

Governance in League of Legends: A Hybrid System

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ABSTRACT

Disruptive behaviors such as flaming and griefing are pervasive and problematic in many online venues. Riot Games, the maker of League of Legends, one of the world's largest multiplayer online games, receives thousands of player complaints about disruptive behavior almost every day. To deal with this situation, they devised the "Tribunal" system, a crowdsourcing system that leverages player norms to identify and punish disruptive players. We conducted an ethnographic study concerning the interplay between player norms and rules in League of Legends. We found that governance in League of Legends is a hybrid system. Norms and rules both govern player behavior. Players engaged in a variety of conversations to interpret formal rules, communicate with Riot Games, analyze behaviors, and articulate norms. Riot Games' official forums were a key venue for these discussions. These discussions provided players rich opportunities to learn norms and rules. Through their interactions, players reconciled norms and rules. We analyze how and why the hybrid system emerged. We consider the impact of the hybrid system on governance and corporation-player relationship.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

H.1.2 Human Factors

General Terms

Human Factors, Theory.

Keywords

Online community, Multiplayer Online Games, regulation, governance, crowdsourcing, norms, code of conduct, League of Legends

1. INTRODUCTION

Governance in online communities is important for both players and game companies. Various rules and informal mechanisms govern player behavior. Rules are the authoritative statements or guides for conduct and action [24]. Rules include End User License Agreements (EULAs), codes of conduct, and laws, such as intellectual property law. Informal mechanisms such as social norms and community guidelines also govern player behavior. Both players and game companies benefit from governance in online communities. Game companies increasingly rely upon

rules to control behavior [3]. However, rules are problematic for several reasons. EULAs and codes of conduct are drafted primarily to protect corporations' commercial interests rather than players' interests [1, 11, 20, 29]. As Foo remarked, "*players have, in principle, no representative rights*" in online games [10]. EULAs and codes of conduct allow game companies to discipline players without negotiation or discussion. Players must click to "accept" EULAs and codes of conduct before entering online communities, but few actually read and understand them [17]. Finally, companies must spend human resources, such as customer support, to resolve player disputes [7]. Rules often conflict with community norms. Finnemore and Skinick's definition of norm as "a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity," applies here [9]. Suzor and Woodford argued that in online games and virtual worlds there is a tension between rules and community norms because rules are static while norms are "*contested and emergent, continuously shifting and evolving*" [28].

Because of the shortcomings of rules, many practitioners and researchers have discussed encouraging online communities to govern themselves. For example, based on their experience in creating and maintaining Lucasfilm's Habitat, one of the earliest online games, Chip Morningstar and Randy Farmer recommended in 1990 that "a virtual world need not be set up with a default government, but can instead evolve one as needed" [19]. T. L. Taylor argued that game companies should accord players "*some power and responsibility to govern their own community and world*" because players are crucial to the "*sustainability of the game*" [29].

We studied governance in Riot Games' League of Legends [25]. The League of Legends community is famous for its players' disruptive behavior, or what Riot Games calls "toxic behavior." Disruptive behaviors are socially unacceptable and disrupt other people's online experience. In League of Legends, disruptive behaviors include flaming, intentionally leaving a match, and offensive language such as "*I hate this fucker retard team, shit, except u Amumu*" (from our study). Upon receiving thousands of complaints about players' disruptive behavior almost every day [27], Riot Games developed the "Tribunal," a crowdsourcing system that empowers players to identify and punish disruptive players. The Tribunal brings human judgment together with code regulation [14]. A Tribunal designer we interviewed said:

One of the core philosophies of the Tribunal is to engage and collaborate with the community to try to solve player behavior together.

Riot Games is committed to empowering players to govern their community, and believes the Tribunal can productively engage players in governance.

We conducted an ethnographic study of governance in the League of Legends community from October 2011 to December 2013.

We found that League of Legends' governance is an ecology in which Riot Games, players, the Tribunal, and forums all play key roles. Riot Games acknowledges player norms by empowering players to enforce their norms through the Tribunal. Players want to know what qualifies as acceptable behavior and what qualifies as unacceptable behavior. However, they find Riot Games' rules too ambiguous. Players engage in a variety of discussions to understand rules and learn norms. They interpret rules by relating rules to their norms. They communicate with Riot Games through the forums regarding whether and why a behavior was disruptive. Riot Games' official forums are a key venue for discussions of norms. These discussions provide players rich learning opportunities regarding how to behave properly. Through discussions about behaviors, rule, and norms, players reconciled norms with rules, as we shall discuss. A hybrid system in which norms and rules both govern player behavior emerges in the League of Legends community.

