



## LEADERSHIP COMMUNICATION IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD: EXPERIENCES FROM MULTIPLAYER ONLINE GAMERS (MOGs)

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Received: 6 May 2025 • Accepted: 23 July 2025 • Published: 7 September 2025

### *Abstract*

*Online gaming has become a popular pastime and an integral part of modern life, especially among young people. The rise of online gaming communities and the increasing popularity of multiplayer games have led to the belief that interactions within these games can extend beyond the virtual world. Despite this, using multiplayer online games to foster leadership development remains relatively uncommon. The limited research on leadership within online gaming suggests that effective communication, structure, and direction are essential for successful leadership. This study aims to explore how online gamers experience leadership communication in multiplayer online games (MOGs) and how gameplay influences leadership behaviours. A qualitative research approach was employed, involving in-depth interviews with ten Mobile Legends players to gain insights into their gaming experiences and perspectives. The findings revealed several valuable experiences associated with playing the game, including developing a learning mindset, understanding individuals, building confidence, encouraging participation, fostering adaptability, and creating a sense of belonging. Mobile Legends may significantly influence leadership behaviours, such as role complementation, communication, teamwork, coordination, and personal growth. This study contributes to the understanding of online gamers' behaviour by offering theoretical and practical insights into leadership communication skills in the virtual world.*

**Keywords:** Leadership Behaviours; Leadership Communication; Mobile Legends; Multiplayer Online Games; Online Gaming

**Cite as:** Cheah, J. L. S. (Year). Leadership Communication in The Virtual World: Experiences From Multiplayer Online Gamers (MOGs). *Asian People Journal*, 8(SI1), 77-91.

## INTRODUCTION

The market for mobile games has expanded incredibly quickly over the past 10 years (Dela Cruz et al., 2024). According to Data.ai (2024), over 1 billion games were downloaded, \$1.6 billion was spent, and an astounding 6.4 billion hours were spent playing mobile games per week worldwide in 2023 alone. In addition, mobile gaming overtook console and PC gaming to take the top spot in terms of revenue in 2022. Globally, there are an astonishing 1.75 billion mobile gamers, and by 2026, that figure is predicted to increase to 2.2 billion (Statista, 2024a). In this expanding industry, multiplayer online games, or MOGs, play a significant role. With player interaction and the formation of close-knit organisations known as "guilds" or "clans," these games generate incredibly immersive and competitive virtual environments that function as communities within the game (Hao et al., 2024). Mobile MOGs have grown in popularity as a result of the ubiquitous availability of mobile devices and the internet, allowing players to play these games from anywhere at any time. The ease with which game advertisements and player recommendations may reach a wide audience has contributed to the rise in popularity of social networking sites. Unfortunately, there is still a lack of recognition for studies on mobile games. Most studies to date have focused on how mobile games affect children's educational performance (Li et al., 2022) and how mobile game addiction affects health issues, mental disorders, and social challenges (Abdul Kahar et al., 2023; Gan et al., 2022). The misconception in the public perception is that playing mobile games may only be detrimental to the player, blinding them to the many benefits they offer.

Online games have been proven to have positive outcomes, as there is a great deal to gain from playing games, particularly by collaborating with other players (Chan & Vorderer, 2006). One of the key aspects of interaction within online gaming groups is leadership communication (Johansson, 2018). Online games frequently demand cooperation and good communication between players, which calls for teamwork. Gamers are shown how important it is to delegate tasks and work together towards a common goal, which are skills that are required for successful leaders (Barnett & Coulson, 2010b; Sousaa & Rocha, 2019). With the release of titles like World of Warcraft (WoW), PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG), and Perfect World Mobile, MOGs became increasingly popular across the globe. The most downloaded free multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) game globally as of April 2024 was Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, which generated more than five million combined downloads across Google Play and the Apple App Store (Statista, 2024b).

