

Tekstivastine Podcastille: Growing To The Role Of A Producer

Wanda

Welcome to the DGC podcast, brought to you by Expa Game Business Cooperative and Jamk University of Applied Sciences. I'm your host, this one to O'Rly. And here we discuss game industry, games, education, the bridge between them and any related topics and projects. Today in the studio with me, we have a Lloyd Craske who works as a producer at Metacore. Welcome.

Lloyd

Thank you for having me.

Wanda

And from Jamk University of Applied Sciences, joining us is Niko Kiviaho, head of department service business. Welcome.

Niko

Yes, welcome. Thank you. Nice to meet you.

Wanda

So in today's episode, we will be discussing what goes into being a producer in the games industry and what type of education, experiences and personal traits can lead one down the path. Now, Lloyd, you worked in various producer roles in the past seven years, so let's start with a nice warm up question. You enjoy being a producer and what's really best about it?

Lloyd

Oh good one. Yeah. I really enjoy, being a producer because, I think it's, every day is different. Basically, I like to, pair it with being a firefighter, although it's less slightly heroic. You know, every day is different. You come in every day, there's a new fire to put out. There's a new thing that's, needs your, attention. And. Yeah. Keeps you, keeps you going.

Niko

Every day is different.

Lloyd

Yeah.

Wanda

Doesn't get boring,

Lloyd

No, Absolutely no.

Wanda

All right. I think that already kind of gives us the overview of what kind of, expectations the role comes up with. But, perhaps then, Niko, the role of a producer tends to vary depending on the project and the team at hand and so on, but certain aspects tend to be pretty fixed. So I'm interested to know how is the role of a producer defined or introduced in the yum games education program?

Niko

Hey, thanks. Good question too. And of course, like like you all know, we are at Science University and we like courses in there, so it's still defined that way. So of course we have courses related to that like game industry and production. It's the first year course with with the students first coming to a situation thinking about what is the game industry, how the money is involved and how everything works out. And of course, the productions, how, how well it's defined there and so on. Of course, any other, production related courses because like, like, you know, you, you, you need to be some sort of a designer or some sort of an artist, some sort of jack of all trades.

Lloyd

Yeah.

Niko

We have courses for every, every single aspect of those. And then, of course, I hope that it's defined through our game projects that we have many in the, in the, in the set.

Wanda

I think that's very necessary. Like it's difficult to introduce the firefighting nature of that,

Niko

without being a firefighter

Wanda

without giving some fires to put out.

Niko

Yeah.

Wanda

Yes, exactly, exactly.

Niko

That's what we trying to do in the, in the, in our education. So we are having a lot of, a lot of different courses starting from the very first year. And, and then the project continue the second year and the third year. And it's overall I think it's 50 etc's. It's so almost a full academic year of game projects.

Wanda

Yes.

Niko

And during those times, all the roles related to art related coding but also related to producing.

Wanda

Yeah.

Niko

And is is involved.

Wanda

But basically everybody in the team gets a like a point of view that what actually goes into it when they do it and so on.

Niko

Yeah. Yeah. It's true.

Wanda

Yeah. So, if I, if I maybe yeah, that's a little bit, like I'm hearing, seeing the big picture connecting perhaps product vision with actual business models.

Niko

Yeah.

Wanda

User experience.

Niko

Yeah. of course.

Wanda

So yeah.

Niko

Project manager also also the soft skills. Related to that.

Wanda

Yes. So these people skills.

Niko

Yeah. Yeah. Fires to be put down.

Lloyd

We also create create them sometimes as well. So you know.

Wanda

Yeah it's good to keep the team alerts. You know don't let them slack off but okay. Lloyd does this like, align with your practical experience, and perspective of the producer role? How would you.

Lloyd

Yeah, I would say it's quite encompassing, like, I'm. I'm very, like, surprised because, for me, when I was, going for education, I had no idea what a producer was or many of these, like, niche. You know what I wouldn't even call niche roles that really essential roles. So, yeah, it sounds like you've got a really good, good spread of, like, knowledge that you're giving to people very early on.

Niko

Yeah, of course it's it's relation in relation is into mostly into project managerial part of it and team leading part of it.

Lloyd

Yeah.

