



Stanford eCorner

The EA Creative Process

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

November 12, 2003

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/736/The-EA-Creative-Process>

Earl and Kim respond to the question: How do you manage the business imperatives versus the creative imperatives when developing a game? The decision makers at EA are people who really understand the creative side and have generally worked on the production side as well, says Earl, and are therefore able to make more informed decisions.



Transcript

That's right. So he's asking about managing the creative process, the sort of the business imperatives as opposed to the creative imperatives. That is the crux of what I do at each day is to try to understand how creative we can be and how much risk we can take creatively knowing that there is a tremendous amount of dollars at risk. So my response and my gut feeling about that is the people, the general managers, the executive producers, the decision-makers in our business are business people who really understand the creative side and who have generally come up from production have made games. So they have been able to be in both side of the fence and therefore, can make informed decisions about if a product can be successful in the marketplace. That said, we have a pretty serious reliance on a kind of core group of advisers and counselors inside the company who also represent the business end and the creative endeavor. And as a group, we tend to make, hopefully we make, out of 10 decisions, six right ones. We certainly don't make 10 right ones. We make six or seven or maybe eight in a good year but it is really, really tough to know how risky you are going to be. So Grand Theft Auto, if we have done that game, my guess is that we or someone would have walked up to that group and said, "Here is the game.

Here is how it works. Here is a prototype." We probably would have looked at him and said that, "You know what? It just doesn't feel like that is going to work." And we missed a \$300 or \$500-million opportunity because of it. There's also a lot of times when we backed things and it didn't work out, like the Sims. So structurally, one of the ways that we deal with that and it's been part sort of the evolution about sort how teams are developed is by splitting the role of creative and sort of business management, I guess, or risk management. Traditionally, when games sort of were 40 people, the producers was the one making not only the decisions where creatively the product was going to go but also how to manage and develop the ship schedule. And I know that on The Lord of the Rings, this is also one of the reasons why this is very entrepreneurial. The way that we do it in The Lord of the Rings was totally different to the way that we did things in Bond. I mean we were able to make our own choices on structure. The way that we did it in The Lord of the Rings was there were two distinct people that had different responsibilities. One person, all he cared about was the creative, making sure that we're making the best game possible.

He was really concerned about the Metacritic, the rating and the review points. All I really cared about was the game got shipped on time. And I used to always say, "I don't care about where your game is. I'm just here to make sure that we're going to ship this game on time." Of course, that's not true, right? But by actually splitting those two roles, there was a lot of fights. But actually being able to fight in all those topics and sort of being able to do a sort of analysis on the table to make sure that you're making those decisions in a way that matches the project, I think, was key. And so there's structural things that you can

do in order to make sure that you are shipping a great game and making sure that you're hitting that window. I think that that structure is going to continue to evolve or refine itself as each game that we make becomes more and more expensive and also at a higher and higher risk.