

Trucking for Victory:

The role of collective player action in shaping the environment of Foxhole

Bachelor Thesis

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Abstract

Background:

Foxhole is a real time, large scale, massive multiplayer, war simulator. Almost every aspect of the gameplay experience is directly created by the players. The social systems created to support gameplay allow large quantities of players to cooperate and interact with each other in real time. The complexity of this game's gameplay and communities, playing this game requires large quantities of time and effort to be put in. Due to this playing this game can blur the line between work and play. The numerous social connections that players have within the game coupled with frustrations based on issues the game has, fosters an environment where collaboration towards achieving a shared goal becomes a necessity. Collective action of the player base is required for the game to function.

Aim:

The aim of this paper was to discover the roles of collective player action, playbour and communication in the videogame Foxhole.

Methods:

This research consists of qualitative interviews in which participants are asked about their experiences in relation to the game as well as their knowledge of the community and the games development. Data from 22 participants was gathered, all of which are members of the player-led union of logistics players known as L.O.G.I (Logistics Organisation for General Improvement). This union is directly involved in the logistics. A simple explanation of logistics is the moving of resources from one point to another. Interviews were conducted on the logi (logistics) community Discord server. Qualitative data analysis was conducted via deductive coding based on the topic list.

Results:

Generally the logistics playerbase see themselves as the foundation of the entire system the gameplay experience is built upon. A central point of frustration of these players has been the developers, who they saw as unable to effectively communicate with the playerbase. This, alongside other issues such as quality of life for logistics players, was a major reason for crises that the game experienced, such as the strike of the logistics players.

Conclusion:

Collective player action in foxhole allowed the player base to enact major changes within their environment. Negative perceptions of the game were based on various frustrations, with developers of the game playing a key role in this. Their main point of failure was a severe lack of communication. Their inability or unwillingness to interact with the community effectively forced the hand of players so that their opinions could be seen. The strike of the logistics players demonstrated the power that the player base possesses. Future research should compare the events of the strike with similar occurrences of collective actions by players in other games to identify what fuels these events and what leads to their success or failure.

Keywords: Playbour, Collective Player Action, Foxhole, Strike, Logistics

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Introduction

Collective player action in video games relates to coordinated actions and efforts of groups of players interacting with the intent to achieve a common goal. A core aspect is the collaboration and communication of players to achieve goals or overcome obstacles that an individual player would be unable to manage. As games differ greatly from each other, so can the forms of collective player action. Depending on the game, collective action can take the shape of collaboration of players to solve puzzles, as factions trying to defeat the other factions, defeating a boss battle, roleplaying and for in-game economic gain among other examples. Almost any game that allows multiplayer modes will see some form of collective play.

Foxhole is a massive multiplayer online, real time, persistent world, total war simulation game. The game revolves around two factions that are locked in a near constant state of warfare. These factions, the world they are in, and the technologies used are all fictional, although the level of technology and their designs are heavily inspired by the interwar period of the 1920s-30s. The two factions that are in conflict are known as Wardens and Colonials. The game is divided into “Wars” that have an average timespan of approximately one month. At the end of a war a short downtime of reduced activity exists where changes to the map and gameplay are usually implemented by the developers.

Due to the game being a simulation of all aspects of warfare, the gameplay does not just revolve around combat itself but also focuses heavily on the logistics aspects behind the frontline. Logistics, often abbreviated to “logi” is a broad term which captures the many facets of supporting the war effort through the gathering, refining, manufacturing and transporting of resources. Resources are in constant need, not only to supply the troops at the frontlines, but also to keep buildings that have been erected from decaying and ultimately breaking on their own, forcing constant interaction by players with structures.

Foxhole is seen by its players in a mixed light of positive and negative aspects based on their experiences and beliefs. The community in Foxhole is very tightly knit, and voiced their opinions very strongly and in large groups. As the issues within the game compounded themselves the frustrations of players expanded. The article by Plunkett (2022) describes what the culmination of these frustrations became. A strike of around 1,800 players of the logistics section in the game. This show of collective player action and cooperation with the goal to change major issues in the game begs the question: what role has collective player action played in the videogame Foxhole?

Theoretical Framework

It is important to both understand the topics of collective player action as well as the game Foxhole. First a description of the gameplay within Foxhole will be presented so that an understanding of how the gameplay elements that are present relate to the theoretical aspects that will be presented afterwards.

Logistics gameplay can be divided into two sections, production and distribution. On average a player will choose to focus on one of these two sections for their play session. Production can be divided into two categories, resource gathering and “factory dancing”. Resource gathering as the name implies is the act of gathering resources from the world and having them refined at a refinery. “Factory dancing” is a player-made term for the act of moving around factories to make sure that the production queues at the factories are not empty and thus are constantly producing equipment. Once equipment has been produced it is transferred to a stockpile at a depot or a seaport. This allows for the consolidation of vast numbers of materials for distribution. The second part of logistics is the distribution, this, like production, can also be divided into two categories, midline and frontline distribution. Midline distribution takes materials from one stockpile to another stockpile, this involves large quantities of resources and any mode of transport that is able to use containers, as they are able to carry the most amount of equipment within a single unit. The vehicles capable of moving containers are trains and large ships, as well as some specialized trucks; however, they are not as efficient as the other vehicles. Finally, there is frontline logistics, where players take smaller crates of equipment from stockpiles directly to frontline headquarters or other installations that require resources. While doing any of these tasks, although more prevalent when doing distribution, the danger of being ambushed by “partisans” is constant. Partisans are enemy combatants that snuck past the frontline with the goal to harass logistics players and stop them from doing their tasks.