Niko

And we are using scrum for example as a, as a baseline as a process. So that and use and as you might know there is this product ownership and the scrum mastering type thing. And it lies behind that the producer roles. And, and when we come into the corporate which is the final stage of our, our productions, and you can see the results in the, in our steam account. So you can download our, our fruits from those projects there

so they know everything from there. I hope they know everything from the concept or from an, an idea, to the, to the solid product.

Lloyd

Awesome. That sounds awesome.

Wanda

Yeah, but this is this is really, where I want to tap in because, like, often when the producer role is trying to be like summarize in a nutshell, people often think like, okay, agile method. Sure. Like process leadership. Okay. You need to connect with the products and the client and so on. But that's, that's basically like what you can see on paper. But the like like we talked like none of the days are like or one to like and exactly. There's so much variety to it. And you need to react to things and, and so on. So, I'm interested to hear, a little bit more practical, aside from your experience like that, like, can you, can you give us a little bit more like with around the ball and what goes to your day to day job, like over a month say, like. Yeah. Yeah.

Lloyd

Okay. Yeah, yeah. I think like firstly I would say like it's very true that the production role changes company to company. Like I've seen producers, I've also been a producer who's led games and led the game vision, for instance, open to the people who like to look and care for the team. So it's very, very different metacore that currently like, a typical months, I guess you would say it resolves or a lot around agile methodology. So, you know, the sprint planning meetings and retrospectives and reviews. Also I, we have a weekly, feature reviews and stuff like this feature breakdown meetings being very hands on, where also supervisors medical, which is not also typical for producers. Sometimes it is, sometimes it isn't. So you're looking after people is career and the, like, well-being and making sure that, you're basically the communicator, the thread that holds everything together. So if anything goes off or breaks, you need to reattach it and make sure that everything goes so, yeah. Like there's, there's a there's a lot to it to boil down into, into such a, into a short, short, message. But I think, like, the key is that we kind of like this thread that connects everything. And, generally you have to be a very good communicator, and you have to make sure that you facilitate, conversations and make sure that you don't stifle it as well.

Niko

Keep it focused and so on

Lloyd

So, yeah, it's a very delicate balance. And I would also say that we're, always looking to improve or change processes and add processes or remove processes that make sense

as well. So we we talked a bit about scrum, like I have a very strong opinion on scrum, which is I think it's a framework that we should use, but we should also take things away if it's not necessary. So yeah. Practical examples

Niko

ScrumBut

Lloyd

Yeah. I actually have a standup bot, so I don't do my standups in person. My team doesn't want that.

Niko

Yeah.

Lloyd

Getting them all in the room together is they work at different times right.

Niko

Yeah.

Lloyd

But they love this bot that just pings them. And every day they fill it in and I check it and it's

Niko

All good.

Lloyd

Yeah. So yeah.

Niko

I in a way, want to want to say something about these firefighting things that it has been a pleasure since we started this, this, these projects, game projects here. But it was happening also before this digi and game center here. It was enjoyable to see the students understand, like the core things in products. And then when people start to work together closely, there are arguments and uneven restrictions and and then they come to me. For example, when I was I was steering the, the Scrum Masters for the project and they had the similar problems that we had in, in the industry.

Lloyd

Yeah.

Niko

And it was so nice for them to realize how things go out and to be frustrated about different situation and then trying to problem solve things. And what should we do? What can we do and how should we do? Can we use other scrum master to do something with our team? Because this team is not functioning correctly at the moment. So. So it was pretty neat to to in a way see that they really end up being in the same situation situations then most of us has been and still is every now and then we.

Lloyd

that that's so awesome to hear. I feel like I just fell into it and then I had to learn as I went. So yeah, yeah.

Wanda

But yeah, you mentioned that like, every producer role is also different, like depending on the company and depending on the team, like, okay. Before metalcore, you were with Nitro.

Lloyd

Yes.

Wanda

Yeah. So, can you perhaps, touch on the similarities and differences of your producer role there versus metalcore?

Lloyd

Yeah, I think, my producer role in, Nitro Games was, a lot like, a lot wider spread. I was managing the entire team. The budget, PNL, things like this. And also like stakeholder relationships as well. Yeah. Flying out to see clients, making sure that all the milestones are approved and everything like that. All was, I say, all the way down to the kind of nitty gritty day to day stuff as well. So and the product vision of the, project path of, like, the entire roadmap, everything. Manticore, it's a lot more focused. That's one of the reasons, actually, why I made the made the jump is, is because it's, a little bit more focused on a role on production. And I wanted to kind of sink my teeth in a little bit deeper and become a better producer.

