

IMPROVING WORKFLOW

Implementing Process Guidelines to Requests for Proposal -Workflow

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ABSTRACT

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The aim and purpose of this thesis was to create an improved RFP (Request for proposal) workflow for Dreamloop Games. To do this, the theoretical framework consists of topics related to process- and project management, such as Business process management, Deming's PDCA cycle and SCRUM.

Due to the nature of the thesis, an effort was made to focus on the company and the people working there. For this reason, a major part of the reference material consists of interview data.

The outcome of this thesis is an improved RFP workflow that takes into account the team's strengths, limitations of technology and the challenges introduced by a 3rd party partner, whilst using the aforementioned theoretical framework as an inspiration for structure and convention.

Key words: request for proposal, workflow improvement, process management, efficiency management

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GLOSSARY

TAMK	Tampere University of Applied Sciences
cr	credit
RCP	remote control productions
RFP	request for proposal
IP	intellectual property

1 INTRODUCTION

Processes are a huge part of today's business environment. Selling produce in markets is a multi-staged process that includes tens, hundreds or even thousands of people on a multitude of different premises. Each of these people are working on their own tasks with little to no knowledge of what the rest are doing. The glue that makes sure this complicated sequence of tasks works well and achieves its goal is the process. On a smaller scale, brewing a pan of coffee in the company break room is a process. Even though there are only few people taking part, usually only one, there is a set of tasks one must perform to achieve one full pan of coffee. Sure, brewing coffee takes far less time, effort and management, but what it has in common with selling produce in a market is that there are several points during the process, where a deviation in the process will produce a different result.

Dreamloop Games has recently changed their business model from simply financing their own game development to working on outsourcing and client projects. The introduction of a 2nd party, whether it is a client or partnering company, has brought up problems with the current workflows. As Dreamloop Games is a small company with a flat hierarchy, the workflows have formed organically and do not have a basis in any process management methodology.

Most of the outsourcing and client projects the company receives come through a German partner company called 'remote control productions', who are contacted by a client requesting a company to do work-for-hire for them. These requests are called 'requests for proposal', or 'RFPs'. In these RFPs, Dreamloop Games is requested to make a proposal on the work-for-hire project, usually containing information like budget and production schedule, and in the case of game projects, documents on game design, concept art, narrative outline and the experience of the development team. These proposal documents are called 'pitch decks'.

1.1 About Dreamloop Games

Dreamloop Games Oy (PICTURE 1) is a small independent video game company located in Tampere. The company has 12 employees working on different areas of video game development. Dreamloop Games has released one product to the market, a game called Stardust Galaxy Warriors: Stellar Climax which is a side-scrolling shoot-em-up (shmup) game. Currently the company is doing a lot of outsourcing work for other development studios to create cashflow to fund their future game development. This outsourcing work consists of creation, and polishing, of art assets, implementation of game mechanics and even creation of entire projects.



PICTURE 1. Dreamloop Games' logo

During its first full financial year, in 2016, Dreamloop Games' turnover was only 18 000 euros. This was due to the release of their first game, Stardust Galaxy Warriors: Stellar Climax, which did not become a huge success, even though it broke-even. As Dreamloop entered into partnership with remote control productions in 2017, their turnover grew 1127,8% settling at 156,000 euros.

As the majority of the company's cashflow is currently generated by outsourcing work, it is extremely important that the work is executed as efficiently as possible. In its current state, there are no guidelines or unified processes for the work that goes into the RFPs. The people working on the RFPs change on a case by case basis, or by whoever are available. This creates obvious problems with the employee motivation, workflows and RFP schedules.

1.2 About the requests for proposal and the RFP-workflow

During 2017, Dreamloop Games worked on 20 RFPs. The requirements, scope and timelines have varied greatly, but a lot of progress has been made during the first year and an organic workflow has arisen from the experiences the team has had with these 20 RFPs.

The current workflow (FIGURE 1) with the RFPs starts with the management receiving information on a new RFP through their contacts at remote control productions. The management proceeds by booking a workshop for a set of employees, who are: Available and interested in the topic or available and specialized in the specific type of work the RFP requires. In the workshop, the group discusses the viability of the RFP. If the RFP is deemed viable, the team proceeds to discuss the details of the RFP. At this point, the workflow diverges into different directions, depending on the type of RFP in question.

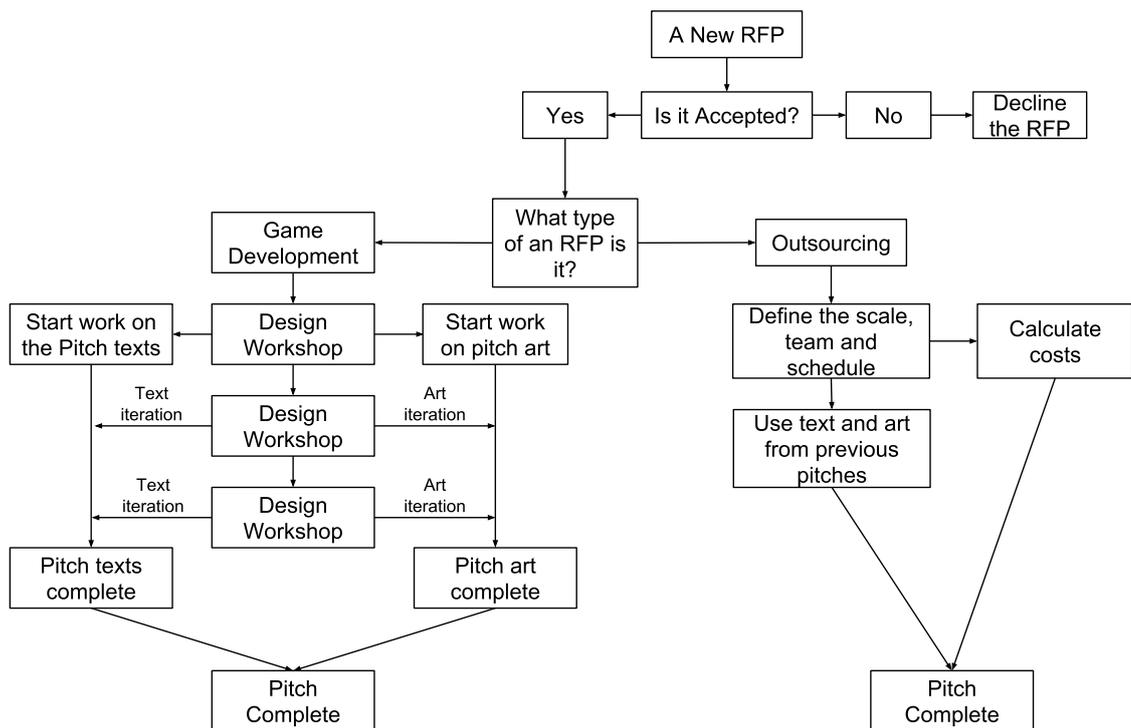


FIGURE 1. The current RFP pitch creation process.

If the RFP is for an entire game development project, the workshop turns into a design workshop, where the core elements of the game are discussed and a basic high concept is developed. During the work on this type of an RFP, there will be multiple workshops where the team iterates on the design of the game. Later on, there will be workshops that emphasize on the deliverable pitch deck. Mainly on what it says and how it looks.

If the RFP is for an already existing project, requiring porting from one platform to another or extra art assets, the workshop moves to discuss the required information for a pitch. The pitch deck is usually created much faster as it does not require as much text as the previous, game development RFPs do.