2.1 Collective Player Action

Collective player action in video games is the idea of collaboration, coordination and organization of players both within the game they play as well as outside of the game in communities usually related to the game. There are several theories that fuel collective player action. Collective player action can be based on the topic of cooperation. The paper by El-Nasr et al (2010) mentions how cooperative gaming encourages collaboration between players with the purpose of winning as a team rather than as an individual. This topic is expanded on by Riar et al (2020) where the idea of behavior in benefit of the team is affected by cooperative game features. Foxhole directly relates to this due to its previously described gameplay elements that focus very heavily on cooperation and interaction to the benefit of the team an individual player is in rather than for the personal benefit of the player.

2.2 Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory plays a major role in the world of Foxhole due to its very clear lines of social circles and groups. These shared identities within the game shape interactions between players within

their In-group and Out-group. Mcleod (2023) describes the core of social identity theory that members of an in-group will attempt to find negative aspects of those that are part of the out-group. The way a Warden player would interact with another Warden player is in most cases very different from how they would interact with a Colonial player. These aspects of different social groups with opposing goals and general animosity towards each other is what makes the Logistics strike that occurred fascinating as it went against the entire conventions of the social systems present in the game. Liu (2021) further expands on this by mentioning that players within the same group will be more likely to interact with each other outside of the environment that their group is present in, this relates to collective action by the way of players inviting their friends from a different in group to join another group based on the previous connections.

2.3 Communication and coordination

Communication and coordination are crucial parts of the gameplay experience within Foxhole but also they play an important role in the facilitation of collective player actions. Games often provide tools for communication such as text chats or voice chats. These channels allow players to coordinate for plans. However, there are also third party tools that have become very prevalent for communication and coordination such as Discord. It was thanks to communities and servers on third party services such as Discord that the L.O.G.I Union was able to be formed and coordinate their plans and conduct them to such a large scale efficiently. These communities employed both text and audio communication channels as methods of coordination, Spyridonis et al. (2018) describe that within a gaming environment players are able to communicate more efficiently using audio and text channels, audio channels in particular being preferred by players due to the multitasking aspect and reduced effort in communications. Insight into these communities thus is an important part of understanding the actions of the players during the strike. Furthermore Steinkühler and Williams (2006) as cited in Zhong (2011) mention that online games have the ability to serve the role of a tertiary location of informal sociability, where players are able to create and foster social connections through cooperation and interaction with strangers.

Just as the strike had a lasting impact on Foxhole, collective player actions in other settings can also have a significant impact on their environments and the experiences that players as individuals and within communities can have. Collective action can enhance the immersion someone has within a game when everyone plays true to their roles as well as influencing satisfaction of players when they see their collective efforts change things that have caused issues in the past. Keogh and Abraham (2022) note that collective action can only be successful if the complex natures and interactions of players are accounted for. The impact that collective action can have on games should be noted by game developers in particular so that they can create and design games that will make players engage with their content in a positive way. In relation to this a subquestion was formed. What role did communication play in the logistics strike within Foxhole?

2.4 Playbour

The concept of playbour can directly relate to Foxhole due to its gameplay necessitating constant interaction with elements in the game so that the collective experience can continue. This concept is not unique to Foxhole and many other Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) such as EVE Online, offer similar situations that blur the lines between work and play. Taking EVE Online as an example, the framework that the gameplay experience is built, bears strong similarities with Foxhole. Both games' gameplay revolves around combat, resource gathering, processing, and transportation. While being presented in both games as elements of gameplay, they involve large time investments, effort, strategy and coordination which ultimately blur the line between work and play. Taylor et al. (2015) remarks how the goal of power, wealth and status within a virtual world is very enticing to large quantities of players. Just as players' motivations stem from different sources so do the playstyle preferences of players, while some players prefer individual activities where they handle all aspects of their operation others prefer small closely cooperating teams while others again wish to work with large groups of people, often referred to as regiments or corporations for Foxhole and EVE Online respectively.

An unfortunate part of most economic systems is the issue of exploitation, this topic has found itself in the spheres of games like EVE Online where players spend large amounts of time "working" towards goals while not receiving a reward that represents the amount of effort put into the task. An example of exploitation within EVE Online is described by Mell-Taylor (2019) where new players that had recently joined the game shortly after its change to a free to play basis found themselves coerced into joining a trading alliance called Standing United. Here players were treated in a similar manner to miners of the late 19th century forced to live in company towns. Brought to hostile space able to only safely interact and trade with those that brought them there and being subject to harsh corporate taxes making most efforts by players unprofitable.

Logistics players in Foxhole found themselves in a similar situation where the efforts they put towards logistics were often coupled with extra hurdles and difficulties that made their tasks more frustrating and difficult. Both games found themselves with social groups with player-made hierarchies and relationships based on collective efforts. Both settings also had major events of player-driven protest against the environment that they found themselves in. The blurring of the lines between play and work creates unique environments within video games that allow for large scale frameworks of player interaction, often towards similar goals, and it can help analyze how real social, economic and cultural dynamics can affect communities, both in, and outside of the virtual world. Based on this Blodgett and Tapia (2011) point out that it will become increasingly important for game developers to be aware of their communities and how they interact with the product they consume. This paper further aims to answer how playbour relates to Foxhole and how it has influenced the community and the events of the logistics strike.

