Bursting the matchmaking bubble / Matchmaking as an emancipatory process

Qualitative matchmaking of people and AI

Can matchmaking make games safer and a better place for vulnerable and marginalised groups?

Online video games are social spaces where we develop relationships, have moving experiences and spend many hours of our time with friends and families. At the heart of these platforms is their community of players and their play network. Central to the production of play networks is matchmaking.

Matchmaking systems are still following an old-fashioned skill-based model. In this workshop we imagine and speculate on ways to disrupt and challenge it.

If you ever felt frustrated by how games matched you with a team in an online game or if you just want to have the option to decide to play with specific groups based on political views, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or interests then this workshop is for you to explore and develop ways beyond skill-based matchmaking bubble.

Why can't we get matched based on our interests in cooking, music, and fashion or at least have the options?

Please register here so we can send you more information about the workshop and documentation in June. https://forms.gle/Z3heY5DDxQu71nWD7

Number of participants: 30

Workshop time: 2 hours

Led and facilitated by: Dr Hadi Mehrpouya (Abertay University), Duncan McCann (5Rights Foundation) and Dr William Kavanagh (Abertay University)

Who is this workshop for?

Game study scholars, researchers with background in game design, data scientists, players and other individuals with an interest in matchmaking.

Summary of activities:

In this 2-hour workshop, participants will first engage in developing simple matchmaking processes using sample data provided by facilitators. There is no coding or deep data analytics involved as we engage with the processes and discuss diverse types of data that can be used to match players.

Following this we engage in an hour of developing speculative models of matchmaking. We use old fashioned typewriters, bamboo pens, stencil papers and any other forms or language you prefer to develop alternative ways to imagine what matchmaking can become!

Workshop plan:

Introduction [10 minutes]

Brief introduction to our work and getting to know the participants.

Simulated matchmaking process [40 minutes]

Participants at tables, total number of tables is a multiple of 3.

Activity 1: feature selection [10 minutes]

Each table is given 10 player profiles with 3 features for each player within a given category. Each table is to come up with 2 additional features within their category and then estimate values for each player, extrapolating from what is given.

These features are passed on to the next table in the group of 3 tables. They will inherit 5 features from a different category from a previous table.

Activity 2: matching [15 minutes]

Using the same player profiles as before, now with 10 features (5 from their work in the previous activity, 5 inherited from another team's work), your task is to create a match for two teams each with 4 players. We want to maximise happiness for each player, considering how competitive each team would be and how cohesive each team would be.

The matchings are then reported to the next table.

Activity 3: evaluation [15 minutes]

Tables will now have all 15 features for each player and a matching of players to teams from the previous table. They will be tasked with scoring the quality of the matchmaking based on whatever quality that they see fit.

We will then compare the matches made by the various tables using the same players.

Break [10 minutes]

Emancipatory matchmaking [60 minutes]

Participants will be introduced to three short narratives written based on ethnographic work in PUBG Mobile, providing subjective in-depth experience from players, their needs, challenges, and desires for gaming.

Activity 1: Immersive qualitative narrative [15 minutes]

Each team will select one narrative of choice to discuss as the basis for their speculation and matchmaking recipes. Following this, they will develop their own matchmaking processes, manifestos, pseudocodes,...

Activity 2: Creative production [30 minutes]

Participants will be provided with art and production materials (papers, pens), typewriters, traditional pens. Format is not given, art pieces, pieces of writing and pseudocode.

Activity 3: Exhibition [15 minutes]

We will bring together all different matchmaking artefacts developed by workshop attendees and share the outcomes with all attendees.

Organisers

Hadi Mehrpouya

I am research fellow at Royal Society of Edinburgh and lecturer in computer games technology. Over the past year, I have been conducting ethnographic work in online social gaming platforms with more focus on PUBG mobile. My research focused on two areas, emergence of gameplay big data and its effect on players and their communities. This investigation provided me with better understanding of the conflicts between players and platforms values, technologies of humility and scientific matchmaking.

Duncan McCann

Duncan is Head of Accountability at 5Rights, an NGO that advocates for children's rights in the digital sphere. Duncan's work is focused on improving compliance and seeding best practice in digital service design to ensure that rights are respected by digital services. He is especially interested in how systems are designed when the best interests of users are not aligned with the commercial interests of the companies and how we create spaces to resolve these tensions in favour of users. Duncan joined 5Rights from the New Economics Foundation where he led their Digital Economy Programme and previously work in the tech industry for over a decade.

William Kavanagh

I am a lecturer in Games Programming at Abertay University in Dundee. I completed my PhD at the University of Glasgow in game balancing. My research is centred around game balancing and how numeric systems design can lead to satisfying play experiences. I am particularly interested in fairness as it relates to asymmetric game design and developing systems for automated game design to support rapid testing of game configurations.