# Tekstivastine podcastille: Generalists and Specialists- Supporting Different Orientations In Games Education

Speakers:  Wanda O Rly, Teemu Vilén (COO Makea Games), Jere Lamberg (Jamk)

**Wanda**

Welcome to the DGC podcast, brought to you by Expa Game Business Cooperative and Jamk University of Applied Sciences. I'm your hostess, Wanda O'Rly, and here we discuss the game industry, games, education and the bridge between them and any related topics and projects. Today in the studio with me is the COO of Tampere based studio Makea games Teemu Vilen. Welcome!

**Teemu**

Hello. Nice to be here.

**Wanda**

We are happy to have you. And from Jamk University of Applied Sciences joining us is games education specialist Jere Lamberg welcome.

**Jere**

Thank you.

**Wanda**

So the umbrella of this entire podcast series revolves around similar topics making the industry accessible and reviewing games education from the point of view of professionals to keep it relevant and to and up to date with industry needs.

**Wanda**

In our previous episode, I was discussing the pathways to employment for juniors and fresh graduates of game industry, together with Mika Tammenkoski of Meta Core and Kalle Raijonkari from Jamk. Today, our focus will be more on the perspective of a small and mid-sized studios. So let's start with a question for Teemu. Teemu I know that Makea games is best known for the upcoming title Super Moves, but before becoming the operational lead in Makea, you've also done a considerable career at Kuuasema, as a designer and a producer. And before that, you

yourself have been a vocational school teacher in games and animation at Sata Edu. So starting with the small question, how would you summarize your professional identity?

Teemu

I have never been asked that question, and that's an interesting one. I would say in Finnish, it's easy to say I think it would be "välimallin jätkä" in English it could be generalist. I think I'm a, generalist in the sense if you look at my history of set design producing, now I'm in management, I have done coding. I have coded several commercial games so generalist, but I think why I'm now in management is the fact that, I kind of have, let's say, tended to watch like, teams and helping teams. That's, that's my main thing. Yeah. I don't know if this answer to anything,

Wanda

I think it's a very nice and kind of, broad, answer to the question, perhaps as a follow up. could you elaborate? Do you have any skills or, like, benefits from other types of, professional roles that you have had outside games that come into play in your generalist identity?

Teemu

outside of games? Well, actually, I have done some producing, and also software programing in, like military industries with drones back in the day. Yeah, that's something that that comes to mind right now.

Wanda

That's very interesting. just brought that up because like, we discussed last time the true nature of the game industry. So that's, people of our age have never been into games education before.

Wanda

We kind of came to the industry. So we've learned our skill set somewhere else. So just wanted to probe a little bit what kind of background you have there. But thanks for sharing and to include Jere also to the discussion. I would start with a warm up question for you. Speaking of generalists and specialists, how would you evaluate the Jamk bit? That is business information technology program. Is the program designed to produce aspiring generalists to the industry, or is it more leaning towards like specialists or both?

Jere

Well, I would like to say that we, produce both, the way that the program is set up is that in the first year, everyone kind of does the same thing. Everyone learns the basics of programing, game engines, graphics, etc. so they get all kind of like a basis that they can build, further

knowledge upon. And then on the second year onwards, people can specialize in what they, feel like they want to specialize in. So if someone really wants to go hardcore on programing, for example, they can do that, but they can also split kind of 5050 if someone is interested in, like technical art type of stuff so they can study game engines and then for example, 3D, modeling animation, whatever, visual effects, etc..

Jere

So it leaves quite a lot for the student to decide what would they like to focus on. But I feel like, for each and everyone they get at least a small base of everything. So there isn't a person who just know only one thing. And that thing only.

Wanda

Well, I think that's very, very crucial in the sense that, making games is a team sport. And, you always need to understand at least a little bit that what the person next to you is doing. So. Yeah. definitely. what would you say about that Teemu?

Teemu

So, I think that's a good kind of basis, also for generalists because that doesn't mean I don't know anything very well. That's, that's a wrong, wrong definition of a generalist. And I think, knowing, a bit of everything that's a generalist, but a generalist, oftentimes has something like one strong discipline, for example. That's my experience. I don't know if you agree with me.

Jere

Yes, I do agree. So quite often, to my students, I speak about people's people. So we want to have that broad range of various skills that we know to some degree. But you always want to have some deep knowledge. Or in one field at least, it could be in multiple fields, but at least in one field. So you you don't want to be a jack of all trades, master of none. You want to be a jack of all trades, master of one

Teemu

Or some.

Jere

Yeah.

Wanda

That's poetic. Yes. Awesome. Awesome. perhaps to, elaborate on that. what kind of, like, industry knowledge or business training do the students get? I mean, if you think about the role of a generalist, it usually means that you are also able to put some things together. And that usually requires business knowledge about the operation environment where you are in.