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

To find answers to the research question presented during the Introduction, I decided to use qualitative research methods to gather personal and more in-depth information about personal experiences related to the game and players' experiences within it. In particular I decided to conduct interviews for my data collection. One of the main strengths of interviews is that it offers the possibility to find new aspects of information that may be hidden in quantitative data collection. I decided to gather information using semi-structured interviews, due to their flexibility as well as retaining major points for structured data collection. The goal for these interviews is to answer this paper's main question; What role has collective player action played in the videogame Foxhole? Furthermore secondary topics will be focused on. The role of communication in the events of the logistics strike, as well as the relationship between playbour and its influence on the community and the events of the logistics strike. To gather important and relevant information about this topic I decided to interview people who were active players of the logistics side of the game as well as directly involved in the logistics community, with a smaller focus on those that experienced the previously mentioned L.O.G.I Union Strike, although that was not a requirement for people to participate.

3.2 Sample

Participants for this study were approached via the L.O.G.I community Discord server, this was chosen instead of the general Foxhole community server due to access issues in relation to privacy as well as failed communication with the moderators of the server who were also the developers of the game. The Server Administration on the L.O.G.I server were very eager to participate and assisted with accessing members of the community via specialized text and voice channels. The text channel was used for organization and information purposes while the voice channel was used for the Interviews.

Because the majority of participants were strongly involved with logistics gameplay and the L.O.G.I Union the type of sampling that was used is purposive sampling. There was only one major criterion towards being able to participate in this research and that was having played the game. Participants were informed before the interviews how their data would be stored (using both personal and university databases), when the data would be deleted (September 2023) and assured them that the only person with access to the unfiltered data was myself. While participants were never asked their country of residence, their time zone was requested in order to facilitate planning of interviews. The final sample of participants consisted of 22 males with a single non-binary person, a mixture of general locations based on the aforementioned time zones, with a majority of participants being European, followed by Americans as the second largest group and, finally, participants from Asia being the smallest group. As previously mentioned participants were not asked about their country of

residence, however they were asked general demographic questions. These demographic questions also related to the game and were; Age, total playtime, Level, preferred Faction and Rank. The average age of participants was 24 years with an age range of 31 years and a median and mode of 22 years. Average playtime of participants was 1250 hours, with a range of 3750 hours and a mode and median of 1200 and 1100 respectively. The average and median level of participants was level 16, while the most common level participants had was 17. Three quarters of participants were of the Warden Faction while one quarter played the Colonial Faction. Finally the average Rank of participants was Captain while the most common one was Officer Cadet. A more detailed description of the rank system in Foxhole is available in Appendix E.

3.3 Procedure & Research Instrument

The interviews themselves were conducted on Discord and participants were informed about all necessary consent and procedure ahead of time and active consent, either via verbal or written methods, was requested before recording began. The interviews were semi-structured type interviews with a set of predetermined questions that would be asked with follow-up questions that I would formulate myself during the interview depending on the answers given by the interviewee. As stated earlier the interviews were in a semi-structured style to allow me for a general direction during the interview but also explore additional avenues of information. Participants were not given the questions beforehand and were explicitly asked to refrain from doing active research into the past occurrences however interviewees that were much more involved and experienced were asked to think about important things that they wanted me to know a day or two before the interview occurred. As the interviews progressed a greater focus was placed on player-made content as well as community interaction within and outside of the game. The full topic list is listed in the appendix (B).

3.4 Data Analysis

After the interviews had been finalized, data analysis began. Transcripts were created using transcription tools and errors were corrected manually. The main unit of analysis were the finalized transcripts. Analysis was conducted using deductive coding with a prepared coding scheme based on the topic list used for the interviews. Some of the major codes that were repeatedly related to responses from the participants were “Issues in game” which related to player and community opinions on problems the game itself had, “Gameplay” which related to all aspects of gameplay, “Strike” which related to the strike directly and “Custom Content” which related to content both within and outside the game that was made by players to facilitate gameplay. A full list of codes can be found in the appendix (see *Appendix C*). After a majority of interviews had been coded an intercoder reliability test was conducted using two interviews and a third party. From the coded interviews a value for Cohen's Kappa was calculated, this value was rounded to 0.75 which shows an excellent degree of agreement between the coders.

Results

4.1 Gameplay, Skill, & Custom Content

The interviews began by gathering general information about the experience level that the participants had within the game and the community. Participants were asked about the total playtime they had in the game, what their rank and level were within the game as well as the team they mainly played on and, finally, their age was asked for demographic purposes. The difference between rank and level within the game is that while a player achieves levels by gaining experience points within the game for a large variety of actions, players can only gain higher ranks through receiving commendations from other players. The average playtime for participants was 1250 hours, average rank and level were Captain and 16 respectively and the average age was 24 years old with an age range of 31 years. While an equal ratio between Warden and Colonial players was expected the actual ratio was one Colonial player for every three Warden players. The reason for this turned out to be random chance.

After participants had answered the introductory questions the first main section was introduced to them. Interviewees were asked to describe logistical gameplay in simplest possible terms. The responses generally started off with the same basic description of picking up a hammer and gathering resources, *“The most basic resources that you can get with your basic hammer that you have in your inventory.”*, *“That will be what you need to go to a scrap field, which on the map is a screw icon. And you go there and you hammer the nodes, you'll get scrap”*-Tzening123, (24) so that they could be brought to a factory and turned into Basic Materials to be used in the war effort. Basic materials are also known as BMATs and are a type of resource in the game, they are used in almost every aspect of manufacturing in the game *“You go there and you go and refine it. You can make it into explosive materials and you can make it into basic materials.”*-Tzening123, (24). Deviations occurred at this point between players that had been more invested in recent changes in the game and those that had not been. This is due to the recent introduction of a new type of mass production factory known as facilities. With these the required resources quantities were highly different than with standard production factories as well as the times needed to produce the materials. Facilities were generally described as a section of logistics gameplay reserved for bigger groups of experienced players rather than a fresh solo player. Due to this most participants were not as knowledgeable in their use and due to the niche nature of its mass production abilities as well as their recent introduction they were deemed to be less important to this research.

