



Role of a Producer

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis aims to explain the many roles of a producer and the skills or qualities that are important to develop. This thesis could be useful for those considering becoming a producer and willing to learn about this subject in more depth. The definition of a producer and their responsibilities can vary greatly from company to company and project to project.

The main method of research was literature review. Ethnographic research was carried out by interviewing current and past professional producers in various fields of media. Finally, the author wrote about their experience as a producer from within their own company and various projects. A comparison was then discussed based on what was researched to what professionals had to say and then the author's experience as a producer.

Many examples were found of what a producer can be responsible for within different media fields and projects. Also, there are many opinions from professionals as to what they find important for a producer to do. From this, the skills and roles that would be important for any producer were gathered but also what it meant to be an efficient producer. The focus within the research was on game development.

Since there are so many different types of producers there can constantly be more research done within specific fields and the different types of producers that are needed. Furthermore, the author felt there is a need to continue to develop themselves as a producer, so they could focus on their role as a producer and remain efficient.

Key words: producer, media, development, production

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ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

TAMK	Tampere University of Applied Sciences
MVP	minimal viable product
Indie Game	Informal term for a video game typically created by individuals or smaller development teams without the financial and technical support of a large game publisher.
AAA Game	Informal term used for video games produced and distributed by a mid-sized or major publisher.
Agile	A method of project management used especially for software development, that is characterized by the division of tasks into short phases of work and frequent re-assessment and adaptation of plans.

1 INTRODUCTION

Being a producer can mean different things depending on their field of work, the company, the team size or even the project. There are also many kinds of producers even within one field. A producer in short is a person who manages and helps to ensure their team can work effectively. From what I have learned, the role can vary because what is effective can change depending on a project's needs and the individuals working on it.

I felt this was important to explore and learn about more in depth because those striving to be or ending up becoming a producer can greatly influence the end product as well as all the people they work with. Also, I wanted to learn what skills are important or relevant regardless of the field or project.

The first part of my research delves into the subject of what skills and roles are important for a producer. These skills and roles should be known and developed. Taking a look at what the role of a producer can be within different media fields was also explored and researched. This should help give an idea of what may be different or important for those different media fields.

The second part of this research was conducted through interviews with current and past professionals that worked as producers in various fields. Practical knowledge and insight from professionals' help confirm what can be researched and is often the most valuable insight.

The third part will explain and discuss my own experience taking on the role of a producer during my studies and then within my own company, Mohavi Creative Company Oy. Mohavi is a multimedia company, and this can mean vastly different types of projects. Which is why it has been important to research the role of a producer from multiple media perspectives.

The last part will have the conclusion of what I found important through my experiences compared to what I have researched, and what other professionals have thought.

2 Role of a Producer

Every media industry has producers and what they do can vary greatly. This is one reason why I thought this thesis would be useful. According to Studiobinder, producers are involved throughout all phases of production from inception to completion, including coordination, supervision, and control of finances, talents and crafts. This can mean that producers do a little bit of everything (Studiobinder 2020).

Thomas Verdi from The Film Fund (2020) thought that description from Studiobinder was broad, but they also enjoy the description because it means a producer can do a myriad of different job responsibilities. These starting examples were about the film industry, but it is true for most roles a producer takes on in other industries as well. In the following sections I will also be explaining what a producer can mean and do in some of the different media production areas. A lot of the tasks a producer carries out will be similar, but each industry can have their own quirks.

It can be important to realize that it is good for a producer to know a little bit of everything or to be a jack of all trades. This helps a producer to not only understand but to connect and communicate effectively with the team they work with. Communication and the skills to work with people is likely the most important skill or quality a producer can have. Communication skills can come naturally for some people which can then in turn make them good producers. I dedicated a section for this because many sources and experts state communication is important.

Another important topic Ines Lagarto from Lab42 Games (2021) said that it can be important for a producer to fill in the grey areas. If there is a task that does not fall under one category and nobody is technically responsible, then the producer can take on that responsibility. Martti Sirkkola from Gigglebug Entertainment (2021) also says he fills in the gaps where needed and likes to keep the office tidy or even make sure there is enough coffee. The experts working should be given every chance to do what they do best and were hired for.

2.1 Communication

Collectively from what I have researched, communication is the most important skill or quality a producer can have. Top producers use their communication skills to keep the project running as smoothly as possible. Producers do this by trying to keep the team happy, fill in the gaps between different teams or people and make sure everyone is on the same page with up-to-date information. These opinions were also the same in the interviews which can be read about later in this thesis.

While communication is one of the most important aspects of being a producer, it can also be the hardest to consistently do effectively. As seen from figure 1, the channels of communication can have what is considered noise. This noise means the message that the sender is saying might not be what the receiver understands. Having a feedback loop in place can help this along with other tools for communication.

