White Paper on Competence Building for Mentors

Output 2.2.1 of the BSGI Project

The concept for game mentoring workshops translates the intention of work package 2 to pilot transnational actions that would encourage mentors to engage with incubators and start-ups. Following this rationale, the output will summarise the decision-making process that led to the consensus on the most suitable concept for the competence building pilot workshops to be carried out with mentors.

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Content

Soft skills and clear structure - Creating a new concept for a game mentor workshop

When the BSGI consortium was established, one of its core goals was to develop a concept for establishing the best practices and guidance for mentors in the game industry through a mentor workshop concept.

The game industry has many mentorship programs that operate in either a regional or international capacity, and there are more mentors joining these programs each year. However, mentorship programs tend to focus on the needs and support for the mentees, either as individuals or as start-up teams, and no program to support prospective and current mentors of the game industry has been developed. Furthermore, as the industry grows fast, so does the need for mentoring. Within this project we are aiming to build an agile support system for the mentors regardless of their previous experience in mentoring.

To better understand the needs of the target group, we first launched a survey for active and prospective mentors in the game industry. The survey also provided us with an opportunity to make the mentors with various backgrounds and expertise aware of the planned pilot event for competence building, offering them the option to register their interest to take part in it.

After the survey, we used the data collected from the survey to design a preliminary pilot mentor workshop with a small test group. The participants of that test run gave us valuable feedback on the content, structure and facilitation of the workshop. The feedback was used to further develop the concept.

An actual pilot workshop was organised later in the Autumn of 2021 to assess the revised version of the workshop concept. After the workshop, we again collected feedback, which was used to polish the final concept.

As the final result, we crafted a concept for a workshop to support game industry mentors. We also gave some other recommendations and pointers for next steps in the development of a healthy mentoring culture in the game industry.

This document describes our journey from the plan to the end results, including the data collected from the survey. The concept and recommendations can be found at the end of this document. The concept has also been published separately as Workshop Concept for Game Industry Mentors, which is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. We hope it will be widely used and further developed by the industry.

Mentor Survey

Before designing a more detailed programme for the mentor workshop, we needed to better understand the needs and expectations of game industry mentors and people who would like to mentor in games, and correlate this with the experiences and expectations of mentees. A survey was conducted to provide us with relevant insights.

The survey targeted people who work in the game industry and are, have been or would like to start mentoring others. With this in mind, the project group shared the survey in their networks and on channels that reach the target group, like the IGDA Finland Facebook channel.

The survey was open for 28 days, 30.3.-25.4.2020. During this time, it got 65 responses.

Respondent profile - European industry seniors with some mentoring experience

Despite the project group's efforts to share the survey internationally, most of the respondents were from Finland (27; 41.5%)[1]. Second most respondents were from Denmark (14; 21.5%). Other countries were Sweden (6; 9.2%), Lithuania (5; 7.7%), Estonia (5; 7,7%), United Kingdom (3; 4.6%), Germany (2; 3.1%), and Spain, Singapore and Norway with one (1,5%) respondent each.

Most respondents had been working in the game industry for 3-5 years (24; 36.9%) or 5-10 years (17; 26.2%). 9 respondents (13.8%) had worked in the industry for 10-15 years, 8 respondents (12.3%) for 1-2 years, and 7 respondents (10.8%) for 15+ years.

A large majority of respondents had at least some experience in mentoring in the game industry; either occasional (21; 32.3%), some regular (20; 30.8%) or years of regular experience (6; 9.2%). 15 respondents (23.1%) were interested in mentoring but had no experience yet, and 3 respondents (4,6%) had experience in mentoring outside of the game industry.

The question about mentoring experience was used to share the respondents in subgroups; respondents with no experience in mentoring in games yet got slightly different questions from those with experience in mentoring in games. Furthermore, both subgroups answered a question about being mentored themselves and the ones who responded yes, also answered some questions about their experiences as a mentee.

Subgroup profiles - with and without mentoring experience

The subgroup of respondents with no experience in mentoring in games (18 respondents) includes respondents who were interested in mentoring but had no experience yet (15), and respondents who have experience of mentoring outside of games (3).

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[1] In addition to the Finnish game industry being particularly open, this would substantiate the notion that the more mature the industry the more interest in mentoring by veterans. See also the BGI publication (2020) "Guideline for Set-Up and Maintenance of a Mentoring System for Game Business Incubation", p. 17

The subgroup of respondents with experience in mentoring in games (47 respondents) includes respondents who have occasional experience (21), some regular experience (20), or years of regular experience (6) in mentoring in games.

The subgroup with no experience in mentoring was more likely to have little experience in games in general; however, it also includes some more experienced professionals. Respectively, the subgroup with experience in mentoring largely consists of experienced professionals, but also includes some less experienced respondents who have started mentoring early in their career. (see chart below).
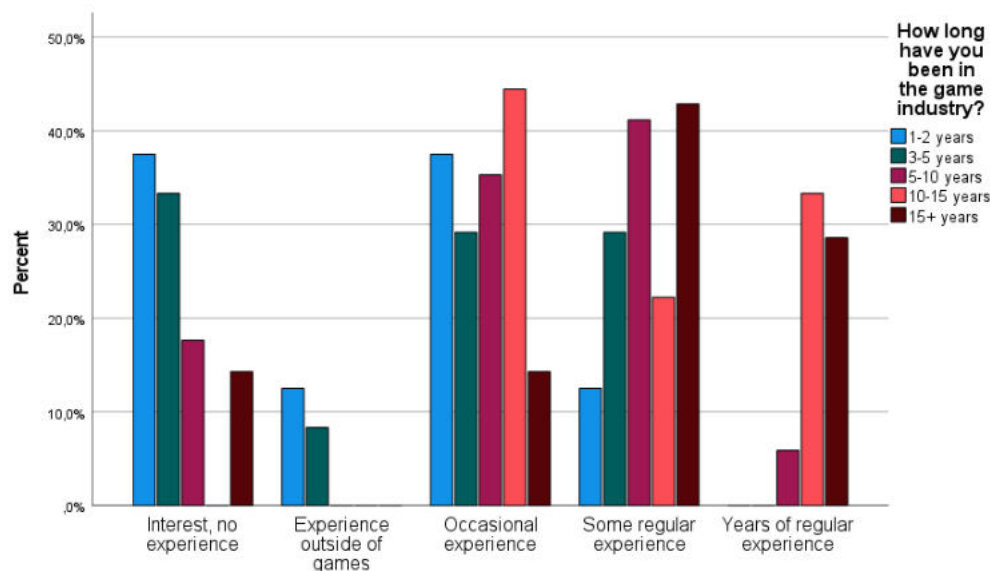
Motivations for mentoring - giving back, learning, and networking

For respondents with no mentoring experience in games yet (18 respondents), the most common reasons to be interested in mentoring are "give back to the community" (18; 100% of the subgroup) and "I learn from it, too" (17; 94.4%). "Networking with future collaboration partners and co-workers" (13; 72.2%) and "deep discussions with interesting people" (12; 66.7%) were also common motivations. "Fresh ideas from juniors" was selected by 8 respondents (44.4%), and "It would help me get forward in my career" by 5 respondents (27.8%). 2 respondents (11.1%) selected "other, please specify"; both specifications were related to social gratification.

Respondents with experience in mentoring in games (47 respondents) were largely motivated by the same factors as the subgroup with no experience. The most common motivations were "give back to the community" (42; 89.4% of the subgroup) and "I learn from it too" (42; 89.4%). They were followed by "networking with future collaboration partners and co-workers" (37; 78.7%) and "deep discussions with interesting people" (34; 72.3%), which were both slightly more common than in the other subgroup. "Fresh ideas from juniors" was slightly less common (20; 42.6%).

"Other, please specify" was chosen by 9 people (19.1%) in this subgroup. Specifications were related to different forms of social gratification and strengthening the local community. One respondent also mentioned they had found a new job through mentoring.

The subgroup with experience in mentoring had two more options than the other subgroup, both about mentoring as a part of one's professional role. "It comes with my work role" was selected by 16 respondents (34%) and "I'm paid to mentor" by 7 respondents (14.9%). It's worth noting that none of these respondents only selected these options as motivations for their mentoring; they were all also motivated by other factors.

A large majority of respondents found it either very beneficial (50.0%; 24) or beneficial (35.4%; 17) for themselves to mentor others. A minority found it neutral (12.5%; 6), and only one respondent (2.1%) found it negative.

How beneficial has it been for you to mentor others?
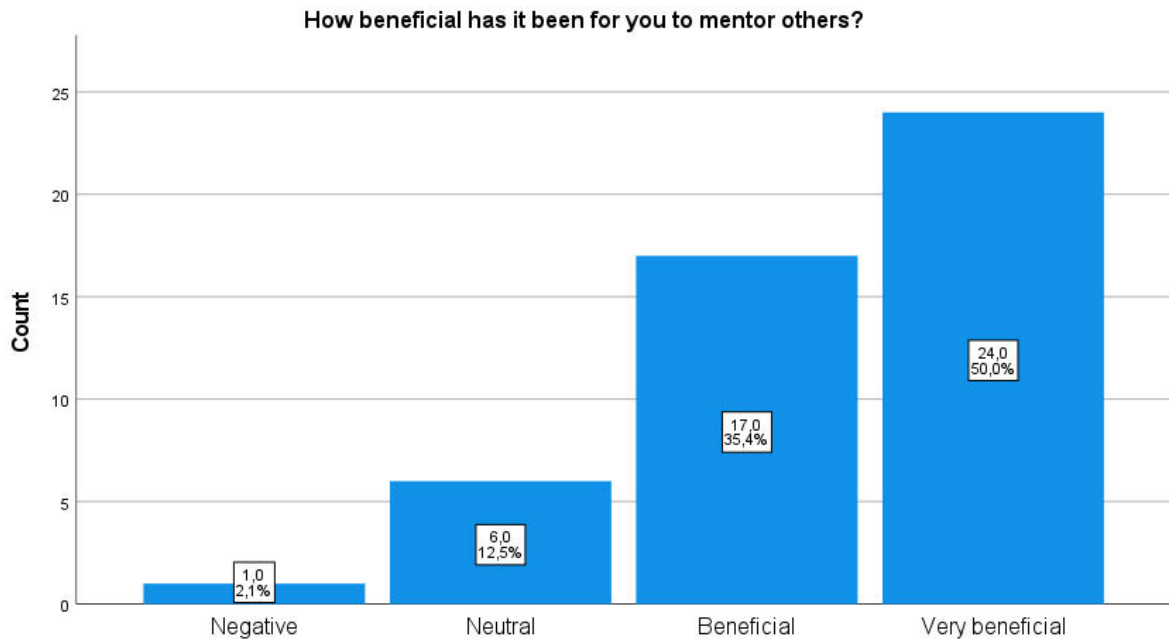
Reasons for not mentoring yet - perceived lack of mentoring skills and industry experience

Respondents with no experience in mentoring in games (18 respondents) were asked to select the reasons why they haven't mentored yet. The most common reasons were "lack of knowledge on how to mentor" (8; 44.4% of the subgroup) and "I need more experience in the industry" (8; 44.4%). They were followed by "lack of important professional knowledge" (7; 38,9%) and "I don't know how to find someone to mentor" (5; 27.8%). "I don't have the time" and "I came to think of it only recently" were chosen by 3 respondents (16.7%) each.