Wanda

So. So there, you get to be a little bit more focused on the product.

Lloyd

Yeah. And the people like, so it's been mainly with the team and the strategic level stuff

is, is done by somebody like my development lead, for instance.

Wanda

So this is a very typical thing that's you know, in, in smaller teams, as a producer, you are the person who knows the products kind of in and out. So if you're a good communicator, there's a big chance that they might put you into sales because like, you know, or managing the client relations because they need someone who has all of those props, over there. So, yeah, but, obviously it has to do a lot with the, like, a team size. Yeah.

Niko

That is one thing that I was just wondering that we lack actually, is the, the in a way the budgeting side and the money involvement because we as you know, it's more sweat and tears like I not thing that we do here. So and then then we are publishing it in true true steam and then perhaps some, some teams will end up establishing some sort of studio we thought about in the beginning, but the goal is to have a vat company at the end. But but the money is not that much involved. And how could we? We have been discussing that. How could we simulate these kind of things in this kind of an environment when they think government is or, or the mothers and fathers are paying the bills and then and they are getting the, the credits as a reward.

Lloyd

I think, sorry.

Wanda

Sounds almost like an opportunity to create a game about it.

Niko

Yeah.

Lloyd

Sounds like a great idea.

Wanda

But you were saying.

Lloyd

Yeah, I was, I was thinking as sure as talking like it would be quite difficult because it's the value of money, you know, like, you, you kind of, whilst you're studying, it's really hard to perceive that. But then when you, you're kind of dropped into it, then you kind of get it. Yeah. But I think most developers also like kind of lack that understanding

sometimes of like, you know, the business side of things, like how long something takes versus what kind of effort should I put into it

Niko

And how much does it cost.

Lloyd

Yeah. Like so I think even just a baby baseline, like a baseline, like, I don't know, you put an a value on somebody for months and then you're like, hey, like this meeting cost us this much. Like I know, like it was a great meeting, you know?

Wanda

Was it worth it?

Niko

Yeah, yeah. Five people, two hours. Yeah, of course it's something.

Lloyd

Yeah. Of course. We had never hoped to get to that level, but I think it's good to kind of highlight, you know, like to be like, hey, this is kind of the reality of things. So repeat repeats. If it's a trend that repeats itself. Yeah. Is it something that we could do maybe biweekly instead and focus on actually making the game?

Niko

Yeah.

Wanda

Yeah, that's definitely great points that the could be added into the like.

Niko

Yeah.

Wanda

Education program one way or the other.

Niko

Yeah. Like I said, there's a bachelor's of Business administration.

Wanda

Exactly. So down to the core.

Niko

Down to the core, down to the money.

Wanda

Yeah, exactly. All right. But, still, if we try to frame a little bit more like what? What goes into, producer role, we mentioned already, like, soft skills, personal traits. So what you said, like, being an excellent communicator is, like, bonus or like, a requirement, but what else goes into it? Soft skills wise?

Lloyd

I would say. Yeah, communicator is definitely one of them. I would say like, also very open or transparent communication. I'm a big believer in transparency. Proactivity is perhaps one of the biggest ones that I always focus in on. Is, is, you have to be able to see the problem or the fire starting to brew before it, becomes, gets out of hand and also put it out as well. And then maybe, also like, like trustworthy, I guess, or like being able to, like, carry through what you say you're going to do, so that you like good, good lead and like, lead by expecting by example.

Niko

Yeah. And of course, you need some negotiation skills a lot inside your team to make things happen for sure. And then and then also internally in, in, in company and of course to perhaps some. Funders.