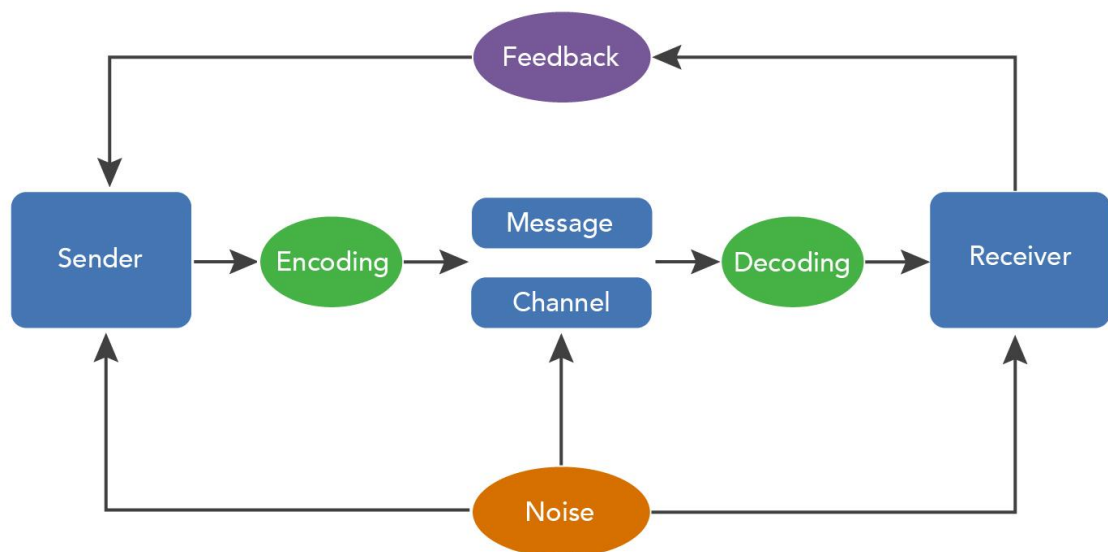


FIGURE 1. Channels of communication (Lumen 2021)

All of the responsibilities a producer takes on is reliant on communication. Regardless of the experience or seniority the producer has, if they can communicate well then the work becomes more efficient and flowing. Even simple responsibilities the producer is in charge of should improve communication. In the following sections I will be covering some of these responsibilities.

2.1.1 Knowing your team

One key to getting everyone to work efficiently is largely knowing your team. Vartika Kashyap from ProofHub (2021) wrote about a way to empower teams to be more productive and a big part is learning about their skills, then trusting that they can do their work. This improves many aspects of the work environment as a whole. The team should also know the producer, be able to approach the producer anytime and to ask for whatever they need.

Another aspect is knowing how to give tasks that are clear and understandable. That makes it easier for the team member to start. If a team member needs further clarification, that takes precious time from creating what they do best. John Rampton from Entrepreneur Europe (2017) said that it is important to have honest conversations to find out what works best for individuals. Forcing people to work in a certain way can have negative effects. A producer then needs to think which type of worker the team member is and think if they need very clear instructions or free reign to accomplish their work efficiently.

Knowing some personal things going on in someone's life can also influence how you communicate with them. If they are having personal troubles, then giving them time to work that out to be healthy and happy can lead to things being much more productive. Individual's mental and physical health can turn into its own topic altogether as well, but it is still an important aspect to consider when having a leading role among a team.

2.1.2 Creating Efficiency

Good communication is the core to creating efficiency and it is what every producer should strive for. Using good communication practices to create efficiency also covers the tools that are used. Ernst ten Bosch from Gamasutra (2013) describes that if the task was assigned correctly, the team member can get straight to the task. Then if this task is approved or needs updates this should be written in a clear way. That then leads to the schedule being clear and informative without the need of further explanation.

Having the skill to get people to say what they need is not always an easy task. Ernst ten Bosch describes this in a clear and simple way, everyone is unique. How a producer communicates with their team members can be different for each individual. Some may like to have meetings, while others prefer chatting at their desk, and this is all to help share the right information at the right time. A good producer should learn about their team and then tailor the communication to the individuals.

2.2 Responsibilities of a Producer

Since producers' roles can vary so greatly depending on the field and team they produce, I wanted to go through common responsibilities a producer often takes care of. This should help to understand what skills are needed and what any producer can strive to learn and become better at.

