A TUTORIAL FOR EQUALITY

How to work for equality and inclusion in the Games Industry

THE AUTHOR'S THANKS

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Jakob Bohman
Project Manager of Equal Gaming

About Jämställd Utveckling Skåne

Jämställd Utveckling Skåne is a non-profit organization based in Skåne that works to further the knowledge, interest, and commitment to equal regional development and growth. We work within the areas of education, the labour market, entrepreneurship and innovation, and with stakeholders such as businesses, public authorities, civil society, the knowledge sector, and the capital and finance sector.

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About Game Habitat

Game Habitat is a community-focused non-profit organization based in Malmö. We help create, nurture, and grow a thriving, supportive, and inclusive ecosystem for game development in southern Sweden. Our vision is for southern Sweden to become and be known as the best possible environment for everything and for everyone related to game development.

Game Habitat

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Intro

About the Equal Gaming Project and This Guide

What you have in your hand is a guide for working with equality in the games industry. It is made for those who want to work with equality development but are unsure how to go about it, for those who are already working with equality and want more methods for furthering their work, and for those who are sceptical, but open to learn why and how they should be working with equality and inclusion. The goal of equality is that people, regardless of gender, should have the same power to shape society and their own life, and we hope that this guide can help achieve this goal by making the games industry a more equal and inclusive place.

This handbook was created by the Equal Gaming project with the goal of helping the games industry in their work with equality. The project is run by Jämställd Utveckling Skåne (Equality Development Skåne) in collaboration with Game Habitat. Jämställd Utveckling Skåne is a NGO working with equality integration and development. Game Habitat is a community-focused non-profit organization based in Malmö, Sweden, working to create the best possible environment for everything and for everyone related to game development. Equal Gaming was funded by the Swedish Gender Equality Agency (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten).

As we are financed by the Gender Equality Agency we have mainly focused on gender, but we have worked with other aspects in mind as well. A lot of the methods and tools that we have developed applies to other aspects of diversity as well, as they focus on how to create games, workplaces, and an industry where anyone is welcomed, made to feel safe, and have the possibility to thrive. We also want to say upfront that we will mainly talk about men and women, and other gender identities will not be as present. This is because many of the studies which we will cite have only used "male" and "female" categories.

We hope that this handbook will provide you with the tools and methods needed to continue and expand upon your company's work towards equality, diversity, and inclusion. Together we can overcome the challenges facing the games industry.

How to use this handbook

The goal of this handbook is to present concrete methods and practices for actively working with equality and inclusion in the games industry. Before going into the various methods on how to approach and further your work with equality, we will discuss why equality matters for the games industry. Special attention will be given to the financial benefits of working with equality. Here, we touch upon a broad range of subjects, since different companies and actors within the industry face varying and different challenges. The goal and idea is that you can use this handbook as a troubleshooting guide to identify your game studio's unique challenges, and furthermore, how to overcome them. Regardless if you have picked up this handbook while already knowing what challenges you are facing, or rather, are reading it to find new ways of furthering your work with inclusion, we believe that this handbook can still provide useful and meaningful tools for you to be an agent for positive change in and out of the industry.

While we of course recommend that you read this material from start to finish, we also welcome you to go over the table of contents and be steered by what catches your eye. Use it to find the things that are most acutely related to your organisation and start where you are standing. Creating the change that the games industry needs to be welcoming and inclusive for everyone is not something a single person or studio can do. But by starting with yourself and your own workplace environment, and building upon it, you can help to improve upon many aspects of it, and even inspire more people to take active steps towards equality.

Discussion methods

First and foremost, when entering discussions on how to work towards equality for the first time, it should be noted that there will be a learning curve, which, if left unaddressed, might turn so steep that people give up. There will be new vocabulary and terms to learn and understand, as well as the need to foster and create a deeper understanding of the subject matter. As this handbook mentions repeatedly, it might be challenging to look at the world from a different perspective than your own, but it is truly necessary to create positive change. Sometimes it might feel like the only thing you do is talk, but it will get better. Just bear in mind that all that talking eventually evens out the learning curve so that you all can have a better understanding of equality – and for each other.

While discussing how to work with equality you might face scepticism, maybe from your staff, perhaps from your management, and possibly even from yourself. To handle this situation, you need to talk about it, and a lot of the time this is easier to handle in a structured manner by utilizing formal discussion methods.

This handbook is a start towards working more actively with equality, and for integrating it into your everyday work. As many of the methods presented in this handbook are focused on discussion, we thought it best to include some tips and tricks for creating constructive and inclusive dialogue. They can be used by themselves or in combination—use the ones you feel will work best with your team.

Moderator

A moderator can fill many functions in a discussion, sometimes at the same time. The important part is to clarify which functions the role needs to fill within a specific setting and then sticking to these iterations so that the boundaries for a discussion are clear for everyone involved. One of the most critical things to decide upon is whether the moderator should actively participate in the discussion or not.

As an expert – a moderator can act as an expert on a subject and use this to clarify and turn discussions.

As a cooler – the moderator is mainly there to make sure that arguments stick to the subject and to ensure that emotions do not dictate or derail the conversation.

As chair – the moderator decides who is to speak in turn, maintaining both time and speaking schedules.

As participant – the moderator is part of the discussion and on the same terms as anyone else, but with some assigned extra responsibilities for timekeeping and perhaps annotation.

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Echoing

Be attentive to whose ideas and contributions are referred to and built upon. If you see that someone's thoughts are not being met or lifted, repeat them, and refer to the first person saying them. This is something that everyone in a discussion should be encouraged to do.

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Around the table

Everyone gets to present their point of view, one at a time. In this method it is not voluntary to speak, but you can give the option for people to say "pass". This makes sure that you do not have to take the step to speak up, but the opportunity is presented to you.

Ask to understand, not to challenge

This method can both be used dually as a principle in a discussion and as a specific method on a subject. A person presents their view and argument, and people answer with respectful questions. Some questions can be:

"Can you elaborate on..?"

"I can't relate to XX, could you explain a bit more?"

"Have I understood you correctly that you value X over Y? Could you explain the reason for that a bit more?"

Jointly defined frameworks

Let the group define the rules and values that they want to have in framing the discussion. They all get to weigh in and the majority decides the finished list. Some examples of frameworks are:

Everyone gets to finish talking

Refer back to the person who said "it" first

No referring to people's personal life

Acknowledge people when you think they have made a good point

If you do not agree, ask questions with the explicit intention for trying to understand that person's view, not to challenge it

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List the speakers

When you wish to speak, you raise your hand, the moderator or chair puts the person in line to speak. You are only allowed to speak when your name is first on the list. This method can be modified to allow for questions, but the main point is to allow every speaker the freedom to finish their points without getting interrupted. This is also a method in which you can keep track of how much space different people take up in the discussions.

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Buzz Groups

Buzz groups are a common method to both divide the speaking time more efficiently, and to create a calmer environment to participate in. You divide a bigger group into smaller ones, comprised of 2-4 people. Depending on the discussion, you then present what you have been talking about to the group as a whole. This is a great way to start off bigger discussions, and to get everyone equally involved in the process.

Why Equality Matters

There are many reasons why you and your company should work with equality. Firstly, it is a matter of justice and fairness, everyone deserves equal opportunities. By actively working with equality and inclusion, we can address and counteract many industry problems thereby creating company and industry cultures and standards where everyone is welcomed and can participant on the same terms. It is important that the work for equality and inclusion is integrated holistically into the entire company structure and is considered a collective project. Solely relying on passionate individuals is not only unfair to them, but also leaves the progress vulnerable.

Women and other groups that are marginalized within the games industry face greater challenges in seeking employment, and when finding employment opportunities, they are not always fully welcomed into the organization. Everyone deserves to feel safe at their workplace. Inclusive workplace environments counteract discrimination, sexual harassment, and assault, which the industry has serious problems with. Furthermore, as the games industry gains more and more cultural power, this influence tends to spill out and extend beyond the boundaries of the game community itself. By creating equal opportunities for promotions and access to positions of power, the games industry can contribute to a more equal distribution of power in society in general. The games industry holds the potential to be an important agent for positive change and can help create a better more equal world.

Secondly, working with equality and inclusion creates better games, and a better game community surrounding them. By having a diverse team with a range of different experiences to draw from, more original and ground-breaking ideas can be created, pushing the limits on conventions for games and for the industry. Creating games with inclusion actively in mind welcomes more people into the game community, making it a more positive and supportive arena. By working with an equality perspective when creating games, we can create narratives and experiences that, to an even larger extent, move people in profound ways. Games that make people think, feel, laugh and cry—stories and experiences that stay with us and help shape and define who we are. Game studios working with equality not only have the possibility to create these kinds games, but to reach a larger and more diverse audience to share their creations with.

