Game Developers Conference®

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www.GDConf.com

GDC

UBM
TechWeb

Monster Teams

How a Producer Tamed the Beast and Lived to Tell

Alex Parizeau

Senior Producer @ **Ubisoft Toronto**

Team of 225
3 years

Team of 325
2.5 (5) years

Alex Parizeau

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Senior Producer @ **Ubisoft Toronto**

January 2006

Monday

16
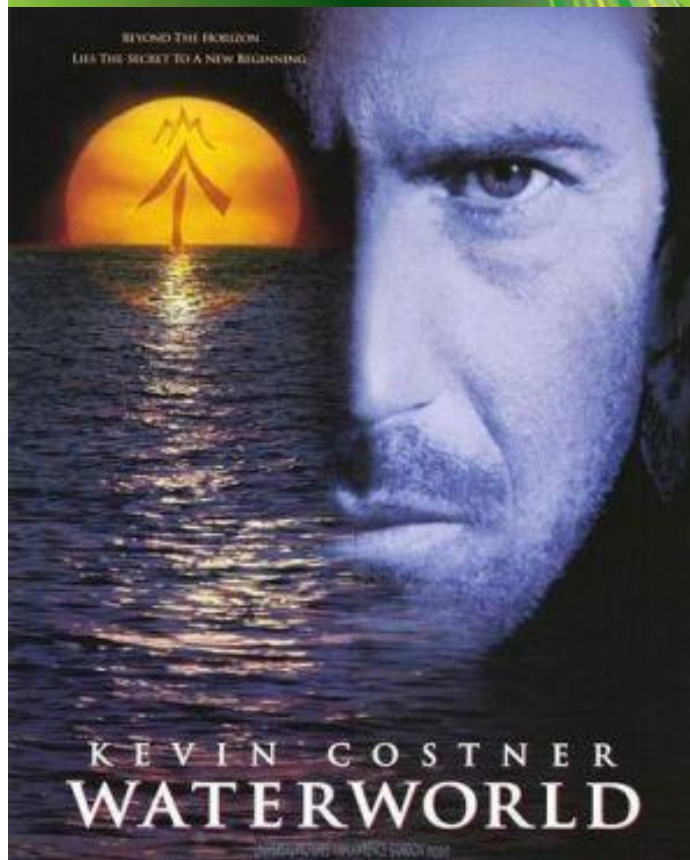
2011 Ducati 796 Monster
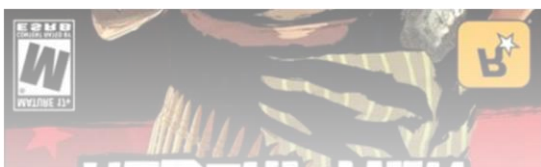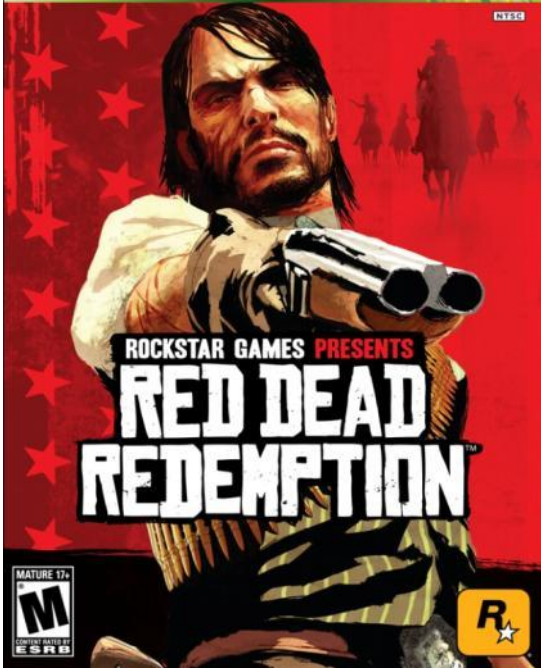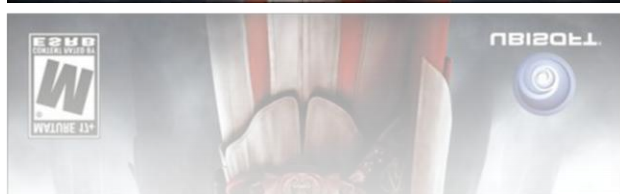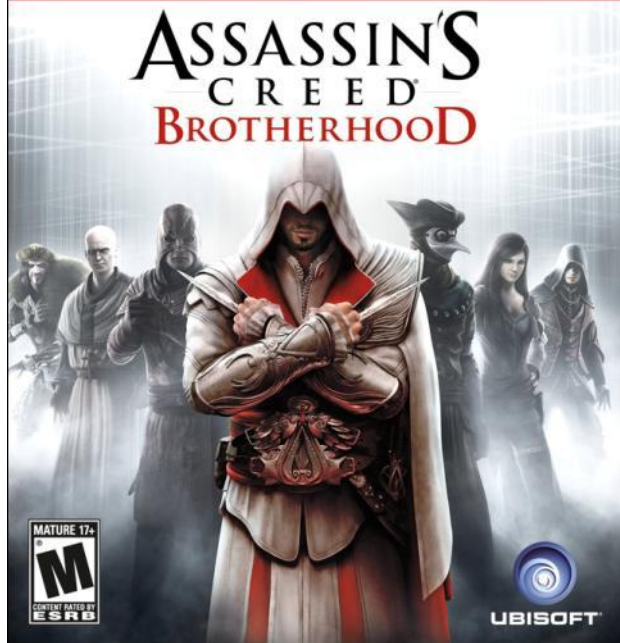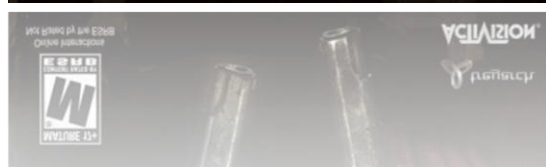
Team of 400-500