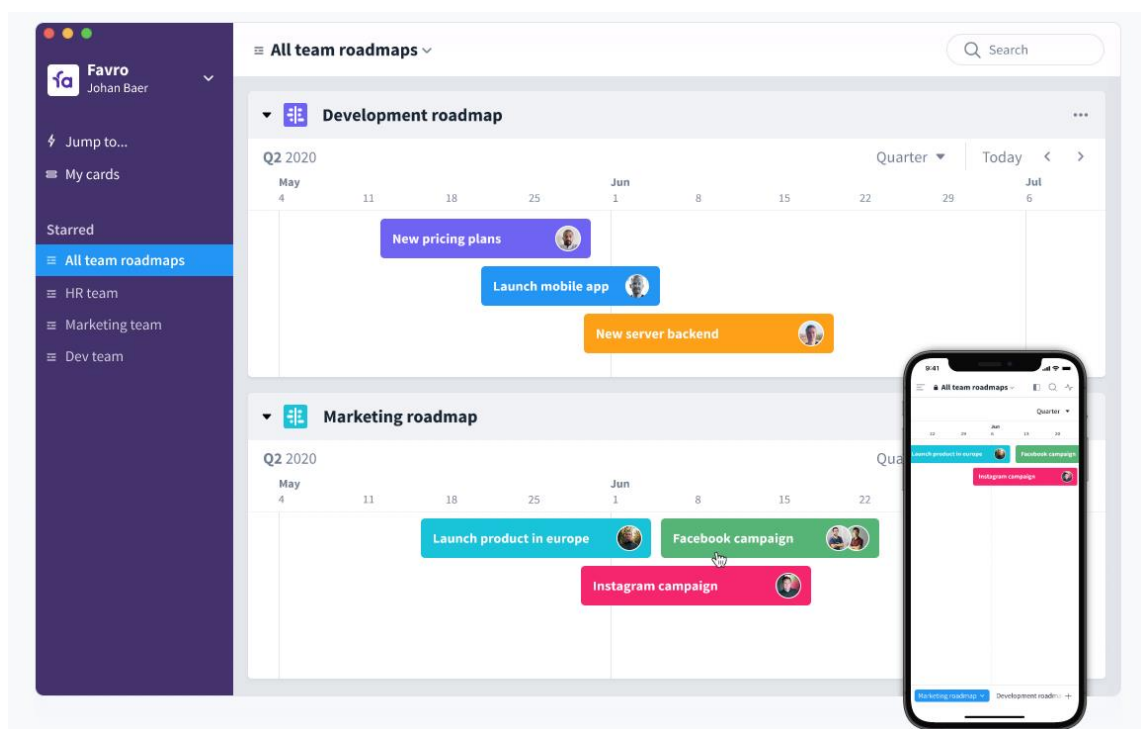
A lot of the responsibilities a producer has is that of a project manager and it was often easier to find extensive knowledge about project management. The traits of a good project manager overlap that of a producer as seen from figure 2. If these overlapping traits and responsibilities are done correctly, then a project has a better chance of succeeding.



FIGURE 2. Seven traits of a good project manager (Campbell 2014, Chapter 2)

2.2.1 Schedule / Timetable Management

An important skill for any producer is to be able to set up a timetable showing what needs to get done and who is doing it. There are many methods to this, and it greatly depends on the project or who is going to use the timetable. If a timetable was made for just the producer to see, it could likely be filled with notes solely important for the producer. The timetable for others needs to be useful to them and that means it should be clear and easy to follow. Many different applications like Favro exist to make this task easier and even dynamic as seen from picture 1.



PICTURE 1. Demonstration of the Favro application (Favro 2021)

Good knowledge of the team's skills makes creating the preliminary timetable easier but communicating with the team and getting even a rough confirmation is crucial. Even then the timetable will likely not match up and it can be vital to add an extra buffer time to these tasks that allows for more time to complete a given task.

The added buffer time does not need to be open knowledge to the individuals performing the tasks as it is more important for the timetable management. If the

task is completed before the initial time, then that is great for the timetable and budget, and praise can be given to the individuals. On the other hand, if the task extends over that initial time there was already room to work around it without pushing back other tasks, which is better for everyone involved.

Tasks can be put into a timeline with people assigned to them and tasks being completed should eventually lead to milestones being reached. “A milestone is a specific point within a project’s life cycle used to measure the progress toward the ultimate goal. Milestones in project management are used as signal posts for a project’s start or end date, external reviews or input, budget checks, submission of a major deliverable, etc. A milestone is a reference point that marks a significant event or a branching decision point within a project.” (Wrike 2021)

Summary tasks are also a clear way to show what needs to be done because it includes sub tasks. Russell Huebsch from Chron (2021) wrote a summary task lasts from the start of the first sub task till the final sub task being completed. Both summary tasks and milestones can be tracked in software like Microsoft Project, the application Russell wrote about, and are important events in a project’s timetable. Completion of these can be clearly shown to all parties involved that the project is advancing. A producer needs to understand how to set these correctly in a timetable and update them when changes or problems occur.

2.2.2 Budget

Often with larger projects spanning several months to years the budgets will be very complex. Michael Campbell (Chapter 10, 2014) wrote that a schedule should come before the budget because writing out the preliminary schedule will help reveal the actual costs to produce it. Experience from the producer, upper management and the team will make this more accurate and then the initial budget can be planned.

All projects run on a budget and that budget is not just based on funds available. Long term projects often need to raise multiple rounds of funding which dictate what all is possible to achieve. Some projects only have a set budget and what can be done needs to work around that. The budget can also be cut during the

project and the entire project either needs to pivot, have a new funding round started or be stopped altogether.

A producer together with other leading roles decides what will be produced and often how it will be produced. What is produced can also change at any given stage of the project depending on what features are required or possible. While a producer may not need to make the decisions about what will be made, they could know if it is even possible. Knowing or communicating that need to the team and evaluating if it is feasible helps maintain the budget.

2.2.3 Tasking

Tasking will last throughout the project and is a common and essential responsibility of a producer. The skilled people that are hired to do the job should know what to work on and once that is finished, know what to work on next. This ties together with the schedule and budget greatly. The tasks given need to be tracked and updated, and they can change as the project proceeds.