Lloyd

Yeah, I think there's a level of like, sorry to cut you off right now, psychology and even like, I'm vaguely interested in psychology. I never studied it, but like, I think it is. You're dealing with lots of different people, lots of different types of people, and you have to approach them in different, different ways. I feel like sometimes you have to wear many masks. Almost. And, yeah, yeah, it's very intriguing. I would definitely recommend

Wanda

Often we talk about wearing many hats, but this brings a new layer to the thing, like wearing materials. But yeah, this is very interesting. Like, because like, after all these, like, personal traits and your soft skills, they tend to dictate what, where you kind of gravitate career wise, a lot more than than, what your hard skills are. So this is, interesting to see. And that's why I also wanted to kind of ask from your side, Niko. That's. Do you have any idea, like, are you keeping any kind of analysis of what type of students are actually naturally attracted by the producer role? What kind of, makers do you see there? And, is it is it something that people learn, or is it, is it something that, it becomes more naturally?

Niko

A good question again, perhaps we turn it another way that who are not the ones who are interested about producing or interested other or being in the lead somehow people may have some loving relationship into code, for example. And during I'm talking about during the times the students spend with us here. So they tend to love coding and then they focus on that and are not that much willing to take care of the the things that happens somewhere else. I'm just doing my game and that's perfectly fine. And then, people with outside doing artistic things are in love with that one. Want to work on that, but not that much about producing things. And then there are people who tend to like be in front then to like show things out. And they might even have before they even come here. They have something in their head saying that I want to do this. And I even had two years ago, a student who went to to abroad earning money through peacekeeping, got a lot of money there and spent everything to a game she learned with us here and established a company and woke that up. So there are people who are already in that, even though they don't even know that.

Lloyd

Yeah.

Niko

So they have something in their hand already.

Wanda

So yeah this was kind of the hypothesis that I was making that it comes so much down to the personal traits. I'm like for sure how people kind of gravitate in social situations anyway and so on. So it has to do a lot with that like, I don't know if, if calling it a soft skill is or like wrong because, it's more like a trait.

Niko

Yeah.

Wanda

Rather than a skill that you learn as. So that's why it's interesting. But okay. So .

Niko

And in many case, it's personality thing.

Wanda

Yeah. Exactly.

Niko

So that you end up being raising how that. Okay I can do that.

Wanda

Yeah. And what you what what you were describing there was the proactivity that the lloyd was mentioning, but also with a lot of like and different entrepreneurial like thinking where when you, when you give this example of the peacekeeper. Yeah. Okay. So if we, if we try to somehow crystallize like what goes into the production role, there was like there's process leadership, there was this like, certain structure orientation and like informing and communication. At mind. But then, then again like it's more, more about like the product, and, and being with the people.

Lloyd

Yes.

Wanda

And, and managing all of that, not expecting things to go smoothly but rather trying to smooth the bumps out. Yeah, yeah. Anything you would add?

Lloyd

I think you just have to be, like I would say, like most, most producers I know actually are kind of introverts or semi semi okay, classified as introverts, even though it doesn't look like it would go home and like hibernate. But but I think, you have to love, like, optimizing things or like, you have to look a lot of like, going like, hey, that's not right. I can I can edit that and or like, hey, like, I can fix that for you. You have to love that kind of, I don't know what I think it's funny, like, we're kind of perfectionists in a way.

Niko

But not in a bad way.

Lloyd

No no no no no, we're like optimize perfectionist. So that's the way I like to think. But yeah, like, imperfect. Okay. But but yeah, like I would say that's, that's the key thing that I think that takes if you tick that box, it's like organizing and that sort of stuff.

Niko

Making things happen.

Lloyd

Yeah, I, I actually have a story. I have a friend is producer. Yeah. He had a baby and before he had a baby in, he put it in Trello and he started like, like planning everything

out and tried. I was like, you're mad. I'm like, what is going on? I know, but actually that's exactly what I would do. So and so. So I thought, he's a genius idea. Mad but genius.

Wanda

Yeah. There's a fine line between like, yeah, yeah, yeah, okay. But, let's, let's move on a little bit. So, let's focus on the pathways one can take to end up in the position of a producer. So, first, starting with, Niko this time, that's a. Well, you already kind of described how, the games education also gives you this, opportunity to become, like, a well-rounded generalist and equipped with, like, the tools to lead the production, and, so on. So, on the other hand, it takes a lot of practical experience and, and self search. So, so how does game games education program, support the development of students to become product leaders or producers?