4 respondents selected the option "other". Their specifications included lack of confidence, experience being from making games as a hobby and not commercial games, and no-one asking to be mentored. One respondent also mentioned that they actually have mentored, but it wasn't official.

The respondents also had the option to answer the open question "if education could help you become a mentor, which subjects would be the most useful ones?" 13 respondents wrote an answer to this question. Their responses included many soft skills, like gaining confidence, learning teaching methods and expectation management, and understanding how to inspire and motivate others. Some mentioned

professional skills, either more general, like public speaking or building a portfolio, or very specific ones, like game PR work and marketing, 3d art, or game project management. Several also mentioned that they need to learn how to mentor and what mentoring is in the first place.

Being a mentee - beneficial, fairly common, and tied to certain life situations

Both subgroups were asked if they have received mentoring themselves. Of the subgroup with no mentoring experience, 50% of the respondents (9) had received mentoring, and 50% had not. Respondents with mentoring experience had received mentoring more often; 74.5% (35 respondents) reported they had received mentoring at some point.

Of all respondents, 69.2% (44 respondents) had received mentoring at some point. Among the respondents with 15+ years of experience in the industry, 85.7% had received mentoring. Respondents with 10-15 years or 5-10 years of experience were significantly less likely to have received mentoring - 66.7% and 61.1%, respectively. Of respondents with 3-5 years of experience, 70.8% had received mentoring, and of those with 1-2 years of experience, 62.5%.

Respondents who have received mentoring at some point were also asked if they are still receiving mentoring sessions. Most of them, 70.5%, answered no. There was a clear correlation between experience in the industry and receiving mentoring sessions. 50.0% of respondents with 1-2 years of experience were still receiving mentoring sessions. For respondents with 3-5 years of experience, the percentage fell to 38.9%, for respondents with 5-10 years of experience, 20.0%, and 10-15 years of experience, 16.7%. None of the respondents with 15+ years of experience were receiving mentoring.

The respondents who are no longer receiving mentoring were also asked to specify the reasons why. There were several repeating themes among the 27 responses: changes in life situations (moving to different companies, starting studies, etc), not knowing the right person to ask to mentor, not having the need for a mentor right now, and fixed term mentoring ending. There were also several respondents who were not sure whether their relationship with a more experienced professional counts as mentoring or not, and some that used to have a formal mentoring relationship that later became informal/occasional. Some other reasons for not having mentoring relationships anymore were Covid, mentee feeling like they should pay, and industry/companies tending to lack mentorship.

56.8% of the respondents (25 respondents) found being a mentee very beneficial, and 25.0% (11 respondents) found it beneficial. 15.9% (7 respondents) found it neutral, and 1.5% (1 respondent) negative.

Challenges of being a mentee - time management, lack of structure, communication and trust

The respondents were also asked to tell about the challenges they have faced as mentees. 35 respondents wrote a response to this open question.

Some of the challenges were very practical. Time management was a clear and common repeating theme; respondents found it challenging to book meetings with the mentor, find the time to think about all the things discussed, and do assignments they were given by their mentor. Several respondents wished they had a more clear framework for mentoring - when to meet, what to discuss, which kinds of questions to ask. Finding the right mentor was also a common challenge; both finding a mentor with the right professional skills and finding a personality match were mentioned several times.

Many respondents also identified more abstract challenges. Reinterpreting the learnings and mentors' stories to the mentees' own situation was a common issue. In some cases, the mentee also felt the mentor didn't understand the differences between their own and the mentee's situation. One respondent mentioned being frustrated with their team members after mentoring, and hoping their mentor could also teach the rest of the team.

Identifying and bringing out the real issues and discussing them honestly had been a challenge to several respondents. These issues often had to do with the mentee's lack of confidence, fear of sounding stupid, or feeling of being overwhelmed by the situation and the learnings. One respondent mentioned that their status as a member of a minority added to the fear of not being taken seriously by mentors. Some of the respondents also felt they could not trust their mentors to respect the confidentiality of the discussions; in one case, the mentor was assigned by the mentee's workplace, and the mentee was afraid of the mentor relaying the discussions to their superiors.

Challenges a mentor could have helped to solve - networking, confidence and self reflection, as well as practical tips and feedback

At the beginning of the survey, all the respondents were asked to identify a challenge a mentor could have helped them solve in the beginning of their career. 53 respondents wrote an answer to this open question.

Many of the responses to this question were clearly dependent on the life situation and/or career path of the respondent. Some of the responses were related to starting up a career after graduation, and some about game entrepreneurship and running your own business. Some of the responses were very practical and hands-on, related to details of specific professional skills. Some were more general and relevant in all of these situations.

Among the more general topics, one of the most common was networking - understanding the importance of networking, how to network, and practical support in getting to know the right people. Many mentioned that having a mentor could have helped them gain confidence early in their careers. Mentorship was also often seen as an opportunity to take the time to think about the issues at hand on another level and see them from a new perspective. It was mentioned that mentoring can help to understand other people's perspectives, and to get honest opinions of people who are outsiders to the situation and thus less biased. Furthermore, it was mentioned that a mentor can help the mentee to set career goals and understand the bigger picture of the industry.

Among the responses related to starting up a career, the responses had themes like building a portfolio, identifying career paths, preparing for job applications and interviews, and being patient when trying to break into the industry. Some of the mentions of networking were also tied specifically to networking with the goal of landing a job.

Responses related to entrepreneurship included some very abstract things, like being more realistic, failing fast and treating ideas as raw material rather than a guide. On the other hand, some responses were very practical and hands-on; ways of financing a company, business models, understanding the game market, marketing and getting visibility, making a business plan and scoping projects (down).

Responses related to practical, hands-on professional skill development included learning the best practices of personal workflow, finding good resources, and "how to make a good game".

Support for mentors - mentor training and peer support

Both the respondents with experience in mentoring and the ones with no experience yet were asked to identify what kind of support they would find useful for being mentors. The questions were slightly different; "would you be interested in…" for the former group, and "what would help you become a mentor in games" for the latter. The response options were the same for both groups: "education in how to mentor", "education to fill professional knowledge gaps I have", "help in finding people to mentor", "hands-on support in being a mentor", and "a network of mentors for peer support". There were clear differences between the responses in these two groups.

A majority of the subgroup with mentoring experience would find education in mentoring to be interesting; 20.8% (10 respondents) responded they would be very interested, and 35.4% (17) would be interested. 37.5% (18) would maybe be interested, and only 6.3% (3) would not be interested. The subgroup with no experience in mentoring was even more interested in mentoring education. It was found to be very helpful by 33.3% of the group (6 respondents), and helpful by 38.9% (7). 16.7% (3) found it to be little help, and 11.1% (2) thought it would not help.

Education to fill gaps in professional knowledge was also interesting for a clear majority of both subgroups. Of respondents with mentoring experience, 35.4% (17) would find it very interesting, 39.6% (19) interesting, 18.8% (9) possibly interesting, and only 6.3% (3) uninteresting. Of respondents with no mentoring experience yet, 22.2% (4) would find it very helpful, and 55.6% (10) helpful. Little help and would not help were both selected by 11.1% (2) respondents.

Help in finding people to mentor was clearly more interesting for people with no experience in mentoring yet. Of respondents with mentoring experience, 20.8% (10) would be very interested in it, and 29.2% interested. 33.3% (16) would be possibly interested, and 16.7% (8) not at all interested. Of respondents with no mentoring experience, 27.8% (5) would find it to be very helpful, 50.0% (9) helpful, and 16.7% (3) little help. No respondent chose "would not help".

Hands-on support in being a mentor was also clearly more interesting for people with no experience in mentoring yet. Of respondents with mentoring experience, only 18.8% (9) would be very interested in it, and 27.1% (13) interested. 41.7% (20) would be possibly interested, and 12.5% (6) not at all. The subgroup with no experience in mentoring found hands-on support was found very helpful by 27.8% of respondents (5), and helpful by 50.0% (9). 16.7% (3) found it to be of little help, and 1.5% (1) no help.

A network for mentors for peer support was found to be interesting by both groups. Of respondents with mentoring experience, 29.2%(14) found it very interesting, 39.2% (19) interesting, and 25.0% (12) possibly interesting. Only 6.3% (3) did not find it interesting at all. Of respondents with no mentoring experience, 72.2% (13) found it very helpful, 11.1% (2) helpful and 16.7% (3) little helpful. No respondent chose the option "would not help".

Useful topics for mentor training - soft skills and practical mentorship tools

Both respondent subgroups were asked which subjects of education they would find most useful for their mentoring, and if they have any other ideas on what would help them. These were open and optional questions, and a majority of both groups decided to write a response.

