all cases, the investors had no influence on the actual game content, nor were they interested in having so. In the case of Nevermind, the investor had a major indirect influence on the game development, as he was the major force behind a developmental re-prioritization due to investments.

The large-scale projects with an investor involved had opposing stances on investor involvement. While at ArtCraft (Crowfall) the managers chose to include many investors in order to not give one single large investor too much decision-making power, the management at Warhorse Studios (KC:D) chose to work with Zdenek Bakala as only investor. This single large investor was indirectly very influential, as the partnership with Bakala made it possible for Warhorse to start developing the game in the first place. Gordon Walton (Crowfall) did not perceive the investors as influential on the game development – however, they had the chance to give feedback to the managers and developing team in exclusive chatrooms, which a few of these investors did. In terms of investors involved in medium- and small-scale projects, the investors at TFitF asked the studio to show the game on conferences and release on time, while the investor at Nevermind – Intel – used the partnership to promote and test their VR-technology.

Publishers

In all three cases where a publisher was involved, the publisher managed to take an influential role in the game development. The experienced publisher involved in the large-scale project (KC:D) gave feedback but would not ask for any major game changes. The publisher would understand and back Warhorse Studio's original game idea and also get actively involved in the game testing. The publisher in the medium-scale project (TFitF) did not actually influence the game development but was a major influence in bringing the game to other platforms.

In the small-scale project (Perception) the publisher influenced the game development the most. According to Gardner, the publisher would give a lot of feedback, which was appreciated by the studio and also resulted in game changes. However, the publisher was careful to not to interfere with the creative freedom of the manager and the developing team. Furthermore, this stakeholder had a major influence on the company's marketing efforts and also helped bring the game to other platforms.

In conclusion, all of the publishers tried to not limit the creative freedom of the developers through requests. However, feedback was provided in two of three cases. In that sense, the publisher would mostly adopt a supportive supervisor role when it came to creative development. Other tasks like marketing efforts or launches on various platforms were major areas of influence for all publishers. These findings neither support nor contradict previous findings suggesting that publishers have limited influence on crowdfunding projects due to developers resenting the involvement of powerful and influential publishers (Planells, 2015).

Game development industry

The game development industry was particularly influential for projects that it had a connection to. In the case of BattleTech, (former) designers and writers of the franchise were actively approached by the studio to give their feedback and expertise. Bill Gardner (Perception) received assistance through former work colleagues, which had a major impact on the game development. Both cases support findings suggesting the importance of first-degree networks particularly in the early stages of a project (Ordanini et al., 2011; Kuppuswamy & Bayus, 2013). In the case of Crowfall, Walton actively sought the opinion of the game development industry in the beginning and received mostly negative comments concerning the feasibility of such a project. In the case of Descent, a competing studio developed a game closer to the original Descent-titles, which drew away unhappy fans of Descendent's project.

License owners

In both cases where license owners were involved (BattleTech, Descent), this stakeholder group exerted influence by giving the respective studio the possibility to develop under their license. On one hand, this gave the studios the opportunity to develop a game under the framework that they had desired to, but on the other hand, it put certain developmental limits on the studio in terms of not being able to develop outside of the design and story structures of the franchise.

Platform holders

Game, console, crowdfunding and festival platform holders influenced small- and medium-scale projects, both directly and indirectly. In all cases, they would not exert direct influence on the actual creative development of the game. However, in terms of Perception, game platform holder Steam would apply a quality standard to all games that were waiting to get published on their platform, and thus indirectly influencing the studio in their development. In the case of Nevermind, the studio was encouraged by taking part in festivals (and receiving positive feedback) to continue the development of the game – the festival platform holders thus indirectly influenced the manager and developing team by providing this platform. Microsoft as console platform holder influenced the development of TFitF by asking the studio to release on time and show the game at festivals. While Microsoft prevented TFitF to be published on other platform through an exclusivity deal, Kickstarter in the case of Perception helped studio Deep End Games to run their campaign on their platform.

Family and friends

Only in the case of both small-scale projects (Nevermind, Perception), the stakeholder group family and friends would influence the development of the respective games. In both cases, family and friends provided moral support for the manager and the developing team. In the case of Perception, friends were giving their expertise and feedback on game content, while in the case of Nevermind, neither family nor friends had an impact on the actual creative development. However, Reynolds' (Nevermind) family and friends helped to found Flying Mollusk. These findings again back the importance of first-degree networks early in a project (Ordanini et al., 2011; Kuppuswamy & Bayus, 2013) as well as the findings of Agrawal et al. (2011) about the personal connection to the project founder being a motive for stakeholders to support the project.

External advisors

In both cases, members of the academia posed influential as external advisors on the development of both small-scale projects (Nevermind, Perception). The idea for Perception was triggered by an academic task given to Bill Gardner by his professor during his university studies. In the case of Nevermind, the academia was actively involved especially in the earlier stages of the game. Nevermind started as a student project and fellow students of Reynolds both helped to create the game idea and provided early feedback. They also had a major influence on the theoretical and therapeutical aspects of the game.

Crowdfunding campaign

Manager

In all cases, the manager posed to have a (significant) influence on the crowdfunding campaign. All managers either set up or at least helped setting up their crowdfunding campaigns and define the stretch goals. For all managers, crowdfunding posed as a means to collect funds. Two of the three large-scale projects (Crowfall, KC:D) used the campaign to validate the development of the game. Reynolds (Nevermind) saw the campaign as both helpful in terms of validation and marketing. Gardner defined the feedback mechanism to be an essential aspect of the campaign.

Particularly managers of medium- and small-scale projects would look at other successful campaigns to gather inspiration and tips, while Weisman was the only manager who had already gathered experience and reputation among fans in crowdfunding by successfully running large-scale campaigns prior to the BattleTech-campaign, supporting findings of a proven crowdfunding track record to have a positive influence on the project (Ahlers et al. 2012; Cardon et al., 2009a; 2009b;

Hobbs et al., 2016; Steinberg & DeMaria, 2012). Reynolds ran a total of four campaigns during the development of Nevermind, gathering more and more campaign experience in the process and as a result, switching platforms between the second and third campaign and attracting the attention of Intel. Reynolds and the team thus overcame the potential risks of a failed crowdfunding campaign rendering all previous effort superfluous, as defined by Macht & Weatherston (2014).

Two of three large-scale project managers would explicitly not let backers and fans influence the campaign in any way. Walton (Crowfall), on one hand, would integrate further stretch goals that reflected backer interests, which turned out to be a bad idea, as the stretch goals defined by the fans were in the end not feasible to integrate in the game. The managers at Warhorse (KC:D) set up spontaneous stretch goals independent of backer feedback, which turned out to be a mistake, as the goals were not refined adequately in order to be realistic. Reynolds (Nevermind), on the other hand, had positive experiences with backer and fan feedback, which eventually – in connection with investor involvement – led to a major re-prioritization in terms of campaign focus and stretch goals between the third and fourth campaign, resulting in reaching the financial goal of the fourth campaign. Gardner would formulate stretch goals according to what he thought would be interesting for the crowd, while Dowling defined goals according to his interests. Gardner (Perception) and Dowling (TFitF) were particularly cautious in formulating new stretch goals, as they feared to overcommit and thus bring the campaign at risk of failure. Weisman (BattleTech) would explicitly stick to the scope of stretch goals and declined backer requests to integrate more or different stretch goals.

Descendent (Descent) was the only studio to build up a crowd before the actual campaign had started – a success factor defined by Frydrych et al. (2014).

Gardner's (Perception) main reason for choosing crowdfunding was the possibility of receiving constant feedback from the very beginning. He was influenced by members of the game development industry and family and friends to pursue a crowdfunding campaign and soon afterwards actively started to collect feedback from backers and fans, the game development industry and his family and friends. However, he would sometimes not follow the feedback of experienced members of the game development industry who suggested the inclusion of rewards, which turned out to be a mistake when the campaign was struggling to pledge funds from backers in the beginning. This result confirms researchers' suggestion that backer rewards are important for motivating potential backers to pledge funds and the overall success of a campaign (Balnaves, 2012; Colombo et al., 2015; Kuppuswamy & Bayus, 2013; Steinberg & DeMaria, 2012; Wheat et

al., 2013) and contradict the findings of Colistra & Duvall (2017) who suggest that backer rewards are not a major factor for backers to get involved in a project.

