



Stanford eCorner

Lessons Learned: Game Development

Erin Turner, *Electronic Arts*; Arcadia Kim, *Electronic Arts*; Nick Earl, *Electronic Arts*

November 12, 2003

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/729/Lessons-Learned-Game-Development>

Kim talks about lessons learned in game development. The first lesson is to focus. You can't build a game unless you know what it is, she says. The second lesson is that with an enormous team, team culture is an issue. EA solved this by dividing the teams into smaller pods with their own leadership, she notes. The pod leaders would all coordinate on reaching milestones.



Transcript

So I'm just going to sort of talk to you about two sort of lessons on the "Return of the King" for the delivery. The first is, 'X really marks the spot'. You cannot build a game until you know what it is. And so we basically held back on anything, any game development going Y until we knew what the game was supposed to be. So we worked on one-quarter of one level until May and didn't allow any other development to happen until we were sure that the game that we were going to be making was going to be fun. And then when we were able to 'go wide', as we say, we built all the other levels, what we did was create a new modular development that allowed for parallel processing. So each level or each new segment of the game actually had its own team, its own milestones, its own leadership, its own culture, and that's how we tried to go fast at that quality level. And we also had the 'X' to sort of say this is the level of quality that you need to go to. And you can have more questions about the toll games process which is sort of how we did that. We had a huge, enormous team.

At the high point we probably had, including QA, like 250 people. I mean, it was ridiculous. And so with that number comes complexity in communication, and so it was--I spent a good portion of the day making sure that the team culture was sound and everybody sort of had contact points within the organization to be able to answer questions. We did these things called 'pods'. Pods are basic cross-functional cells, and this is something that I learned in business school and we were able to apply here, which is pretty cool. Basically we had these small teams that were made up of 15 people that had engineers, artists, designers all working together, all sitting together. And they had their own deadlines, their own sort of milestones. They also had their own leadership. Each person, each of these pods had a leader, and that leader then would coordinate and then that leader would then sort of work with me to make sure that we were coordinating on all the milestones. And that was the only way that we were able to manage a team like that.