

Self-assessment of Our Game “Law-Ya”

First of all, creating a game was a nice change to all the term papers we have written during our studies, but it was also a great challenge for us. No one of us ever worked on a project like this before and, to be honest, we did not know what to expect.

Compared to an ordinary term paper, the game was extremely time-consuming. From the beginning of June until the end of July, we constantly worked on the project. The weekly meetings alone – Tuesdays were our days – amount to 46 hours of work plus several hours of homework and a lively e-mail correspondence in order to solve problems before the next meeting and to keep the other team members informed about our progress. Moreover, it was also the most expensive ‘term paper’ we have ever ‘written.’ In total, we spent 52,00€ on the game equipment like board, Conviction-Point markers and the wall.

The First Step: Brainstorming, Game Mechanics, the Cards and the Board

Our initial question was whether it is possible to put American law into the format of a game. To answer this question, we started brainstorming, collected our ideas and developed the basic concept of our game. We decided on a simple board game with different kinds of cards to draw and different tasks to perform.

It may sound illogical, but Laura’s lack of experience with games was very helpful in beginning our work. She was often very skeptical in terms of game mechanics and made us aware of difficulties we had not seen yet. She also forced us to explain our ideas explicitly to make sure that everyone understands them. Iris, in turn, is a very experienced player who knows a lot of very different games. With her ‘background knowledge,’ she knew which ideas would work and which not. This was a great advantage because we could sort out the impracticable ideas already in the beginning of our work. In a later stage, they would have caused many problems and their solution would have taken a lot of time. Finally, Martina’s interest in crime fiction and crime series was very helpful to get an insight into possible crime mechanics. It provided us with a broader range of causes of death, possible pieces of evidence and some problems an investigator or lawyer may have to face.

When we had decided on the concept, we created the different cards, drafted the board and thought about a logo. Like everything else, this was a lot of work, but we also had a lot of fun. While working, we talked about our private life, discussed different topics, even planned

a board game party and suggested weird cards some of which we included indeed in the game. At the end of this stage, however, we eventually asked some friends and relatives for help because we neither had the abilities nor the possibilities to do some things on our own. Therefore, André helped us to design the cards in *Latex* (to make it look more professional). Sabrina as a Master student of design realized our ideas and plans of the board since she has the ability as well as the programs to make it look like “an actual board”. Finally, as our only design programs are *Paint* and *Draw*, we asked Richard to digitalize our logo.

The Second Step: Testing Phase

On July 19th, we finally started the testing phase. The first test run was already very successful as everything worked well and all necessary changes were of minor importance like, for instance, a more precise formulation on some cards. Even the number of fields on the board and the allocation of the different kinds of fields were quite good. The following two test runs also provided us with new insights on the one hand and gave us positive feedback on the other.

For the second and the third test run, we invited different test players whose reception of our game was awesome and very supportive. They were enthusiastic about the game, but also made some suggestions for improvement. These suggestions were of great importance for us as we realized that we had spent too much time on the project and, as a result, partly suffered from tunnel vision. However, they had only a few points of criticism which showed us again that we had done really good work. The most important point probably was the shortening of the extra run through the woods.

For the third test run, we also wrote the game instructions so that we could check whether they were understandable or not. The writing was actually not as easy as we thought it would be, but we managed to draft them, too. More important, our test players understood them (as far as they read them...)

Our Résumé

All in all, we are extremely satisfied with us and our game. For one thing, we were highly creative, put much effort into the game and were a very good as well as balanced team. Everyone was eager to work on the game so the work load was equal. Everyone was prepared for the meetings and we did not have any arguments at all. For another thing, the game is quite close to “real” life as our everyday life reminded us several times of the game. In a film we just watched, for example, there was a character who did Krav Maga which is one of

Martina's hobbies in the game. In short, we are a great team, it is a great game and both playing as well as only watching it is fun.

Of course, we had some difficulties to face as well. Realism, for instance, is quite a problem in a game about law. Accordingly, we had to abstract a lot. In particular, two closing statements in the end are difficult to realize. Our test players made two good suggestions, but, in the end, both alternatives were not realizable without causing further problems. However, most of the negative aspects have eventually dissolved in the course of planning and of playing with test players.

The greatest hindrance for us, though, was probably the 'hardware.' We were so taken up in the game and so enthusiastic about it that we wanted everything to be perfect. We had so many great ideas about how cards and board should look like in the end and, to be honest, they are quite close to our imagination or even better. Yet, it was not really easy to print the cards because we printed front and back of the cards on front and back of the sheet of paper and needed them to fit in order to cut them out. Moreover, it needed a lot of precision and some tries to put the printout of our board on the actual board.

Finally, we would like to add that we are all willing to repeat this experience (especially with a little less work, less costs and maybe less perfectionism) and that we got to know some new things about ourselves and the influence of the media on our life. We can also recommend such a creative project to everyone who is tired of term papers. However, we would recommend doing it in team with friends. It is simply too much work to be done alone or with the 'wrong' people.

Epilogue

In a way, finding a suitable name for our game was the most difficult task. Fortunately, we told our friends about the game one day during lunch at the Mensa and Lea jokingly suggested to call it "Law-Ya". We did.