In recent years, Mobile Legends (ML) has seen tremendous growth in popularity in Malaysia. The game was the second most downloaded title in 2023 and is currently among the most popular among mobile gamers in the nation (Oppotus, 2023). Its increasing popularity has been fuelled by a number of factors, including accessibility, the development of mobile devices, and better internet connectivity. Players in Malaysia were first drawn to ML by word-of-mouth and social media advertisements. The Malaysian community for the game grew quickly as users participated in tournaments and engaged in discussions on forums and other media. The game's popularity was further enhanced by Malaysian e-sports competitions and events. In addition to drawing large audiences in these competitions, which frequently provide lucrative rewards have assisted professional Malaysian ML players in becoming well-known worldwide (Oppotus, 2023). Therefore, this research aims to investigate how online gamers have experienced leadership communication in multiplayer online games and to determine how gameplay influences leadership behaviours. This study can offer insightful information about how the idea of leadership communication functions in a virtual group setting.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Leadership Communication in Virtual Gaming**

Leadership communication involves conveying organisational vision and providing subordinates with clear, understandable instructions and tasks. The way a leader communicates with their subordinates inspires them to perform harder by appealing to their motivations (Cheah, 2021; Fauzan, 2023). Teams of players in MOGs, like working teams, are tasked with achieving a shared objective that necessitates the efficient distribution of limited resources in a competitive setting (Barnett & Coulson, 2010a). When more players join the game, they can interact with each other in the shared virtual world as if they were all there in person, and players work together to achieve a common goal.

Players organise into networks, groups, and organisations that need collaboration and coordination. Mechanisms of leadership and communication develop to help these processes. As a result, MOG environments resemble actual teams vying for a competitive edge in the marketplace. MOGs, being a virtual setting, offer avenues to explore the crucial functions of leadership communication in the efficacy of virtual teams. Lisk et al. (2012) found that people's motivation to play online games is rooted in leadership. According to them, players who score highly on this factor prefer to play in groups rather than alone. They are frequently confident people who naturally gravitate towards leadership roles in social situations. These players' aggressiveness presumably enables them to function as successful group leaders in the game, while indecisive leaders frequently cause their groups to disintegrate.

Since many MOGs are intricate systems, the communities and groups that play them must complete progressively difficult goals, many of which require well-planned and coordinated work (Mysirlaki & Paraskeva, 2019). Complex activities usually result in more interdependent positions within a group, an increased requirement for well-orchestrated cooperation, as well as reciprocal communication and feedback. Put simply, the more complicated the tasks, the more communication and teamwork are required. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that formal and emergent leadership is a crucial component of many player organisations' social structure. Besides, online games have been proposed as a potential tool for leadership development (Hao et al., 2024). This makes sense because the process of creating the task, through coordination and collaboration with other players, will enhance the thinking process that frequently requires decisive action, providing a great deal of long and short leadership experiences. Furthermore, games reward players to work together to solve problems by offering incentives, relevant information, and features that facilitate better teamwork, such as team communication (Ee & Cho, 2012). The coordination, cooperation, conflict resolution and persuasive abilities acquired in those large-scale online games can be applied to real-life situations. It has been observed by Ee and Cho (2012) that young professionals with extensive gaming experience display the same attitudes as much more experienced managers. These individuals are more likely to be less authoritarian and are equally comfortable taking criticism from superiors and peers in both group and one-on-one situations. Similarly, Barnett and Coulson (2010b) claimed that teamwork fosters a positive environment, encouraging players to support each other emotionally. This can help maintain morale during tough matches and improve overall performance. Thus, playing these games demands teamwork with other players, which calls for leadership and communication skills. Lately, scholars have started to investigate whether these mobile games help people develop their leadership abilities. There is some evidence that these games can help with specific talents, but since these are adult players, it is unclear whether the games are helping create newly developed or previously unspoken leadership skills or whether they are just opportunities for established skills to surface.

### **Multiplayer Online Games (MOGs)**

Chan and Vorderer (2006) define "multiplayer" as the capacity for players to play simultaneously. While "game" can refer to a range of playing styles, from highly scripted to more free-form, and they define "online" as using the Internet. Multiplayer online games, or MOGs, are therefore defined as games that allow thousands of users to play simultaneously in a virtual environment (Mysirlaki & Paraskeva, 2019). Real-time communication and interaction between thousands of players is possible with online gaming. The game worlds are continuously available online, which allows for the emergence of complex social structures, reputation systems and economies (Chan & Vorderer, 2006).