Niko

Yeah. Of course, like I said, we are hands on on, on degree program in that sense. Of course, some basic things coming from years and years one and two. But it's include heavily the these projects. And like I said kids it's it's it's a lot and and the third project also involved with the working with the other studios so in no way subcontracting things to somebody else than just for yourself. Of course Jamk University is very entrepreneurial friendly. So we support and that going to establish new studio and and save us all in, here in middle Finland of course. But after that what comes to the concrete experience? We offer possibilities for our students and we at this very moment has students who are done all those projects working in their own studio, even though they are not yet vat numbered but but they are, they are having the the production going on. They are doing the, their internships there. So we, we give them that possibilities. They can do they, they, they have thesis. Final thesis is related to that. So and we even give them premises. So if we have a room here they can work here. And there has been situations when there that hasn't been possibility. Then they main campus in Rajakatu. Yeah we have given their premises to work there too.

Wanda

So so basically you give a lot of support. But yeah also a lot of freedom on how to kind of dictate your path.

Niko

Yeah. Yeah, yeah. That's the way and I in a way I love the, the, the thing when, when somebody comes and says that I, we established a studio. I don't care if they're making money at that point. But the idea for them. Yeah that they can say that we are running. We are a gang of ten people, even though they are sweat and tears and yeah, and only that and support from from us and so on. But they are still focusing on working on that towards the future. And I kind of kind of enjoy that a lot.

Wanda

That is beautiful.

Niko

Yeah. Yeah.

Wanda

But then, from a more anecdotal point of view, really interested to hear from your own background, Lloyd. I did a little bit of, like, you know, background research, and I understand you were or artist previously.

Lloyd

Yeah.

Wanda

So. So, can you tell us more about your background and how you ended up switching the artist career into a producer role?

Lloyd

Yeah. Yeah, it's, there's semi interesting story that, I started in, in the industry, as an environmental artist, making stylized games actually wasn't an environment artist in my university. I was a Triple-A artist I tried to apply to, like, CD Projekt Red and everything and got rejected. And then I was like, yeah, little nitro games. And then I applied and they were like, hey, you know, like, no you don't do stylized things. And I was like, give me a test. I'll show you. And and I did the test and I got into the industry. And then after that we started making, started junior environment artist, basically. And my lead left and then I took that position, because I wanted to do that, I wanted to optimize the processes that we had there. So you can start to see where it starts to form. And then eventually my producer left and then I was like, on a different project. And then I took that. So, but I think the key, the key for me was like, I saw my friends who are great, great artists, and I was struggling, just struggling, struggling, struggling. And I realized that I'm not an artist in the way that they are an artist. And I just have to accept that. And they're like, hey, you know what? I can I'm probably better as a lead. Yeah. So that's kind of my little journey.

Niko

Yeah, it's the same happened with me with math when I went to university. I thought, I'm good in math. And then I said, these are the mathematicians, I am not.

Lloyd

Yeah.

Wanda

But, that that's, super, super interesting. And I also I had a follow up question about like how it how this journey has impacted your self-perception and identity and you kind of answered that already. So, it was kind of the environment and the people around you that gave you this perspective or?

Lloyd

I think, yeah, yeah, I would, I would say so, like, I had a lot of contributing factors to how to be a lead, also how not to be a lead. So and then I took them forward and I learned from them and yeah, I, I truly believe it's also learning for failure as well. So seeing failure happen maybe who failing as well.

Niko

You grew on that in a way.

Lloyd

Yeah. Yeah.

Wanda

So so this actually brings this perspective that's, to become a producer. You actually first need to analyze the ways of work and work under certain circumstances to get an idea of, like, what could be done better. And, after like eight years of being in the artist role, you already had this, like, I can do so much in the person role.

Lloyd

Yeah, that's is definitely one, one angle. I've seen people jump straight in with no experience into production, but if I'm being completely honest, I think it's, I've also mentored people into those roles, but it's very difficult. Like, you have to really show like an artist can showcase a portfolio, a, a program. I can showcase game. What can a producer show like Jamboard? Like? It's it's quite difficult. Right? So, yeah.

Niko

I run this project smoothly, can you see.

Lloyd

Yeah. But that's, that's the thing. Like, if you are, if you are a part of game teams and you're like, hey, I actually ran this project. This is how I did it. This is the end result. Like I think that's great. Like those are the cases where that's that's how I would get in.

Wanda

Yeah.

Lloyd

If I was really interested in that.