In all fields of media there are different disciplines that need to work together. One department might need to complete a certain task in order for the next department to be able to work or at least work efficiently. This handoff should be known when tasking and be a factor when planning out the schedules. Ernst Bosch from Gamasutra (Part 2, 2013) describes this as fitting the puzzle pieces together. This should not only be understandable for the producer, but also to everyone involved on the project.

2.2.4 Risk Management

According to Michael Campbell (2014, Chapter 8) risks can be broken down into three categories; known risks, predictable risks and unpredictable risks. Known risks are ones that can easily be identified even before a project is started. Michael states that your experience and that of the key stakeholders is one of the best ways to define these types of risks. Predictable risks can also be identified by experience but getting information about these types of risks from the team is

important as well. Unpredictable risks are the last type and some risks just cannot be known or avoided.

One important tool for a producer is to use a risk register. Ines Lagarto from Lab42 games (2021) says that an up-to-date risk register is one of the best ways to avoid pitfalls in the development process. Even if a producer hears a rumor that something might go wrong, it can be important to add that to the risk register. All risks can be checked and crossed off at anytime. Risks caught early give a better option to be combated with contingency plans or changes to the project.

2.2.5 Networking

Growing a network can be important for any professional to do. The need can be more important depending on which kind of producer one is. Some producers are external producers who often focus on gathering and relaying information to and from the team producing and the client or stakeholders. Having an extensive network and growing it can also help make sure the current or next project can get done if more people are needed or to even find a new project.

Michelle Symonds from The Project Management Hut (2014) describes the importance of networking and one thing is that everyone does it. Even if it is not your job to find new projects, there is still lots of information to learn from networking. You can also build your network by socializing within the company. Communication among the team is important and a producer is there to fill in the gaps. This also applies to internal networking.

Martti Sirkkola from Gigglebug Entertainment (2021) and Juuso Aaltonen from Traplight (2021) both focused mostly on just their own internal team and did not worry about external networking. They both felt that it is important to build a network but are happy to focus on working with their current team. Being useful to the team around them and those around you thinking what you did was good could be just as important.

I felt that this is another very important aspect to consider when planning to work long term in the same company. Working with larger amount of people gives a

better sense of relying on an organization as a whole. Someone within the organization will likely do enough networking that others do not need to focus on that.

2.3 Video Game Producer

Video games are a very complex form of media as it can encompass so many different aspects as seen from a screenshot from the game Control on picture 2. Video games include 2D and 3D art, complex user interfaces and all of these can have complex animations. Then all of the art can need programming to function correctly and be shown at the right time while adding dynamic sounds and music. Then all the base mechanics need to be programmed which can include custom physics. Servers are needed for multiplayer games as well as the logic to make them work. That all is just the actual game development with many roles in between (Cohen & Bustamante 2012, Chapter 10).



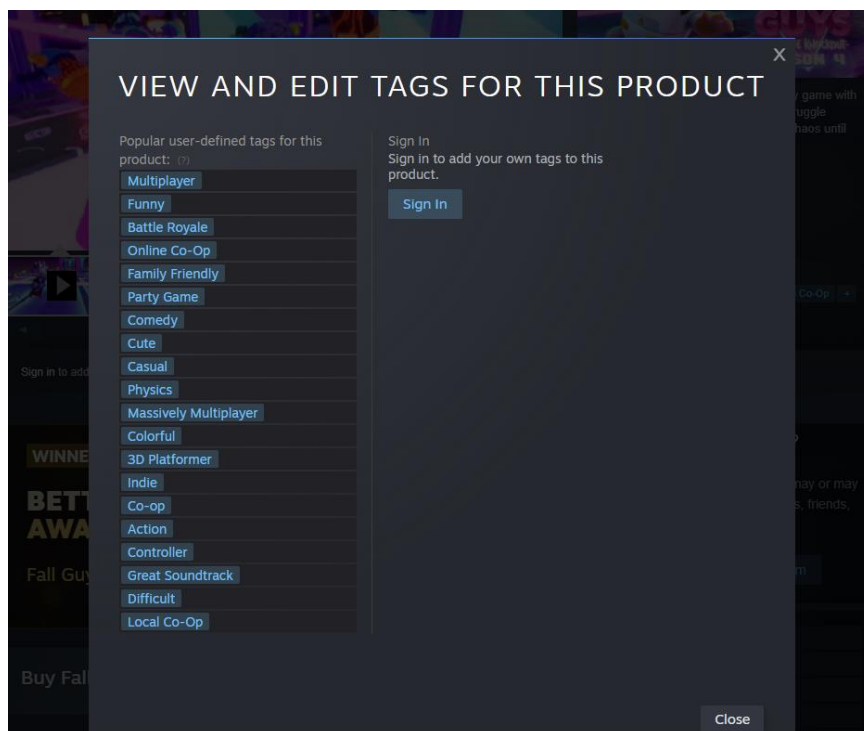
PICTURE 2. In-game screenshot from Control

Then there can be in house teams or separate studios for complex trailers and other marketing needs for the game. Large teams can be dedicated to user acquisition which is often becoming a focus with free to play games. Quality assurance and user testing is used to make sure all this is not only working but what users want. And to get all this done there usually needs to be funding, partners and outsourcing.

