



Model Scheme and Manual for Game Incubation Programming and Financing

Output 3.3 of the BGI project



This model scheme illustrates “how to run” an incubation programme for game development companies, drafted in form of a manual for business support providers and intermediaries working with game business.

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Berlin, March 2020

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1. Introduction

The manual in front of you was created as a product of a cooperation between several partner countries within the Baltic Game Industry project¹. The project with its many activities had encompassed a wide range of improvements with one main goal in mind – to empower the business of creating games in the Baltic Sea region. One of the ways in which the project partners reached for innovation was testing out various methods of incubating – as in “supporting and providing young game studios with necessary skills”.

The following document is divided into six parts. In the beginning the authors share their experience of operating a game incubator and advising on what could be indispensable when establishing such an entity. Then, the subject changes to financing, understood as sources of revenue and finding the most suitable business model. The third part deals with the topic of managing an incubator, building an optimal incubation programme, hiring the right people and the importance of partnerships. Further, the manual introduces different forms of incubation and accompanying activities. Selecting participants of the incubator, screening their applications and maintaining contact with them is the topic of another part. Moving onward, the manual mentions some tools and methods of monitoring the progress of incubatees as well as the incubator itself. Finally, the document wraps up with advice and observations regarding possible ways to further develop a game incubator in accordance with the particularities of individual regions and circumstances.

Building, maintaining and developing a game incubator is a business like any other with a wide range of aspects to take care of before and during implementation. The manual’s goal is to list and highlight the most important ones and shed some light on the topic. However, as the readers will surely notice themselves, it leaves a lot of space for the incubator’s creators to look further for the best solutions and even come up with their own, unique ideas. After all, incubating a creative industry such as video games could mean resorting to creativity as well.

¹ Baltic Game Industry (BGI): <http://baltic-games.eu/>.

2. Operating a Game Incubator

The choice of profile for your incubation programme will determine your decisions for creating the operative model needed to suit the type of incubation programme (more in chapter “[Incubation Programmes and Forms](#)”) and the target group (more in chapter “[Selecting Participants of a Game Incubator](#)”) you have identified. Building an incubation programme can be done progressively, starting from a relative “pure” programme over a fixed time span without a fixed venue to an established physical entity where participants are under constant mentorship or at least share working space with different incubatees (e.g. close to a university, within a co-working space or a tech/science park).

In this chapter we will focus on preparing the “canvas” for the incubation, what is needed in terms of infrastructure, know-how and – most importantly – people, to correlate with your chosen scope of game incubation. We will look at different models of operating the incubator and marketing it to attract both funding and clients.

a. Location and Facilities

The location of the game incubator matters depending on the profile of the incubated teams or companies. If you target students, installing an incubator as a part of university campus can be a good move. If you want to attract companies as an “entity that conducts business activity”, a location in the city center or downtown could make more sense.

The importance of your location choice primarily depends on whether the incubation programme is a permanent fixture or a programme with individual workshops or consultations with trainers and mentors taking place within fixed time frames.

Oftentimes, you are already working within a certain infrastructure and will have to adjust the existing facilities to respond to your needs. There are game incubators that operate remotely, e.g. SpielFabrique². In that case the location of your headquarters does not play any substantial role.

² SpielFabrique: <http://spielfabrique.eu/en/home-2/>.

b. Physical Environments

When it comes to deciding on the shape of incubation, the three most common environments are related to questions of the target group and financing:

- An incubator within or in the vicinity of a university obviously caters to academic graduates or students: This model most often is strongly affiliated with an existing game design or game development study programme, offering students help in the transition from studying to becoming professionals. The environment allows for progressive upscaling from using the same rooms as the students (e.g. DE:HIVE³) to receiving an own separate location within the university premises much like a lab (e.g. Cologne Game Lab⁴), and eventually having a location independent of the university management (e.g. Game Hub Denmark⁵ – they provide their incubatees with location, furniture, access to meeting rooms). In this model the incubatees are working with equipment held by and provided by universities or private schools which often have access to comparatively high-end technology, facilities, studios, showrooms or meeting rooms.
- The inclusion of a game incubator in the larger context of a technology park (e.g. The Game Incubator⁶, part of Sweden Game Arena) or an umbrella incubation programme (e.g. Sting⁷, VHTP GameDev Incubator⁸): The advantage is the closeness to enterprises located in the park and the availability of coaches to share cross-cutting or more generic topics (e.g. legal aspects or accounting requirements, but also enhancing skills such as programming for startups). Also, the overall management of the tech park or umbrella programme will provide for essential parts of the game incubation, and there will also be sharing of facilities and costs. However, you have to consider that the management and financial requirements are likely to be much more challenging than the model of the university environment, while the demands and expectations in terms of workplace equipment and infrastructure will depend on the financial model and the standard and goals of the programme promoted to the target groups.
- An embedded programme in the co-working or community context: This model is becoming increasingly popular as a result of the focus of fostering the national/regional ecosystem through

³ DE:HIVE (HTW Berlin): <https://gamedesign.htw-berlin.de/dehive/>.

⁴ Cologne Game Lab: <https://colognegamelab.de/>.

⁵ Game Hub Denmark: <https://gamehubdenmark.com/>.

⁶ The Game Incubator: <https://www.thegameincubator.se/>.

⁷ Sting: <https://sting.co/en/>.

⁸ VHTP GameDev Incubator: <https://www.vatp.lv/en/business-support>.

talent growth outside the university. The underlying approach means to facilitate both entrepreneurial skills through the proximity of young talents to more experienced professionals and continued learning through knowledge sharing with dedicated coaching, mentoring and peer-to-peer exchange. This model can be realised as part of an initiative of a university programme (e.g. Farm League⁹ or Game Habitat¹⁰). Here, as with the tech park model, the question of facilities and equipment is important, as they will be shared with the other tenants. The co-working space operator might include the programme management or outsource it. Though in many aspects this model seems similar to the tech park inclusion model, there are many aspects that will be less challenging in this model than in the other two models.

There are signs of an emerging model that would place games incubation in the vicinity of media incubation, e.g. the MediaTech Hub Potsdam¹¹. Also, in terms of a university context, e.g. The Film University in Babelsberg¹² also offers game design courses, which – if gaining momentum – could provide a stronger basis for this environment model.

c. Facilities and Equipment Requirements

Most young game startups will not need very specific equipment and facilities to create games. Usually basic hardware should be enough – mobile phones, computers. The same goes for software – some of the more popular engines and tools used to create both mobile and computer games are available to all developers as long as the software is mentioned in credits of the game.

However, some game projects require more computing power or special studios, e.g. for motion capture, sound or VR (Virtual Reality). Usually studios that offer motion-capture services can be found in bigger cities, so it does not have to be a standard facility in a game incubator. In fact, motion capture is being used in rather bigger, more mature game studios which generally should not need an incubator's help anymore.

It may seem obvious, but make sure that you are in possession of meeting rooms and places where your companies/teams can rest and network. Basic equipment such as a projector and flipcharts should be enough for most types of trainings, with post-its, markers and other creativity-inducing materials at hand. If you wish to host events or jams for larger groups of people, more rooms will be

⁹ Farm League: <https://medium.com/@gamesfactory/farm-league-aba6e0b9e24>.

¹⁰ Game Habitat: <https://www.gamehabitat.se/>.

¹¹ MediaTech Hub Potsdam: <https://www.mth-potsdam.de/en/frontpage/>.

¹² Filmuniversität Babelsberg Konrad Wolf: <https://www.filmuniversitaet.de/en/>.

necessary. They do not have to be a part of your proper venue – renting training rooms could be enough.

3. Financing Game Incubation Services

If you are going to build game incubator, one of the most important challenges will be the budget, especially sources of funds, for establishing the incubator, operational costs, staff salaries, facility, mentors, and so on. In this chapter we will try to help you think about the business model of your incubator, identify streams of revenue and build a budget structure. Moreover, we will share with you case studies based on our experience and based on the experience of others.

a. Business Model

If you are reading this manual, you are probably planning to build a game incubator. Awesome! Use this manual, the know-how of your organisation and your own experience and treat your task as a project. Then think about your project as a startup. And finally, start your work with business model canvas¹³. If you don't know this canvas, familiarise yourself with it as soon as possible, as it is an elementary tool¹⁴ of building innovative projects, especially for startups. You can use it to design the business model for your game incubator as well. It is










You have a 90% chance to fail ...

... probably. Under the link below you can find an extremely interesting article by Peter Relan "[90% Of Incubators And Accelerators Will Fail And That's Just Fine For America And The World](#)". Although it applies to the USA, there are few theses adequate for other countries where incubators work. And yes, there are a few words about financing.

a very useful tool because it aggregates main processes/fields of activities: costs and revenues for a project, value proposition, key partners, resources and activities, customer segments and relationships, channels (see illustration below).

¹³ Business Model Canvas (sheet in high resolution and open license): https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/10/Business_Model_Canvas.png.

¹⁴ Business model canvas was designed by Alexander Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur and described in the "Business model generation" handbook (Osterwalder, Alexander; Pigneur, Yves "Business Model Generation: A Handbook for Visionaries, Game Changers, and Challengers" Wiley 2010).

The Business Model Canvas		Designed for:	Designed by:	Date:	Version:
Key Partners  <p>Who are our Key Partners? Who are our key suppliers? Which Key Resources are we acquiring from partners? Which Key Activities do partners perform?</p> <p>REASONS FOR PARTNERSHIPS Optimization and economy Reduction of risk and uncertainty Reduction of particular resources and activities</p>	Key Activities  <p>What Key Activities do our Value Propositions require? Our Distribution Channels? Customer Relationships? Revenue streams?</p> <p>ADVANTAGES Production Problem Solving Performance</p>	Value Propositions  <p>What value do we deliver to the customer? Which one of our customer's problems are we helping to solve? What bundles of products and services are we offering to each Customer Segment? Which customer needs are we satisfying?</p> <p>INNOVATIONS Newness Performance Customization "Selling the Job Done" Design/Process Brand/Service Price Cost Reduction Risk Reduction Accessibility Convenience/Usability</p>	Customer Relationships  <p>What type of relationship does each of our Customer Segments expect us to establish and maintain with them? Which ones have we established? How are they integrated with the rest of our business model? How costly are they?</p> <p>EXAMPLES Personal assistance Guided Personal Assistance Self-Service Automated Services Communities Co-creation</p>	Customer Segments  <p>For whom are we creating value? Who are our most important customers?</p> <p>Mass Market Niche Market Segmented Individual Multi-sided Platform</p>	
	Key Resources  <p>What Key Resources do our Value Propositions require? Our Distribution Channels? Customer Relationships? Revenue Streams?</p> <p>TYPES OF RESOURCES Physical Intellectual (brand, patents, copyrights, data) Human Financial</p>		Channels  <p>Through which Channels do our Customer Segments want to be reached? How are we reaching them now? How are our Channels integrated? Which ones work best? Which ones are most cost-efficient? How are we integrating them with customer routines?</p> <p>CHANNEL TYPES 1. Direct sales 2. Distribution 3. Purchase 4. Delivery 5. After sales</p> <p>How do we integrate them with our company's products and services? How do we help customers evaluate our organization's value proposition? How do we allow customers to purchase specific products and services? How do we deliver a value proposition to customers? How do we provide post-purchase customer support?</p>		
Cost Structure  <p>What are the most important costs inherent in our business model? Which Key Resources are most expensive? Which Key Activities are most expensive?</p> <p>IN HIGH BUSINESS MODE Cost driven channel cost structure, low price value proposition, maximum automation, extensive outsourcing Value driven channel cost structure, premium value proposition</p> <p>EXAMPLE CHANNELS/RESOURCES Fixed Costs (salaries, rents, utilities) Variable Costs Economies of scale Economies of scope</p>		Revenue Streams  <p>For what value are our customers really willing to pay? For what do they currently pay? How are they currently paying? How would they prefer to pay? How much does each Revenue Stream contribute to overall revenues?</p> <p>TYPES Asset sale Direct sale Licensing/leasing Advertising</p> <p>PRICE MODELS List Price Product feature dependent Customer segment Usage dependent Volume dependent</p> <p>REVENUE MODELS Registration (one-time) Subscription (recurring) Freemium (one-time) Usage-based (usage-based)</p>			

Business Model Canvas¹⁵

Why are we writing about it? Because if you think about building a sustainable game incubator, you should design the whole framework around it and connect it within the incubator. So, before you read the rest of our manual – please print the business model canvas, take sticky notes, a pencil and do your homework ¹⁶.