After the pitches are complete, they are sent to remote control productions, where business development experts read them through and give Dreamloop Games feedback on which aspects work and which do not. This 'iteration process' usually takes from few days to few weeks. The changes made with the feedback from remote control productions are often small tweaks to how the pitch is worded or how certain gameplay elements are presented.

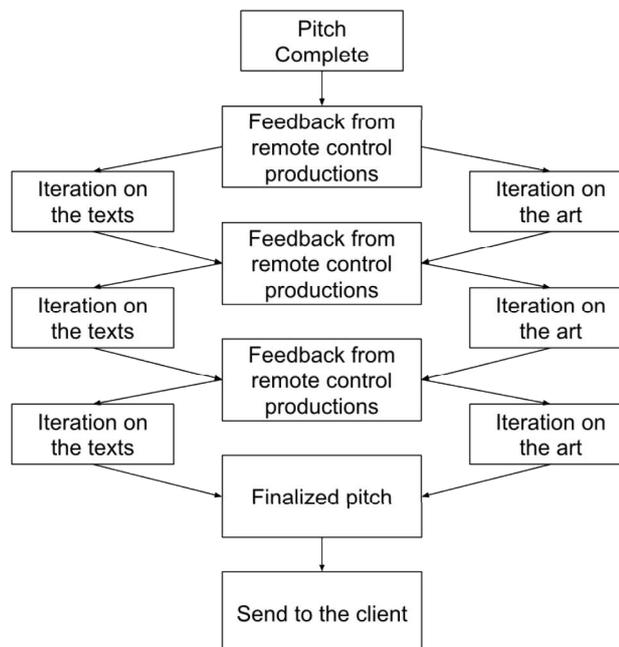


FIGURE 2. The RFP pitch iteration process.

Having the actual pitch process and the iteration process as two completely separate processes causes a lot of excess time spent on each RFP. The many iterations on the pitch's texts and art during the pitch creation process are wasted if they are then changed again during the pitch iteration process.

Another problem in the current RFP workflow is the lack of efficiency tracking. The company uses a rather standard employee time tracking to see how much time each person in the RFP team has put into any specific pitch. However, this time tracking only shows the total time spent by each person and not how much of that time was actively spent on working on the RFP and the pitch.

1.3 Purpose of the thesis

The commissioner, Dreamloop Games, wishes to make their RFP process more consistent and efficient. To change the current organically formed and managed style to something more organized, while maintaining as much of their flat hierarchy and organic structure and workflow as possible.

The goal of this thesis is to create an RFP process plan for Dreamloop Games which will simplify the RFP process. My goal is to create a straightforward process plan that can be scaled to accommodate both small and large RFPs, while functioning as efficiently as possible.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The main topics of the thesis are process and efficiency. As the current RFP process is not based on any existing process management methodology or utility, business process management (later 'BPM') will be used as the theoretical framework when building the new process. To deliver on the goal of creating a process plan that is as efficient as possible, a measurement for calculating efficiency must be set. Process cycle efficiency (later PCE) provides the theoretical framework needed to measure and compare efficiency between the old RFP process and the planned new RFP processes.

2.1 PDCA cycle

The Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle, made famous by William Edwards Deming, is a management method meant to improve quality in production (Sutherland 2015, 35). The PDCA method consists of four phases: Planning, doing, checking and acting.

The planning phase, as the name implies, emphasises on planning. During this phase, the what and how are discussed and determined. The planning phase may involve larger plans in the beginning, but later in the PDCA cycle the plans become smaller as the production starts to improve quality and smaller changes are easier to implement.

In the do phase, the plans are put into action. The new plans are used to build or create and then test the output. Data is collected from the creation and testing to be evaluated later.

The check phase is all about evaluating the data gathered in the do phase. Evaluation is made between current and previous cycles, as well as between the estimated result during planning and the actual result achieved during the do phase.

The act phase is about making changes based on what was learned during the check phase. If the evaluation during check phase suggests that the new plan and do phases worked better than previously, they are made the new default standard.

2.2 Process and business process management

2.2.1 Process

What is a process? The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a process as “a natural phenomenon marked by gradual changes that lead toward a particular result” (2018). When the notion of a process is taken to a business setting, the definition gains some crucial additions. In their book Marlon Dumas, Marcello La Rosa, Jan Mendling and Hajo A. Reijers define a business process as “a collection of inter-related events, activities and decision points that involve a number of actors and objects, and that collectively lead to an outcome that is of value to at least one customer” (2013:5).

Often, creative processes and non-standard work tasks are met with a ‘one-off’ - mindset, where the people responsible think the work they are doing is only temporary, hence not deserving a dedicated process (vom Brocke & Rosemann 2015, 5). By not dedicating time to creating a proper process, the people responsible for the tasks are unbeknown to themselves making their jobs harder. With proper process planning, structuring and management any problems arising from the process are much easier to track down and solve.

2.2.2 Business process management

Business process management, or BPM, is a discipline that focuses on improving the company’s performance through the usage of methods, techniques and tools in discovering, analyzing, redesigning, executing and monitoring the company’s business processes (Dumas et al. 2013, 5). It is based on Deming’s PDCA model, but it has been evolved to encompass the nature of processes better, as can be seen in FIGURE 3.

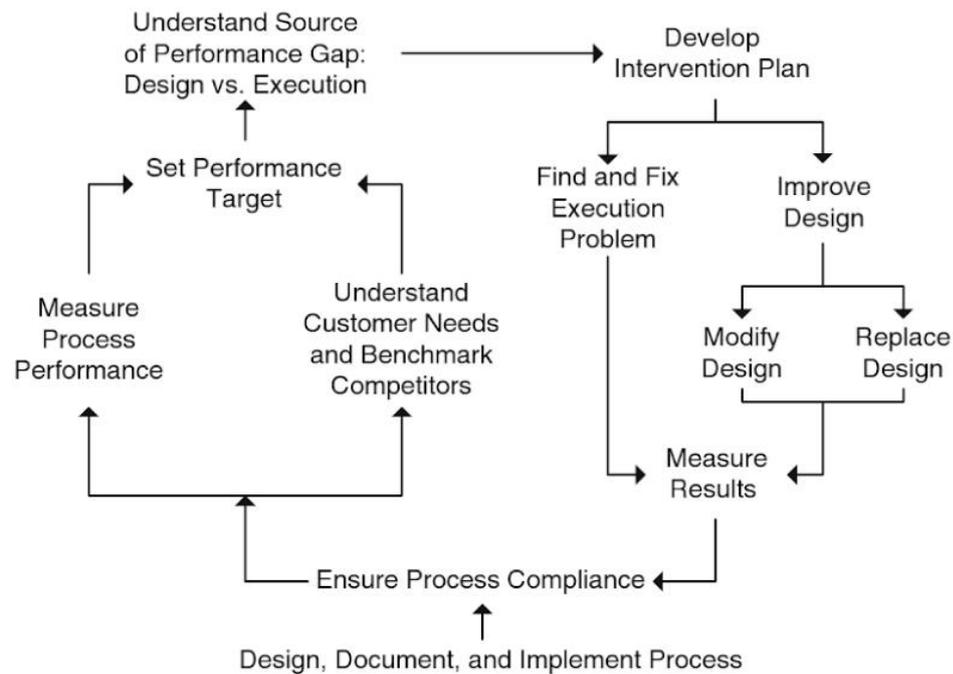


FIGURE 3. The essential process management cycle (vom Brocke & Rosemann 2015)

The process management cycle is an example of the ever-evolving nature of BPM. What makes processes so effective under BPM is the fact that the process is constantly monitored and altered to create the most value out of the process.

