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Fetac Work Placement Assignment

Video Game Project Management

The video game industry is one that has been growing year on year world wide, and with the constant growth in modern technology and the introduction of new platforms and delivery methods, it is one where opportunities are constantly arising.

With the wide spread roll out of broadband internet in most modern counties access to games for millions of people has become as simple as clicking on a link.

Tablets, iPhones and Andriod mobile devices have enabled games to be delivered by "App Stores" , and people can play them either at home or on the move. Facebook is also developing its gaming network, and introducing all sorts of additional platforms for games such as first player shooters, puzzle and sports games that were previously unavailable.

To avail of the expanding market, existing established companies and micro start up's alike, are introducing new games all the time.

To take a game from an idea to a completely functional release, takes an incredible array of skills and expertise involving people with a wide range of very different skills.

While games will vary, there are certain things all games will require, that typically will require skills that no 'one' person will have.

These can include script writing to give a story path for the game, artists to flesh out the look of the game, 3d designers to create the characters, environments and objects that that will be involved, sound designers to develop the world in which the player interacts, and programmers that can write the correct code for different types of hardware like PCs, consoles and tablets , to understand the games trying to be played.

However, a successful development and launch of a game will involve more than artists and programmers.

For example, marketing and proper financial management are also key components , and all of the above need to coordinated together efficiently to keep things on track and on budget and this is the role of the Project Manager.

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The day to day role of the project manager may vary from that of junior manager to that of a senior, but the core objective remains the same.

The project managers key responsibilities are to coordinate the process of production , by planning and managing the development prepossess.

This will involve working with all the teams from financial management to the art department , and deciding , given the budgets available to work with, how long can be spent on each aspect.

They are responsible for the optimisation of the time taken to complete tasks.

For example creating from scratch, a character and an environment for it to interact in, is a creative process, as is creating the story path for the game, but results can be achieved with targets and deadlines.

Once the aesthetics have been agreed, certain activities , such as building the environment or the world the game will take place in, will have many processes that are constantly repeated, such as applying materials/textures to walls/floors etc, or applying programming code to objects, and so schedules can be quite accurately be created and deadlines set.

They must communicate with the different teams and individuals, to manage conflict and facilitate cooperation and coordination, all for the unified goal of completing the game.

As games develop changes big and small will constantly arise, that will affect different teams in different ways. For example an artistic change to the visual theme of the game, may seem like a wonderful idea to the art department, and indeed the change may be noticeable better, however a change may only have take the art department a day to complete, but may cause the Textures team 2 weeks to re-texture all the rooms and buildings in the game. It would fall to the project manager to decide how the changes affect the cost versus the benefit, and what effect if any it would have on the overall time line for the delivery of the game.

To be able to deliver this type of project management in the video game environment there are wide range of skills, experience and qualifications required by the project manager.

Video games have come a long way since 'pong' and 'space invaders' , and there is a lot more involved than just programming. For a project manager to successfully understand the wide range of skills required they must be creative and be able to contribute to development stage by working with script writes and art designers, and most of all understand how the impact of decisions made this stage will affect the possibilities and work load required for the 3d modellers and programmers to achieve the desired results.

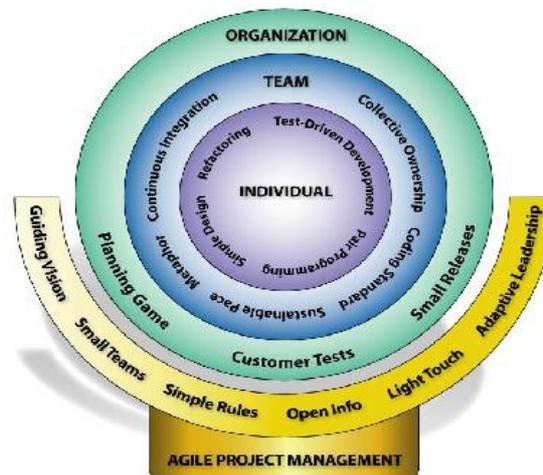
To do this excellent organisation and multi-tasking capabilities are required.

They must also have excellent communication and social skills to interact with different types of personalities stereotypically found in the different types of teams such as programming and marketing.

They must have excellent problem solving abilities and be a good team player while while maintaining an ability to be assertive too.

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A common requirement for employers looking for project managers is that they have an understanding and experience of 'Agile' or 'SCRUM' method of project management. This is a method whereby software is developed based on incremental stages, where problems are solved by teams, as they arise, by working together and adapting and planning rapidly and in flexible ways. It is a concept that promotes interaction through cross-functional teams throughout the development of the product.



Agile Project Management Forces
 Courtesy of Sanjiv Augustine - <http://www.ccpace.com>

So while the world wide market for games is constantly increasing, especially with the ownership of tablets and mobile gaming devices, for the game developer it is one that is heavily saturated with competitors, and so investment in games as staff are decisions that are not taken lightly.

However there are established companies both in Ireland and in Europe that are looking for staff with key skills

There are also excellent opportunities for 'Start-Up' companies, as the Irish government as provided funds for the promotion of software and information technology companies, to help expand export sales.

The National Digital Research Centre (NDRC) Launch Pad Accelerator programme providing hands on mentoring , pre seed investment and workspaces for companies that qualify.

Through Enterprise Ireland there are also programmes available to start up companies, such as New Frontiers , which offers financial management, marketing and sales training. They also have the Internet Growth Accelerator Programme (iGAP) to help companies establish themselves on the internet , and the Competitive Start Fund, which invests €50,000 for a 10% stake in the firm.

So it is an excellent time for people to develop their skills as a project manager, with a wide variety for opportunities available to those prepared for some hard work.