¹⁵ Source (open license): https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/10/Business_Model_Canvas.png.

¹⁶ Before you'll say: *It's not for me, I have no time for it* – think about it as a way to better understand young entrepreneurs and tools for them. And dilemmas. And issues with value building. Maybe it'll help you with the next steps: think about your game incubator as a company with its unique services.

b. Additional Tools (that you might need, but do not know yet)

If you work really hard and seriously with your game incubator, then we've got good news. There are several dozen (or maybe even more) tools for designing new, innovative projects. The web is full of helpful canvases, but if you are looking for the most interesting repository we would like to recommend the Board of Innovation website¹⁷. There you can find i.e. these canvas and charts:

- Value proposition (will help you build a promise¹⁸ of value¹⁹ to be delivered, communicated, and acknowledged by your game incubator)
- Business model validation plan (will help you plan the structure of experiments to test your hypotheses and save time)
- Problem sizing (will help you discover: firstly – how big is the problem of your customer, secondly – is it valuable for your game incubator to solve this problem, AKA fill in the niche)
- Brainstorm cards (business card game will support your team in business ideas co-creation for your game incubator development)
- Future scan (inspirations for your brainstorming and co-creation meetings – over 150 future trends gathered in one place)
- Revenue model flowchart (will help you discover new B2B revenue models and choose the best way for your game incubator)
- Feedback grid (will help you structure data and information from your pilot/test users)
- Concept disruptiveness test (will help you understand if your business model is disruptive or more traditional)
- Customer empathy map (will help you understand your customer and their motives)
- How Might We statement builder (will help you explore potential innovation theses in the beginning of you project understood here as game incubator)
- Analogy thinking (will help you inspire, find and apply best features from other solutions to your project – game incubator)
- Persona (will help you discover who exactly is your customer, their pains and gains)
- Pitching checklist (will help you build complete pitch of your game incubator with all important details)

¹⁷ Board of Innovation: <https://www.boardofinnovation.com/>.

¹⁸ Promise – Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Promise>.

¹⁹ Value (economics) – Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Value_\(economics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Value_(economics)).

- Solution validation script (will help you in talks with your key stakeholders: in this script you can find package of sample questions)
- Scoping canvas (will help you and your team set boundaries for your project)
- Customer journey map (will let you look at your game incubator, services, products, processes from your target group's point of view)
- Innovation blueprint (will support you in overview of key roles and key activities of your game incubator)
- Innovation mission map (will help you define your innovation mission statement by arranging your insights)
- 3 horizons model (will support your analysis for growth strategy in relation to the core business)
- Innovation DNA (will help you choose strategic goals of your game incubator, that really matter for growth)

c. Let's Talk About Money

Salary for game incubator staff, office costs, website, etc. The list goes on. Try to prepare a costs analysis and to calculate where you need money and where other resources could be a good replacement. And when we write about “other resources”, what we mean is: somebody's time, business network, services, software or hardware, office furniture, somebody's know-how or experience, advertising space, tools for management (contract templates, evaluation sheets, recruitment form, and so on), special talents, etc.

Preparing a cost analysis is a very important part of your job at the beginning of your game incubator because it'll help you indicate what kind of money you need, and for what purpose. Moreover, it will help you identify where you save money: maybe your organisation can share office space for free? Maybe some friendly game dev studio could support you by making a logo and visual identity design for free? Maybe your university or tech park can share fablab/makerspace where you can prepare business cards, posters, small gadgets? Maybe the IT department in your organisation can support you in website development and maintenance? Furthermore, you can exchange services with some providers – barter agreement is a very popular tool. Think about the methods above to save some money, because the list of expenses is long, and revenues sometimes uncertain, especially at the beginning.

Maybe we can help you a little more

Below you can find a list with examples of game incubator costs. Feel free to use it (and fill the gaps also).

Staff:

- Salaries
- Social security payments
- Computers and smartphones
- Transportation
- Office space
- Furniture
- Electricity, water, gas, security, internet
- Software licenses
- Staff recruitment
- Printers, copy machines
- Insurance

Visibility and marketing:

- Website (design, domain, hosting)
- Logo design
- Business cards
- Visual materials – projects (for social media, for printing, for website, etc.)
- Small gadgets
- Costs of social media campaigns
- Events/fairs/conferences fees

Incubatee:

- Office spaces
- Mentors
- Workshops
- Food
- Business materials
- Consulting

Other:

- Taxes
- Bookkeeping
- Repairs
- IT support
- Building renovation
- Legal services
- Reserve

d. Sources of Funds

Incubators – game incubators as well – are tools developed by public bodies, universities, tech parks, NGOs with a goal to develop and foster entrepreneurship, for example for game developers. It is no coincidence – if in reality there is a gap and the market does not work properly, that there is a mission and the space for public financing.

Most game incubators in Europe, especially those designed for game creators, are based on public funds and there is not much evidence that this will change anytime soon. Cases of private initiatives are a minority. Thus, the main source of funds for game incubators is the public sector. Sometimes this can mean providing game incubators with the building/venue, sometimes access to services, shared capital, salaries for incubator staff or dedicated part of budget, or a grant. Regardless of the legal status of the incubator, this should not be the only source of its financing, usually.

Revenue Streams – BSR Incubator Examples

Game Hub Denmark (DK) – public funds (regional and local authorities), universities, EU funds

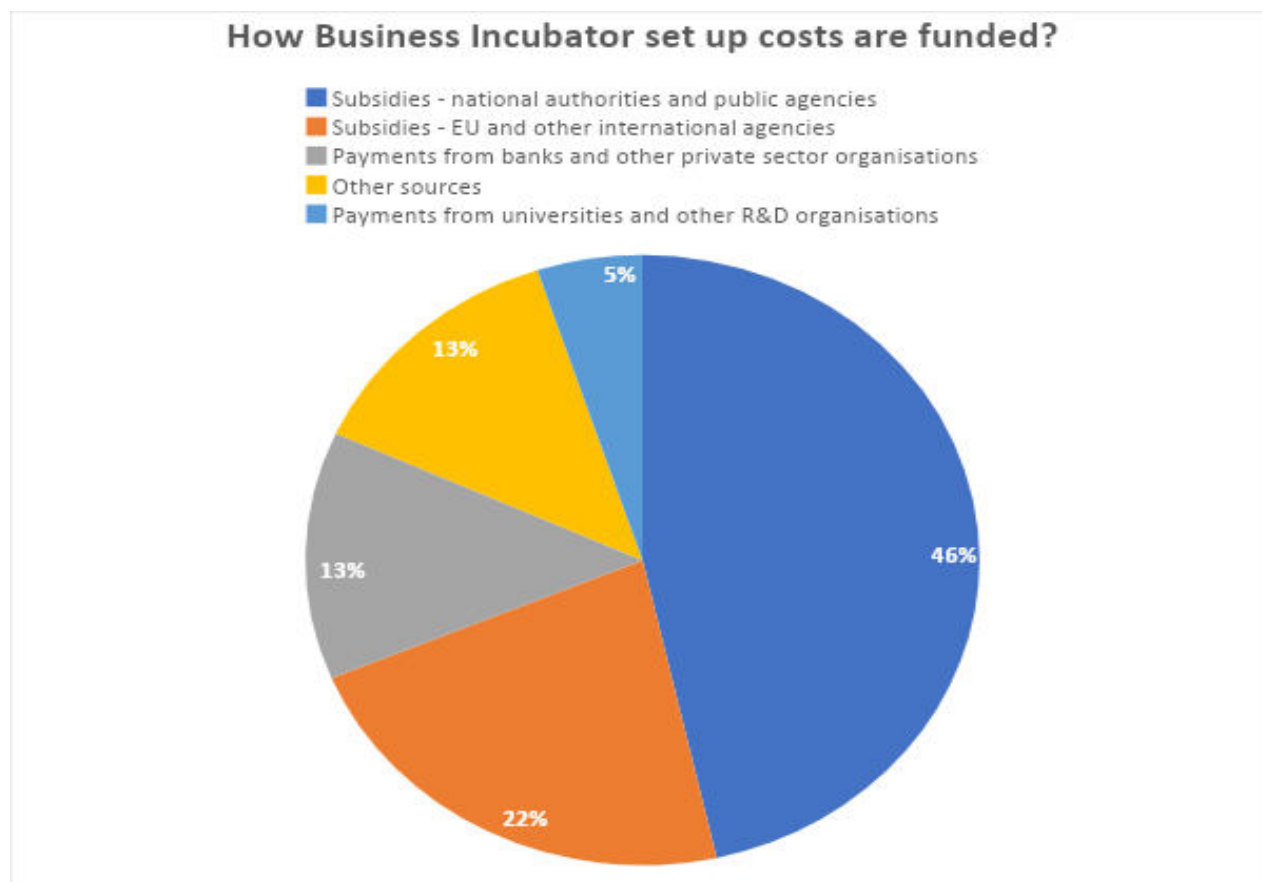
The Game Incubator (SE) – public funds (regional authority, local municipality, tech park owned by universities and municipalities), private funds (Science Park Skövde – ownership association), EU funds

Living Game Intelligence Network (formerly known as Farm League; FI) – public funds (regional and local authorities), private funds (game enterprises), EU funds

Digital Dragons Incubator (PL) – public funds (tech park owned by public authorities, regional and central authorities), EU funds, private funds

Most of game incubators need the public money support to start supporting the game industry. There is no quantified data for that, but we can say it with a high probability.

The most recent (but unfortunately quite old) research on business incubators was done by Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services in 2002²⁰. There have probably been changes since then (more EU funds, more universities initiatives and so on), but we can look at this chart as an illustration in general:



Source: Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services "Benchmarking of Business Incubators" 2002: <https://businessincubation.com.au/wp-content/uploads/benchmarking-incubators.pdf>.

²⁰ It's for business incubators in entirety and is a very old research, but there's no data that's more up to date. Still, we can suspect some trends, especially in the field of EU funds (Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services "Benchmarking of Business Incubators" 2002: <https://businessincubation.com.au/wp-content/uploads/benchmarking-incubators.pdf>).

Most game incubators rely on the following sources of revenue²¹:

Sponsorship/Crowdfunding

Sponsorship is a good way to establish and develop a game incubator. Public bodies, game publishers, investors, banks, large game enterprises, alumni, business angels are good partners to talk to about supporting indie game developers through your game incubator. Of course, it depends on your value proposition²² for your partner, and regional/local opportunities, but generally sponsorship/crowdfunding is a very interesting way to establish an incubator with diversified revenue streams. In case of game incubators that are based on NGO or academic structures, you can think about a particular genre of sponsorship – philanthropy; it may sound unbelievable but 2,7 % of incubators in the UK have declared this as a source of income²³.