The people filling in the gaps to all these aspects often are the producers. How complex of work and how many producers a single game will have can vary greatly. Smaller indie developers sometimes do not even have a dedicated producer, but the role or tasks are important to fill regardless. Large AAA game studios can have multiple producers for a single game as well as a publisher sending their own producer to oversee the project.

2.3.1 Smaller Game Studios

Often smaller studios or smaller games are called indie games. I feel that it is hard to say what exactly an indie game is because a single person can make a game and still get a large publisher. Fred Dutton wrote in Eurogamer (2012) that the term should even just be retired because everyone he interviewed then had different opinions. That was already written over 9 years ago. Fall Guys was marketed as an indie game and on Steam it can be seen from picture 3 that one of the popular tags is indie. Mediatonic has over 300 employees in four different studios (Mediatonic LinkedIn 2021).



PICTURE 3. Fall Guys popular Steam tags

I still refer to smaller game studios as indie but regardless in the terms of the work for a producer this does not affect anything. The size does greatly affect what a producer will do. Like my company and other smaller studios there is not a dedicated producer. Antti Ikäläinen (2021) felt that once a studio has 10 people or over a studio should have a dedicated producer.

Producers with smaller teams often have more responsibilities to cover taking care of the business as well. They can also act as both an external producer by talking with stakeholders, then still need to focus on being there for the team producing the game as an internal producer. With more responsibility they could also have more authority or experience to make decisions on the game's development direction.

2.3.2 Larger Game Studios

The games that are being produced are getting more complex and larger. It is only natural that the teams behind them are growing as well. Large AAA games can be developed by hundreds to thousands of people over the course of many years. Red Dead Redemption 2 is likely the most expensive game ever created. On the Red Dead Redemption thank you page (2021) there are over 3100 people who were involved in the development over an 8-year span. Dean Takahashi from Venture Beat (2018) speculated that it likely cost over 240 million United States Dollars to develop Red Dead Redemption 2.

Before it was stated that a studio should have one dedicated producer if there were 10 or more on the team. A larger game can have many producers. While not all the 3100 people were developers, there was still a significant amount of people that developed Red Dead Redemption 2. According to the credits on the official website there were seven producers and two executive producers with the core team.

The role of a producer should be clear with teams that are large and experienced. When the teams are larger it can take much more time to do even simple tasks. On the other hand, it is also important not to get lost in one task. It could be true that some team members still likely do not know completely what producers do

but if they are constantly around and available, they show people how they are useful.

2.4 Animation Studio Producer

There are many different types of animations that can be done as well as the length of the animation. The teams behind these larger animations are growing and as seen in picture 4, Disney's animation team in one studio is quite large. There can be multiple types of producers in order to ensure all the people and moving parts can work efficiently. Depending on the size of the animation studio there are individuals or teams that work on different sections of an animation. Those different sections often rely on the others to continue their work and timing the tasks correctly allows for the work to flow.



PICTURE 4. A Disney animation studio (2019)

Animation producers can have many titles and responsibilities like I have mentioned previously. In the book *Producing Animation* they break down the producers into three types regardless of the title; the deal-maker, the facilitator and the creative. The deal-maker is like the external producer where they can be in charge of finding financial resources, stakeholder relations and sourcing talents. The facilitator is the type that works closely with the production team and is what I cover the most in this thesis. Then the creative producer has a lot of say in the

creative decision-making process (Winder, Dowlatabadi & Miller-Zarneke, 2011 chapter 1).

Since there can be many people involved in one animation, it often requires these different types of producers to make this happen efficiently. With animation, the focus on creative side is much more prominent than in video games as there is less technical work like programming to be done. This is starting to change as technology is getting more advanced with how animations can be created. The core points of being a good producer are still quite similar as communication is key and then everything else continues to benefit the project.

2.5 Film Producer

While there are many similarities to film production and animation production, the biggest difference is that usually with film there are sets and locations to film at. There can be large teams for props, make-up and costumes alone. This can lead to there being many more types of producers. As seen from table 1 there can be many types of producers and that is an example of a general chain of command among them (Jungle Software, 2021). Each type of producer needs to work with their own team as well as working with other producers and leads.

TABLE 1. Producer Chain of Command

• Executive Producer
• Co-executive Producer
• Line Producer
• Supervising Producer
• Producer
• Co-producer
• Coordinating Producer
• Consulting Producer
• Associate Producer
• Segment Producer
• Field Producer
• Edit Producer
• Post Producer

Much like other forms of media, when the team is smaller there does not need to be as many producers which means one kind of producer will take on more work. Even among these varying types this thesis is still largely focusing on the base producer. Within film and even animation, these titles are broken down even and handed out to different people. The base producer is still there with the team making sure their work runs as smoothly as possible.

3 Interviews with Producers

Insight gained from those with experience often turns out to be the most valuable. I felt it was important to interview different kinds of producers in multiple media fields to get a better idea about what is similar. My goal was to find these similarities that makes up the core of being a producer. I asked the current and former producers all the same base questions and if a topic branched out, that was fine.

