

Good at playing video games? You might also make a good leader

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Video games can be used to assess the capabilities of aspiring managers by recruiters, according to a new study from the Rotterdam School of Management Erasmus University (RSM) (<https://www.rsm.nl/>) and the University of Liechtenstein.

Conducted by Dr Markus Weinmann (<https://www.rsm.nl/people/markus-weinmann/>) along with colleagues; Dr Alexander Simons and Dr Isabell Wohlgenannt from the University of Liechtenstein and Dr Stefan Fleischer of the University of Münster, the study built upon pre-existing research into the benefits of using specifically-designed recruitment games and tasks (a tactic called “gamification”) to judge applicants’ capabilities.

Their study analyses whether off-the-shelf video games can also indicate essential management skills possessed by applicants to senior-level roles.

Using the popular strategy game Civilization, which may be considered a modern-day equivalent to chess, the researchers enlisted 40 business students to learn the rules of the game – giving them a month to do so, before playing a series of timed games against each other under test conditions.

Participants were also required to complete a series of typical assessment centre exercises, designed to measure the managerial skills most commonly desired by employers when selecting candidates for senior-level positions. These include; consideration and awareness of others, communication, ability to influence others, organising and planning, and problem-solving.

The study found that those students who achieved high scores within Civilization were also revealed to possess significantly better problem-solving, and organizing and planning skills.

Dr Weinmann says:

“IT has already disrupted traditional forms of personnel selection – conducting reference checks via business-oriented sites like LinkedIn for example. Whilst gamification is nothing new the potential of commercial video games in assessing talent has long been ignored by HR experts. Our research shows the competences revealed by job applicants by playing such games can offer many benefits to employers, particularly for management level roles. The high levels of complexity that players are confronted with require them to plan their actions carefully, develop sophisticated strategies, employ critical thinking and negotiate with other players – all critical skills for managerial roles.”

Whilst the researchers acknowledge that video games are unlikely to replace the traditional assessment centre recruitment methods, they state that their use provides a significant advantage. Video games allow recruiters to see and measure skills that may not be as visible, or measured as accurately through other methods.

For example, in analysing the in-game data such as the chat function, the researchers suggest that strategy games such as Civilization could be effective in enabling recruiters to conduct “stealth

assessments” – which can reduce test anxiety because applicants can fully immerse themselves in the game – providing a more holistic insight into not just their communication and negotiation skills but their personalities. Furthermore, analysing gameplay performance data could also provide a key indicator to potential managerial performance and capabilities.

An additional benefit suggested by the researchers is that using such games as part of the skills assessment process could also provide an opportunity for recruiters to save both time and money.

In terms of personnel development, the researchers also suggest that deliberately designed strategy games may not only be used to measure performance but may also be used by organisations in-house to improve certain skills, enabling employees to train and test their abilities before putting themselves forward for promotion.

The study, “Good gamers, good managers? A proof-of-concept study with Sid Meyer’s Civilization (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11846-020-00378-0>)” is published and available via the Review of Managerial Science.

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