2. RELATED WORK

Many factors besides rules affect governance. For example, Malaby suggested that governance is a "continual and open-ended project," which is composed of not only formal methods, but also unexpected creativity from users [18]. Kow and Nardi noted that game companies and player communities should build "cordial relations of mutual respect," because legal enforcement leaves behind "hostile connotations of control and power in communities" [15]. Some researchers advocated that governance should involve player. For example, Taylor argued that game companies should trust players with the power to govern their communities because players already are "active, creative, and engaged agents within games" [29]. Johansson and Verhagen reported that clans and guilds in multiplayer online games and first-person shooter games were able to generate rules to govern their members' behavior [12]. Woodford reported that players were capable of enforcing a norm themselves [31]. Regarding how to empower players, Castronova remarked that to achieve community-organized governance, players must be equipped with necessary technical powers to perform acts of governance [4].

3. BACKGROUND

League of Legends (LoL) is a free-to-play match-based game. One match is played between two teams, each composed of five players (or "summoners") assembled from a large pool of available players. Matches last about 20-50 minutes. Riot Games' official forum is the major online venue where Riot Games releases official announcements and LoL players communicate.

The Tribunal works in the following way. First, players can report disruptive players immediately after a match. The Tribunal creates a case if a player has been reported frequently. Second, players can log into the Tribunal and judge cases. The Tribunal allows players to judge voluntarily if their accounts are of level 20 or higher (maximum level is 30). The Tribunal assigns punishment if the majority of the judges vote to punish. The Tribunal punishes a disruptive player using an account suspension. The Tribunal sends the punished player a permanent link to his "reform card," a warning message detailing his disruptive behaviors. With the link, everyone can view the player's reform card. A reform card contains the same information as a case does.

A report includes the name of the reported player, the type of disruptive behavior, and comments. A player can select the type

of disruptive behavior she wants to report from a list created by Riot Games (see Figure 1). The Tribunal automatically collects reports and game logs and organizes them into Tribunal cases. A Tribunal case consists of reports from multiple players.



Figure 1. Report Disruptive Behavior.

A Tribunal case contains multiple reports from up to five games, as well as in-game information including game length, game type, types of disruptive behavior, and chat log (see Figure 2). However, it does not include information from a game's pre-game lobby and post-game lobby. In each case, judges can choose to either punish or pardon the player. The judge can choose to skip a case if he feels uncertain. A Tribunal judge can review up to 20 cases per day. Tribunal judges cannot communicate about cases they are both reviewing. The Tribunal judges do not get rewards of any kind for judging cases.

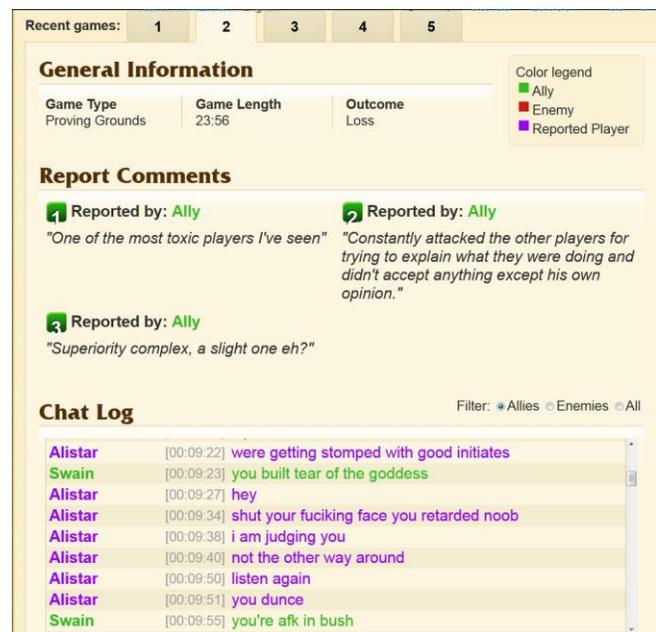


Figure 2. A Tribunal Case.

The Tribunal assigns each case to a certain number of judges (Riot Games does not disclose the number). If the majority of judges votes to punish the reported player, the Tribunal System will send the reported player a warning email with a reform card. Riot Games will suspend the punished player one day for a first offense and can do so permanently for later offenses.

The Tribunal was implemented in May 2011, and players continue to use it. In May 2012, Riot Games reported that more than 47 million votes had been cast in the Tribunal. Seventy-four percent of players disciplined by the Tribunal improved their in-game behavior. Riot Games has described the Tribunal as an effective way to keep the LoL community “constructive and enjoyable” [22].