Team of 1000+
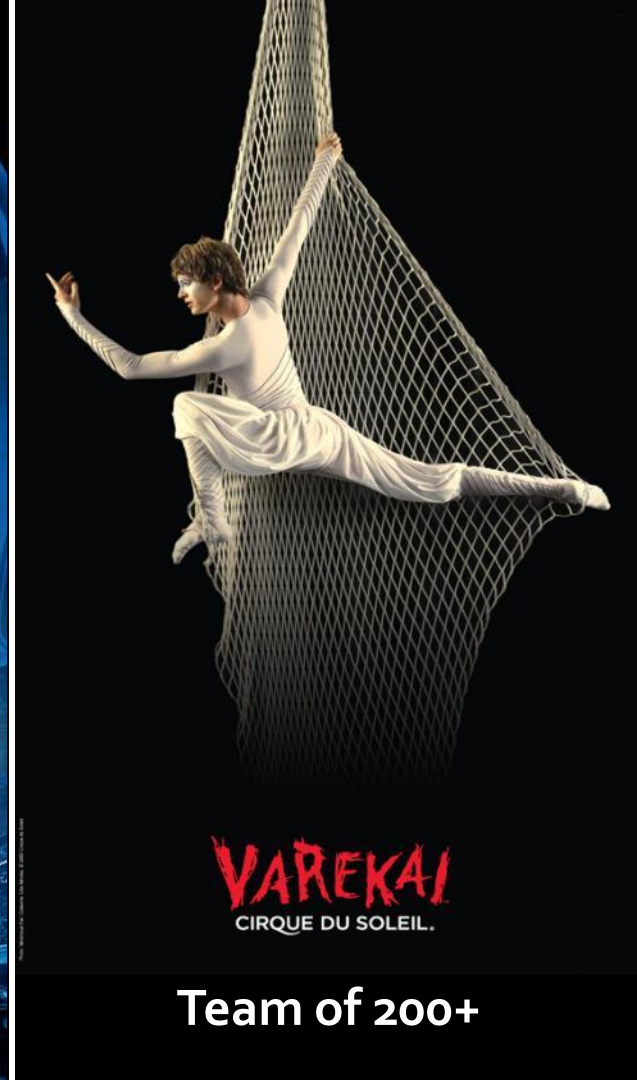
Team of 200+

- The **Immaturity** of the Game Industry:

  - Producers & managers have poor / no experience with large complex projects

  - Methodologies used are diverse and/or undefined

  - Haven't solved production challenges that were a problem on smaller teams

- Harness the **power** of large teams:

  - ## Organization
    A network of self-organized teams

  - ## Process
    Achieving the right balance between top down direction and individual contribution