All the same themes were raised in the responses of both subgroups, when asked about the subjects of education. The biggest difference was that respondents with mentoring experience more frequently mentioned topics around psychology, soft skills and communication; these topics did come up several

times also with the non-experienced subgroup, but even more with the experienced one. These topics included active listening, inspiring others, giving feedback and supporting growth, among other things.

Both groups also mentioned practical mentoring topics more than once - how to structure mentoring, what kinds of tools and processes to use, creating goals, and teaching methods. The challenges of mentoring people with a different role to yours was also mentioned.

The respondents also raised some topics that are clearly a part of their professional skill set. The most common one was marketing and other visibility work, including mentions of platform specific marketing, publishing, and successful indie game launch examples. Other topics mentioned were art in its different forms, game architectures, game design, programming, funding, team dynamics, and business development.

"Regional knowledge for different regional game funding and development scenes" was mentioned once by an experienced mentor. Another experienced mentor mentioned they'd like to have a crowdsourced reading list of recommendations by other mentors.

When asked to mention anything else that would help them mentoring, the respondents came up with a wide array of suggestions. A clear structure for both mentoring and finding people to mentor was mentioned several times. Peer support also was brought up repeatedly; it was also mentioned to build confidence. One respondent was hoping to get a mentor who would mentor them on mentoring. A couple of respondents were hoping for a toolkit; reading lists and learning resources, or a guide on different mentoring structures and learning styles. Mentor training was also mentioned a few times. One respondent was hoping to learn more patience, and one was waiting for a time when it would again be possible to meet face to face after COVID.

Conclusions

Soft skills, like communication, supporting growth, and understanding others and their motivations were a common theme throughout the survey results. Mentions of confidence - both building your own and supporting others' - came up several times, too. Training on soft skills could support the culture of mentoring effectively. These skills are also useful for nearly anyone's professional development, no matter their specific profession.

While some hard skills were also brought up in the survey results, training on them would be complicated to organize. The skill level of experienced industry professionals is already high and varies a lot. Especially in games, it is also shared in tens of specific sub-skills. Organizing mentor training on professional hard skills is not necessarily realistic. However, supporting mentoring, possibly peer-mentoring, even in the later stages of a career could address this need.

Another topic that was brought up a lot was the practical side of mentoring - structures, matching mentors and mentees, setting goals etc. A clear framework for mentoring would make it more effortless for busy professionals, and thus make the continuation and success of mentoring relationships more likely.

Potential new mentors were especially interested in having a peer support network for mentoring. Having the support and gentle pressure of a community of mentors could help fresh mentors to succeed and gain confidence.

Mentor workshop

When analysing the survey results, we discovered that the main challenges for the mentors are defining the scope and goals of the mentoring, keeping up the long-term communication with the mentees, and having confidence in their own expertise. Because of this, the workshop concept should aim to provide concrete tools and guidelines that will support new as well as more experienced mentors in their practice. It also needs to encourage and empower the participants and offer them peer support. The target group of the workshop is a mix of professionals with mentoring experience and ones who are only planning to start mentoring others; this enhances peer learning and confidence building.

First test-run

To test our early concept for the mentor workshop, we ran a preliminary test workshop with a small, handpicked audience - a balanced mix of people with and without mentoring experience. This test group was tasked to give us detailed feedback, which we could use to further develop the concept before organising the pilot workshop in the autumn.

The test workshop agenda was as follows:

> Time: Jun 3, 2021 05:00 PM Helsinki
> Agenda:
> 17:00 - Welcoming words
> 17:15 - Keynote: Renee Gittins, Executive Director of IGDA
> *Guiding Light: How to Empower Others Through Mentorship*
> 18:00 - Workshop (group work), facilitator: Natasha Skult
> *No worries, I got it!*
> 18:30 - Presentations, results of the group work
> 19:00 - Summary and review, closing words
> 19:15 -> Open discussion, feedback and networking

The workshop was fully online. This made the threshold for participation low. It also enabled us to have a keynote speaker from the US. Most, but not all, participants were in Finland.

The angle of the test run was to encourage and empower mentors, as well as give them a clear understanding of mentoring and some practical tools. Mentors also worked together and had a chance to network.

The content of the hands-on session "No worries, I got it!" was an exercise in listening and empathy. Participants were divided in breakout rooms in groups of two. In each group, one person took the role of a mentor, while the other was a mentee. The mentee told the mentor a story of their situation - real or imagined - and the mentor gave them some quick support and advice. After this, each mentor was moved to another breakout room, while the mentees stayed. Then, the roles were flipped; previous mentors took the role of mentees and put themselves in their shoes by retelling the same story to a new mentor. This exercise had a dual purpose: the participants practiced their listening skills, and empathy via roleplay.

Test workshop learnings

Directly after the workshop we collected feedback from the mentors to enable us to develop the workshop further. We also had one participant who was tasked to only observe and take notes. On top of this, there was a focus group discussion with handpicked participants a few days after the workshop. This combination gave us plenty of feedback to work on.

The keynote by Renee Gittins (IGDA) went fairly deep in different types of mentoring, how to mentor, and what kinds of options for mentoring there are. According to the feedback from the participants, it was a little overwhelming. While they thought it was good to discuss these topics, the speakers should strive to find a balance between giving instructions and encouraging mentors.

The hands-on session was found to be helpful and fun by the participants. However, some of them misunderstood the instructions; they should be communicated very clearly, and optimally, the participants should have them at hand also in the breakout rooms. During the discussion after the workshop, another concern was raised. The structure of the hands-on session encourages people to share very personal stories with their first working partner; it needs to be very clear to them beforehand that these stories are not fully confidential but will be re-told to another participant.

The participants were encouraged to give feedback, discuss and comment on everything during the workshop. This together with the intimate, two-person hands-on session led the workshop to be a very open and trusting environment. The participants enjoyed this a lot, and it helped them with genuine networking and peer support. This "circle of trust" effect is something that the final workshop concept should aim to replicate.

In the survey results, one of the most hoped for forms of support was a peer support network. It was both rated high in the rating scale question and mentioned multiple times in the open field question. It was also brought up by the participants of the test workshop, and widely supported in the discussions. This is an important pointer for the next steps of development for a healthy industry ecosystem.

Pilot workshop

After analysing the feedback from the test workshop, we moved on to planning the pilot mentor workshop. The experiences and feedback collected from the pilot would then be used to finalise the concept.

Development process

Our experiences with the test workshop confirmed that the concept was valid. The feedback was good, and the mentors found the workshop to be useful. We managed to establish a confidential online environment where people felt they could share their opinions and experiences freely.

However, we also noticed some things that we need to pay more attention to. A better balance between informing and encouraging the mentors should be found. There were also some slight weaknesses in our communication of the hands-on session instructions; these need to be worked on.

The pilot workshop would have a lot more participants, be a lot longer, and have a lot more international audience than the test workshop. We knew this would pose new challenges to facilitation and communication. With this in mind, we decided to find some external expert help to help us in developing the program further.

With a consultant from a facilitation specialist company Grape People, we discussed our plans for the workshop. This proved to be very helpful. Their understanding and experiences of facilitation helped us identify potential issues in our plan, and to correct them. We decided to split our planned hands-on session in two parts with a clear connection to each other, but with a keynote in between; this would help us keep the participants better engaged and committed to the 5-hour event. We also decided to alternate between talks (keynotes and panel) and hands-on exercises throughout the event, both to pace it for the participants and to give ourselves more flexibility for preparations and possible technical issues.

Although the hands-on session we had in the test workshop was a success, we wanted to try something else for the pilot workshop; potentially, we'd then have two optional hands-on work recommendations for the final concept. So, we also worked on a new hands-on workshop concept.

We decided to ask the participants to first identify and then discuss and potentially solve some challenges of mentoring in a two-part work session. To support their work, and also to provide us with notes, all participants would have access to a Google Drive file with the work instructions and a template for notes for each breakout room.

Program

The Mentor Workshop was a 5-hour event with two keynote speakers, a panel discussion, and two hands-on sessions. It was organized on September 20th 2021 fully online, on Zoom. All hosts, speakers, and participants joined from their own computers with no special equipment. The full agenda is in the image below.
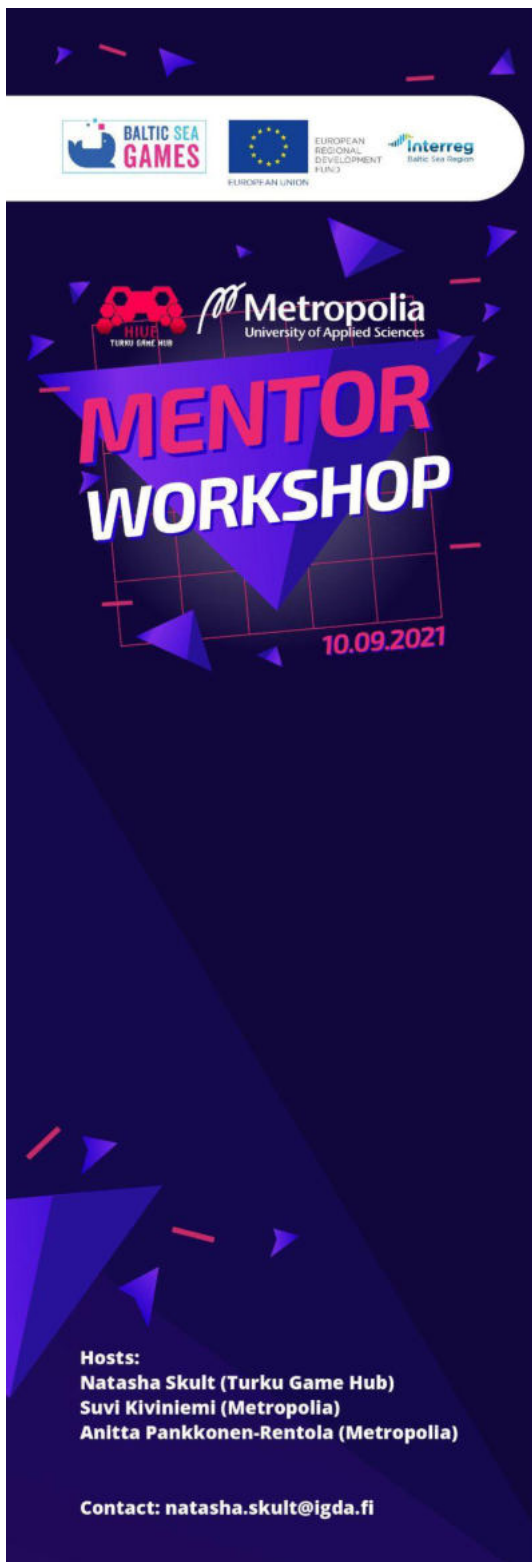
AGENDA