The concept of Skill in terms of logistics gameplay was the second question that participants were asked about. In particular participants were asked if they understood the concepts of a skill floor and skill ceiling in terms of video games in general, while most participants understood the concept some others asked for clarification. The response from the majority of participants was that while the skill floor within Foxhole was very low with a low barrier of entry into gameplay the skill

ceiling was very high and the differences between a veteran player and a novice player were profound, *“The skill floor to just being helpful is pretty low. It could be as simple as grabbing a truck from point A that's already filled by your friend and taking it to point B and trying not to die between the two. That's a pretty low skill floor.”-EpicKalen, (20)*. Although not everyone agreed with this and believed that the game had a higher skill floor and barrier to entry than people would expect, *“Take someone who knows nothing about the game, without anyone to help them. I don't think they would be able to do much, frankly the in game systems tend to be very opaque and there are lots of traps of inefficient processes.”- CastleKSide, (25)*. However all respondents agreed that the game had a high skill ceiling and that later stages within the game delved deep into calculations and formulas to maximize efficiency, *“The skill ceiling, however, gets you into facilities and train maintenance and the memorizing of costs of X, Y, or Z, or trying to bring some very high value target, high value supplies.”-EpicKalen, (20)*. Facilities were a point that was repeated by a majority of interviewees. In relation to the questions about skill, participants were asked to rate themselves from one to ten as to their skill level within the realms of logistics. Most players gave two responses, with and without the inclusion of facilities. Without facilities most participants rated themselves at about a seven in terms of skills but with facilities included most rated themselves between four and five.

Afterwards interviewees were asked if they were in agreement with the statement that Foxhole was at its core a sandbox game, some participants required an explanation as to what constituted a sandbox game. A sandbox game being a game environment in which there is little to no linearity and players are free to engage with their surroundings in any way they see fit, these games often have few goals if any and most are not a requirement for the gameplay experience to be sufficient. Participants almost unanimously agreed:

“I mean, it's kind of a it is a sandbox game at its core in the sense of the devs just give you the tools and then the players have to make their own fun from it because without the systems that were kind of put in place, things wouldn't run as smoothly”-George1

Participants also pointed out due to the sandbox nature of the game and the loose goals and rules unique events could unfold within the game: *“So anything can happen, really. There have been times where people have done stuff like Christmas truces. That's only really possible in like a sandbox social environment where there are not really any overarching rules.”-Murdock.*

The reason why the previous question had been asked was as a support question for the following questions about how the gameplay experience was shaped by players and player-made content rather than the systems put in place by the developers as well as the ratio between player-made systems and content compared to developer-made content compared to developer-made content. Responses varied in this section however the average response was that at least half of the gameplay experience was shaped by players rather than the developers, *“Without the framework, you wouldn't get far. So think about 60% in favor of developers.”-Cyclops, (22)*, some participants

believed that much more of the game was shaped by the players, *“everything in the game is about community. Like, for example, about logistics, everything in the game is player made. Like every rifle and bullet and boots, every kind of fuel, every whatever is player made.”*-Onoya, (26). Participants also explained how the game was interacted with without actually having the actual game open. *“online maps with casualties and how active the war is going on certain fronts and community itself, like communicating with other people to figure out what is where. Who is producing what.”* - Cyclops, (22). Players in the game had access to many community made tools that allowed them to interact with the war effort without needing to open the game, although usually these tools were open simultaneously with the game. While most tools were available for all players from both factions such as the artillery calculator, which showed where to aim the artillery guns to hit a desired location, some tools were available only for one faction. The largest Warden logistics community “Warden Logistics Hub” created a specialized logistics calculator designed to ease use of facilities, while being only accessible to Warden players.

The final question within the first section was about further details about community and player-made content and systems, some participants talked about custom roles that exist as an idea of certain actions that a player takes rather than a role or title a player would have within the games code, the most commonly mentioned role was that of the Partisan, *“Partisans is what we call going behind enemy lines and going into hexes where you can't set a spawn. But the reason you would do that is so you can get around there and disrupt logistics.”*, *“And that very much doesn't seem like the devs intended for that to be a feature, but it sort of just evolved out and became something that part of the community enjoys to do.”*-SquashyHex, (25). This role has a niche sub role which is used by the community to differentiate between the way that these players engage enemy logistics. The Fisherman focuses on naval raiding of enemy logistics, *“But the fishermen, they specialize in freighters. They raid freighters either when they cross a bridge and they just shoot it or they can go up in amphibious vehicles or, like motor boats or barges to go raid them”*-Tzening123, (24). These roles are not official in the sense that a player is not able to choose this role in the games menu but rather it becomes a description of their actions. Other named roles created by players include, Medics, Tankers, Artillerymen. These descriptions and names are also not static, thus as the game receives changes some roles may fade and be absorbed by a new role. Another way that players create custom content is in base building and design, *“I think the perfect example would be a bunker base. It's a very simple modular system with, I want to say about 15 different pieces.”*, *“But the community has created specific types of designs that are very, very hard for attackers to penetrate”*-Sasha, (20). Base building is a central part of this game. Most battles within the game would be within or around major bases due to the ability to control larger areas using them. Some defensive structures could become so large and massive that sometimes the best way to defeat them was to simply avoid them.