2.3 Process cycle efficiency

In sciences, efficiency is calculated by dividing the output with the input and multiplied by 100%. Using a similar principle, process efficiency can be calculated using process cycle efficiency or 'PCE'. PCE divides the time spent actively working in the process (value-add time) with the time spent on the process in its entirety (process lead time) and then multiplies it by 100 to achieve a percentage.

$$\text{PCE} = 100 \times (\text{value-add time}) / \text{process lead time.} \quad (1)$$

The PCE percentage can be used to estimate the efficiency and the cost of the process -a high PCE generally means lower costs and higher efficiency (George 2010, 85).

2.4 Agile development

Game development has been traditionally a long process, with the full development cycle lasting anything from half a year to a decade. Many things can change in the industry, development team, the creative vision or marketplace during a game's development and the team needs to be able to respond to that change quickly. Therefore, the game development industry has opted to use agile development methodologies and agile thinking. One of the most common methodologies is 'Scrum'.

Scrum values individuals and interactions over processes and tools. Instead of assigning each development department their own tasks and then monitoring them through a highly thought out process, in agile development, multi-disciplinary teams are created to tackle a set of multi-disciplinary tasks. The teams are autonomous and own their accomplishments and failures, meaning they are responsible for setting up, and then meeting, their own goals for each milestone (Sutherland 2015, 44).

Putting together teams consisting of developers from multiple different disciplines has many benefits: The teams can find game-ready solutions faster than working in homogenous teams and decide the best way to work on each assigned task instead of working on a standardized process that might not suit their own workflows (Keith 2010, 160-161).

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Interviewing

Interviews are used in order to understand the way the people in the RFP team work, think and feel. As Irving Seidman wrote in his book: “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience.” (2006, 9).

Interviewing, like other qualitative research methods, has its own techniques. According to Irving Seidman, the most important one is listening. By listening carefully on what the interviewee is actually saying, what the subtext of what they are saying is and how the interview is flowing, an interviewer can effectively control the course of the interview (2006, 78-80). Another important technique is asking question. Normally, the interviewer enters the interview with a basic set of questions, or even a single question. The questions then emerge from the information the interviewer has gained from listening the interviewee. Following up on important topics or asking a clarifying question on something that the interviewer did not quite understand is essential for a good interview (Seidman 2006, 81-83).

To make the new RFP workflow best suit the work and workers of the RFP team, their input must be heard and be taken into consideration. In the spirit of BPM and PDCA, the new workflow is iterated on through monitoring and feedback, even before it is implemented in use for the first time.

The interviews will be conducted both face-to-face and over the internet. The interview concentrates on the changes to the RFP workflow and the potential need for additional iteration. As a starting point, the interviewees are walk through the old RFP workflow, showcasing the problems found during the research. Then, the interviewees are introduced to the new RFP workflow and the solutions it provides to the old workflow’s problems. What follows is a discussion on the planned changes and whether or not additional changes are needed. The results will then be used to improve the new RFP workflow.

4 IMPROVING THE WORKFLOW

4.1 Feedback

Starting off with the old game development RFP workflow (FIGURE 4), we can see that there is already a big problem with how the business development people, who are responsible for selling the pitch to the client, get to give their feedback after the pitch has been finalized by the RFP team. As the business development people usually have a better understanding of the client's requirements and desires, they should be included into the process at the earliest stage possible.

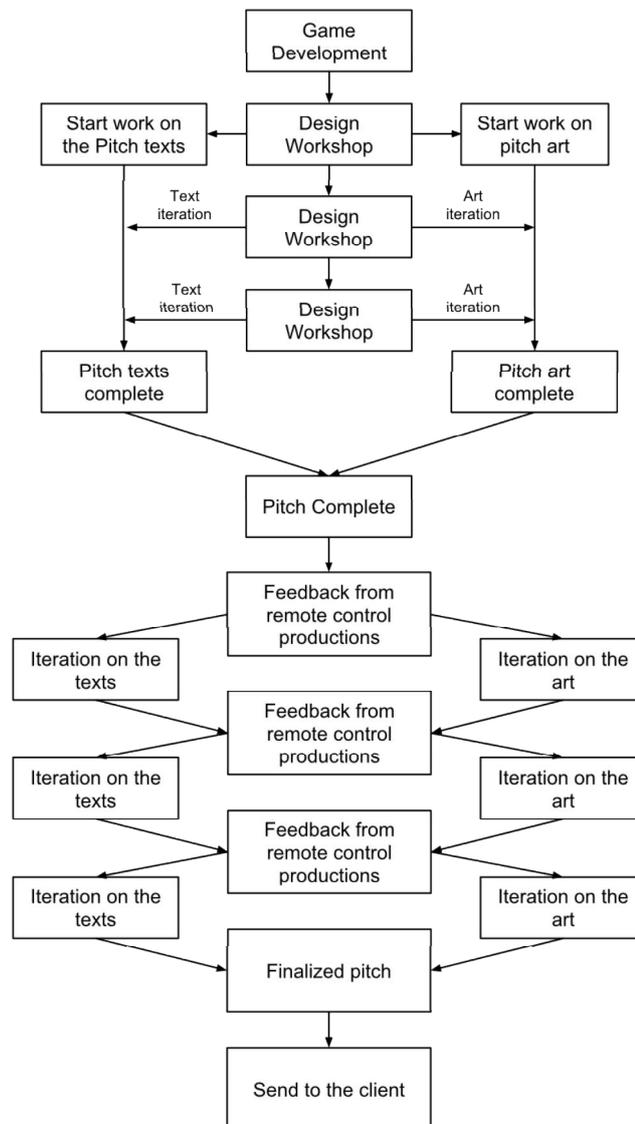


FIGURE 4. Old game development RFP workflow.

The RFP team spends hours writing designs, planning features and drawing concepts and art for each of the pitch decks. All of this is done based on the original RFP that the business development people at RCP have provided to the team. The RFP usually contains information that is based on what the client has directly told RCP and information that has been interpreted by the RCP business development people. These two information sources are often indistinguishable from each other as they are not clearly credited to either party. Due to this, the team can end up interpreting some of the texts wrong and by the time this turns out to be the case, the team has already gone through multiple iterations of the pitch. This problem creates a lot of wasted effort and lengthens the lead time of the RFP process considerably.

This problem regarding the team's knowledge of the RFP that is being worked on is supported by the findings from the interview with Juraj Kyppö (Appendix 1), where he mentions that he is often asked to start work on "something preliminary" before all the details are known. This often results in the work being "not relevant" and the time being lost on something that will not be used.

To minimize the lead time caused by misinterpretations and misunderstanding the client's needs, the feedback from RCP business development people must be implemented as a core step in the RFP workflow.