NOTE: THE EVENT IS FOLLOWING EEST TIME ZONE

12.30 REGISTRATION

13.00 OPENING REMARKS

Natasha Skult, Suvi Kiviniemi

2min - Warm Up Exercise

13.15 PANEL, host Gregory Pellechi

Salla Hiiskoski (FuturePlay)

Teemu Kokkonen (Lightneer)

Tuomas Hakkarainen (Housemarque)

14.00 WORKSHOP I - Have you ever...?

14.30 Coffee break, networking

15.00 KEYNOTE

Cris Solarski, SAE Institute Zurich

**15.30 WORKSHOP II
Shall we look more into this?**

10 min Break

16.30 KEYNOTE

Renee Gittins, IGDA

17:00 Overview, closing words

18.00 Networking

Welcome!

Experiences

Tickets for the event were available for free on the Eventbrite platform. The event information was shared widely on game industry channels and in project partners' personal networks. 66 ticket reservations were

made; 31 participants joined the workshop. The majority of participants were from Finland, but there were people from all over the world, even outside of Europe.

The workshop started with a 30-minute registration period to avoid a last minute rush, and to enable the participants to chat and network a little before the workshop would start. The hosts encouraged the participants to join the smalltalk; a significant part of the participants turned on their cameras and started chatting.

After the registration period, the hosts welcomed participants to the workshop, introduced themselves and the project, and briefly explained the program for the day. This was followed by a small warm-up task; the participants were asked to write down their expectations for the workshop. This was done to activate them and help them bring their thoughts fully to the workshop, as well as to offer a basis for their feedback about the workshop later on.

Next, we had a panel discussion with three experienced mentors from the industry: Salla Hiiskoski (Futureplay), Tuomas Hakkarainen (Housemarque) and Teemu Kokkonen (Lightneer). The panel was hosted by an experienced mentee and entrepreneur Gregory Pellechi (Third Culture Kids, Critical Charm). The purpose of the panel was to show different sides, situations and styles of mentorship. The discussion would be food for thought and offer role models to identify with for the participants.

The panel discussion was followed by the first hands-on session. Participants were sent to small (2-3 participants) breakout rooms to discuss and make a list of challenges they have or expect to have as mentors. All groups worked on the same Drive file, on separate pages. This way, the hosts got a long list of potential challenges for the second hands-on task. Participants, on the other hand, had a chance to discuss their challenges and fears, while intimately networking with their small, randomly assigned breakout room group. The results of this hands-on session are discussed in more detail in the chapter "Workshop 1: mentoring challenges".

After the participants returned to the main room, they were reminded of the remainder of the schedule to keep them committed, and then told to have a break. Some decided to rather stay and chat for the duration of the break.

After the break, the workshop continued with the first keynote by Chris Solarski (SAE Institute Zurich). This keynote went deep into the details of the speaker's mentoring experiences, techniques and tools. The purpose was to give the participants concrete advice and tips on how to help their mentees.

The second hands-on task was to discuss the solutions for some of the challenges that came up in the first task. For this task, the hosts created breakout rooms named after five hand-picked challenges, and participants could freely choose the room they joined. The participants did not spread evenly between the rooms; two rooms ended up being empty, while one was overly full. However, discussion was lively, and the participants jokingly complained to the hosts when it was time to close the rooms. Some of the topics were briefly discussed in the main room after the rooms were closed, and all rooms made notes to enable the hosts to make a summary of the discussions afterwards. The results of this hands-on work are discussed in more detail in the chapter "Workshop 2: solution discussions".

After a brief break, we had the second keynote by Renee Gittins (IGDA). The topic of this keynote was more general; it discussed what mentoring is, and what it isn't, what to expect and how to set boundaries. It was a shorter, less information dense version of Renee Gittins' keynote in the test workshop.

After the final keynote, the hosts went through a brief overview of the event, and encouraged people to compare their expectations with the outcomes. A lively discussion sparked, and some great feedback was

given. The feedback is discussed in more detail in chapter "Learnings and feedback". A peer support network for mentors was discussed in length, and several people expressed their interest. A majority of the participants sent their LinkedIn profile links to the chat to continue networking and discussions later. The participants were promised the workshop materials and a recording of the keynotes and panel, and after the closing words, the workshop was over.

Hands-on session 1: mentoring challenges

As the first hands-on exercise, the participants were asked to identify challenges they have faced or expect to face as mentors. The challenges identified in the breakout rooms are here sorted by theme for clarity. Many challenges were mentioned in several breakout rooms.

Finding the right mentee. Finding the right person or team to mentor isn't always easy. Especially for mentors with a narrow area of expertise it can be a challenge to find a suitable mentee.

Mentee's motivation and attitudes. Sometimes mentoring is a requirement and not the mentee's independent decision; this can happen in a work environment, or in education. In these cases, the mentee is not always internally motivated, or doesn't even understand why they need mentoring. They may struggle to commit to mentoring or to accept advice. On the other hand, mentees might be very motivated, but crippled by perfectionism or unreasonable expectations they pose on themselves or their projects. They might lack a bigger picture and find it hard to prioritize and concentrate on the right things.

Time management. Mentors can find it difficult to commit to mentoring regularly, or to find the energy and mental state needed to mentor effectively.

Boundaries. Sometimes mentees have unrealistic expectations for the mentor, or push to meet them more often or on a shorter notice than what was agreed. Some mentees cancel meetings repeatedly, or even skip without canceling. Many mentors feel responsible for the mentee's success, tend to go above and beyond to help them, and feel guilty when they reach the limits of their skillset. Mentors need to be able to draw and hold on to their boundaries in the mentoring relationship, which can be a challenge.

Roles. Mentorship is a close relationship between people, and can easily turn into friendship, which makes it difficult for the mentor to stay objective and professional. A mentor's roles can also be in conflict; for example, if a senior employee is mentoring a junior in the same company, and the mentee would benefit from going to a university, should the mentor encourage them to go, or keep them in the company? Many mentors have an unclear picture of the role of a mentor - what does it really mean to be someone's mentor, and how should you behave as one?

Trusting and understanding each other. Like any human relationship, mentoring relationships are complex, and require work. A common issue among mentors is building trust. Getting the mentee to open up and be honest and vulnerable can take time. Breaking the ice and getting the mentee to start asking questions is often a challenge. People may have very different backgrounds, which can make it difficult to communicate and understand each other's point of view. Another challenge is to avoid relying on stereotypes and making assumptions based on each other's age, gender, etc.

Hands-on session 2: solution discussions

In the second hands-on session, the hosts opened five breakout rooms, and the participants were able to freely join whichever room they wanted. Each room had its own topic. The topics were selected by the hosts from the list of challenges identified by participants during Hands-on session 1. The descriptions below are based on the notes each group made during the Hands-on session 2.

Work, life and mentoring balance had no participants.

Goals and structure was the largest group with 10 participants. Their discussion revolved largely around differences in expectations, and how one should try to avoid making assumptions about them. A mentoring relationship should always start with a discussion on expectations, goals, structure, and boundaries.

This group also put their heads together about the fact that getting feedback can be tough for a mentee, especially for junior artists. A suggested solution to this was that instead of criticising the art from the outside, a mentor can guide the mentee to do it themselves.

It was also mentioned that some countries - specifically, Denmark - have a legal requirement for companies to have regular development dialogues with their employees to address the future development of the employee.

This group also discussed the fact that the percentage of people moving on to have careers in other industries is exceptionally high in the game industry, despite mentoring being a fairly common practice.

How to make a mentee ask the right questions had 5 participants. They defined the biggest challenge to be that the mentees often don't know what they need. They may believe they do, but it isn't necessarily the case.

As a way to solve this problem, the group discussed encouraging conversation that expands beyond the original topic and includes a lot of "why"-questions. This can help the mentor to read between the lines and figure out the real issues. Other things brought up were a coach-style mentoring with no answers, only guiding questions, and the classic approach of asking "why" five times recursively.

The group talked about two styles of mentoring a team. The mentor can approach the problem as if they're a part of the team and help them solve the issues in practice. Or they can aim to stay detached from the team's issues and offer perspective to the issues.

Keep up the motivation - both mentor and mentee had 7 participants. Based on the notes, the discussion in this group fluctuated between subtopics.

The group discussed how it's not reasonable to expect a mentor to help someone who doesn't want to be helped - a mentor cannot be the sole source of motivation for the mentee. However, there is a relationship between confidence and motivation. Helping your mentee to build confidence and create realistic goals for the future can help them find motivation.

The group also discussed learning environments and practices that support confidence and motivation - game jams, casual meetups, collaborative drawing and role models were mentioned. Many young mentees also need support in learning life skills and teamwork.

Mentorship Relationship - professional vs friendship had no participants.

While the discussions didn't stay strictly on the defined topic in every room, they all had a lively conversation on mentoring related topics, and the participants seemed to enjoy this part of the workshop a lot.

Learnings and feedback

Feedback was collected both during the event in discussions, in a feedback discussion directly after the event, and via a short survey that was sent to all participants after the event. We also aimed to understand participants' behaviour and learn from it to find out how to further develop the workshop concept.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive; participants found the workshop useful and felt more confident to mentor after it. While the show up rate was only 47%, very few people left during the workshop.