Developing team

In all cases, the developing team posed to be influential on the crowdfunding campaign, although mostly not as influential as the manager. They would always help in setting up the crowdfunding campaign, and in only two cases (BattleTech, Nevermind), they were not involved in the creation of stretch goals. In many regards, they influenced the campaign in the same way as the manager, thus acting as one together with the manager.

Developing teams of medium- and small-scale projects would reach out to other campaigns and family and friends for inspiration and feedback. The developing team of Crowfall would use the campaign as a validation mechanism, the team at Deep End Games (Perception) for feedback. The teams at ArtCraft (Crowfall) and Flying Mollusk (Nevermind) would change campaign aspects due to backer feedback, which resulted in different outcomes: ArtCraft soon regretted the inclusion of backer feedback-related content, while Flying Mollusk completely changed the focus of the campaign because of backer feedback and investor involvement. Meanwhile the developing team of KC:D would mainly change campaign aspects due to manager requests.

Along with manager Jordan Weisman (BattleTech), the team at Harebrained Schemes had already gathered experience and the respect of the gaming community by previously successfully running a crowdfunding campaign. The team at Descendent helped to build up an audience prior to the launch of the campaign.

There were no instances of developers acting against manager interests in campaign-related matters.

Backers and fans

While considered as a major (direct or indirect) influence on small- and large-scale projects' crowdfunding campaigns, backers and fans were seen as having a minor influence on the campaigns by medium-scale projects' managers. The extent and type of backer and fan-influence varied widely between the cases. The backers and fans of KC:D and TFitF were not granted any influence on campaign content. Backers and fans of BattleTech indirectly influenced the preparation of the campaign – the manager had potential wishes from backers and fans in mind when creating prototypes and designs -, while backers and fans of Perception indirectly influenced the preparation of stretch goals for the same reason. By request of the backers and fans of Crowfall, VR-technology

goals were included in the game's campaign, but later discarded due to infeasibility. In the case of KC:D the backers and fans asked for continuous updates on the game in order to keep the fans interested in the campaign. The biggest influence on a campaign had the backers and fans of Nevermind, who managed to uplift a manager and developing team discouraged by campaign failure to set up another campaign. They also were partly responsible for a major re-prioritization of the campaign.

In terms of stretch goals, particularly in large- and medium-scale projects the backers and fans were not granted any influence. In two large-scale projects (Crowfall, KC:D), the backers and fans validated the game through their support of the crowdfunding campaign.

Considering backer and fan happiness with the campaign, there were unhappy fans across all campaign sizes. While the backers and fans of BattleTech were very accepting towards negative answers of Harebrained Schemes particularly because the studio had earned a reputation for running successful campaigns, parts of the backers and fans of Crowfall (VR-stretch goals being discarded), Perception (no physical goods as backer rewards) and TFitF (“boring” stretch goals) disagreed with the studio's agenda in various aspects – and in the case of Perception were successful in changing the studio's mind. However, a large part of the backers and fans of TFitF appreciated the honest approach of the studio to stick to realistic stretch goals.

In the cases of TFitF and Descent, the managers emphasized that backers and fans would often lack crowdfunding knowledge, hence why the managers would often not include the solutions to a campaign-related problem presented by the backers but come up with their own solutions derived from backer feedback. This aligns with findings of Wang et al. (2018) about the risk of inexperienced backers influencing crowdfunding campaigns.

Investors

In two cases (KC:D, Nevermind) where investors had an influence on the crowdfunding campaign, both times they proved to be indirectly very influential. In both cases, they had no influence on actual campaign content.

In the case of KC:D, investor Zdenek Bakala was a major reason why the campaign was created in the first place, as Warhorse Studios wanted to prove to Bakala there was a keen interest in the game among the gaming community. The financial investments promised by Bakala in the case of

campaign success were a major incentive for Warhorse to reach their campaign goals. These findings support research suggesting that running a crowdfunding campaign is a potent tool to measure initial community interest in a project to determine the viability of further investments (Mollick, 2014; The World Bank, 2013; Fleming & Sorensen, 2016). In the case of KC:D, the successful crowdfunding campaign acted as a solid value proposition to the investors (Fleming & Sorensen, 2016).

For Flying Mollusk, the financial involvement of investor Intel meant a certain financial independence from the outcome of the last crowdfunding campaign. Paired with the investor's interest to test and market their VR-technology and the backer interests of bringing the game to new platforms, the campaign underwent a major restructuring. Crowdfunding also acted as a means for bringing attention to the game, as investor Intel only became aware of Nevermind during the third (and largest) campaign, thus backing the findings of Mollick (2014) and Gierczak et al. (2015) about crowdfunding campaigns drawing the attention of potential investors.

The investors thus never directly influenced the actual campaign, but indirectly shaped the campaigns through their interests (including testing potential audience interest, marketing and testing their own technology, interest in a successful investment opportunity) and financial power in a major way.

In the cases of Crowfall and TFitF, the investors had no influence on the campaign.

Game development industry

In terms of influencing the crowdfunding campaign, members of the game development industry were influential on small- and medium-scale projects (Descent, Perception). They did not exert any campaign-related influence on the two large-scale projects, where members of the game development industry were involved.

In both cases (Descent, Perception), the managers appreciated and actively sought the feedback of members of the game development industry. Both Peterson and Gardner would get inspired by and gather information and tips from previously successfully run campaigns.

Platform holders

Crowdfunding platform holders either had indirect influence or minor direct influence on the campaign. Klima (KC:D) and Reynolds (Nevermind) considered the crowdfunding platform to be

an important mechanism for setting up and running the campaign. However, Klima did not see the crowdfunding platform holder as a stakeholder, but just as a means for reaching a goal. For Reynolds, the differing mechanisms of Kickstarter and Indiegogo had different degree of influence during different stages of the game development: While Indiegogo was a better fit during the early developmental stages, Kickstarter offered the better framework for running a larger campaign in the latter stages, thus supporting the findings of Cha (2017) about existing crowdfunding platform infrastructures to be beneficial particularly for smaller projects.

In the case of Perception, Kickstarter representatives helped to set up and run the campaign and thus exerting direct influence on the campaign.

Family and friends

Only in the two small-scale projects, the family and friends exerted influence on the crowdfunding campaign. In both cases, they mainly supported the manager and developing team morally by encouraging them to run (another) crowdfunding campaign. In the case of Perception, Gardner also actively sought their feedback in campaign matters.

Larger gaming community, publishers, license owners, external advisors

In none of the cases these stakeholder groups had any influence on crowdfunding campaigns.

Funding

Manager

In terms of funding, the degree of manager influence varies widely between cases. In all but one case (KC:D) the managers would add their own funds to the project. In the case of Nevermind and TFitF, these funds would only be a minor contribution to the overall funding volume, compared to other funding sources. In the other cases, the manager's funds would have a major impact on the overall funding. In all but two cases (KC:D and Nevermind), the manager would influence the choice of the financing model. In the case of Crowfall, Gordon Walton would be the only manager to influence the in- and exclusion (sic!) of funding sources: Walton would not accept a large and powerful investor as the only big funding source of the project. Meanwhile, Peterson (Descent) would have liked to attract investors to help fund Descent but failed in doing so.

In both medium-scale projects, the manager would stay unpaid for a certain amount of time in order to secure funding for the game.

Weisman (BattleTech) and Dowling (TFitF) were aware of the risks of overcommitting and thus

deliberately set a conservative funding goal. Weisman furthermore helped to plan a development budget. Dowling (TFitF) emphasized the lack of developmental freedom in crowdfunding due to high backer expectations paired with underfunding, thus contradicting the findings of Guillaud et al. (2013) about more freedom in crowdfunding as a result of the absence of a publisher.

In conclusion, we see that managers with their own financial stakes in the project would be also more likely to influence other funding-related aspects of the game; they stay unpaid for a longer period of time if necessary, helping to develop and decide on the funding model or planning the development budget.

Developing team

In four out of seven cases, the developing team influenced the funding of the game.

In the case of Perception, members of the developing team would add their own funds to the project, while in both medium-scale projects, developing team members would stay unpaid for a longer period of time to fund the game. In the case of Descent, all developing team members would furthermore be company shareholders, thus having a larger stake at risk than developing teams in any other case. In the case of Crowfall, some members would buy stock in the company, though on a voluntary basis.

In conclusion, the developing teams of small- and medium-scale projects were more likely to be financially involved in the project (through own funds, company shares or bootstrapping), than in large-scale projects.