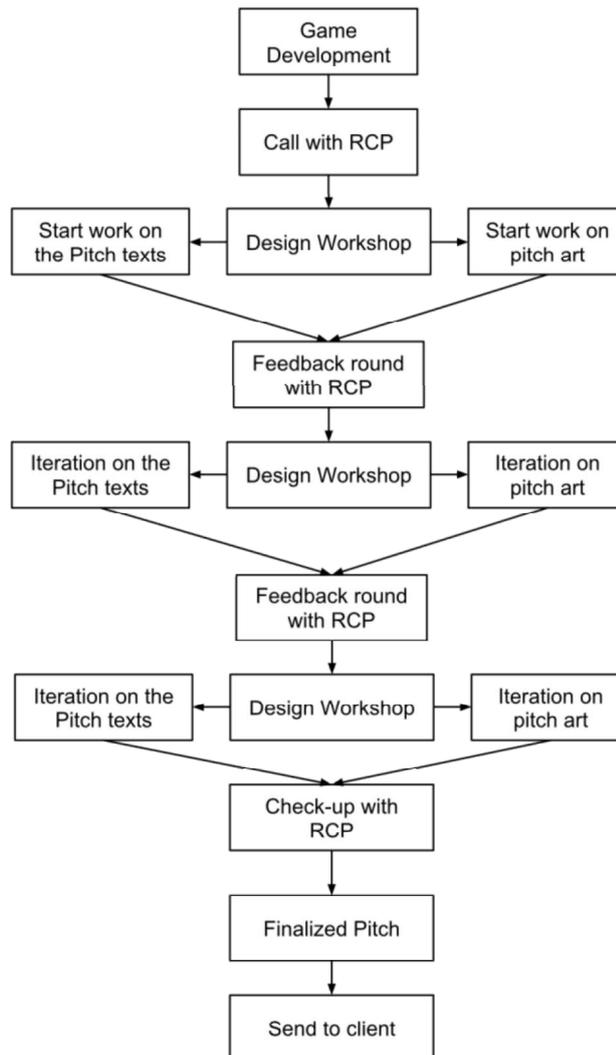


FIGURE 5. New game development RFP workflow.

The new model uses Deming's PDCA model as a basis for better quality and more efficient production. In the new feedback model, the RCP business development is introduced to the workflow right from the start. The RFP team starts the RFP workflow by calling the RCP business development and discussing the information in the provided RFP documents. After the call, the RFP team moves forward to having their first design workshop, which serves as the first planning phase of the PDCA cycle.

Once the plans have been created in the design workshop, the RFP team moves on to produce the first iterations on the pitch texts and art. This serves as the do phase and provides especially valuable information on how well the planned art style works with the pitch deck.

After the first iterations of both the texts and art are completed, the RFP team contacts RCP's business development to check on how their texts and art are progressing and if there are any major changes that need to be done. Once the feedback has been received from RCP's business development, the RFP team moves on to act on the feedback – another design workshop is held and plans are revised based on the RCP feedback.

This cycle of design workshops, text and art iterations and RCP feedback is repeated as many times as necessary to produce a pitch deck that is thought to satisfy the client and that the RFP team can stand behind.

By using the PDCA cycle and implementing the RCP feedback into the RFP workflow as an integrated step, the lead time is shortened considerably compared to the old model, as the team does not need to recreate finalized assets after receiving feedback, but instead they can organically iterate on the assets based on the feedback.

4.2 Pitch assets

Currently, the vast majority of assets used in the pitches are custom made for each RFP. Especially with the game development RFPs. Building art assets for each RFP is both time consuming and tedious for the artists. Instead of creating each RFP pitch from scratch, the team should build a library of generic assets that can be either easily customized to fit multiple pitches or used as is.

Joni Lappalainen said in his interview (Appendix 2) that the team is approaching a situation where they have created so many pitches that soon they should have enough material to come up with a selection of templates for different RFPs.

The pitches are delivered as pdfs, but they resemble Power Point presentations in their form, each slide having background art, text and pictures. The backgrounds are made to be atmospheric but not eye-catching. Their job is to set the mood for the reader, but not draw attention away from the text and pictures. These backgrounds could be made reusable, by building a library of easy-to-customize background arts. This would give the artists a chance to spend more of their value-add time on more important art tasks, such as concept art and game mock-ups.

4.3 Technical limitations

In the current workflow, the artist responsible for putting the pitch together works with their own software of choice, offline. This has produced really high quality pitches, visually, but it has also created some wasted efficiency as the artist may need to change assets, texts and format many times over during the process and the software might not be well suited for it.

Ville Kaunisto says in his interview (Appendix 3) that in his mind, one of the biggest problems with the current process is that the artist is basically working on their own. The artist may not know which version of the texts are the most up-to-date and which are old, meaning there have been times when old texts have been used instead of the new ones.

A solution for this problem would be to take the pitch online, where more than one people could work on it at the same time. This way, the texts would always be up-to-date and the artist could focus on the pitch's assets.

4.4 Documentation

All game development pitches start with a design workshop where the RFP team discusses ideas on what the core mechanics, scope and art style of the game should be. These workshops often last for several hours and provide the team a foundation on to which they will then build. Depending on the scope of the pitch, several design workshops may be had during the pitch workflow.

The design workshops are used to make the largest decisions in every pitch. This is because all of the most crucial members of the RFP team are present in these design workshops. Currently, the documentation of these workshops is rather light, with one person being responsible for taking notes of all aspects that are discussed during the workshop, be it a specific aspect of the art style, a game mechanic or a matter of the game's technical architecture. This approach puts a lot of pressure on the one taking notes, as they need to understand every subject well enough to make comprehensible and worthwhile notes.

Juraj Kyppö (Appendix 1) mentions in his interview that he often needs to sit down with the person who took the notes to make sure which parts of the documentation is supposed to be design for the actual project and which of it is supposed to be utilized in the pitching.

Another point of view comes from Joni Lappalainen (Appendix 2), where he says the documentation is working out pretty well for the use of the creative lead. In its current form, the documentation serves as a list of notes for the creative lead, who can then create advanced designs using the workshop notes.

An improvement to the current documentation method would be to have a short after meeting talk between the one taking notes and the creative director. This way, the creative director can have a look at the notes and provide additional information on any discussed subject that is not presented well enough in the notes.

4.5 Tracking efficiency

The company tracks its employees' working time through a service called Kimai. In Kimai, the workers will choose which client's project they are working on and what category of work they are currently working on. The service will then show the management in Dreamloop Games how much time each member spent on any specific task on any specific day.

Normally, each employee tracks their current work efforts by choosing a client, a project and an assignment. The client can be anyone from Dreamloop Games to an outside company. The project also varies greatly depending on who the client is, for Dreamloop Games the project is usually one of their own IPs and for clients they are either RFPs or outsourcing projects. The assignments are generic, game development related categories, such as 2D art, programming or management.

A note from Joni Lappalainen (Appendix 2) is that even though we do not track the active time on pitches, it is not a big loss as people are working on pitches as a “side-activity”, with their primary focus being in project work.

To implement Kimai into tracking process efficiency, a new practice must be introduced. In addition to tracking the time one person spends actively on an RFP task, the RFP team should make notes on when their RFP workflow is suspended due to another assignment or hold up in the RFP workflow.

In PCE the two important elements of efficiency are lead time and value-add time. So far, the company has only tracked the value-add time, but with the implementation of the new efficiency tracking in Kimai, the company can more easily and reliably calculate the lead time as well. This will hopefully help the company discover and rectify any unnecessary hold ups in the RFP workflow.

5 ITERATING ON THE NEW WORKFLOW

5.1 Iteration on the feedback

After interviewing some of the employees of Dreamloop Games, an idea emerged to create a system, where different RFP workflows would be used for different priority RFPs. The proposed changes to the RFP workflow were deemed good but problematic due to RCP's limited resources. RCP cannot give enough time from their business development personnel for each RFP in the new workflow. In addition, the first feedback round with RCP was deemed to be problematic due to the materials not being useful to the RCP personnel at such an early stage.

To remedy these problems, the initial, primary workflow, would be adjusted to feature an internal feedback round between the first and second design workshops. Also, a new, secondary workflow must be created for projects that are either low in potential revenue or unlikely to happen, where RCP feedback is given less weight.

5.1.1 Primary workflow

As pointed out by Joni Lappalainen (Appendix 2) the RCP personnel cannot utilize the materials created in the early stages of the RFP workflow. For the RCP personnel to be able to provide useful feedback, a more detailed pitch deck must be provided. For this reason, the first RCP feedback will be changed to an internal feedback round.