Today, millions of people worldwide enjoy playing MOGs. Multiplayer games offer a unique and immersive experience that can connect players in ways that traditional single-player games cannot (Spyridonis et al., 2018). Online games give players access to a virtual environment where they can interact and take part in various activities. They will improve social, creative, and management abilities, among other real-life skills, during the process. The hierarchical leadership structure of online gaming guilds allows individuals to accomplish tasks in groups (Chen et al., 2008). According to Hao et al. (2024), game leaders engage in organisational and strategic tasks like recruiting, evaluating, inspiring, rewarding, and retaining team members, tasks that are similar to real-world tasks.

When it comes to MOGs, the majority of player organisations fit the definition of collaborative groups because they are (usually) attempting to achieve a common objective. The group has a shared goal that none of the members alone can achieve, cooperation amongst group members requires communication (which can occur in person or through a computer), cooperation can transcend organisational boundaries (Stohl & Walker, 2002). One important question is how much of the knowledge and abilities gained from playing MOGs can be transferred to other situations, like working in a virtual team. Research indicates that leadership skills gained from gaming may, at least in less complicated circumstances, improve performance in real-world tasks (Barnett & Coulson, 2010a). Numerous online gaming communities, such as the Mobile Legends community, have emerged as a result of this propensity. Every player in the community, both new and experienced, will have thoughts and stories on how they gain skills when playing Mobile Legends.

### **Mobile Legends (ML)**

Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, often referred to as Mobile Legends, is a Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) mobile game developed and published by Moonton. On July 14, 2016, it was initially made available for iOS and Android devices. Since its release, ML has become incredibly popular in many countries, including Malaysia. It is now regarded as one of the top mobile MOBA games worldwide, rivalling games like League of Legends and Dota2. The game's interface has been streamlined for mobile devices, but it still offers an experience akin to MOBAs played on PCs. Its captivating gameplay, eye-catching visuals, and intuitive mechanics are major factors in its success (Hosky & Wibowo, 2023).

ML's competitive gaming environment requires leadership, which is itself a key factor in achieving success in various fields. To effectively guide and coordinate the team members in this game, players must possess strong leadership qualities. These games let the player design their character and the formation of communities, shared identities and social customs within the game world itself fosters the growth of an online gaming culture (Chen et al., 2008; Siitonen, 2009). The Malaysian ML community is actively engaged through frequent updates, special events, and the introduction of features that capture players' attention. In order to increase the number of players

and maintain the game's appeal, Moonton also works with regional influencers and celebrities. Consequently, ML has emerged as a noteworthy phenomenon in Malaysia, nurturing a vibrant community and augmenting the expansion of e-sports within the nation. It is still one of the most popular games in Malaysia and has established a solid foothold in the country's mobile gaming sector in recent years (Oppotus, 2023).

Indeed, ML is very popular among younger and even elderly generations. ML players engage in the game for a variety of somewhat common reasons. Many use this as a hobby or distraction, while some use it as a way to make some money since they may make money by livestreaming their games (Hosky & Wibowo, 2023). Since this online game is already a part of the Southeast Asian Games' event sports competition and even the global arena of online games, some people even aspire to become famous ML players. As a result, research on leadership communication in Mobile Legends might offer insightful information on how the idea of leadership functions in a group setting.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Method**

The research aims are to explore how players perceive leadership communication in multiplayer online games and how gameplay influences leadership behaviours. To that end, a qualitative method was used in this study. The semi-structured interviewing method is appropriate for this study since the study aims to learn about the experiences and viewpoints of informants who play MOGs, particularly Mobile Legends. Mobile Legends were chosen because of their impact on leadership development.

The reason this study addresses the Mobile Legend game in Malaysia is that the game has gained immense popularity in the country, becoming a cultural phenomenon among various age groups. Its widespread adoption offers a unique opportunity to explore the experiences and potential impacts of playing MOGs on Malaysian youngsters. Additionally, understanding the role of Mobile Legend in the Malaysian gaming community can provide insights into broader trends in digital entertainment and its influence on local culture.