Backers and fans

In all cases, the stakeholder group backers and fans were either influential or very influential in the funding aspects of a campaign, which makes them the most influential stakeholder group next to investors and publishers in terms of funding.

In all cases but one (BattleTech), backers and fans were considered by the manager as a or the primary funding source in the project. Only Weisman (BattleTech) considered the backers and fans to be a secondary funding source. In the cases of Crowfall, Descent and Perception, the backers' funds were essential for the funding of the game. In the case of KC:D, the pledges of backers and fans led validated community interest in the game and thus led to investor funds. In this case, it can be argued that the backer and fan-funds were indirectly essential for the funding of the game, as they opened up another major funding source for the studio. In the case of BattleTech, backer funds were considered as an additional money source.

In support of Macht's (2014) findings about post-campaign communication with backers leading to further project success, in some cases (Crowfall, Nevermind) backers and fans continued to fund the games even after the campaigns were over.

Dowling (TFitF) was the only manager who had conflicts over funding aspects with backers and fans, as some backers were unhappy about the decision of the studio not bringing the game to certain platforms and not giving away Xbox One keys for people who had backed a Steam version of the game. In these cases, the backers and fans would lose the argument with the manager.

Larger gaming community

In all cases except Perception, the larger gaming community exerted a degree of influence in funding matters. This stakeholder group typically started to exert influence in the latter stages of the project. Early access buyers and Alpha/Beta version buyers helped to keep up the stream of funds in the cases of Descent, Nevermind, KC:D, and TFitF. BattleTech-manager Weisman even regarded them as the primary source of funding (while being the only manager to perceive backers and fans as a secondary funding source). In the case of Crowfall, some gaming community members bought stock (equity funding).

Investors

Whenever an investor was part of the project (in the cases of Crowfall, KC:D, Nevermind, and TFitF), this stakeholder group would always exert a very high level of financial influence on the respective project, making investors one of the most influential stakeholder groups in terms of funding. While KC:D and Nevermind had one main investor, Crowfall and TFitF dispersed the funding among many small investors.

One or several investors would always act as a major or primary funding source. In the case of the two large-scale projects, the investors were not interested in the actual game content but saw the project purely as an investment opportunity.

In two cases, crowdfunding helped land a partnership with an investor and thus acted as a means to access further funds. While Warhorse Studios used crowdfunding as a way to convince investor Zdenek Bakala, Flying Mollusk's third campaign was the reason Intel became aware of and interested in the project.

In the case of Crowfall, many kinds of investors were involved in the funding of the game. Angel investors who liked the game idea helped to fund the project in the early stages, while investors primarily interested in a viable investment opportunity as well as investors interested in buying stock (equity funding) came in during the latter stages.

Publishers

In terms of funding, publishers were influential in all three cases that they were involved in. In the case of Perception, the publisher was one of the major funding sources. KC:D received significant funds from their publisher in the latter stages of the project. For TFitF, the publisher's funds were crucial in bringing the game to another platform.

Game development industry

In three out of four cases, where members of the game development industry were involved, this stakeholder did not exert any influence on the funding of the respective games, making them mainly influential in game development and campaign aspects. In the case of Crowfall, some members of the game development industry bought stock and thus helped to finance the game in the latter stages.

Platform holders

In three out of the five cases with a platform holder exerting influence, the platform holder would not exert any influence on the funding. However, in both medium-scale projects, platform holders influenced the funding. In the case of TFitF, the console platform holder posed a major funding source, as the studio and the platform holder had agreed on a timed exclusivity deal. In the case of Descent, Peterson pointed out that the crowdfunding platform would charge around 15% from the overall money gathered through crowdfunding as usage fee, thus having a negative impact in terms of funding.

License owners, family and friends, external advisors

In none of the analyzed cases these stakeholder groups had any influence on the funding.

Research question #3: What are the conflicts of interests between the involved stakeholders in the cases examined?

Stakeholder conflicts in the seven cases examined emerged for a variety of reasons. Managers, the

developing team and backers and fans were the stakeholders that were mostly involved in these conflicts.

Reasons for backers and fans to become unhappy included: the content of the original game idea, the studio sticking to it and denying game changes (Crowfall, Descent); game (Crowfall) or campaign (Crowfall, KC:D) content changes motivated through backer feedback being cancelled by the studio; the lack of stretch goals (BattleTech) or “boring” stretch goals (TFitF); lack of transparency, dishonesty in communication and/or a lack of communication; or the lack of physical campaign rewards (Perception).

Conflicts between backer and fan-fractions emerged when a game could be played in different ways and the fractions perceived the studio to develop mainly for the “opposing” fan fraction (Crowfall). In franchises, interests of long-term fans and new fans were a source of conflict; long-term fans expected the studio to base the game design, gameplay and mechanics strictly on the original titles, while new fans expected the game to meet today's standards (Descent). In the case of Descent, hardcore fans would even start to develop a competing product closer to their ideas. Both studios working under a franchise license (BattleTech, Descent) experienced developmental limits because of long-term fans' high expectations.

The Molasses Flood (TFitF) experienced backer and fan unhappiness due to no free access keys for the Xbox-version of the game to backers of the original PC-version. Backers and fans furthermore became unhappy when The Molasses Flood refused to bring the game to certain platforms due to economic infeasibility.

Research question #4: What strategies do managers employ to prevent conflict situations between stakeholder groups? And what strategies do they employ in acute conflict situations?

There are many ways for managers to help keep the risk of a conflict to a minimum.

In almost all of the cases, managers emphasized the importance of transparent, honest and regular communication with stakeholders, especially with backers and fans. In the case of TFitF, Forrest Dowling would always explain to the fans in a rational way, why a certain request was rejected – according to Dowling, backers would respect this approach, even if it meant that they would not get what they want.

Gardner (Perception) would assess feedback based on the consistency of the points in question

being brought up by backers and fans. He would treat consistent feedback, voiced by a large number of people, over a long period of time, in a serious manner potentially resulting in additional content being included in the game. He would mostly reject requests from vocal minorities or individuals. Erin Reynolds (Nevermind) emphasizes that as a manager, one would need to be open to change when a majority of backers and fans would ask for project changes. In the case of Nevermind, backer and fan requests for bringing the game to more VR-platforms were partly the reason for the studio to abandon their initial approach of adding more game content and start to look into further VR-options.

Some managers would minimize the chance of getting involved in a conflict by avoiding potentially risky situations entirely. For example, in the case of BattleTech, Jordan Weisman would not take part in any backer and fan debates at all.

Bill Gardner (Perception) would continuously try to anticipate wants and needs of stakeholder groups as well as potential conflict situations. He would regularly try to view game aspects from a gamer's perspective when developing. He would also observe the gaming market and ongoing discussions and debate within the gaming community to spot upcoming trends. In terms of anticipating conflict, Gardner resolved a potential conflict situation (the main character talking too much) by giving the user a choice to switch between two modes (Chatty Cassie/Silent Night mode), which satisfied both factions.

Preparation was also a method to avoid conflict situations. Weisman (BattleTech) would plan the whole development phase as well as the campaign and the budget needed to deliver the game, while Dowling (TFitF) would be careful not to overcommit on stretch goals and set a conservative funding goal. Both managers would stick to these plans and would communicate them to their backers and fans.

In franchises, managers would face additional risks of conflicts with long-term fans. In the case of BattleTech, Weisman was careful to stay within the design and storytelling limits of the BattleTech universe in order to not upset long-term fans. Descendent Studios (Descent) were perceived to be developing the game too far away from the original Descent-titles, which resulted in many long-term fans becoming frustrated.

Within the studio, managers would try to apply a cooperative atmosphere among the developers.

They would promote a company culture where everyone could give feedback and would thus have the chance to influence the project. Managers would set up regular meetings and if any debates arose, they would try to find common ground and consensus between discussion parties.

If backers were unhappy because a request was rejected due to not being fully compatible with the original game idea, some managers would try to find compromises that were likely to satisfy all stakeholder parties involved (Perception, Descent). Sometimes, managers would give in to backer demands, even if they were not compatible with the original game idea (Perception, TFitF) in order to avoid further conflict. Gardner (Perception) would accept his mistake of not including physical goods as backer rewards in the campaign and changed his approach, which resulted in more backer pledges.

Finally, in two cases (Crowfall, Descent), the managers did not back down within a conflict situation with the backers and fans, which lead to parts of the backers and fans to become frustrated and turn their back on the game.