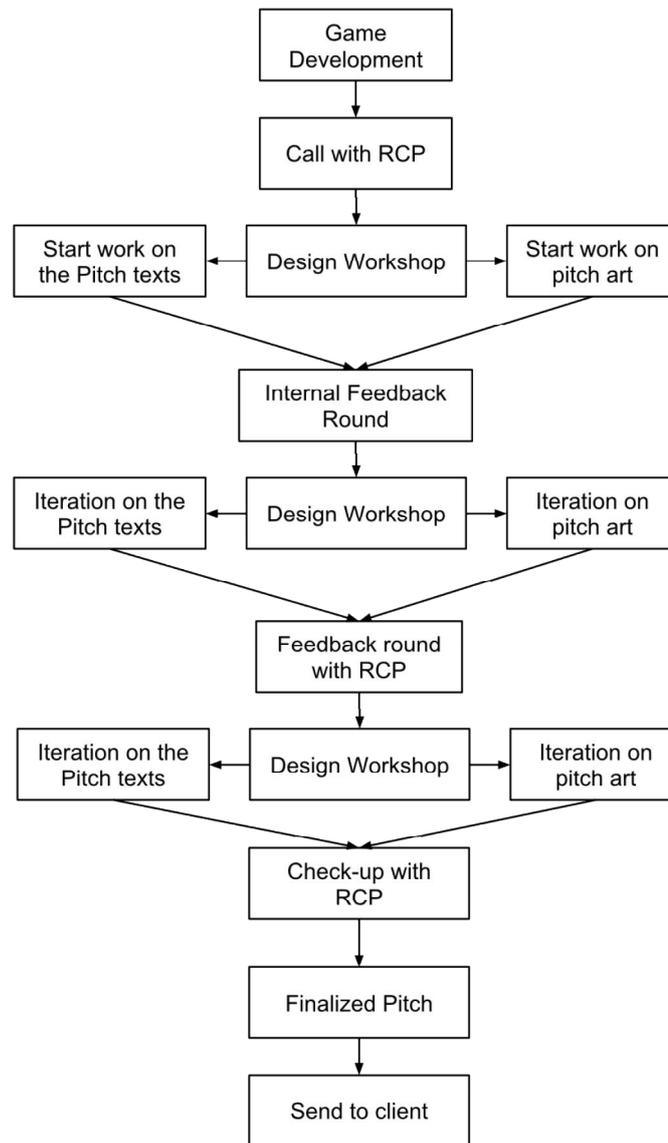


FIGURE 6. Primary game development RFP workflow.

5.1.2 Secondary workflow

The secondary game development workflow is designed for pitches that are deemed to not be of high priority due to low budget or low chance of success. It deviates from the new game development RFP workflow seen in figure 5 by making RCP's involvement smaller. RCP is only involved at the very start of the process to ensure the RFP team has all the information they need to make the pitch happen and at the very end to check the pitch for any glaring mistakes.

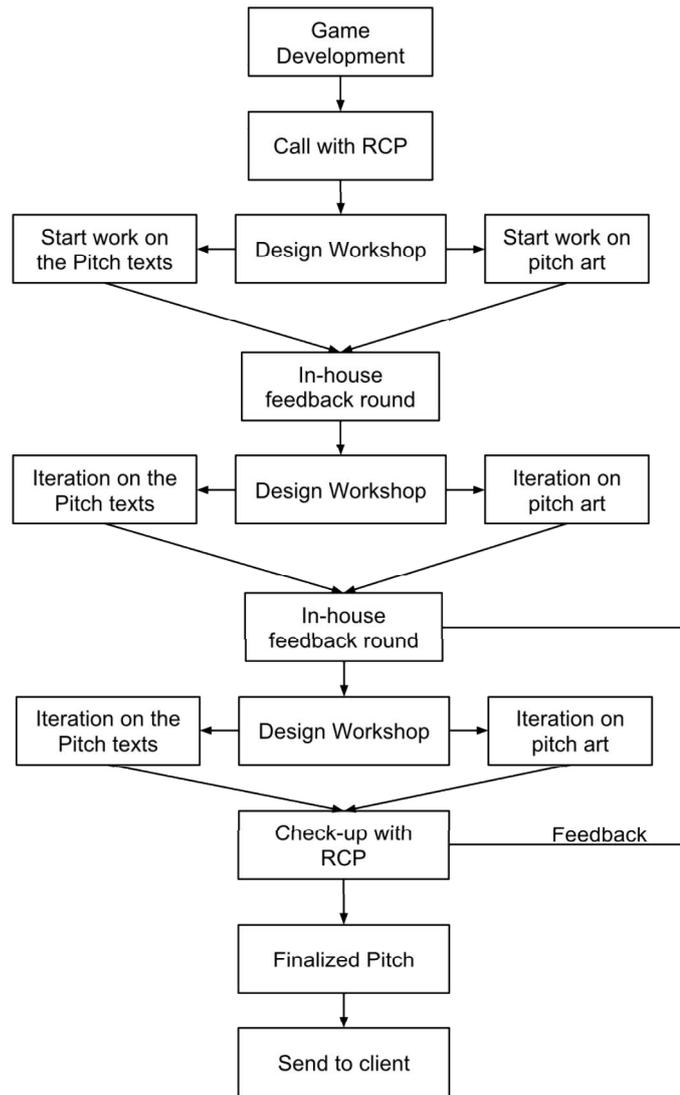


FIGURE 7. Secondary game development RFP workflow.

This way, the time spent on the pitch, both value-added- and lead time, can be shortened making the whole process more efficient. The new game development RFP workflow would remain as a go to solution when the pitch would be deemed important enough and where RCP involvement would remain crucial.

5.2 Iteration on documentation

The interviews showed that a previously unnoticed problem was affecting the workflow when it comes to documentation (Appendix 1). The documents produced in the design workshops contain information for both the pitch and the game to be. However, the latter is not relevant information most of the time for the people working on the pitch deck and can distract or even confuse the people putting the pitch deck together.

5.2.1 Post-workshop sit-down

To make the design documentation as clear to read as possible, the creative lead and the workshop secretary should have a sit-down after each meeting and compile a list of which material is used in the pitch deck and which is purely game design documentation.

Another matter concerning the documentation came from the interview with Ville Kaunisto (Appendix 3), where a problem was identified with the design workshop not giving the person creating the pitch deck any visual references or material to build on, concerning the look of the pitch deck.

This problem could be solved by the aforementioned sit-down by the creative lead and the workshop secretary. The creative lead would be responsible of giving the references and visual cues to the person working on the pitch deck and the workshop secretary would be responsible for writing the ideas up.

5.3 Iteration on the pitch deck asset pipeline

The idea of a gallery of pre-made assets for the artists was quickly found inadequate by the people responsible of the visuals of the pitch decks. Both the artist and the creative lead thought that instead of making their job easier, the pre-made asset gallery would make their work harder. The reasoning for this was that since every pitch is made for a different project, the pre-made assets would need to be customized to fit that specific pitch. The time needed to customize something pre-made is equal or more compared to building up something fit for purpose from scratch (Appendix 1 & Appendix 3).

5.3.1 Pitch deck templates

To make the RFP workflow better when it comes to the art assets and putting the pitch deck together, the idea of pitch deck templates came up in the interviews. Instead of trying to make small, reusable assets, the RFP team would come up with multiple pitch deck templates suited for different types of RFPs. These templates would include the areas for key art, texts and other visual elements.