4. METHODS

We studied LoL through immersive ethnographic fieldwork including participant-observation, face-to-face interviews, online interviews (through in-game chat and instant messaging), the collection of game logs and Tribunal cases, and the collection of documents such as LoL-related forums, websites, and player blogs. In October 2011, the first author created an account to play with players on North American Servers. He participated in the Tribunal and judged over 1,200 cases. To get a range of diverse player opinions and experiences, we conducted 37 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with players from the United States, Canada, Australia and China. Twelve interviewees played with the first author in games, ten were recruited through snowball sampling, and fifteen were recruited through a recruiting thread on Riot Games’ official forums. We asked study participants how long they had been playing LoL, and whether they had reported other players’ misconduct. Eleven interviewees had experience judging Tribunal cases. We asked the judges why they chose to judge cases and how they determined whether specific kinds of behavior were disruptive. We interviewed one Riot Games designer who worked on the Tribunal system. We asked him how he and the designers he worked with developed the Tribunal and what he thought about the Tribunal’s influence on player behavior. When we report quotes from interviews and forum posts, we retain the original orthography and punctuation.

5. FINDINGS

Players must know exactly what qualifies as acceptable or unacceptable behavior to report and judge. However, Riot Games’ official rules are ambiguous. Since the implementation of the Tribunal, players have engaged in a variety of discussions in game and on forums to interpret rules. Players have communicated with Riot Games regarding rules. Players have analyzed the Tribunal to understand how their norms were enforced. Based on these activities, players reconciled player norms and the official rules and articulated their understandings in community guidelines.

5.1 Riot Games’ Rules Are Ambiguous

Riot Games provides players a set of formal rules in the “Summoner’s Code” [26], but many of the rules are ambiguous. For example, here are two rules:

1. *Support Your Team ...Being a good team player begins at champion select...*
2. *Show Humility in Victory, and Grace in Defeat...*

These rules encourage players to play cooperatively and show respect for opponents. However, they do not delineate which behaviors conform to these two rules. In an interview, a player commented:

I think the “Summoner’s Code” or rules are way too vague and anybody can report for nearly anything. If you look at most games’ rules, they have pretty clear rules. Meanwhile

Riot has ones like “be a good team player” and “enjoy victory and show grace in defeat,” so essentially you can report anyone for not enjoying victories because that is breaking the Summoner’s Code.

The player pointed out that Riot Games’ rules were open to interpretation. Players could not use the rules alone to identify and punish disruptive behaviors.

In another interview, a player said:

The Summoner’s Code is vague, because Riot wants it to be vague. If you read the Tribunal FAQ there’s a question why is there no simple rules of what is allowed. Answer is that Riot wants [the] community to draw the line between acceptable and punishable.

The player commented that Riot Games intended to make the rules ambiguous and expected players to determine acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.

The Tribunal designer we interviewed confirmed this player’s conjecture. He explained:

We use the Tribunal to help moderate behavior, but also to inform ourselves about what behavior our players deem appropriate in League of Legends.

Riot Games recognizes that player norms are dynamic and evolving. Riot Games expects players to take the initiative in determining acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.

5.2 Interpreting Formal Rules

The Tribunal itself does not provide a venue for discussing player behavior. Players gathered on the official forums to figure out acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. They participated in an enormous number of discussions regarding specific kinds of behavior, their reform cards, the Tribunal cases on the official forums, and ongoing disruptive behaviors in game. Players analyzed specific player behaviors with their norms and proposed conditions and contexts to elaborate rules that Riot Games defines ambiguously.

5.2.1 *Is Intentionally Leaving Ever Justified?*

On the forums, players debated specific in-game behaviors, such as leaving the game. Riot Games defines this behavior as: “*Leaving the Game/AFK - This category aims at punishing behavior that includes logging out before a match ends as well as standing idle for long periods of time and refusing to participate*” [23]. This rule does not consider the complex circumstances in which “leaving the game” can happen. Here is an excerpt in a forum thread “*Is intentionally leaving ever justified?*” in which players considered whether leaving was acceptable in specific situations.

The poster: I haven’t left a game in quite some time, but I’ve had games recently so horribly not-fun [that] I’ve considered it. Is it ever possible, ethically and/or technically, to intentionally leave a game justifiably?

A player: If it’s like a 3v5 or something, honestly I wouldn’t report for it. That said I’ve never left a game intentionally and don’t plan on ever doing so. Just saying that when a game is THAT bad, I can honestly understand it if one of the remaining people calls it a day rather than wasting time.

Leaving a 4v5 the instant it happens is pretty bad though. Many 4v5s are only temporary.

Second player: Unless something happened with your Internet or with real life, there really isn't an excuse to leave game.

Third player: If real life comes up, then it's more important. If your house catches on fire, please don't keep playing League.