Research question #5: What are the similarities and differences of the different sizes of the respective projects in terms of stakeholder influence in the project developing process?

Similarities

In the cases examined, stakeholders regularly share certain traits or behaviours that are exhibited in most or all the cases.

Managers would typically be (very) influential stakeholders in terms of game development and campaign involvement. They would always be (co-)founders of the company and always (co-)develop the game idea. Managers would typically be open for feedback and actively pursue feedback from backers and fans. They would regularly communicate with backers, which confirms existing literature on the success factors constant backer communication and reduction of uncertainty (Xu et al., 2014; Hobbs et al., 2016; Cha, 2017). Furthermore, they would include them in game testing and would see them as a stakeholder group that they had made a promise to. Managers were always involved in setting up the campaign and defining the stretch goals. They used the campaign as a funding means. They typically would influence the choice of the financing model and in most cases would add own funds to the project.

Developing teams typically would exert high levels of influence on the game development and the

campaign. Like the managers, they would communicate regularly with backers and fans, would actively pursue their feedback and include them for testing. They would see them as a stakeholder group that they had made a promise to and would include backer and fan feedback if it fit the general game idea. They mostly would have a voice in internal processes to influence the game through feedback, but never had the last word in the decision-making processes. Developing teams would generally cooperate and compromise with managers. They would furthermore typically help to set up the campaign and define stretch goals.

In all cases, backers and fans posed to be (very) influential on the game development and funding. They typically gave a lot of feedback, which was appreciated by the studio. Except in the case of BattleTech, they were involved in game testing and their feedback was actively sought after in all other cases. Studios generally felt obliged to deliver a good game for them. They generally would have a good relationship with the studio (except in the case of Descent, where parts of the backers and fans had conflicts with the manager and the developing team). Except for BattleTech, backers and fans were always considered to be a major or primary funding source.

In terms of game development, the larger gaming community would mostly exert indirect influence. They furthermore typically would influence the funding of the game. Apart from Bill Gardner (Perception), managers typically would consider Early Access-, stock, and/or Alpha/Beta-buyers as a major funding source in the latter stages of the project.

In all the cases where investors were involved, they proved to be very influential on the funding of the project and would be typically seen as one or the major funding source. They would furthermore never exert direct influence on the actual game content. In large-scale projects, investors typically would not be interested in the game content.

In all the cases where publishers were involved, they exerted influence on the game development and the funding of the game. They would typically help to publish the game on other platforms, which means that in most cases, they were a stakeholder group that joined the project in the latter stages of development. In small- and large-scale projects, publishers were interested in the game, would give feedback and participate in game testing, but were also careful not to ask for too many changes or interfere with the creative freedom of the developers. Mostly in the latter stages, publishers provided significant funds and thus were considered a major funding source. However, they exerted no influence on the campaigns in any of the cases examined.

Members of the game development industry would regularly assist the studio with feedback, expertise and moral support. This, however, only occurred if the stakeholder groups had previously been connected to the manager or the franchise (BattleTech: former employees of the franchise, Perception: former work colleagues of the manager).

License owners typically would influence the game development by either selling or granting studios the right to develop under their franchise. In the cases examined, this happened in medium- and large-scale projects. However, they would exert no influence on the campaign or the project funding.

Platform holders, family and friends and external advisors did not share any consistent similarities among the cases examined.

Differences

Small-, medium- and large-scale projects showcased sometimes significant differences between each other in the projects examined.

In large-scale projects, managers would generally always stick to the game idea and would attach less importance to backer feedback than in small-scale projects, in which managers would rather compromise with the fans or even alter the game idea. Managers of large-scale projects were more likely to reject the implementation of stakeholder feedback than managers of medium- and small-scale projects. In smaller projects, managers would generally not go into open conflict with backers and fans, but would rather avoid conflict, compromise with or give in to backers and their requests. This corresponds with the findings of Spitzack & Hansen (2010) about the scope of stakeholder power – the larger the project, the bigger the scope of firm power and the lesser the scope of stakeholder power. Managers of large-scale projects would generally pre-define their target audience, confirming a finding from Osterwalder & Pigneur's (2010) business model canvas about customer segments.

In terms of campaigns, small-scale campaigns were used as marketing tool (supporting the findings of Macht & Weatherston (2014)) or as feedback means, whereas large campaigns would have a validation function. Managers of small- and medium-scale campaigns were more likely to seek help and inspiration from other successful campaigns than their colleagues of large-scale campaigns. Managers of large- and medium-scale projects demonstrated a tendency to initially plan the project

in detail and to set realistic funding goals and a conservative scope of stretch goals, thus support findings about the success factor campaign preparation (Mollick, 2014), including preparing and planning content (BattleTech), bringing an existing crowd to the campaign (Descent, BattleTech) and setting a realistic funding goal (TFitF, BattleTech) (Kraus et al., 2016; Mollick, 2014). In both medium-scale cases, managers would stay unpaid for longer periods of time in order to help finance the game.

Developing teams of small- and medium-scale projects would exert more overall influence on the funding than in large-scale projects. However, the larger the project, the more influential the developing team turned out to be in terms of actual development of game content. On the contrary, the smaller the project was, the more the manager substituted the developing team in terms of content development influence. Developing teams in small- and medium-scale projects was more likely to actively shape the creation of the original game idea and to seek help and inspiration from other successful campaigns than developing teams of large-scale projects. Small-scale developing teams would generally help found the company and would also be more likely to add their own funds to finance the project, while medium- and large-scale project teams were more likely to become shareholders or buy stock in the company. Only in both medium-scale projects, the developing teams would stay unpaid for a longer period to help finance the game.

Generally, the results lead to the conclusion that in small projects, the developing teams were especially important in setting up and maintaining the overall project processes, while in larger projects, the teams generally were the primary force in actual game content creation.

The results of the case examination conclude that backers and fans generally had a bigger impact on the game development of smaller projects than on larger projects. The smaller the project, the more backers and fans would be asked for their feedback, the more the studio would listen to their opinions and implement game changes stemming from this feedback.

In medium- and large-scale projects, backers and fans were more likely to lose a conflict to the manager or developing team members and would also have a smaller chance of pushing (major) game changes through feedback than in small-scale projects. Particularly in large projects the studios differentiated between high-level and low-level backers in terms of direct communication. Because of the sheer number of feedbacks given by backers and fans of large projects, the studios paid more attention to the feedback of a smaller number of high-level backers.

Studios running large-scale projects would generally pre-define the target audience and would validate the creation of the game through campaign interest. Particularly in medium-scale projects, the backers and fans would exert hardly any influence on the campaign, as opposed to backers and fans in large- and small-scale projects, who would directly and indirectly influence the crowdfunding campaign.

In terms of game development, the larger gaming community was considered a major stakeholder mainly by large- and medium-scale project managers. In terms of actual involvement in the game development, direct influence was only to be seen through feedback in the latter project stages. Also, they were actively mentioned to be a target group only by large-scale project managers.

While investors showed varying degrees of influence on the game development, in the case of the crowdfunding campaign, investors either indirectly influenced the campaign or did not exert any influence at all. In large-scale projects, there were two different approaches in terms of investor involvement. While Warhorse Studios (KC:D) had one large investor joining the project, ArtCraft (Crowfall) deliberately chose to work with many small investors. While in large-scale projects, the investors perceived the involvement in the project solely as investment opportunity, investors in small- and medium-scale projects showed further interest (marketing) in the game's possibilities.

There were varying degrees of influence on the game development from members of the game development industry. The game development industry proved to be influential on the campaign in small- and medium-scale projects, while they did not influence the large cases. Only in one case (Crowfall), representatives of the game development industry also influenced the project funding-wise. Only in large-scale projects, the studios actively sought the industry's feedback for developmental aspects, while small- and medium-scale project managers would seek feedback for their campaigns. Managers of small and medium cases would use previously successfully run campaigns by members of the game development industry as a pool of inspiration and information.

Considering platform holder influence, research shows that the larger the project, the less influence platform holders have on the game development. If platform holders influence a project, it is mostly done in an indirect way (pushing the studio to show the game on festivals, releasing on time, applying quality standards to games that are scheduled to launch on their platforms) – the actual game content is never influenced. There is also no influence on medium-scale campaigns and mostly indirect influence on small- and large-scale campaigns. In terms of funding, only medium-

scale project managers perceived platform holders as influential (through timed exclusivity deals (TFitF) or Kickstarter fees (Descent)).