5.3.2 Technical pipeline

During the interview with Ville Kaunisto (Appendix 6) an issue was raised about the technical pipeline in the RFP process. Once the work on the final pitch deck starts, the work is done on one person's computer using software that does not work very well for the use-case. This creates technical problems within the RFP workflow.

To remedy this, and to better utilize the aforementioned templates, the use of cloud-based systems, like Google Slides, should be implemented into the RFP workflow. This way, all members of the RFP team could simultaneously work on the pitch. Currently, if someone wants to update the texts to the pitch deck, the one creating the pitch deck needs to stop whatever they were working on and add the new texts. With the cloud-based systems, this would not be an issue.

5.4 Iteration on efficiency

5.4.1 Efficiency analysis

To better understand the time spent on each RFP, the team's management needs to go through the Kimai time tracking after each RFP has been completed. By doing this, the management can look for and pinpoint moments during the RFP workflow that caused unintentional lead time. The information would then be taken into the RFP retro and discussed with the rest of the team.

5.4.2 RFP retro

After the completion of each RFP and after the management's analysis of the RFP team's efficiency, the RFP team should have an RFP retro meeting. In this meeting, the team would go through the events of the latest RFP workflow and see where the team succeeded and what are the areas that require improvement.

Retrospective meetings are an integral part of Scrum and Agile practices and introducing one to the RFP workflow would give the team more tools to potentially improve it.

6 THE NEW RFP WORKFLOW

The new RFP workflow has been developed by taking inspiration from Business Process Management, Deming's PDCA model, Sutherland's SCRUM and the method of Process Cycle Efficiency and infusing the ideas with the experiences from the RFP team members from Dreamloop Games. The result is an improved workflow that is made to fit the team's expectations and work methods, and to be easily customizable.

Everything starts with the analysis on whether or not the RFP requires a lot of input from the business development personnel of RCP. If the RFP is considered to be of high importance, due to large profit margins or potentially long-lasting customer relationship, the RFP workflow will be done as shown in FIGURE 6. Should the RFP be deemed of low importance, the workflow shown in FIGURE 7 will be used.

Throughout the RFP workflow, the design workshops will be held as they were in the old model. But at the end of each workshop, the creative lead and the workshop secretary will have a sit-down to go through the notes collected in the workshop. The creative lead will correct any misunderstood parts, make a clear definition between game design notes and pitch deck notes and give guidelines towards the visuals of the pitch deck.

The majority of the pitch deck work will be done using cloud-based tools, where the entire team can collaborate on the pitch deck simultaneously. The team will create and then utilize a set of pitch deck templates, that are created to fit specific needs for certain types of RFPs.

The team will log the time they spend on working on any RFP to the time tracking service Kimai, changing their tasks corresponding to the task at hand. After the RFP has been completed, the team's management will go through and analyse the time tracking data.

After the RFP pitch deck has been completed and has been sent to the client, the RFP team will have an RFP retro meeting, where the management will deliver their findings from the time tracking data and discuss if any time was lost due to blockers. The team will then discuss where they succeeded in the latest RFP task and where they could still improve.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview about the old RFP pitch workflow with Juraj Kyppö.

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Interviewer: In your words, how does our RFP process work currently?

Participant: It's basically reliant on me. There are many people included in the content creation, but the 'actual work', putting the pitch together, is on my shoulders. Teemu used to be responsible for it, but it has now transferred to me.

I: You said it's on your shoulders, but how would you describe the actual workflow? How do the feedback and iteration rounds work in your opinion, both inside our team and with RCP?

P: There are quite a lot of steps, middle-men. When we start a pitch for any RFP, RCP is not in the loop of at which times in the process the feedback is supposed to be given. And since they have their own schedules, they can't always be there for the feedback.

Many times, the pitch workflow starts with Joni coming to me and telling me that "we need something made for a pitch that needs to be ready next week." Then he tells me to start working on something preliminary and that's what I do. Afterwards, there comes the point where more people, like Ville, are introduced to the workflow and we actually start thinking about the designs. Then it comes apparent that the things I had already worked on were not relevant anymore and have to be changed. Later on, when we finally get to RCP with the pitch things might change even more, sometimes with very large changes.

I: So, you could say that we do not have an understanding of the "big picture" of what the pitch is supposed to be before the work on it has already started?

P: Yes. One thing that has become easier though is that when we started making these pitches, the texts needed to be in the project file very early on. It was horrible. Since the texts were very much placeholders, it was a waste of effort from RCP to give us feedback on the grammar and punctuations of the texts, since they were going to change completely. I'm happy that nowadays the texts are separate from the final pitch until very close to the end of the process, so that there is no need to change the texts in a big way in the project file.

I: We have been working on these pitches for a while now. Would you say that every pitch is basically done from scratch?

P: Yes. I think it's something that I have shot myself in the foot for always designing the entire pitch from scratch... And I think it is a good thing when the pitch needs to reflect a specific brand from the client, say a comic book for example. It's something where you just cannot use the last pitch as a base for how much art and text there will be in the pitch. Of course, I will always try to recycle elements from the previous pitches when possible, but it is in no respect a 'modular' system.

I: So you do not have like a catalogue where you can pick and choose elements to use in a pitch, but you are basically dependent on luck to be able to use something from a previous pitch?

P: Yes. And one thing I've mentioned to Joni several times is that if we need to develop a brand for the customer, it will take at least twice the amount of time than it would for an established brand. It takes a huge amount of effort to design a visual look for something that does not yet have a visual identity of its own. If we work on an IP that is widely known and you can find reference material with a simple Google search, it dramatically lessens the amount of effort needed. Colour pallets, fonts, visual elements. You can get a lot of things from established IPs, which you could then take and just implement to an older pitch's template.

I: Would you say then that the problem is not that much about not having a gallery of ready-made things to use, but that there is not enough time to design the visual style for a pitch?

P: Yes. There will be more room for iterations the more custom designs we make. Compared to an established brand where no one would want to iterate on the brand's logo for example. It's clear that the logo is from the client and it will be the one we must use. But if we need to make it ourselves, there is a chance that someone from our team or from RCP, or even from the client, is not happy with the logo design and wants to iterate on it. There are already three separate modifiers that may cause iterations on custom design, which then leads to more time used. The more we get ready-made from the client, the less iteration is required.

I: Do you think the documentation from our pitch design workshops give you a good ground to start working on the pitches? Do they help you with designing the visuals for example?

P: For some parts, yes, it does help. Usually, though, I need to have a chat with the person who has written the document to better understand which parts of the document are relevant to the pitch process and which parts are just game design related and meant as notes for us.

I: Do you ever find yourself being blocked from continuing the work on pitch? Do you feel like you are getting too much feedback on what you are working on or do you feel like you have to wait for the feedback?

P: Most often the feedback I receive is overwhelming. Especially, if we are working on a pitch that people are excited about. It is also sometimes hard to know whose feedback is the one that I should be listening to. Then, if we are working on something that no one is really interested about it might be hard to get feedback.

Sometimes, if some one person is working on a specific slide, there might be a little hold-up with me having to wait for that one person. These situations are rather rare, though.

I: How about the feedback from RCP? Have you noticed it halting your process?

P: What sometimes happens with RCP is that we send them a version of the pitch and continue working on it. When RCP comes back to us with the feedback, some changes have already been made. This creates a conflicting situation, where we receive feedback on something that has already been changed to something else and we do not know whether to change the pitch according to RCP feedback or send them the already changed pitch, which is not according to their feedback.

Comments on the old pitching workflow

P: The problem with the old process is that we are doing to design jobs at once. We are designing the game and the pitch at the same time. It would be completely different if the game would already exist. Then they (RCP) wouldn't comment on the art side of things because it is from the game. For example, with SGW the pitch is purely about the texts and visuals of the pitch deck, not how the game itself looks.