An important aspect of the interactions between players as well the custom content created for the game was the platforms for communication that exist. The main platforms used by the players were Reddit and Discord. The way these two platforms differentiated in use was that Reddit was more of a general forum where anyone could post about any opinions or issues and have general discussions and communications with players from both factions. Discord was much more specialized, Discord servers were set up in sizes from tiny regiments up to the official Foxhole Discord Server. Notably as previously mentioned even the L.O.G.I union had their own Discord Server through which most communications between members of the union occurred. Discord servers served the purpose of direct and instant communication with specific groups of people that had access to them. They could be used to plan offensives between allied regiments, find out about the progress other sections in the faction were having in the war among any other sort of communication. Discord gave the most flexibility in terms of what could be done and with whom.

4.2 Community & Strike

The second and final section of the interviews focused on the community aspects of Foxhole as well as the L.O.G.I strike, in initial interviews the strike was given a minor role within this section as the interviews went along it became very clear that the strike was the culmination of a large quantity of factors feeding into the frustrations of the logistics community. Participants were asked about their experiences during the strike. Initially participants were asked if they were present during the strike which, surprisingly, was not every participant, *"I only came on board after the strike. The strike occurred about war 87, and I came in on the war afterwards"*-*The_Really_good_Man, (24)*. The reason that this was surprising was due to the participants all being part of the L.O.G.I Union community which gave the sense that in general a member would have participated in the strike. The following questions were about the experiences players had during the time of the strike the situation during the strike was reported to initially be rather chaotic: *"Like it was definitely easy to tell, especially on the front lines, that many of the public bases were getting severely undersupplied and that the logistical chain for public players and for players not associated with the regiment or not part of an active operation by a regiment suffered the most."*, *"And on the front lines, it would take hours for a new delivery of guns or ammunition."*-*Anonymous 1, (17)*. While the frontline players were trying to continue keeping things moving, the backlines in general for both sides had come to a complete standstill *"And that war that the strike happened at the time, ended up becoming the longest war in the game's history., because there was no one making stuff. So there were no major pushes. No major.., production was being made. And keep in mind, the strike happened on both sides, so all the major logistical regiments just stopped working."*-*Loyal, (28)*. It took a while for the new situation to be understood and dealt with by everyone affected. After the initial shock has subsidized gameplay changed only minimally as the main difference had simply become the quantity and quality of resources available to those on the frontlines. This however does not mean everyone was

affected equally. Some regiments that conducted their own logistics did not participate in the strike and kept feeding themselves *“Not really, because I'm in a standard regiment. We do our own logi. We don't do a lot of logi for the public. We're not logi oriented.”-Corto, (22)*. Other regiments expanded their supply to other players to better support their areas. As such the frontline saw areas with some players having access to little to no supplies while playing alongside fully supplied armored units.

In connection with this question participants were asked about what they did in relation to the strike. The L.O.G.I Union had decided on a passive and non disruptive strike where participants of the strike would not hinder people that wanted to continue doing logistics work. This was done to avoid toxicity *“As a union, we gave people the ability or we quote unquote sanctioned people, the ability to strike in a number of ways, such as,, literally just don't log in, just don't log in. Have them see a dip in their active player chart as well as a couple of non disruptive ways in game in Foxhole. If they felt that they needed to make their voices heard, we didn't sanction them. Blocking off Logi hubs parking trucks across places and calling it part of the strike. You know, if you do Logi, you will be punished.”-Hyllios, (32)*. Players that would actively strike by hindering others were discouraged from this behavior and L.O.G.I distanced themselves from such players: *“We didn't condone any of that.”-Hyllios, (32)*. Most participants chose to simply not play the game: *“well, I mostly just played other games, to be honest.”-Seiko, (22)*, and if they did play they decided to play on the frontlines instead *“I played Frontline.”-TheUntacticalMan, (19)*. The final questions of the interview asked participants on the feasibility of another logistics strike happening in the current state of the game, *“What I saw in this update in the most recent one is that was a lot of quality of life and a lot of like smaller changes that they probably didn't have time to include or implement during other updates. So I think now what they're doing with this update and probably the next one is just going to be addressing like long standing issues. I don't think the community is angry enough or frustrated enough, but I do see some people being really dissatisfied with the state of the game”-LoneWolfHowlin, (22)* as well as their opinion on whether another strike should occur, some members believed another strike should happen *“I would like it to happen.”-Anonymous 3, (17)*, although most did not agree with this belief *“Maybe? Honestly, how would I say? I don't see a justification that's as strong as it was back in the 80 wars when the first strike happened.”-Tzening123, (24)*.

Participants were also asked if they still played the game. Most participants still played the game, some participants in particular had been streaming the game during the interview as a visual aid, however some had quit the game, *“I do not, but I like to keep, uh. I like to keep informed of the goings on of the game”-LorenLuke*. A majority of the respondents said that they played much less now than they did in the past, especially when compared to before the strike. The following question asked participants about their personal opinions on issues within the game, a point that was often repeated was the decay mechanic “

Basically in the game, a lot of player-made structures such as bunker-like defenses, facilities, consume BMATs (Basic Materials) to be to not be decayed over time. So if a structure like that doesn't have BMATs to consume, it will take damage and it will be destroyed over time. So you need to provide BMATs to maintain it and sometimes the consumption can be really high. You will need several players walking, playing the game every day for a longer off time to produce to maintain stuff. And I think it's like really crazy.”-Onoya, (26). The decay mechanic has always taken a large quantity of resources that could be used to produce other machinery or structures simply to keep existing structures from breaking. In connection with the previous questions participants were asked if problems had changed over time or if the same set of issues were constantly present, participants generally remarked that issues kept reappearing or not disappearing at all in the first place: *“Well, they are still there because you can't expect a single update to erase them, but. The main problems I had, and that was widely shared by people in my regiment, was the problem with the decay mechanic and the fact that the logistic gameplay was tedious”-Corto, (22).* Most players due to the frustrations that the game brought them with its tediousness found themselves at a difficult choice, either give up the game, accept the issues or try to change them. As previously mentioned some players had quit the game already, often due to the issues with the gameplay. The participants of the strike decided to do something against the issues because they held the game in high regard and believed that the issues could be fixed. The strike occurred because players cared about the game.