Family and friends exerted influence on both small-scale projects in the areas of game development and crowdfunding campaigns. They would exert direct (feedback, expertise (Perception)) and indirect (moral support, motivation, company setup (Nevermind)) influence on game development and would encourage the managers of both games to run a (second) crowdfunding campaign.

Exclusively small-scale projects were impacted by external advisors. In both cases, they would influence the game development – either in a direct (helping to create the game idea or giving feedback on game aspects) or indirect (the game was created as part of an academic task) way.

Publishers and license owners did not exhibit any striking differences among large-, medium-, and small-scale projects.

8. Conclusion

This study aims to contribute to academic research on crowdfunding, video games and stakeholder relationships by adding new insights and discussing the findings of seven examined cases of crowdfunded video game projects under existing research results.

Limitations and further research

This case study is not intended to examine all variables that have an influence on the development of a crowdfunded video game, as such a study would exceed the resources of this study.

Furthermore, this case study includes the most important and common types of stakeholders identified by both the interviewees and the study author that can have an influence on a crowdfunded video game development process. Future studies on this topic thus might identify further relevant stakeholders that were not included in this case study or include perspectives other than the managers' subjective observations.

Outlook

The crowdfunded video game market being a relatively new phenomenon offers a dynamic, ever-changing environment for future researches. Managers predict a rather negative outlook on the further developments of the crowdfunded video game industry. Reynolds predicts an increase of conflicts with external stakeholders like publishers, who would increasingly put pressure on developing studios by attaching conditions to possible monetary funds (Reynolds, 2017). Dowling (2017) furthermore sees an increase of unrealistic backer expectations about the amount of funds needed to produce a game of a certain quality standard: "There is an economic problem with the viability of what one can raise versus what it actually costs to make things and the [gap] there is pretty huge" (see Dowling, 2017). Paired with the pressure of studios to reach their funding goals within a few days in order to not count as a failed project in the eyes of the backer community and unrealistic promises made by developing companies to match the backer expectations, potential crowdfunders will find an increasingly difficult and competitive market to succeed, "a kind of mental economic environment that's been created in crowdfunding over the recent years. I think that's a very big challenge to crowdfunding overall as an approach" (see Weisman, 2017).

9. Appendices

A1 – Crowfall keywords (based on Walton, 2017)

	Game development	Crowdfunding campaign	Funding
Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Co-founded the company • Developed the game idea • Would always stick to the original game idea • Always open to feedback • Active pursuit for feedback from backers and game development industry (questions, updates, chatrooms) • Would regularly communicate with backers (especially with high-level backers) and fans • Would only implement feedback if it would make sense to him and fit the game idea • Would include backers for testing • Would pre-define the target audience and thus primarily develop for the backers and fans • Did not have the last word in internal decisions • Would not back down in conflict situations (backers) • Would apply a cooperative atmosphere within the developing team (regular meetings and discussions, cooperative decision-making, if possible) • No rigid adherence to developing schedules if the game benefits • In charge of selecting the developing team members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Set up the crowdfunding campaign • Defined the stretch goals prior to the campaign • Used the campaign as a funding means • Used the campaign as a validation mechanism • Would let backers and fans influence aspects of the crowdfunding campaign (further stretch goal requests) • Would discard previously included stretch goals due to insufficiency, even if it meant negative backer reactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Would add own funds to the project (major source) • Influenced the choice of the financing model and the in- and exclusion of financing stakeholders (no single big investor)
Developing team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Primary force in the development of the game • Would understand and back the original game idea as defined by the managers • Would regularly communicate with backers (especially with high-level backers) • Would include backers and fans for testing • Did not have the last word in internal decisions • Would have a voice to influence the development through feedback during meetings and discussions • Would cooperate with managers to find solutions that would work for everybody (compromises) • Would not back down in conflict situations (backers) • Were selected by the managers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Helped to set up the crowdfunding campaign • Helped to define the stretch goals prior to the campaign • Used the campaign as a validation mechanism • Would implement further stretch goals due to backer requests • Would discard previously included stretch goals due to insufficiency, even if it meant negative backer reactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor influence • Some members of the developing team would buy stock in the company
Backers and fans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Primary stakeholder group for which the game was developed • Gave a lot of feedback • Their feedback was appreciated by the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Influenced the inclusion of certain campaign stretch goals through feedback (VR-technology, which turned out to be not working and thus was discarded) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Seen by the manager as primary source of funding • Backers' pledges were essential in the funding of the game

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> developing company Their feedback was actively sought after by the developing company Their feedback was only included, if it aligned with the managers' game ideas Were actively involved in game testing Were not granted any decision-making power over creative matters Were given a promise by the developing company to stick to the original game idea Regular conflicts between two major fan factions High-level backers would have the chance to communicate with the developers more often than regular backers (access to exclusive chatrooms) Vocal minorities were told to either accept the game direction or leave Would lose out to managers/developing team in conflict situations Had a major influence on certain parts of content (combat mode) Some backers became frustrated and left due to being denied game changes or content originally changed because of their feedback being discarded Were pre-defined as target audience by the studio Validated the game through positive reactions towards the campaign News updates were released due to backer demand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Validated the game through positive reactions towards the campaign Some backers became frustrated due to content based on their feedback being discarded (VR-technology) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Backers buying stock (equity funding) helped to finance the development in the latter stages
Larger gaming community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indirect minor influence Not seen by the managers as target group Partly the reason why the managers developed the game idea (broken MMO-market) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor influence Individuals buying stock (equity funding) helped to keep up the stream of funds in latter stages
Investors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor influence The majority of investors was not interested in the game content Deliberate manager choice to include many investors to not give a small number of investors too much impact on the game Not seen by the managers as influential on game development Investors would have the chance to communicate with the developers more often than regular backers (access to exclusive chatrooms) A few investors gave feedback on game content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very influential Several large investors as one of the major funding sources Saw the game purely as investment opportunity Secondary stakeholder group for which the game was developed Funding of angel investors in the earlier stages of development Funding of investors in the latter stages of development Individuals buying stock (equity funding) helped to finance the development in the latter stages
Game development industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor influence Their feedback was actively sought after by the developing company Were sceptic about the game becoming a success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor influence Individuals buying stock (equity funding) helped to keep up the stream of funds in the latter stages

A2 – BattleTech keywords (based on Weisman, 2017)

	Game development	Crowdfunding campaign	Funding
Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Co-founded the company • Developed the game idea • Creator of the original game and franchise • Would always stick to the original game idea • Always open to feedback • Would communicate with backer and fans about certain topics (explaining decisions and decision-making processes) (Facebook, Forum Posts, Email) • Would only implement feedback if it would make sense to him and fit the game idea • Would see backers and fans as a group of people they had made a promise to/tried to fulfil backer expectations • Transparent and honest in backer/fan-manager-communication • Would never give backers and fans any control or decision-making power over/in the development process • Would pre-define the target audience and thus primarily develop for the larger gaming community • Had the last word in internal decisions • Would apply a cooperative atmosphere within the developing team (regular meetings and discussions, cooperative decision-making, if possible) • Would be constrained by developmental limits an established franchise brings along • Would keep control over the development process • Would expect professional behaviour from the developing team in decision-making processes • Would not actively participate in backer and fan debates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Helped to set up the crowdfunding campaign • Defined the stretch goals prior to the campaign • Used the campaign as a funding means • Had experience gathered through former crowdfunding campaigns • Would not let backers and fans influence aspects of the crowdfunding campaign (further stretch goal requests) • Had built a good reputation among fans for his crowdfunding campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Would add own funds to the project (major source) • Influenced the choice of the financing model • Was aware of the importance and influenced the setting of a rational funding goal • Helped to carefully plan the game development budget
Developing team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Primary force in the development of the game • Helped to plan the whole game development • Always open to feedback • Would regularly communicate with backers and fans (email, Facebook and forum posts) • Would see backers and fans as a group of people they had made a promise to/Tried to fulfil backer expectations • Would change game aspects due to backer feedback, if it fits the general game idea • Would not give backers and fans any control over the development process • Did not have the last word in internal decisions • Would have a voice to influence the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Helped to plan and set up the crowdfunding campaign • Had built a good reputation among fans for their crowdfunding campaigns • Had experience gathered through former crowdfunding campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> development through feedback during meetings and discussions • Would cooperate with managers to find solutions that would work for everybody (compromises) • Would not actively participate in backer and fan debates • Transparent and honest in backer/fan-developer-communication • Would be constrained by developmental limits an established franchise brings along 		
Backers and fans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Secondary stakeholder group for which the game was developed • Gave a lot of feedback (email, forum posts, Facebook) • Their feedback was appreciated by the developing company • Their feedback was only included, if it aligned with the managers' and developing team's game ideas • Were not granted any decision-making power over creative matters • Were given a promise by the developing company to stick to the original game idea • Would constantly debate about game aspects among each other • Appreciated the transparent and honest communication with the studio • Expected transparency and rational explanations for decisions made by the studio • Long-term fans of the franchise would have higher-than-average expectations towards the game • Would accept it if their wishes were rejected • Long-term fans' expectations would put developmental limits on the studio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Indirectly influenced the preparation of the campaign (showcase material, prototypes, designs) • Did not influence the stretch goals • Would accept it if their wishes were rejected • Would ask for more stretch goals to be included • Studio had a good reputation among backers and fans for having run successful campaigns in the past 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Seen by the manager as secondary source of funding • Backers' pledges were considered as being additional in the funding of the game
Larger gaming community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indirectly very influential • Primary stakeholder group for which the game was developed • Seen by the manager as main target group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Seen by the manager as primary source of funding in the latter stages
License owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Sold a franchise license to the studio to develop under their license 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence
Game development industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Their feedback was actively sought after by the developing company • Long-term designers and writers of the franchise would regularly assist manager through feedback, expertise and moral support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence

A3 – Kingdom Come: Deliverance keywords (based on Klima, 2017)

	Game development	Crowdfunding campaign	Funding
Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Co-founded the company • Co-developed the game idea (with other managers) • Particularly influential before the campaign • Would always stick to the original game idea • Always open to feedback • Thinks that backer feedback is valuable • Active pursuit for feedback from backers (questions, chatrooms, forums, testing) • Would regularly communicate with backers and fans • Would only implement feedback (backers) if it would make sense to him and fit the game idea • Would see backers and fans as a group of people they had made a promise to/ tried to fulfil backer expectations • Transparent and honest in backer/fan-manager-communication • Would include backers and fans for testing and playing the game • Would ask backers and fans in decision-making processes, but would mostly not give backer and fans any control or decision-making power over/in the development process • Would pre-define the target audience and thus primarily develop for the backers and fans and the larger gaming community • Would not treat internal feedback differently to external feedback • Conscious about not being able to please every type of gamer • Tried to appeal to a certain extent to both backers and fans and parts of the larger gaming community • Changed certain parts of the developing schedule because of crowdfunding • Chose crowdfunding partly due to constant feedback acquisition from the very beginning and for building an audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Helped to set up the crowdfunding campaign • Helped to define the stretch goals prior to the campaign • Used the campaign as a funding means • Used the campaign as a validation means • Would not let backers and fans influence the crowdfunding campaign • Helped to set up new, spontaneous stretch goals (which had a negative impact, as they were not thought through) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor influence • Helped to find and convince the investor
Developing team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Primary force in the development of the game • Would understand and back the original game idea as defined by the managers • Shaped the game in a major way through feedback within the confines of the original game idea • Active pursuit for feedback from backers (questions, chatrooms, forums, testing) • Would regularly communicate with backers • Would see backers and fans as a group of people they had made a promise to/Tried to fulfil backer expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Helped to set up the crowdfunding campaign • Helped to define the stretch goals prior to the campaign and helped to set up new, spontaneous stretch goals (which had a negative impact, as they were not thought through) • Would not change campaign aspects due to backer requests (mainly due to manager decisions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would include backers and fans for testing and playing the game • Would change game aspects due to backer feedback, if it fits the general game idea • Would sometimes ask backers and fans in decision-making processes • Did have occasionally the last word in minor decisions • Would have a voice to influence the development through feedback during internal meetings and discussions • Would cooperate with managers to find solutions that would work for everybody (compromises) • Conscious about not being able to please every type of gamer • Transparent and honest in backer/fan-developer-communication • Chose crowdfunding partly due to constant feedback acquisition from the very beginning and for building an audience • Particularly influential before the campaign • Would have parts of team who exclusively talk to fans (community managers) • Changed certain parts of the developing schedule because of crowdfunding 		
<p>Backers and fans</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • One of two stakeholder groups for which the game was developed • Gave a lot of feedback (forums, during testing) • Their feedback was appreciated by the developing company • Their feedback was actively sought after by the developing company • Their feedback was only included, if it aligned with the manager's and developing team's game ideas • Were actively involved in game testing • Were not granted decision-making power over creative matters, but would sometimes be asked for their opinion in decision-making processes • Would often cause minor game changes through feedback • Studio felt an obligation to fulfil their wishes • Vocal minorities (fans who wanted fantasy aspects to be included) were told to either accept the game direction or leave • Their feedback was equal to internal feedback • Were pre-defined as target audience by the studio • Typically more loyal and forgiving than members of the larger gaming community, but more demanding • Particularly influential during and after the campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indirectly influential • Did not/Were not granted influence (on) the campaign content • Did not influence the stretch goals, but indirectly influenced the setup of new stretch goals • Validated the game through funds and positive reactions towards the campaign • Studio was forced to release continuous stream of news in order to keep backers and fans interested to the campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Seen by the manager as one of the major funding sources • Backers' pledges posed as validation mechanism • Backers pledges led to further investments by other stakeholders

Larger gaming community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mostly indirectly influential • One of the two stakeholder groups for which the game was developed • Only parts of this group were targeted by the studio • Studio would go to greater lengths to make this game more appealing to this stakeholder group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Alpha/Beta version buyers helped to keep up the stream of funds in latter stages
Investors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indirectly very influential • No influence on actual game content • The investor was not interested in the game content • Single investor • The partnership with the investor was the reason why it was possible to start game development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indirectly very influential • No direct influence on the actual campaign content • Was a major reason, why the campaign was launched • Validated the game through the successful campaign • Financial investor promises were major incentive for studio to concentrate on running a successful campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Major funding source at the beginning and after the campaign • Saw the game purely as investment opportunity • Particularly influential before the campaign
Publishers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Gave feedback • Asked for no major changes • Experienced publisher • Would understand and back the original game idea as defined by the managers • Were actively involved in game testing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Provided significant funds to publish the game in latter stages
Platform holders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indirectly influential (crowdfunding platform) • Important mechanism to set up and run the campaign (crowdfunding platform) • Not seen by the manager as stakeholder (crowdfunding platform) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence

A4 – Descent keywords (based on Peterson, 2017)

	Game development	Crowdfunding campaign	Funding
Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Founded the company • Co-developed the game idea (with developing team) • Fan of the franchise • Always open to feedback • Thinks that backer feedback is valuable • Active pursuit for feedback from backers (questions, chatrooms) • Would regularly communicate with backers (especially with high-level backers) and fans • Would only implement feedback (backers) if it would make sense to him and fit the game idea • Transparent and honest in backer/fan-manager-communication • Would include backers for testing and playing the game together • Would never give backer and fans any control or decision-making power over/in the development process • Would primarily develop what he perceives the majority of backers would want • Had the last word in internal decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Helped to set up the crowdfunding campaign • Helped to define the stretch goals prior to the campaign • Used the campaign as a funding means • Would seek help, tips and inspiration from other successful crowdfunding campaigns • Set up a crowd before launching the campaign • Perceived reaching stretch goals as low-priority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Would add own funds to the project (major source) • Influenced the choice of the financing model • Would stay unpaid for a longer period of time in order to secure sufficient funding for the game • Would have liked to have an investor