Thirdly, working with equality helps generate revenue. The games industry is a business, and the economic benefits that an equality driven business can attain is sizeable. Thus, an argument and advocacy for equality within the economic sphere of the industry deserves its own section, a chance to thoroughly analyse the varying aspects in consideration, and ultimately outlining how working with equality and inclusion can help your studio grow and create larger profits.

The Economics of Equality in the Games Industry

While the vast majority of the games industry acknowledges the need for equality, we also know that sceptics exist and are ready to challenge this notion. It is therefore important for us to explain why working with equality and inclusion is, without a doubt, a financially sound and valuable investment of both time and money.

A lot of the time, the social actions and policies taken by a company boils down to simple mathematics: revenue and expenses— the classic cost/benefit analysis. "Is it worth investing the time and money?" Albeit, while actively working with equality, diversity, and inclusion is indeed an initial investment, it ultimately, over the long run, helps to lower expenses and raise profits in a number of ways. Research has shown that companies with a high degree of equality and diversity do better financially.

Companies that actively work with equality and inclusion attract, keep, and promote the best talent in the field.

The study "Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters" done by McKinsey & Company, one of the world's most respected management consultancy firms, has shown that companies whose executive teams have a balanced gender distribution are in fact 25% more likely to financially outperform their competitors. Companies that actively work with equality and inclusion attract, keep, and promote the best talent in the field. By having structures that give people equal opportunities, companies forego the risk of being held back by personal biases in the recruitment and promotion processes. Diverse and inclusive workplace environments have a rich collection of perspectives to draw upon, derived from a multitude of experiences and knowledge, which in the end promotes healthier conditions for problem-solving and innovation. It goes beyond just binary gender distribution of management teams and employees; it is about companywide structures and organization, where equality and inclusion are integrated into all aspects of everyday work. The gap between companies that are

working with equality and those that are not, increases every year as more and more companies are following a trend towards creating and implementing more developed equality and diversity strategies; meaning this is also about staying relevant and staying on par with the developments within the business. Therefore, the longer a company waits to create structures promoting equality and inclusion, the harder it will be for that company to catch up, adapt, retain employees, and remain competitive.

The games industry faces challenges with keeping women in the industry. Women oftentimes leave the industry because of hostile workplace environments and due to fewer opportunities for career advancement and upward mobility when compared to their male counterparts. Working with equality helps create inclusive workplace cultures, meaning company expenses are lowered as costly recruitment and training processes can be avoided, instead it shifts the focus to retaining and keeping staff, reducing turnover, and further developing and investing in the talent of the company. The worst examples of hostile workplace environments we have are the numerous

Working with equality and inclusion is a proactive way of immediately combatting harassment and assault.

instances of sexual harassment and assault that people in the games industry have been subjected to, the majority of these cases seeing women on the victim side. While the argument that no one should experience these atrocities should be enough, we also want to point out the financial consequences of these crimes. Not only is it costly to handle these situations, but it also damages the brand of the company, often for years to come, leading to further negative financial impacts, and a diminishing reputation as a safe and sound workplace. Working with equality and inclusion is a proactive way of immediately combatting harassment and assault, minimizing the risk of it ever happening, and all the while lessening the costs spent on such instances.

Inclusive workplace cultures benefit the mental health of employees, which creates further financial benefits. Such an environment tends to lower expenses, as less money needs to be invested into rehabilitation, and it also increases profits as good mental health amongst employees helps to bolster productivity and innovation. The best ideas do not come from the minds of a stressed out and anxious team, but rather, from a well-rested, enthusiastic, and healthy one.

I would also like to mention the financial benefits of creating games with equality in mind. The total number of male and female gamers are roughly the same. However,

the number of female gamers drops drastically between the ages of 13 and 25, and increase again at around 30. 13 to 25 year olds are amongst the largest consumer populations in the games industry, or when we are talking about the younger end of this spectrum, it is rather likely that their parents buying power is being represented. But, by creating games which manage to hang on to or entice this lost demographic of female gamers in this age span, a company stands to rediscover a massive and financially profitable target audience. Many game companies lose female audiences by featuring negative stereotypes when it comes to female characters, or even more so, by not featuring women at all. The argument is often that women are not interested in games, which is a false assumption. Statistics show that interest in games is universal, which means that many game studios are missing out on revenue by not creating games that are equally appealing to women. Research has also shown that playing video games at a young age has a strong correlation to pursuing a future career in the tech industry in general, and the games industry more specifically. By making games more inclusive we can inspire a more diverse group of young people to study and work in game development, meaning a larger pool of talent in the future. Equality is therefore a way of ensuring and encouraging long-term industry rejuvenation, sustainability, longevity, and profitability.

Most gamers also care about the community and the people behind the scenes who are making the games they love.

Being able to show off a thorough and well-executed workplace that promotes equality also makes for good PR—both in terms of recruitment and investment, and in terms of sales. Knowing that a game studio actively works with equality and inclusion attracts more people to the company, helping to attract the best talent. As research has shown, diverse companies are more likely to be profitable, which also helps attract investors. Most gamers also care about the community and the people behind the scenes who are making the games they love. As consumers generally and gamers in particular are becoming more and more knowledgeable about the products they choose to consume, for example being concerned and aware of the social issues and stances behind the products they buy, equality and inclusiveness in games can be a means to help sales by appealing to the informed consumer in a socially progressive way. Seeing games without negative stereotypes but rather with good representation, and knowing that the company cares about their employees, doing everything they can to be inclusive and productive towards a healthy workplace, can make gamers more enthusiastic or at least, partial to spending money on just that particular company and or game. Of course, we need to acknowledge that there are those who object to inclusion and representation in games, as has been shown

when games challenging norms have been released and met with some consumers becoming upset. However, this group of gamers is a minority, albeit a loud one. To continue making the games industry and the game community a better place, we cannot be intimidated or swayed by this group. Otherwise we will be allowing a small and destructive group of individuals dictate the future of the industry. This would not only be a cultural loss, but also a financial one, as it discourages the larger group of consumers.

No matter how we look at equality, be it from a moral, a quality, or financial stand-point, it is the right way to go. The methods presented in this guide offers help companies to keep their business machine well-oiled, efficiently maintained, and therefore most productive. Working with equality, diversity, and inclusion has a snowball effect, making it exponentially easier once you get the ball rolling—but the hardest step is the first one. Once you are on the path though, as the process progresses, more and more things will start happening organically and falling into place automatically. By daring to take these first steps, you and your company can become an agent for positive change and help make the games industry, and game community, the best it can be.

The games

Representation and Stereotypes

There are many ways of creating games that can lead to positive change, and one of the most central tenets is representation. Representation theory is a field of study within social science that explores how the people we see represented in media influences us as people and as a society.

Creative media such as movies and games can both enforce and challenge harmful stereotypes by who is shown performing certain tasks. By always having, for instance, a man as the protagonist in action games it reinforces an idea in our society and our culture that only men can be that type of hero. The opposite effect is also true in that by showing a varied cast of characters being heroic, this depiction can challenge stereotypes and enforce the idea that anyone, no matter who they are, can be a hero. Representation shapes our way of perceiving the world, and the lack thereof has been shown to lead to heightened discrimination further down the line. Diverse representation can help attract a larger player base and can inspire underrepresented groups to go into the games industry. Although, it is also important to avoid creating "token characters", meaning stereotypical or non-descript characters that only serve the purpose of becoming an equality or diversity alibi, rather than full fleshed out characters who are given the same attention and detail as other main characters. In practice, representation can be done in a number of ways, of course this is based on what kind of game we are talking about. But the main point is that by portraying a more diverse cast of characters, or by neutralizing gender when gendered characters is unnecessary, it can help create a more inclusive game, industry, and community.

To attract more female gamers, a good starting point is to analyse your games and how the characters are portrayed.

Here are a few questions to start asking yourselves and to discuss within your team:

- Do your games feature male and female characters in equal numbers? If not, why?

- Do your games feature male and female protagonists in the same way? If not, why?

- In what ways are female characters portrayed? Are they passive or active?

- Is gender relevant for the game setting?

With these questions in mind, we can go into different strategies for working with representation. Keep thinking of these questions when deciding which of the presented methods of working with representation.

ASK YOURSELF • ASK YOURSELF • ASK YOURSELF

Neutralizing Gender in the Game

WHY

If gender is irrelevant in the game, then avoiding gendered aspects is a good way of keeping the game gender neutral and include everyone.

