Reflection Essay on 'The Business Trip'

Introduction
Since the first period, I already knew that we would finish our schoolyear with the course "Project Interactive Multimedia". Initially, I had no idea what to expect of this project. A couple of weeks before the 6th period started, I already did some online research and saw some project of previous years. Those gave me a little bit of insight and a more clear view on this project. After the first lecture, the main goal of this project was presented by professor Eliens, namely to create a "Career Game". I still had no clue what to expect, nor what to deliver at the end of the period. However, after we saw some XIMPEL-examples that were shown by Winoe, the objectives became clearer. Furthermore, when we had to present our concepts, we could compare our ideas with those of others, and I started to realize how the structure of the course was built up. I knew that this last period would be very productive as well as fun, as we could implement our most creative ideas in the project.

Brainstorming
As group 13, consisting of three dedicated students, we came up with a concept considerably fast. We wanted to emphasize on the fact that more and more people are suffering from burnouts, which are caused by being "overworked". However, after all groups presented their concepts, we found that lots of them resembled ours. In order to differentiate ourselves from the rest, we took our concept to a whole new direction. Another important idea that comes in mind when thinking about career, is making choices which have influence on the relation with your colleagues. We went more in depth with that idea, and came up with a whole new concept, namely: What choices would you make at a business trip? Many people find it hard to be themselves when they are with their colleagues. Sometimes they are afraid to say something that the others might not like, or they are just not comfortable when they are surrounded by their colleagues. In real life, though, such occasions occur often. The goal of our game is to emphasize on the fact that many choices you make (also off duty) have consequences on relations and that many people are unaware of these consequences. With this game, we tried to make people more aware of the choices they make.

XIMPEL
We used XIMPEL as framework to create the interactive video (the game). XIMPEL is used to easily create interactive media presentations. Initially, as I was not familiar with this application, I did not understand its purpose, nor its coding. However, the XIMPEL documentation was very clear to start off our project with. To give us a better insight of how XIMPEL could be used, Winoe gave a lecture about this topic. He showed us some projects of previous years which brought up ideas to use in our own game. He was also willing to help us when we got stuck with questions about XIMPEL. We, as group 13, did not have to seek for much help though, as we already did some coding in HTML during previous courses. However, the idea that we had Winoe as our back up, was satisfying.
We got to work in small steps, trying out the functions which were in the XIMPEL documentation one by one. Soon as we got the picture, we started creating our own project.
After creating the interactive video, I can say that the XIMPEL documentation is sufficient to create an interactive video from scratch. However, XIMPEL (as application) could be improved by making its functions more diverse. This may result in a broader user base, thus future projects to be more differing and varying. In general, it is a framework to get in touch with basic interactive media presentations.

Viral clip

Beside the interactive video, a considerable part of this project was the viral clip. The goal of this viral clip was to bring the purpose of your game into vision. In real life, potential "players" should be attracted to your viral clip in order to buy the game that you are promoting.

Beforehand, neither of my group members nor I, were familiar with editing videos. However, we have taught ourselves to edit videos by watching several Youtube-tutorials. We have made our clip in an editing program, called "Sony Vegas Pro 14".

As we wanted to be as original as possible, we tried to gain attention from the user by not putting too serious aspects in our video. On the contrary, we made use of the humorous aspects of making choices at a business trip. These aspects went from "Do you sit next to familiar colleagues, or new ones?" to "How many shots do you take?". We are very happy with the final result of our viral clip, as we have (in my opinion) succeeded in passing on a serious message in a "not so serious" video clip.

The game

One main objective we (the members of group 13) had, was to distinguish us from the other groups as this is the only way to stand out when there are 22 groups in total. This objective can be recognized when playing our game. We have filmed everything in first person, so that the player of our game really feels that he or she is the one who makes the choices. We did this to create a realistic vibe in the game.

Furthermore, we thought it might be boring using almost all video fragments in our game of people in suits, at their office, who are sitting behind their desk. To make the game more appealing for its players, we took the liberty to use more joyful videos. However, the message that those joyful videos brought with it are serious. By doing so, we created a pleasant vibe for the player while playing the game about serious matters.

The objective of the game is introduced to the player before the game starts. The user is then free to make his or her own choices based on his or her own intuition. In short, the objective is to make the "right" choices at a business trip. As these choices will determine how the relation between you and your colleagues will develop, the player has to choose wisely.

We decided not to show the score while playing the game, as this might affect the choices that are being made. Though, the player will get a final "score" at the end of the game. The final score consists of a summary of the player's choices, and a possible advise to follow up in order to improve his/her behavior next time. The player will get the best final score when he/she finds a balance between partying too hard (when your colleagues ask you to go with them) and being too boring (which results in being antisocial).

Portfolio

During this course, we had to upload all deliverables to our own website. In the first week we had some difficulties with this, as we could not get our own URL that easily. After sending multiple emails to the VU IT Servicedesk, we received the URL which made it possible to store the documents online. Initially, our portfolio was very limited. Moreover, it could not even be considered as a real website. However, after we uploaded more and more files, we thought of organizing all files in a way that people use on websites. To do this, we looked for a template for a portfolio, and edited this in our own way. We have succeeded in creating a comprehensive website containing all documents which are made during this project. The link of this website is: http://www.few.vu.nl/~abe237/

Polls

In order to predict what kind of choices most people would make while playing our game, we made a Facebook page where we added all our Facebook friends (aging 18 to 23 years old). On this page we made several polls, where the members of the page could make their choice about the scenarios we have in our game. These polls came out to be very handy in order to make such a game. In this way, we did not only get insight of people's opinion, but we also got nice tips and suggestions that we applied in our game. These polls were not necessary for the project deliverables, but our goal was to score a grade as high as possible. In order to do so, we thought it might come in handy to put extra effort in our project, such as creating the polls.

Collaboration

At the beginning of this course we had the freedom to choose our own group. These groups could consist of one to (at most) three people. We (as group 13) chose to work together because we all had corresponding ideas about the project and the concept. The collaboration went smoothly in my opinion, as we could discuss about every detail of the project in our own Whatsapp-groupchat. Each group member also knew what his or her task was, and kept to his/her agreements. Sometimes it was hard to make appointments, as we all have a part-time job after college. However, we always succeeded in coming to a point where everyone contributed in their own way. The benefit of working in a group is that every group member can learn from the others. I think that every one of us had their own interpretation of a career game, and that the blending of these interpretations led to our "successful" interactive video.

Conclusion

I found the concept and purpose of this course a little bit fuzzy in the beginning of this period as the structure of the lectures was a little bit… unusual. However, unusual does not mean that this was not effective. Professor Eliens seemed to succeed in obtaining our attention, as (most of) the students were always aware and listening when he was talking. In my opinion, the lectures provided us of some kind of deeper message concerning life, which we should be able to follow up in order to become successful.

Another aspect that I liked about this course was the high rate of its flexibility and creativity. In contrast to all other courses I followed during my bachelor IMM, this course offered students the most freedom. It seemed as if the students could "do whatever they want" which made them more motivated to come up with their own, often most creative ideas. Again, I have never experienced such a structure of a course before, but I have to say that it was very effective according to the deliverables of each group.

In retrospect, I can imagine why this course fits in the IMM bachelor program. It requires students to apply their gained skills in designing and developing a multimedia application with educational as well as gaming elements, as a resource in a communication strategy with a social goal or objective. That is why I would recommend the VU to keep this course in the bachelor program. Sometimes "learning by doing" is more efficient than studying from a book, as it turns out.

Group 13 - Project Interactive Multimedia 2017.