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conscious about not being able to please every type of gamer • Tried to appeal to a certain extent to all fan fractions • Would often not back down in conflict situations (backers)/Would sometimes look for a compromise in conflict situations (backers) • Would apply a cooperative atmosphere within the developing team (regular meetings and discussions, cooperative decision-making, if possible) • Lots of conflict with backers and fans • No rigid adherence to developing schedules if the game benefits • Active pursuit for fan-created content 		
<p>Developing team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Primary force in the development of the game • Co-developed the game idea (with manager) and would understand and back the general direction given by the manager • Active pursuit for feedback from backers (questions, chatrooms) • Would regularly communicate with backers (especially with high-level backers) • Would include backers and fans for testing and playing the game • Would change game aspects due to backer feedback, if it fits the general game idea • Would never let backers and fans have the final say in decision-making processes or take over control • Did not have the last word in internal decisions • Would have a voice to influence the development through feedback during internal meetings and discussions • Would cooperate with managers to find solutions that would work for everybody (compromises) • Lots of conflict with backers and fans • As former work colleagues, they followed the manager to his new company • Active pursuit for fan-created content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Helped to set up the crowdfunding campaign • Helped to define the stretch goals prior to the campaign • Would seek help, tips and inspiration from other successful crowdfunding campaigns • Set up a crowd before launching the campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Would stay unpaid for a longer period of time in order to secure sufficient funding for the game • All members of the developing team were also shareholders
<p>Backers and fans</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Primary stakeholder group for which the game was developed (especially new fans/modern audience) • Gave a lot of feedback • Their feedback was appreciated by the developing company • Their feedback was actively sought after by the developing company • Their feedback was only included, if it aligned with the manager's and developing team's game ideas • Were actively involved in game testing • Were not granted any decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor influence • Did not influence the stretch goals • Were built up before the campaign launch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Seen by the manager as the primary source of funding • Backers' pledges were essential in the funding of the game

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> power over creative matters Lots of conflict with the manager and developing team High-level backers would have the chance to communicate with and influence the developers more often than regular backers (access to exclusive chatrooms) Vocal minorities (fans of original game) were often told to either accept the game direction or leave, but would occasionally reach a compromise with the manager and developing team Would often lose out to managers/developing team in conflict situations Some backers became frustrated and left due to being denied game changes Were actively involved in content-creation Very fractioned (existing fans vs new fans, singleplayer (puzzle-solvers, destroying boxes) vs multiplayer) 		
Larger gaming community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly indirectly very influential Primary stakeholder group for which the game was developed (new fans/modern audience) Early access buyers heavily influenced the development of the singleplayer mode 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influential Early access buyers helped to keep up the stream of funds in latter stages
Game development industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor influence Competing product closer to the original game drew parts of hardcore-players/vocal minority group away 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influential Their feedback was actively sought by the manager and the developing team Their campaign feedback was appreciated by the manager and the developing team Previously-run successful crowdfunding campaigns would pose as inspiration and as pool for valuable information for manager and developing team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No influence
License owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influential Offered studio to develop under their license 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No influence
Platform holders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor influence (crowdfunding platform) Kickstarter platform usage fees would reduce overall crowdfunding money gathered by ~15% (crowdfunding platform)

A5 – The Flame in the Flood keywords (based on Dowling, 2017)

	Game development	Crowdfunding campaign	Funding
Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very influential Co-founded the company Co-developed the game idea (with another manager) Would mostly stick to the original game idea Thinks that backer feedback is valuable and had a major impact on the game Active pursuit for feedback from backers (questions, chatrooms, testing) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influential Helped to set up the crowdfunding campaign Helped to define the stretch goals prior to the campaign Used the campaign as a funding means Would seek help, tips and inspiration from other successful crowdfunding campaigns Stretch goals reflected interests of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influential Would add own funds to the project (minor source) Influenced the choice of the financing model Would stay unpaid for a longer period of time in order to secure sufficient funding for the game Was aware of the importance and influenced the setting of a rational

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would regularly communicate with backers and fans • Would mostly implement feedback if it would make sense to him and fit the game idea • Would see backers and fans as a group of people they had made a promise to/Tried to fulfil backer expectations • Transparent and honest in backer/fan-manager-communication • Would sometimes change minor game aspects due to backer feedback despite being against the original ideas of the game • Had a very good relationship/No major conflicts with the backers and fans • Would generally hit consensus with the developing team in internal decision-making processes • Derives problems from solutions that backers give in form of feedback (rarely sees the backer suggestion as right solution due to their inexperience) 	<p>manager and developing team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was careful not to overcommit on content and stretch goals 	<p>funding goal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparent and honest in backer/fan-manager-communication (particularly funding conflicts with backers and fans)
<p>Developing team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Would understand and back the original game idea as defined by the managers and helped to further shape the original game idea • Helped to create game concept and prototype • Active pursuit for feedback from backers (questions, chatrooms, forums, testing) • Would regularly communicate with backers • Would see backers and fans as a group of people they had made a promise to/Tried to fulfil backer expectations • Would change game aspects due to backer feedback • Would sometimes change minor game aspects due to backer feedback despite being against the original ideas of the game • Would have a voice to influence the development through feedback during internal meetings and discussions • Would cooperate with managers to find solutions that would work for everybody (compromises) • Had a very good relationship with the backers and fans • Derives problems from solutions that backers give in form of feedback (rarely sees the backer suggestion as right solution due to their inexperience) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Helped to set up the crowdfunding campaign • Helped to define the stretch goals prior to the campaign • Would seek help, tips and inspiration from other successful crowdfunding campaigns • Stretch goals reflected interests of manager and developing team • Was careful not to overpromise on content and stretch goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor influence • Would stay unpaid for a longer period of time in order to secure sufficient funding for the game
<p>Backers and fans</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Gave a lot of feedback (forums, during testing) • Their feedback was appreciated by the developing company • Their feedback was actively sought after by the developing company • Their feedback was generally included, if it aligned with the manager's and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor influence • Did not/Were not granted influence (on) the campaign content • Some backers were unhappy with “boring” stretch goals • Many backers appreciated the honest and realistic stretch goals set by the managers and the developing team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Seen by the manager as one of the major funding sources • Some backers were unhappy about funding decisions made by the studio • Would lose out to managers/developing team in conflict situations about funding

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> developing team's game ideas • Were actively involved in game testing • Would often cause minor game changes through feedback • Studio felt an obligation to fulfil their wishes • Had a very good relationship with the managers and the developing team • Had major influence on aspects dealing with the game difficulty • Would sometimes cause minor game changes through feedback although it would not align with the general game idea • Appreciated the transparent and honest communication with the studio • Would often not be able to formulate solutions that were accepted by the studio 		
Larger gaming community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor to no influence • Early access buyers could give some feedback in the late stages of the game development process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Early access buyers helped to keep up the stream of funds in latter stages
Investors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor influence • No influence on actual game content • Wanted the studio to show the game on conferences and release on time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Several large investors as one of the major funding sources
Publishers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Helped to publish the game on other platform(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Provided significant funds to publish the game to another platform in latter stages
Platform holders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential (console platform) • No influence in creative matters (console platform) • Wanted the studio to show the game on conferences and release on time (console platform) • Prevented studio to bring the game to other platforms through a timed exclusivity deal (console platform) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential (console platform) • Timed exclusivity deal with the studio as a major funding source (console platform)

A6 – Nevermind keywords (based on Reynolds, 2017)

	Game development	Crowdfunding campaign	Funding
Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Founded the company • Developed the game idea • Main driving force behind the game • Would re-prioritize the original game idea/developmental focus due to backer feedback • Always open to feedback • Thinks that backer feedback is valuable • Active pursuit for feedback from backers (photo updates) • Would regularly communicate with backers and fans • Would only implement feedback if it would make sense to her and fit the game idea • Would see backers and fans as a group of people they had made a promise to/ tried 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Helped to set up the crowdfunding campaign • Used the campaign as a funding means • Used the campaign as a marketing/validation means • Would re-prioritize the campaign focus due to backer feedback. • Would change campaign aspects due to backer feedback, if it fits the general campaign idea • Influential in switching crowdfunding platforms between campaigns • Would re-prioritize the campaign focus due to investor involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor influence • Would add own funds to the project (minor source)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to fulfil backer expectations • Transparent and honest in backer/fan-manager-communication • Would include backers for testing • Would sometimes listen to the backers' and fans' opinions in decision-making processes • Had the last word in internal decisions • Would not treat internal feedback differently to external feedback • Would apply a cooperative atmosphere within the developing team (regular meetings and discussions, cooperative decision-making, if possible) • Had a very good relationship/No major conflicts with all stakeholder groups 		
<p>Developing team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Helped to further shape the original game idea • Helped to found the company • Would re-prioritize the original game idea/developmental focus due to backer feedback • Always open to feedback • Active pursuit for feedback from backers (photo updates) • Would regularly communicate with backers and fans • Would see backers and fans as a group of people they had made a promise to/Tried to fulfil backer expectations • Would include backers for testing • Would change game aspects due to backer feedback, if it fits the general game idea • Would listen to the backers' and fans' opinions in internal disagreement situations • Did not have the last word in internal decisions • Would have a voice to influence the development through feedback during internal meetings and discussions • Transparent and honest in backer/fan-developer-communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Helped to set up the crowdfunding campaign • Would change campaign aspects due to backer requests • Would re-prioritize the campaign focus due to investor involvement • Would re-prioritize the campaign focus due to backer feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence
<p>Backers and fans</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Gave a lot of feedback • Their feedback was appreciated by the developing company • Their feedback was actively sought after by the developing company • Their feedback was generally included, if it aligned with the manager's and developing team's game ideas • Were actively involved in game testing • Would often be asked for their opinion in decision-making processes • Would often cause minor game changes through feedback • Were given a promise by the studio to get a good game • Had a good relationship with the manager and the developing team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Managed a campaign re-prioritization through feedback • Motivated the manager and the developing team to set up another campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Seen by the manager as a major funding source • Continued to help funding the game after the campaigns