HOW

In many games, such as the classic Tetris, gender is irrelevant. If the game does not feature any characters, if the characters are blobs or strange creatures, it is easy to simply refrain from adding gendered features. This is a valid way of doing equality, as it negates the risk of reinforcing stereotypes.

Randomizing Gender of Characters

WHY

We all carry with us personal biases. By randomizing certain aspects of characters, such as gender, we can negate personal biases and stereotyping.

HOW

Another way of working with representation of characters and avoiding stereotyping is to leave certain attributes, such as gender and skin colour, up to chance. Start by creating all the central aspects and attributes of a character that are relevant for the story and gameplay, and then randomly assign the personal attributes you left out at the start, for instance with something as simple as the roll of a die. This ensures personal biases and stereotyping does not come into play and can create some really interesting characters that challenges norms in a lot of ways. If you are interested in working in this way, we recommend you get in contact with PkByrån who have developed a more in-depth method for working with equality based on randomized characters. Their contact information can be found in the appendix.

Deliberate Representation

WHY

This method goes the extra mile of not just neutralizing potential stereotyping, but actively works to challenge norms and create good examples.

HOW

By analysing your characters more in-depth and adjusting them it is possible to create a diverse cast that deliberately challenge norms and stereotypes. This is a well-known and effective way of working with equality and representation in games. One example of this is Apex Legends, where the personal attributes of characters does not affect the gameplay, but the diverse cast of characters reflect the diverse world we live in. A good way to go about this is to use real people in your environment as the inspiration when creating characters. If you want to portray groups of people which you are not a part of, it is recommended to engage with said group and finding someone willing to help you learn what symbols, signifiers, and other details that are important to the community or culture. When working in this way it is important to be humble and respectful, and admitting when it is something you have little knowledge or experience of. This way of working with representation holds the potential to create inspiring character that represent people, groups, and communities in a truthful and personal way.

Integrated Representation

WHY

By taking it one step further and integrating the diversity of characters into the story and gameplay it is possible to create more realistic game worlds and discuss values that are directly connected to real world problems, and can therefore make a larger impact on the world itself.

HOW

There are games that have gone the distance and fully integrated diverse characters into the game world, letting them shape the story. One examples of this is the Dragon Age series, where characters' attributes such as sexuality, gender, and race play a large part in the story and gameplay. The characters exist in an in-game context with power dynamics that are inspired by real-life struggles, such as the racism against elves, which in many ways, mirrors the racism in our own society. Or for example, one of the characters has a storyline about gay conversion therapy, but with blood magic as a component. This way of working with representation portrays real problems, albeit done with a fantasy twist. The use of this method creates the opportunity to discuss real world issues and it creates in-game worlds that feels more dynamic, realistic, and closer to home. By determining what power dynamics exist in the game world and how different characters would relate to said power dynamics, representation becomes fully integrated into the story. It makes people think and, as interest in games are so prolific, have the potential to engage people who otherwise do not participate in this kind of discussions.

To work with integrated representation in your games, a starting point is to create a game world. Determine what power struggles exist, who holds power and who does not. Who is considered the norm and who is marginalized. Be inspired by real world problems, but feel free to be creative. Create the history for the world, what lead it to being the way it is? Create the basic concepts for the characters, how would they fit into the setting? How would their lives have been shaped by the circumstances around them? Working with integrated representation takes more effort but can also have the most significant impact, it can move people in a way which few other creative mediums can.

Work With Community Management Through a Code of Conduct for Players in Multiplayer Games

WHY

Many gamers are deterred from playing online multiplayer games because of the harassment they face, this is especially true amongst female gamers. By working with community management via a code of conduct, you can create a more inclusive game community, attracting a larger player base as harassment diminishes.

HOW

Using a code of conduct for online multiplayer games sends a message from the studio that the harassment of other players is unacceptable and gives you something to refer to when actions need to be taken. The code of conduct does not need to be long or complicated, it can simply be that harassment is prohibited and that players are encouraged to contribute into making the community inclusive, as well as defining and outlining what the consequences are if the code of conduct is broken. The code of conduct should be a separate part of the user agreement and presented in such a way that all players need to actively confirm it, which can make sure you have your back covered if you need to enforce it. The most important part of this is how you handle complaints and how you make sure reports are taken seriously to protect those players who are facing harassment. To create an inclusive community, time needs to be spent on following up on reports with both the player who was reported, and the player who made the report/complaint. This ensures that both parties know that they have been heard and that you have taken warranted actions.

We have also seen examples when studios have received backlash and even harassment from gamers when creating games that promote equality. While this is unacceptable, it is important to remember that this is the voice of a minority. Even though it is a loud one, it is still just a small part of the community. Do not let this small group of gamers who object to positive change deter you, but make sure that you as management have the necessary structures in place to take care of the mental wellbeing of your employees who might find this hard to deal with.

Diversify the Marketing and Trailers for Your Games

WHY

To expand upon your work with representation in the games, you should also communicate this effort to the world. Make sure that the work you have done is shown in your advertisement and trailers for the games. This is especially important as there are many false preconceptions of who plays games, which often affects how games are presented in that they only cater to what many believe is the "typical gamer". However, the interest for games is universal and by diversifying the material surrounding your games you can appeal to a larger player base and make your game community more inclusive.

HOW

In a lot of aspects, the way to go about this is the same as how you go about analysing your games in terms of representation. What characters are shown? What story elements are presented? Who is portrayed as the player? If you find that the answers to these questions become too one-sided or that they only cater to specific group, then it is a good idea to go over your material one more time and adjust it to become more inclusive. If you find that you are having a problem finding a diverse set of characters to present, this is a signal that you might have some more work to do in-game in terms of representation. Good indicators to use, depending on the game, are number of characters, different characters' screen time and voice lines, how different characters are portrayed as passive or active, who is the narrator, and whom they are speaking to. By portraying a varied and diverse cast in this way you can create game ads that speak to a larger audience and attract more players to your game.

The studios

Make Sure Equality is Considered an Important Matter for Management

WHY

Equality is something that affects everyone and should therefore be a priority for management. It takes strong and robust leadership to make sure that we live by the values we stand for, and that equality is implemented in every part of the company structure. If management prioritizes something, others will too.

HOW

Make it a standing part of the agenda, equality is a process that must be discussed continuously. An hour a month where you discuss the company's values, how to implement them, and what areas you still have to work harder on is a good place to start. Lead by example and practice what you preach. It is important that management takes the values of the company to heart. If not, it will at best be seen as an unimportant joke, and at worst, as straight up hypocrisy.

Ask questions. When a project is starting, ask how it will work with equality matters. This highlights the question as a priority, and prevents it from sliding under the radar. Make sure this applies to managements' internal discussions as well. Ask the question "in what way does equality relate to this discussion/subject/process/decision?". If management does it, then it will be easier for others to do the same.
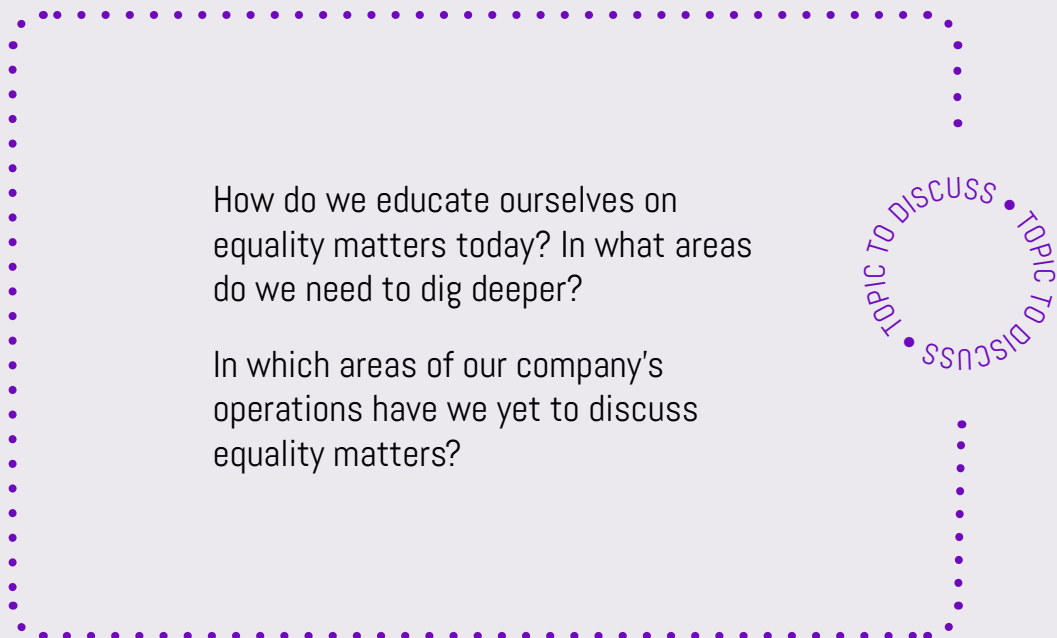
Make sure that management has a diversity of experiences, knowledge, and backgrounds. This will make it easier to take others' perspectives and experiences to heart, and to understand the complexities of how something that favours one person might be limiting to another. People react differently to change, and it is important for management to acknowledge this by making sure to validate those feelings and by helping people navigate beyond them. Read more about this under "Self-Reflection and Becoming Aware of Our Own Behaviours".

