Chapter 98
Career Development among Japanese Female Game Developers:
Perspective from Life Stories of Creative Professionals

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the process of female developers' career development and their characteristics based on the life stories of creative professionals employed in the Japanese gaming industry. This study followed a one-to-one semi-structured interview format and employed a qualitative methodology. The survey was conducted on 21 female game developers who have more than five years work experience in the Japanese gaming industry. One of the most important analytical results of the study is the behavioral characteristics of female game developers in their career development are that they support persons who have similar problems in the workplace, and they contribute to mentor game developers in the next generation. In conclusion, female game developers do not have clearly defined career goals; however, they have the ability to alter their work situation, and evaluate and manage it if needed. Therefore, it is important that female game developers have diverse role models. Further research directions are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

In the digital gaming industry, the relationship between the market share of game hardware and game software packages is affected by the interaction between demand and supply, have been pointed out "network externality" (Tanaka, 2000a). Network externality is a phenomenon in which user benefit rises when consumers who use some goods increase. For example, if many people buy a particular game hardware, then game software companies adapt to develop games for that particular hardware. As a result, game software for the hardware of a wide selection is supplied, and

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a good cycle that the hardware is sold more than ever is generated. Therefore, the hardware and software businesses are separated in the Japanese gaming industry. As a result, the Japanese game software market grew rapidly until the early 1990s because various venture-capital companies were able to enter the digital gaming field (Shintaku, 2005). However, the game software that won a big market share began to show a tendency to limit the genres of video games produced by particular companies, and much of it was developed mainly by large companies starting around 1995 (Tanaka, 2000b). Because of this, Japanese game companies no longer achieved significant sales and did not release innovative products. Therefore, they developed two strategies: first was to make products that were similar to existing products, and second was to create novel products that complemented already existing products because a "moderate differentiation" would create added value (Yonekura & Ikuine, 2005).

These changes denote that the environment surrounding game development has transformed. That is, game companies can no longer survive only by developing and selling games; it is becoming increasingly important for them to make prompt decisions based on management strategies such as multi-platform development and online service adaptation. The need for creative human resources to resolve these issues is an important factor in the gaming business. However, according to Kobashi (1996), who is a pioneer researcher of the Japanese gaming industry, the Japanese game development process were named "self-sacrificial process model." She pointed out that Japanese game developers deal with a number of different tasks in a short period of time. The Japanese game software is designed for fun, which includes a consideration of level design, game balance, a balance of logic and ambiguity, and playability. It is completed by skillfully tuning it many times by game developers. Therefore, Japanese game development needs a lot of time to ensure high-quality.

An important aspect of game development is for a company to have diversity in the composition and creativity of the developers. Therefore, on the basis of previous studies, I will consider career development among Japanese female game developers in this paper.

In recent years, the number of female professionals and creators has been increasing steadily in the gaming industry. Research on the status of female game developers can thus clarify various aspects of their career development. Researchers have therefore begun to pay more attention to the career development of female developers in the gaming industry throughout the world.

The number of female developers in the gaming industry is extremely low. Out of the total number of developers, the proportion of female developers stands at 12.8% in Japan (Fujihara, 2010), 11.2% in the USA (Gourdin, 2005), and 4% in the UK (Prescott & Bogg, 2010; Skillset, 2009). The percentage has been similarly low in Canada, at 10%–15% (Dyer-Whitheford & Sharman, 2005), and less than 10% in Australia (Geneve, Nelson, & Christie, 2008). However, Prescott & Bogg (2010), the leading researchers on female workers in the gaming industry, pointed out that, "Games companies need to broaden out their recruiting scope and attract talent from other new industries and seduce more diverse groups into game teams, particularly women and ethnic minorities" (p. 143).

Game developing is clearly a high-risk, high-return business. Thus, despite game publishers' strategy of releasing only hit titles of series and remakes in similar genres, the Japanese consumer gaming market has recently been shrinking (CESA, 2013). In such circumstances, it is therefore vitally important for Japanese companies to employ diverse management that goes beyond customary gender requirements, especially so that they can provide a variety of gaming entertainment for young and old around the world. Namely, they should follow the approach mentioned by Prescott and Bogg (2010) and draw upon the talents of a