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# Early Stage Game Evaluation: Lessons Learned and Best Practices

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#GDC22

# Why are early assessments for ‘Good Game’ so important?

- **To bring a refreshing and fun game experience to players**
- **To evaluate whether it is a ‘good game’ ASAP**

Netease Games established

# Early evaluation system

6 years ago

# How to define

# ‘good game’ & ‘early stage’

# 1.Concept of “early stage”

## Product

**(only 1 game design concept or demo)**

# 1.Concept of “early stage”

**Product**

**(only 1 game design concept or demo)**

**Team**

**(Small size with less than 10 core members)**

# 1.Concept of “early stage”

**Product**

**(only 1 game design concept or demo)**

**Team**

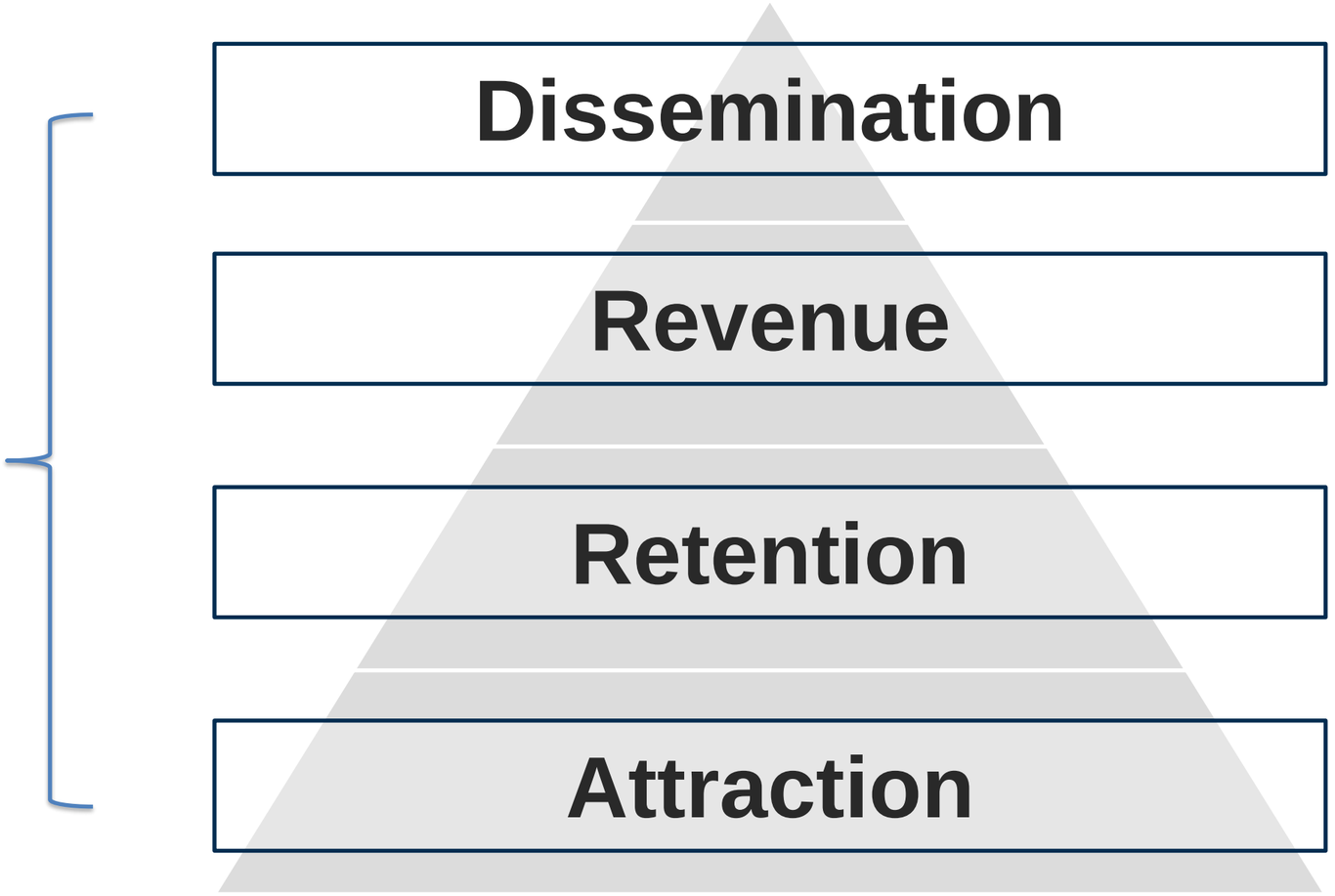
**(Small size with less than 10 core members)**

**Period**

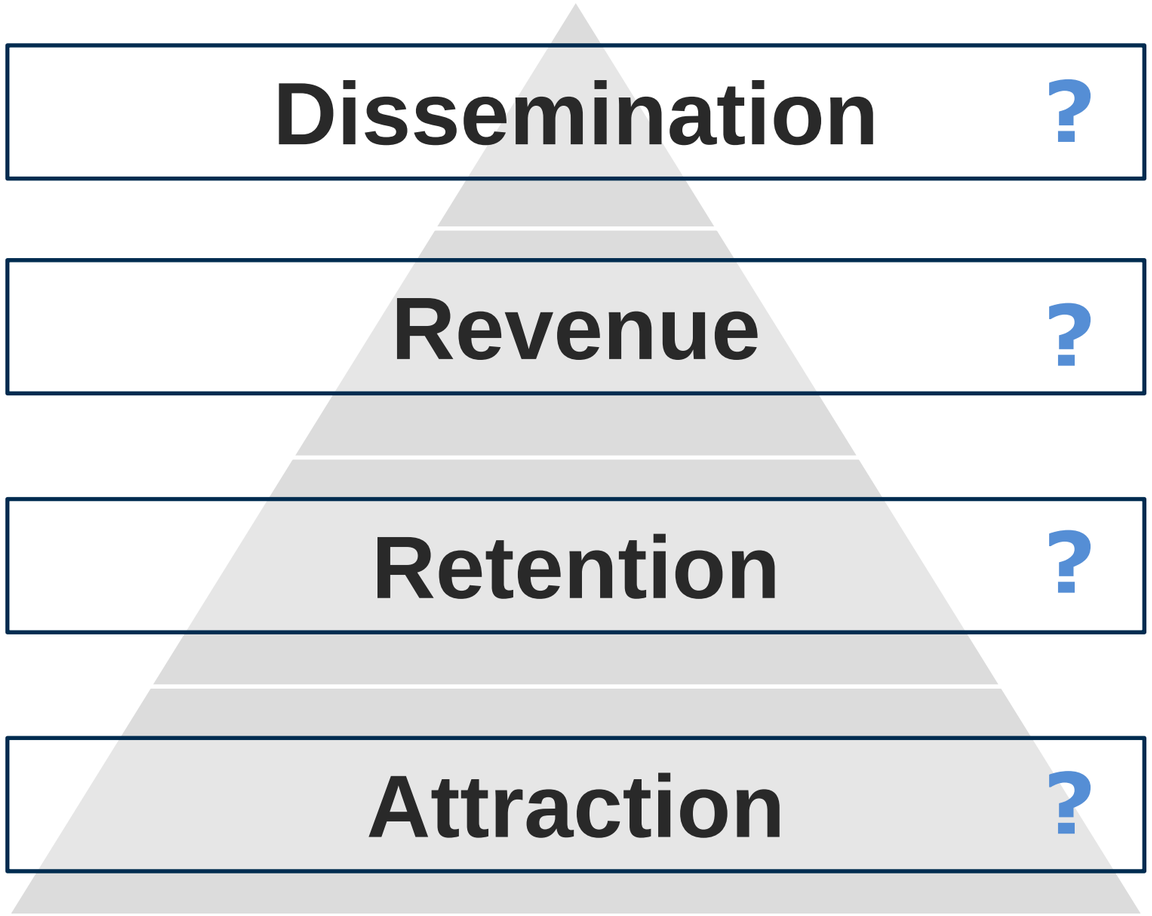
**(Small investment, typically within 6 months of R&D)**