Make it a group effort. Even though you might have someone assigned to be responsible for the work, everyone must be able to participate and contribute to equality and inclusion. This prevents two things: that someone is appointed the "alibi", where the existence of such a person excuses everyone else from the work, and that the person responsible for the work does not have to fight for the validity of the issues raised when put in conflict with other interests.

Make sure to delegate responsibilities. Everyone has a role in lifting equality matters into their own daily work, but who is responsible for bringing the matter to discussion amongst your teams? To coordinate so that the entire studio moves in the same direction when it comes to equality?

Educate yourselves. Make sure you have a common vocabulary and understanding of equality so everyone can take part in the discussions on the same terms.

How do we educate ourselves on equality matters today? In what areas do we need to dig deeper?

In which areas of our company's operations have we yet to discuss equality matters?

TOPIC TO DISCUSS · TOPIC TO DISCUSS · TOPIC TO DISCUSS

Ensure Everyone Has the Same Opportunities to Contribute to Matters on the Agenda

WHY

The one making the decisions on what is to be discussed, what information and subjects are to be given time and priority, and whether or not a matter is relevant to the context, holds just as much power as someone that makes a final decision, albeit it expresses itself differently. This power sets the frame for which perspectives are valued and what matters are allowed to dominate a discussion, it literally sets the tone for the entire process. By recognising this power, you are able to change how it is used, to make sure it is unbiased, either by choice or by old habit. It is important to broaden the discussion and change how you prioritize and value things to be able to meet different peoples' needs.

HOW

The first step is to determine where this power is currently placed within your company. Ask yourself who is setting the agenda for meetings, in what ways can people leave input, and whether everyone within the company is enabled and has the clear paths of doing so. In larger companies, it is likely that there are people making decisions along the way who determine if an item goes up the chain or not, delineating who become gatekeepers in these channels of communication. It is necessary to have the criteria for what items are passed along which are readily available for everyone, as well as the possibility for discussion when disagreements occur. The management of the company needs to discuss how this power is used to best benefit the company and its employees to make sure the decision is based on an active thought process rather than habit. It should be the result of conscious and proactive decision-making instead of non-decisive reactive decision-making. This provides clarity and a sense of security for the whole organization when employees know how to go about making their inputs and perspectives seen and heard.

Self-Reflection and Becoming Aware of Our Own Behaviours

WHY

While processes promoting equality and inclusion are the responsibility of management, everyone contributes to shaping the workplace culture. That means it is important for everyone to reflect upon themselves in order to become aware of their own behaviours and how it affects others.

HOW

Lift your biases to the surface, ask for feedback, and listen to it with an open mind. It is often easier to define behaviours in others than yourself, to ask for help in learning about yourself is therefore useful. Turn the perspectives when presented with feedback where you feel like you have done nothing wrong, try and analyse it from a standpoint of understanding that view instead of trying to rationalize your behaviour.

Accept that the journey is sometimes tough. Challenging your own bias means challenging parts of your world view you might not have had questioned before. Be aware of reactions of anger, of outrage, or when your gut says something is ridiculous—this is when you need to push forward since all these are signs of you being uncomfortable. Being uncomfortable is part of the process, especially if you are part of the norm, the feelings you have when your behaviour or thoughts are being challenged or questioned comes from the same source as the experience for those who constantly stand outside of the norm. It is the feeling of you, your thoughts and your behaviour not being fully in sync with the norm anymore, and that change will cause some sort of reaction. This is also an important issue for management to face, people react to change, and how we handle that is important to the overall outcome.

What are my values? How do they express themselves in my daily life?

How am I considerate of other people in my everyday behaviours?

How do I react when I disagree with someone?

How do I like to be shown appreciation?

ASK YOURSELF • ASK YOURSELF • ASK YOURSELF • ASK YOURSELF

Equal Pay

WHY

Equal pay for equal work should be a given, but in reality, this is often not the case. Management needs to put measures into effect to ensure equal pay. It is one of the most clear-cut ways to prevent structural inequality within the company and is also a matter of resource effectiveness.

HOW

Management's job is not to keep down the salary of their employees as much as possible, it is to make sure resources are spent in the right way. It means that the right tasks, the right competences, and the right people receive the right salary. Fair pay is a matter of resource effectiveness, as it means paying the right amount for the right work. Define what you base the salary of your employees on. This will not only help the goal of fair pay, but also communicate to your employees what to aim for, which only serves to further benefit the company. If you can show that you employ equal pay for equal work, then your company will be more likely to attract and retain top talent. Research has shown that women tend to negotiate with themselves about their salary before negotiating with their employer, meaning a lower starting bid. This should not be taken advantage of, and while it might seem like it saves money initially, it will in the long-term, just reinforce inequality. Which, as has been shown earlier in the economics of equality in the games industry section, lead to a negative effect on profits. Individual pay done right is based on a set of standards defining what merits a higher salary, not attempts to keep salaries down by creating salary inequality.

One of the current challenges is the lack of available statistics from the industry, a gap in the research which needs to be addressed. Without transparency in this matter, a large portion of the problem is made invisible and therefore hard to be made tangible, and even more so, to change. Participate in joint reports, such as the Swedish Games Industry's "Game Developer Index", where results are partially anonymized and provide as much information as possible. By doing so, you can provide the industry with a much-needed insight into the challenges it faces, but at the same time maintain necessary levels of confidentiality.

Diversify Ads for and Communication From the Studio

WHY

We previously discussed representation in association with games, and the process works the same when it comes to ads for internal and external communication from the studio. If you have not read that section you can find it at page 21. Inclusive ads help attract a larger diversity to the company and shows that you value an inclusive workplace culture from the get-go. It becomes especially important as it can help attract underrepresented groups to your studio, bringing you more perspectives with different experiences to your studio.

HOW

Start by analysing your current external communication. Who is shown representing the company? If the people you show in your visual material are always representing the same group, you might want to consider showing off more sides of your company. When it comes to text-based communication be mindful of your language and how you describe yourself. Things like "we are a group of guys" is easily exchangeable with "we are a group of people". It is also important that there actually exists active measures promoting equality and inclusion, otherwise it can be seen as misleading and discouraging people. If you are unable to paint a diverse picture of your company, simply because you lack diversity, make sure to communicate your ambition to change this and how you are working to become a more inclusive company.

Gender Inclusive Language

WHY

The language we speak helps us define the world, how we choose to formulate ourselves towards others either creates or hinders inclusion. Gender inclusive language makes more people feel like a natural part of the group and also serves the purpose to break stereotypical gender norms.

HOW

Do not gender things if you do not have to. Gendering explicitly tells who belongs and who does not. If you for example describe yourself as a boys club it excludes women from joining in, and it makes the women who are already in your organisation invisible. Mind how you greet a crowd: "Welcome gentlemen" is easily switched out for "Welcome folks" and gives a more inclusive stance on who is welcomed in the crowd or at an event. Many women in the industry have also testified to often hearing sexist jokes. This is something that needs more awareness as research has shown that sexist jokes lead to discrimination and harassment. It should not be brushed off as "just a joke", it has real life consequences and is one of the contributing factors to women leaving the industry. Just do not do it, and help each other to break patterns and engrained bad habits.

Another aspect of creating a welcoming environment is to use the correct pronouns for everyone. If the only ones that must mention their pronouns, or are asked about them, are the people not fitting in to common gender stereotypes, then it becomes an unnecessary spotlight. Make it a habit that every time someone new joins the group, everyone presents themselves with their name and their preferred pronoun. It is one of the small things that sends a big message.

Recruitment

Who you bring into your studio creates and in a lot of ways defines who you are as a company. Actively working with merit-based recruitment, where you know what you are looking for, can make it easier to bring in the right people for the right job.