EU Funds

In the case of EU members and associated countries. This source of revenue could sometimes be the main part of your budget, but in general we would like to recommend diversifying revenue streams. Recommendations for your programme: Help your startups by either having them participate in EU projects or by having the incubator itself participate in EU projects to gain new knowledge and enhance staff and tutor competences, or to organise transnational programmes. If you understand how EU funds work, your game incubator could be considered as a component of a larger EU

Business model, diversification of revenues, incubator math

“Trying to understand incubator math” and “There Is an Incubator Bubble – And It Will Pop” are two interesting articles where you can find questions and answers about incubators and money. We recommend these articles for your consideration when you build the financial foundations of your game incubator.

project. As the EU supports the growth of entrepreneurship in its member countries, there are some industries receiving additional support because of their importance and potential. One of them is the video games industry, recognised for its commercial popularity, ability to attract and generate a

²¹ More about business models for incubators you can read on infoDev – Innovation & Entrepreneurship “Global Practice in Incubation Policy Development and Implementation”: <http://www.infodev.org/articles/global-practice-incubation-policy-development-and-implementation>.

²² Do you remember your Business Model Canvas (BMC)? Your unique value proposition is a part of your BMC!

²³ Bone, Jonathan; Allan, Olivia; Haley “Business Incubators and accelerators: The national picture” BEIS Research Paper 2017: <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/196202/1/2017-07-business-incubators-accelerators-uk-report.pdf> - see page 21.

Innovation vouchers and so on

Europe Union and regional funds sometimes give tools for companies that support R&D activities of entrepreneurs (for example innovation vouchers or GameINN programme in Poland).

supply of young programmers, artists, designers, as well as for promoting the country as a modern and accessible environment for talents and capital from abroad. Public funding is needed as an indirect investment in startups that helps them develop their business, become sustainable and then go for private risk capital that can help them grow and create new jobs which the

public will then benefit from.

There are cases when public grants are given directly to clients, not to the incubators. It can help incubators attract clients, guarantee fair advantage and move towards the financial sustainability of the incubator.

Rent

In many countries renting office spaces is the main source of income and the main guarantor of autonomy (if they are large and developed enough) for incubators. The revenue from rents could reach from 20 % to 40 % and more, depending on the country.

Digital Dragons Incubator – rent your stuff

Renting of office spaces, hardware, conference spaces is one of the indirect revenue streams of the Digital Dragons Incubator as a part of Technology Incubator and Krakow Technology Park.

Equity

In some countries equity business models are used. The main idea of this model is that in return for free and low rent periods, incubators take minority shares in incubated businesses with the possibility

... and percent of ARP Games

Polish accelerator ARP Games is funded by a public agency as a joint-stock company and supports teams of game developers (trainings, funds). For that, ARP Games can take equity of up to 25 %. When time will come ARP Games and incubated team set up a new company in an LLC legal form.

Percent of the Sting

Swedish incubator/accelerator Sting supports startups – game startups as well – using “equity” as one of few streams of revenue. Startups at the “Sting Incubate” stage give up to 5 % stock, at the “Sting Accelerate” stage up to 2 %.

of extra equity for additional periods in the future. Very important: this model will work seamlessly in private incubators, but in case of public game incubators it could be more complicated – sometimes it requires building the game incubator as an independent

organisation: foundation, limited liability company, joint-stock company or something similar which is compliant with the respective national law.

Royalty

The idea of the royalty model is that revenues earned by the incubated business will legitimise a royalty payment (about 5 %) for the incubator. Trust and constant communication between the parties is needed to ensure this. If the client is in the startup phase, the royalty could harm the financial management. For this reason, there are cases when incubators postpone payments. As above: it could be more complicated for public funded game incubators and could require special financial instruments.

Service Fee

It may not be the best way at the beginning, but during more mature stages of the incubator it works well. If you build a game incubator, you also build a community. And your community is a part of a larger community, the game industry on the national and international level. And here are some streams for supporting the game industry, where you can generate some revenues: conferences, game jams, research for the game industry, support in internationalisation, business networking and business meetups, specialised workshops, e-learning, consulting, HR solutions, and maybe even specific IT solutions for game industry. If your game incubator will be publicly

How is Dutch Game Garden doing things?

We have asked the DGG team about brokerage fees and their approach. Here is what they said:

"We take 5 % on successful lead generation on the development side. Dev to publisher, dev to investor, dev to project, etc. There is no endless payoff as we cap on 50 000 EUR per case. We service all Dutch game companies who want to, not just our incubators. Recently, we made this [deal](#) by introducing Triangle to the publisher. We've been doing this since the summer of 2016."

funded, you should ask your lawyer and bookkeeper how to set up revenues and for-profit activities to be in accordance with the law.

Brokerage Fees

Specific stream of revenue from 1) investors and publishers, 2) incubatee, 3) both. Based on an incubator's ability to connect investors and game startups. It has roots in startup tech incubators but isn't commonly used yet. Probably even more unknown in case of game incubators.

e. Summary

Financing game incubators is a difficult challenge. In theory there are many sources of funds. The reality is that if you like to establish a sustainable game incubator, you have to be prepared to work with many clients, stakeholders and target groups and design a diversified and flexible budget. And this work could be either hard or extremely hard. If you think carefully about your business model, value proposition, structure of costs, business environment, and needs of your client – then your work will be just hard. If you don't – it will be harder.

Breaking even (fun fact)

For the question „How long will it take for the Business Incubator to break even?“ asked by Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services (CSES), 7,5 % of incubators answered less than 1 year, 14,8 % 1-2 years, 29,6 % 2-3 years, 3,7 % 3-4 years, 3,7 % 4-5 years, and 40,7 % over 5 years. This shouldn't come as a surprise, because for the question “Is it part of the Business Incubators business plan to break even?” asked by CSES, only 40,8 % answered “Yes”.

The same goes for your clients, young game startups. You can understand them better and support them better in your game incubator, as your product (game incubator) faces similar challenges as their products (video games).

4. Managing a Game Incubator

Maintaining a game incubator is of course closely tied to having financial capacity and stability. The physical environment is naturally very important. These issues are mentioned in the chapter [“Financing Game Incubation Services”](#).

However, one would argue that the true value of incubation is to be found in the know-how and the people responsible for management, also known as the incubation staff. Thus, here we will focus solely on managing soft skills and knowledge sharing within incubation services.

a. Management Approaches and Tools

In terms of managing the people, it can be understood in two ways:

- managing the incubation staff
- “managing” the incubatees, understood as guiding them, providing them with tools and competences that enable them to become independent

For incubation staff, meaning the people who will be responsible for building and executing the programme, it should be important to surround yourself with people who have had at least some experience with either event management or maintaining professional relations. Usually the smaller the team the better, as you as the coordinator will have a clean view of the work distribution between your personnel.

When talking about guiding the incubatees, what we mean is both making sure that they are being provided with the highest quality of services from our side and monitoring whether they contribute their time and efforts to actually employ the knowledge. Some proposed methods of monitoring progress are mentioned in the chapter [“Monitoring & Evaluation”](#).

The business model, the mission and the programme type will strongly affect the choice of the appropriate management model for your incubator. It will also guide management decisions related to designing the programme:

- the content focus (e.g. technical proficiency or entrepreneurship) will determine the topics and the skill requirements of the teaching/mentoring staff.
- the business focus (e.g. just mobile games, or no VR games, etc.)
- the duration of the programme,

- the maturity level (admission requirement and target achievement)
- the practical experience level (e.g. internships, pitching at events, hackathons)
- the internationalisation (e.g. market orientation, marketing strategies, investor approach)

All these decisions will determine the scope not only of the programme itself but also of the related management tasks. They will also determine the resources needed and offers to be provided to meet these aspirations.

Using online tools while managing an incubator seems like a must-do nowadays. The principle of each tool is more or less similar: You create projects, divide them into smaller tasks, and assign a person responsible for the task's realisation and fix a deadline. This can be beneficial to everyone: startups that work on their game and have to assign tasks to different team members, incubation staff to monitor their own tasks and responsibilities towards incubated companies and, finally, for the relation between startups and the game incubator. Project management/collaboration tools can prove to be a more organised way of monitoring the progress of an incubated startup – their way of achieving milestones, providing the trainers with documentation and paperwork, and bringing up current questions and concerns.

Useful online tools

There is a multitude of platforms and websites helpful while managing and organizing work for different groups of people. Here are some prime examples of free tools:

[Discord](#) – communication platform used initially by gamers to talk while playing, now it has become one of the most popular places to build communities with gamers but also to talk to e.g. incubated teams in a nonofficial atmosphere

[Asana](#), [Trello](#), [Slack](#) – popular management tools where you can make tasks, assign them to different people and monitor their progress

[Google Docs](#) – helpful when working on a single file with many people; you can add comments and work remotely while the file saves itself automatically

[Dropbox](#), [WeTransfer](#) – easy and fast ways of sending and sharing bigger files like videos or pictures

b. Marketing Incubation

Marketing your incubator is another important aspect of your management. In the contexts of game incubators, external communication creates value to potential clients in several ways:

- provide access to new ideas and resources;
- enhance credibility and reputation through alliances with reputable partners;
- facilitate knowledge exchange and the generation of collective learning.

By providing access not only to an internal network of resources but also to an external network, incubators offer opportunities for faster business development.

Marketing a game incubator in principal should not be very much different from marketing a regular incubator focused on more “traditional” industries. It is closely tied to event and network management and finding valuable partners in the ecosystem.

c. Programme Management

Managing the programme of the incubation could be arguably the most crucial part of the whole incubation. It requires a certain mindset and readiness to change your assumptions according to the everchanging reality of the industry you wish to support with your incubator.

Issues that should be thought through beforehand are your target group, facilities and people you can engage in building your incubation. In the next phase you should ask yourself: what kind of support I can offer? What do I even know about the game industry? Just because you do not know this now does not mean that you are unqualified for managing an incubator. On the contrary, if you are not afraid to ask, you do not only receive valuable feedback but also start to build your own network of people who care about your incubator and the teams that will be growing under your wings.

Once you get to know the recent trends in the game industry and understand what are the issues that young companies may face at the beginning, it is time to build a programme, as in – plan on how long a single company will stay, what kind of benefits can you offer and within what kind of timeframe. Some of the most popular topics that perhaps should be mentioned in each game incubator are:

- game design, level design
- technologies and engines
- marketing and PR
- building and managing communities
- pitching and preparing offers
- legal issues
- business models
- monetisation models
- production management
- team management

See what others are doing ... and get inspired

- [Carbon Incubator](#) (Romania)
- [Game Hub Denmark](#) (Denmark)
- [SpielFabrique](#) (France/Germany)
- [Tartu Science Park](#) (Estonia)
- [Games Factory Farm League](#) (Finland)
- [The Game Incubator](#) (Sweden)
- [Digital Dragons Incubator](#) (Poland)
- [The Dutch Game Garden](#) (The Netherlands)
- [The NYU Game Center Incubator](#) (USA)
- [Digital Media & Gaming Incubator](#) (Canada)

The “correct” order of the above does not exist as within game industry business, artistic, social and technological aspects are intertwined, new ideas and issues come and go. It could be important, however, to pack all of the above mentioned in a “block” for each batch of your incubatees to go through in order to make sure they could consult mentors or trainers in as many aspects of the industry as possible.

d. Roles in an Incubator - Incubator Staff, Mentors, Trainers

It is important to distinguish between different roles that the people in the incubator’s environment can take. Some of the most basic ones are:

- **Mentor** – usually a game industry veteran who now gladly shares their knowledge with younger specialists. A mentor is someone with whom game startups can consult their ideas and who monitors their progress if they turn to him/her. Mentors can be fixed members of incubator staff, always at hand, or someone who comes from time to time and during these time slots is available to your incubatees. Much of it depends on who that person is, what kind of relations you have with them and (usually) how much you can pay them.
- **Trainer/coach** – within many incubation programmes one of the key points are workshops/masterclasses run by specialists within given fields. These trainers (or coaches, as some call them) are the people who are usually paid to give a thorough workshop to your incubatees and their main asset is their extensive knowledge on certain topics ranging from game industry specified to more generic, business-related. It may happen that a trainer builds a closer relationship with your incubatees and wants to keep in touch with them (free of charge). However, usually coaches are the people whom you address when you want to arm your proteges with specific skills.
- **Manager/coordinator** – someone who manages the incubator, deals with paperwork, finances, chooses the rest of the personnel and binds it all together. Usually a manager will not have close relations with incubatees but will still want to know about the level of their satisfaction.
- **Buddy** – an “older brother/sister” of a kind, can be either an incubator alumni or one of the staff who has had some experience (in game development or generally in business) and is there on a daily basis to help incubatees not only with work-related issues but also to simply be their moral support in times of need. Buddies would be usually the people with whom

incubatees are the closest and vice versa which makes them perhaps the most suitable to monitor startups' progress, needs and modify the incubation programme to meet them.

e. Internal and External Partners

Not unlike any other business, the game industry is strongly focused on building networks. The more people you know, the more they can help you with whatever projects come into fruition. The same is true for game incubation. While looking for personnel for your incubator (assuming you do not have a trusted and experienced team already) it is worth reaching to people who work in game development to either ask them to become mentors or trainers or to simply consult your ideas and confront them with reality. After all, who knows the best what people starting their journey in game industry need than the people who have been there some time ago.