# 2.Quantitative values defining a “good game”

**GOOD PRODUCT**

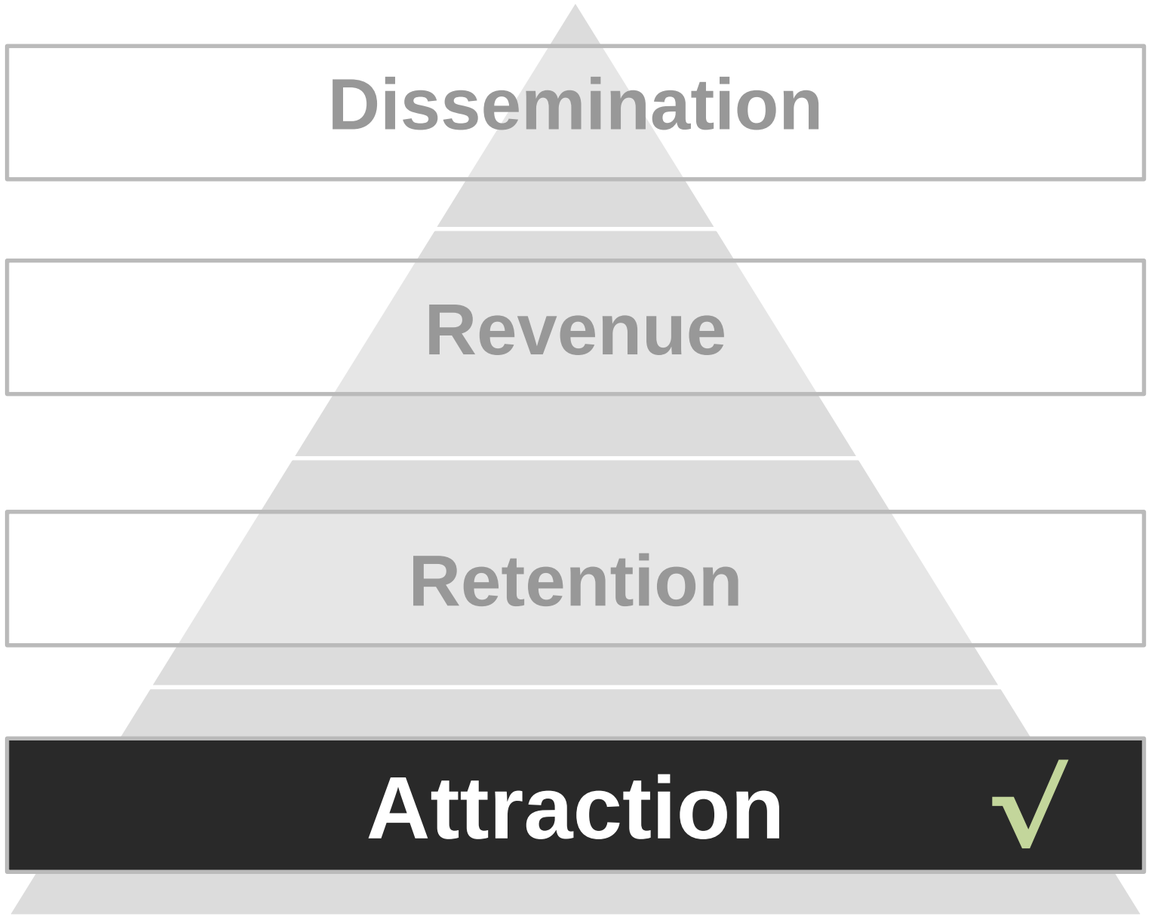


# 2.Quantitative values defining a “good game”




**early stage Evaluation** ?

# 2.Quantitative values defining a “good game”

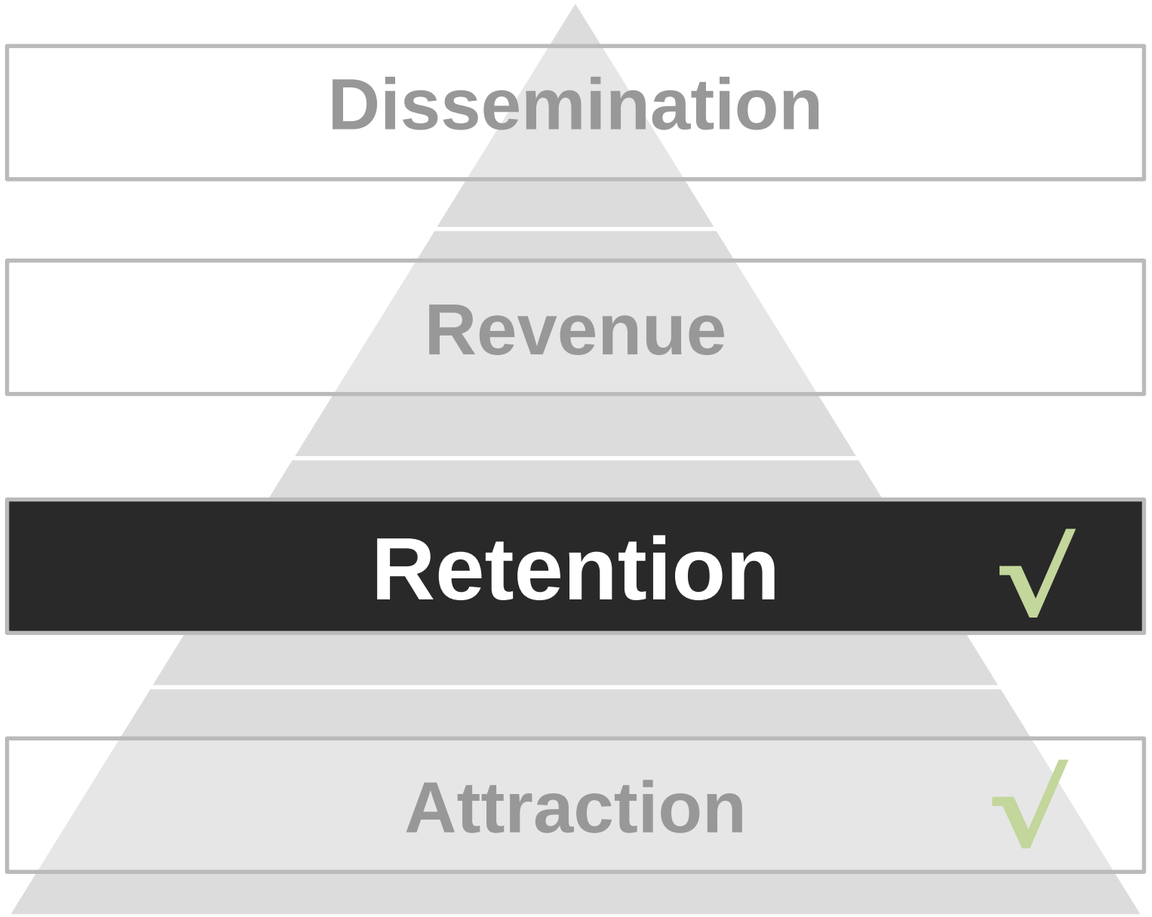



**Design highlights**

**Attractive point**

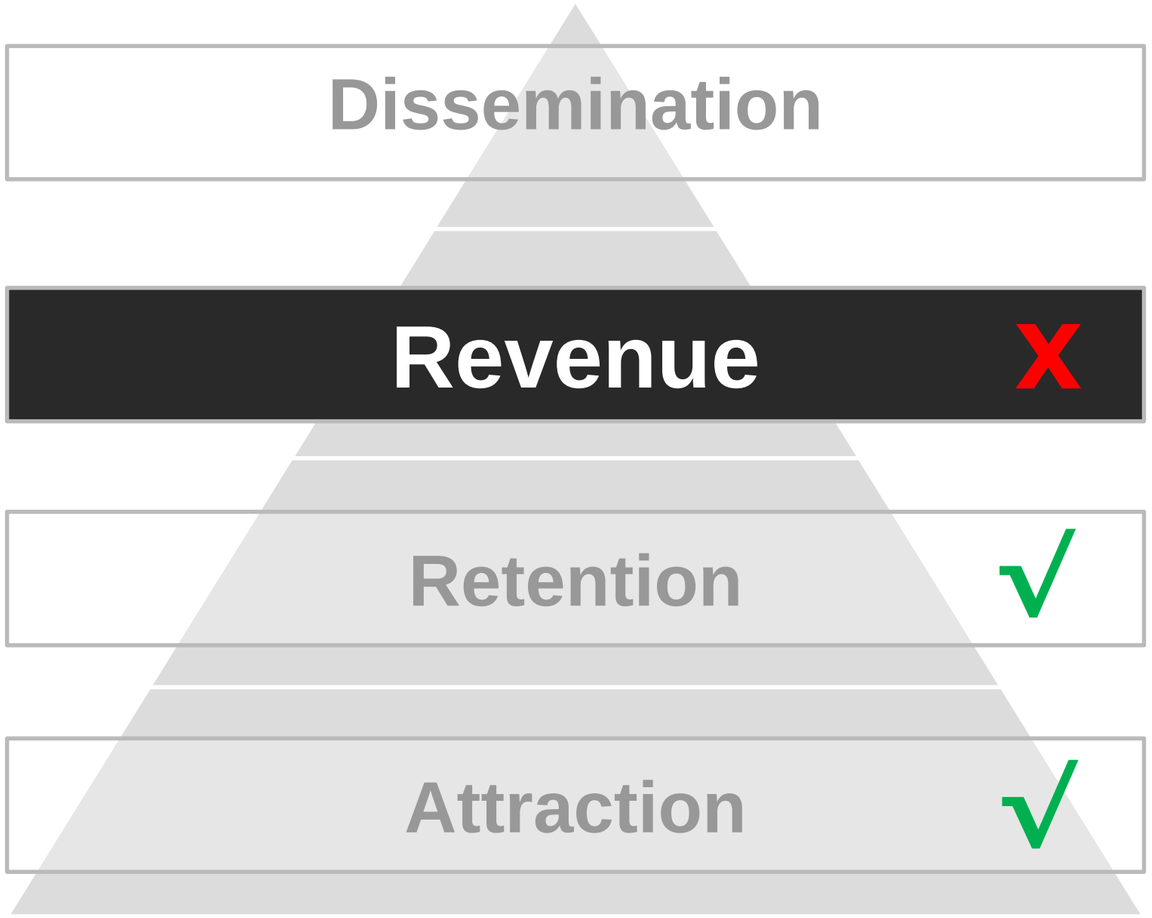
**Competitive Advantages**

# 2.Quantitative values defining a “good game”




**Extend**
**the active period of players,**
**and increase player**
**stickiness in the game**

# 2.Quantitative values defining a “good game”




**Income scale assessment at the early**

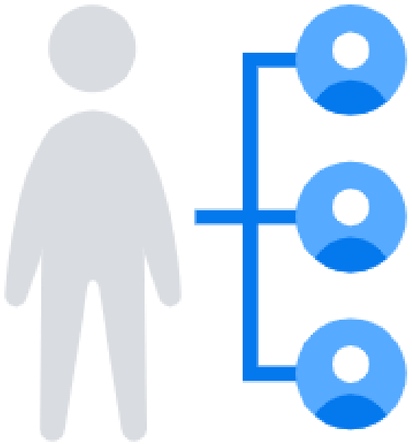
# 2.Quantitative values defining a “good game”

**Dissemination** √

Revenue X

Retention √

Attraction √



**Willingness**

**Scope**

**Audience**

**Method**

# How to approach a “good game”

# NetEase’s Practices

CASE of Netease:

**Melee + Battle Royale = Good idea?**

CASE of Netease:

# NARAKA: BLADEPOINT

Released Version
2021.11

# NARAKA: BLADEPOINT global released version(PC 2021.11)

CASE:

# NARAKA: BLADEPOINT

First Demo Version
2019.4

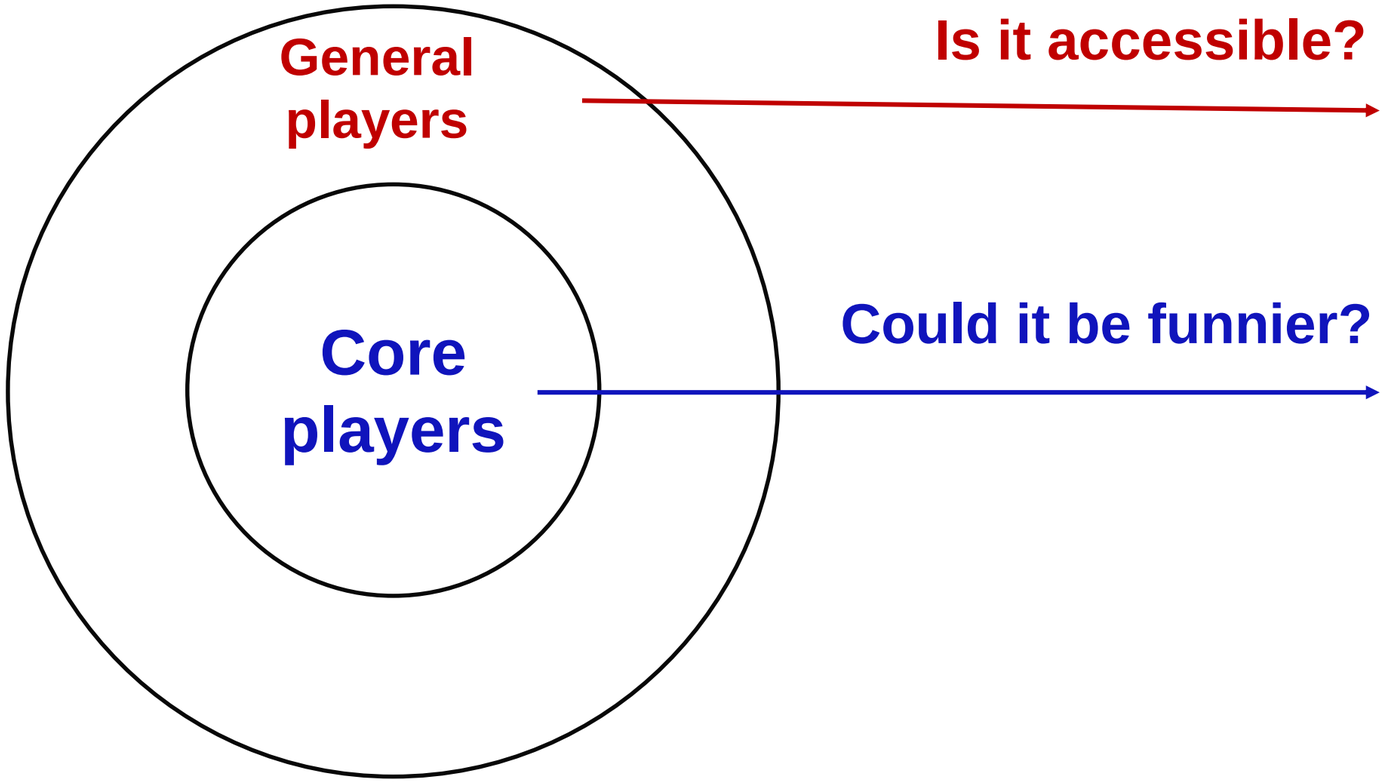
# NARAKA: BLADEPOINT in first demo (2019.4)

# 3.Core assessment factors

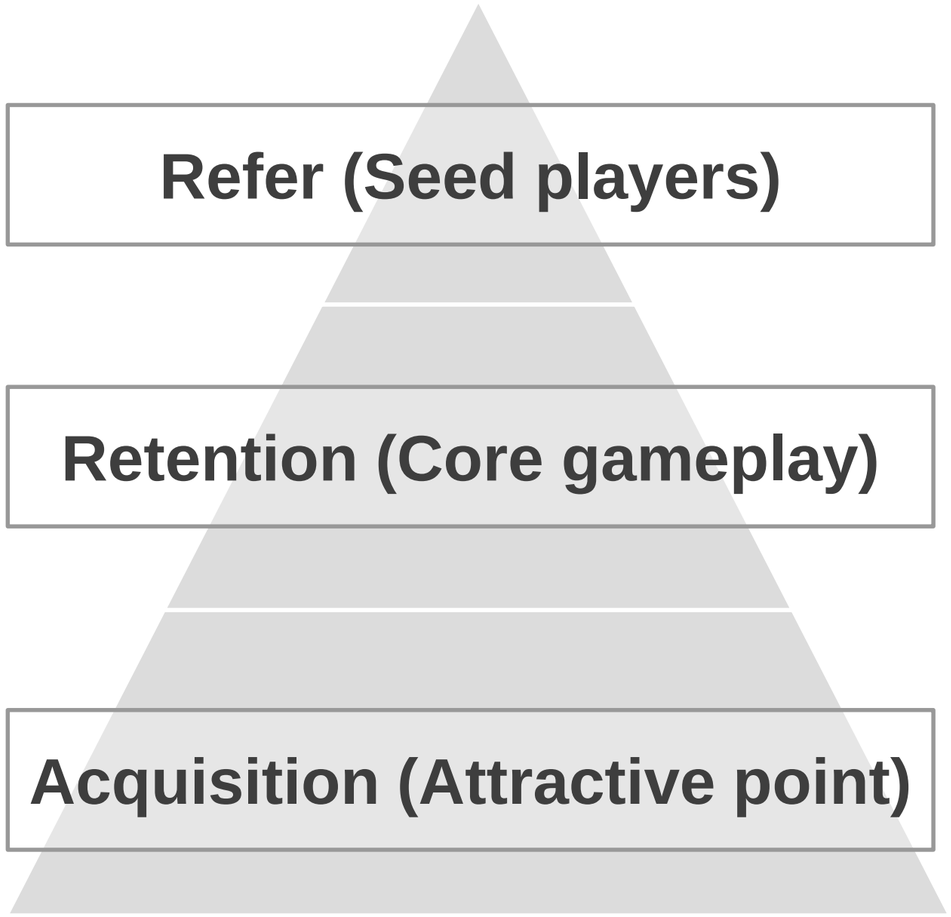
**Refer (Seed players)**

**Retention (Core gameplay)**

**Acquisition (Attractive point)**



# 3.Core assessment factors




**15-30 min**

**An initial assessment can be made within a 15-30min player experience**

# Three Early Stage Game Evaluation Methods at NetEase

01

Expert Evaluation

**Six-Dimensional Radar**

02

Concept Evaluation

**“CONCEPT100”**

03

Experience Evaluation

**“3X10” Assessment**

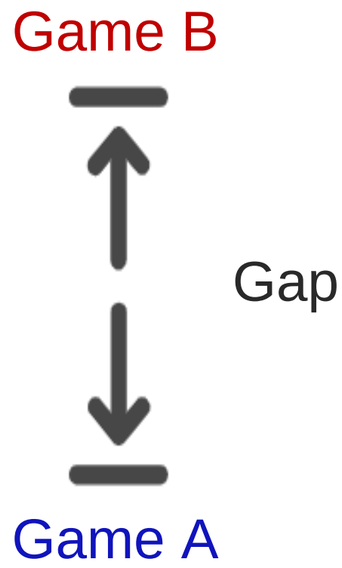
# Three Early Stage Game Evaluation Methods at NetEase

01 Expert Evaluation
**Six-Dimensional Radar**

02 Concept Evaluation
**“CONCEPT100”**

03 Experience Evaluation
**“3X10” Assessment**

**Evaluation based on target differentiation of competitors**



# Three Early Stage Game Evaluation Methods at NetEase

01 Expert Evaluation

**Six-Dimensional Radar**

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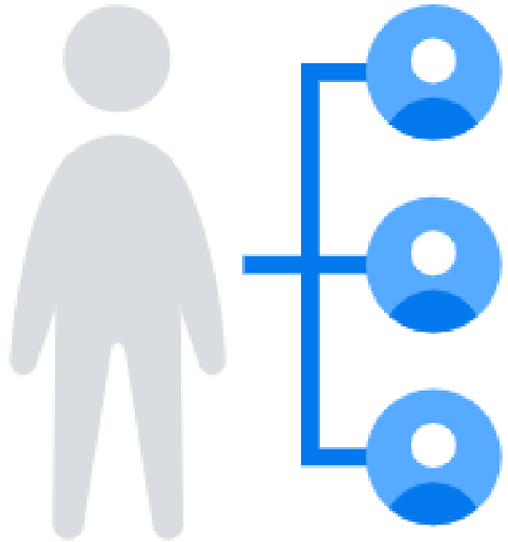
**Based on referring effect amongst users**