Jere

So how would you comment on that? well, we have if we think about like studies, we have courses about just like game industry in general, we have studies about game production. And then of course, all of our students, because our motto is that we learn by doing things, we learn in practice. So we have a lot of projects that our students do. So it isn't just that we teach him theory, and then they have separate courses here and there, but rather we have courses which takes things. But then we put them into practice and put things together in the projects. So, in that sense, our students get a lot of experience even before they enter the working life in like, bringing, production to the end, finishing something we do releases. So, currently, we are releasing on steam some of our games, but we are looking into different avenues as well. So in that sense, we have that in strictly like business sense. We are not that focused on business because we can't offer everything. So business is something that we lack a little bit, but that's just we have a limited amount of resources. So we can't put, effort into everything. There is.

Wanda

How do you see that demo? do you think that the focal point of the education is in the right place?

Teemu

Well, it sounds like so you have all the disciplines to have development disciplines about business. I have to say I was, CEO and, kind of we had an indie studio in Rovaniemi before, a SataEdu and we were like, very eager and young, and we wanted to make a game, but we forgot about the business side a little. And it was a good game. It good got a publisher, but we did not know game business. But, how much you guys need that? I don't know. That's a that's a good question. Many times young people, when they start to make games in, when they are students, they are so full of passion for games. It kind of, you know, it's hard to associate the business side sometimes. I don't know if that makes sense to you.

Jere

Yeah. Yeah, I agree with that. And like it's a shame. I think that we can't have that focus on the business side. But as I said, we have a limited amount resources, limited amount of personnel. So we can't offer everything. But I do agree that it is a bit of a problem. It can lead to that kind of like Booth, a lot of projects. So projects that never really finish or really get to the end because we don't really focus on the business. And then for example, we don't all the students don't really

think about who's going to be playing this game. They create the game for themselves and not to the customer.

Teemu

But I, I still think we are now here in Digi and Game Center.

Wanda

Yeah that's correct.

Teemu

So so the thing is that you still bring your students together with, with real companies doing real stuff. I think that's that's very important. We've had drove anime running at game company and there was nothing like that there outside of us where development studio was, but that even they were doing a bit different things. So we were alone. But you bring your guys here and that's, that's, that's the best. I'd say.

Wanda

Definitely. Thank you for that. on behalf of Expa, I appreciate that comment, but, yeah, that's also very true. in the sense that, I was about to add to your comment that, after all, it's difficult to teach the ever changing business environment of the game industry changes so fast to to put it to a kind of course based curriculum. It's very difficult.

Jere

Yeah

Wanda

but but what you can do and what you are doing is bringing the students into events, bringing them out there to meet the companies, because that's where well, the business usually happens. So in that way it's kind of informal learning.

Jere

Yeah, indeed. And since a lot of our projects run here at the big end Game Center, it's the opportunity of clashing the students with the actual companies and then getting that information across. So in that sense, even though in strictly like the curriculum, we don't really

have that much of the business side, we do have that kind of like collaboration and, and doing things together with companies where it kind of comes along.

Wanda

And you also explained about these, like product development. So you learn about how to produce a product, you learn about the processes, you learn about agile development, you learn about all these like, like the things that make the workflow of the game industry. And I believe these are also crucial business skills to understand, because when you deal with the customer and you start putting your schedules together, you need to be able to kind of explain that how your team works and how the things come together. What kind of input do you need from the client, perhaps, and how to integrate them in the process? So this level of thinking is definitely business thinking, don't you agree?

Jere

True. Perhaps it's my like engineer kind of mind which does the thing that we of course we have those kind of things like if we want to call it software engineering. And I like thinking about, the requirements of the game and, and like the customer, etc.. So in my mind, I don't see that as business. It's just developing software, developing games. And what relates to that pre-production phase of the development. But yes, you're correct in that sense that, yeah, that's related to the business side.

Teemu

Yeah. And of course, as the saying goes, time is money. And if you are a producer, you are actually calculating what's the cost of this feature in practice. So I think that's a good point. It comes close production and business. Those are like yeah.

Wanda

Yes definitely. You cannot run one without understanding the other. Yes that's true. And this perhaps takes a further in this topic of generalists and specialists. So bouncing back to you Teemu. how does this, description of the byte program at the, sound to you from an employer point of view? What what roles are best treated for generalists? And where would you hire specialists?

Teemu

Well, if I think the case of mock out games like this very specific case, I would say that right now, specialists would be those guys that are, doing something with the Unreal Games engine, like using the engine as an editor level design, UI design. I, I there is space for generalist, you know, like taking the editor and expanding it and hopping to, let's say, blender or something and going

back and forth to kind of between the hardcore coders and a super artsy artists could be the generalists in our case, I don't know, let's say.