Appendix 2. Interview about the old RFP pitch workflow with Joni Lappalainen.

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Interviewer: How would you describe the current RFP process?

Participant: The current process is pretty much a case-by-case process. We are still kind of trying to find the workflow. We don't really have anyone specifically working on just the RFPs, instead we'll have to put in resources to the RFPs as they come. It's challenging. Of course, it would be nice to have someone to work only on the RFPs but that would require a lot of extra money to be able to pull off. Or then we would need to re-train someone, like Matias, to be implemented into the RFP process.

The bad thing is that the process is very much reactive. The good thing is that now we can say "no" to some RFPs, I guess we have found the courage to do so.

I: How about the actual workflow? Feedback and iteration, both within the team and with RCP?

P: That too is very much case-by-case. It is very much dependent on who the person at RCP's end is. There are a lot of differences between the people there and how they work. With some it might be a very straight forward process: We have a call in the beginning, do a few iteration-rounds at the end and that's it. Then, with some we might be going as far as redoing specific sentences.

Internally, we are very agile. The reason why we have been able to make so many RFPs is because we are all sitting right next to each other and we can solve multiple problems within a single conversation and make decisions... We are really good at making calls (decisions) and solving problems and then jumping into the actual work.

I: You said before that the RFPs are made with a case-by-case mentality, and all the RFPs are made from scratch. Do you think it is a good or a bad thing that all the pitches for the RFPs are built from nothing?

P: It's a bad thing, efficiency-wise. But we get to test a lot of different workflows and ways to tackle the challenges provided by the RFPs. At the same time, we have made quite a few RFPs, but still not that many. Meaning, we have tried a lot of different ways of creating the pitches and could soon start building a template of some kind. --- We should build different types of templates for different sized RFPs.

I: How do you feel about the design workshops we have in our current RFP workflow? Do they serve their purpose and do you think that what they provide is valuable?

P: It works as a good basis for Ville (creative lead). What is discussed in the design workshops serves as a basis for Ville to then turn the designs into something that can be used in the pitch. In that use it works as it should. But it also makes us critically dependent on Ville, the workflow being that we first discuss the designs and the Ville finalizes them. That makes the process rather risky. But, the documentation coming from the meetings is good. If we'd spend more time writing the ideas down with more detail, it would considerably lengthen the meetings. With Ville doing the writing on his own, we only need to use his time for it, lessening the overhead.

I: Where do you think we are spending most of our time with the current RFP workflow? Do you think most of the time is spent actively working on the pitch, or are there lots of waiting time?

P: There are blockers every now and then. As the pitch decks are the “side-activity” that people will work on whilst working on something else, they can work on their primary tasks if there are any blockers with the RFP process. That being said, it is true that sometimes we need to wait for the feedbacks from RCP. Especially, if the person responsible is traveling to an industry expo. But more often than not, it does not halt the entire process.

Appendix 3. Interview about the old RFP pitch workflow with Ville Kaunisto.

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Interviewer: Generally speaking, how do you feel about our current RFP process?

Participant: It is a process that is continuously evolving if nothing else. It is a process that I still can't quite grasp because we haven't really had any RFPs lately. But back when we had a bunch of them it started to mould into a pretty nice form with specific roles for the team members and a general workflow. We started to produce some good quality work.

Or, I guess we always did produce good quality, but now we were able to transfer the same quality over to the pitch as well, faster and faster as we went along.

I: Have you noticed any areas of the process, where there would be hold-ups or blockers more than on other areas?

P: The biggest one, for the longest time, was the fact that Juraj alone was responsible for putting together the deck. Then at some point we transferred some of the responsibility to you and others... but the point being that Juraj had to make the majority of the deck – the layout, the visuals and the export to PDF.

Another area was the work done on the texts. A lot of stuff was made, but there were things left without supervision, like what the headings for the slides would be for example. There were also problems with the fact that since we iterated with the texts, there were times when old texts were used in the deck instead of the new iterated ones.

But I believe most of the problems were due to the software we use. For example, I ask for drop shadows for some texts and I get told that it's not possible. Then the PDF breaks somehow after exporting. And so on and so forth. That part of the pipeline has always been the most problematic one in my opinion. In this pipeline, the visual design sort of just happens, almost by accident. It's almost like a by-product from the rest of the deck. We concentrated on the game idea and Juraj just made the visual design. That is something we should work on.

I: So the problems were mostly due to technology and not so much with ideas or the designs?

P: Yes, that's how I would put it. Of course, these are also connected to the limited human resources that we have for the pitch deck production.

I: How do the iteration and feedback processes work internally and with RCP?

P: Internally, when we had the time, it worked well. But the times when we had time to do iteration and feedback rounds in house were few and far between. Mostly, our so-called iteration was just about correcting some grammar mistakes and moving the texts few pixels here or there. What we were going to say in the deck were decided relatively soon in the pipeline. The times when we had time to do some actual iteration the end-product was clearly superior.

With RCP it is a mixed bag. Generally, the RCP feedback is hard to use, since it is not clearly presented as either something that they know that needs to be changed according to the data or if it is just something that they think might need changing. With the Hollywood project, there was a lot of loud and concrete feedback that was hard to decipher. The feedback also came in large portions and at very inopportune times, so we had to make rash decisions on what feedback to listen to.

In my opinion, the marketing people at RCP should either have no say in the content of the pitch deck or they would need to be integrated into the process at the very beginning and everyone would be clear on their roles. Optimally, their feedback would be something to be taken into consideration, but it can't be presented in a way where it is impossible to say if the feedback is backed up by anything or if it's only based on one person's opinion or feelings.

I: When we make a pitch deck, we build it from scratch. Do you see this as a good or a bad thing?

P: Probably more as a bad thing. Mostly due to our technical pipeline. I can see now that there is a problem with the way we work, since I like to oversee the deck building process but I have no idea how the things work in the software we are currently using. Like I said earlier, the drop shadows were a problem. At some point I realised that they were being done by copy pasting the same text under the actual text, which led to a situation where if the text was edited, both of the texts needed to be edited separately. This process seems very painful and slow with a high chance for mistakes to be made. To counter this, it would be good to have a clear template with ready fonts selected for headings and main text, places for the texts in the deck and a structure for the deck. Main point here is that we would need tools that would be straight forward enough to lessen the battle against the software.

I: Do you feel the documentation from the design workshops is good enough for what it is used for or is there something we could do better?

P: It's hard for me to say, really. Since I usually write the texts for the deck by using the workshop documentation as a reference point, for which the documentation works really well. But then again, most of the stuff from the design workshop is still fresh in my mind. I really can't say how they would be for someone who has not been in the workshop.

I think the bigger thing would be to think about the visual elements of the deck and document that. I mean, we tried to have the texts in the google slides and the google docs and in both. But there were cases where wrong versions were used for the final deck. This all ties up to what I said about the software we use. About, how the ideas we have in the workshop end up being visualized on the screen.

Appendix 4. Discussion about the new RFP pitch workflow with Juraj Kyppö.

Page 1(3)

Interviewer: Here is the new proposed workflow for RFP pitches [shows the new workflow chart]. We would integrate RCP into the actual workflow, instead of them being the last hurdle in the process. What do you think?

Participant: I have experience from working for another company where we did pitches as well, for different type of products, though. The sales people first introduced us to the upcoming pitching project by letting us know what kind of a customer we were dealing with. And not only did they tell us about the company, but also about the person at the client company who would be reading the pitch. What kind of a personality they have and if they are serious or whether they like a bit of humour in the pitches. Stuff like this. The contact with the sales people was really important.