The order of the agenda wasn't optimal. The second keynote, which explained mentoring and described some different types of mentoring, was at the end of the pilot workshop. This led to some confusion and misunderstandings between the participants, when a common understanding hadn't been established before the group discussions.

At least one participant was expecting to get a very concrete tool box, some sort of a framework or a handbook for mentoring from the event, and was slightly disappointed when one wasn't shared.

There were too few breaks during the event. People need breathers, and having one longer break can't replace having short, 5-minute breaks along the way.

Some rooms for the second part of the workshop were left empty, and one was overly crowded. This may have been avoided if the selection of topics would have been made by the participants themselves. For example, the hosts could have collected the challenges identified in the first workshop into one list, and asked the participants to vote for the best topics by adding a star next to their favourites.

However, the participants enjoyed the breakout rooms and workshop discussions. Small group sizes allowed for active, high quality discussions. Some expressed surprise for an online event being great for networking.

The thought of a peer support network was, again, actively discussed during the event. There seems to be a real need for a structure to support networking, knowledge sharing and discussions between industry mentors.

Development needs

Based on the feedback and learnings, the final workshop concept needs to

- establish a common understanding of mentoring early on,
- have more breaks,
- keep the strong social elements and encouragement to networking, and
- encourage hosts to share materials for later use.

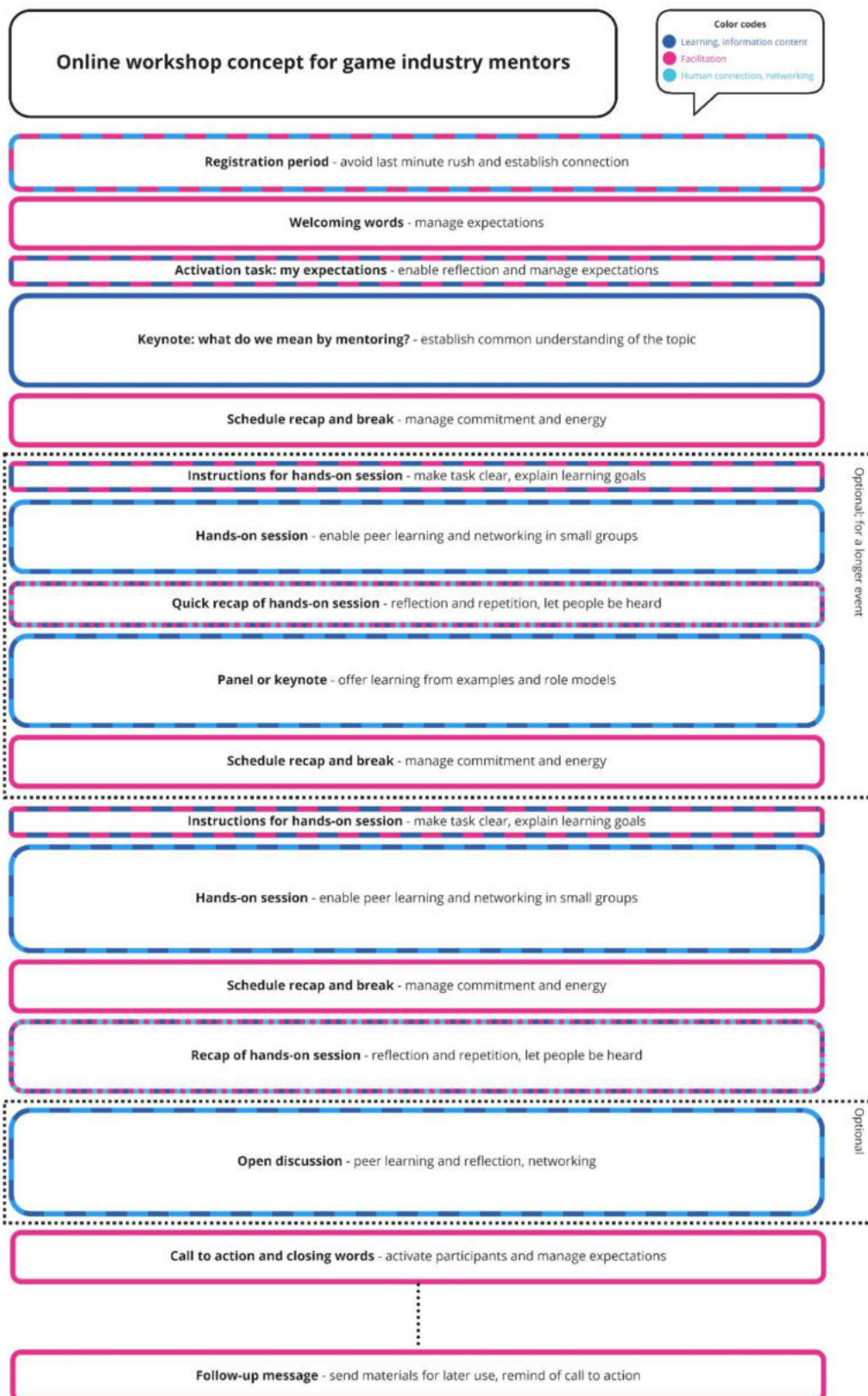The final concept was crafted with these needs in mind.

Mentor workshop concept

This mentor workshop concept is meant to be used as a guideline for organising workshops for current and aspiring game industry mentors. The main goals of this workshop concept are to encourage and train game industry professionals to mentor, and to give them an opportunity to network and get peer support.

The assumed target group of the workshop consists of industry professionals, and networking is one of the core goals. Because of this, the concept has a heavy emphasis on peer learning, and less weight is put on traditional lecturing or information content.

However, the contents of each block can easily be tailored to better fit the exact needs of each workshop organizer and target group. The length of the workshop can also easily be altered by adding or removing content blocks. Read the block descriptions at the end of this document carefully to understand the function of each block before making changes. The core functions of the blocks are also color coded in the image.

This concept has also been published separately as [Workshop Concept for Game Industry Mentors](#), which is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Online workshop concept for game industry mentors

Color codes
- Learning, Information content
- Facilitation
- Human connection, networking

Registration period - avoid last minute rush and establish connection

Welcoming words - manage expectations

Activation task: my expectations - enable reflection and manage expectations

Keynote: what do we mean by mentoring? - establish common understanding of the topic

Schedule recap and break - manage commitment and energy

Optional: for a longer event

Instructions for hands-on session - make task clear, explain learning goals

Hands-on session - enable peer learning and networking in small groups

Quick recap of hands-on session - reflection and repetition, let people be heard

Panel or keynote - offer learning from examples and role models

Schedule recap and break - manage commitment and energy

Instructions for hands-on session - make task clear, explain learning goals

Hands-on session - enable peer learning and networking in small groups

Schedule recap and break - manage commitment and energy

Recap of hands-on session - reflection and repetition, let people be heard

Optional

Open discussion - peer learning and reflection, networking

Call to action and closing words - activate participants and manage expectations

Follow-up message - send materials for later use, remind of call to action

Workshop building block descriptions

The exact content of each building block can be easily edited to match your event, goals and target audience. You can also choose between different lengths of the workshop by adding or removing optional content (see image on previous page).

Registration period. Having a registration period (15-30min) is beneficial even in an online event; it diminishes the risk of last minute technical issues and delays caused by belated participants. This time should be used to establish a connection with the participants and make them feel welcome. In a small event, simply chatting with the participants and asking about their day can do the job. If the event is bigger or you expect the participants to be more shy to talk right away, there are other methods you can use.

For example, you could share a couple of images or video clips with numbers attached, and ask the participants to identify which image best describes their current mood and add the number in the chat. Or you could share a map and ask the participants to tag their location on the map. The hosts can then casually talk about topics related to the answers to create a warm, welcoming environment. Involving participants in the conversation is a good idea.

Welcoming words. When you're ready to start the event, it's time for welcoming words. Use this time to manage expectations; remind the participants of the reason for your workshop, and present them with a schedule for the event. You may want to mention some practical "housekeeping" rules; are the participants supposed to have cameras on or off, what they should do if they want to talk, and who to contact in the case of a technical issue, for example.

Activation task. Encouraging participants to get involved early on supports their commitment and energy levels. Ask them to briefly describe their expectations for the workshop in the chat; this will enable them to reflect on their learnings afterwards. It can also be a start for a connection between the participants. If you have time, you can comment on some of the expectations, or ask some of the participants to elaborate on theirs out loud.

Schedule recap and break. Online meetings can be exhausting. Remember to give your participants enough breaks. Depending on the length of the keynotes and workshops, you may want to have even more breaks than the concept has. Right before a break, remind the participants of the event schedule, and especially of the next item; this will help them stay oriented and committed.

First keynote. The concept of mentoring isn't necessarily crystal clear to all the participants, or their view on mentoring can differ from the one you have. The first keynote - or the only one, if you decide to do a shorter event - should be used to establish a common understanding on what mentoring is, and what type of mentoring you mean in the context of your event. This will help people concentrate on the topic of the hands-on session(s), instead of spending time discussing what mentoring is.

Panel or second keynote. If you have a longer event, use the second keynote or panel to target your primary goal more specifically. If your goal is to empower the participants, a panel discussion with experienced mentors can give them role models and an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences. If you aim to give the participants practical tools for mentoring, a keynote on the best practices is great content. Remember to choose your hands-on session part to match.

Hands-on session and instructions. Giving clear instructions for the hands-on tasks is crucial. Give the participants an opportunity to ask questions after you've explained the task. Provide them with written instructions, and make sure they'll still be able to see them in the breakout rooms.

Option 1: learn listening and empathy through role play. Send the participants to breakout rooms in pairs. In each room, participant A takes on the role of a mentor, and participant B that of a mentee. The mentee describes a situation where they need support, and the mentor gives them advice. Then, the roles are reversed; group A becomes mentees, and group B becomes mentors. Additionally, A is sent to another room, so that everyone has a new partner. The group A re-tell their new mentors the same story they previously heard, when they were in the role of a mentor. (Make sure the stories told are not too personal to be rotated around. You can even supply the participants with fully fictional stories.)