Participants were also asked for their personal opinions on what they saw as the biggest issue that had ever been present within the game. Responses varied greatly between respondents. Some players believed that the game was too difficult to enter as a new player and its barrier to entry was too high. They saw this as one of the reasons that a sizable number of new players gave up on the game after a short period of time. Another point of complaint was the backend of the game, server stability was mentioned. Entire sections of the map could desynchronise with the main server and boot all players within them. These issues often were more prominent in areas of the map that had higher loads, due to player numbers or structure numbers. Quality of life was mentioned repeatedly, especially for logistics play: *“Definitely what started a logi strike, which was I don't know if you have a question about them later on, but basically it was like there were no next to no quality of life changes for logimen.”-Tzening123, (24).* The playerbase saw many issues present in the game and saw a majority of them not change in significant ways.

The thing that relates directly to the issues that the participants mentioned was the developers. In particular the developers caused a majority of issues including the strike due to their communication, or rather the lack thereof. This unwillingness to interact or acknowledge the community in any meaningful way was the catalyst to a majority of frustrations the player base held towards the game. When asked to describe developer communication every single participant gave a negative answer: *“The devs have always been kind of, kind of, you know, like there's it's a mystery, you know, how they operate, you know, like you know, the criticism of the community about the devs*

being kind of out of touch are somewhat valid at times.”-Seiko, (22). They felt their voices unheard and that pushed them towards the show of force and will that was the strike. It is important to note however that developer communication was bad not because the developers were rude to the community or dismissed their voices as unreasonable, but simply because communication with the developers was akin to talking to a brick wall. Participants also noted that since the strike communication had improved however they would still not describe it as sufficient.

Discussion

5.1 Main findings

This thesis investigated the role that collective player action has played in the videogame Foxhole, as well as its relation to the logistics player strike. Furthermore the effects of communication in relation to the events of the logistics strike were assessed. Finally the relationship between the idea of playbour and how it influenced the community of Foxhole as well as the events of the logistics strike. Research was conducted with 22 members of the L.O.G.I community. Several attempts had been made to establish contact with developers or representatives from Foxhole. The initial goal had been to get an internal view of the happenings to contrast the players' experiences and opinions. Unfortunately no contact could be established. The general opinions that players had of Foxhole were complex. They saw many faults and issues with the game and especially with the developers, however these negative opinions were contrasted with a sense of endearment towards the game. Due to the game being very unique in its approach and the effort that players had put into the game, they wanted to see the game become the best possible version instead of abandoning it.

This research also showed that the developers were a driving force behind a majority of the issues that the game had. Communication was often pointed out as a major failure point of the developers, not due to malicious or hostile communications with the community, but rather due to complete avoidance of open communication. As frustrations grew in the playerbase a lack of communication from the developers only served to stir the pot of discontent.

The findings of this study strongly relate with the results of other experiments in similar fields. The article by Blodgett and Tapia (2011) mentions how companies hosting virtual worlds will need to be more aware of who their audience is alongside how they are able to mobilize and the ramifications of such mobilizations. Due to Foxhole already having strong communities established by the nature of its game design, players were able to connect with each other very easily. Using the community tools available to them, players were able to set up their own specialized communities with the aim of counteracting the issues they saw within the game. Thanks to the ability for large scale instantaneous communications players were able to effectively coordinate large scale collective actions. The effects that the strike had were profound and it became a symbol of the strength that

players had to combat issues they saw within games. As the developers were unable to correctly interact with the community they were unable to stop the large scale actions that occurred.

Communication was shown to play a key role in all aspects related to the community, the game, and the role it played in the strike. In order to facilitate the answering of the previously mentioned research question it is necessary to explore the connections between the answers that participants gave and the relationships that they have with the coding scheme.

As this research related to the logistics strike and its causes, the most common thing that participants had mentioned were issues that they had with the game. Ranging from minor annoyances to game ruining bugs. These issues even though they had a great variety often related to other topics that participants would talk about.

A topic that was mentioned repeatedly in connection to issues was gameplay. As this topic was more descriptive than evaluative it worked more towards explaining the environments that participants found themselves in. As gameplay had been described as a time consuming task that required a large quantity of effort it connects directly to the findings by Taylor et al. (2015) which relates activities within a game environment to eventually become akin to labor rather than leisure activities. With the constant pressure by the game to be active as much as possible due to decay mechanics, as well as the real time aspects of the war effort, playing the game was more of a task rather than a form of leisure. As players would go from their daily activities they would log into the game due to the pressure of losing the progress they had previously made with large quantities of effort and time.