### **Informants**

Purposive sampling is employed. Purposive sampling is a method of selecting samples based on predetermined standards or factors (Suri, 2011). The requirements for informants to be selected are individuals who are actively participating in playing Mobile Legends and are between the ages of 18 and 28. This population was chosen because they are digital natives who have grown up with mobile gaming as an integral part of their entertainment culture (Chang & Lin, 2019). They are more likely to have in-depth experience with the game mechanics, updates, and community interactions. Additionally, all informants are either students or working adults, actively engaging in the game for several years. Each informant has also held leadership positions within the game, allowing them to provide valuable insights into leadership dynamics and communication in the gaming context.

### **Data Collection**

Interviews were conducted with ten informants who have played ML to explore their experiences with the game and if they had seen any considerable changes in their leadership behaviours outside of the game. Every interview lasted for thirty to forty-five minutes. Cisco Webex was found to be the most suitable platform to interview the informants. With Webex, researchers can conduct in-person interviews and record the entire conversation for

transcription at a later date. Additionally, this was also done for convenience in the study since the potential informants were dispersed throughout the country and because the majority of the communication in the selected game occurred through online conversations, which made it a "natural" way to talk about game-related topics.

The interviews were conducted in a comfortable language, either in English or Bahasa Malaysia. The researchers transcribed the video recordings of every session and translated selected statements from Bahasa Malaysia into English. A copy of the transcript and the pre-selected themes were sent to the informants following the transcription of the interview conversations. Every informant was asked to verify whether the findings accurately reflected their perspective and reflected their intention, as well as the veracity of the information (Suri, 2011).

### **Data Analysis**

The data from the interviews were coded and transcribed. The opinions and points of view of each informant will subsequently be evaluated through an analysis of the transcriptions. Researchers examined the themes and patterns of the data from the leadership communication perspective. The NVivo12 software was utilised to analyse all of the data that had been gathered. The interview transcripts were read, and their key themes were highlighted using this software. The transcripts were then subjected to an open coding procedure to determine the themes and subthemes.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Leadership Communication in Mobile Legends**

Multiplayer online games (MOGs) provide a three-dimensional (3D) virtual environment for thousands of players to engage with and explore. These games are described as a relatively realistic environment where the player is represented by an avatar or character, interacting with other characters, under the constraints of rules defined by the developers and by the players (Siitonen, 2009).

Leadership skills and online games may seem unrelated, but this study has shown that they are connected.

*I have spent hours playing video games with friends, which has given me a lot of insights and ideas that I have applied outside of games. The biggest discovery of them all is that online games can be a great tool to develop and teach leadership skills. (Informant 5)*

Informant 4 said that he has become a better leader by practicing his leadership skills through online games. Similarly, Informant 1, who is a sales manager, also honed his leadership qualities from online gameplay. The experience they gained includes utilizing game to learning mindset, understanding individual strengths, building confidence, team participation, adaptability and sense of belonging.

### **Learning Mindset**

Learning is essential to all individuals, including playing online games (Nur Fadziana, 2020). The ability to pick up knowledge from other players is one of the main advantages of teamwork in online games. Playing with teammates who have different playstyles and strategies helps players improve their talents because it exposes them to fresh perspectives and ideas.

*As soon as you start playing the game and continue until the end, you are fully engaged in an endless educational journey. This stems from the fundamental idea behind games, which is to become an expert at them. The only possible way to master is to adopt a learning attitude. (Informant 6)*

Thus, acknowledging the significance of this behaviour outside of gaming is a valuable lesson. Applying this idea to leadership abilities, a successful leader should constantly have an open mind and be eager to learn, particularly in a collaborative environment where receiving feedback, going over mistakes made, and actively absorbing information from the surroundings can provide valuable insights and opportunities to assist in achieving the intended result.

### **Understanding Individual Strengths: Every Hero is Unique**

Like the heroes in Mobile Legends, every member of the team is unique. Their styles, aptitudes, and strengths differ. For this reason, it's critical to recognise and handle each one differently.

*Each team member is unique, like the heroes in Mobile Legends. They have different skills, strengths, and styles. That's why it's essential to understand and treat them individually. (Informant 6)*

Moreover, knowing the strengths and weaknesses of the team can help to decide on the best strategy and the distribution of the workload. A great leader knows how to effectively deploy each piece in different scenarios.

As Informant 9 stated that each hero has a specific role (tank, fighter, assassin, support, etc.). Teamwork ensures that players fulfill their roles effectively, providing balance and synergy within the team. For example, tanks can absorb damage while fighters focus on eliminating opponents.