The first step of merit-based recruiting is to define what you are looking for. What are you looking for in experience, skills, and knowledge? What positions are relevant for your company? Are your expectations towards a certain role based on what is actually needed for the tasks to be performed by the position? By asking these questions you will probably both subtract some things from your standard job advertisement as well as add new things that you have taken for granted or have not thought about before.

In merit-based recruitment active choices are in focus. Conscious decisions where you always can answer the question "why?" is part of the basis for the method. This helps you overcome unconscious biases in assessment and perfunctory formulations of qualifications needed, ads, and interview questions. It also helps your applicants to better assess if they are qualified and feel safe in the recruitment process. It is important in this process to allow yourself to broaden your definition of what for example "experience" is, in order to allow for new perspectives.

Merit based recruiting is not specifically built to bring in more diversity, rather it is built to make sure you get the staff you need. But, when done right, diversity is a natural benefit that tends to coincide with it.

Properly Define What You Are Looking For

WHY

To ensure that you are making conscious decisions about what you want in terms of experience, skills, and knowledge and that you are able to assess your candidates towards this and not against preconceived ideas of what is needed or what kinds of people possess those qualifications.

HOW

What is the job? What are the tasks assigned to the role? What is expected of the person in the role outside of the formal tasks? A properly defined profile of demands contains all the experiences, skills, and knowledge you ask for sorted in need-to-have and good-to-have. If it is not in there, it is not relevant for the recruitment process. This allows you to dismiss "gut feeling"-arguments which often are based on different kinds of bias.

Write it down, make sure that all involved in the recruitment team have the exact same definition of what it says, communicate what you are looking for towards your potential candidates and go!

How to Write Job Ads That Don't Deter Women

WHY

The ad for the job is the display window for your company and for the job listed. It is important to reflect on how you formulate the ad and how it is perceived by different people. There are some common mistakes in formulating ads that discourages, often subconsciously, women from applying. Research shows that women often do not apply for jobs that they don't feel absolutely qualified for, if not overqualified for, while men tend to do the opposite. If you want qualified women to apply you have to consider what you put in your ad. You might have to sort through a bigger stack of applications, but you will also be more likely to find some more-than-qualified women.

HOW

Only list what is actually needed for the job in the ad, and skip the rest. Sort the list for the ad into "must-have" and "good-to-have", with the most important things first.

Encourage people to apply even if they do not feel that they match every criterion. "Could this be you? Even if you don't feel like you match every single criterion, we would appreciate your application!"

When you define your merits, make sure to focus on the actual skill or knowledge they represent instead of the most common way to acquire them. For example, why is a specific degree relevant, and how to you make sure that people that have required the same skills and knowledge elsewhere is eligible?

Talk about work conditions and how you work with employee benefits, how you work with fair pay and how you work to be a good workplace for people in different life situations. These things matter more to applicants than you might think.

Reach Out Beyond Your Network When Recruiting

WHY

As the old saying goes, birds of a feather flock together. In this instance we mean that our networks are often comprised of people similar to us. Therefore, we run the risk of only reaching the same groups of people who are already represented in the company when we are solely relying on your own networks for finding new talent. Unfortunately, this often leads to the excuse "but there are no women to find". By expanding your horizon, you will find people with perspectives and experiences that differ from your own.

HOW

While our personal networks can prove to be a valuable for finding new talent, solely relying on them risks hindering us as much as it can help us. By searching for new recruits from multiple pools of talent, you create the possibility to both find the best possible talent, and in doing so, creating a more diverse team. Combine advertising in your existing networks with public ads and reaching out to specialized networks for people that you normally do not reach. Networks on social media are often easy to find and can prove helpful in sharing information about your company and available positions.

Anonymization of the Recruitment Process

WHY

This tool can help you overcome both conscious and unconscious bias. Anonymization means redacting information about a person's name, gender, age, ethnicity and so forth to make sure you only assess the candidate towards the defined qualifications for the job.

HOW

To make anonymization work you have two vital points to fulfil.

1 Your application process needs to ask questions directly related to what you are searching for, so the answers are relevant. Remember to inform the candidates of the anonymization so they can describe their experiences without revealing facts that nullifies the anonymization for example "women's soccer team" or "men's wrestling club".

2 If you choose to do the anonymization inhouse where the information is sorted and redacted by a person involved in the recruitment process, make sure this person has the adequate knowledge and tools, otherwise many things may slide by without notice.

Fair Assessment of Candidates

WHY

"We want the candidate best suited for the job" becomes empty words if you do not ensure that all candidates are evaluated equally. This means ways to assess them that allows you to go beyond bias, both conscious and subconscious. For example, when you assume that someone is good at customer service, find ways to validate this and when you assume the opposite, try to be proven wrong. Research shows that women in general are more prone to underestimating their abilities while men in general tend to overestimate theirs.

HOW

Start with a properly defined profile of demands, and make sure that is what you assess the candidates towards. To be able to do the assessment towards this properly you need to make sure that your candidates know what you are looking for so they can present in what way they match up to it. If they are not able to present themselves towards this you might be matching them towards it by guessing, and guessing, leads to bias. Ask questions, both when you are sure a candidate has a specific skill and when you are unsure about it, this helps to avoid discrimination as well, and actually promotes a positive reinforcement based only on what you can objectively infer.

One way of doing this is by comparing candidates towards the profile of demands and towards each other in a matrix where every skill, experience, and knowledge needed is put in as a variable. Remember to answer the question "why?" when you grade your candidates.

Consider it a merit when people come from underrepresented groups as that can bring new experiences and points of view to the table. In recruitment and promotion processes, do not just ask people about what their experiences are, but what their experiences gives them for unique and valuable perspectives that can contribute to the company. Word it in such a way that it includes both personal and work experiences. Make sure to ask these questions to everyone, as to avoid singling people out.

How can your experiences contribute to broadening our audience?

How can your experiences contribute to coming up with new, creative solutions to problems?

What experiences do you have that you think differ from the norm of the industry?

What do you bring to the table that most other do not?

QUESTIONS TO ASK • QUESTIONS TO ASK • QUESTIONS TO ASK •

External Help in Recruitment

WHY

Sometimes it is easier to evaluate what you are doing right and what you need help with by bringing in an outside perspective. This helps to ensure merit-based recruiting and identifying the needs that you might otherwise miss. Remember that you still must be an active part of the process to make sure it is customized towards your specific needs.

HOW

Get help from others, there are many companies and methods specialised in this, for example the Yes Way. By bringing in someone external you also enable an outside perspective that might be able to identify needs you are missing.

Ensure Equal Access to Positions of Power

WHY

Equal opportunity is not only about the gender distribution in the company, but also about the distribution of power. If some groups are underrepresented in management and leadership positions it means that more work needs to be done. This is one of the main reasons why women tend to leave the industry, their opportunities for promotion are scarcer than those of their male counterparts, and women are often overlooked in promotion processes.

HOW

The same principles of fairness and merit that we explained in association with recruitment needs to be applied to promotion processes as well. This means explicitly discussing and stating what qualifications are needed for the position based on a needs analysis to ensure fair assessment of the candidates. Even if you have a particular person in mind for the position before starting, challenge yourself to open the process to more people. If you can identify that some groups are underrepresented in management positions in your company, consider it a merit to have these experiences, or rather the knowledge that comes with the experience. This helps you to find the person that can contribute the most with new perspectives, perspectives that you currently might be lacking.

Create a Policy of Values

WHY

It is important to define what you believe in and create guidelines in how to act accordingly. This leads to a better work environment where the main responsibility to take action falls on the system and the leadership, instead of being the sole interest of specific individuals. It also makes sure you have a unified vocabulary for the topics which makes the discussions and the implementation processes more accessible. Creating and implementing a policy of values moves the responsibility from individuals, and incorporates it into the structure where it belongs.

HOW

Bring in an external process leader, who can ask the hard questions and help you define your values. This makes sure that the process is done in a professional manner, something that otherwise may be a challenge if you are starting to work with these issues for the first time, and it also gives everyone in the process the chance to participate on the same terms.

Make sure to include how to implement the policy in the document. The important thing is that you live by your values, otherwise the policy is just an empty promise, offering basic help to define the values and a map to find the way. By including as many people in your company as possible in creation process, it will be easier to integrate and incorporate the policy into your company structure, ultimately ensuring ownership and authorship from the start, making it clear that this is a policy for everyone, by everyone.