# Three Early Stage Game Evaluation Methods at NetEase

01 Expert Evaluation

**Six-Dimensional Radar**

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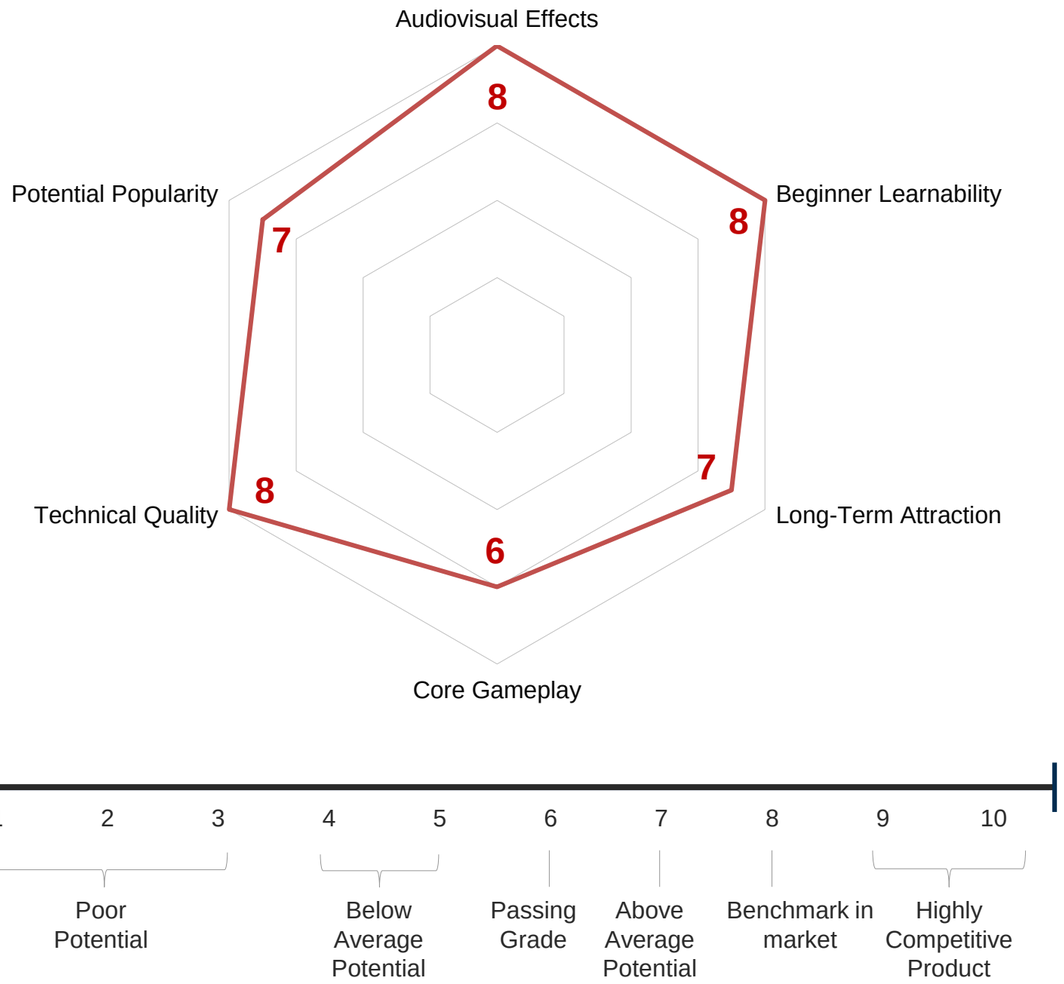
03 Experience Evaluation

**“3X10” Assessment**

**Based on surprising level of the game**

# Expert Evaluation： Six-Dimensional Radar



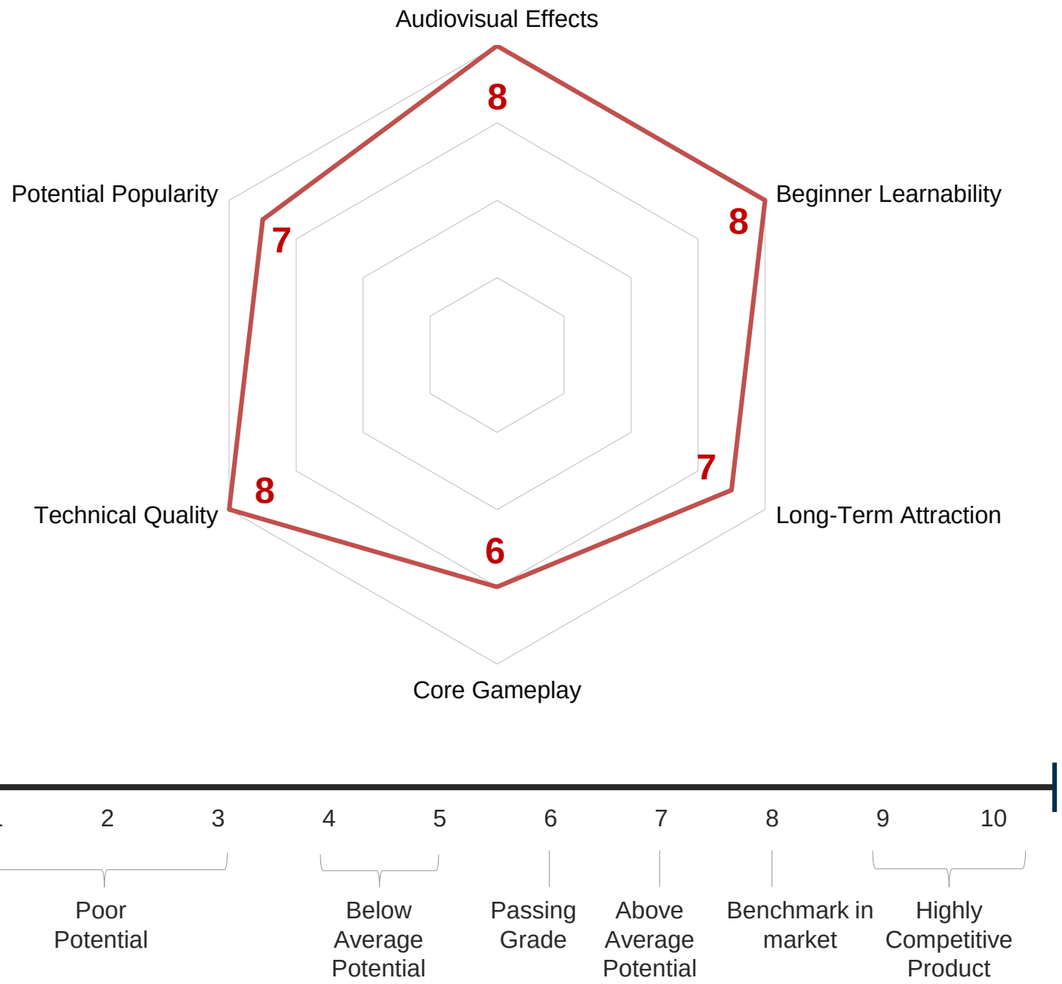

## Target differentiation

**Invite corresponding experts to assessments**

**Evaluate early-stage demos with benchmark products**

**Six-dimentional comprehensive evaluation**

# Expert Evaluation： Six-Dimensional Radar




## Brief Introduction: Six-Dimentional Radar Evaluation

1. **Audio-visual Effects**
2. **Beginner Learnability**
3. **Long-Term Attraction**
4. **Core Gameplay**
5. **Technical Quality**
6. **Potential Popularity**

# Concept Evaluation: CONCEPT100

**Game role**

**Style**

**Theme**

**Gameplay**

**Other “IDEA”**

**Video**

**Picture**

**Text**

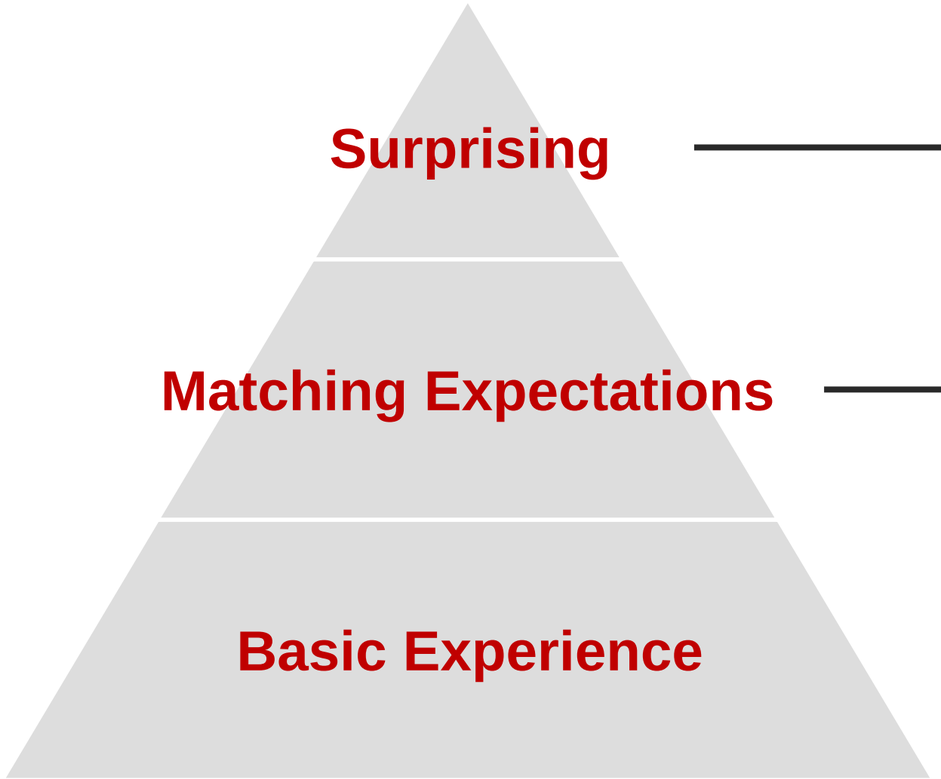
Dissemination

Picture of “CONCEPT:100” in Japan

# Experience Evaluation: 3 X 10 Assessment

## Surprise

**Surprise is how the game exceed our players' expectation.**
**Here we assess how surprise our users feel about the gameplay during the demo stage**




