Designing a workshop for Game Industry Mentors

Output 2.2 of the BSGI Project

The Workshop Concept for Game Industry Mentors is part of BSGI's whitepaper on competence building for mentors and investors. As the white paper will provide a full documentation, insights as to consideration and choices and an assessment of the success of the concept, as well as recommendations, the mentor workshop concept will serve as a short and comprehensive handbook for the organisation of such an event.
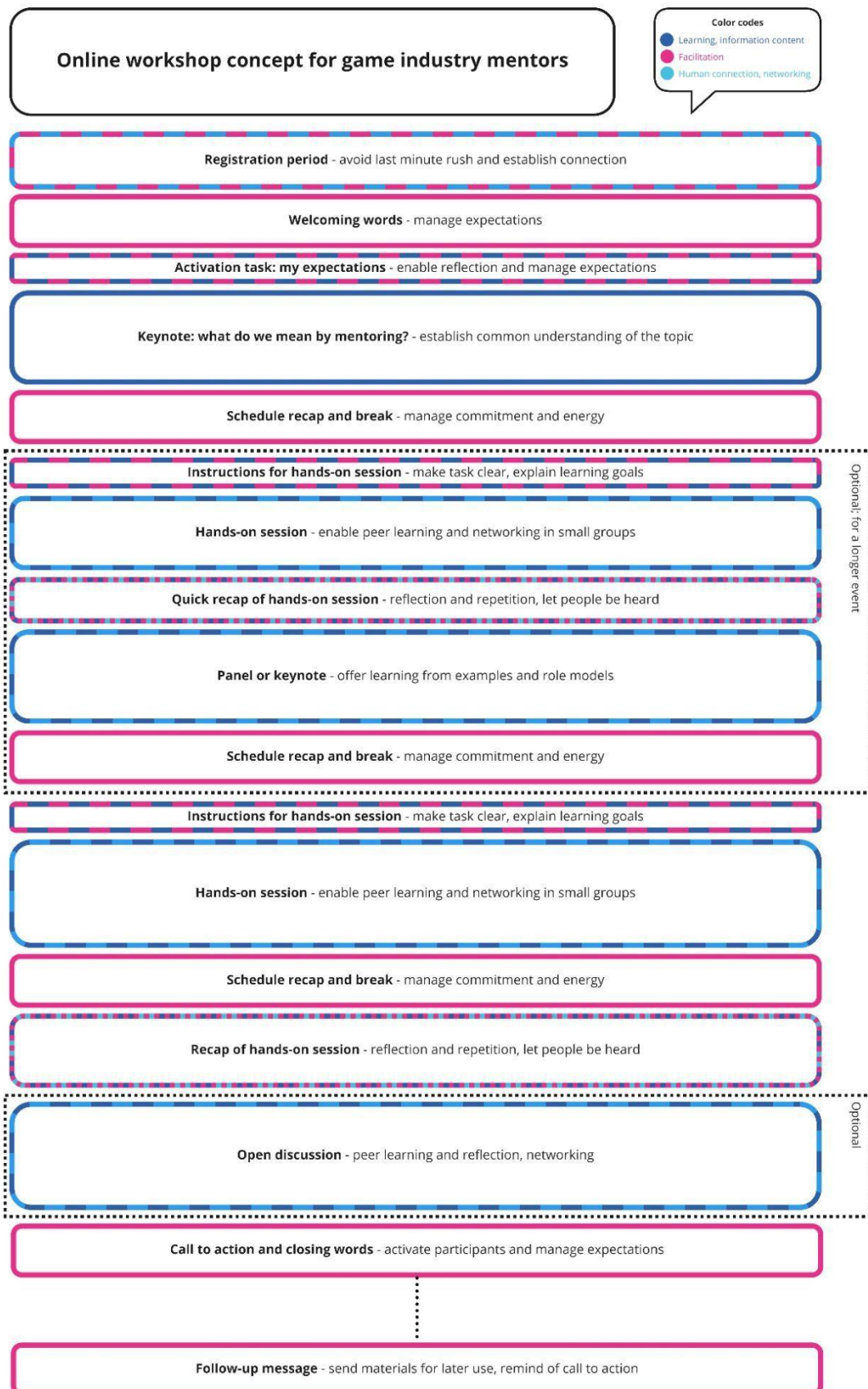
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Berlin, November 2021

Content

1. Workshop Design for Game Industry Mentors

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 organiser 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 mentor workshop concept was developed by the Baltic Sea Games Incubation (BSGI) project, based on research, a test run, a workshop pilot and attendee feedback. A full description of the research, test run, pilot and feedback are also published by the project. The concept (excluding its photographs) 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.

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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