Game industry specialists, or even entire game studios, can become your partners. That means they can get involved in some way in the entity of your incubator. They can help you with many steps:

- Recruitment process – when you are looking for teams or companies to join your incubator, but you are fairly unknown as a support provider, a partner can testify to your skills and competences. They can promote your recruitment using their media and social media channels.
- Mentorship – some partners may wish to keep an eye on your incubatees as they may wish to recruit them to their studios or collaborate in different projects if they show potential. In this case make sure the partner does not only take the role of a silent judge but convince them to actively participate in the professional lives of your incubatees – for both them and mentor's benefit.
- Workshops – many game developers are more than glad to share their expertise. However, make sure that they do not only have the necessary knowledge but also have the soft skills crucial to run an interesting and structured workshop.

Naturally, not only game studios can become your partner. Many local government units are open for cooperation, as game development is one of the “hottest” industries to support nowadays with projects and contests. If nothing else, they can at least provide you with marketing and often funds necessary to carry out incubation. E.g. The Game Incubator in Skövde is also provided with office space granted by its local government unit.

Game media or media in general are partners worth working with as they have broad networks and can help you market your incubator to the world. Informal communities of game development creators or enthusiasts are invaluable, although you might want to build relations with them before you ask them favors – they value credibility and will support your activities as long as they believe in what you do serves the industry. One of the most important game developers' associations with its local chapters all over the world is the IGDA – the International Game Developers Association.²⁴

Industry organisations such as foundations of indie creators, associations of game developers (e.g. Polish Games Association²⁵, Latvian Game Developers Association²⁶), hubs (e.g. Game Habitat²⁷) are other great partners. Many similar associations and lobby groups function internationally (e.g. European Games Developer Federation²⁸) and organise events and meetings that you can utilise both for networking opportunities as well as for marketing your incubator.

If you are working within bigger structures (e.g. tech park, science park, etc.), always try to find synergies between branches. How about a joint project with HealthTech or CyberSec? Many interesting serious game projects can come into mind when you are open for new ideas.

²⁴ International Game Developers Association (IGDA): <https://igda.org/>.

²⁵ Polish Games Association: <http://polskiegry.eu/en/>.

²⁶ Latvian Game Developers Association: <https://www.gamedev.lv/>.

²⁷ Game Habitat: <https://www.gamehabitat.se/>.

²⁸ European Games Developer Federation: <http://www.egdf.eu/>.

5. Incubation Programmes and Forms

Incubation can be as diverse as the companies and informal teams benefiting from it. Game incubation, which is the focus of this manual, strives to provide the incubatees mostly with skills and knowledge of the business aspects of game production. These alone can be taught in different ways and within different time frames. One form is no better or worse than the other. All depends on incubator's capabilities, funds, local policies as well as on the needs of the incubated.

Below are some of the more popular formats in which game incubators function.

a. Preincubation

This way of supporting is often implemented when dealing with informal teams, young people (students, high schoolers or even younger). It is a delicate introduction into the business aspects that go along with creating games. Teaching your “preincubatees” what establishing a business means, what kind of entrepreneurial skills they should learn and the attitude they should have to succeed (or accept the concept of failure) – these are all important issues that the participants can learn in a friendly and professional environment.

Preincubation ventures are often established within the vicinity and with close cooperation of universities offering courses/majors on game development and similar topics.

All partners carrying out incubator pilots, both within the project Baltic Game Industry and outside, have activities that could be given as examples of preincubation, e.g. Digital Dragons Academy (Poland, website in Polish; series of speeches and workshops once a month on a different topic related to game development)²⁹, Game Hub Denmark³⁰ and VHTP GameDev Incubator (physical and online meetups and workshops)³¹.

Some assumptions of this model:

- the duration: usually long (from few months to almost a year)

²⁹ Digital Dragons Academy: <http://academy.digitaldragons.pl/>.

³⁰ Game Hub Denmark: <https://gamehubdenmark.com/>.

³¹ VHTP GameDev Incubator: <https://www.vatp.lv/en/business-support>.

- the level of startups' maturity: low

b. Fast Programmes

Fast programmes are focused on giving intensive, accelerator-paced series of workshops. The incubatees are most often more experienced teams and formalised startups with games in progress. The participants of fast programmes (simply called “incubation”) are eager to learn more about the business aspects of creating games. They may still have some issues with technical or artistic aspects of game development but are mature enough to acknowledge that if they wish to make a living from making games, learning the business side of it is crucial.

Examples could be: GameBCN from Barcelona, Spain³² and outside EU – NYU Game Center Incubator (USA)³³, The Academy of Interactive Entertainment Incubator (Australia)³⁴ and GameFounders (Malaysia)³⁵.

Some assumptions of this model:

- the duration: short (usually 3-4 months)
- the level of startups' maturity: medium

c. Long-Term Programmes

Arguably the most common form of incubation where teams/companies spend a lot of time together in the same surroundings. There are workshops/masterclasses, but the main focus is the growth of the startups. Mentors and buddies play a big role here, giving feedback and guiding teams/companies. This form truly encapsulates the meaning of term “to incubate”, as in “give extra support and favorable conditions for young organisms to grow” (in this case – game studios). Examples: Game Hub Denmark (Denmark)³⁶, The Game Incubator (Sweden)³⁷, Kuura Incubator (Finland)³⁸, Dutch Game Garden (The Netherlands)³⁹.

Some assumptions of this model:

³² GameBCN: <https://gamebcn.co/>.

³³ NYU Game Center Incubator: <https://gamecenter.nyu.edu/about/incubator/incubator-curriculum/>.

³⁴ The Academy of Interactive Entertainment Incubator: <https://aieincubator.com.au/>.

³⁵ GameFounders: <http://www.gamefounders.com/>.

³⁶ Game Hub Denmark: <https://gamehubdenmark.com/>.

³⁷ The Game Incubator: <https://www.thegameincubator.se/>.

³⁸ Kuura Playhouse: <https://www.kuuragames.com/>.

³⁹ Dutch Game Garden: <https://www.dutchgamegarden.nl/>.

- the duration: usually long (1 year+)
- the level of startups' maturity: medium

d. Acceleration

Like fast programmes, acceleration focuses on short time spans within which companies will have many practical workshops and intensive consultation sessions, often focused on enhancing pitching skills in order to get the game ready to be launched. There is usually money involved, as startups are given some funds to finish working on their projects and often the accelerator will take equity in the company in exchange. The incubatees (or rather – “acceleratees”) at this point are more often than not companies strongly focused on finding investors or publishers.

Examples: ARP Games (Poland)⁴⁰, Carbon Incubator (Romania)⁴¹.

Some assumptions of this model:

- the duration: short (usually 3-4 months)
- the level of startups' maturity: high

e. Other Forms of Support

Co-Working

The assumption behind co-working is that people can mutually benefit from each other if they work in the same environment or are at least prone to often meet in informal situations. Co-working (or co-work) may mean sharing one vast space with some separated areas for each person/group. TechTarget defines it as “a business services provision model that involves individuals working independently or collaboratively in shared office space”⁴².

In a model, where, as a game incubator you want to stimulate game studios without interfering in their creative process, sometimes it may be beneficial to simply locate them in a shared space where they will unknowingly exchange ideas, discuss problems and solutions. It is also imperative that the profiles of companies/teams do not have to be identical. On the contrary – diversity inspires to look at things from other perspectives, thus mingling different game genres, platforms or even mixing game startups with companies from different branches of IT/ICT may result in interesting outcomes.

⁴⁰ ARP Games: <https://arpgames.pl/en/about-arp-games/>.

⁴¹ Carbon Incubator: <https://carbon-incubator.com/program/>.

⁴² TechTarget Whatis.com “coworking”: <https://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/coworking>.

One of the advantages of having more companies in the same environment is also knowledge about recruitment needs and word-of-mouth recommendations. The startups may exchange employees and come up with their internal HR system for “renting” employees and their unique skills.

A perk that may not be clear at first glance is having a shared kitchen or social room of any kind where people meet in noncommittal circumstances and simply talk. The more they talk, the more they are eager to share thoughts and work-related issues to help each other.

Examples: Games Factory (Finland)⁴³, outside the EU – Digital Media & Gaming Incubator at George Brown College (Canada)⁴⁴ and Google for Startups Residency (worldwide)⁴⁵.

Event and Network Management

One of the main goals of leading an incubation programme is to stimulate knowledge transfer between various parties of the programme. One method of achieving that can be organising events. They serve two purposes, one being the knowledge and skills acquired from the panelists, speakers or – generally speaking – the substantive core of the event, the other and perhaps even more vital being the informal exchange of know-how between the startups and simply networking. Indeed, building a network seems to still be an underappreciated part of establishing an efficiently working business and one that can be possibly troublesome for more introverted members of the teams.

However, there are a number of various events structured in a way to encourage participants to talk and work on a given task, bypassing the ever-so-often uncomfortable small talk.

Own events on site, often achievable with small to no external resources:

- Hackathon/jam – usually lasting 48 hours, this intensive event focuses on team working while finding a solution to a given problem or creating a product (e.g. a game). While “hackathon” is a wide term, a separate name “(game) jam” was coined to accentuate a game industry event. One of the most popular game jams is the Global Game Jam taking place in January each year in every venue that has joined the initiative.⁴⁶ For two days the participants all over the world create a game on a given, usually vague topic. Jams can also be used for mixing teams/co-creation/co-development – e.g. if a team consisting of mainly programmers need to find artists

⁴³ Games Factory: <https://www.gamesfactory.fi/>.

⁴⁴ Digital Media & Gaming Incubator: <http://gaminginc.org/space/>.

⁴⁵ Google for Startups Residency: <https://www.campus.co/google-for-startups-residency/>.

⁴⁶ Global Game Jam: <https://globalgamejam.org/>.

to join their production, jams can be a way of getting to know each other and try to develop together in an informal, productive setting. Looking at game jams from the perspective of a game incubator, encouraging your startups to join such an event may help stimulate their creativity, force them (without a real obligation) to learn how to schedule work around a small project to complete it within given deadline and for those who join different work groups, it may help them to cooperate in various environments.

- Demo day – usually hosted at the end of the incubation as a crowning achievement of the process. The event most often comprises of pitches presented by startups in front of an audience of potential investors, business angels, media, publishers and other parties. Demo days can be more or less official, depending on their purpose. For game incubators, organising a demo day can be a good way of verifying the maturity of game startups and monitoring the progress of lessons learned from the incubation process.
- Conference – game startups may be both part of the audience and the speakers, depending on the level of conference's advancement on a given topic. If startups are the participants of the conference, then apart from the knowledge gained from the lectures, they usually have the opportunity to ask questions from the audience as well as meet new people interested in the same field. As for preparing a speech, public speaking is surely a serious test for inexperienced speakers but will work in favor of honing their presentation skills and establish their position as specialists in a given subject.
- Workshop – understood as an intensive training focused on ameliorating participants' skills and/or teaching them something new. The difference between a workshop and a speech/lecture is that during a workshop a more practical, empirical approach is recommended. The trainees should actively acquire new knowledge and implement it by solving tasks, analysing case studies, etc.