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managed a game development re-prioritization through feedback Their feedback was equal to internal feedback Their feedback was occasionally rejected (out of scope) Motivated the manager and the developing team to continue with the game after failed campaigns 		
Larger gaming community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor influence Gave feedback through Let's Play-videos and in Early Access phase Would be included for testing (Early Access) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influential Early access buyers helped to keep up the stream of funds in latter stages
Investors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influential No influence on actual game content Indirectly managed a game development re-prioritization through funding Used the partnership to test and market their technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indirectly influential No direct influence on the actual campaign content Indirectly managed a campaign re-prioritization through funding Became aware of the game through the campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very influential The primary funding source Funded the game development after the third campaign
Platform holders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indirect minor influence (festival platform holder) No influence on actual game content (festival platform holder) Taking part in festivals (platform) motivated the manager and the developing team to continue with the game (festival platform holder) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indirectly influential (crowdfunding platform) Important mechanism to set up and run the campaign (crowdfunding platform) Kickstarter mechanisms and characteristics helped to set up and run campaigns in the latter stages (crowdfunding platform) Indiegogo mechanisms and characteristics helped to set up and run campaigns in the early stages (crowdfunding platform) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No influence
Family and friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indirectly influential Helped to found the company Motivated the manager to develop the game No influence on actual game content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor influence Helped to convince the manager and the developing team to run another crowdfunding campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No influence
External advisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influential Helped to create the game idea Gave feedback in the beginning Major influence in theoretical and therapeutical aspects of the game 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No influence

A7 – Perception keywords (based on Gardner, 2017)

	Game development	Crowdfunding campaign	Funding
Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very influential Founded the company Developed the game idea Convinced key stakeholders (developing team, backers and fans) to back the game idea Would look for compromises between sticking to the original game idea and satisfying backers and fans Always open to feedback Thinks that backer feedback is very valuable Active pursuit for feedback from backers, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very influential Helped to set up the crowdfunding campaign Helped to define the stretch goals prior to the campaign Used the campaign as a feedback mechanism Would seek help, tips and inspiration from other successful crowdfunding campaigns Stretch goals reflected what the manager and the developing thought might satisfy backer and fans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influential Would add own funds to the project (major source) Influenced the choice of the financing model

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> game development industry, and family and friends • Would regularly communicate with backers and fans (Facebook, Twitter, Email) • Would mostly implement feedback (backers, publisher) if it would make sense to him and fit the game idea • Would see backers and fans as a group of people they had made a promise to/tryed to fulfil backer expectations • Transparent and honest in backer/fan-manager-communication • Would include backers for testing • Would not pre-define the target audience and always keep potential wishes of the larger gaming community and platform holders in mind • Had the last word in internal decisions • Would sometimes change minor game aspects due to backer feedback despite being against the original ideas of the game • Tried to appeal to a certain extent to all fan fractions • Would try to avoid conflict by giving conflict parties a choice so that everybody is satisfied • No major conflicts with backers and fans • Chose crowdfunding partly due to constant feedback acquisition from the very beginning • Would not include feedback from vocal minorities • Would use game changes because of backer feedback for marketing purposes • Would change game aspects in order to empower the users by giving them the choice between different playing styles • Would especially include consistent feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was careful not to overcommit with stretch goals • Went to crowdfunding because of the possibility to get constant backer feedback • Was inspired by the game development industry and family and friends to start a crowdfunding campaign • Active pursuit for feedback from game development industry and family and friends • Did sometimes not include feedback from experienced members of the game development industry (which turned out to be a mistake) • Decision not to include physical goods was taken negatively by backers and fans • Had the last word in internal decision-making processes 	
<p>Developing team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Would understand and back the original game idea as defined by the manager and would look for compromises between sticking to the original game idea and satisfying backers and fans • Helped to found the company • Would regularly communicate with backers and fans (Facebook, Twitter, Email) • Would see backers and fans as a group of people they had made a promise to/Tried to fulfil backer expectations • Would include backers for testing • Would change game aspects due to backer and publisher feedback, if it fits the general game idea • Would sometimes change minor game aspects due to backer feedback despite being against the original ideas of the game • No major conflicts with backers and fans and would try to avoid conflict by giving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Helped to set up the crowdfunding campaign • Helped to define the stretch goals prior to the campaign • Active pursuit for feedback from game development industry and family and friends • Used the campaign as a feedback mechanism • Stretch goals reflected what the manager and the developing thought might satisfy backers and fans • Was careful not to overpromise on stretch goals • Was inspired by the game development industry and family and friends to start a crowdfunding campaign • Went to crowdfunding because of the possibility to get constant backer feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Would add own funds to the project

	<p>conflict parties a choice so that everybody is satisfied</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tried to appeal to a certain extent to all fan fractions • Transparent and honest in backer/fan-developer-communication • As former work colleagues, they followed the manager to his new company • Chose crowdfunding partly due to constant feedback acquisition from the very beginning and for building an audience • Would not include feedback from vocal minorities • Would especially include consistent feedback • Would always keep potential wishes of the larger gaming community and platform holders in mind • Would change game aspects in order to empower the users by giving them the choice between different playing styles 		
Backers and fans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Gave a lot of feedback (Facebook, Twitter, email) • Their feedback was appreciated by the developing company • Their feedback was actively sought after by the developing company • Their feedback was generally included, if it aligned with the manager's and developing team's game ideas • Were actively involved in game testing • The studio tried to match backer and fan expectations • No major conflicts with the manager and developing team • Vocal minorities would not get any decision-making power • Would sometimes cause minor game changes through feedback although it would not align with the general game idea • Would not ask for specific features, but rather give general opinions/feedback • Backer feedback was a major reason why the studio chose to crowdfund • Would sometimes get empowered by the manager and developing team by including features that would let backers and fans choose their playing style • Would understand and back the original game idea as defined by the manager 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Indirectly influenced the preparation of the campaign (stretch goals) • Reacted negatively when the manager would not include physical goods in the campaign • Negative reaction towards manager decision caused the manager to give in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Backers' pledges were essential in the funding of the game
Larger gaming community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indirectly influential • The manager and the developing team would always keep their perceived opinions and wishes in mind during development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence
Publishers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • Gave a lot of feedback • Helped to publish the game on other platform(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very influential • One of the major funding sources

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were careful not to interfere too much in the creative game development in order to give the manager and the developing team enough creative freedom • Helped with marketing efforts • Their feedback sometimes resulted in game changes • Their feedback was appreciated by the developing company 		
Game development industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Would regularly assist manager through feedback, expertise and moral support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Their feedback was actively sought by the manager and the developing team • Their campaign feedback was appreciated by the manager and the developing team • Previously-run successful crowdfunding campaigns would pose as inspiration and as pool for valuable information for manager and developing team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence
Platform holders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct and indirect minor influence (crowdfunding platform, game platform (Steam)) • Would apply a certain standard to games in order to give access to their platforms (game platform (Steam)) • Kickstarter: Helped the studio to bring their game to their platform (crowdfunding platform) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor influence (crowdfunding platform) • Kickstarter representatives helped to set up and run the campaign (crowdfunding platform) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence
Family and friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Would regularly assist manager through feedback, expertise and moral support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influential • Convinced the manager and the developing team to run a crowdfunding campaign • Their feedback was actively sought by the manager and the developing team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence
External advisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indirectly influential • Game idea was created as part of academic task given to the manager by members of the academia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No influence

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