Some important aspects to include in a policy of values is your long-term vision, your measurable goals, a definition of who holds the official responsibility, and what is expected of everyone. It needs to start in the abstract and lead to the practical, accountability is paramount. Include your definition of equality and define how you will work to achieve it.

Revise it regularly. The document where the policy is written down is not the finished product, it is just the start of the process.

Integrate Policy Into Structure

WHY

As we are all aware, actions speak louder than words. Policy without implementations just turns in to a nice piece of paper. To make sure we live our values we have to integrate those values into our everyday work and life.

HOW

Integrating a policy of values into your company structure means making it part of decision making on all levels, accountable and referable as a document that should be readily accessible. Do the actions correspond to the values you have determined for yourself? The policy needs to be evaluated through follow ups in regular intervals to determine that you are moving forward. This should be done both with quantitatively via statistics but also, and maybe more importantly, qualitatively in how your team relates to it, has knowledge of it, and lives by it.

The policy of values should be used to create an internal code of conduct, and these two documents should define what you are trying to achieve and how you are working to get there. You can start the process of integrating these documents already in their inception, in the process of creating them, which will make it easier for you to live by them, by creating them in dialog with the whole team. People are more motivated to contribute in the daily work if they are a part of creating the guidelines. By having the discussions early and involving everyone you avoid singling people out.

Make the policy a part of orientation for new employees. As it is an important document that in many ways defines you as a company, it is important that everyone on the team is familiar with it and takes it to heart from the start.

A Well-Known and Implemented Structure

for Handling Harassment and Other Equality Related Complaints and Difficult Situations

WHY

It is important to create a safe working environment, part of this is having secure structures and safety nets for handling the times when it isn't. Well implemented and safe proceedings help people speak up and feel comfortable bringing issues to light.

HOW

A structure for handling harassment and other equality related complaints and situations needs to be easy to navigate. Everyone should be aware of it and be able to access it. Examples of how it may look might be a digital form in which you can choose to submit anonymously or a specific email which is only accessible to the persons in charge. Remember that the admins usually have access to all emails at will, and make sure this cannot be used for further harassment or the complaint being leaked.

Make sure all team leaders and managers are educated on how to react to and take action when a situation comes up.

Make this system a part of the intro, it is part of your work to keep your staff safe. It compares to pointing out where the fire exits of the office is. By doing so you make the process of voicing your concerns feel less intimidating.

Keep it written down and available. The information should be easily accessible for everyone and possible to access anonymously so that people, in what can be very delicate situations, do not have to out themselves to explore their options.

There also needs to be more than one person to turn to. To tell someone about harassment requires trust, and it is important that you feel safe in the process. What if the one who the allegations are made towards is the one who is supposed to handle the matter? Having all possible fail safes in place is important to minimize the risk of making an already difficult situation even worse.

Make sure to have your code of conduct written down. This way you have something to refer to when presenting the situation and measuring out consequences. It gives the victim something to rely on and to avoid second-guessing themselves, which may result in silencing themselves. Harassment can be a situation where unions and employer organisations can be of help by mediating and providing assistance. For this reason, among others, consider signing collective agreements. As harassment is such a serious issue, and unfortunately a manner gone rampant within the games industry, all possible measures, tools, and fail-safes to prevent harassment need to be taken.

Work Towards an Inclusive Workplace Culture

A good workplace culture makes people feel safe and happy at work. A common challenge people encounter when working with diversity and equality is that people enter the arena, but only a few of the ones who are breaking norms stay. This can be directly connected to the saying that: "that all people are welcome does not mean they are welcome, and even less of a guarantee that they feel welcomed".

People from marginalized groups are often treated like they continually need to prove that they belong. This makes it important to create a long term, stable, and safe workplace culture where inclusion and adaption are natural parts of how you work.

Your current culture might work with the group you currently are in, but wanting to include more people will inevitably lead to change, no matter if the inclusion is for more diversity or just more people. Make sure to work on your workplace culture before you invite more people in, and you will probably see a lot more of them staying.

Enable Everyone to Define and Communicate Their Wants and Needs

and for Them to be Valued Equally

WHY

The lack of understanding and acceptance to their needs is often a big obstacle to overcome for people who challenge norms. Their needs, especially those who differ from the rest of the group, are way too often seen as obstacles, irrelevant, or luxury wishes. It is important to realise that the needs of people are different, and to accommodate as many of them as possible, you have to value them all.

HOW

Reflect on how you value different needs, especially in relation to each other. Some needs are difficult to measure and define in easy terms, for example the need to feel safe at work, while others are easy to define and meet, for example the need for more monetary resources to a department. Both needs to be valued and both have to be met, but one takes more – well invested – time to define and create solutions for. If you feel that your needs do not have a place in the system then you are less likely to address them, no matter how valid they are. Remember that to understand the needs of others you might have to step outside of your own comfort zone.

For some people it can be hard to define what their needs and wants are, an easy method to start this process is to discuss what you don't want, or what you feel is an issue, and from that point ask the questions "Why is this an issue?", "What is unfulfilled that makes this an issue?", and "What would you like it to be instead?".

When asking what your staff needs, ask questions without obvious answers in such a way that makes sure that it is highly likely to produce unique answers from every individual. Make sure that the group is in on this as well, so peoples' voices are not silenced by the perceived consensus in the room.

When you do your company surveys, use the help of a professional to develop the questions in a way that allows different perspectives and needs to be seen and taken seriously.

Make it Clear from the Start What Values and Behaviours that You Expect From Your Staff

WHY

It is harder to teach an old dog new tricks than it is to train a puppy. If everyone entering the company is given a proper introduction in the values and what behaviours are expected from them, then it will make change happen faster, healthy workplace etiquette and culture, and the commitment to values and policy will be indoctrinated from the start. This is a proactive measurement to break patterns before they appear.

HOW

As a company you want to make it clear what values you stand for as soon as possible, preferably before the recruitment process even begins. By making sure your values are integrated into your brand you create the best conditions and prerequisites to uphold them. If your values are reflected in your games, your external communication, and your job ads then future employees will get an idea of what is expected of them before even applying. Include discussions of company values in interviews and questionnaires for the recruitment process. From the first contact and throughout orientation with new employees, make sure to state what kind of workplace culture you strive for and what is expected of them.

Make the Physical Space Welcoming

WHY

The physical workplace is an often-overlooked part of inclusion, but it holds a lot of weight. It shows who the space is for and who is welcomed into the group.

HOW

Let the whole team leave input on what they need to feel comfortable and welcomed. Is the space accessible? Bathrooms and sanitary products? If the team is not that diverse, ask your friends to find where you are lacking so you can be prepared for when you hire someone who differs from the norm. Try to walk through the workspace while actively looking at it. A lot of the times you will find things that send the wrong signal as to who is welcomed into the space. This is an example of small things that, when viewed holistically, paint a bigger picture of the overall work space, and oftentimes, going the extra mile in accommodation and in viewing the setting in this manner, can really make a difference for people.

Prevent Master Suppression Techniques

WHY

Master suppression techniques is a term used for subtle ways of affecting the power balance from the formal to the informal and keeping power amongst those who currently have it. It undermines marginalized groups by belittling them and keeping them from taking part of discussions on equal terms. It is quite common, and many people do it without actually being aware of what consequences their actions have.

HOW

To be able to break these patterns one needs to become aware of what is happening. Master suppression techniques include making people invisible by ignoring them or marginalizing them in discussions, ridiculing another person's argument, or the person's selfhood, in order to avoid facing their argument, withholding information, double binding, shaming, objectification, and threatening. Many of these are done in a subtle ways in everyday situations, such as making fun of someone's opinion in a discussion instead of trying to understand their point of view. To break these patterns, you need to identify how informal power is distributed in your company. What roles, characteristics, behaviours, and people come with status? Do these correspond with your formal power structures, or do they influence decision-making, leading to decisions being made outside of the meeting room? By not being mindful of these patterns you run the risk of people taking up space at the expense of someone else. In a meeting there is a limited amount of time, meaning a limited amount of talking space. The goal is to give everyone the possibility to share their perspective and to be listened to, and by breaking this kind of behaviour you can avoid people being silenced. This is beneficial not just for the person in question, but for the whole team, as one of the greatest assets for a company is the multitude of perspectives of the people in it, and how when combined, can rise to overcome challenges and adversity.

Manage Negative Reactions Within the Company to Working with Equality
and Begin Before they Show

WHY

Change is often difficult, and change that requires you to introspective and reflective over your own behaviour, even more so. It is important to take this into consideration when you plan your processes, and to make sure to have countermeasures in place.