  - ## Culture
    Keeping the organization human

Organization

A Network of Self-Organized Teams

- **Priorities**

■ **Priorities**

Team Size

Label	Value (axis)
COOP TEAM	
PROJECT RESET	
VISION DEFINED	
VERTICAL SLICE	

300
250
200
150
100
50
0

Team Size

2005 → ← 2006 → ← 2007 → ← 2008 → ← 2009 → ← 2010

MANAGEMENT, 12

AUDIO, 6

OTHERS, 28

PROGRAMMING, 47

ANIMATION, 26

LEVEL DESIGN, 37

ART, 68

GAME DESIGN, 11

235
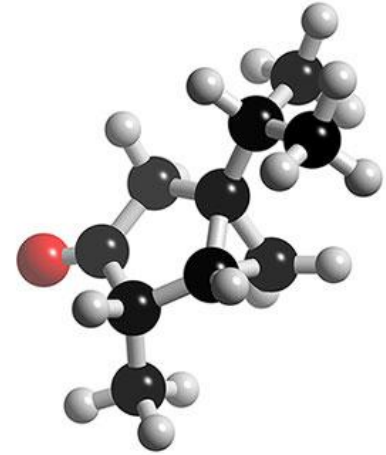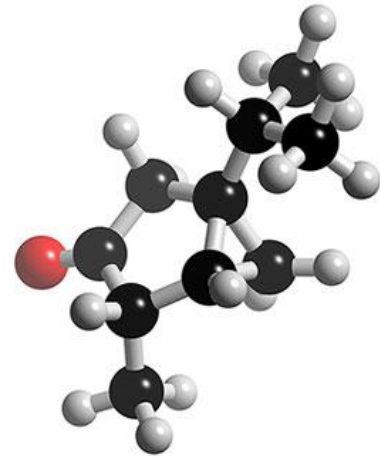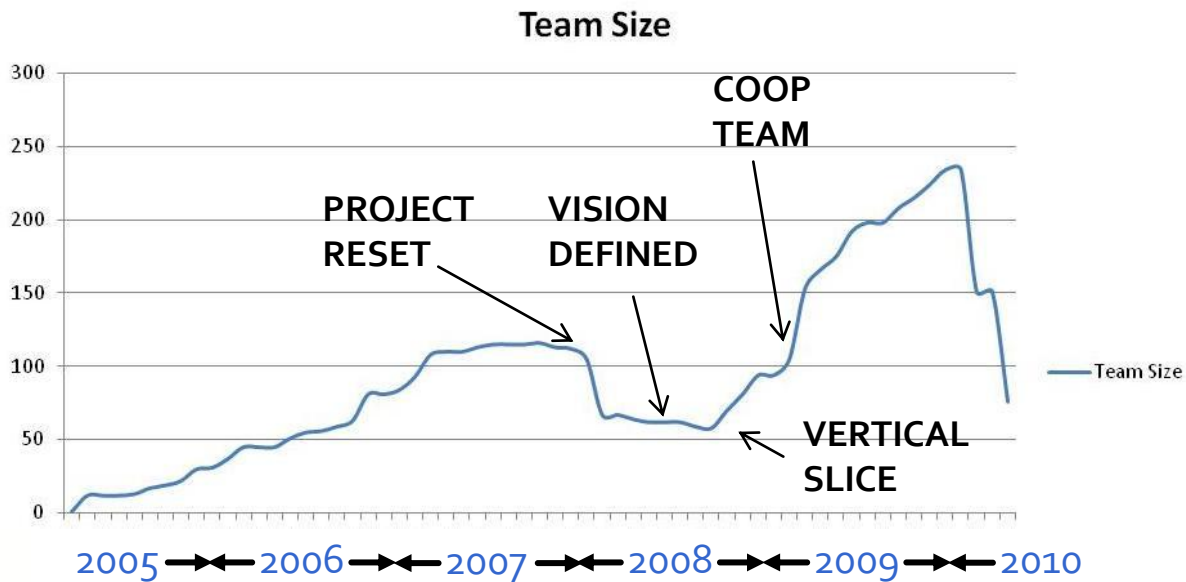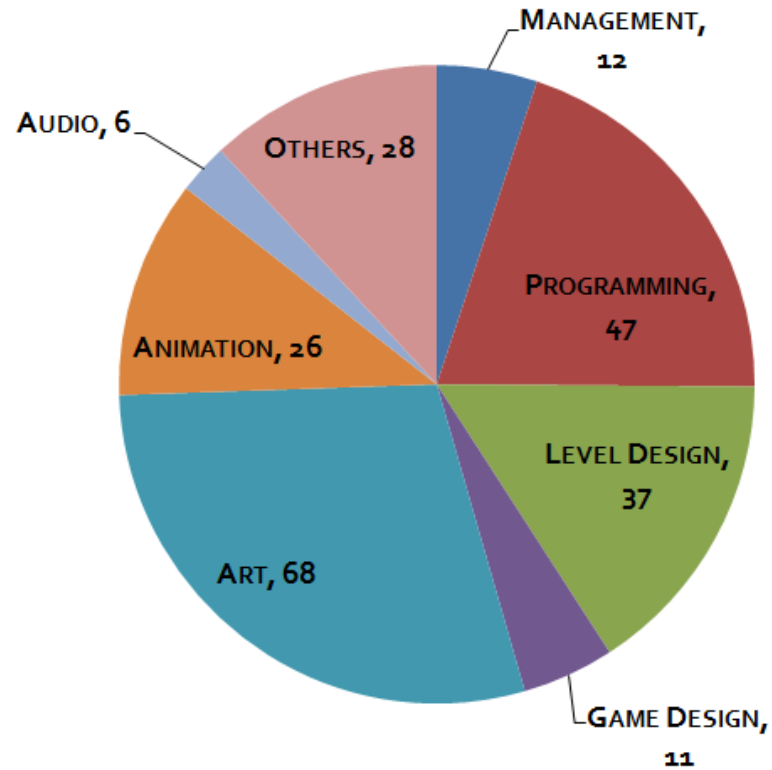
- **5 principles** to put together the optimal structure