Option 2: identify and discuss mentoring challenges. This option is a two-part session with a voting task in between the parts. In the first part, the participants are sent to breakout rooms in pairs or small groups and asked to identify challenges they have faced or expect to face when mentoring in games. They write these challenges up in a file the hosts have access to. During a break or a keynote, the hosts collect the challenges into one file in an easily understandable format. The participants then vote for the most interesting challenges, for example by adding a star next to their favourites. For the second part of the hands-on work, the most popular challenges are used as discussion topics for breakout rooms that the participants can freely join. In each room, one participant is tasked to take notes, so that the key takeaways can be shared with the participants after the workshop.

Option X: if you have previously identified a challenge or have a specific task for the event, the hands-on session is a great place to work on that. You can either share the task in smaller parts to be discussed in separate rooms, or have several small groups working on the same task.

Recap of workshop. After a hands-on session, take a moment to reflect on the discussion in the main room, with all the participants. Depending on the size of the workshop and your goals, you could ask one member of each breakout group to recap their discussions briefly or tell them to write their core findings in the chat. If they are shared in the chat, comment on some of them out loud. On top of offering the participants access to other groups' findings, this will also help the participants to feel heard.

Open discussion. Depending on your goals and the size and nature of your workshop audience, you may want to have time for some open discussion at the end of your workshop. If you wish to collect feedback, discuss the next steps, or encourage participants to network further, this is a good opportunity to do that. You could also ask the participants to add their LinkedIn profiles or other contact information in the chat, so they can easily stay in touch after the event.

Call to action and closing words. At the very end of the event, it's time for closing words. Don't forget to add a call to action, whatever yours might be - encourage them to find a mentee, remind them of a program or event to join, or wish them good luck with a mentee they already have. Remind them of the purpose of the event, and that now it's their turn to take their new skills to action.

Follow-up message. It is a good practice to have something to share with the participants after the event, so they can remind themselves of their learnings later on. Whether it's a recording, results of the hands-on work, presentation materials, a mentoring handbook, or some useful links, be sure to share something meaningful with them in a couple of days after the event. You can also use this opportunity to remind them of your call to action.
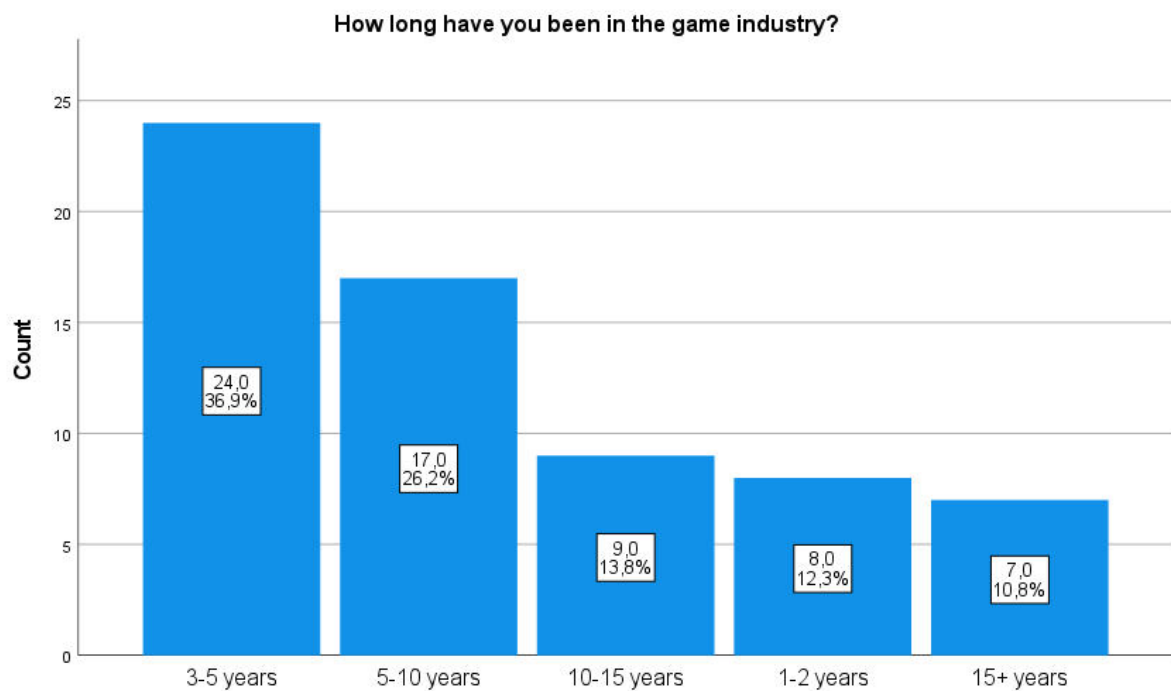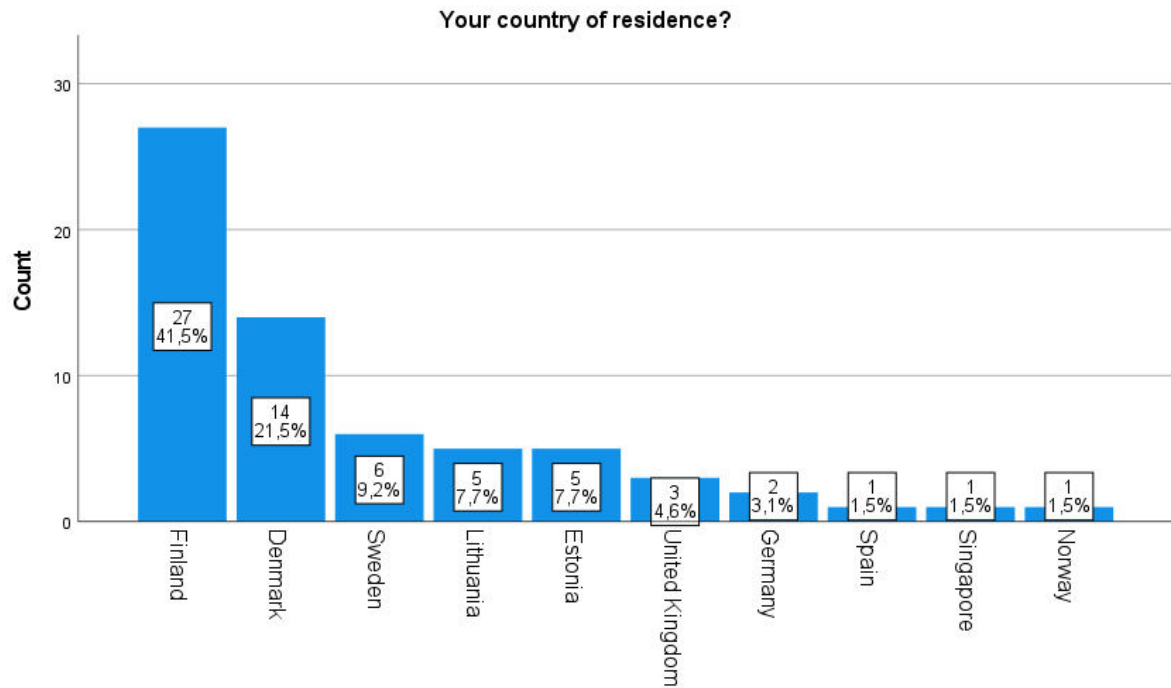
Outlooks

