

ROOM AT THE TOP

Room at the Top is a massively multiplayer card game designed for in-person engagement that challenges assumptions and biases about creative collaboration. In pursuit of success, how do we weigh our own vision with our team's strategy? How do we seek out collaborators and what does that tell us about ourselves? Create, negotiate, and compete in a race to achieve success!

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Where collaboration meets competition

In creative industries, who is on your team matters. Research points to the importance of diversity - in race, gender, intelligence type, and more - in boosting team creativity, problem-solving, and overall efficacy. Yet for all our knowledge about the potential unlocked by diverse and inclusive group settings, we still struggle to collaborate across differences --choosing, even unconsciously, to work with people "like us." While gender and racial inequities in the games industry, in Silicon Valley, and in Hollywood have received wide news coverage lately, it is not a new problem. So we need new solutions. This game is an intervention.



Room at the Top is a massively multiplayer card game for groups from 12-200 people run by a facilitator. Players take on the role of interplanetary media-makers and compete both as individuals and groups to win the top prize in an intergalactic media festival. Over the course of the game, players hailing from four different planets are challenged to collaborate to create the best creative work, but must pit their individual goals against that of the group. These goals are designed to highlight real-world biases, so players are motivated to work with people

similar to them (from the same planet, wearing the same shoes, etc.) to achieve a personal victory. Like in the real world, some players are more powerful than others because of the resources they (and their home planet) bring to the table. Players must balance power and influence, personalities, and creative output to win. The game provokes players to weigh their own motivations against the creative goals of their group, but provides a safe space for players to test, experiment, and challenge their notions of what it means to collaborate with people who the player might deem an Other. The game period ends with a rich facilitated discussion that prompts players into important conversations about competition, team-building, community, creativity, bias, and knowing oneself as a way to prepare to work best with others. *Room at the Top* builds the foundation for self-reflection and generates a safe place dialogue about how to promote a culture of open communication about implicit bias, inclusivity, and collaboration.



Innovation Through Creative Play

Room at the Top was incubated at the Emerson Engagement Lab, an applied research and design lab dedicated to reimagining civic engagement for a mediated culture. At the Lab, we work with partners to co-design solutions to the most pressing problems in democracy and governance, including participation gaps, gender or racial discrimination, lack of basic media literacies, youth exclusion, and gaps in public health practices. Our research and practice are influenced by the fields of media studies, communications, human centered design, and cultural studies. Our research ranges from basic research about play and learning to specific program evaluations. Past and current partners for our research include: Red Cross/Red Crescent, United Nations Development Programme, World Wildlife Fund, the Knight Foundation, The World Bank Group, UNICEF, Microsoft New England, and the MacArthur Foundation.



This game was designed to find a new approach to tackling a topic most people find difficult to talk about: inclusion and implicit bias within one's own community. People from under-represented or minority groups (women, people of color, people who identify as LGBTQ, people from socio-economically disadvantaged groups) don't need to be told again that they deserve a chance--and people who do have privilege often get defensive before the conversation can even start. The game addresses extremely emotionally and politically charged topics by creating a safe distance, locating them in another universe. By using colorful planets with no real world analogues instead of race, class and gender, the game enables players to frame the conversations around abstracts, and then move into specifics when they wish. Players can have a better chance to step outside their personal experiences (and their privilege--or lack thereof) and inhabit their role within the game. Banks wanted playing the game to be enjoyable and illuminating about bias for everyone--no matter who they are or how much they know about bias walking into the game.



Room at The Top is based off of years of extensive research with media professionals and young people who aspire to join these industries to understand the ways in which biases disrupt and hinder creative collaboration. Research directly informed the game mechanics and Banks used a participatory design method for creating the game. In creating this game, Banks wanted to build a tool that encouraged conversations about difference, creativity, and collaboration where everyone could find common ground and speak about difficult topics from a shared experience. We need innovative ways to talk about our differences--because when you reach for the stars, there's room at the top to bring along others, too.



Learn more about the Engagement Lab at www.elab.emerson.edu and @EngageLab