The poster reflected on the rule regarding leaving the game. Drawing from his own experience, the player found that sometimes this rule prevented players from having fun, the object of playing games [20]. Players agreed that leaving the game was not universally disruptive. They pointed out that the rule should be flexible to account for specific situations, such as 3v5, network problems, and issues in a player's daily life.

Players understood that rules oversimplified player behavior, ignoring reasonable and acceptable circumstances that might lead to targeted behaviors. They knew simplified rules could not apply to all the complex situations. They referred to their understandings of norms when rules could not hold. In this way, they enriched the rules with their norms.

5.2.2 Am I Toxic?

Reform cards provided materials for players to develop understanding of norms. Punished players shared their reform cards on the forums and sought constructive comments. They wanted to know why they had been labeled toxic. Here is a partial dialog in a forum thread titled "Am I toxic?" started by a player who shared his reform card.

The poster: ... I didn't think I was very toxic since I've been playing for so long although I do feel like the rage is catching up to me, so if you guys tell me I'm toxic, I'll try to change my behavior so that I don't get banned the case: <http://na.leagueoflegends.com/tribunal/en/case/6351219/#no-go>

A player: I think you are really toxic...Too much blaming others, talking about reporting others, when (sorry but,) you aren't doing well in game yourself either. Just be chill and you won't get banned.

Second player: I voted yes. Why? Because of the amount of ragecaps. I understand this game can get frustrating, but when people start chucking insults and activate the caps lock, one needs to sit back and realize it's just a game. Flipping out on someone because of their mistakes or whatever else might happen in game isn't going to solve anything.

The poster: ok, thank you all very much! I think I'm going to try and change my attitude and not say anything that might be rude or mean, I'll say it out loud but I won't type it. A warning is scary and I don't want to get banned, also my behavior toward others is wrong, so thank you all!

Reform cards reflected how player norms applied to specific behaviors. However, reform cards used the official term "toxic" to mark punished players. Based on their own understandings, players explained which behaviors were toxic. They considered raging a type of toxic behavior.

Reform cards provided vivid examples for players to know which behaviors violated their norms and the official term that denoted these behaviors. Players used their understandings of norms to explain terms and clauses from the rules.

The reform cards provided punished players an opportunity to learn norms. Forums helped them learn why they were punished and what the community deemed acceptable. Fellow players were an important resource for consultation. Learning norms helped players pay attention to and reflect on their own behavior, which contributed to LoL's overall gaming environment.

5.2.3 Punish or Pardon?

The Tribunal judges gathered on the official forums to reason about whether specific behaviors were unacceptable in the Tribunal cases. They often asked other players to shed light on specific cases that they were uncertain about. For example, a new Tribunal judge posted a forum thread "New Judge, Slightly Confused by A Case."

The poster: So I'm pretty new to judging cases,... Well today I had a really odd one and couldn't figure out why the heck it was reported. I looked through the chat log on both and it was literally empty except for at the end everyone said random stuff like gg wp, gg, gg noobs. This player in question was the one who said gg noobs. But he said nothing else in the rest of the game and was reported for "Verbal Abuse." ...

First player: gg noobs is against Summoners Code so lots of people report it.

Second player: Wow really?I can't imagine a contract saying "gg noobs" lol.

Third player: Personally I don't think it has a place because the equivalent is kicking someone when they are down.

Fourth player: I play sports in real life and after each game we shake hands with the opposition. Most people also say "good game" to each player as they shake hands. Saying "good game, noob" in this situation would earn you a lot of dirty looks and (depending on the sport and demographics) could make your trek across the parking lot rather dangerous. Just because someone is hidden behind their computer doesn't make it appropriate for them to act like a jerk.

Although not mentioned in rules, it is a norm for players to type "gg" (good game) and "wp" (well played) at the end of a match to compliment opponents. However, players considered "gg noobs" (good game, new/inexperienced player) disruptive and against norms, because "noobs" insulted the opponents. Players believed that saying "gg noobs" violated rules, although the rules did not mention the term.

Rules only suggest that players exchange "constructive feedback" and lead "civil discussion" [26]. In response to this vagueness, players articulated their norms to clarify rules. Debates over the Tribunal cases could help foster players' understanding of norms and rules because they directly showed specific behaviors and the rules those behaviors violated.

5.2.4 How Am I Being Unsportsmanlike?

Players disputed rules during a game. For example, Riot Games expects players to exercise "good sportsmanship" in LoL. Rules state: "Lead by example: if you share our vision of a game where players exercise good sportsmanship, help each other improve and form lasting friendships, you've got to start living the dream before anybody everybody else is willing to do so." However, Riot Games does not explain what "sportsmanlike" or "unsportsmanlike" mean. Players explored the meaning through in-game debates. Here is a partial conversation from a Tribunal

case the first author judged. Nidalee, Yorick, and Tristana are players in LoL.