While not the central piece of the study, the logistics strike was not only mentioned repeatedly, it was also strongly related to several aspects of this study. The strike was the culmination of all frustrations that the players had and is generally seen as the strongest link in representing collective player action. Almost all other topics had at least some connection to the strike. The relation to issues in game is simple and direct as issues within the game caused frustrations which fed the idea for the strike. The relationship to gameplay was that players felt that the activities they conducted had more similarities with an actual job rather than a pastime, the effort needed for efficient play with limited returns fed frustrations in the playerbase and became an issue that was voiced repeatedly by the community in general and by participants during research. The collective action that was taken by the community based on the goal of solving the issues that plagued logistics gameplay is supported by El-Nasr et al (2010) which both relate to cooperation and collaboration between players with the purpose of winning as a team. Although in the setting of the logistics strike the idea of winning became the goal to see the changes they wanted implemented.

The next topic related to interactions both between players and also within and between the communities that exist in the game. When talking about interactions the topic was often linked to other topics such as the communities themselves, gameplay elements, the strike, and the developers among others. Interaction and communication found itself repeated many times throughout the

research, it was included but not limited to, descriptions of how communities were created, descriptions of how interactions were a problem, and explanations of how the opposing factions cooperated for the strike.

The next two topics were repeatedly mentioned in conjunction with each other. Custom content and Communities. Custom content focused on player-made and community-made content such as slang terms, custom roles, and designs among other things created by players. Communities was related to mentions of communities within Foxhole. While they were repeatedly mentioned in conjunction with each other, both of these also had repeated occurrences with other topics, in particular gameplay and interactions for custom content and communities respectively. The connection between communities and interaction is supported by Liu (2021) who extrapolates that having a shared community or social group increases the likelihood of continuous interaction between players.

The developers played an important role in the formation of the strike. They served both as a catalyst for discontent, as well as being a form of “common enemy” that allowed for a united front of players to form. The position that the developers ended up in is supported by Mcleod (2023) who suggests that Social Identity Theory can affect how people view and interact with other people that are not part of their community or social group. Their role became that of the out-group, while the player base became the in-group. Even after the goals of the logistics players had been achieved, the player base kept the developers in a strongly negative view. They saw the developers to still behave similarly to the past. They were distant to the community, unwilling to interact with players and generally avoided any mentions of issues the game had.

5.2 Limitations & further research

It is important to note that this research is solely based on the experiences and opinions of players within the logistics community, in particular members of the L.O.G.I union. As such an inherent bias exists within their view of events and the surroundings of the game. While having the views from the developers would have been interesting to see how they viewed the events of the strike and collective action their input was not vital.

This research engages with events that occurred two years ago, the memory of participants is unlikely to be infallible. Their memories could have been skewed towards a more negative view of the events simply based on their emotions.

The original sample size that was planned for had been 30 participants, however due to difficulties the final number of participants ended up being 22. This number, while not being a small number of participants, is only a minor section of the L.O.G.I union. Furthermore, the L.O.G.I union itself is a section of the logistics community which in turn is a small section of the entire Foxhole playerbase. Other research could look into what shape collective player action in Foxhole has taken outside of the logistics community.

While the strike itself was a significant event in the logistics community, it is difficult to gauge how far its effects reached into other parts of the game. Frontline players were only affected by the strike while it happened and possibly could have little to no recollection of the events or have seen any major changes occur within their gameplay loop. Further research could thus delve into the effect that the strike had on other parts of the community.

There are several other possibilities for further research, comparative studies between Foxhole and similar games such as EVE Online could show how collective action changes shape within different game environments.

Lastly, the interview questions themselves had some weak points. Not all questions gave insight into the topic that was being investigated and ended up as a sort of distraction from the important parts. Not all participants would always understand the questions fully so their wording could be reworked as well. Further research into the same topic would definitely require a reworked topic list. Other possibilities for further research could be to compare the collective player actions undertaken by communities in separate games, such as EVE Online.

Conclusion

This paper explored what role collective player action played in the videogame Foxhole, as well as the role of communication in the events of the logistics strike and the relationship between playbour and the influence it has had on the community and the events of the logistics strike. This study involved 22 members of the L.O.G.I community and intended to involve developers of the game as well however attempts at establishing contact were unsuccessful. The findings of this study revealed that many aspects of the game, its community and the events of the logistics strike are strongly connected. The gameplay environment that Foxhole offers is one of strong cooperation with a large quantity of players, creating the necessity of strong communication. This strong sense of community coupled with the frustrating gameplay elements within logistics gameplay created a united logistics playerbase. The centerpiece of these frustrations was undoubtedly the developers of the game, they were seen as the driving force behind a majority of issues present in the game, as well as the main obstacle towards solving them. This view was spawned by the main point of failure of the developers, communication. The players saw the developers as having adopted a behavior of avoidance of communication. They felt that the developers never even acknowledged or attempted to interact with the communities present in their game. As discontent among the player base grew the concept of actions speaking louder than words became more widespread, and if the developers would not listen to the players they would at least watch what they were doing. With this idea the strike, a last resort to get the attention of the developers, fueled by discontent over communication, quality of life issues, and feeling voiceless became a reality. To finalize, collective player action has played a

significant role in shaping the environment of Foxhole by forcing the developers, unwilling to interact with their community and address long standing issues to do just that. Even though Foxhole was a much smaller game compared to other games that had similar events, the events of the logistics became very well known among the gaming community. The reason for this is most likely the media coverage it received from major gaming news sites. While not the first or last show of collective actions of the playerbase against issues they saw within the game it became a sort of textbook example of how a successful strike could be conducted. While developers could dismiss singular voices they were unable to counter a combined effort of the majority of their playerbase. Players in other videogames are likely to be inspired by these events as a way to pursue change in the games that they play. Some recent examples of collective action to combat issues in a game are for the video games Escape from Tarkov and War Thunder, where the respective communities were able to push for major changes in their games through their collective voices. For developers of games this research should show that the communities that they foster with their games are not something that should be easily dismissed, after all the player base is always what keeps a game running.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Literature Log Book