### **Building Confidence**

The majority of informants believe that learning through games is advantageous, particularly for boosting confidence, solidifying previously learnt material, and acquiring new knowledge.

Like players in ML, who have their own "heroes" to manage, enhance, and employ to win the game, leaders also have special and precious "heroes" within their organisations that can assist followers in achieving the ultimate objective.

*These "heroes" are dedicated, industrious leaders. Managing an organization and being a leader are similar to playing Mobile Legends. Leaders are the "heroes," while subordinates are the actors. Each leader has a unique identity, personality, skills, and area of speciality. Therefore, in order for you to allocate your "heroes" to what they do as a leader, you must be well familiar with them. (Informant 5)*

While Informant 7 added,

*There are enemies to battle with in ML and an organization, we have problems and challenges to overcome. But again, we have leaders who can be like heroes. Leaders just have to utilize the subordinates who can be like Marksman, Assassin, Mage, Support, Fighter, and Tank, to be our best weapon in achieving certain goals.*

For instance, those with low self-esteem would log on to the game in an attempt to feel strong and capable, which gave them a sense of accomplishment. In a similar vein, people who were under stress in the real world would play and lose themselves in the fantasy realm as a way to decompress.

### **Team Participation**

The way tasks are assigned to team members frequently reflects how real-world organizations operate, with a designated leader guiding the group as a whole towards a successful conclusion. There are certain distinctions between MOGs and actual team leadership. For example, if earlier attempts to kill an adversary have failed, the leader must consider alternative strategies, redistribute work as necessary, pay attention to the opinions and ideas of other members, and relentlessly inspire the group to finish the mission.

Given how team leadership and real-world teamwork are comparable, it's probable that team leaders in MOGs have abilities that translate well into team-based activities outside of the game.

*ML is more than just assaulting and destroying your adversaries or killing them. Collaborating with your allies, you must develop your tactics and abilities to safeguard your own base and achieve your ultimate objective, winning the game. (Informant10)*

Informant 4 added, "In order to accomplish a mission, we must work closely and coordinate with our teammates, just as you must with your subordinates in the workplace. As a team, we have to choose and manage our own hero or character and each of us needs to understand how to use our hero's abilities and powers strategically."

### **Adaptability**

According to the findings, the majority of gamers believe they have developed a stronger bond with their virtual friends compared to their in-person counterparts. Informant 3 said that playing ML is more to me than just a game.

*Like millions of other people, I also like to play ML. I play when I have free time, before bedtime, or when I'm stressed out and exhausted. However, I also play ML because, despite the fact that I haven't met any of my fellow players yet, I believe it to be a special means of fostering cooperation and teamwork. (Informant 3)*

In a dynamic game like ML, situations can change rapidly. A cohesive team can adapt to new strategies, adjust its playstyle, and respond to the enemy's tactics effectively.

*Through critical analysis of game mechanics, strategic planning, and situational adaptation, players can improve their capacity for critical thought and well-informed decision-making under duress. These abilities are beneficial in academic, professional, and personal settings in addition to the gaming world. (Informant 8)*

This study demonstrates how player behaviour and communication dynamics in playing MOGs are impacted by players' ability to adapt to particular changes in identity, norms, and language. Players' opinions, attitudes, and interactions change significantly as a result of group interactions inside MOG.

### **Sense of Belonging**

The strong sense of community experienced within ML guilds highlights the potential for virtual environments to facilitate social integration and belonging (Lu et al., 2014). Beyond the boundaries of the game, players can create lasting relationships by connecting with diverse people in the virtual world.

Interviews with players who were part of ML guilds underscored the importance of social connections within the game. Many informants emphasised the significant role their guilds played in fostering a sense of belonging and community. These virtual affiliations often extended beyond the game itself, leading to lasting friendships and interactions outside the game realm.

*ML have played a definitive role in the development of new leaders. The lessons that I have learned here should be acknowledged as dependent on each other, for us to work effectively. (Informant 10)*

Additionally, the majority of informants reported an enhanced sense of community and belonging through participation in guilds and groups within ML. Players also indicated improvements in real-life communication and teamwork skills as a result of their in-game experiences.