1. **De-centralization**

   - Create a network of self-organized teams

   - Focus on empowerment & reducing dependencies

SP MAP PRODUCTION

TEAM A

TEAM B

VFX & BREAKABLES

COOP

DESIGN

COOP STORY

ONLINE

DENIABLE OPS

ENGINE & FEATURES

ENGINE

GAMEPLAY

AI

PRESENTATION

STORY & CINEMATICS

ANIMATION

LEVEL SCRIPTING

CHARACTERS

SOUND
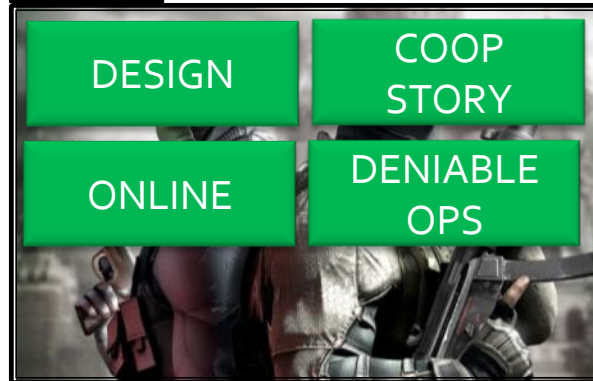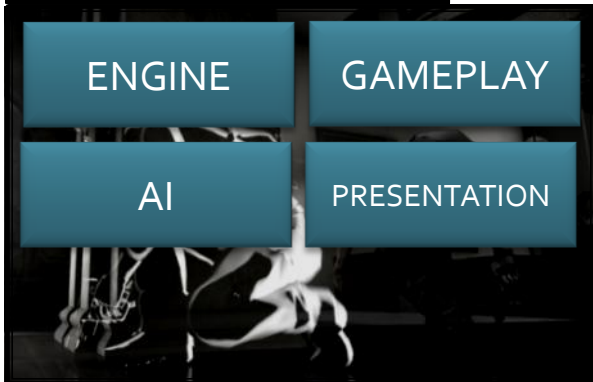
TRANSITIONS & PROJECTIONS
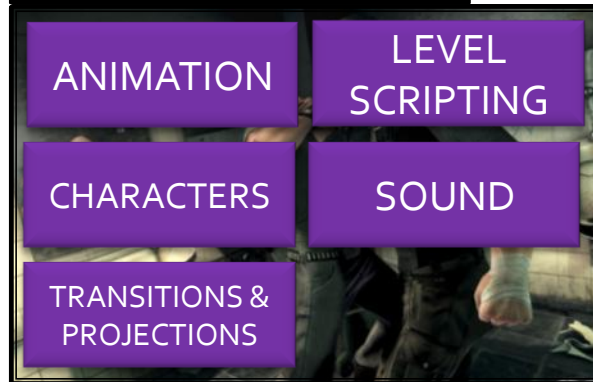
2. Separation between **management** and **content direction**