Literature Search Overview

Date	Source	Search String	Total hits	Relevant Literature
10-05-23	Scopus	“Collective player action”	0	0
10-05-23	Scopus	collective AND player AND action	615	1
10-05-23	Google Scholar	“Collective player action”	983,000	0
10-05-23	ResearchGate	“Collective player action”	1000	2
12-05-23	Scopus	“Collective action” AND Videogames	3	0
16-05-23	Scopus	Strike AND Videogames	8	0
16-05-23	Scopus	Union AND Videogames	13	3
18-05-23	Scopus	"Collective action" AND Strike	282	0
21-05-23	Scopus	“Goal Theory”	1,100	2
23-05-23	ResearchGate	Social Identity Theory	4,550,000	2
23-05-23	Google	Foxhole Strike	863,000	4

Appendix B: Topic List

Informed Consent

- Purpose of Research
- Risks/benefits of participation
- Procedure for withdrawal (DM me)
- If you wish to use a nickname for this study you are free to do so (tell me what it is) if you don't wish to you will be given an anonymous name by default (participant 1)
- You can request your data any time, change your responses and request to be removed as a participant in retrospect
- Data will be deleted after the thesis is completed unless currently unknown intervention occurs.
- Contact details
- Do you have questions?

RECORD THIS

Do you consent to your voice being recorded?

Do you wish to use a nickname or an anonymous ID?

Introductory section

- General Introduction of yourself
 - Since when do you play
 - How many hours
 - Always logi?
 - Rank+lvl
 - What team
 - age?

Logi gameplay and community interaction

- Explain Logi gameplay as if I was someone with 0 knowledge dont ask it many more times
- How good does someone need to be for logi gameplay?
 - Personal Ranking in skill level (do you think you match this level?) (not important)
- Sandbox?
- How do players go beyond the systems created by the game
 - E.g Partisans and other custom roles and tasks
- How much of the game follows the strict game design compared to the amount of custom community content

Strike

- Do you still play
- Current major issues in player opinion
 - Changed over time?
 - Old problems solved?
 - How?
- Greatest problem game ever had
- How has the community responded to issues in the past as well as issues being fixed
 - Dev communication?
- Ask about strike
 - Personal experiences?
 - Effects of strike
 - Did it solve the problem?
 - Should it happen again?
 - Would it solve the problem?

Appendix C: Code Book

Table 2

Code Book

Code	Description	Example
1. Age	Age of participants	“I am 22 years old”
2. Team (Warden/Colonial)	Team participant plays in	“I only play Warden”
3. Skill	Anything related to the topic of Skill in Foxhole, including personal skill ratings	“And I dont know nothing about facilities. Like , really nothing. So, yeah, I will say like six overall. Six to Seven”
4. Issues in Game	Mentions problems the game has	“Well there is the balance thing. There is always going to be balance issues.”
5. Strike	Any mentions of the strike	“I was a pioneer for the logi union, i was one of the original members that joined it.”
6. Developers	Description of the developers and their actions	“The devs are very stubborn to be honest”
7. Communities	Descriptions and examples of communities	“Also, I founded a clan back in War 19, which i am no longer the lead of anymore.”
8. Gameplay	Anything related to gameplay	“Like, say somebody wants to build a bunker base. They can build a massive fortress that can stop the colonial advance dead on its tracks. I've seen it before, and I've seen it time and time again. Some bases can be built with engineers.”
9. Interaction (Community/Player)	Mentions of player interaction, community interaction	“So band together, we all said, yeah, this sucks. We got to do something about it. So then they had a poll, which is like, what do you think is the worst what's the worst thing that could happen? What's the parts that you hate the most about the logistics side?”
10. Custom Content	Content created by players/community within the game	“For example, as for tools, as I know, there is the Warden logistics hub, which is where most of the major regimen leaders gather to discuss logistics in general, like, how do we optimize this, how do we optimize that?”

Appendix D: Cohen's Kappa Table

		Torben											
Codes		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Constructs	
Noah	Age	2										1	Age
	Team		2									2	Team
	Skill			4								3	Skill
	Issues				4		1					4	Issues
	Strike					8						5	Strike
	Devs						1					6	Devs
	Communities							1				7	Communities
	Gameplay								4			8	Gameplay
	Interacton									2		9	Interaction
	Custom										1	10	Custom Content
Total codes:		33											
Total agree:		26											
Age	0,0036731												
Team	0,0036731												
Skill	0,0146924												
Issues	0,0183655												
Strike	0,0734619												
Devs	0,0036731												
Communities	0												
Gameplay	0,0183655												
Interacton	0												
Custom	0,0073462												
	0,1432507												
Cohens Kappa -----> 0.75495915986													

Appendix E: Ranking system in Foxhole

Ranking System Foxhole

#	Rank	Total Commendations
1	Private	1
2	Lance Corporal	4
3	Corporal	8
4	Sergeant	20
5	Staff Sergeant	50
6	Warrant Officer 2	100
7	Warrant Officer 1	150
8	Officer Cadet	200
9	Second Lieutenant	500
10	Lieutenant	800
11	Captain	1,200
12	Major	1,800
13	Lieutenant Colonel	2,700
14	Colonel	3,900
15	Brigadier General	5,900
16	Major General	8,900
17	Lieutenant General	13,400
18	General	19,900
19	Field Marshal	29,900