GAME TECH ACADEMY

Interreg Co-funded by the European Union
Öresund-Kattegat-Skagerrak

Game Tech Academy

Game Jams, Innovation Challenges & Game Tech Hackathons

Best Practice #1

Best of Both Worlds: Introducing a structured innovation process into a Game Jam to foster meaningful outcomes

Key words: serious games, game jam, youth, STEM, innovation process, education

Game Tech Academy host: Science Park Skövde

About Game Tech Academy:
Game Tech Academy is a 3-year long interregional project supported by the Interreg Öresund-Kattegat-Skagerrak (ÖKS) fund. The project consortium works with students, entrepreneurs, companies, educators, and researchers in an effort to showcase and support the extended, innovative use of game technologies beyond the entertainment industry. The project runs from 01/2024 to 12/2026. Read more on Game Tech Academy's website & Interreg ÖKS' project bank.
Game Tech Academy's partners are:
AAU Innovation, Aalborg University; **Business Aalborg**, Aalborg Municipality; **Dania Games**, Dania Academy; **MAU Game Lab**, Malmö University; **University of Skövde**; **Science Park Skövde** AB

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Introduction:

In early October 2024, “Volvo Game Jam” was be organized by Volvo, Science Park Skövde, Drivhuset Skaraborg, and Balthazar Science Center. The event wasa creative and inspiring Game Jam where university students had three days to develop games aimed at sparking curiosity about technology and innovation among young people around the age of 12.

The background to this initiative is clear: interest in technical educations is declining among the youth. Fewer students are applying to technical programs at the upper secondary and university levels, which, in the long run, can negatively affect both the availability of skilled labour and the pace of innovation in society.

The purpose of this Game Jam was to take a new approach—using games, something many young people love—as a tool to demonstrate how fun, creative, and important technology truly is. Over three intensive days, students worked together in teams to develop game ideas and prototypes that hold the potential to engage and inspire a younger audience.

Innovative elements:

The event was innovative in several ways. Unlike traditional Game Jams, which often operate with very **loose frameworks**, we married the format **of a Game Jam** with a **structured innovation process**. Students were not only asked to develop a game—they were guided step by step to think outside the box and create something truly original and relevant. Always referring to the overarching challenge described above.

We therein introduced a new element by combining the creative freedom of a Game Jam with the more strategy-focused structure known from innovation races or hackathons. Throughout the three days, the student teams followed a curated process that included **ideation methods**, **problem reframing**, and **concept development**.

Moreover, the innovation process was grounded in real needs regarding organizational challenges and future workforce ambitions, presented by Volvo. This was complemented by a presentation from Balthazar Science Center, offering insights into how young people think, learn, and are motivated—ensuring the solutions were tailored not just to Volvo's needs, but also to the cognitive and emotional landscape of 12-year-olds.

By merging these approaches, we created a Game Jam that was not only about building games, but about designing meaningful, innovative, and educational experiences with real-world impact and tailored to a specific target group.

Main challenges:

One of the main challenges was getting the students to let go of their preconceived notions about how Game Jams are usually structured. A further challenge was assigning participants to mixed teams rather than allowing pre-formed groups to sign up together. This led to some conflicts and difficulties in team cohesion, especially considering the short time frame and high stress levels during the event.

Positive surprises:

Surprisingly, all teams managed to develop a final game concept by the end of the event, and no one dropped out along the way, despite the intensity and unfamiliar format.

Take aways for next time:

For the next edition, we would allow pre-formed teams to register together to create a stronger sense of security and team cohesion. We would also remove the on-stage pitching element on the final day and instead place more emphasis on showcasing and playtesting the games.

Key learnings:

We learned that this target group finds it difficult to work within a goal-seeking process where the outcome is not defined from the start. Secondly, pitching on stage turned out to be more stressful for the participants than we had anticipated. Lastly, we realized the importance of providing a certain level of psychological safety—participating in such an event is already a challenge, and letting participants work with people they already know can make a big, positive difference. Students expressed concern that their projects would be used by Volvo for advertising without payment.

Workshop-guide with time schedule

Below is a program for the workshop described so it is easy for other educators to develop and facilitate a similar workshop. Besides the Case Company, the main roles in the workshop are:

- **Organizers:** Responsible for facilitating the workshop and all plenary sessions for the students.
- **Moderator:** A person from the organizer team who will take the presenter role on stage.
- **Host company:** Staff from the host company (Volvo) with which the collaboration is made.

- **Volunteers:** Student volunteers to help during the designated hours of the game jam.
- **Mentors:** Industry specialists who will offer mentorship to teams during the game jam
- **Jury:** Selected group of people from the games industry, host company, and relevant actors for the target audience.

Phase	Time	Content	Main role(s)
Pre event work	15 hours of work	• Arrange teams and communicate them to attendees • Arrange seating chart for teams at venue and name badges • Theme selection • Communication • Call and selection of mentors	Organizers and host company do all necessary preparation work.
Day 1 **Phase 1:** **Introduction to the game jam, topic, and target audience**	16:00-16:30	**Registration and badge pick-up** (Groups have assigned seating)	Guides, Organizers and Volunteers
	16:45–16:45	**Welcome** -presentation of the agenda for the weekend, tools, Discord server, rules for competition, how to sign up for mentorships and presenting the client (Volvo)	Moderator
	16:45–17:30	**Host company introduces itself.** They introduce who they are, reveal the theme and give background to it. Open the floor for participant questions.	Host
	17:30–17:40	**BREAK**	
	17:40–18:10	**Presentation of the target group** and persona profile and questions.	Moderator
	18:10–18:20	**Target group on stage** Moderator does a short interview with the target group representative; floor open to questions.	Moderator
	18:20 – 18:40	**Dinner is served** Wraps or foods that can allow people to continue with the agenda easily**.**	Hosts, volunteers

Phase 2: **Ideation**	18:40–20:00	**Moderator kicks off the creative process.** Groups sit at their own stations and will now brainstorm ideas for games according to a predetermined process	Volunteers and mentors help the groups when needed.
	20:00	**Doors closes**	-
Day 2 **Phase 4: Development at home**	10:00 – 10:30	**Visit to the target audience's game space** to draw inspiration.	
	10:30 – end of day	**Development of games** Mentors are available online for 1 hour sessions with each team.	Moderator keeps track of Discord channels in case of questions. Mentors have their own channels on Discord to give mentorships
Day 3 **Development at home**	All day	**Development of games**	
Day 4 **Phase 5:** **Presentations**	11:00 – 12:00	**Participants build a stand** to present their games back at the venue.	Volunteers help groups find their designated spaces
	12:00 – 13:00	**Lunch**	Jury's arrival at the venue. Volunteers oversee lunch
	13:00 – 14:00	**Playtest 1** With target audience	Target audience tries the games and scores them on a point sheet
	14:00 – 15:00	**Playtest 2** With Jury	Jury plays the games and talks to teams about the concepts.
	15:00 – 16:00	**Presentations on stage** All teams present on stage for about 5 minutes each. The moderator interviews the participants on stage.	Moderator
Phase 6: Closure of event	16:00 – 16:20	**Jury deliberation**	Jury
	16:20 –16:30	**Winners are announced**	Jury and moderators on stage
	16:30 –16:40	**All final thanks and closing remarks.**	Organizers

		Start-up program offers a visit and explains how teams can join the program	