HOW

Stop seeing equality as a matter of opinion, it is a matter of knowledge. Equal workplaces make better workplaces in matters of productivity and profits and in workplace culture and happy staffers. Make sure this knowledge is shared.

Being uncomfortable is natural in a process of change. It is important to channel this into self-reflection and healthy questioning instead of anger and ridicule. As management you should recognise these feelings and make sure that the staff feels seen in them, but also make sure to help them define them into more constructive lines. Make sure to talk about this when starting up the processes towards equality and to remind yourself and others along the way.

Management sets the rules for the company. While large parts of the games industry value agile work methods, some guidelines for professionalism need to be in place to avoid ostracizing and discouraging those who challenge the norms. If these guidelines feel forced people are less likely to follow them and non-constructive conflicts will be created. Management needs to involve and explain the guidelines and code of conduct, both in terms of what is expected, and why it is expected. The guidelines should encourage self-reflection and to challenge yourself to understand why some things might feel uncomfortable. By discussing possible negative or uncomfortable reactions before it even happens, people will have the language and conceptual frame to explain what they are feeling and why. This facilitates constructive discussion and enables management to hold the line on important matters.

Create a Culture Where it is Possible to Call Someone Out
But Also Feels Safe to be Called Out

WHY

To break a culture of silence it is necessary to face situations head on before they become a bigger issue. A company culture where open communication is promoted is a company culture able to quickly identify challenges and overcome them with ease. An important part of workplace culture when working towards inclusion is to be able to address situations head on without them becoming too dramatic. If people do not feel safe to express when they think something is wrong, things will go unnoticed. If people feel it becomes a threat when called out, they are less willing to change behaviours.

HOW

Teams need to discuss how they like to receive criticism. We all have different ways we want to be approached and knowing this about each other makes it easier to create constructive dialogue. The focus should always be on the wrongful actions, not on the person. By calling out, for instance, sexist behaviour by labelling a person as a sexist rather than pointing out the sexism in the actions leads to people becoming less susceptible to change. None of us are perfect and there are always opportunities to grow. That should be the focus—facilitating growth and moving forward. It is also as important that the person who brings attention to the issue be encouraged and receive positive feedback for taking responsibility for the group.

Work Against Crunch

WHY

While the issue of crunch has been heavily highlighted in the last few years, many miss that there is also a dimension of equality to it. As we, unfortunately, live in a society with a lot of gender stereotypes and unequal expectations, women are often expected to do a majority part of household work. This means that crunch periods risk making it especially difficult for women and hetero-sexual relationships to combine both their work and private life, which often results in leading to women leave the industry. Empl-oyees are the most valuable resource for a game studio, caring for the team is not only good for them as individuals, but for business as well.

HOW

Set realistic timeframes where you take setbacks and problems into account. Projects will take the time they need, and it is more costly to push deadlines and releases than to accurately assess them from the start. Unforeseeable challenges can occur, and by having the foresight to account for these externalities from the beginning, appropriating time accordingly, a failsafe system for dealing with unnec-essary stress can be established. Failing to plan is planning to fail. Even more so, with such a framework in place, work is often more efficient, leaving time for tasks to be completed properly, without haste, and when projects are finished before deadline, this creates time for other tasks such as working with company culture, which only further benefits the company.

To prevent crunch. bottom-up planning is a good practice to use. Include time in the beginning of a project for breaking down assignments and assessing the appropriate time needed. People can identify their own needs when given the time, so be sure

to provide that opportunity. This will save time and money later in the project as it creates a realistic timeframe. Throughout this process, honesty is key. Management and team leaders need to communicate honestly and clearly what is expected and maintain a focus on the project rather than individual performance. If team members feel they need to prove themselves in order to avoid criticism based on unrealistic expectations, they are more likely to downplay their needs which results in incorrect time assessments.

Another cause for crunch is under-staffing. It is your responsibility as management to have enough people working on a project for it to get done without harming those who working on it. Trying to lower expenses by under-staffing only serves to hurt the employees, which in turns hurts the finances of the company. It also sends the message that employees are expendable, which besides being harmful to people, is also harmful to the company as it hinders further skill development as people will leave the company and or the industry.

As management, you need to lead by example. You play a vital role in setting the standards for the company culture, and by sticking to normal work hours you can communicate what is expected of others. Avoid sending out important information and e-mails during evenings and weekends.

If a game studio faces backlash for pushing a deadline to prevent crunch, the industry needs to back each other up. Make it clear that these expectations from the community are unrealistic and unacceptable as it harms the people making the games. Once again, honesty is key. As we have seen multiple times during the last few years, when studios have been honest and open about why they are delaying a game, and especially if it is to avoid crunch, the vast majority of the community, while disappointed, is supportive and understanding.

Crunch is a huge problem for the industry, and you probably have many more ways to prevent it. Crunch needs to be acknowledged as an industry-wide issue, so we encourage you to share these methods and practices with each other. This is not where you want to get a competitive edge by withholding information from other studios. This is about the well-being for the whole game eco-system and actions need to be taken together, in solidarity.

The industry

Realize Your Creative and Cultural Power and Take a Stance Together

WHY

Media shapes our way of perceiving the world around us and therefore shapes our society. The games industry is vast, which means that it holds huge power to be an agent for positive change and to help create a better world. Many companies are trying to be careful about doing this, as they do not want to be perceived as political, which is understandable. However, everything we do or don't do is in some way political, this is unavoidable. You might have heard someone say, "I do not want to add politics into my games, I just want to create a dream world where those things do not matter", but whose dream world are we talking about? Who is included in that world? Staying silent or avoiding to address the need for equality is as political as actively working with it, even though those who fall within the norm and are at the centre in the current situation often consider it not to be. Frankly speaking, this is a matter of being on the right side of history and contributing to positive change instead of slowing it down. This leads to a more inclusive industry that attracts a broader diversity of people to game development.

HOW

The games industry needs to collectively realize and acknowledge the amount of power it holds in society and use this power to create positive change. A lot of good is already being done, but by doing this as a united front. The games industry could have an even larger impact. There are organizations who gather the industry, here in Sweden we have Swedish Games Industry and internationally there are organizations like International Game Developers Association (IGDA). Use these platforms to take a stance together on the basic values or principles that you have, such as inclusion, diversity and equality and define what these mean to you as a collective. Based on these values, weigh in on debates and decisions that affect you as an industry, where your perspective is central. This will benefit both the industry and the world around us. Do so because it is just, fair, and also financially beneficial.

Create and Support Networks in the Games Industry

WHY

Creating and supporting spaces for underrepresented groups helps the possibility to discuss their experiences and formulate their agenda. One often stays quiet if you believe you are alone in your experiences, but realizing that others are experiencing the same thing can help in articulating problems and finding solutions. This can then be brought back to the individual operations and lead to development. It also serves the function of inspiring more people to get into the industry as part of an underrepresented group, knowing there are support systems, as well as by inspiring people in the industry to raise their voices.

HOW

There already exists several networks in the games industry, gathering people based on a number of different factors. There are networks based around such aspects as being a woman in the games industry, being a game developer, or wanting to advocate for equality development in the industry. A first step is to do inventory of the networks relevant for you, and you can help others by spreading this information, this is especially important if you are in a management position. If you cannot find the type of network you are searching for, there are many forums for people in the industry where you can find others to create one or start one at your own workplace.

A popular form of networks is those that are in some way separatist, such as women in game development. However, some people are sceptical of this form of organising. Reasons for this scepticism have included that the networks are perceived as excluding or not effective by not taking enough concrete actions towards change. The pros of this way of organising is that it becomes possible to create a support system and a safe space where people from underrepresented groups can articulate their experiences and what they want to change with others who share similar experiences. Separatist networks can therefore be a valuable resource for many.

It is also possible to create networks based on goals and values rather than aspects such as gender. Broader networks advocating for equality in the games industry, and where anyone who shares that sentiment is welcomed, can also be an effective way of organizing. It is important however to make sure that the experiences of underrepresented groups are at the forefront and allowed to set the agenda in these networks. As networks can be organized in many forms, and they all have pros and cons, the most important thing is to decide and clearly formulate what form and purpose the network is using. This is to make sure everyone is on the same page and to easily explain to others why your work is important.

Industry networks are a valuable resource. They are a way for employees to discuss their experiences and come up with ways it could be improved. When management invites representatives from networks into the decision-making they can bring important perspectives into the discussion as they can convey the experiences of the group and the important knowledge that comes with it. Management can support these initiatives by helping to spread information and allowing a number of work hours each month for employees to participate in networking. This benefits both the individual studios and the industry as a whole and helps us become a more inclusive community.