Wanda

That's really good point. So a lot of the work goes kind of hidden. Yeah. And only when the product comes out and your team says that this guy was a great lead, then you will have your testimonials like okay, you you performed well. But yeah difficult one. Yeah. And for Niko, interested to kind of learn that well, students who study game development, obviously grow in their studies. So, are there any milestones or recurring themes that teachers can spot in their development of their professional identity, similar to what Lloyd just shared here?

Niko

Yeah, in a way, of course, the professionalism in in selected trade in it can be coding. It can be art or something. When. Well you talked about the the portfolio for artists and coders. So when they end up showing things and, and they can discuss about it like you might, knowing that in the school when you, when you are forced to present something you don't know about.

Lloyd

Yeah.

Niko

It's very hard. But when you know things about what you've done, then that's that's one milestone. When they start without any pressure, discuss about what they can do and what have they done. That's one milestone for them to grow as a as a professional.

Wanda

Like a natural confidence.

Niko

Yeah. Yeah. You can see that.

Wanda

Okay.

Niko

That guy over there show confidence. And he is present day since years ago.

Wanda

Pointing at the studio tech.

Niko

Yeah. I still remember it. Yeah. And he's now working with me.

Wanda

Kudos, Jani.

Niko

Yeah. And of course problem solving capabilities. So you end up well basically doing what is set to be done. And then when things go wrong somebody drops the gloves and just waits, what can happen. But at the end during the time then, then they start to problem solve things by themselves. And they don't no longer they ask questions, but the question level of questions defer from the first. They already tried things out, they tried to solve. They have searched for help and and everything. So that rises and that can be seen. And and it's very nice. Nice thing to see. And I like I say it in earlier that one when they say that I am this. So you put that hat on and boots and cloak and everything else and I'm this guy or lady or whatever, and I'm the studio owner and or I am this, I am good coder. Then that's a level again, a milestone that you can see that they have in a way confident.

Wanda

Yeah. And and they have actually developed a professional identity.

Niko

Ofcourse, yes.

Wanda

Exactly. So yeah, yeah that's the milestone in itself.

Niko

Yeah. Yeah. And that's what I think it's our task to do build confidence.

Lloyd

Yeah.

Niko

To get that certain level job entry level usually called but a job in the industry.

Lloyd

Yeah.

Niko

And then we'll fall for like I said you start as an artist now.

Lloyd

Yeah.

Niko

Making something else. And we always say to people that you start from something then you can do whatever you want.

Lloyd

Yeah.

Niko

Basically just go forward.

Lloyd

Yeah. Take your time. Like, yeah, yeah, yeah I think it resonates as well because you know like looking back on my, my past is like that role wasn't clearly there for me. You know, I just acted like I was the head of art at the time. And then I got it.

Niko

Yeah.

Lloyd

I didn't I acted like it before I got the role and I acted like a producer before I got the role. You know, I carved my own way and I think if you want them things, you and you act like it and you go for it.

Niko

Yeah, that's how it is.

Wanda

Very, very nice. Conclusive thought. So time wise, we are coming to an end. But, any any final things you want to add?

Lloyd

I would just say if you're really interested in, production, I would. One thing I would really recommend is, is, finding a mentor, who is a producer, like, we are people, people at the end of the day so that people want to learn and they also want to teach, you know, so I would just say, don't be afraid to reach out to people and actually, like, ask them. Yeah, I've done that a few times in my career and I've not been disappointed. So I'd recommend that.

Wanda

Yeah, that's a very game industry veteran answer in Finland. Like the people love sharing knowledge. So so make use of that.

Niko

Yeah. Yeah. And and of course for this day when I, when I started to go through the script and everything and I was wondering about, hey, producing things and how it's visible in the, in our curriculum and how it, how it shows in the projects. And like I said, we should do more. And this kind of, well, there is a producer role in, in our projects. That's a good start.

Wanda

Yes.

Niko

But it's thin steel, so we need to add more muscle. Yeah. Into that role. And that's one one learning that that I will take away from this day to the curriculum development.

Wanda

Amazing value generated.

Niko

Yeah. Value generated.

Wanda

Yeah. Awesome. So many thanks Niko. Many thanks Loyd, awesome to have you here. And, yeah, this was the DGC podcast this time. And thank you for listening. And tune in next time for more interesting game industry discussions.