These kinds of activities may detach a startup for a day or two from their production process but will ideally arm them with new abilities and knowledge to improve the experience of creating a video game.

Industry Research

As a manager of game incubator, you will get to know the industry from inside out – the veterans, the media, the investors, the creators. Taking part in various researches of the industry can help you build up your network as well as understand more about the needs and shortages – all helpful while creating your incubation programme.

Examples of industry researches co-written by partners in Baltic Sea Region:

- Warsaw Video Games Industry 2019/20_(Krakow Technology Park)⁴⁷
- Polish Gamers Research '19 (Krakow Technology Park)⁴⁸
- State of the Polish Video Game Industry '17 (Krakow Technology Park)⁴⁹
- Danish Content Producers in numbers (in Danish; Interactive Denmark)⁵⁰
- Swedish Game Developer Index (Dataspelsbranschen – Swedish Games Industry)⁵¹

Booths at Conferences

When dealing with more mature startups that know how to pitch and want to market their game in front of potential clients or investors, taking them on local or international game conferences and fairs may be a good idea. You will see the knowledge you shared with them being implemented in real life and also have time yourself to meet with people and startups who may be interested in either joining your incubator or supporting it in various ways.

Animating Cooperation Between Alumni and Incubatees

Nothing will confirm your beliefs that making a game incubator is something worth pursuing as much as seeing the alumni (graduates) want to stay within the incubator, take on the role of either

⁴⁷ Krakow Technology Park “Warsaw Video Games Industry 2019/20”: https://www.kpt.krakow.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/raport2020_21x27_48p_en_final_web.pdf.

⁴⁸ Krakow Technology Park: “Polish Gamers Research '19”: https://www.kpt.krakow.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/prezentacja_polishgamers_final_watermark.pdf.

⁴⁹ Krakow Technology Park: “State of the Polish Video Game Industry '17”: http://digitaldragons.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/state_of_polish_video_game_industry17_web.pdf.

⁵⁰ Interactive Denmark “Danske Indholdsproducenter | Tal 2018”: https://interactivedenmark.dk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Danske-Indholdsproducenter-i-tal-2018_0.pdf.

⁵¹ Dataspelsbranschen – Swedish Games Industry “Game Developer Index 2019”: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a61edb7a803bb7a65252b2d/t/5db812f3df1a2166b947a58a/1572344586626/GDI19_web.pdf.

mentors, trainers or buddies. In Sting (Sweden)⁵² the alumni can also invest in startups in current batches.

⁵² Sting: <https://sting.co/en/>.

6. Selecting Participants of a Game Incubator

Another area of management that requires strategic decision making as part of establishing an incubator is the question of how to acquire and select the game startups. This will have an impact on the resources, the promotion of the programme and the time schedule of the incubator. Considering the different approaches to selecting potential participants of incubators we can distinguish several aspects to be included in the selection process. Naturally, the type of people to be addressed and the business model will inform the choice of application procedure.

a. Criteria for Specific Batches

You may want to consider splitting your incubation programme into batches, as in – editions suited best to different target groups. The incubatees will have varying needs, levels of maturity and experience. It is beneficial to take that into consideration before setting them up in one group and giving them access to workshops, mentorship and other means of support. You may also focus on only one of these target groups, making that the overall selection criterium.

One of the methods of classifying incubatees is dividing them into the following categories:

- Project-focused: amateurs, students and teams interested in developing a game (a project) – mostly their first game,
- Publication-focused: teams who want to commercialise their game. They might have already developed games, but not professionally endeavoured to make it a market success (or they have tried but failed),
- Business-focused: teams that have worked in a loose “amateurish” way together (e.g. during their studies) or teams that have been employed as game developers and are now creating their own company – hence teams with experience in making games, but not in being entrepreneurs.

Another example of classification can be based on platforms:

- Mobile: teams that create games for smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices,
- PC (personal computer): startups making games for computers and laptops,

- Consoles: teams creating products intended for e.g. XBOX, PlayStation, Nintendo Switch (handheld console),
- Web browser: startups making games hosted on either individual domains or on social media platforms.

Each of above mentioned do not only require different technical knowledge and design but are tied to different targets, marketing strategies, distribution platforms, etc., so they may require different mentors' expertise.

b. Application Procedures and Requirements

Application processes typically include following steps:

1. Application Form

Most incubators have a unified application form for all applicants regardless of their age, education level, or company status. For most, the determining factors for choosing the right applicants are motivation, their desire to start and run a company rather than the sheer passion to create video games. These points can be stipulated in the incubator's application form to help the selection committee choose appropriately.

Some of the more typical information and data gathered through the application form are:

- information about the team: describing each member's skills, educational background, experience in industry, previous games worked on, etc.,
 - motivations: what is their motivation for starting a company, etc.,
 - high-level brief about the initial game project, build (playable version of the game), gameplay video, etc.,
 - SWOT analysis of the teams/company's own situation, or at least identification of their needs and challenges with a plan for dealing with these. They should also have a clear understanding of what a given incubator can provide them with and state it,
 - for more mature teams – information about their product: listing competitors, listing intended business model, describing plans for marketing, initial budget, etc.
- 2. Face-to-face or online interview with potential incubatees to assure the determination and level of maturity of all parties involved to have a mutually fulfilling cooperation throughout the incubation process.*

The screening process needs to be structured & efficient:

1. Schedule open days/info sessions by sending out invitations to prospective candidates, as well as various stakeholders, universities etc. and track attendance
2. Online applications should be available on the website/portal of the incubator guiding the applicant in a step-by-step manner to filing in the necessary information.
3. Application evaluation – the applications will be submitted to an evaluation team to review and score the application (the results can be posted online or sent to each applicant individually). The results should be automatically consolidated and aggregated thus allowing to identify whether the applicant has qualified for the next round.
4. Selection panel interviews – candidates who passed the application screening process will be eligible to attend a selection panel interview, preferably face to face, but possible online as well.
5. The incubator should make use of a standard “operating procedure” for future applicant selection, thus minimising the time to screen all the applications and potential incubatees.

A committee that may consist of incubator staff, befriended game experts, alumni from previous batches and other partners would ideally combine the results from the application and interview to choose the most consistent group.

If you want to be working with student teams, they usually may spend their first project learning how to build a game. During this process you will evaluate if they can develop an entrepreneurial mindset, and then they will be evaluated on the same criteria as the startup team.

For startup teams, rather than focusing entirely on the product, the core members of the company are what will most likely be decisive in the longer run. They need good team dynamics and to have the right game development competences in place, and – if not present - a valid argument for how they will strengthen the team; do they e.g. have a close network from their game education, from former game development activities, or maybe a plan for how to attract funding to hire new team members? These are all important issues worth discussing about while deciding about who joins the incubator.

Also important is to get an understanding of the company’s vision and mission. Why do they choose to build their own studio rather than applying for jobs in more established companies? Being entrepreneurs should always be their first choice – and not something they do because it is too difficult or time-consuming to land a job. And if that is the case, where do they see their company

going in the near and not so near future? Are they ambitious – and do their competences match these ambitions? Do they have at least a basic understanding of the game industry, the market, where it is going – and why the games they want to develop fit in?

These are basically the exact same questions an external investor would be looking for answers to – and as a game incubator serves the purpose of being the first step on a journey for a game startup that very likely will involve pitching to investors at some point, it makes good sense to ask those questions when screening applicants to the incubation programme.

If an incubator has a lot of applicants the criteria for selecting them need to be tightened and the other way around – if the number of applicants is diminishing, the incubator may want to lighten the selection criteria, unless it does not have a minimum number of startups to accept.

c. Time and Schedule

There is no perfect recipe for choosing the time and schedule of your incubation batch. A lot of it depends on whether you cooperate with a university, organise other kinds of events and trainings, have different incubation programmes afoot etc.

As for the time needed to gather a satisfying amount of applications and to assess them, at least a couple of months is advised. Be mindful that the potential participants of the incubation programme will want to know the structure and timeframe of the batch to evaluate how much time and effort they will have to make from their side so the time spent in your incubator was as fruitful and meaningful as possible.

Online or face-to-face interviews can usually take up to an hour. It should be enough to confirm the information they have previously given through the application form and go deeper into the details, see the teams' members and how maturely they think and talk about their project and whether they seem like people you would genuinely want to work with and support.

As for the number of batches scheduled for the year, it depends on the intensity and length of your planned programme and on the resources you have at your disposal.

d. Communication Strategies

The communication channels for talking about recruiting to incubator should in principal not be very different from those for talking about your incubator in general. Social media, e.g. Facebook⁵³ is a great start as there are numerous groups and fanpages for beginner game developers, lobby groups, indie studios and game enthusiasts who are taking their first steps on the game development career path. In some countries Twitter⁵⁴ or Instagram⁵⁵ may attract the target of your posts better than somewhere else. While recruiting more experienced teams and studios LinkedIn⁵⁶ could be a good place to reach more professionals and business-oriented candidates.

You may want to consider cooperating with portals accumulating job offers in video games industry. E.g. Skillshot.pl from Poland⁵⁷ was the partner of Krakow Technology Park with a promoted the offer to join the incubator. If your local startup communities are open to write about and promote initiatives outside their standard technological ventures, you may want to use their help to build awareness of your incubator's brand wider. A word-of-mouth marketing done by your partners and – in best case scenario – your alumni is priceless as nothing says more about the quality of your offer than the people who have been within your structures and can testify for your programme.

Talking about the frequency of communication, there is also no perfect recipe. Think about how many applications you would need to choose from and if you feel that you are not getting there – try to post more frequently, join new social media groups, etc.

⁵³ Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/>.

⁵⁴ Twitter: <https://twitter.com/>.

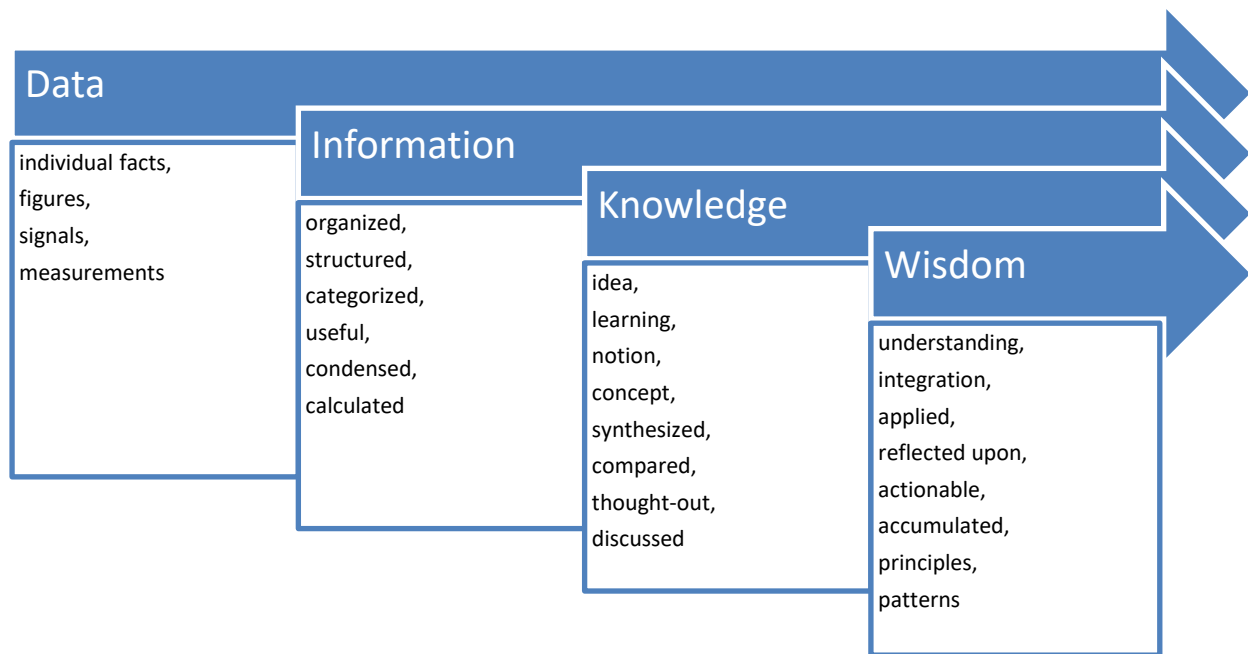
⁵⁵ Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/>.

