Escape room structure/path

Educational goals of the games and other factors, such as time restrictions or level of difficulty, usually determine the escape room structure or, simply put, the path of puzzles. Although the possibilities are many, below are the core approaches which are most widely used.

1.   Sequential structure (or linear path): this is when puzzles are done in order. So, players have to solve a puzzle in order to be able to progress with the second one and so on. This puzzle path is easier both for the creators to design as well as the players to solve. However, there are a couple of drawbacks that have to be taken into consideration. The advancement of the game might rely exclusively on one puzzle and, if the puzzle can be worked on by only one person, this means that the rest of the team will do nothing until the puzzle is solved (player bottleneck).

2.   Open structure: this is when several puzzles can be worked on in any order. Obviously, this does not refer to the final puzzle (meta-puzzle) to escape the room, which has to be worked on only when all the other puzzles have been solved. This type of design increases the difficulty of the game partly because players have no clear indication where they should start from. Yet, this type of design is preferable for large groups of players because it gives all the players the opportunity to get involved in puzzle solving and decreases the likelihood for bottlenecks.

3.   Path-based structure: this structure means that the game consists of several paths of puzzles before the final meta-puzzle takes place. It resembles the open structure but is more difficult because players have to succeed in a series (path) of puzzles and not in single puzzles before they are able to escape the room.

4.   Hybrid structure: this refers to a combination of the basic structures. For example, there might be multiple paths that intersect or paths that have different ending points. The puzzles are provided either altogether in the beginning of the game or gradually throughout the game. In this way, a complex, hybrid structure might be produced, such as that of a pyramid.

Linear pathways are easier for students to understand, therefore less guidance is needed, and progression is easier to monitor.

Reference

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