- Starts with the Producer and the Creative Director

- Model replicated throughout the team

LEVEL PRODUCTION TEAM

MANAGEMENT

CONTENT DIRECTION

Production Manager

Level Design Director

Art Director

Level Design TD

Art TD

CONTENT CREATION

Level Artists
Level Designers
Modelers
Shader Artists
Lighting Artists
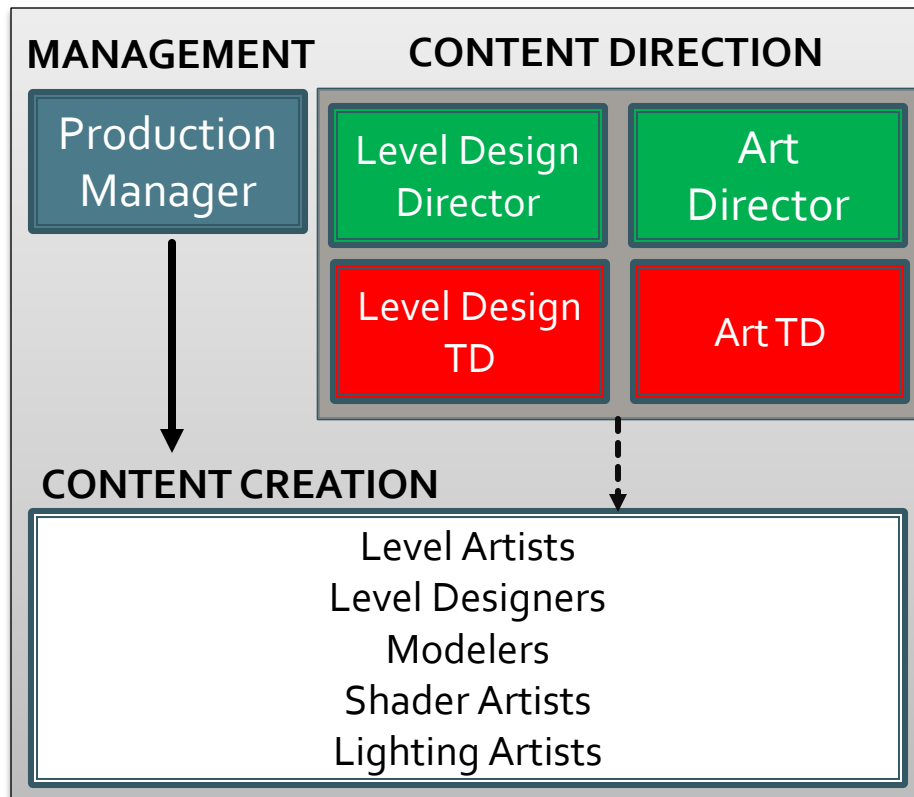
3. **Multi-Disciplinary** Teams
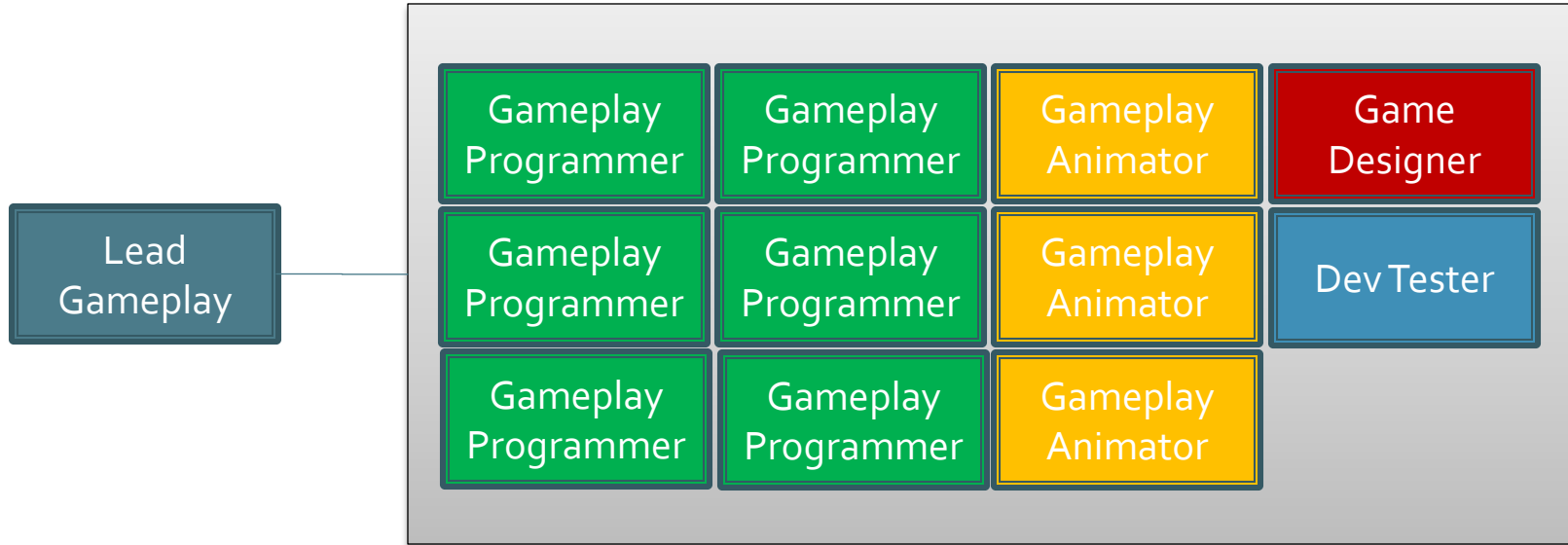
4. **Small Teams** in a Large Team