Nidalee [All] [00:19:34] report yorick for unsportsmanlike

Yorick [All] [00:19:48] how am i being unsportsmanlike?

Yorick [All] [00:19:53] the accusations you make

Yorick [All] [00:19:56] are pitiful

Nidalee [All] [00:19:57] farming a level 1

Tristana [All] [00:19:57] He is bragging about beating a afk [player who is "away from keyboard"] for 6 minutes

Nidalee [All] [00:20:02] exactly

Yorick [All] [00:20:10] no im not

Nidalee [All] [00:20:10] farming someone who dc at 1 when u are 6

.....

Yorick [All] [00:25:31] I'm allowed to play whatever way I choose.

Tristana [All] [00:26:08] Then don't get mad when people dislike you for it

Nidalee [All] [00:26:11] that's why we have the tribunal

Players such as Tristana and Nidalee used an official term "unsportsmanlike" to denote what they considered disruptive, such as "bragging about beating a afk." They explained to Yorick why his specific behaviors were against rules and norms.

Players referred to norms to relate specific behaviors to official rules. By constructing association between norms, specific behaviors, and official terms, players explained ambiguous rules with norms.

In-game conversations provided players such as Yorick opportunities to learn what others deemed appropriate. It is at a player's will whether he wants to learn.

5.3 Communicating with Riot Games

Riot Games' employees (Rioters) sometimes joined player discussions of behavior. Communication with Riot Games shaped players' understanding of behavior. For example, a punished player posted a forum thread "Very bad tribunal system, Riot," which a Rioter "Pendragon," with a title of "Director of Player Experience," joined to explain.

The poster: My main account was banned until the end of the month. I try my hardest, despite my team afk'ing and raging the entire time, regardless of my performance. I remember Morello saying that you won't be banned solely for champ selection, as long as you actually try to play, and don't rage out and cuss. Thats what I've been doing. I tried emailing support and was given an automated reply telling me to review the summoner's code. Okay. Pendragon, please some help. Ty.

Pendragon: Greetings,

Thanks for bringing this to my attention. I've reviewed the history of your account - and I've determined that the suspension was indeed appropriate. It had little to do with the champions you chose to play, and far more to do with the way you chose to interact with your teammates once you chose them. Common examples include:

- Spamming "afk" or "I'm afk" in-games dozens of times

- Linking to offensive pornographic materials telling people they were streams

- Insulting your team frequently (and the enemy team on occasion)

Due to the extreme nature of your offenses, I've closed your account permanently. I hope you enjoy your future gaming endeavors.

First player: God Pendragon, you never disappoint me in these threads. <3

Second player: Define offensive, was it like guy on guy stuff?

Third player: Doesn't matter. Spamming porn links to a game you know has minors in it (and he knows, he's been playing since beta) is wrong. Don't get me wrong, I'm not a prude. I think porn is great but as adults our job is to protect kids from things they aren't ready to see. Additionally, we are in this together with Riot. If you see that kind of stuff you should report it. We don't need them dealing with frivolous law suits because someone's precious little Bobby saw porn links in the game chat.

Pendragon's detailed explanation duplicated Riot Games' official view of disruptive behaviors. Players accepted and incorporated Riot Games' opinions into their understanding of behavior, such as spamming porn links being unacceptable. Riot Games' official explanations affected players' understanding of rules.

The claim "we are in this together with Riot" referred to the collaborative relationship between players and Riot Games. Players and Riot Games respect each other within LoL's governance.

Riot Games' response furthered player dialogue regarding behavior. Riot Games' participation in player discussion fosters players' learning of how to behave appropriately.

Another player who had experience communicating with Pendragon on official forums told us:

I thought there was a way to avoid being punished by the tribunal. I was toxic in pre-game and post-game chat because I knew no one could see it. But then, in the link I posted, Pendragon saw that and upheld the ban because of it.

Through communication with the Rioter, the player learned that circumventing the Tribunal by being "toxic in pre-game and post-game chat" was unacceptable.

Forums Rioters joined often attracted many players. Riot Games' participation in these discussions fostered a collective learning environment.

5.4 Theorycrafting the Tribunal

Video game players explore the game mechanics through a process called theorycrafting [5]. LoL players theorycrafted the Tribunal to inform themselves about behavior. For example, here is an excerpt from a forum thread "Statistical Analysis of Tribunal Cases."

The poster: I could download large numbers of games and perform some analysis on them, trying to learn about the Tribunal and the game as a whole.....So, let's begin.