→ Exceeds players' expectations

→ Match players' expectations

→ Meet the basic requirements of players

# Experience Evaluation: 3 X 10 Assessment

## Player evaluator pool

**For player evaluators, we need to clarify the game type and structure**

Type I

**Core players from target competitors**

Type II

**Secondary target users**

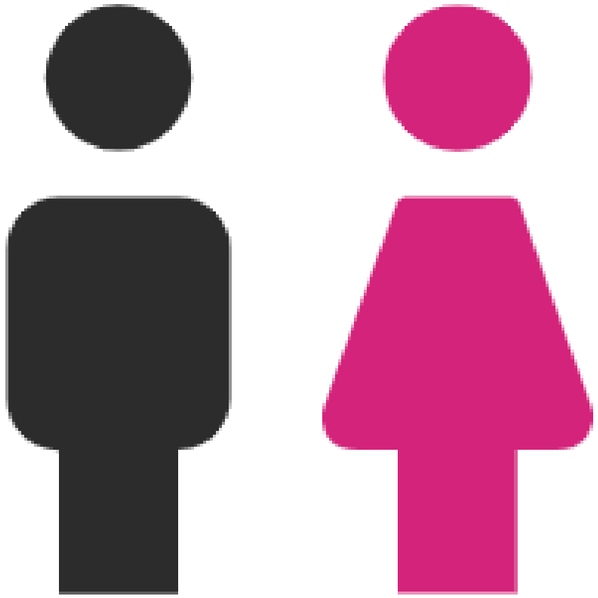
Type III

**Users in the broad DAU market**

# Experience Evaluation: 3 X 10 Assessment

## Player evaluator pool

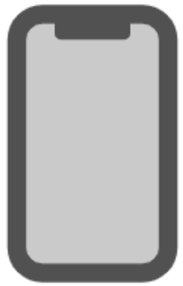
- **After identifying the game types, we need to control the demographics (age, gender, occupations) of player evaluators in the pool.**
- **We can refer to existing personas from competitor products at this stage.**



# Experience Evaluation: 3 X 10 Assessment

## Different Platforms & Devices

- **Demo testing includes core gameplay and highlight contents.**
- **Wild game-play scenarios on various devices and platforms.**



**Mobile Phone**

Random sampling

**PC**

PC lab test with invitations

**Console**

Lab test with invitations

# Experience Evaluation: 3 X 10 Assessment

## Mobile

Mobile game evaluation in the US

Mobile game evaluation

- A cozy environment
- Little interference
- First impression
- surprising experience

# Experience Evaluation: 3 X 10 Assessment

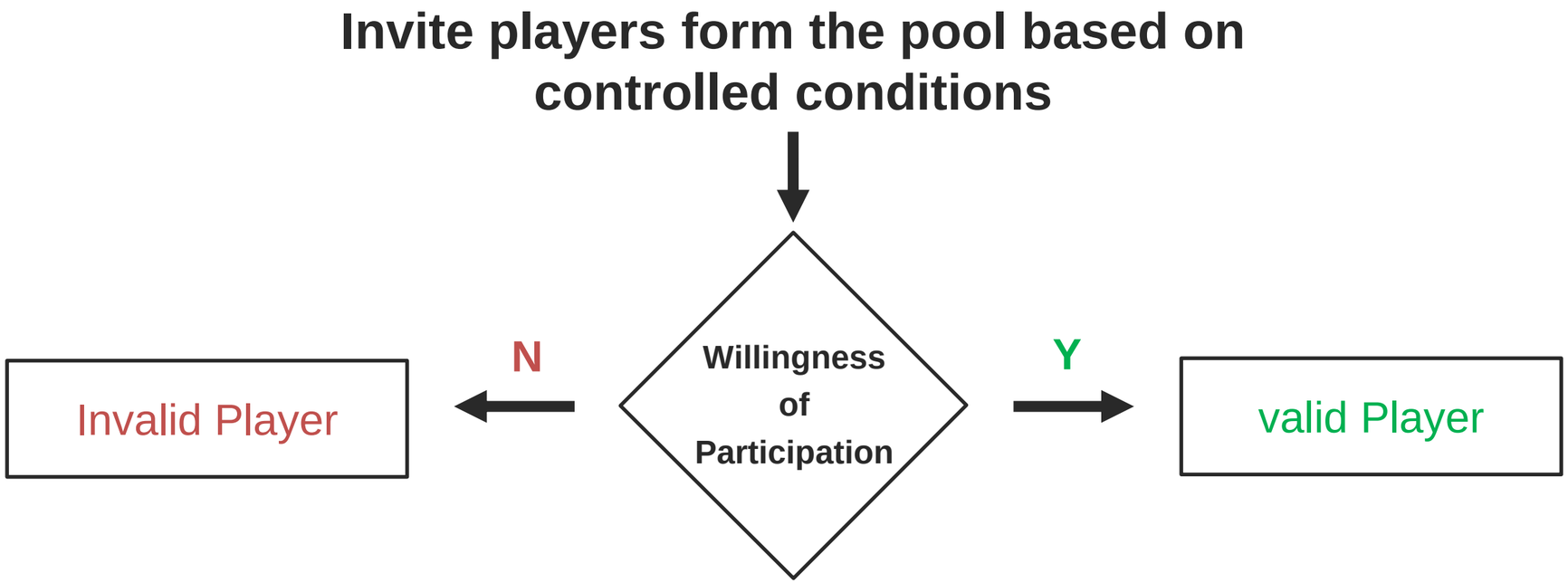
## PC & Console

- Evaluation done in the studio labs.
- The lab settings close to the gameplay in reality.
- Little interference.