During the project, two topics kept popping up. These topics are not something a mentoring workshop concept can fully address. However, addressing them in other ways could empower game industry mentors, encourage professionals to start mentoring, and make it easier for juniors to find mentors. They could also strengthen the overall health of game industry ecosystems.
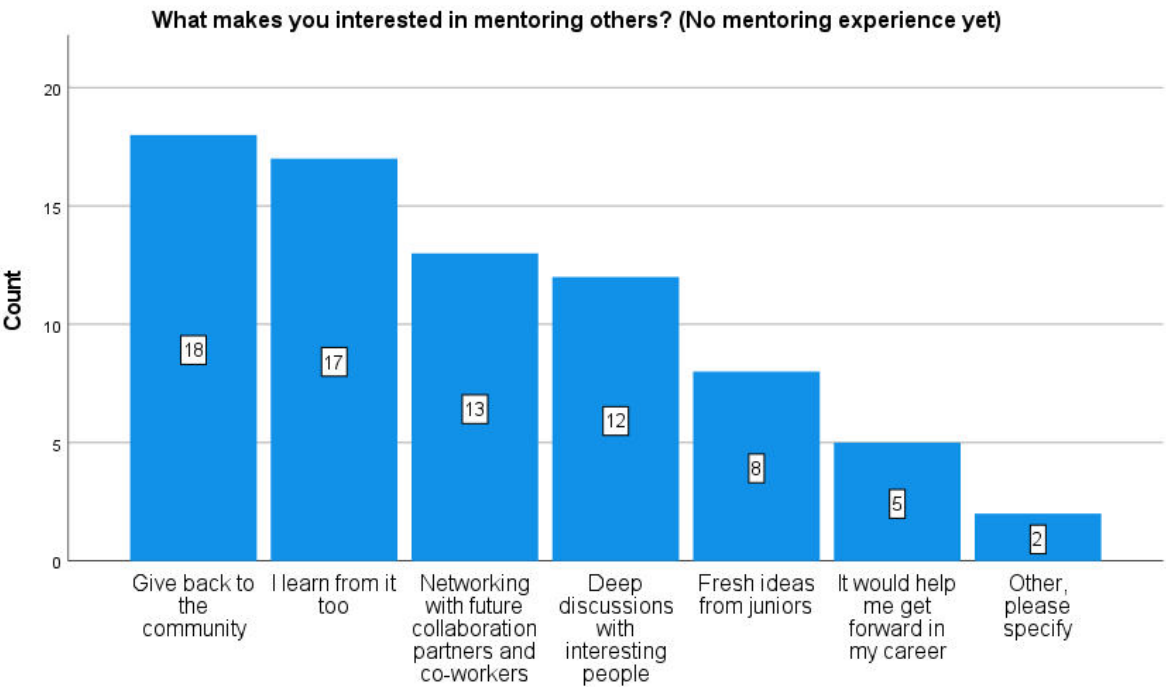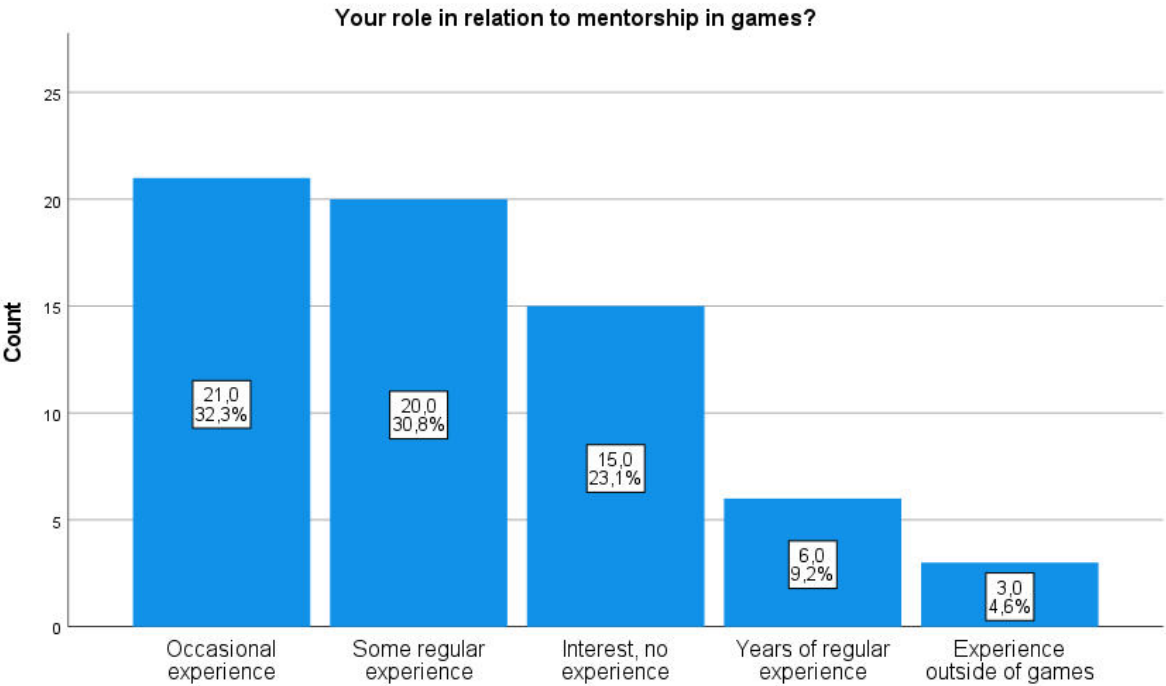
Mentors repeatedly expressed a need to discuss mentoring with their peers, learn from each other, and share experiences. **A peer support network for mentors** would encourage mentors and help them discuss best practices and support each other in a welcoming environment. In an industry as international as games are, this could even be a global network with local hubs.
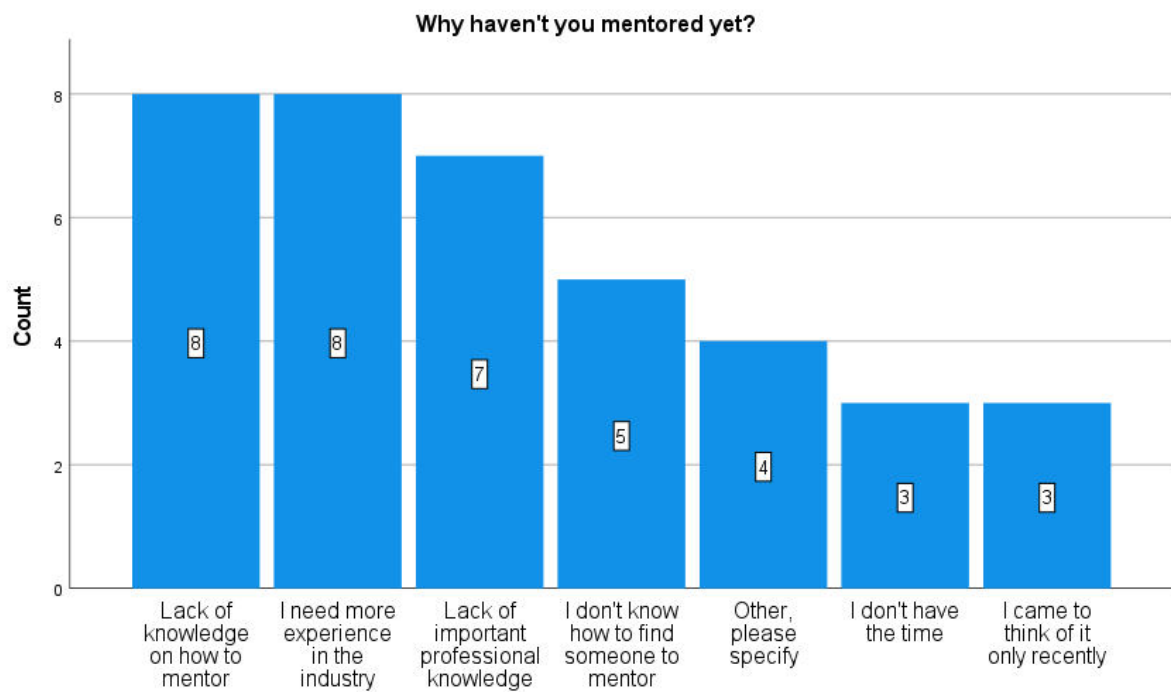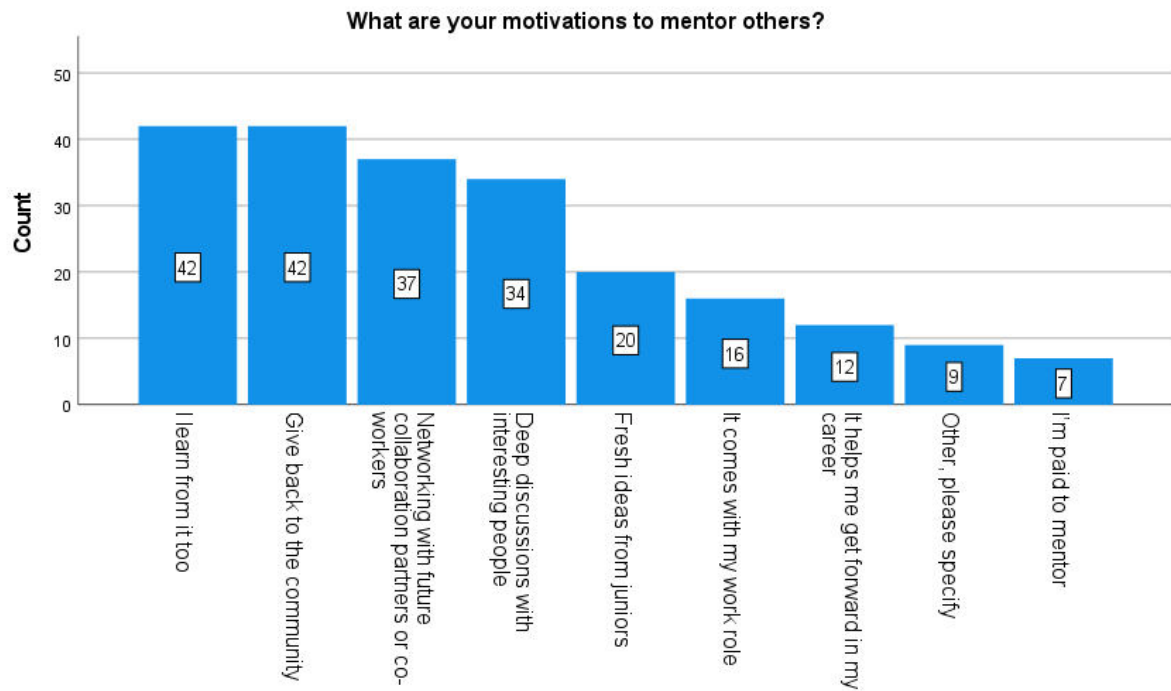
Finding the right mentee can be challenging especially for very specialised mentors. **Matchmaking of mentors and mentees** is already done to an extent in some areas, but not everywhere, and rarely comprehensively. Furthermore, it can be a challenge in areas where the game industry is still very young, and experienced professionals are in short supply. Adding structures for matchmaking could solve the challenges of many juniors that don't yet have industry networks. Structures can also be beneficial for aspiring mentors who don't necessarily have contact with many juniors. This, too, could be done even globally, potentially together with a global peer support network for mentors.

Annex

Mentor Survey

Your country of residence?

How long have you been in the game industry?

Your role in relation to mentorship in games?

What makes you interested in mentoring others? (No mentoring experience yet)

What are your motivations to mentor others?

Why haven't you mentored yet?

Have you ever received mentoring yourself? (No mentoring experience)

No
Yes

9
50,0%

9
50,0%

Have you ever received mentoring yourself?

