

SE Outsourcing strategy at DICE

Mikael Kalms
Programmer/TD, BF1943 PC

mikael.kalms@dice.se

Current SE outsourcing at DICE

1. BF1943 PC development
10 external developers
2. BF3 website development
~3 external developers

BF1943 PC: Project overview

Not enough personnel to develop PC SKU in-house

Nearly all art/design work done on console title

PC SKU development is primarily programming,
and then some design

PC SKU trails console SKU by 1-2 months

Coldwood profile

Located in Umeå (800km away)

Experienced game developers

developed both console and PC games

still a bit of a “garage” company though

somewhat lacking in formal processes

PC SKU team

DICE

Producer – “what shall be done?”

TD - “how shall it be done?”

Business dev - “how much will it cost us?”

Coldwood Interactive

Project Manager

Business dev

Lead Programmer

7 Programmers

UI designer

Getting started

My job: getting the most out of Coldwood

- Initial training
- Getting good workflows in place
- Facilitate communication between offices
- Assisting in defining tasks
- Handling communications DICE <-> CW
- Empowering the team
- Implementation aid

Getting started

Patrick Liu's job: making the game as good as possible

- Game/UI design decisions
- “Administrative” tasks
- (and more which I'm not privy to)

Initial training

Discuss with each developer:

- their role on the team
- their responsibilities
- our responsibilities
- their level of autonomy
- where to turn to if questions arise

Useful, because they are a “garage” company
lacking in formality

Initial training

Have a run-through of how the tools work:

Perforce

Frostbite development environment (Drone,
FrostEd, pipeline, remote console)

Introduce the codebase

Game, Pipeline, configuration scripts

Getting good workflows in place

Goal: CW development should be as smooth and efficient as at DICE

VPN tunnel: slow, takes time to configure. Prepare the stuff below in advance!

local Perforce proxy (cache) - works well
local data-build cache – works well

Ensure that all pieces of the Frostbite development environment works (takes some time)

Communication between offices

Goal: make inter-office communication less of a chore

Get to know the team

Build and maintain personal relationships

Email and text-chat is not enough!

Brief morning meetings over phone, every day

On-site visits: once per month, 2 days

Day 1: planning

Day 2: handle implementation issues

Communication between offices

Email – works well

MSN – works well

Phone – works well

Skype – didn't try yet

Twitter, MSN Groups – didn't try yet

Desktop sharing – issues with VPN tunnel

Overall: works well

Defining tasks

We could just send specifications, but they function better with a little bit of hand-holding

But we try to push this over to their project manager

Works reasonably well; weak project manager at
CW

Handling communications between offices

Act as an intermediary during inter-office contact

Allows throttling of information:
manage disturbance level at DICE,
don't worry CW with things outside their control

Improves our insight into the project

Quick response times from me make them more
prone to ask in the future

Works well – I'm not a choke point

Empowering the team

Define the boundaries of each developer clearly
Ask for results, let them devise solutions

“I don't care, so you'll have to decide”

Empowering the team

- > personal investment in the product
- > high quality games

Works well!

Implementation aid

Implement things which require a lot of coordination/input from DICE developers

Not satisfactory: I'm stretched too thin

Attempting to move more of implementation over to CW, and move some non-implementation tasks to others at DICE

Measuring progress

We have a monthly milestone plan, and a checklist of UI/code features for each milestone

CW's payment tied to us accepting a milestone

So far so good, but the real test of CW is during the QA phase

Works OK... but suggestions welcome!

Differences to a “base-line” outsourcing gig

CW developers have domain specific experience and they are empowered

- they can work with a minimal spec, do design decisions, without constant contact with DICE
- no need for an on-site DICE person at CW

Roles filled at DICE

Risk analyst

Implementation analyst

On-the-fly documentation writer

"Errand boy"

Designer (all specializations)

Modus operandi: enable Coldwood to work
efficiently

BF3 website development

External devs also live in Stockholm

Almost like internal developers:

- Integrated into team
- Work at DICE office several days a week

Practical reasons:

- 1) Better communications with game team
- 2) VPN trouble when accessing EA network

Questions?

Anyone?

Thank you.

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