- 10 direct reports per managers at peak as a general rule

- …Map production teams tend to get to 20-25 at peak

- Should be less, but hard to achieve without the right people
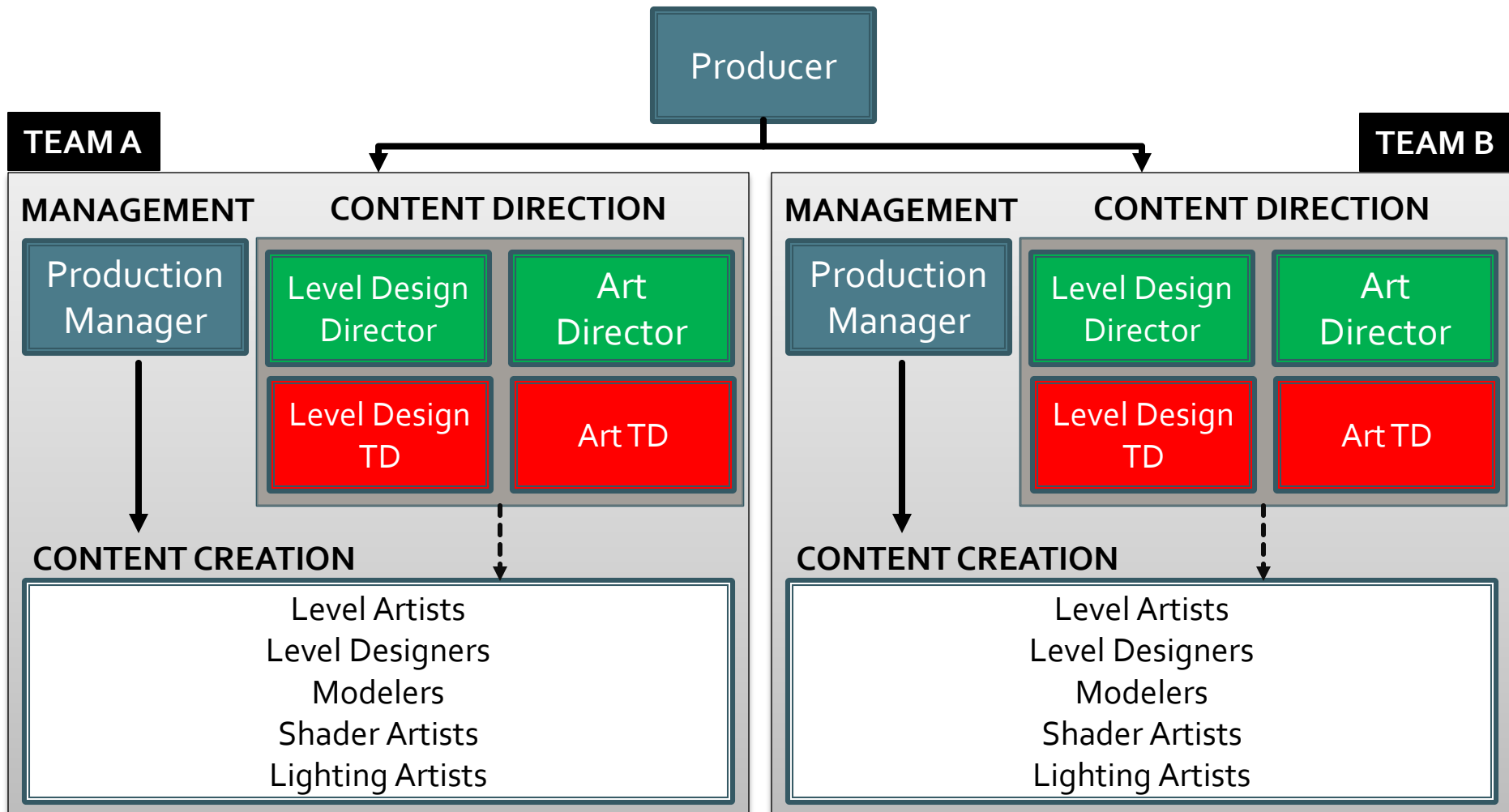
5. Stay Close to the **Vision**

- Adapting the structure to support design intentions

- Adapting design to reduce dependencies

- Creating team to generate ideas and innovation

INFILTRATE THE MANSION

VALLETTA

Evolution through project phases

CONCEPTION	PRE-PRODUCTION	PRODUCTION	RELEASE	POST-LAUNCH

■ **Evolution**

30-60

CONCEPTION	PRE-PRODUCTION	PRODUCTION	RELEASE	POST-LAUNCH

- Core team and part of extended core team
- Backbone / Skeleton of project structure
- Focus on innovation and supporting idea generation

Evolution

50-100

CONCEPTION	PRE-PRODUCTION	PRODUCTION	RELEASE	POST-LAUNCH

- Core team + extended core team
- 80% of programming team
- Production staff to put together vertical slice of all major components
- Adapt structure based on project concept & vision

200-250

- **Evolution**

CONCEPTION	PRE-PRODUCTION	PRODUCTION	RELEASE	POST-LAUNCH

- ⚠️ Don't ramp-up until vision is crystal clear
- All levels done in parallel
- Often ramp-up additional people in the second half of production to finish & polish levels