Wanda

Yeah, yeah, that's, good that you, explain that. And for reference, can you also elaborate that? What is the size of your team?

Teemu

Oh, that's a good point. The size of our team is currently 15. Yes. And, yeah. and of course, that's a good question, because I guess that's kind of given that the bigger the team, usually the more specialized the roles are, as we know. But actually also one point about that is that also it depends a bit of the specific games industry. I was doing a lot of stuff, a lot of stuff with kuuasema, many project with them. And when you have lots of like, subcontracting projects coming in in many times, then you need that need the generalist, a very good tool, because if you get, let's say some projects from some, let's say, I don't know, some bank wants, wants, want something for the web or something. What I'm saying that lots of different projects, smaller ones, then a generalist is a good, good employee to have.

Wanda

And yeah, you are like, working inside, with these projects, of the students and thinking in terms of, like, the real world opportunities. we in Finland, of course, we have, like, these very big game houses who might have these need for, like aspiring specialists and so on. But the reality of the industries, at the same time that we have lots of studios like makea games with, 10 to 20, people in them where there are lots of, generalists working inside them. So, thinking about the, like, paving the way for the student opportunities, how does, like, Teemus words sound to you in that sense?

Jere

Well, I think first off, every company is a bit different. Every company has their own culture and their way of doing things. So it's a hard to generalize. And also, from the point of the student, they don't really know and we can't know for them where they will end up in. And let's say they might end up in a small company, but they might change in the big company or whatever. So, it's it's like impossible for us to focus only on the generalist and only on the specialists. We should, do our best. Of course, that's all we can do. Do our best to focus on that. We create the possibility for the student to become what they feel like they want to become. And then, of course, the learning will continue in the work life as well. As I said, every company has their own culture, so when they enter the company, they will learn a lot there as well. But yeah.

Teemu

And would you actually this is a bit philosophical question but but also say that, will you become a general stock or whatever one discipline. it's also like a question of persona. What kind of pattern does the student have on what he or she wants to do? Right?

Jere

Of course we have. We have had and still have students that are really into just one specific thing, and they want to learn just about that. Everything as deep as possible in that one thing. And why shouldn't we allow them to do that? And then we have students that, for example, are interested in becoming kind of like the solo indie developer. So then we try to offer them as broad of, skill set as possible. So we try to be as flexible as possible to offer the students what they need, because we should be doing, that, offering the students what they need. And of course, also looking at the company side and seeing that what are the company's needs at the moment, both locally in Finland and also worldwide?

Wanda

It's it's super cool to hear that you are providing for a variety of needs for the students in terms of like what you can learn, but, like them. Well, you pointed out that it's a kind of a there's a philosophical side to it and also like a self awareness side to it, when these young, people are making like decisions that will guide their life further. Are you providing, this kind of decision making counseling or aspiring with the students about what kind of paths they want to take?

Jere

Of course. So, like thinking fully from like, educational institution perspective, every student has a career tutor. So one of our lecturers, who will guide them through their studies and kind of talk with them, listen to them, get to know them. And in that sense be able to recommend that what they might want to take on. And of course, we have people who have been working in the gaming industry, so they kind of know, okay, you want to be this kind of person or you're interested in this kind of thing. These are the courses. These are the skills that we would recommend for you to take. And then we try to get as much as possible, people from the industry to come and tell their own experiences. And then someone can find like, oh, that sounds like something I want to do. And then we try to kind of like a build a custom path. So we have the curriculum, but every student has their own path through the curriculum and into their working life in the future.

Teemu

I have one hard question for you. Just out of interest, when I, think of my past as, sataedu teacher. So what's the thing you you think is the kind of your unique selling point of Jyväskylä game education compared to Finland, otherwise.

**Jere**

I feel like there's a couple of things. one thing that comes to mind that we, the name that we kind of want to call ourselves is game production. Meaning that we cover a lot of basics so we don't just focus on because there's some schools that focus on programing only or only on the game design. So we offer all of like programing, game design, graphics, etc.. then one other strong point that we have that we have two amazing, audio people. I'm not one of them. So I can brag about them. So we have, in my opinion, the best game audio side in in Finland. And also since we do a lot of projects, the students get to learn in practice. And the goal is that when they enter like practical training at the end of their studies, they have released 2 to 4 games at that point. So there's a lot of practical work. So I feel like those three points are like main selling points.

**Teemu**

Good answer, good answer.

**Wanda**

Thanks. Thanks for asking. By the way, that question was not paid.

**Teemu**

I was just interested.

