Reflection paper Advanced Topics in Game Engineering

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For this project, I was one of the game designers to create The Dungeon of the Mad Mage.

What went well

The teamwork between Mano and me went very well. The two of us were on one wavelength most of the time and we allowed each other to criticize each other's work. We also accepted it if the other person didn't think something would work out, however hard that could be sometimes. A good gut feeling about something is very important and to be trusted.

One of my favourite moments was the first playtest, where I just came up with this random combat system and we played it for the first time. When I realized that it is a nice and functional combat system I was ecstatic. I'm very happy we went all the way with this combat system. This also really helped the group as we instantly knew what we were working with and what we were going to work towards.

The creation of the GDD and how much work some of us put into it helped with the communication within the group(let me be honest, I didn't do as much work on making the GDD look clean as the others did.). It allowed us to work on our own without having to ask other people. Have a question about a monster? It's in there. Question about a system? It's in there. In the later weeks, this helped Anja a lot to create amazing art.

Something I found very endearing is that the motivation within the team was very high. Everyone was excited to work on the project and always ready to go. It was a very good time working with this team. Everyone was very open about their problems and communicated well.

What went wrong

One thing that went wrong was the communication with Anja and Fahad sometimes. And this was not the communication between them, but more between Anja/Fahad and Mano/Rover. Mano and I kind of entered a bubble sometimes where we just ran through 100 different ideas and decided on something without announcing the change. We changed it in the 5000 words GDD, but that doesn't mean everyone is aware of it.

Task consistency. We found during the meeting with Felix that some people in the group had a hard time doing things when they wanted to because they didn't have any goals they could work on. Anja

couldn't work on art, as the game designer(Mano and myself) didn't finish the monsters/characters/rooms/treasures yet. We kind of followed the waterfall workflow model.

I remember me sitting behind my computer crunching values into Excel documents, importing art and a lot more to make the second playtest. Making a paper card playtest is a lot of work. First to make it on a PC and then to print it out, cut the 100+ cards and sleeve them up to then use them once for a playtest.

Planning between team members is always a tough nut to crack. When does everyone have time to meet? Can you work on that this week? And so much more. Everyone lives their own life and has things to do.

Conclusion and take home messages

Care for you artists! They are awesome people and as a game designer, you really need to talk with them and discuss, what they need. Just ask: "How can we help you to make awesome art?" this will really help. As far as I know now, this comes down to describing what you made as if you are writing documentation for a spaceship. Each nail, each too, and each string of hair need to be described so that the artist can get to work. But do leave some space for creative freedom.

One of the take home messages from the playtests is player agency. It is very important that during a game you don't take away the agency of a player. Each player only has one action they can take during their turn and they need to wait a bit before it is their turn. So to then get to your turn, excited to do something and then get reminded that you need to skip your turn is not very nice.

Felix taught us that one way to get around the "I want to do something, but I can't right now" feeling is to create a list of tasks that need to be done at sometime in time, but don't have any time pressure. This way people can always do more work on the project if they want to.

Don't fall into the waterfall workflow trap. Afterwards, we kind realized that we worked with the waterfall model and it is rather known in the industry that that doesn't work. Switch to Scrum and put some work into doing that.

Figure out a good workflow for card testing, it might just be better to use a digital system to test a card game. Rapid prototyping is super important for a game and as per the nature of a board game, it is very difficult to test. So next time, we would have to test parts of the game instead of testing the whole game each time.

Next time figure out at the start how we are going to plan in meetings. Plan in a regular meeting. This way we can avoid the "When does everyone have time to work on this?" question and have a smoother workflow.

Communicate with the team when something is changed. It is all good that the GDD is changed when changes happen, and that should always happen. But Also shoot a message to the group that something has been changed and note to what/where.

We had fun. During the entire process, we all had fun(As far as I could tell at least). I think this was one of the key elements of why this project went rather well, everyone was just working on something they found fun to do and it keep the mood/motivation within the group high.