The N-word

*The first word I want to talk about is the most commonly discussed instapunish word, n**** r. And indeed, it is pretty much an instapunish word.*

0 usages - 65% Punish

1 usage - 87% Punish

2 usages - 94% Punish

3 usages - 93% Punish

4+ usages - 100% Punish

As for the overall prevalence of the word, 0.52% of players overall in the database use it at least once, and 2.11% of reported players use it.

The Other N-word

This one I can type in without self-censoring. Noob. The more it is said, the more likely a punishment is, but not so dramatically as above.

0 usages - 62% Punish

1-8 usages - ~75% Punish

9+ usages - ~85% Punish

As for the overall prevalence of this word, 11.9% of players overall in the database use it at least once, and 31.3% of reported players use it.

A player: I just hit lvl 30 the other day and just learned of the public voting thing. And quickly found this page while looking up stats, as I figured someone would have done the work for me.....I love this whole voting thing, makes me feel good when I get to click that PUNISH key on people who do nothing but spam "my team is noob" along with their annoying language.

Riot Games' official rules do not mention "nigger" or "noob." However, player norms establish they are unacceptable. Many players reported and voted to punish such behavior. The theorycrafting results informed players of the aggregated opinions towards these disruptive behaviors. Theorycrafting strengthened players' norms regarding these words. For example, the player who was a new Tribunal judge confirmed his belief that saying "noob" was disruptive and should be punished.

Many players wanted to learn about the Tribunal's mechanisms, which could affect their gaming experience. Theorycrafting provided players a great resource for learning which behaviors were unacceptable.

5.5 Articulating Player Norms

Players articulated their norms in community guidelines on the official forums. They formulated definitions and elaborated instructions to identify disruptive behaviors.

5.5.1 Formulating Definitions of Disruptive Behaviors

Players collectively edited community guidelines in threads such as "a Guide to Tribunal." In the guideline, players used their norms to interpret rules. They revised each guideline multiple times. Take the development of the definition of "offensive language" as an example. Riot Games states that offensive language is "language that employs vulgar, obscene, sexually explicit, or racially, ethnically, or otherwise objectionable language" [23]. Players first defined offensive language as:

Language that makes others uncomfortable or evokes a negative response in others.

This version defined offensive language in terms of its effects on players. Players refined this version through discussion. Here is an excerpt:

A player: It might be better to define offensive language as follows: Offensive language is any speech that, by your definitions, is intended to attack or insult the listener or reader that you believe merits some form of punishment. The context and intent of the speech is as important as the words that compose it.

The editor: Specific words or phrases can be offensive regardless of the context. This is at least one aspect that separates Offensive Language from Verbal Abuse. If we allow these words in any context other than to explain what they mean or why they are offensive, then the possibility of people using them more often increases exponentially and the complaints will increase exponentially as well. It's the reason why you'll never see a smart politician use certain words in public, even in jest.

Dialogue revolved around whether contexts were important in identifying offensive language. Players engaged in rational debates to define of player behavior. They knew that contexts played an important role in determining disruptive behaviors. They explored whether and how contexts affected specific behaviors such as offensive language. After the conversation, the editor refined the definition of offensive language:

Final version of the definition: This violation [offensive language] is the result of the violator using offensive words and/or making lewd (often overly sexual and/or violent) comments. Offensive words are typically words that dehumanize/insult people based on race, ethnicity, gender, skin color, religion, or sexual preference. Even if the offensive words are not used in the context of insulting people, they are not welcome in the game because they can offend people regardless of context. The language filter's existence is no excuse for the use of hate language. This violation is a violation of its own apart from verbal abuse because of the offensive nature of certain words and comments even when they are not used to directly insult a person.

Players generated final versions through extensive discussions. During the process, players referred to examples, listed facts, and reasoned about contexts. Final definitions such as that of "offensive language" are composed of many players' contributions.

The processes of compiling the community guidelines provided participating players opportunities to deepen their understanding of norms. Riot Games encourages players' practice of editing community guidelines by putting the guidelines at the top of the forum. Players could easily access this guide. They found it helpful. A player replied that: "This is incredibly informative and can be referred to frequently in discussions." The guidelines constituted a learning resource for players who wanted to know more about behavior.

5.5.2 Elaborating Signs to Identify Disruptive Behaviors

Sometimes, player-generated definitions did not provide enough information for players to determine whether a behavior was disruptive. Players elaborated various signs to help identify disruptive behaviors. For example, in a forum thread "Signs of NEGATIVE ATTITUDE," players summarized the characteristics,

or “signs” of negative attitude, such as “refusal to communicate with your team,” “berating and belittling your allies,” and “defeatist stance.” Here is a conversation about the last sign—“defeatist stance.”

