PLAVING THE DATABASE

A Game About Managing Content by Aaron Trammell Doctoral Candidate Rutgers University

Overview

system win! and cons of each database. Good luck, and may the best work to engineer the best flow of information. Competing fundamental decisions about their system structure and system. Over the course of play, players will make understanding the dynamics of a content management responded to user queries, the users will evaluate the pros players take on one of three major roles and work as a team This game simulates the layers of abstraction necessary for to help fulfill user queries. After all of the teams hav



SET UP

Materials

The game coordinator should bring a set of colored index cards and markers for players to use in the game.

Players

This game works best in groups of nine to fifteen players, but can be played with as many as thirty. Players should be split into teams of exactly three with whom they will collaborate. If there are players left over, they will take on the role of the user. If there are no players left over, the coordinator should take on the role of the user.

Queries and Databases

The game coordinator should come prepared with a set of ten database cards for each team playing. These sets of cards represent the organizational structures of databases. Each set of cards should contain the same symbols. When constructing the sets of database cards, the coordinator should write a unique symbol on each card in a set and then repeat the process by putting the same series of symbols on each set of cards. The cards in each set should vary by color. One set should contain cards that are all the same color. Another set should contain cards that are half one color and half another. Yet another set should feature three cards in each color, and one card of a fourth color. Finally, there should also be a set that features two cards of each color. If there are more than four teams, feel free to repeat the above options or create your own sets of cards.

There should also be a set of uncolored cards for the player playing the role of the "user" to hand to the database. This is the set of user queries. These cards should contain all of the symbols found the database sets.

Finally, there should be a set of "disposition" cards for the players taking the role of the interfaces. There should be at least one disposition for each team, and these should contain adjectives that describe the interface. Some examples include: slow, happy, friendly, dour, silent, and helpful.

ROUND STRUCTURE

Workshop

Players should be first broken into teams of three. Any players without teams should be assigned the role of the user. They may collaborate with the interface players on one team and request that they take on a set of unique protocols or dispositions in order to make the user experience more intuitive.

The coordinator should distribute a set of database cards to each team as well as a set of disposition cards to each interface. Users should be handed a set of query cards.

Players working on teams will take about ten minutes to decide upon their roles and write down a clearly related set of "code" for the PHP player. During the game, the PHP player must follow these instructions to the word. Additionally, during this time, players are free to mark-up and organize their database cards however they like. The Interface player may also use this time to organize their space and consider their disposition.

Game

During the game, the interface players will request a query from the *user* player. This will then be relayed to the PHP player and who will act out their "code," thus interacting with the database player. Users will then query the next database and onward until all systems have processed requests. After play, users will evaluate their experiences with the various databases.

Debrief

After the game the coordinator should lead a group discussion where they ask players to relate their experiences with the game. Be sure to ask users which database they liked best, and teams if they felt that their system worked well. Finally, players should be urged to make connections between the game and the abstraction necessary to understand content management systems.

PLAYER ROLES

User

The player taking the role of the user should approach each interface, one at a time, and hand them a card. They should also take notes as they evaluate each team on how well they perform.

Interface

The player who is playing the interface will receive a card with special instructions regarding their disposition toward the user and will be responsible for relaying queries to the PHP code. They are to emulate the feel of a web interface, be it clean, messy, slow, or fast to respond.

PHP

The player who plays the PHP is essentially a robot for which the team will devise instructions (or code) in the workshop. Players will write down a set of commands for the PHP player to follow during the pre-game workshop and the PHP player must follow them *exactly*. They will receive an input from the interface player, run their "code," and then provide an output back to the interface player. The PHP player is the only player who can talk to the other parts of the content management system.

Database

The database can organize their cards however they want. Once play begins, they may only flip cards and respond to the PHP player's queries with "yes" or "no." If the answer is "yes" the database may hand the card to the PHP player. If the answer is "no" the PHP player should not give the PHP player any cards.