No
Yes

12,0
25,5%

35,0
74,5%
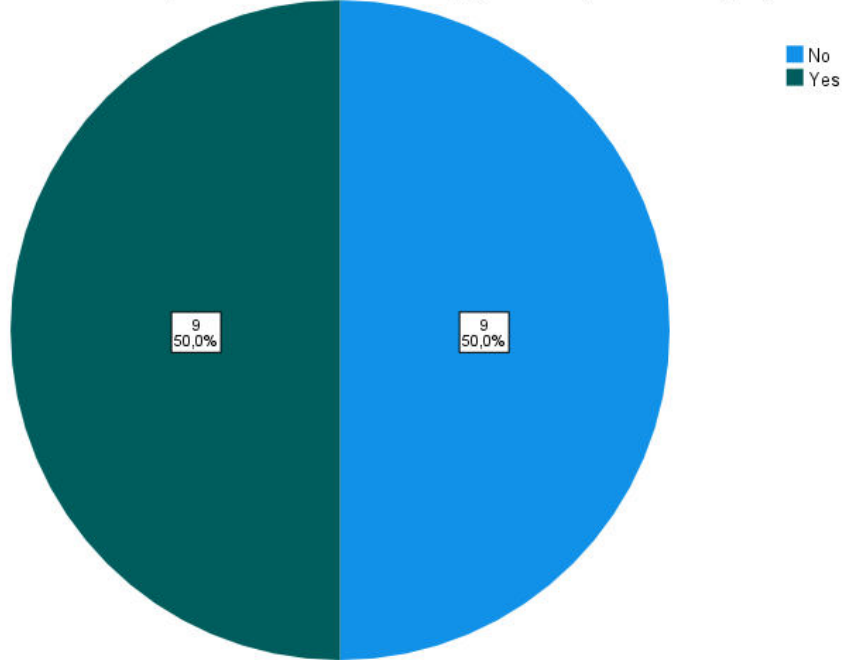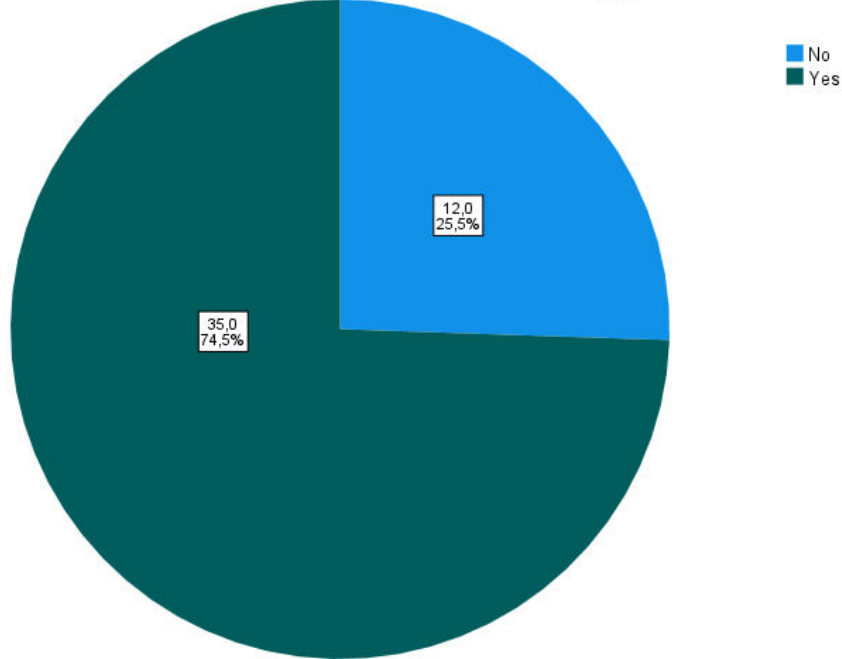
Have you ever received mentoring yourself? * How long have you been in the game industry? Crosstabulation

			__How long have you been in the game industry?__					Total
			1-2 years	3-5 years	5-10 years	10-15 years	15+ years	
Have you ever received mentoring yourself?	No	Count	3	7	6	3	1	20
		% within How long have you been in the game industry?	37,5%	29,2%	35,3%	33,3%	14,3%	30,8%
		% of Total	4,6%	10,8%	9,2%	4,6%	1,5%	30,8%
	Yes	Count	5	17	11	6	6	45
		% within How long have you been in the game industry?	62,5%	70,8%	64,7%	66,7%	85,7%	69,2%
		% of Total	7,7%	26,2%	16,9%	9,2%	9,2%	69,2%
Total		Count	8	24	17	9	7	65
		% within How long have you been in the game industry?	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		% of Total	12,3%	36,9%	26,2%	13,8%	10,8%	100,0%

**Are you still receiving mentoring sessions from your mentors? * How long have you been in the game industry? Crosstabulation**

			__How long have you been in the game industry?__					Total
			1-2 years	3-5 years	5-10 years	10-15 years	15+ years	
Are you still receiving mentoring sessions from your mentors?	No	Count	3	11	8	5	4	31
		% within How long have you been in the game industry?	50,0%	61,1%	80,0%	83,3%	100,0%	70,5%
		% of Total	6,8%	25,0%	18,2%	11,4%	9,1%	70,5%
	Yes	Count	3	7	2	1	0	13
		% within How long have you been in the game industry?	50,0%	38,9%	20,0%	16,7%	0,0%	29,5%
		% of Total	6,8%	15,9%	4,5%	2,3%	0,0%	29,5%
Total		Count	6	18	10	6	4	44
		% within How long have you been in the game industry?	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		% of Total	13,6%	40,9%	22,7%	13,6%	9,1%	100,0%

How important has being a mentee been to you?
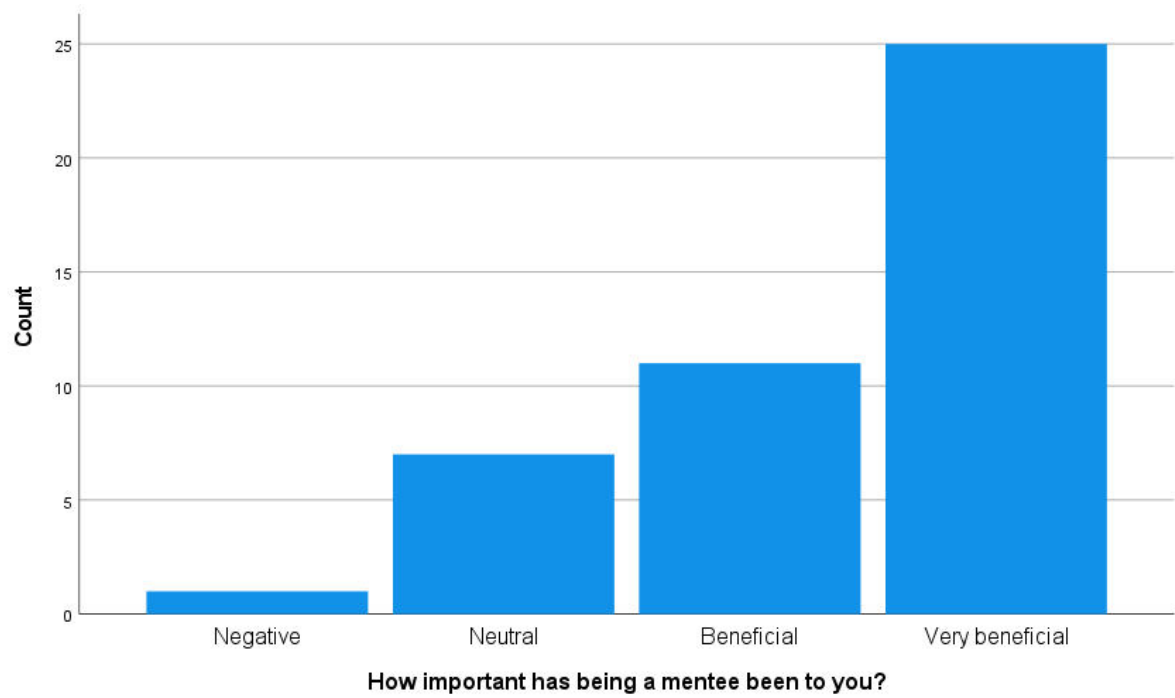
What would help you become a mentor in games?
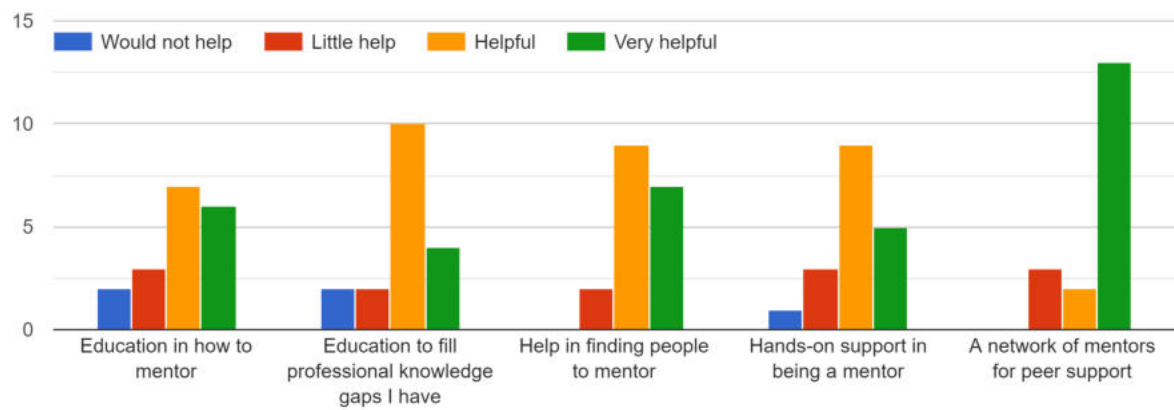
Would you be interested in...

THE PROJECT

The extension project "Baltic Sea Game Incubation – Piloting Network Activities to Foster Game Incubation in the BSR" (BSGI) builds upon the BGI-project and continues to work on boosting the game industry in the Baltic Sea Region – giving special attention to capacity building. Its main objective is to enhance business support of game incubators through strategic transnational collaboration with other game incubators in the Baltic Sea region (BSR). Joining forces in transnational cooperation will significantly raise the impact on industry development as opposed to acting alone. A viable international incubation network, a standardised incubation approach with powerful support tools and the expansion of the talent pool will enable young game studios and game developers to compete successfully in the game market and turn it into a growth market.

Read more at https://baltic-games.eu/171/project-extension-bsgi/

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- Germany: HTW Berlin University of Applied Sciences
- Lithuania: Lithuanian Innovation Centre
- Sweden: Creative Crowd AB, Invest Stockholm

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