I see this proposed new workflow as slightly unrealistic with RCP. A company like RCP with so many different game companies, does not have the resources to sit down with us on such a constant basis as is proposed in the new workflow.

But, that said, I think this would be something that would be absolutely needed after a certain budget is surpassed in the RFP. For example, with pitches concerning large Hollywood or famous comic book IPs. Then there should be a secondary model where RCP is not so much involved, which would be used when we are pitching for smaller projects. In these cases, it would be important to make RCP understand that if they cannot give us resources for the pitching, then their feedback will have less weight.

I: Here is the idea for a pre-made asset gallery, where you could pick and choose elements for the pitches. Do you think this kind of a gallery would make sense?

P: In a way, yes. I kind of started this thing already with building a pitch deck for Dreamloop that could be used to pitch for the smaller RFPs. There we would have not so much 'elements', but layouts that could be re-used in other pitches. It would be one hell of a job if you could design a library of elements to be used in every pitch, because we work with such a large number of IPs. You can't use the colourful shapes from the 90's on every pitch. We must make the pitch look like the IP it represents and use the elements from the IP as the building blocks for the pitch's visuals.

I: About the documentation: My idea is that after the design workshops, there would be a sit-down between the person who took notes from the meeting and the lead designer to confirm that the notes are accurate to the designs that were discussed. Another person who might join the sit-down would be the artist or artists responsible for the pitch. What are your thoughts about this?

P: A very important point when writing the texts is to differentiate the texts relevant to the pitch from the general game design notes that will be left out of the pitch. Currently, it is sometimes very hard to differentiate the important bits from the rest of the text in the design workshop documentation.

I: To make the pitch process more efficient, I'm proposing to make better use of our time tracking to know if we are wasting time in some respects.

P: One thing to come in mind is that sometimes I am blocked from continuing my work since I'm waiting on the finalized texts for very late into the process and I have like only 3 hours to put the final texts in and make sure they look nice.

One thing I'd like to say is that back in my previous workplace, each pitch we made was an actual project. We had one person making sure we have enough material from the IP to work with, one person who was writing the texts, one person who's only job was to create the backgrounds for the pitch and one person working on the custom visual assets. This was the case when we knew that the project had a huge budget. Then, it would make no sense to have this many people on it if the budget is small. There needs to be scalability in the process depending on the possible yields of the pitch. You shouldn't spend as many hours working on a 5000€ pitch as you spend on a 500.000€ pitch. Also make note of the project probability – If the game is likely to happen, put more effort in to it.

Appendix 5. Discussion about the new RFP pitch workflow with Joni Lappalainen.

Page 1(2)

Interviewer: How do you feel about this new RFP workflow?

Participant: On paper, it looks good. There is a problem, however, with the first feedback round. For example, Chris (one of the RCP business development people) will most likely say that he can't really give feedback on it. There is not enough to go with. The problem is that we would have to use the first design workshop and the subsequent art- and writing time to make close-to-final designs on what would be in the pitch so that RCP could give feedback on it. Let's take the art as an example: The artist(s) would have to nail the look of the pitch from the start, and we wouldn't get to make it as we go. Also, they would have to immediately work on the in-game mockup. On the text side, we'd first have to come up with the sales pitch. If we have a lot of text without the pictures to support them, the texts lose a lot of their meaning. In a nutshell: We would have to change the workflow so that we first create all of the most sellable features.

I: Which, of course, might not work since if we don't have a solid understanding of the big-picture, how do we know which are the sellable parts.

P: Exactly. That would be the challenge. Of course, it would work better with some than with others. Kirstin, for example, usually is able to give feedback from very basic concepts. Whereas, Stef and Chris need to have an understanding of the big-picture before they can give feedback.

I: About the efficiency: Currently, we don't really track how much time is used to actively work on the pitch and how much is lost in waiting.

P: With the changes we did to how we track our hours, we should be able to see much more clearly where the hold-ups come from.

I: What we still need is to manually then keep track of when the pitch is sent to feedback and how long it takes.

I: Do you have any further comments or ideas?

P: We should have another look at this as I need to get into another meeting.

Appendix 6. Discussion about the new RFP pitch workflow with Ville Kaunisto.

Page 1(3)

Interviewer: What do you think about this idea for the new RFP pitch workflow?

Participant: So, what is the purpose of the call with RCP before the first design workshop?

I: It is to make sure that we have understood the RFP correctly and that we have similar understanding of the situation with RCP.

P: In that case it is good. Then we go to the design workshop and move on from there. Yeah, this one seems a lot more sensible than the old one. One thing that I do find strange in our current process, and this one as well, is that the texts and art pipelines are so separated from each other. I mean, instead of making them separate from one another, it would make sense to make the texts first and then see if what is written affects the way we should do the art.

I: So, instead of the workflow shown here, we would go from design workshop to the texts to the art?

P: Exactly. Or, maybe rather that art can start after the workshop, but as the texts are being finalized they would affect the art. But these are small iterative things. All in all, this looks much better than the current one.

A point about the RCP feedback rounds: We should make clear to the RCP people that the feedback we want from them is about whether or not this is sellable to the client and why, and what we should do to the pitch to make it more sellable. We do not want game design feedback from a person working on sales and marketing. I can ask about game design from anyone from the company. Of course, they can give feedback on their feel of the game design, but it needs to be labelled as such and they shouldn't go up in arms if their ideas are not incorporated.

I: With RCP we would need to make sure that whatever is being communicated, must be labelled correctly, no matter what the occasion is?

P: Precisely. It hopefully wouldn't be a big thing for them to incorporate, but it would help a lot in many ways.

I: I had an idea about having a gallery of generic assets that could be used with building the pitch deck.

P: More than a gallery of generic assets that need to be customized to fit the deck, I would say it is more important that we would have tools that allow us to properly make things like the drop shadows for texts, save pre-set fonts for headings and body text, and to have like basic project templates.

The problem with generic assets is that it is easier to just make the assets from scratch than it is to first go through the library of generic ones and then having to customize them.

I: My idea to make our documentation better, would be to have sit-downs between the person taking notes from the workshops and you to make sure the notes are accurate and clearly tell which parts are for the pitch and which are game design. What do you think?

P: I mean, I have usually made that myself manually, but this could be a way to make it clearer. One of the problems with our RFP workflow has always been the question whether we are actually designing a game or just enough to be comprehensible for the client in the pitch deck. In some RFP it would make sense to think these through more and with some it doesn't really make that much sense.

I: So we would have to make different workflows for different type of RFPs?

P: Yeah, or rather cut down things from the workflow for RFPs that do not require that much.

I: Tracking efficiency mostly concerns me and Joni, but the idea is to more closely track if there have been blockers in the RFP workflow. The changes we made to our time tracking support this already, we'd just need to start manually going through the logs after we finish an RFP.

P: That makes sense, and I think it would help. We could even start having pitch deck retros, depending on if we have time.

I: Do you have any further comments on the new RFP workflow?

P: To summarize, I think in the current RFP workflow the technical aspects have been very stiff and I don't really have a direct answer to the problems it introduces. We need to have a simple tool to plan our pitch deck layouts, since the software we use for the pitch deck itself is not the best for layout design. And also because we don't really have anyone specialized in layout design. We might even want to start making moodboards or mockups of the slides that would be in the pitch deck.

Then instead of working with PDFs, we might move to using for example Google Slides and Docs. And if necessary we can export to PDF from those programs. The benefit would be that we could have more people working on the same file simultaneously – one could be on the texts, one on layout and one on art mockups for example.