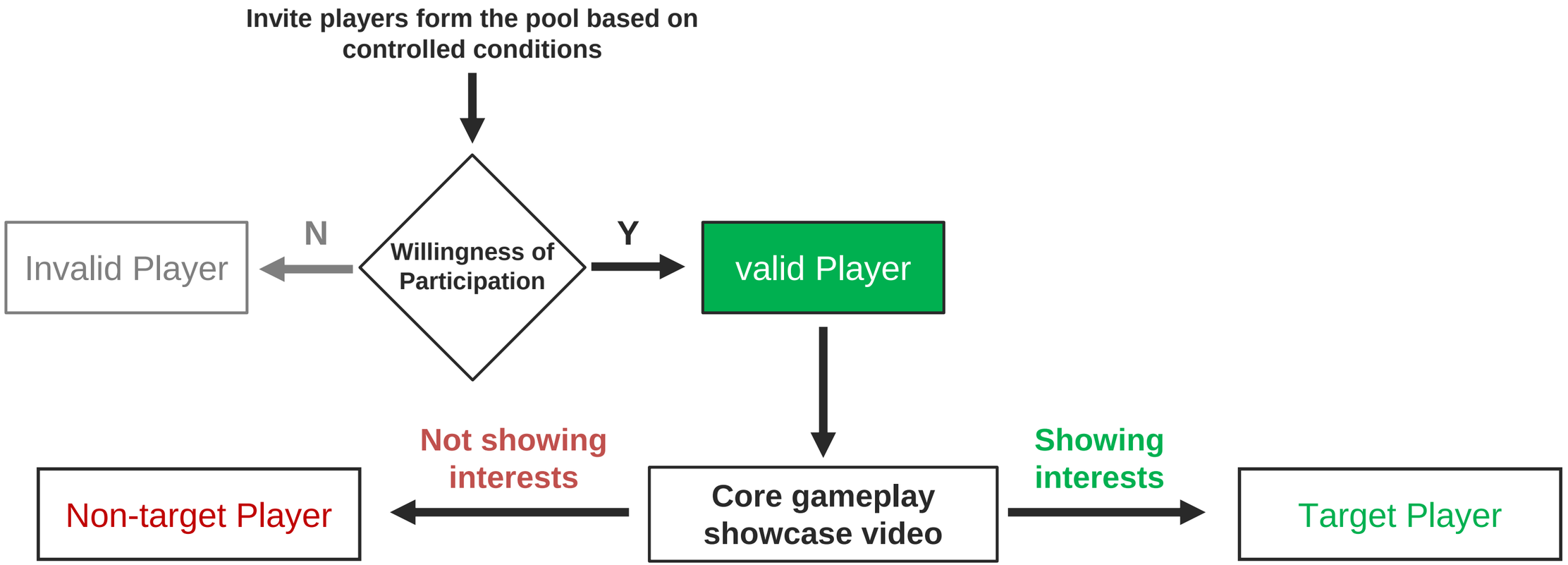
PC game lab tests

Console game lab tests

## Target Player Selection



## Target Player Selection



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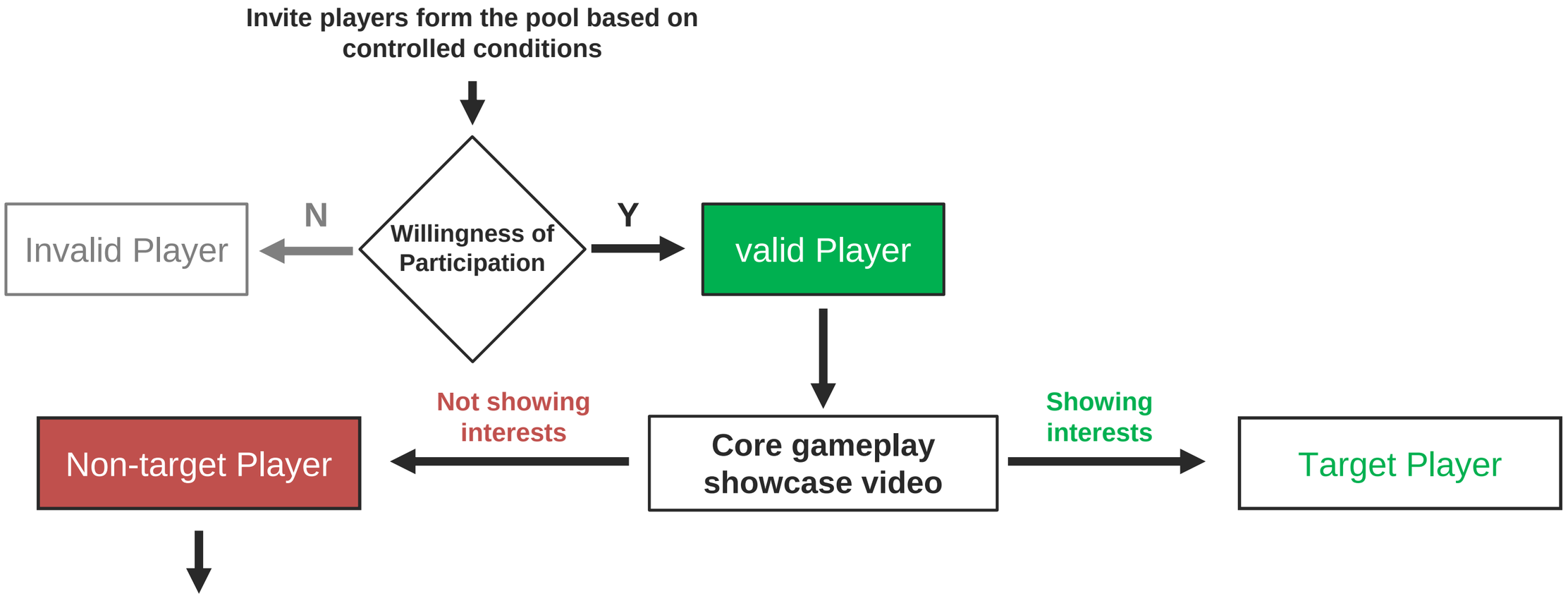
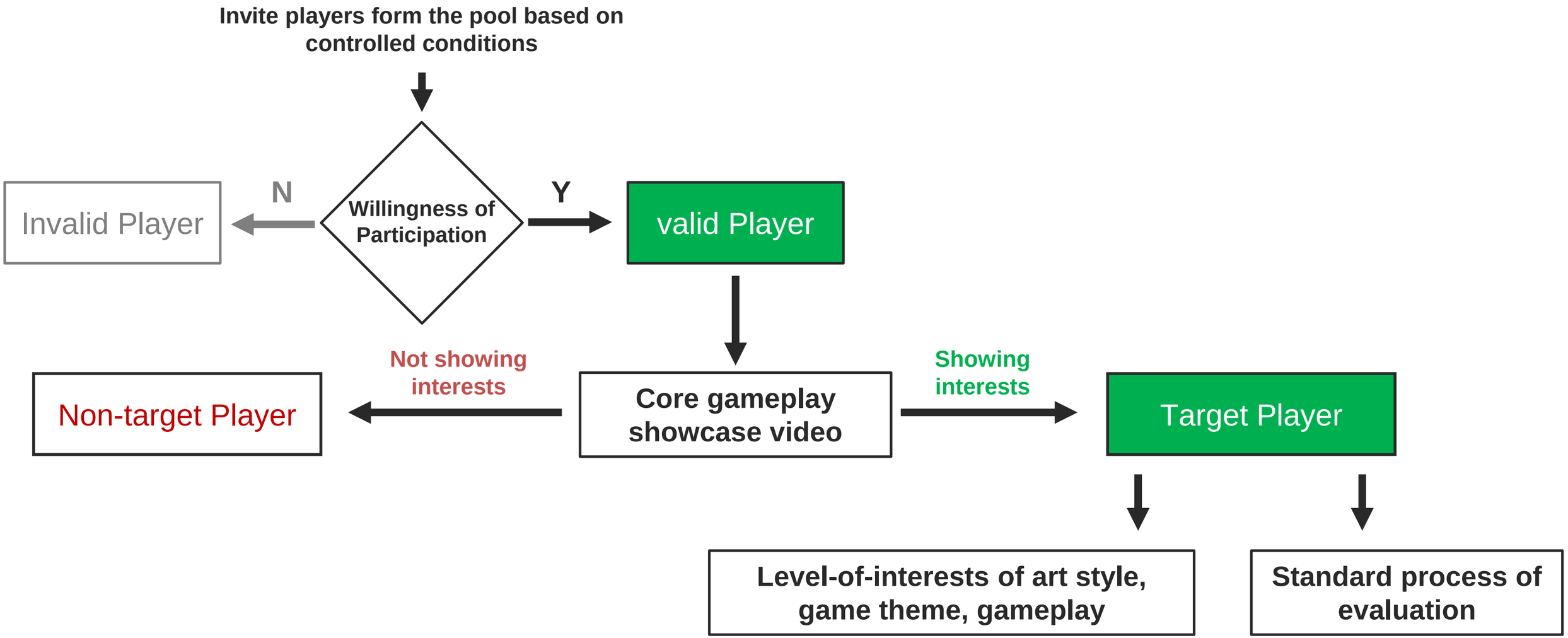



**If most players in our pool are not interested in the game at this stage, we need to reconsider the players we are targeting and the game types.**

## Target Player Selection



## Beginner tutorials and standardization

**Beginner Tutorial**

Standard Process

Consistent Language

**Building foundational skill sets**

**Scope of skill sets**

**Core gameplay intro and experience**

## Real Game Experience

Players are willing to play the game patiently, unacted on distraction from the tester and their friends.

### Things to investigate in gameplay experiences

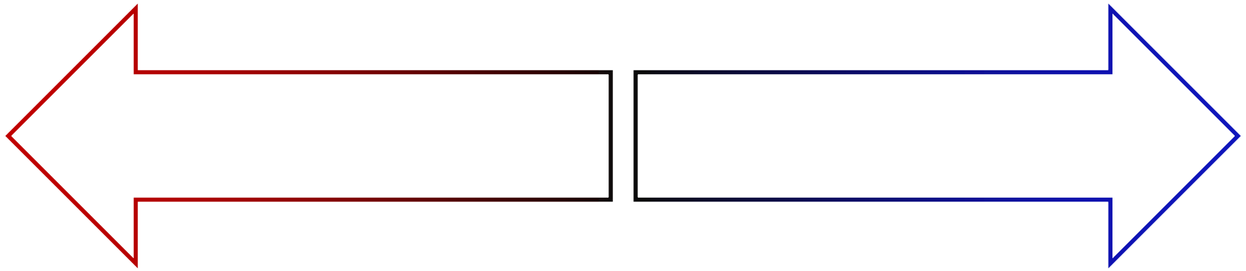
1. Game actions and issues
2. Gameplay appreciation points
3. Confusing points
4. Complaints
5. Emotion change
6. First impression and surprising points

# Experience Evaluation: 3 X 10 Assessment

## Game Evaluation

**Evaluation of players' surprising level with quantitative scales**

**Comparing to similar games you have played (-5 to +5 scales)**



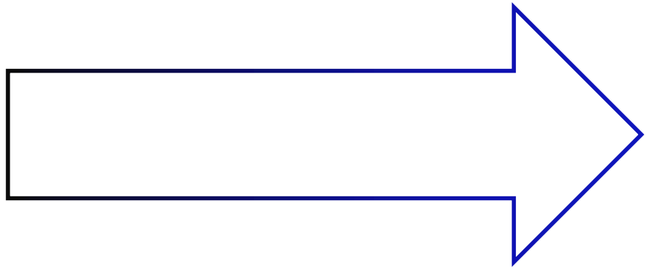
**Not my type of game at all**

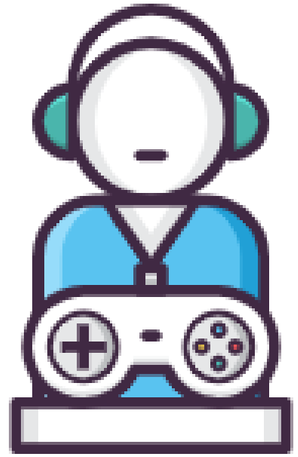
**Amazing game exceeding my expectation**

# Experience Evaluation: 3 X 10 Assessment

## Game Evaluation

**Attraction**





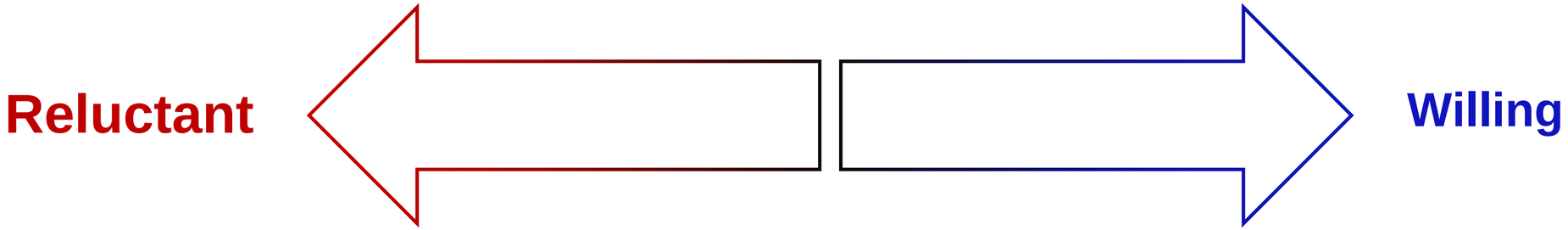
**Whether players can get the game's surprise point and highlights when experiencing**

**How attractive are highlights for players?**

## Game Evaluation

**Use a scale to evaluate players' willingness to experience and download**

**How willing are players to download and play the game?**



## Game Evaluation

Play by own (players)