80-120

■ **Evolution**

CONCEPTION	PRE-PRODUCTION	PRODUCTION	RELEASE	POST-LAUNCH

- Programmers
- Tech artists for debugging support
- Polishing team

■ **Evolution**

15-40

CONCEPTION	PRE-PRODUCTION	PRODUCTION	RELEASE	POST-LAUNCH

- Engineers for post-launch support & patches
- DLC team

Specialization

- Senior team members focusing on smaller section of the game's scope

- New positions

Specialization

Level Design Director
▪Mission design ▪Layout approval ▪Pacing ▪Learning curve ▪Difficulty

Presentation Art Director
▪UI ▪Front End ▪HUD ▪Projections

Scripted Events Director
Animation director specialized in directing human performances for games

PHYSICAL SPACE

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

A

Machine

QC
05 06

35 36
37 38
39 40
3C-Presentation
55 56
57 58
59 60
77 78
79 80
81 82

97
99
101 102

Loc.

98 117
100
121

CD
119
122

118 140
120 142
Management
144

141 163
143 165
145 167
Marketing

164
166
168

187 188
189 190
191 192

199 200
201 203
204 205

212 213
214 215
216 217

224 225
226 227
228 229

Prod 2

B

07 08
09 10
11 12

41 42
43 44
45 46

61 62
63 64
65 66

83 84
85 86
87 88

103
105
107

Animation, Scripted Event & Transitions

104 123 124 146 147
106 125 126 148
108 127 128 150

AI

169 170
QC

149 171 172
250 173 174

DT

193 194
195 196
197 198

QC

206 207
208 209
210 211

218 219
220 221
222 223

230 231
232 233
234 235

Prod 1

237A

C

13 14
15 16
17 18
19 20

Engine

21 22
23 24

25 26

27 28
29 30

31 32
Sound
33 34

33A

47 48
49 50
51 52
53 54

QA

53A

Sec
54A

67 68

Animation Scripted Event & Transitions

71 72
73 74

73A 74A

89 90
91 92
93 94
QC
95 96

109 110
111 112
113 114
115 116

115A 116A
116B 116C

129 151 152 175 176
130 131 153 154 177 178
132 133 155 156 179 180
134 135 157 158 181 182
136 137 159 160 183 184
138 139 161 162 185 186

COOP

184A

198A 210A

211A 22A

223A 240A 241A 242A 244A 245A 246A

236 237
238 239
240 241
242 243
244 245
246 247

Prod 3

249 248

D

75
75 A
76

R.H

Enter/ Exit

Build Mach SC5

264 263
266 265

CharMod

253 252 251
256 255 254
259 258 257

30A

32A

268 262 261 260

Tom Clancy's SPLINTER CELL CONVICTION

Process

Achieving the right balance between top down direction and individual contribution

- **Productivity** = strong vision + clear constraints

  - Strong top down direction & focus is critical

  - Defining "creative space" for people and teams is just as important

- **Priority** System

  - Not great at planning, but good at establishing where we need to be at main gates

  - Project needs to go through regular re-scoping and re-priotizing

Process - **Features**

MANAGEMENT & DIRECTORS   TEAM

Scope	Features	FSOs	Tasks

- Vision & goals
- Master list of features
- Per team
- Prioritized
- Feature "sign-off"
- 1 per feature
- Specs list
- Defines state of features
- From FSOs
- In tracking software

- **FSOs** – Feature Sign-Off

  - Quickly becoming the standard for communicating design at Ubisoft

  - Specs list for a feature / functional requirements document

  - Stages: PROTOTYPE ➡ ALPHA ➡ BETA

FEATURE NAME

Feature Owner :

Co-Owners :

Validators :

Includes:					Excludes:
Description	**Co-Owner**	**Required**	**Checked**	**Jira ID**	**Comments**
Gameplay					
Engine					
Controls					
Camera					
Animation					
Sound/Music design					
AI					
Presentation / Feedback					
Save Games					
Related Bugs					
<list of bugs here or link to filter if list is too long>					

Process - **Content**

Scope	Blueprint	Level Design	Tasks

- Vision & goals
- Synopsis
- Map breakdown
- Pre-production deliverable
- Level design & art intentions per level
- In tracking software