⁵⁶ LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/>.

⁵⁷ Skillshot.pl: <https://www.skillshot.pl/>.

7. Monitoring & Evaluation

Monitoring & evaluation (M&E) is one of the many processes you should design in your new game incubator. And if do this early – better for you and for your incubator. You probably perfectly understand the power of information and data, especially big data. Look at the diagram below and see for yourself that data is the basis for planned growth of your game incubator.



In the beginning we should clarify the meaning of both words:

- **Monitoring** is a continuous assessment that aims at providing all stakeholders with early detailed information on the progress or delay of the ongoing assessed activities.
- **Evaluation** is a systematic and objective examination concerning the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and impact of activities in the light of specified objectives.

So, you will use M&E to answer a question: does your game incubation deliver any value, and what type of value is it?

a. When?

You can evaluate your game incubator activities within the three time horizons:

- Ex-ante (before or early in game incubation programme)
- Mid-term (carried out underway, during game incubation programme)
- Ex-post (towards the end or after game incubation programme)

We would like to recommend all three levels of evaluation. Your approach will be more comprehensive.

b. What is the Goal?

We can indicate the following goals for monitoring activities:

- Upgrading management processes in your game incubator
- Anticipation of issues
- Optimisation for available resources
- Verifying documentation compliance

We can indicate following goals for evaluation activities:

- Defining directions of development
- Learning your customers'/stakeholders' needs
- Increasing the effectiveness and usability of your game incubator
- Determining a level of compliance with the assumed objectives, results, products
- Identifying strengths and weaknesses of the game incubator (offer, process, approach, human resources etc.)
- Supporting the process of decision making

We hope that you build your game incubator using Business Model Canvas (see chapter "[Financing Game Incubation Services](#)") with defined values, measurable key performance indicators, embedded on strategy, etc. It is vital to know where you want to go with your incubation. To make sure that you have reached your goals, you have to use the right tool, as in – tools of monitoring and evaluation. Theory of management knows a few models for goals defining, the three most popular you can find in the text box. It does not matter which model

Models for defining goals:

SMART – your goal in game incubator should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound.

SMARTER – almost as above: goal should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound, and additionally – Exciting, Recorded.

EXACT – in this model your goal should be: Explicit, eXciting, Assessable, Challenging, Time-framed.

you choose. What matters is: have you defined specific development goals? Be sure to mix goals, for example: qualitative, quantitative, short-, mid- and long-term, and cover all your incubation aspects:

- Incubator as an organisation:
 - financing,
 - staff,
 - mentors,
 - forms of support and effectiveness (workshops, mentoring, game jams, study trips, etc.) – quality and quantity,
 - learning goals,
 - business environment (network, local and regional authorities, publishers, investors, opinion leaders/influencers, game development organisations, etc.)
- Incubatee:
 - number of incubated teams/projects,
 - changing skills of incubatee,
 - profitability of incubatee/alumni,
 - game projects (launched, revenues, users, etc.),
 - competitiveness (data from App Store/Google Play, Steam, Epic Game Store, etc.).

Monitoring and evaluation help you measure the degree of achieving your goals.

To sum up: If you are going to correct your programmes of incubation, upgrade the strategy, change your scope, do pivot or something else – you need data, information, knowledge, wisdom. And an introduction to all of the above is M&E.

c. Next Steps

We can divide the M&E process into the following next steps:

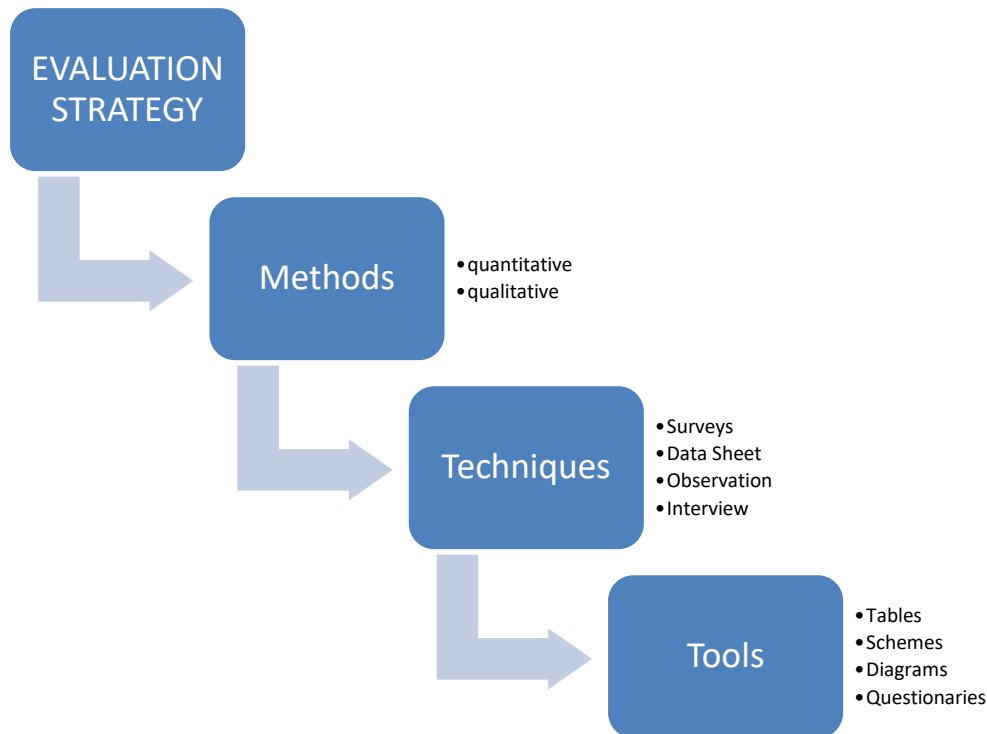
- 1) Planning
 - a. Why are we doing M&E?
 - b. What is the subject of evaluation/researches?
 - c. How are we going to do M&E?
 - d. Which method(s) will we use?

- e. What evaluation criteria will we use?⁵⁸
 - i. Relevance: is the activity (workshop/game jam/pitching contest/etc.) of your game incubator doing something that matters?
 - ii. Coherence: how well does the activity of your game incubator fit?
 - iii. Effectiveness: is the activity of your game incubator achieving its goals?
 - iv. Efficiency: how well are resources being used?
 - v. Impact: what difference does the activity of your game incubator make?
 - vi. Sustainability: will the benefits last?
- f. Who
 - i. ... is the target group?
 - ii. ... is the owner of this process?
 - iii. ... will implement evaluation result?
- g. Resources:
 - i. Time
 - ii. Staff
 - iii. Funds
 - iv. Specific tools
- 2) Enforcement
- 3) Data collecting and analyses; for example:
 - a. Cost-benefit analysis
 - b. Effectiveness analysis
 - c. Strengths and weaknesses analysis (SWOT)
 - d. Benchmarking
- 4) Report
- 5) Implementation of the evaluation results

⁵⁸ Evaluation criteria are based on OECD approach. OECD "Evaluation Criteria":
<https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>.

d. Structure, System and Strategy

The M&E system refers to all the indicators, tools and processes that you will use to measure whether a programme has been implemented according to the plan (monitoring) and is having the desired result (evaluation). We can imagine comprehensive evaluation strategy as three levels (or layers):



e. Methods

Evaluation methods are systematic plans utilised in the collection of data or evidence for analysis in order to gather information or to create better understanding of the subject of evaluation.

We can indicate two main groups of research methods: qualitative and quantitative. The results of qualitative methods are descriptive in opposite to the results of quantitative methods with numbers, models, measures, etc.

Qualitative methods include: ethnography⁵⁹, narrative/storytelling⁶⁰, phenomenological⁶¹, grounded theory⁶² and case study as a research system⁶³. Research systems in quantitative methods could be observation, experiment.

You need both – qualitative and quantitative research methods – to better understand your incubation reality.

f. Techniques

Basing on methods we can indicate research/evaluation techniques like: participant observation⁶⁴, in-depth interviews⁶⁵, and formal surveys⁶⁶, interviews⁶⁷, direct observation⁶⁸, focus group discussions⁶⁹, expert interviews⁷⁰ and mapping⁷¹ and so on. And from techniques we can derive the right tools.

⁵⁹ Wikipedia “Ethnography”: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnography>.

⁶⁰ Wikipedia “Narrative inquiry”: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narrative_inquiry.

⁶¹ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy “Phenomenology”: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>.

⁶² Grounded Theory Online “What is Grounded Theory”: <http://www.groundedtheoryonline.com/what-is-grounded-theory/>.

⁶³ Harrison, Helena; Birks, Melanie; Franklin, Richard; Mills, Jane “Case Study Research: Foundations and Methodological Orientations” Forum: Qualitative Social Research Sozialforschung 2017: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/2655/4079>.

⁶⁴ Kawulich, Babara B. “Participant Observation as a Data Collection Method” Forum: Qualitative Social Research Sozialforschung 2005: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/466/996>.

⁶⁵ Wisestep “In Depth Interviews Advantages and Disadvantages”: <https://content.wisestep.com/depth-interview-advantages-disadvantages/>.

⁶⁶ Qualtrics “What Is a Survey”: <https://www.qualtrics.com/experience-management/research/survey-basics/>.

⁶⁷ Research Methodology „Interviews“: <https://research-methodology.net/research-methods/qualitative-research/interviews/>.

⁶⁸ Fuel Cycle “The 3 Most Common Observation Research Methods” 2019: <https://fuelcycle.com/blog/the-3-most-common-observation-research-methods/>.

⁶⁹ Wikipedia “Focus group”: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Focus_group.

⁷⁰ Design Kit “Expert Interview”: <https://www.designkit.org/methods/43>.

⁷¹ Trochim, William M.K. “Concept Mapping” Research Methods Knowledge Base: <https://conjointly.com/kb/concept-mapping/>.

Here you can find an (anonymised) example from GameHub Denmark – its solution to evaluate game startups. This solution is like a really good game – easy to learn, hard to master. Feel free to get inspired:

M&E Tool Game Hub Denmark

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Updated: 01.01.20xx					
2	COMPANY	LOCATION	COMPANY STATUS	PRODUCT STATUS	COMMENTS (below are examples, for demo purposes)	
3	Company name A	City A	Concerns	Concept	On pause. Concentrating on studies.	
4	Company name B	City B	Concerns	Concept	Concentrating on studies.	
5	Company name C	Office A	OK	Concept	Working on new prototype	
6	Company name D	Office B	OK	Other	Working as teaching assistant, and building a consulting service business.	
7	Company name E	School A	OK	Funded production	Investmen received from "Partner X", production plan on track for "Project X"	
8	Company name F	School B	OK	Funding ready		
9	Company name G	City A	Concerns	LAUNCHED	"GameTitle" launched, but uncertain if team will continue, as they suffer from burnout.	
10	Company name H	City B	OK	LAUNCHED	"GameTitle" launched, sales ok. Working on console versions and increasing sales.	
11	Company name I	Office A	OK	Multiple products		
12	Company name J	Office B	Critical	Playable	Company on break. Still exists, but uncertain if they will continue.	
13	Company name K	School A	OK	Playable		
14	Company name L	School B	OK	Multiple products	Focus on getting "GameTitle" out. Going really well. "OtherGam" on pause.	