Even though the producers had different levels of experience and some from within different industries, collectively the producers that I interviewed felt communication was the most important part of being producer. All other skills and knowledge would then mean the producer would become better at their job.

The biggest difference in opinion amongst those interviewed was if they could be a producer in a different field. Some were certain they did not feel willing or capable of managing a team in a field they are not familiar enough with, while others felt they could learn the field and be able to adapt. The Chief Operating Officer of Traplight Antti Ikäläinen (2021) was confident that he could be a producer in another field. Antti already had experience with this as he went from the music industry to fine arts, then finally to video games.

3.1 Eliisa Aikkila – Sanoma

Eliisa Aikkila is the producer at Helsingin Sanomat Lifestyle, Sport Magazine (2021). One of Eliisa's tasks as a producer for a magazine is finding story ideas that can be written about. To help accomplish this, Eliisa needs a network of freelancers that can either help or complete certain tasks. This brought up that growing a professional network is crucial to running the magazine. Eliisa stated that the better network, the better ideas the magazine will get to write about.

The magazine needs to publish content the readers want to read in order to continue driving sales. This responsibility falls more on Eliisa's role as a producer from what I understood. The responsibility is also motivating as Eliisa felt she can affect which articles are written about wellbeing and contribute to making the world a better place.

In the case with Eliisa Aikkila's role as a producer they had more control over what is being produced by being able to say what kind of articles would be published or not. This is not always the same for every producer. It brings up the important topic that producers can be praised for being vital for the product being produced or be seen as a background figure that was a part of helping the team.

3.2 Gareth Noyce – Triple Eh?

Currently Gareth Noyce (2021) is a teacher in Games Academy and has covered topics around game development fundamentals and programming. Gareth has also founded a game development company called Triple Eh? where he has developed and released 2 games and has an upcoming game. Gareth has a long history with game development and acted as a producer for various large AAA games.

I was one of Gareth's students in Games Academy so I knew he was one person that would be great to interview to get a better perspective on his experience as a producer. Gareth felt that a good producer in the games industry needs to know skills around the development. During a project, another producer was needed, and Gareth helped choose who that would be from the team. The person he recommended to be a producer was a skilled programmer and that skill allowed him to truly know how what it took for the game to be completed.

The programmer was also respected among the team already and this helped with the communication. These two vital skills made it natural for them to be a good producer on that project. Someone trying to start off straight away as a producer may lack the fundamental knowledge that it would take to be a good producer. The base communication also becomes harder because an inexperienced person trying to lead highly experienced people they do not know can lead to mistakes and conflicts of interest.

3.3 Martti Sirkkola – Gigglebug Entertainment

Gigglebug Entertainment is an animation studio that works with their own intellectual property and service work for other companies. Martti felt it is important for the producer to know about running a business in general and to also know the specific industry. The producer does not need to be specialized in one specific area but more of the overall knowledge of the workflow. As well as understanding people, the producer needs to work with creatives and artists but also the business side as well.

Titles can be given to try to make sense of what is done but that does not limit what kind of tasks one takes on or is responsible for. Martti has had the title of line producer, production manager and is currently the head of studio. The role he takes on within these different titles has still largely been what a producer does, but he has also written premises for episodes and does human resources work. He is there to keep people happy and fill in the gaps where needed.

Martti's attitude towards producing has been fitting and inspiring for me. I also took part in a lesson Martti taught during an animation minor which explained the pipeline and his role. That lesson also made me more interested in becoming a producer and hopeful that I was already on the right path with the skills I had and was developing further.

3.4 Antti Ikäläinen – Traplight

Antti Ikäläinen used to be a producer at Traplight but is currently the Chief Operating Officer at the time of my interview with him. Traplight has made its success within making free to play mobile games. The team has grown to be over 40 people and Antti even recommended me to interview the current producer which is Juuso Aaltonen.

Antti had a lot of insight about being a producer and continues to operate parts of his new role like he did previously as a producer. It was also stated that it is natural for a producer to eventually be promoted to an upper management role. I

feel this is also true that the next steps would be upper management because there can be a lot of the same tasks overlapping.

One thing that I heard from Antti and other producers is that they know a little bit of everything or consider themselves as a jack of all trades. I related to this strongly as I have always felt that I try to know a little bit of everything related to the projects I work on. Antti felt that he would struggle to really specialize in a certain area like being a server programmer specialist.

Not specializing into a certain field can actually be beneficial as a producer. It is very valuable for a producer to know the different areas in their media field in order to relate to people and be an effective producer. On the other side, if the producer has specialized in one area before becoming a producer, they may always look at it from that perspective. That does not mean to favor one side over the other but to try to solve problems with a certain mindset.

3.5 Juuso Aaltonen – Traplight

Juuso Aaltonen is the current producer at Traplight and has been with the company for over five years. Juuso felt that communication is the most important part of being a producer. Being able to communicate with different types of people is important because he handles the intercommunication with all the different development teams. Juuso explained it in a clear way by saying that he helps translate what the artists have done to the server programmers. That is a good description of how the communication works with a producer involved.