Thus, the findings suggest that ML not only serves as an entertainment platform but also as a valuable tool for socialisation and skill development. Furthermore, guilds in ML also foster a strong group identity, which in turn enhances players' sense of belonging and social integration.

### **Gameplay Influences Leadership Behaviours**

Previous research has shown that skills acquired in online games can be applied in real-world settings (Hao et al., 2024; Surjumnong, 2014). Playing the ML may undoubtedly offer great insight into several areas of leadership communication.

The findings revealed that MOGs influence leadership behaviour such as role complementation, communication, teamwork, strategic coordination and personal growth. Because of their nature, MOGs encourage players to form extensive social networks and use leadership and teamwork abilities to establish and uphold social structures, including decision-making, inspiring others, negotiating, and resolving conflict.

### **Role Complementation**

Every team member should be placed in the best position by their leader (Bahari & Fauzi, 2023). This includes allocating each team member's tasks and responsibilities according to their areas of expertise. Clear roles are essential to ensure the players understand that the leader still expects those tasks to be completed on time.

*The first lesson is knowing your role as a leader. Playing ML has taught me that a great leader understands the parts of his role and how each of the "teammates" (partners) fit together as a whole. (Informant 4)*

*As their leader, you've got to guide and mentor them. Sometimes, you'll need to lead the charge and show them how to turn a losing game around. (Informant 7)*

Informant 3 advised treating the team like in-game friends, a chilled-out attitude often fuels the best

strategies. But remember that clear roles are important and make sure that the team know that the leader still expect those tasks to be done on time.

Thus, the key is creating a strong bond of trust and respect in the team. Without these elements, the team synergy will be as uncoordinated as a disorganized.

### **Communication**

In order to be effective in leadership management, good communication is crucial. A leader needs to be able to offer directions, receive feedback, and maintain a positive team environment (Sunarto et al., 2019). Effective communication is vital for sharing information about enemy movements, coordinating attacks, and calling for help. Teams that communicate well can respond quickly to threats and opportunities.

*Yes, communication plays a vital role in games, for example, Let's say your teams' objective would be to "eliminate" the other side, you are in a "war zone", so every decision and information is vital for the team and the mission, in the middle of this game you encounter an enemy in the distance, the correct move would be to communicate this information so that the team can decide on the best action course. Whether you choose to communicate or not this information can decide between a win or a loss scenario. (Informant 8)*

*If you want to have your game plan followed, then you've got to listen to your team's ideas too. If the leader messed up in matches, and so will you. We need loads of feedback from our team to improve our gameplay and listen to our leader. (Informant 2)*

Furthermore, one of the challenges about playing online games is that communication is a skill that is probably the most important for effective leadership. Language and time zone disparities hinder the need for clear, timely, and consistent communication. With players located all over the world, communication difficulties are evident.

According to Informant 3's count, five different languages are spoken in a single chat discussion in ML, which included English, Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin, Cantonese and Hokkien. "I've also played in coalitions with a mix of Chinese languages. We are both so close to and so far from the universal translator that science fiction films seem to envision when I watch fights between people speaking different languages".

*In my gaming environment, people who shared the same language and time zone frequently collaborated at times that worked best for them. As long as the leadership's intentions were understood, these linguistic and temporal difficulties became tools for planning rather than barriers to it. (Informant 1)*

This findings showed how a clear understanding of the situation and expressing valuable information in a format that is understandable by others can mean the difference between a failed project or mission. Once everyone is on the same page on communication, the progress is far higher.

### **Teamwork**

It takes a team to win huge fights, and this is especially true in intensely competitive games like Mobile Legends.

It wouldn't be possible to use the other lessons in combination with the final, crucial concept, that is teamwork. One important factor for the success of teamwork is trust, such a small detail, but its impact is huge. When it comes to delegating work there needs to be mutual trust that one will accomplish the mission. Feedback is a critical component of effective teamwork, as it fosters continuous improvement and collaboration. In this context, trust serves as a vital precondition for psychological safety, ensuring that team members feel secure in taking risks and expressing their viewpoints without fear of judgment or retribution. Because of their growing complexity, video games are advantageous for the study of leadership and can enhance social, creative, and management skills.

