



INTERVIEW / ROZHOVOR

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YOU HAVE A PHD. IN PSYCHOLOGY FROM SORBONNE UNIVERSITY. THEN YOU DECIDED TO WALK AWAY FROM ACADEMIC RESEARCH AND TO ENGAGE MORE IN THE DOMAIN OF PSYCHOLOGY OF VIDEO GAMES. WE WOULD LIKE TO ASK HOW PSYCHOLOGY STUDIES CONTRIBUTED TO YOUR WORK AS A UX STRATEGIST?

I have a PhD in cognitive psychology, which is part of cognitive science that studies mental processes (such

as memory, attention, language, etc.). When a product is developed, whether it is a video game, a tool, or a service, it's important to not build it in a silo. If you do this, then there's a very good chance that the product will not really satisfy the needs of the end users, or it might not be intuitive to use. If you were ever frustrated when using an application or a tool, I'm sure that you understand what I mean! Instead, product developers and designers having a "user experience" (UX) mindset adopt the perspective of the end user at every step of the process. It's also called "human-centered design". The goal is to



provide the best experience possible to the targeted audience of a product, who are humans with human limitations, and to first keep in mind users' best interest (not just business goals). Since an experience cannot be designed, because it is what happens in people's minds as they interact with a product, this is when cognitive science knowledge comes handy. More specifically, human factors psychology and human-computer interaction disciplines provide guidelines and a methodology (commonly called "design thinking") allowing to anticipate issues that users might have with a product and using an iterative process to verify that we are on the correct track. For example, since we know that humans are not able to efficiently multitask, we ensure that we do not convey too much information at the same time to users. And as soon as we have functional prototypes, we test them with the people who might be interested in the final product to identify issues that they encounter with it so that we can fix those issues early. Similarly, when designing a video game, developers having a UX mindset are paying attention to human limitations in terms of perception, attention, and memory when designing a video game. I explain this process in detail [in this article](#) describing my work on the game *Fortnite*.

YOUR BOOK: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF VIDEO GAMES BESIDE OTHER INTERESTING TOPICS INCLUDE CHAPTER ABOUT BENEFITS OF GAMING ON PLAYERS IN HEALTH AND EDUCATION. CAN YOU SHARE SOME VIDEO GAME CASE WITH ADVANTAGEOUS EFFECTS ON HEALTH OR EDUCATION?

Many things have been said about video games, and we sadly witness the persistence of a moral panic towards them. Video games are games, they are mostly supposed to be fun. Play is very important in child development and to keep a sharp mind as adults, because when we play we usually encounter situations that are more complex and different from real-life situations. Some video games can provide additional benefits in certain conditions. For example, some commercial games (i.e. action games) can improve certain visual or cognitive skills in players. Certain multiplayer games (e.g. collaborative games) can enhance social skills. Other games, being systemic, allow for exploration and creativity, which is why for example educators are using the game *Minecraft* in class to accomplish specific educational objectives. Lastly, some games are specifically created with



an educational goal in mind, or with a health benefit in mind, for rehabilitation or to reduce pain perception. There are many types of games and it's important to start thinking about specific video games and what they can offer instead of perceiving them as one big block. Not all video games are equal.

CURRENTLY, YOU WORK AS A VIDEO GAMES UX CONSULTANT AND YOU TRAVEL AROUND THE WORLD. YOU SHARED THAT YOU GREW UP PLAYING VIDEO GAMES ON YOUR WEBSITE AND YOU GAINED SO MUCH EXPERIENCE THROUGHOUT YEARS, THAT WE WOULD LIKE TO ASK WHAT STILL MOTIVATES YOU ABOUT COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY/UX?

Video games are fascinating! They are an interactive art form requiring the collaboration of many people with various skills (artists, designers, programmers, etc.), all very passionate about games. It's a very rich environment to work into. Also, video games are played by over one third of the world population, so I find it important to ensure that the video game industry will grow in maturity in terms of UX so that we

can offer interesting and fun games to everyone that will also be respectful of all players.

WHAT SHOULD UX PROFESSIONALS BE MINDFUL OF?

UX professionals are always on the side of users (or players) and as such they should always be defending them. We are seeing the rise of "dark patterns" in tech overall that are used by certain companies to trick users into buying something or staying on a platform when it wasn't really users' intention to do so initially. When the interests of business goals take over users' best interest, this is when the UX mindset is betrayed or lost. These dark patterns are everywhere and we are starting to see them in the game industry. For example, players might feel some pressure to join a game at a very specific (and short) moment in time because otherwise they might miss out on something really cool. This is using what we call the "fear of missing out" (FOMO) and it's not considered to be an ethical practice in certain contexts. The video game industry is also currently not very inclusive and there's a lot of effort that needs to be done. This is why I created the initiative ethicalgames.org with a few colleagues so that



we can raise the bar of ethics in the game industry. UX professionals, while not responsible for unethical business decisions, should nonetheless be the most fierce advocates for inclusive and ethical design in my opinion.

DO YOU HAVE ANY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS THAT WANT TO START A CAREER IN UX DESIGN ?

They should learn about human-computer interaction principles and about design thinking processes. If they are interested in a career in the game industry, I would recommend them to read my [long blog post](#) on this topic.

Spracovala:

Mgr. Andrea ZELIENKOVÁ, PhD.