Playtest Results

Who's The Boss

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Introduction and Methodology

All the usability and play tests were conducted at ITU on Demo night on the 5th of December, 2016. All test players used ear plugs playing the game on a Windows PC. The play test was conducted using a combination of passive observations of players during a playtest of the game and questions on a survey. The survey was filled out immediately after playing the game. We had a total of 15 playtesters.

Positive Results

Initially, we would like to reflect on the positive results of the play tests. Although there is room for improvement, as we will address below, the game has also received a lot of positive feedback, indicating that we are on the right track.

Entertainment

Our play testers indicated that they found the game entertaining, and nobody expressed negative reactions to the narrative. These are positive signs even when we account for the positive bias of a test conducted mostly with play testers who knew us or are our classmates. This is not to say there is not room for improvement (the average evaluation of the overall entertainment was 3.4 out of 5) but it is a promising start.

Play time

When asked about the playtime a tester would prefer for a single session, 60% responded 5-10 minutes, the time that fits our intended context. The remaining 40% were divided equally between less than 5 minutes and 10-30 minutes, but nobody answered the last possibility (30+ minutes), which indicates that our target timeframe is more or less correct.

Repetition

The last purely positive result we received showed that the testers were not frustrated by the repetitive nature of the game. We are keenly aware that repetitive game play walks a razor's edge, easily resulting in player frustration if not handled well.

Happily, our play test have shown that our play testers rated the frustration/satisfaction of the repetition at 3.6 out of 5 (5 indicating satisfaction), with no one rating it a 1. This indicates that we have hit a game length that fits the repetition, and that at least over 3 or so playthroughs, the repetition does not get in the way of what makes the game interesting.

Aspects to Improve

Text-length

One of the things that we need to revisit and improve is the length of the text that is used for the narrative, more specifically the boss's reply texts and the choices of dialogue given to the player.

From the playtest we observed that many players skipped parts of the boss's replies, although only one directly commented on the length of the text. This could be either a usability issue (we mention in the usability test that some players skipped the next button for the navigation of the reply) or simply because they did not want to read the extra text that would appear once they hit the arrow buttons. A possible improvement to this (apart from just making the text shorter) is mentioned in the usability test on the boss's dialogue arrow button.

Another reason for trying to shorten the text is the current contradiction that exists between the vague and really short topics and the detailed and longer choices of dialogues given to the player. This difference changes the way the player feels about the amount of control of her choices (topics or dialogues).

Some testers mentioned unpredictability between the topics choice and the responses from the boss, and they could not get the feedback they expected. It was deliberate from our part to have some unexpected reactions from the boss, however the goal was not to confuse but to surprise.

An improvement could be made to the narrative so that it provides a better representation of the boss's personality (either through his replies or the intro text), or the narrative could also be changed in order to make his reactions more coherent with the choices of the player. Changing the topics and/or adding more context (maybe a short text that would appear when hovering the mouse over the topic, giving more information about it) would also help bridging that gap mentioned above.

Game Progress

Several play testers indicated that it was difficult to get a sense of their progress through the game. At least once during the playtest a tester asked "how long is it?". Leaving the player feeling confused during the game is not our intention, therefore this is an issue we need to deal with.

We plan to mitigate this issue by adding a game progress counter to the menu we intend to add for usability purposes. This game element would simply indicate the number of dialogue levels and how far the player is. This basic numerical counter would allow the player to orient themselves without giving away too much of the exploratory challenge of the game. Placing it in the menu also means the player will not have to deal with the additional information unless they feel the need to do so.

Communicating the Goal of the Game

A primary focus of our play testing was whether or not the actual goal of the game was conveyed well enough to the player.

When asked, many players picked goals such as "Laughing" or "Finding the different endings" (20% and 26% respectively) while 26% "did not see the point", and 20% thought the goal of the game was "to avoid 'bad' endings".

These misconceptions obviously need to be addressed and to that end we intend to add an overview of the available endings. This list tracks which endings the player have found, while having the remaining endings shown but kept secret (e.g. marked as "hidden" or grayed out). We intend this game element to be part of the menu we have mentioned under game progress above. In this way players can orient themselves as they see fit.

We have also talked about adding an additional motivator for discovering all the endings, such as an alternate game mode (e.g. new animations or art, different music) or a "good" promotion ending that can only be reached by finding all the endings.

This is primarily meant to be a communication tool rather than an important gameplay element. Receiving these additional rewards should not be presented as the goal, but rather as a badge of honor for players who play through the whole game.

From the playtest and ensuing survey we could see that the goal of the game was not clear to everybody. 26,7 % of the respondents in the survey marked out that they did not know what the goal of the game was, and as seen from the observations on the play testers, the players are thrown into the game right in front of the boss, after a small introductory text and no other visual or audio signifiers to show where the game is going. The topic choosing even before the boss initially says anything confuses the player further where he (the boss) instead should talk first, framing the situation as a supplementary to the introduction text.

Other modifications to our game which could mitigate this missing of a clear goal and framing the motive to play the game in a more clear way could be to make a simpler text in the intro, but also make an introductory scene in the play where the player is presented with a view of the office landscape where he/she would be able to see that his co-workers are looking at him in a way that shows they are feeling empathy towards the player, because he/she is on his/her way into the boss office for a little talk about their future. It could also be expanded with a mini interaction game with a colleague, framing the upcoming talk with the boss even further.

Conclusion

Overall, we think that the results from this playtest were really useful. We had a general positive feedback that encouraged us. One of our biggest concerns – the narrative of the game – got good evaluation, as well as its humor. But we also got feedback that helped us have a better idea of what issues the game has.

It was interesting to see how many of those problems were elements that we had already discussed. We anticipated that maybe the texts would be excessive for some, that the meaning of the topics and their relation with the dialogues could seem a bit confusing, and that the goal would maybe not be as clear as we would like. And just like we discussed those issues, we also considered several others, and each of us in the group had different opinions. That is why we feel the feedback we got in those playtests was so important, once it helps us prioritize and focus on the biggest problems, while it also showed us points that we hadn't thought about.