Therefore, immersive virtual environments can catalyse teamwork. The development of these skills often attributed to the collaborative nature of MOGs, where players engage in a complex, cooperative tasks that require effective team communication and strategic planning.

### **Strategic Coordination**

Another important component of multiplayer gaming is strategy. Players need to devise and use deft techniques to outsmart their rivals in order to win competitive games. This entails assessing the mechanics of the game, knowing the advantages and disadvantages of various characters, and projecting what the other team will do.

*Not only strategic thinking help players win, but also improves cognitive abilities like decision-making, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Players can improve their capacity to evaluate options, analyse difficult circumstances, and make wise judgements under pressure by playing strategy games. These abilities are useful not only in games but also in real-world scenarios like solving problems at work or coming to significant personal decisions. (Informant 3)*

In the game, a leader needs to be able to coordinate strategies and tactics. This entails assigning teammates to the appropriate locations, choosing whether to attack or defend, and making use of each Hero's special set of skills to accomplish team objectives.

*Your team is your group. They are the ones who support you during every game and assist you to achieve success. Thus, treating them well is just as important as honing your gaming strategy (Informant 2).*

Thus, players must collaborate closely to implement strategies effectively, such as coordinating ganks, securing objectives, and defending against enemy advances. Strong teamwork enables us to capitalize on their heroes' strengths while compensating for any weaknesses.

### **Personal Growth**

Informants were also asked which areas of personal growth they felt an improvement in as a result of playing ML. Specifically, a majority reported enhancements in communication, visual attention, critical thinking and problem solving and conflict resolution. Playing as a team allows players to learn from each other, share strategies, and improve their skills collectively. This collaborative environment can lead to better individual and team performance over time. In addition, ML offer the perfect setting for contextual learning, in which users gain knowledge by engaging with social communities.

For example, Informant 7 discovered that playing games improved problem-solving, critical thinking, and visual attention skills as well as real-world learning. This implies that MOGs are a valuable instrument for personal learning.

*I enjoy playing ML, I feel passionate about it, and most of all, I learn. I pick up some skills that I basically use in my job as a leader. (Informant 7)*

The immersive nature and wide selection of activities provided in ML act as inspirational catalysts that inspire players to learn and grow. Specifically, the ability for players to manage their learning environment while taking on the game's difficulties improves continuous engagement. Accordingly, MOGs should be viewed as rich learning environments as much as games, where advancement requires a blend of social interaction and game play.

Therefore, the findings revealed that playing ML provides more than just entertainment, it helps players grow personally and socially. The game encourages a learning mindset as players adapt to new strategies and updates, building adaptability and problem-solving skills. Through teamwork and social interactions, players learn to understand others, gain confidence, and become more active participants. The sense of belonging fostered through team dynamics also contributes to positive social experiences. Moreover, ML helps develop leadership skills like communication, teamwork, coordination, and personal growth, making it more than just a game, it is indeed a platform for skill building.

## **CONCLUSION**

Playing multiplayer online games provides an intriguing setting for examining leadership and communication experiences and practices. While players' experiences and expectations regarding leadership communication in online multiplayer games may differ, one thing is certain: leadership communication is seen as critical to the operation of long-term, goal-driven player organisations. This study highlights that Mobile Legends plays a significant role in developing leadership and communication skills. Research on mobile online games can contribute to the broader field of leadership communication theory, offering new perspectives on how leadership principles can be applied in diverse contexts, including virtual environments like gaming. By exploring leadership communication within the game, this research provides valuable insights into how leadership functions in complex settings. It's important to recognize that Mobile Legends involves many intricate elements, particularly the role of a leader, which warrants further investigation.

Scholars could significantly benefit from exploring the connection between the communication styles necessary for leading traditional physical teams in the real world and those exhibited in game-based virtual teams. This understanding is vital for leaders who aim to identify, hire, and promote individuals capable of excelling in these critical roles. Participation in online, team-oriented, task-based informal learning environments can thus have a lasting impact on personal growth and real-world development. Consequently, online games are no longer just entertainment; they are sophisticated systems that can contribute to research in fields like communication and leadership.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my undergraduate student, Muhammad Aiman Bin Md Dzlan for his invaluable assistance in collecting the data for this paper.

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