- Planning **Methodologies**

  - Reporting: Common way to share status and progress

  - Regular milestones to demonstrate progress

  - Allow teams to adapt work methods to their needs and expertise

Culture

Keeping the organization human

- **Leadership**

  - Team leader vs project manager

  - People have to believe the work they do for the project has a <u>purpose</u>

  - Need to foster investment in the project, sometimes in a very short amount of time
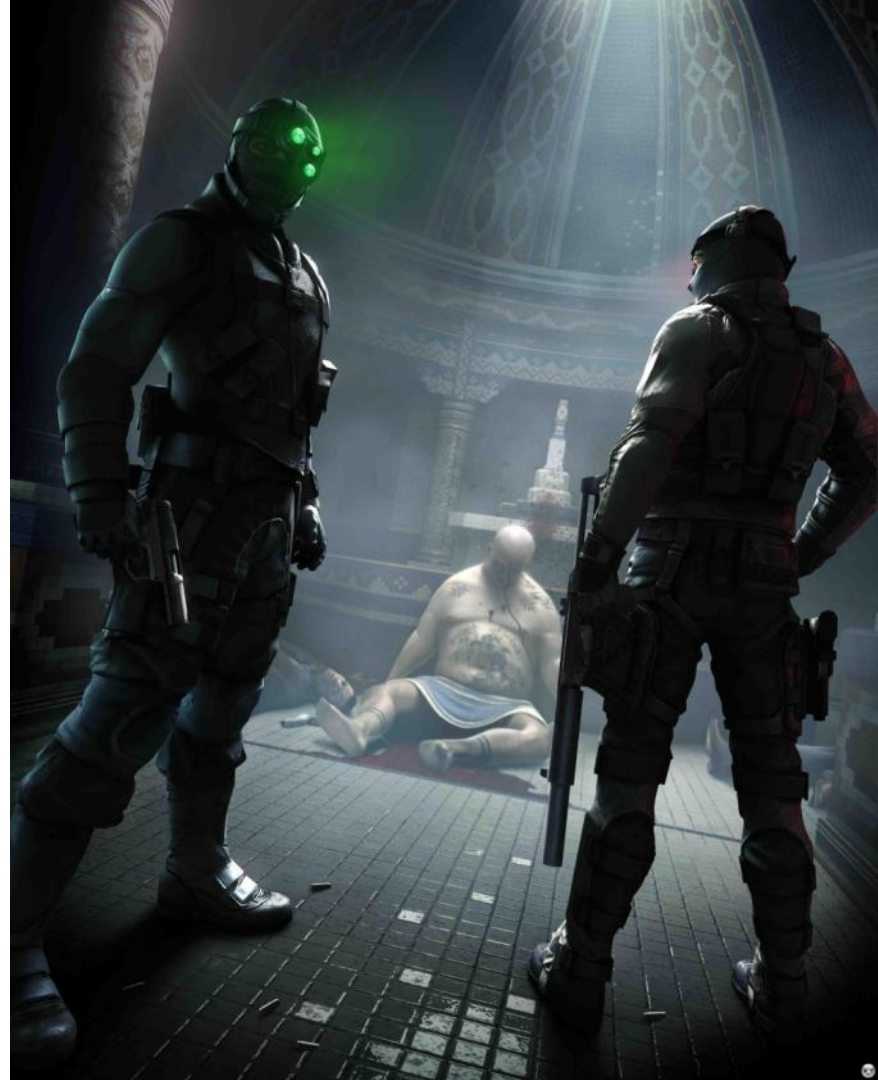
LEADERSHIP

- Focused on people
- Provide vision and direction
- Manage with others

MANAGEMENT

- Focused on work
- Provide goals and objectives
- Organize and plan the project

- **Leadership**

  - Sharing the leadership role

- Team **Values**

1. Empowerment & accountability
2. Excellence
3. Transparency
4. Communication
5. Perseverance

1. **Empowerment & Accountability**

   - Provide a context where people feel empowered

   - Everyone should expect to be accountable for results

2. **Excellence**

- Quality first – if a deliverable is on time but not at the level of quality expected, <u>it is late</u>

- Priorities & benchmark have to be properly defined – not everything can be perfect

3. **Transparency**

- Large teams are amazing at detecting when you are trying to cover things up – be transparent about what is going on

- Managers are accessible and not afraid to talk about the real issues

4. **Communication**

- Sharing information and progress is worth the time investment

- Remind people to speak up when there are issues

5. **Perseverance**

"Success is the ability to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm."

Sir W. Churchill

Conclusion

Monster Power

The **Good**

- Large teams give us the means to put together entertainment blockbusters that transcend videogames

- We are getting better!

- The **Bad**

  - A large % of time of production is spent on learning to work well as a team

  - We would get better faster with more stability, but not coming any time soon

  - When we fail the consequences are dramatic

- Harnessing the **power of the monster**:

    - **<u>Organization</u>**
    Put together the optimal structure for you large project

    - **<u>Process</u>**
    Maintain the right balance between top down direction and individual contribution

    - **<u>Culture</u>**
    Keep the organization human

- What **Now**?

  - In Ubisoft Toronto building the team to work on the next Splinter Cell

  - Foundations of the team are based on core principles discussed today

  - Great teams are the competitive advantage

THANKS!
&
QUESTIONS?

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