The editor: Defeatist stance – It’s still early in the match but you completely give up on trying to win and maintain this mindset, carrying it into your communication in chat, until the end of the match no matter what. You either start running around your base or wander around aimlessly telling everyone on your team to surrender or that the game is over instead of contributing anything helpful. The chat aspect is not always considered a transgression because sometimes the advantage taken by the enemy team can be overwhelmingly huge.

Players enumerated signs of specific disruptive behaviors. Some signs inspired player debates, such as the following excerpt.

A player: Defeatist stance: Meh. I see this in at least 50% of the games I play...hell. I’m even guilty of it. When compared to the others, I don’t feel it fits here. It’s a mindset that is easily altered with proper teamwork and support.

Second player: There’s a difference between a game at 30 minutes when the enemy team has you by several levels, and are pushing your base (while you have no towers down against them), and saying “surrender at 20” at 6 minutes when your team is 0-2. In the latter case, it absolutely does fit here.

The editor: Based on the point [the second reply] brought up, I’ve added a NOTE text to “defeatist stance,” about what can happen to a team’s morale and gameplay when a player adopts a defeatist stance so early in the match.

Players actively participated in conversations to refine these signs, such as “defeatist stance.” They shared their own experience and subjective feeling to enrich the conversation.

Based on players’ comments, the editor added a note to the sign of negative attitude:

NOTE: If it’s only a few minutes in and a player starts putting up a defeatist stance, then that can adversely affect the rest of the match, potentially snowballing into a breakdown of team cooperation and communication. A defeatist can be just as bad as an afker in this way because a player having the attitude may be perceived as a potential intentional feeder or afker/leaver, forcing the rest of the team to rethink how they fit that player into the gameplay (can be very disruptive to the flow of the team).

Players refined the signs by adding many factors such as time and influence. They generated comprehensive descriptions of disruptive behaviors types. For example, the additional note stated clearly whether and why time was an important factor in determining defeatist stance. Players’ elaboration of the signs contributed in-depth explanations to definitions of disruptive behaviors.

5.6 Learning

Learning is an important component in LoL’s governance. Punished players can improve their behavior. Players who have not been punished can develop understanding of norms. A player who had never received punishments told us: “I always enjoy reading discussions on the forum. It’s fun and I get to know others’ thoughts on some behavior.”

The LoL community provides rich opportunities for learning norms. Players can learn by discussing in game and on forums, reading the Summoner’s Code, and consulting the community guidelines. Players acknowledged and appreciated these learning opportunities. For example, a player told us: “I know why I got punished after reading the Summoner’s Code and [player-generated guidelines] on the forum.”

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 An Ecology of Governance

Riot Games, players, the Tribunal, and forums interact with each other and have formed an ecology of governance. Within the ecology, these different elements are interdependent. They engage in a complex dance between what Nardi and O’Day deemed “technology with its texts and affordances, and people with their values and choices” [21]. An ecological view of governance emphasizes human activities rather than technologies. The introduction of the Tribunal does not guarantee that governance would work as Riot Games anticipates. Player participation enables it by bringing in human judgment. Players also see the limitations of the Tribunal such as lack of venue for discussing. They further engage in discussing norms and adopting other technologies such as forums and statistical analysis tools. Players’ participation and engagement characterize governance in LoL.

Riot Games and players make deliberate, conscious choices about governance. Riot Games encourages players to govern themselves by devising the Tribunal. Taylor suggested that “players already are active, creative, and engaged agents within games, though this fact often goes unacknowledged or not structurally attended to” [29]. The Tribunal represents Riot Games’ acknowledgement of players’ potential in regulating themselves, affording them the responsibility and power to enforce their norms.

League of Legends players want to be responsible for and contribute to the community. When asked why they wanted to participate in governance, a player who actively engaged in forum discussions told us: “I want to do my part to make the community a better place.” Another player who judged the maximum number of cases every day said: “I do enjoy doing it. I like doing my part for the League community.”

Players choose to participate in the governance by not only using the Tribunal but also engaging in extensive discussions about rules and norms. Players are creative during this process. For example, the Tribunal itself does not provide a way for judges to communicate with each other. Judges choose official forums as a venue for discussing. This resonates with Consalvo’s finding that video game players often consciously push the boundary set by game companies [6].

Nardi and O’Day noted:

An ecology is marked by the presence of certain keystone species whose presence is crucial to the survival of the ecology itself [21].

Tribunal judges are keystone species in this ecology. They are skilled people whose presence is necessary to support the functioning of the ecology. They bridge nuanced, dynamic norms with rigid, static code, because code cannot decide which behaviors are disruptive. They bridge the complex mechanisms of the Tribunal with average players by communicating on forums, because most players do not understand how the Tribunal works.

