



Gaming Employers Equality Toolkit

# Toolkit Document

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# About This Project

## Mission Statement

*My mission is to create an informative, educational, and useful toolkit for professional business use within the video game industry to promote change and impact for these industries to provide a better work environment/culture & promotes equality for employees.*

## About

The Gaming Employers Equality Toolkit Project was created as a passion project, I've been following the gaming industry for many years and have seen both the positive and negative aspects in the evolution of the industry as a whole. The gaming industry has gone through several successful arcs but none greater than now with so many indie developers rising and taking on the challenge of creating new, fun engaging content for gamers worldwide.

Unfortunately, many of the issues that have plagued the overall technology industry have bled over to the video game industry since it can be considered a branch of the same sector. This project is built on the love for the art of video game creation and the fans that want to see their favorite businesses succeed. Creating this toolkit allows the distribution of a resource to educate and inform these studios to maintain a level of transparency and trust not only with their fans but their employees as well to create a conflict-free environment that's safe and welcoming for all.

This toolkit will provide multiple examples of the toxicity that has come as a result of these types of cultures. The examples featured will give insight into how a business is negatively affected by these revelations as well as how employees within the industry are affected by either bro culture or crunching. In providing these examples, it's hopeful this will provide a first-hand example of how this can be damaging to the business's reputation as well as consumer trust, the goal is to steer clear and find the signs before they happen, and if they already have, try and make things right with both the employees and the consumers.

## Project Overview

*This project will highlight common issues regarding “bro culture,” and work crunching which have plagued the video game industry, as well as large parts of technology companies as well. The document underlines the negative outcomes (both internal and external) that come as a result of a failure to take immediate action. The document will be equipped with an overview of how to mitigate these issues and how to properly respond effectively to any of these negative developments.*

## How Will This Help?

This toolkit provides multiple examples and methods for how to recognize the immediate danger of an emerging “bro culture,” as well as crunching strategies employed within an organization. In providing these examples and methods it’s critical to acknowledge the negative effects both of these issues pose to a company, its reputation, and long-term success.

In providing a toolkit with various resources, the goal is to give business managers or executives an informative guide that isn’t convoluted but displays true concern and effective methods for supporting the well-being of the business, its employees, and the overall trust of the fans that support them.

## Education

Being properly educated on the issues that are on the rise within the industry allows for a headstart in being able to look back and examine if any of the signs are present within your company. Learning about the issues early on allows for a more detailed plan of action to tackle the issue head-on with proper data instead of pure intuition.

## Acknowledgment

The next step to moving forward when an issue is found is acknowledging there’s an issue and reflecting on what led to the issue and what is needed to further prevent the issue from happening again. While it may be difficult to believe such a thing can happen in your organization (especially if you are unsuspecting of what goes on in your lower ranks) it’s easy to brush off these issues as normal bickering.

## Action

Being informed about the dangers of these toxic issues and acknowledging they are in your business or are possibly forming requires action immediately afterward to ensure that the business thrives and doesn't suffer from the consequences to follow. Action is putting everything into motion using the acquired data from the situation and all contributing factors and working together with any available Human Resources department and management positions to execute the plan and provide support to employees to take care of the issue at its root.

## Examples of Toxicity

### In the News

In the news, multiple video game giants such as Activision/Blizzard, Riot Games, Nintendo, CD Project Red, and many more, have been subject to strong criticism after being outed by employees and numerous investigations. The significance of these types of issues appearing on the news is the overall mistrust in the companies that are generated as a result of the mismanagement of the issues. The video game industry relies on the gamers that purchase and play their games, reputation matters just as much today as it did in the past, the current informational landscape has changed the way we share news and made it easier for the word to travel worldwide. This change in how we share and receive information is good when building a worldwide brand, but internal issues such as “bro culture,” and crunching can tarnish that brand in a matter of minutes once a story is published.

It's essential for employers to be aware of the consequences and why making a move right away should be of utmost importance to avoid PR disasters which can have long-lasting effects on sales, reputation, trust, and more. The good news is that doing the right thing can lead to positive news coverage. Hello Games hit and controversial title, No Man's Sky, is a prime example of running into a PR disaster and making a remarkable recovery. The game was released on Aug 9, 2016, and had one of possibly the worst ratings of any to date; it was a buggy mess that released many false promises of features, a PR nightmare. After a declaration by Hello Games to make it right and dedicate all of its resources to delivering to gamers what they deserved it is now a highly-rated title that delivers even more than initially promised (Ampoloquio, 2021). Overall, it's crucial for companies to recognize the magnitude of what being “outed,” can cause within the news scene, but a swift response before or after can be beneficial to the company to survive.