Use Conferences and Industry Spaces to Further an Inclusive Industry Culture

WHY

While much of the work with industry culture is done within the studios, it is important that this also is reflected in larger spaces where many studios meet. This helps people feel welcomed, not just within their own company, but broadly across the whole industry. Outwardly it also helps the industry-wide image that will attract more people to the games industry.

HOW

Game conferences are a good example of industry spaces that connect many different studios. They become a showcase of the industry as a whole, and therefore help set the standard for the industry culture. By making equality and diversity a priority it helps create a more inclusive space, and there are a number of ways this can be done. Like making equality a central topic of the conference schedule and trying to include equality perspectives in the different seminars. Since equality challenges relate to many different aspects, it is a relevant perspective for many different topics. As shown in this handbook, there are equality dimensions in finances, game development, advertisement, marketing, recruitment, and many more. This means that in many of the different seminars, equality is a valuable aspect to take into account, as it is holistic, able to explain the whole picture of the challenges and possibilities related to the subject.

Representation, as has been discussed earlier on several occasions, is also a factor when it comes to the speakers. Analyse who is given the space to represent the industry and take the role of being an expert on various subjects. It is a matter of both the gender distribution of the speakers, and the time given to different people. In many panels female participants are given less time than their male counterparts to share their view. By keeping track of the time of individual speakers and then direct questions to those who have been given less space you are helping yourself as organisers and moderators to train the intuitive ability to make this assessment, and after a while, time keeping no longer becomes necessary as it becomes second nature to divide time and space equally. Some people find this picky and unnecessary, but it is a tried and true method of promoting equality.

A problem for many women and non-binary people in the games industry is that they are pushed to always prove that they belong and are complicit in a way their male counterparts do not have to be. By working with representation in conferences and other industry spaces and by giving female and non-binary people the chance to share their expertise, we can in some ways, begin to counteract this problem. It creates a broader, more representative image of who is part of the industry and who is an expert. This help minimize the scepticism against women and non-binary people and reduces the time and energy they have to spend to continuously prove that they belong in the games industry.

Create Mentorship Programs for People Who Are New in the Industry

WHY

To help people who are new to the industry feel more welcome and comfortable in the games industry, mentorship programs can be a valuable resource. Being able to learn and discuss with more veteran industry professionals helps people navigate the industry and find support in challenging situations. This is especially important for female and non-binary people, as they often face challenges with inclusion. This creates a solid ground to stand on and helps keeping people in the industry.

HOW

While mentorships within a company can have its benefits, it is a good idea to collaborate and find mentors in each other companies. Having a mentor separate from your own organisation, can for many, provide a sense of security as it is someone who can be unbiased and unrelated to challenging situations that may arise. Otherwise the mentee may be hesitant to speak freely as the mentor is their superior. This can greatly benefit employee's mental health, so it is in management's best interest to support and help create and maintain these structures. Work together with the other companies' management to provide mentors and determine guidelines for what should be included in non-disclosure agreements. This provides a sense of security for both management and mentees as to what should not be discussed outside the company, but is dependent on that a framework exists within the company to discuss the aspects included in NDA's. Lastly, mentorship programs are a great way to develop and deepen the level of skills, as well as improve the mental health of workers. Employees should therefore be providing the opportunity to take part in mentorship programs during work hours, and time should be allocated each month for this. This also means that the mentors need to be given the tools to meet the needs of the mentee, such as coaching methods and training in equality and inclusion matters, to be better prepared for the task at hand.

Creating Structures to Help Up-and-Coming Creators

WHY

Many people, and especially women, feel unwelcomed in the established games industry due to the problems it has been facing, and therefore have chosen to try to forge their own path. Supporting this, especially financially, is important from an industry-wide perspective as facilitating this brings new talent into the industry and can help in redefining the industry to become more inclusive and diverse, both in terms of people but also experiences, ideas, and ultimately games. It also benefits individual studios as it helps create and develop new talent as potential future collaborators or recruits, and therefore help the rejuvenation of the company.

HOW

There are many ways the industry can support up-and-coming creators with equality in mind, but we will focus on three.

1   The first is that the industry, both as individual companies and as a collective, can help spread information of the existing support systems such as the WINGS fund that help diverse teams financially, focusing on teams with women and marginalized genders developers at key positions. By making this available for more people, more talent will be available for recruitment in the future.

2   Secondly, we can look at Coffee Stain Studios initiative "Levelling the Playing Field" as an example of what individual studios can to do help new creators. The initiative offers investments in small teams where at least half of the employees are women. While the main goal is not maximizing profits, it still offers a financial gain for the investing studio and creates a close collaboration that envisions the foundation for new recruitment of talent and a possible future requisition. Use this as an inspiration and see how your studio can create similar projects.

3   Thirdly, the structure of "Levelling the Playing Field" might be hard to implement for game companies that are not as large. It is however possible to create similar concepts as collaborations between multiple studios, thus making it a larger industry initiative.

These are a few examples of what can be done but you need to determine what works for your specific studio. Structures for supporting up-and-coming talent that do not fit into the norms of the industry right now have huge future benefits. By giving them a platform to start they can develop as creators and find new creative solutions to industry problems. As many companies have said that they are facing problems finding female game developers this is a tangible way of minimizing that problem in the future and to create a rejuvenation in the industry and in the individual studios.

Collaborate With Game Development Education

WHY

By collaborating with game development educations the industry gets a chance to, at an early stage, set the standard for industry culture, find new talent, and help more people find paths into the industry. As many female game developers in training are often outside of the industry networks and do not have as many contacts as their male counterparts, reaching out to game development education becomes an equality concern as it especially helps those who does not have access to other spaces, such as industry networks.

HOW

While it is a good idea to reach out to game development programs as an individual studio, doing it as a joint effort holds an even greater potential. It means that the workload of organizing collaborations are shared and shows off one the industries greatest strengths: That even though companies in many ways are competitors, they also are a friendly collective that cares about the industries financial and creative development as a whole.

Work together to create easy paths for internships, and if your positions are full, help out with contacts to other companies. In the process of choosing interns it is crucial to value diversity. Interns coming into the industry with fresh eyes can give valuable perspectives that are easy to miss by those who have been a part of the industry for a while, as it is easy to develop home blindness. By having interns that come from different life experiences, those new perspectives are multiplied. Job fairs are also a good way of creating connection with future game developers. It especially creates the possibility for the industry to collectively communicate their shared values and set standards for the industry cultures.

Youth Community Outreach as a CSR Strategy

WHY

Research has shown that few factors correlate more towards going into the tech industry generally, and the games industry specifically, as having an interest in games when young. As previously mentioned in the section: The Economics of Equality in the Games Industry, between the ages of 13 and 25 the number of female gamers is lower due to cultural perceptions that games are for boys, which is a statistically untrue perception. During these years, many initial career decisions are made through choice of education. Finding ways to meet and connect with the young population before making these choices, finding ways to inspire more young people, and a more diverse group of people to go into the games industry, will lead to long-term change.

HOW

To inspire more young people, and especially young women, to get into the games industry the first step is to find or create spaces and opportunities to connect with them. A good place to start is to collaborate with schools for the possibility to visit, or letting them visit you, and talk about the industry and the jobs within it. In the same way as we talked before about representation in external communication, this is an important avenue to consider as well. Make sure to include women from your companies as representatives of the industry as well as discuss the broad range of jobs and positions that are part of the industry. Give them the chance to see all the reasons why the games industry is a fantastic place to work in and how you are working to make it even more welcoming. Other arenas where it would be possible to connect with young people are various youth science centres and NGOs, such as game associations and, with the rising interest in esports, sports organisations.

Last Remarks From
the Project Manager

I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for reading this handbook and I hope you found something helpful in it. There is more that can be done that can't be squeezed into this handbook, and I hope that if you find something interesting that you search out more material to gain a deeper knowledge on the subject. We have included a few examples of further reading, along with studies and sources that played an important role in creating this handbook.

As someone who grew up playing video games, and still do, the game community is close to my heart. I admire all of you who work in the games industry immensely for what you have done for me personally, for culture, and for the world. You have given me amazing experiences and I truly believe that the games industry can help out immensely in creating a better world. The interactive nature of video games create a unique possibility to tell immersive stories that moves people, or lets people take their mind off other things in life for a while, in a way that no other creative medium can.

So, thank you. Thank you for the games you have made, thank you for working to create a more equal and inclusive games industry, and thank you for helping make this world a better place.

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Appendix

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Jämställd Utveckling Skåne

Equal Gaming

Game Habitat