**Wanda**

Yeah. Yeah that's I'm very happy that we are able to raise that genuine genuine interest there. But thank you for kind of describing that how the career advice is also involved. I think it's very, very important. And basically, what we can see here or the type of paths that we've been talking about, this is kind of, being able to grasp a set of, in general, wider responsibilities and working as a generalist in a smaller team, or then perhaps becoming this kind of more specialized only in one thing and searching for an opportunity, perhaps in a bigger company that can offer, career development path for that. But one thing that we haven't touched, based with yet is, the opportunity to start your own business. And, obviously, this is something that is, very big step for someone who is just like a fresh graduate, out of school. But, on the other hand, we know that in the education program, there are also people who are very experienced professionals, perhaps in some other industry before joining the game industry. So they may have the set, what is needed to start their own business and so on. can you comment on this Jere? Is there like a support for this as well?

**Jere**

Of course. So, we have the collaboration with Xpa and these, again, Game Center ecosystem. So there's already like a place where you can go to and talk to people who are entrepreneurs. And,

our degree program itself doesn't have like the support, but the Aamc as a whole has support for finding a place. And so we have, education. If someone wants to start a company, we have education for that. we can grant some, initial seed money, some funding, etc., for that. So we have the support infrastructure. If we have a student or a group of students who would like to start up their own company, we support them. And that's also one of our goals that we want people to start a new company. So we want to have new gaming companies in in Finland and especially in the US. And my personal goal is that, in the future, we get at least one new gaming company every year from us.

Wanda

That's ambitious and super cool. Any thoughts on that Teemu?

Teemu

That that's that sounds interesting. Seed money? So like the school grants money.

Wanda

Yes.

Teemu

Okay, so I suppose they have to be the students from the school.

Jere

I'm not 100% sure. And as far, as far as I know. It has to be either a student or someone who has recently graduated from Jamk.

Teemu

Okay. Okay

Jere

But don't quote me on that.

Teemu

Okay. That's interesting. Yeah. Well, I yeah, I think it's really great to push envelope there. There was something like that back when I was a teacher. But I'm sure that that world has gone much further nowadays. I will definitely want to hear more about this. How it works.

Jere

For sure.

Wanda

And for anyone listening, please check the facts on the requirements of getting the seed. We do not know it here locally right now, so we're kind of just a disclaimer, but okay. yeah, that's that's a very interesting and like, really concrete, things that, that the Jamk is doing to support this entrepreneurship. And obviously it is, outspoken, aspiration of both expa and jamk, to develop this ecosystem here in Jyväskylä and to get new companies, in many ways. So in getting the local people and the talent to start them, but also, perhaps, kind of, being a center of gravity in that sense that people see the value of our local, economic and the game business ecosystem. So that they want to benefit from it and perhaps come to Jyväskylä. So there are many, many pathways to, to this. And obviously, by boosting the industry, we can we can, accelerate all of them. But, now we have been already, talking for quite some time. We still have time for a little bit more. So as a final question for you, Teemu, can you summarize what do you think are the key elements we need to consider in finish games education to keep it relevant for the companies in the near future?

Teemu

Well, well, based on my experience, which I have some, I would say that you are on the right track when you try to be as close to the industry as humanly possible. That's one thing. Of course, you also need, high level, I think high level teaching, let's say, and I would imagine finding the right kind of talent is also hard. This is kind of quest. And also what I'm saying now that if you have time, please comment on that. So motivate, motivate that and also experts on their fields kind of the steps not easy, not easy. I would say those two come to my mind.

Wanda

Thank you for sharing Teemu. And of course, Jere how do you think about, are those, easy to achieve or how do you see it?

Jere

Of course not. Like that's a thing that we always want to be, like, on the lookout to make sure that we are doing the right things. But I feel like, if you allow me to brag for a little while, I feel like we are providing that high level education and we are on the right direction because, just recently we got like, 4000 applicants for our program, and our intake is 30 students. So if I remember

correctly, we are the second most popular English degree program in Finland. And we I might not be sure on this, but we're it's about as difficult as getting into Harvard what we have. So that's one thing on on talking about like the students I'm not gonna name the companies, but just recently I heard that one of our students got an internship in maybe the biggest game company there is out there. And also we have interns in, like, the biggest Finnish companies in game industry as well. So if our students are getting there, I feel like we're doing something right, at least.

Teemu

4000. That's huge, considering also that you you've you vascular is not like the capital of Finland.

Jere

Yes,

Teemu

I would think that the capital area would draw most of the students That's that's amazing. I'd say. And this is not paid, also.

Wanda

But but I think it's, good to wrap up with a little bit of brag. I confirmed those numbers. We discussed those last time as well, so. Yeah. Yeah, it's definitely a sign that the something is being done right.

Jere

Yeah.

Wanda

But, Yeah. Thank you for joining us this time Teemu and Jere.

Teemu

Thank you, thank you.

Jere

Thank you.

Wanda

And this was DGC podcast. Thank you also for everyone listening and tune in next time for more interesting game industry discussions.