Juuso felt that a producer does not need to be specialized in a certain area but is there to understand the process as a whole. It is more important to understand what it takes and respect those who know these different skillsets. Knowing parts of these areas helps to understand what people mean when they describe what needs to be done. Then the producer needs to try enabling the team members to do the best they can in the shortest amount of time with the highest quality possible.

Working in a different field is something Juuso thought he could do because of how he has done his work as a producer. Building a pipeline is important and Juuso has done this for artists to make sure they can work efficiently and not worry about the pipeline themselves. This may not work for every industry like film but if there is a pipeline to follow, then the work could be similar enough to still be a good producer and adapt to the new field.

One part I have not focused on with this thesis is the idea behind remote work and the challenges this raise for communication. Juuso Aaltonen and I discussed this in more detail. Remote work has made this harder because there is only work to do. There are not the more casual interactions you get by being around people in an office environment. While everything is remote there is less of a reason to speak with other unless there is a reason to like scheduling a meeting. Everyone needs to be informed and information might get stuck someone and it is more challenging to find out where or why the information is stuck.

4 My Role as a Producer

My first interest with being a producer came from my time in Games Academy. I then worked on various client projects which led to me co-found Mohavi Creative Company Oy during my studies at TAMK. The team sizes varied depending on the project and I often took on the roles and responsibilities of a producer. I was fortunate enough to usually work with great individuals that made my role as a producer much easier.

Mohavi is primarily a business-to-business company that specializes in interactive media and game development. We started out focusing solely on client projects to build our portfolio as a company while also allowing the members to gain experience working together as a company. Since then we have also developed our own prototypes which is a very different approach than working with a client.

During my experiences I saw that it was important to truly understand the skills of my team members and have open communication. These aspects make working together not only enjoyable but more effective. I could confidently think of a budget and deliver what clients expected of us.

4.1 Games Academy

Games Academy is a minor in TAMK where artists and programmers work together on two game projects while covering courses related to game development as seen in figure 3. Individual portfolios can be improved greatly because games artists and programmers will work together from an early stage to hopefully create full games ready to be released or showcased.