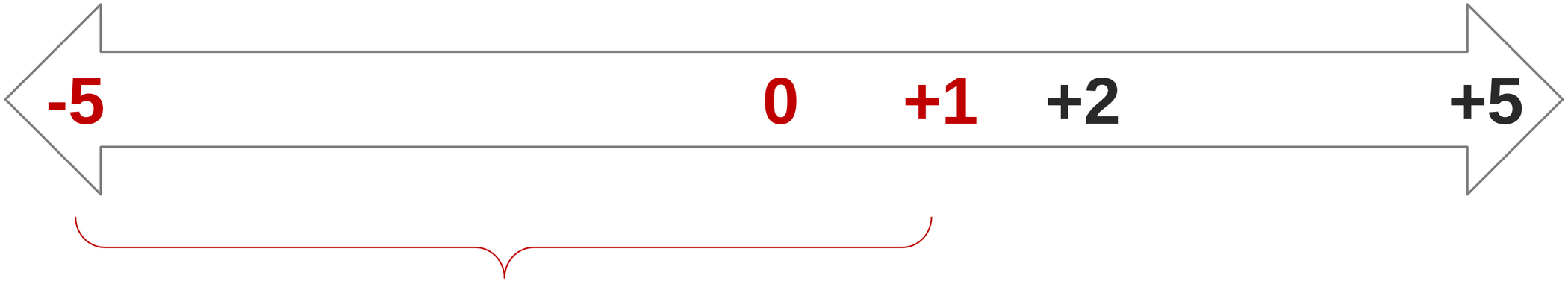
Observe and record

Standard process for evaluation

**Qualitative & quantitate**

## Game Evaluation

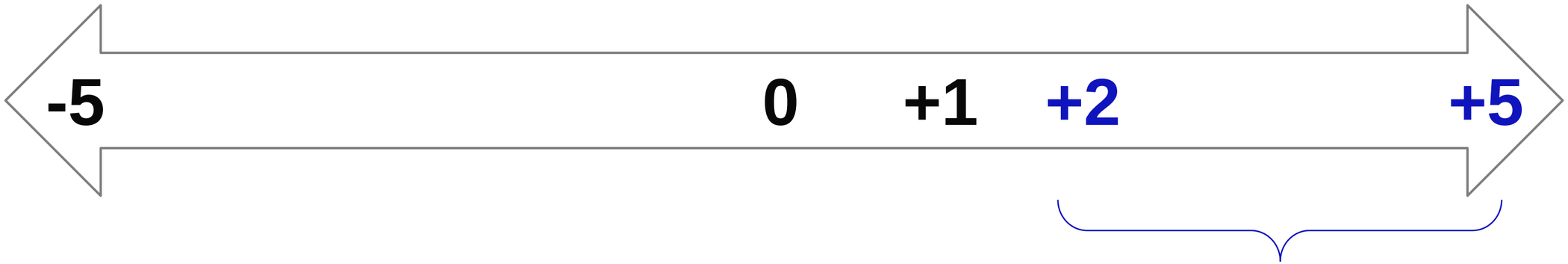
**In the stage of analyzing the results, we can draw conclusions by making comparisons between your score and the criteria.**




**1 If something wrong with the core gameplay, then make adjustment on the idea**

**2 To know how to adjust and which key points get wrong through the evaluation results**

# Experience Evaluation: 3 X 10 Assessment



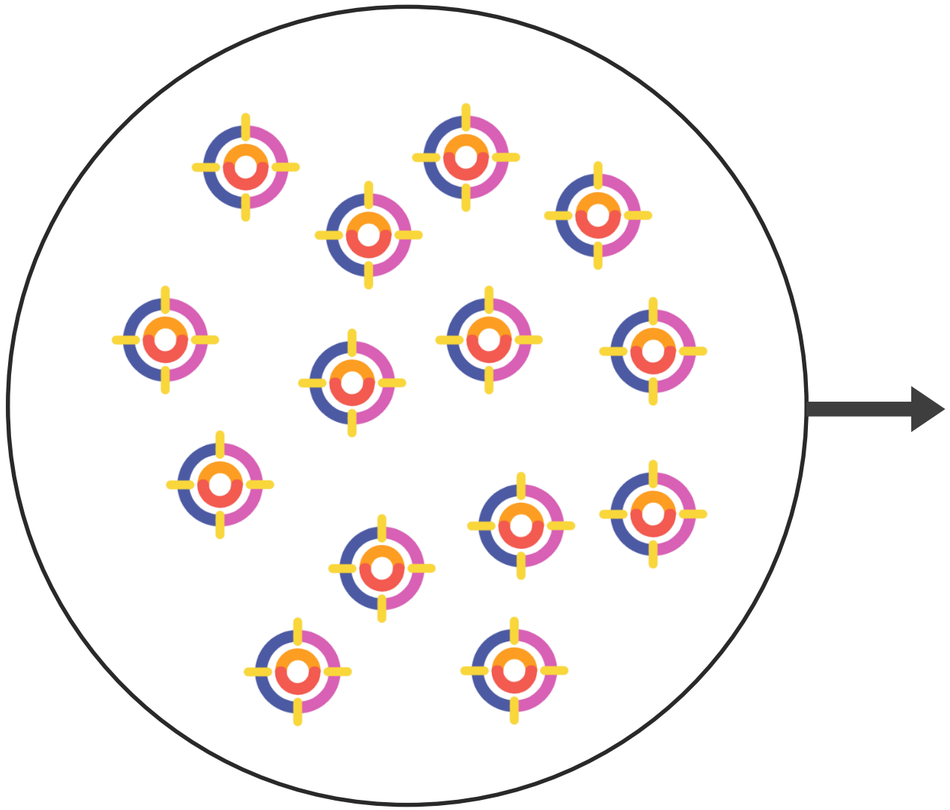

**1 To make it clear about the game's core**
**2 If the artistic effect weighs, the overall score needs to be more than 2**

# NetEase's Lessons

# Excessive Pursuit of Scores

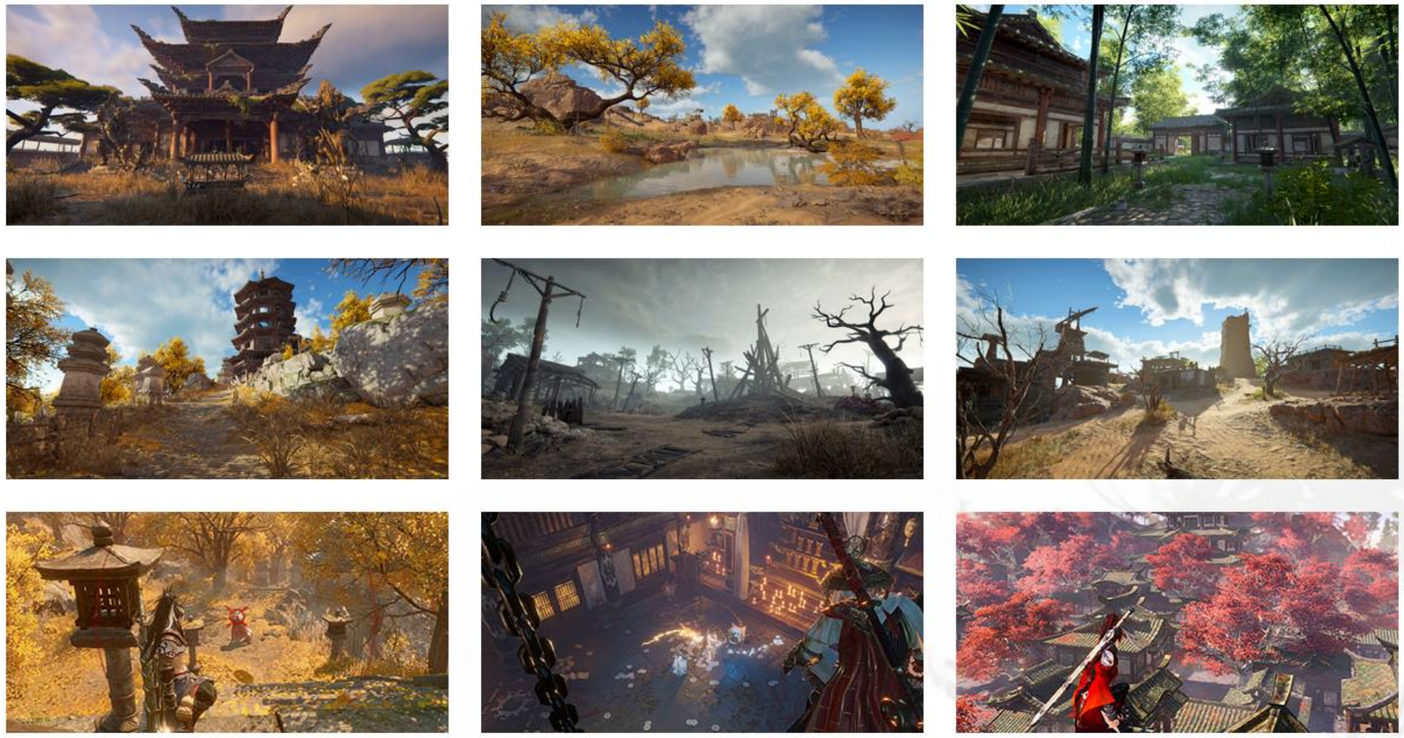
Create surprises

# Narrow user base



- Many players are interested in the gameplay
- If you find users within narrow market limits
- Excessively pursuing score brings bias for future market performance