			Phase 1: maturing & establishment														Phase 2: validate/ proof-of-business										Phase 3: growth / accelerate											
	Consultant/ incubator staff person	Log date	VAT number	Owners & documents	Core idea	Prototype	Identity and profile	Competitors	Customers and target audience	Business model	Sales plan	Marketing & plan	Budgeting	Production plan	Ressources & competences	Vertical slice?	Pitch materials	Leads/ exposure	Motivation	Mission/ vision/ strategy	Product USPs	Finances	Business plan (exec)	Product quality	PoB / metrics	Sales results	Launch plan	Investor pitch deck	Organisation	Product cycle (loop)	CRM / salesfunnel/pipe	Profit	KPIs	Growth-strategy	HR & employees	Board of directors	Exit strategy	
Company name (example)		010120xx	3	2	3	3	3	2	2	3	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	2	3	3	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
TOPIC	PERSON	DATE	LOG NOTES																																			
Company	AdvisorA	01/01/20xx	Organisational focus on finding a replacement for "partner x" (i.e. new partner). Could this new partner be found in "City B"?																																			
			Works towards sending application for funding in October																																			
			Skype meeting: AdvisorXX has had meeting with the owners, to discuss reconstruction and plan forwards.																																			
Company	AdvisorB	01/01/20xx	Former PartnerX has has exited and PartnerY has purchased shares (i.e. Partnerx did not contribute). Recommending that accountant or other legal/financial advisor is assigned to assist to correct transfer of assets and dealing with taxes.																																			
			AdvisorXX recommends making headroom for negotiations with a potential new partner.																																			
			Recommend they focus on sales efforts, because current customer has advised that they may not have new work. The owners are close to going full-time (end of university), so will need full salary to support continued operation.																																			
Product	AdvisorB		They are planning to apply for "Grant X" and "private startup funding Y".																																			
Company	AdvisorB	01/01/20xx	Final agreement in place that "PartnerX" has exit, and shares are bought by remaining partners. Accounting company Y is assigned to support.																																			
Product	AdvisorB	01/01/20xx	Status meeting: CEO is currently finalizing funding application to be submitted at latest on XX. September 20XX. The application is for business support for product "NAME"																																			
			Currently they have two interns, that are developing new product prototype (app). This is a side-project, but positive test feedback makes them consider releasing it as a product.																																			
			Incubator business advisor worked with them to reboot their sales and business strategy towards key leads.																																			
			Opened up dialogue with experienced business advisor to enter their board of directors.																																			
Company	AdvisorC	01/01/20xx	Check up - "Grant X" application got approved.																																			
Company	AdvisorA	01/01/20xx	New "PartnerY" has joined the company, and they are now 3 owners again.																																			
			The CEO is now fulltime, and he successfully ended University.																																			
Product	AdvisorB		They have received money from "Grant X" to build up their "Product Z". The project timeline runs for the next 6-8 months. This																																			

g. Tools

When you have designed goals and KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) for your game incubator, and connected with them goals for you M&E activities you can choose the right tool (it should be done in this order; setting up an M&E process from questions for an interview scenario is as popular, as it is wrong). Look at the list of tools below, think about your goals and available resources and choose the best tool for you:

- theory of change
- logical framework
- statistics – open datasets
- system data
- surveys (personal, online, by e-mail, by phone)
- interviews (formal, non-formal, with experts, individual depth)
- focus groups
- sample size
- visual data
- content analysis
- online ethnography
- case study
- simulation

Survey, interview...

are basic tools for all evaluators. Everybody knows (or they just think they know) how to design survey or interview. But we would like to recommend you other tools also. When you build new game incubator, it's the perfect time for an experiment, pilots and trying new things.

So, when you design your evaluation system, try to experiment with focus group interviews, case studies or other approaches to evaluation.

Above you can see tools in academic understanding. Below you can find tools – applications, canvas, scenarios, etc.:

- Client Heartbeat (automating surveys)⁷²
- LimeSurvey (self-hosted surveys)⁷³

⁷² Client Heartbeat: <https://www.clientheartbeat.com/>.

⁷³ LimeSurvey: <https://www.limesurvey.org/de/>.

- QuickTapSurvey (offline surveys)⁷⁴
- SmartSurvey (collaborating on survey questions)⁷⁵
- SurveyAnyplace (gamified surveys)⁷⁶
- Surveybot (chatbot surveys in Facebook Messenger and Workplace)⁷⁷
- SurveyMethods (event management in surveys)⁷⁸
- SurveyMonkey (surveys especially on mobile devices)⁷⁹
- SurveyPlanet (fast editing)⁸⁰
- YesInsights (one-click surveys)⁸¹
- Kahoot! (game-based learning and feedback)⁸²
- Mentimeter (interactive software to enhance presentations and workshops)⁸³
- Klaxoon (software for meeting, brainstorming, questions, tests and learning)⁸⁴
- Google Forms (fast surveys based on Google services)⁸⁵
- Google Analytics (collecting and analyzing data from your websites)⁸⁶
- Facebook (basic analysis tools; try Business Manager Overview)⁸⁷
- Agorapulse (social media measuring and analysis)⁸⁸
- Sociograph (social media measuring and analysis)⁸⁹

Models of evaluation for professionals

Most of your M&E activities will try to balance between your goals, opportunities and resources (with a strong accent on “resources”), especially in the beginning of your game incubator. But when your organisation will grow and become sustainable, you can try building more professional M&E system. Check these expanded models:

- [The Kirkpatrick Model](#)
- [The Phillips Model](#)
- [The Scriven Model \(or Goal-Free Model\)](#)
- [Brinkerhoff's Method \(or Success Case Method\)](#)

⁷⁴ QuickTapSurvey: <https://www.quicktapsurvey.com/>.

⁷⁵ SmartSurvey: <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/>.

⁷⁶ SurveyAnyplace: <https://surveyanyplace.com/>.

⁷⁷ Surveybot: <https://surveybot.io/>.

⁷⁸ SurveyMethods: <https://surveymethods.com/>.

⁷⁹ SurveyMonkey: <https://surveymonkey.com/>.

⁸⁰ SurveyPlanet: <https://surveyplanet.com/>.

⁸¹ YesInsights: <https://www.yesinsights.com/>.

⁸² Kahoot!: <https://kahoot.com/>.

⁸³ Mentimeter: <https://www.mentimeter.com/>.

⁸⁴ Klaxoon: <https://klaxoon.com/>.

⁸⁵ Google Forms: <https://www.google.com/forms/about/>.

⁸⁶ Google Analytics: <https://marketingplatform.google.com/about/analytics/>.

⁸⁷ Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/>.

⁸⁸ Agorapulse: <https://www.agorapulse.com/>.

⁸⁹ Sociograph: <https://www.sociograph.info/>.

- Socialbakers (social media measuring and analysis)⁹⁰
- Brand24 (social media measuring and analysis)⁹¹
- Sotrender (social media measuring and analysis)⁹²
- Brandwatch (social media measuring and analysis)⁹³

Below you can find a few samples of questions to your surveys or interview scenarios (instead of “workshop” you can add “game jam”, “meetup”, pitching contest”, “presentation”, “incubation programme” or something else). Some of the questions are open and your respondent can build a longer statement, sometimes questions require them to rate something (so you need rating scale, for example 1-5). And last but not least – do not use all these questions in your surveys, because they will be too long and tiresome. Choose the ones most relevant for your goals.

- Did the workshop content meet your expectations?
- Was the size of your workshop group appropriate?
- How would you rate the quality of the training?
- Was the mix of activities suitable?
- How would you rate the quality of the mentor in general?
- What was the instructor’s level of content knowledge?
- How was the speed of knowledge delivery during workshop?
- How would you rate organisation and preparation of workshop?
- Did you learn anything new?
- Was the workshop relevant to your needs?
- Was the workshop practical or theoretical?

⁹⁰ Socialbakers: <https://www.socialbakers.com/>.

⁹¹ Brand24: <https://brand24.com/>.

⁹² Sotrender: <https://www.sotrender.com/>.

⁹³ Brandwatch: <https://www.brandwatch.com/products/consumer-research/>.

- Would you recommend the workshop to your colleagues?
- Do you have any suggestions to improve this workshop?
- Did you feel equally engaged in workshop modules?
- How would you rate the workshop sequence and flow?
- Was the language of the trainer easy to understand?
- How would you rate learning materials (printed notes, syllabus)?
- How would you rate your trainer's communication skills?
- How would you rate your trainer's knowledge delivery skills?
- Were your training expectations fulfilled?
- How would you rate the course in general?
- Do you feel that your knowledge or skills have improved by taking the course?

Pro tips

- Collect and analyse data from the beginning of your game incubator
- When you build new incubation programme, event, networking, idea – think twice, and do not forget about evaluation and measuring of effectiveness
- Prepare space (time, venue) for evaluation and lessons learned after your activities
- Save notes for the future

Case study: Development Goals Canvas

In the [Digital Dragons Incubator](#) (Krakow, Poland) when a company starts its incubation journey, one of the first steps is filling in the fields in the Development Goals Canvas (see picture below). Startup do this in cooperation with an incubation specialist. There are six milestones including 2 predefined goals (1: basic pitching readiness, 2: final pitching readiness during demo day).

Examples of milestones: *set up fanpage on Facebook, achieve 100+ fans on Facebook, prepare demo of your game, prepare budget with all details, analyse documentation for the GameINN development programme, prepare key art of your game, build professional press kit for your game, etc.*

During the incubation programme, each company works with their own goals, with the support of game incubator staff. When the deadline comes near, the startup uploads materials on a dedicated Google Drive and shares it with an incubation specialist. And then comes feedback from incubation specialist and/or mentors.

DEVELOPMENT GOALS

TEAM:

deadline	area of development	development goal
October 14th		
January 25th	strategy	basic pitching readiness (incl. pitchdeck)
February 29th	strategy	final pitching readiness and presentation during demoday (pitchdeck, budget, production schedule, team and so on)

Development Goals Canvas Digital Dragons Incubator

h. Summary

When you set up your game incubator, you are probably strongly focused on the structure of incubation programme mentor selection, funds, selecting companies and so on. However, as important as it is, it is not all you should have in minds. If you are going to establish your game incubator not only for the duration of one project, but for the long term, you have to build a M&E system.

As we have written in other chapters: think about your game incubator as a startup. Create and collect data, analyse it and use it to know your customers and your market better and to improve your services.

8. Further Framework Development

Game incubators, just like other organisations, startups or companies, are living organisms and change is a part of their existence. Throughout months and years, they change their strategy, goals, staff, services, scope, partners, etc. In a radically pessimistic scenario – they can collapse. In an optimistic version – they grow and build a more and more ambitious offer for their customers and environment. As much as we wish for you the second way of development, you should be ready for pessimistic scenario as well.

a. Pessimistic Scenario

One of the hardest challenges in startup building is preparing to pivot and preparing to recognise the right moment to leave the old business model and – thanks to earlier experience – transform the company into a new startup. The situation is the same for a game incubator.

If you prepare a thoughtful concept for your game incubator, including strategy, business model, KPIs, boundary conditions and so on, you should be ready even for a pessimistic scenario. Such a pessimistic scenario can for example be linked to the following questions: Your region does not need a game incubator? Maybe your regional game community is too weak? Maybe you have no real partners? Maybe there are not enough good trainers and mentors? Maybe it is just a beginning of the game industry in your region or country? Or maybe it is too late for a game incubator, because another organisation or company already supports young game studios?

In brief: There is a probability that your incubation will not be needed. In that situation you should do what startups do: pivot. Change the supported industry, change services, build new value, change your target group, change the geographic scope, do international incubator and so on. Establish your new position with your game incubator experience.

b. Optimistic Scenario

There could be an optimistic scenario as well. If your pilot implementation works well, you can develop the framework of your game incubator with greater ambition. Below we suggest what you can develop.

