

Biobanking: the board game

Public engagement through table top game development

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INTRODUCTION

Public awareness of the existence, purpose and value of biobanks is crucial to their future sustainability. Recognising the lack of awareness among the general public, the UKCRC Tissue Directory and Coordination Centre initiated an exploratory public engagement project based on the development of a strategy table top game.

Social table top game play has been proven to be very popular in London: the proliferation of 'Meet-up' groups dedicated to table top game playing (over 26 groups and counting, with up to 6,000 members)¹ and cafes and pubs dedicated to gaming² presents spaces with a readily available audience receptive to new games. Indeed, large cultural institutions, such as the Wellcome Collection and the Science Museum, have used games to introduce medical and science themed material for public outreach.³

'Gamers' (members of the public who play interactive games) were invited to a series of workshops to channel their passion for play and design into shaping a game that models how biobanks operate. As a result, the participants learned about biobanking and helped to design a prototype game that can be used as a tool for future public engagement activities and as a basis for a smartphone game application.

METHODS

Members of the public and an external games facilitator were invited to participate in workshops to learn about biobanking and apply their understanding to refine a prototype table top game. Participants were targeted based on their interest in social gaming with the dual aims of raising awareness about biobanking while among their peers and possibly reaching them before a point in their lives when they would be approached to donate samples for research.



Participants were given information on how samples are stored, how biobanks work with researchers and the regulatory and ethical frameworks under which they operate.⁴

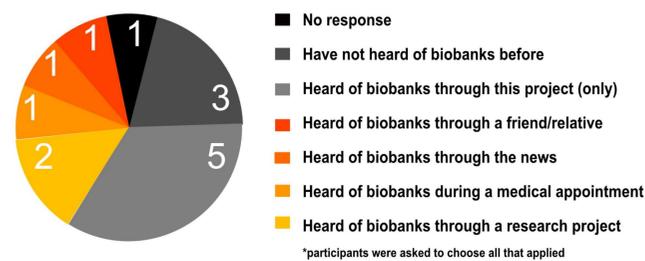
The prototype game was also playtested to gauge interest in the game and to test whether the game could be used as a public engagement tool.



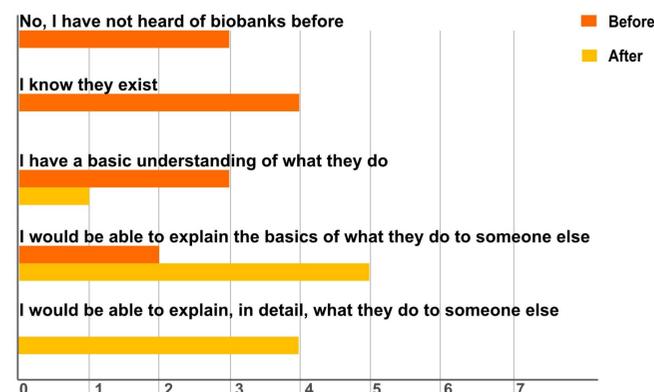
After each play of the prototype, the project team incorporated player feedback to improve the game and clarify biobanking content.

RESULTS

Knowledge of biobanking



Self-rated knowledge based on participation: before & after



DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

PROTOTYPE PLAYTESTS

Knowledge of biobanking



- I know about biobanking now.
- I knew about biobanking before and now I know some more about it.
- My attitude on biobanking has changed and I am motivated to learn more about it.
- My attitude on biobanking hasn't changed but I am motivated to learn more about it.
- My attitude on biobanking has changed but I am not really motivated to learn more about it.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aims of this project were met; firstly, the people who participated learned more about biobanking and secondly, a prototype game was produced to use in further public engagement activities. Game development, modelled in this way, presents potential for a small-scale, but effective, method of engaging the public in refining and communicating key messages.

Gamification, or the use of game design elements in non-game contexts, has become an increasing area of interest to communicate and educate the public on larger social issues. 'Dressing' games with specific key messages thus provides an opportunity to target sections of the public who might not otherwise notice or actively engage in new topics outside of their every day lives, such as biobanking.

While the prototype game gives a picture of how biomedical research works and the journey of biological samples for research, it is not able to give players a detailed understanding of the field of biobanking. A possible next step is to introduce additional content related to privacy, ethics and regulation to address some of the areas of public concern. During further refinements, the project team will also scope out the possibility of modelling a smartphone game application on the table top version for greater public outreach.

REFERENCES

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- ⁴ The participants were given basic information to give an overall picture of biobanking, rather than detailed scientific explanation. The information given and their comments and questions formed the basis of an information for the public article on biobanking - Sims J. Introduction to biobanking UKCRC Tissue Directory and Coordination Centre [Internet]. 2015 Aug 4 [cited 2015 01 Sept] Available from: <https://www.biobankinguk.org/introduction/>