## Personal Stories

Personal stories are one of the most powerful ways that employees have found a way to share their experiences with the world and truly be expressive of what goes on behind closed doors. When put into positions where employees feel that they can't even trust their own Human Resources department they will find ways to share the information anonymously as long as it provides the possibility to warn others. This has a big impact on trust, and companies should encourage employees to share their experiences without the fear of retaliation from the company. Retaliation or fear of a loss of job is one of the biggest reasons employees stay silent within the company, moving to a model that embraces these stories and supports employees in an effort to enact change within the company's culture is a great way to enforce trust.

The reason it's a big deal to also embrace these stories from employees is that often times when employees find no support in their organizations, the stories will make their way to news outlets. Depending on the type of information disclosed, it's going to be impactful to the company's reputation if enough compiled data is released in a full news article. This can be a waking call for many companies and is oftentimes required to deliver the news head-on that there's a problem and things need to change. Things, however, shouldn't be this way, employees should not fear their organization's departments that are built to keep the information confidential but should do as they are intended and create solutions to problems within reason.

## The Plan

### Bro Culture

Combating "bro culture" is a difficult issue to tackle when the leadership positions taken also contribute to this destructive culture. First, it's important to understand what bro culture is exactly.

#### *Defining and Signs of Bro Culture*

Bro culture can be defined in a variety of ways but a great definition that conveys the idea behind its effect is a "subculture that promotes misogyny and segregation," (Lopamudra, 2023). According to a blog post on LinkedIn, common signs of bro culture include, but are not limited to:

- Few to no women in leadership roles

- Unable to express emotions as it's seen as "weak"
- Weak policies, ignoring maternal or paternal needs/requirements
- Heavy male-oriented job descriptions

And much more (Garn, 2021).

So what's the plan?

When it comes to bro culture making sure it hasn't plagued leadership is an important observation to make before reporting to Human Resources. Often times when trying to stop this sort of culture from forming through hires, it's important to emphasize the company's values and culture to establish a professional understanding of the business.

Following the three steps described above require time and active implementation. It's worth noting that removing this type of culture is very difficult because more often than not, it's rooted at the top. Sticking through to the true values of the company and making sure others know you do not tolerate that behavior can be highly effective in canceling out bro culture. Bro culture stems from acceptance and ignoring the problem at heart, being oblivious to what's happening is an easy way to infect the space. Working with other co-workers who share the same belief as you for an equal workplace is effective in combating the behaviors and those who hold onto it.

## Crunching

Crunching is an issue that runs deep within the technology sector as a whole, being almost expected or engraved in the employees to meet strict deadlines. However, much more recent game releases such as No Man's Sky, Cyberpunk 2077, and more have shown us that crunching doesn't always have the intended effects.

### *Defining and Signs of Crunching*

Crunching has always been a common issue within game development, it can be defined as a period during the development phase where the workload is increased and development teams are expected to work significant overtime hours to deliver a game on schedule (Marks, 2022).

The University of Gothenberg identifies four different types of crunch in game development.

- Final Crunch
  - Short-term crunch during the final weeks of a project before the final deadline.
- Mini Crunch
  - Multiple crunches to meet deadlines throughout the project.

- Continuous Crunch
  - Crunched time that continues throughout the entire project's lifespan until the project is complete. This is often a product of unreasonable schedules set out by the company.
- Delusional Crunch
  - Crunching where the game development studio does not believe they are overworking their employees. (This is usually engraved into the company's work culture.)

What can we do?

It's important to understand your limits, using that knowledge about yourself is paramount to being able to establish a healthy work environment free of crunching. It's important to voice this with project managers or whoever is involved in the timeline creation, giving professional input on what is realistic helps create better expectations for the final results. Communication is also key, making sure that your audience understands that development might take a bit longer, this isn't usually a key issue when done correctly, businesses feel that fans might be pushy for a game when in reality a full and complete product is more desired than an incomplete game.



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