Technologies such as the Tribunal and forums are mediating artifacts in the formation of governance. First, they shape the ways individual players interacted with other players, Riot Games, and the gaming environment. They spur players to pay attention to behavioral issues and governance. Second, the Tribunal and forums reflect the experience of players who had participated in governance. Players' experience accumulates within technologies, in the form of numerous forum conversations. The Tribunal and forums are created and transformed during the development of player activities. The Tribunal and official forums together provide what Kaptelinin and Nardi called "*an accumulation and transmission of social knowledge*" [13]. The Tribunal evolves by collecting and analyzing millions of players' judgment. The official forums archive players' discussions of rules and norms. This collection of knowledge have influenced the nature of player activities and the values of individual players.

6.2 A Hybrid System

In LoL, rules influence norms in many ways.. First, the language of the rules has rhetorically shaped players' language. Players have adopted terms such as "intentionally feeding," "toxic," and "unsportsmanlike" from rules. Second, players interpret rules with their norms. For example, a player told us that: "*two years ago there was no meta. Now you can get reported for not complying with the meta, because you don't support your team.*" "Meta" refers to in-game strategy [16]. The meta in LoL means that five players in one team should play complementary roles to achieve optimal performance. "Support your team" is a rule in the Summoner's Code. The norm regarding the meta has developed over time. However, the norm has been consistent with the rule "support your team."

Players have developed norms under the influence of rules. They enforced norms through the Tribunal. A hybrid system of governance emerged.

Suzor and Woodford noted that the tension between rules and norms might prevent governance based on formal rules from generating "*desirable or effective regulatory outcomes in disputes*" [28]. They argued that game companies should consider community norms so that players can understand and support governance. Many studies of player governance picture an irreconcilable divide between corporations and player communities. Foo, for example, remarked that "*Official rules telling players how this game should be played do not mean players will actually play that way*" [10]. Kow and Nardi reported that Blizzard's new policies outraged modders in World of Warcraft by creating new rules that violated what players thought of as an implicit good faith agreement between them and the company [15]. Bullard noted that in a game-related forum, the formal rules regarding player comments were very harsh. Moderators enforced rules by being a "jerk" to players who did not contribute in the forums [2]. Corporations have indisputable ownership of online games and virtual worlds, and therefore have the last word. As T. L. Taylor noted for EverQuest, a formerly popular online game, the company repeatedly used the tagline "*You're in our world now*" to declare their ownership [30]. Humphreys commented:

In some ways, the strategies of government implemented by the major publishers are unobjectionable, enabling participants to explore, engage and create in ways not previously possible. In other ways, the forces of government they bring to bear seem to exceed what is necessary for the

functioning of such environments and to compromise the rights of participants [11].

Humphreys emphasized the defect of governing through rules only.

The hybrid system of governance represents a new perspective on the relationship between game companies and players. In LoL, we did not observe conflicts between rules and norms because the hybrid system of governance reconciled them. Players believe that norms, rather than rules, are the source of governance. For example, a player told us: "*Riot doesn't own the Tribunal, the players do.*" Another player said: "*It is the community that makes decisions.*" A third player said: "*Well the Tribunal is ultimately up to the community as far as deciding what behavior is right or wrong.*" Players know that they have the power and are responsible for their behavior. They see punishments as decisions from their own community rather than from Riot Games. Players we interviewed told us that they felt they were part of governance. Many believe that they are collaborating with Riot Games to discipline disruptive behavior. For example, the player who criticized the behavior of spamming links to pornography in game claimed: "*We are in this together with Riot.*"

The hybrid system constituted a bridge between players and Riot Games. The "*cordial relations of mutual respect*" Kow and Nardi envisioned [15] emerged between Riot Games and its player community.

7. CONCLUSION

We examined the processes that LoL players used to reconcile norms and rules in governance. We observed that norms and rules have formed a hybrid system. The ambiguity of rules motivates players to discuss and evolve their understanding of behavior. LoL's player governance does not solely rely on the Tribunal. The official forums are a key venue in which players interpret rules. LoL's novel form of governance has eased the conflicts that usually occur between game companies and players.

Further research is needed to investigate many questions. Why do players participate in governance? How do they assess their norms' role in governance? How do they enforce their norms through the Tribunal? What role does the Tribunal play within the evolution of player norms? How does the crowdsourcing characteristic of the Tribunal contribute to the relationship between norms and rules? How does it affect governance more broadly within the game? What is the difference between LoL's player governance and Wikipedia community's governance? How might LoL's form of governance apply to other online venues? More research is needed comparing governance in different online communities with difference governing methods, to understand the dynamics of governance and how people in online communities are able to govern themselves.

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