Internationalisation

What can you do?

- Make international batches of the game incubation programme
- Organise study visits to other incubators or coworking spaces
- Invite mentors from abroad
- Organise joint, common booths for your game startups during international fairs
- Persuade your game startups to do outsourcing work for bigger game companies or software houses
- Cooperate with other game incubators in the Baltic Sea region or Europe
- Join the International Game Developers Association

Network

What can you do?

- Cooperate with bigger game companies, especially global enterprises
- Engage investors and publishers as main partners or stakeholders
- Invite local, regional or national authorities to common events as representatives or special guests during your events or programmes, making them recipients of your reports or news about the game industry
- Lobby
- Organise events for the community: speed dating, business breakfast, unofficial meeting in pub, pitch contest, conferences, game jams, job fairs, awards, etc.
- Maintain your Facebook or Discord profiles, channels and dedicated groups
- Cooperate with other organisations: incubators, student teams, game development associations, techparks, unofficial game communities and so on
- Keep your mentors as ambassadors of your game incubator

Branding, Marketing and Identity

What can you do?

- Build your own, unique brand (as in the case of Game Hub Denmark or Digital Dragons Incubator) or ... do not (like an incubator inside of Swedish Sting)
- If you decide to build a brand, you should think about:
 - Unique value proposition
 - Expectations
 - Promises
 - Reputation
 - Personality
 - Engaging storytelling
 - ... feels, story and the whole magic of your brand
- Marketing and identity:
 - Official hashtag
 - Roll-up
 - Website
 - Business cards
 - Sales tools (e-mail system, CRM, AdWords, Google Analytics, ticket sale system, etc.)
 - Small gifts/gadgets (T-shirts, hoodies, cups, caps, socks, badges, stickers and so on)
 - SEO activities
- “Corporate” identity:
 - Naming
 - Logo
 - Tagline
 - Fonts
 - Visual style
 - Key art
 - Brand hero

Canvas, maps, prisms and charts...

Yes, you guessed correctly. There is a long list of tools that support brand designing. You can search for them on the web or you can take a look

- Communication:
 - Channels (Twitter, Facebook, Discord, Instagram, LinkedIn or something other/more?)
 - Press kit
 - Professional photos, and bios for your incubator staff
 - PowerPoint or explainer videos. Or both.
 - Blog and/or vlog and/or podcast
 - Newsletter

Human Resources in the Game Industry

What can you do?

- Headhunt – attract talent from your country and from abroad
- Build a competence center for game industry – focus on e.g. lifelong learning or supporting juniors/mids: programmers, graphic designers, animators, 3D designers, composers etc.
- Cooperate with universities to implement practical component into theoretical, academic teaching programmes
- Support student clubs designing video games

Incubator Staff

What can you do?

- Build experience and skills to increase competences in-house
- Send them abroad – study trips, fairs, events
- Be ready for employee rotation
- In general: your team should know what is going on in game industry, what is hot, and what is not
- Alumni of incubation programme can come back to your incubator as mentors for the next incubation batch

The most important game industry events

(for your incubator staff and your game startups):

B2B events:

- Game Developers Conference (San Francisco, USA, March),
- Game Connection (San Francisco, USA – March; Paris, France – October),
- GamesCom (Cologne, Germany, August),
- Digital Dragons (Kraków, Poland, May).

B2C or mixed events:

- Berlin Games Week (Berlin, Germany, April),
- CPH Matchup (Copenhagen, Denmark, April/May),
- PAX East (Boston, USA),
- Casual Connect (London, UK, May),
- Nordic Game Conference (Malmö, Sweden, May),
- Devcom (Cologne, Germany, August),
- Sweden Game Conference (Skövde, Sweden, October),
- Pocket Gamer Connects (Helsinki, Finland, October),
- Paris Games Week (Paris, France, October),
- Game Industry Conference (Poznan, Poland, October),
- GameON (Vilnius, Lithuania, November).

Infrastructure

What can you do?

- Own office and meeting spaces
- Own building
- Own office equipment
- Special hardware and software

... and the list goes on. The sky is not the limit. Feel free to choose the most important methods of growing your incubator and make up your own.

Which came first? Egg or ... dragon?

It could be an inspiring case study for you at the end. Digital Dragons of Krakow Technology Park is a very strong brand in the Polish game industry. In the beginning, Digital Dragons meant purely a game conference (and national award with dragon egg as a statuette). Later came the research – the state of the Polish video game industry reports. Next, Digital Dragons Academy – lectures for young game specialists. And KrakJam – a local part of Global Game Jam. Next, a project named Creative Malopolska – aims at internationalisation of regional game development companies. And – finally – Digital Dragons Incubator. But it is not the end – we have a few new ideas for the extension of our hub.

And at the end

Please be aware: there is no universal scenario of success. There are too many factors, e.g.: how large is your country, the number of inhabitants, the scale of your game industry on a regional/national level, how mature is your game industry, what about social capital and readiness to network or volunteer, the structure of your game industry (number and size of companies), readiness to pay for game incubator services, the number of game specialists (or wannabe specialists), the level of entrepreneurship in your society and so on. Therefore, the final shape and framework of your game incubator depends on local conditions, your analysis and decisions you make.

And at the end, we would like to recommend thinking about game incubator as a hub, or one-stop-shop for game industry, especially for game startups. Perhaps not at the very beginning, but you should constantly see this goal on the horizon. The game industry evolves and needs new or better

services. Your game incubator – as in a hub – should be ready to recognise these trends and needs and support the game industry. We are keeping our fingers crossed for your success and for your game incubation hub!

9. Closing

This manual on game incubation strives to provide complex knowledge on the basics of creating and leading an incubator. The topics and its contents have been a product of substantive consultations between incubator managers and coordinators with different levels of experience and have been based on existing game incubators as well as pilot activities carried out within the Baltic Game Industry project.

The solutions and forms suggested in the document may work for some incubators but not for all. It is the responsibility of the incubator manager to consider the best possible shape of the incubation programme, ways of supporting, target groups, funding and a number of other aspects of a functional incubator.

The authors would like to thank the readers for taking their time to read the document and wish them all the best in incubating talented game developers.

10. About the Authors

Digital Dragons Incubator



Krakow, Poland

Digital Dragons Incubator is a specialised offer of the Krakow Technology Park's Technology Incubator, addressed to newly created game development studios. They are supporting small entrepreneurs operating for no more than 5 years, who would like to improve their sales and marketing skills, learn more about financing and project management as well as design and monetisation techniques. So far, they have had two batches of incubation: 2018/2019 designed for mobile game creators (4 companies) and 2019/2020 for PC/console game developers (8 companies). They offer mentoring with specialists from the Polish and international gaming industry, networking – also international – and a series of practical workshops. At the end of the programme, the incubated companies present their games to a group of investors, representatives of the gaming industry, the media and local government during demo day.

Website: <https://www.kpt.krakow.pl/en/startups/inkubator-digital-dragons/>

Game Hub Denmark



Grenaa + Aalborg + Viborg, Denmark

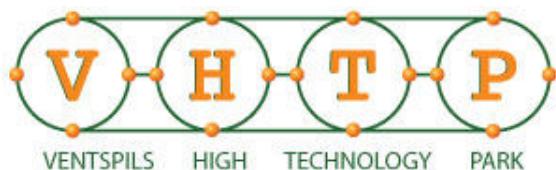
Game Hub Denmark teaches, develops and supports computer game startups, with the purpose of helping the founders build sustainable and successful game companies. This is done by providing support and resources to startups who join Game Hub Denmark, and by building a national and international network with the game industry.

Game Hub Denmark always meets the startup- and company-founders at eye-level. If a group of founders have just established first startup company, Game Hub Denmark provides solid support to understand how to run a business, develop games as products, and to stay motivated even when things get tough. And if they are a more experienced game developers, Game Hub Denmark offers production, management, and strategic level guidance.

Game Hub Denmark is a non-profit organisation, and with no investment or ownership of the games or companies that receives support. The organisation works directly with publishers, investors, or other partners to generate growth and business on behalf of the supported companies.

Website: <https://gamehubdenmark.com/>

Ventspils High Technology Park GameDev Incubator



Ventspils, Latvia

VHTP GameDev Incubator has been operating as part of the Ventspils High Technology Park Business Support Centre since 2018. Designed to promote and develop high-potential ICT and game development startups (with focus on PC, mobile, VR/AR platforms), the GameDev Incubator provides various free-of-charge support tools, like co-working spaces, on-demand coaching, workshops, meetups, events, as well as opportunities to receive money grants to support the realisation of business ideas.

The initial support provided to startups and developer teams includes assistance with business plan development, marketing and PR strategies, monetisation of games, current market analysis, while more mature teams also get involved in industry-specific workshops, networking, presentation and pitching activities, as well as take part in projects carried out by the city of Ventspils and the tech park.

Through the cooperation with [Ventspils Digital Centre](#) and [Ventspils University of Applied Sciences](#) the Incubator received its first inflow of student game development teams in 2020 and organised a series of workshops on in-depth skills and game improvement, while its ties with the [Latvian Game Developers Association](#) allowed the Incubator to operate both in Ventspils and Riga, thus increasing its coverage and improving recognition of the game development industry in Latvia.

Website: <https://www.vatp.lv/en/business-support>

Kaunas GamesPOT Game Incubator



Kaunas, Lithuania

Kaunas Science and Technology Park (Kaunas STP) helps startups and already growing tech companies to increase transnational competitiveness, consults companies on business development issues, provides innovation support services, develops an innovation community, and fosters innovation culture in Kaunas region. Kaunas STP has an incubator running for more than 20 years already. The incubator annually evaluates 30-50 business ideas. Currently, the incubator has more than 100 companies in their business development processes that employ 700 employees (some of these companies are game start-ups).

During the implementation of the EU-Interreg BSR BGI project in 2019, Kaunas STP created a separate game incubation program (Kaunas GamesPOT incubator) and tested the game incubator's pilot activities in the Kaunas region based on the best practices of experienced partners.

Starting from March of 2020 at Kaunas GamesPOT incubator, we provide access to the know-how data that helps to run a business, connect participants with experts of the game industry, and provide game companies with new insights. The workshops themes include marketing, team management, strategy, design tendencies, financing, and pitching.

The game incubation programme is 3 months long. It provides mentoring for the team to improve their business and game quality skills by over 10 top level industry mentors. It offers pitch practice, playtesting, and field trips to successful game studios. The end of the programme includes "The Pitch Day" for the investors and publishers. Game developers are taught business development issues, including finding and growing the market, plus monetisation strategies.

Teams are invited to join Kaunas GamesPOT incubator at the very early development stages. Participants are preselected by panels of experts, mentors who later provide help for the projects in development. In this case we are ensured, that missing components/experience that are identified during the initial pitch, are constantly tackled by the mentors.

The programme does not have entrance fees but includes some obligations. We expect studios to commit fully to the programme, meaning that we expect participants to participate actively and share their knowledge with others.

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THE PROJECT

The project 'Baltic Game Industry' (BGI) aims to foster the game industry in the Baltic Sea region - turning an ambitious game developer scene into a competitive and attractive business sector with sound innovation potential and thus making the region a game hotspot with worldwide competitiveness.

The partnership works together on framework condition improvements, on making business support services fit for the special needs of game startups and finally on new business opportunities for game developers in other industry sectors, such as health care. The core element is the installation of durable game incubators, programmes and schemes for game startups across the region.

BGI effectively combines policy and business development. Tailor-made game business support fosters a durable economic growth of this innovative industry in the whole region. The introduction of VR technologies in non-game industries contributes to boosting innovation beyond games. The common branding of the Baltic Sea region as game innovation hotspot will attract international clients, investors, creative entrepreneurs and qualified workforce.

Read more at www.baltic-games.eu

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