# Art resources difficult to replicate

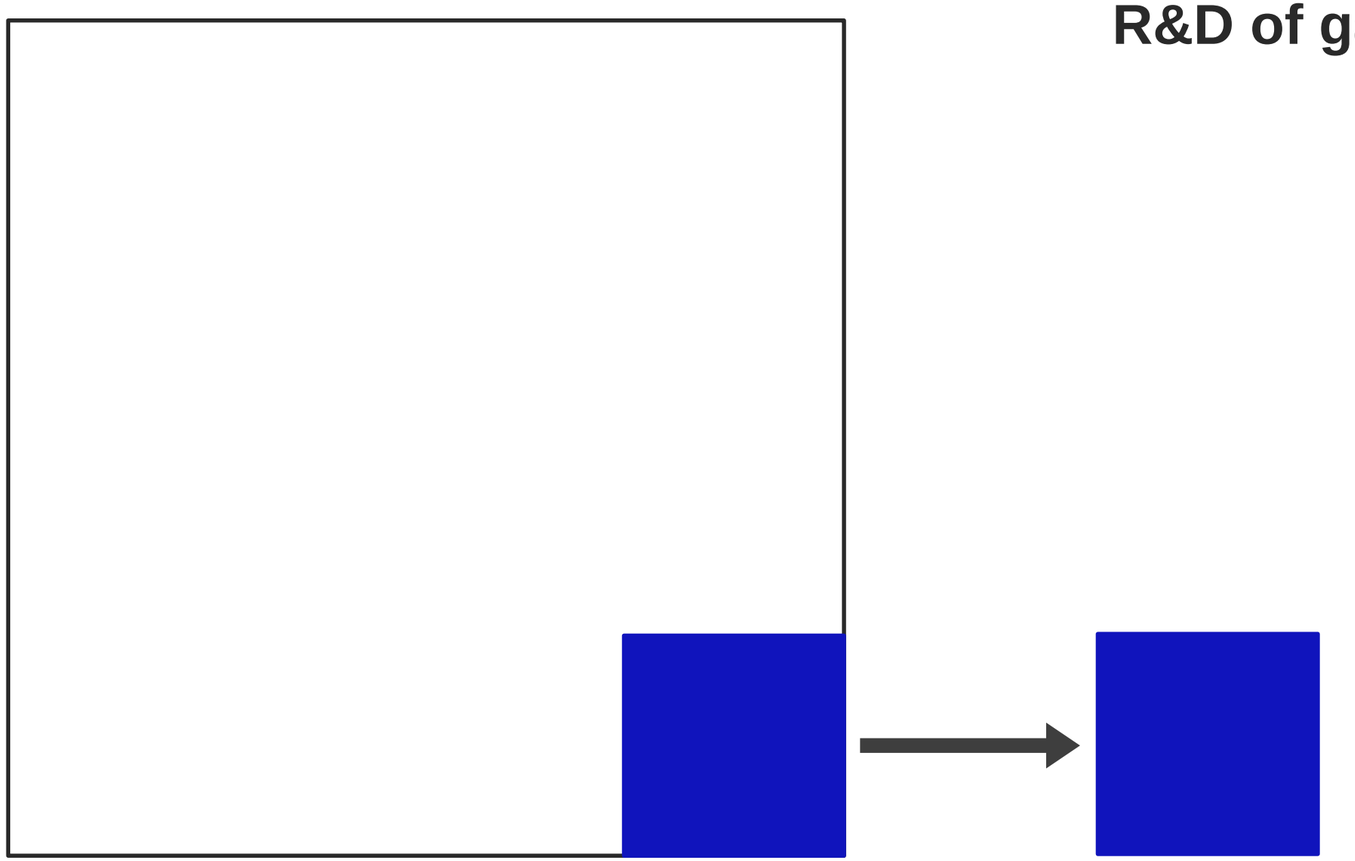


Screenshots from NARAKA: BLADEPOINT

**Replicable**
**&**
**non-replicable art resources**

# Extensive distribution of market segments

**market segmentation**



**With a low player base, but huge inputs on R&D of games on the market segments.**

Game A

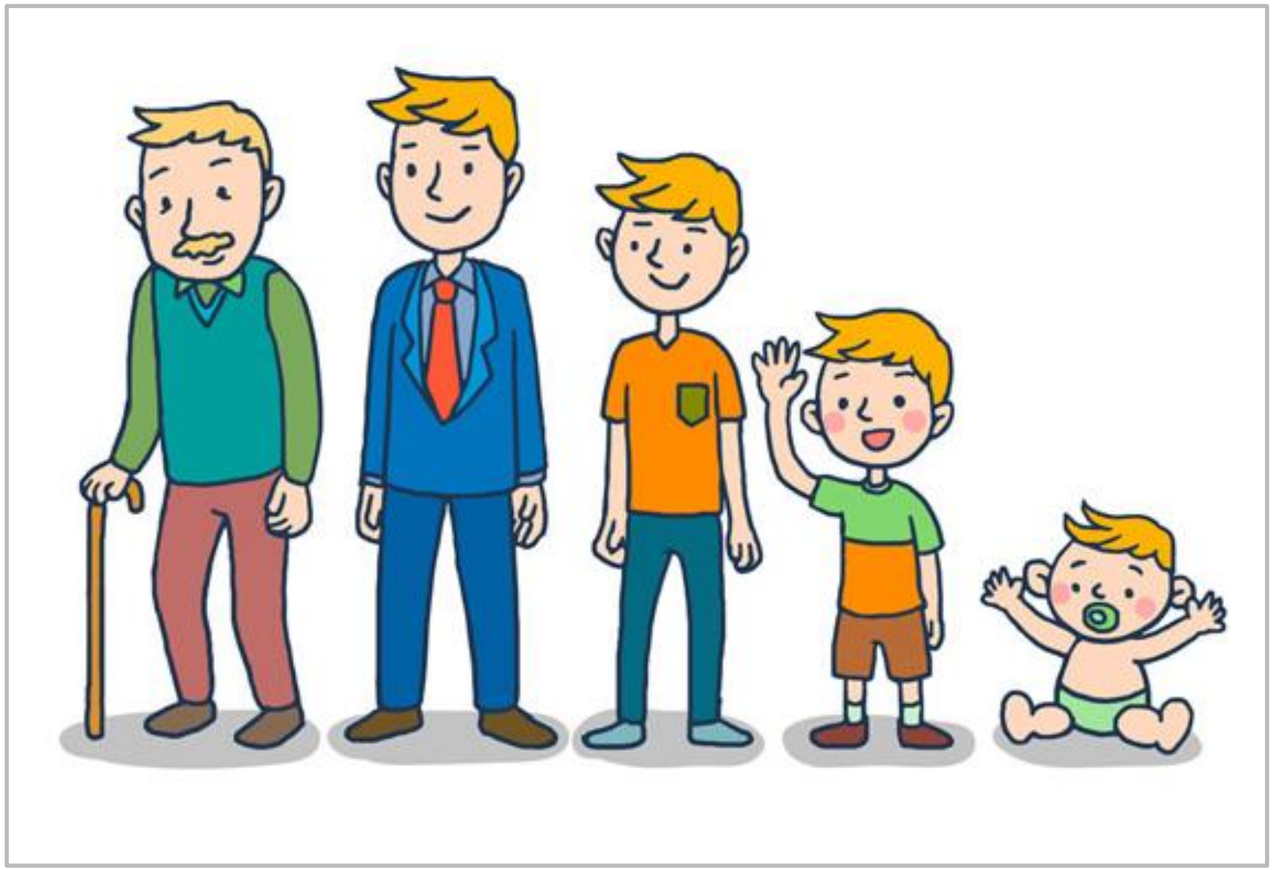
Game B

Game C

Game D

⋮

# DO NOT involve teenagers under 14 years old



**Independent to some degree, but incompletely**

**Reverse psychology leads to bias for evaluation**

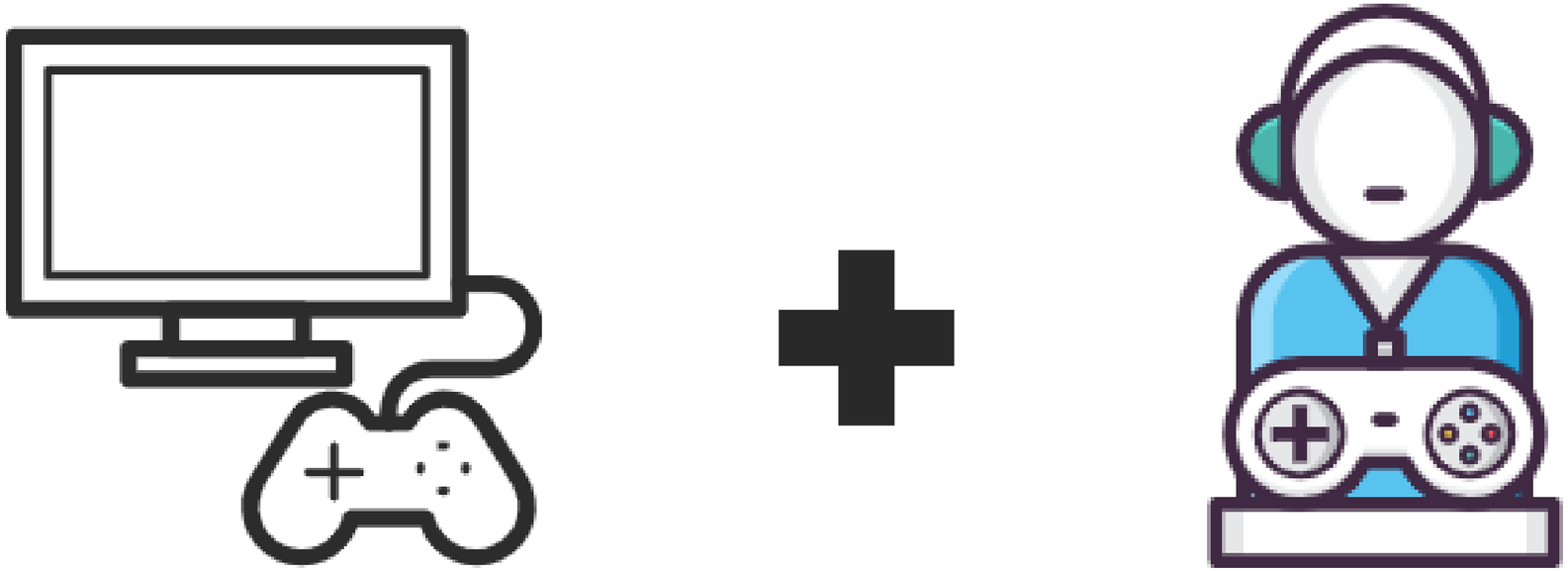
# Suggestions from NetEase

## DO NOT excessively pursue score

# Reconstruct perceptions and trust of decision-makers

Focus on assisting projects with resources, instead of establishing more projects

## Keep user engagement during R&D



**To hear users' voice during R&D,**
**thus to help decision-makings through users' suggestions**

# Takeaway

1. To inspire audiences on early evaluations on games and make them pay attention to that, and get audiences know about NetEase’s definitions and key factors on those.

2. Approaches to organizing effective evaluations at an early stage to evaluate whether your game is a "good idea" or not.

3. Experience and lessons from NetEase on early evaluation.