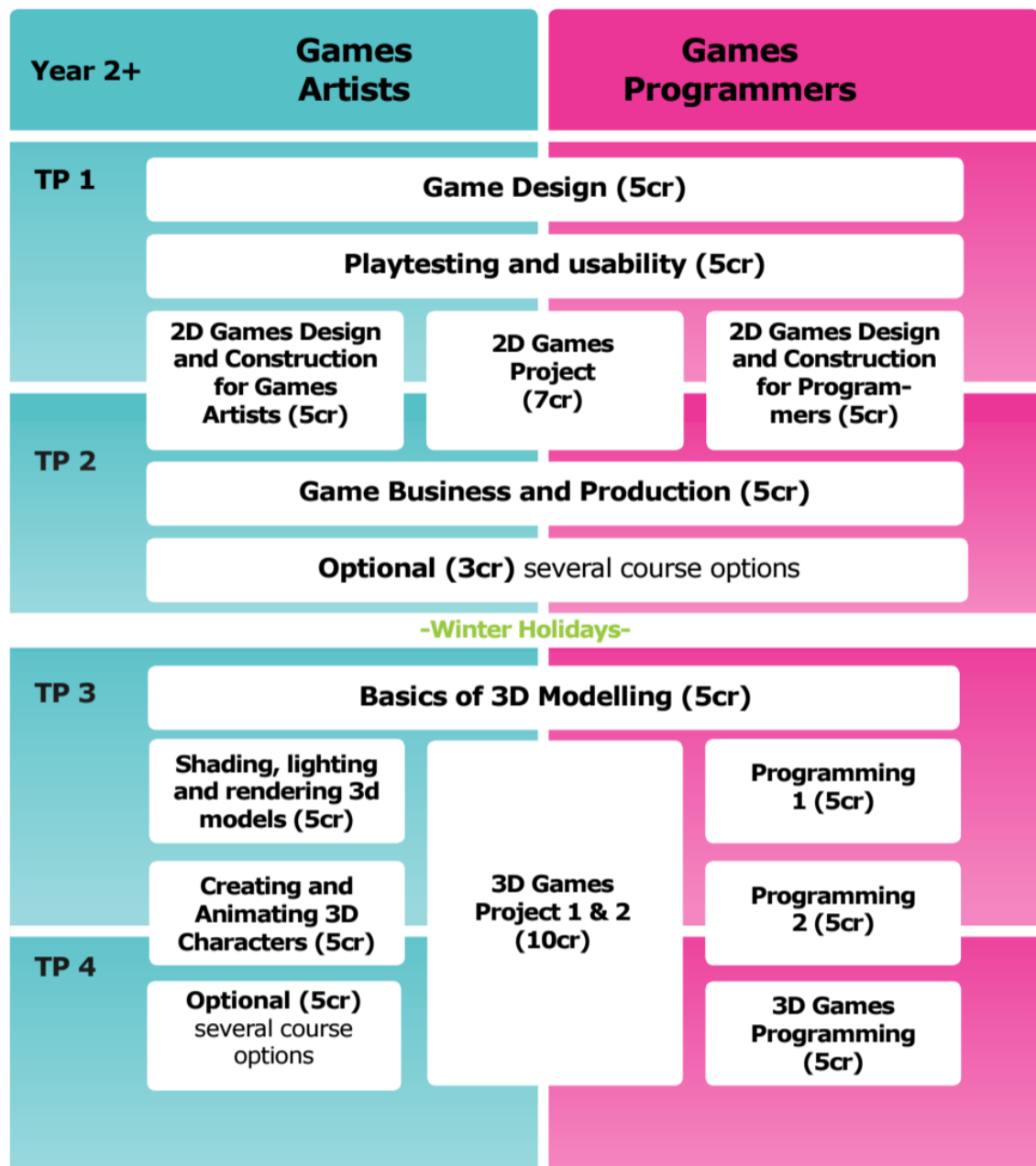


Figure 3. Description of Games Academy course structure (gamesacademy.fi 2021).

I feel that Games Academy gets much closer to real working environment than any other education course that I have at least been a part of. Games Academy is where I first thought I would want to become a producer and was able to practice the skills needed. I did not know what all it meant to be a producer while working on game projects.

In my first year at Games Academy, I took part in the minor and courses. I got some real experience from a client project and I was also hired as an intern at

Kyy Games. Then in my second year, I was the studio producer and taught some essential things on the 3D side. Since then I have been acting as a guest lecturer covering 2D Game Design and Construction as well as 3D art subjects.

4.1.1 Game Projects

All the students on their games projects are equal but teams with more structure can flourish. It can be natural for me to assume the leadership roles because I like to make sure the project gets done as well as making sure everyone knows what they are doing. This was the same for my two game projects during my first year in Games Academy.

The first game project, Necrox, was rough to complete but I learned a lot about game development with a team. In the end we did release a polished game and a marketing banner can be seen from picture 5. Communication was important and we tried various methods during the project. Meeting up in person was definitely the best way to get all the opinions out and decide together what would be done.



PICTURE 5. Necrox banner

The second game project, All That's Left, was much more ambitious and the team that was formed was larger. Though we all knew it was going to be harder with a larger team, we felt it could give more opportunities to get something great done that could be put on our portfolios. This is where I took more responsibility for the

communication between artists and programmers. This was not easy for this project either but I started to learn what information was important and needed for different stages of the project.



PICTURE 6. Gameplay from All That's Left.

I learned after these projects were complete that I took on the roles of a producer. My teams and I thought the scopes of the projects were small enough but still ended up being too large to be completed and needed to change. An agile approach where members accepted the game needed to pivot in new directions was vital to complete the games. Agile seems to work for game development because there are always unknowns. Being open to change and adapting to the situation can be vital in these student projects.

4.1.2 Studio Producer

I enjoyed how much I learned in my first year at Games Academy and I wanted to help future teams succeed. There is an opportunity in Games academy to be the studio producer and I gladly took part in that. I was able to check on the progress of the games, help teams make decisions, share any information I might know and improve their communication.

There was a learning curve for helping set up the teams and then get things flowing. Together with the teachers we guided the students to choose smaller scopes for their first games. This was done by copying a core mechanic from an existing game and then limiting the features the game should have. This gave the teams a better chance to avoid common pitfalls in game development and return a polished game.

The main way to improve communication between team members was to have weekly scrum meetings. This was where the team members could state what they have done and what they will do. I then always tried to make rounds to the teams working in the studio to see if they needed any specific help on their projects.

Casually speaking directly to individuals was the best way for them to actually say which problems they were facing. I could then give advice, show where to find the information needed or teach something directly. I enjoyed trying to make sure all the teams stayed on track and could work on their games. This also led me to think about what I thought could be taught during the 3D art lessons. I was given the opportunity to teach a couple of lessons and got positive feedback from students and teachers. That led me to continue teaching in Games Academy afterwards.

4.2 Game Prototype

My first proper role as a producer came from a client project but since the team was small, I focused on other roles as well. The client wanted a game prototype to be created which could then be used to promote the idea and get funding to continue development. The game, concept and all its contents are owned by the client so I can share only general information about the project.

To get this project started I initially met with a client and discussed what kind of game they wanted in the end. Then I came up with a base budget, which features could be implemented for the prototype, and what kind of team would be needed for this type of project. After this was approved, I then gathered the team I thought was capable and used my close network to achieve this.

The team behind this project was the same team that co-founded Mohavi together. Our skills complemented each other, and we were able to achieve a lot with the budget and time constraints. This project also grew my professional network and I have stayed in good relations with the many people I met throughout the development.

4.2.1 Features Based on a Budget

The main challenge of this project was thinking of which features were the most important to show off the concept and get other parties interested in the potential of the game. The game was broken down by the team as much as we could by thinking of all the potential features and possibilities. Then a game design document was created to list out the features, art direction and core concepts.

The initial visuals and brand are what could catch the interest right away so that was a priority. One other person worked on the art along with me and I knew what their skills were. This made it easier to think what all we could create and achieve with the given budget rather than having to continuously cut things out that would not fit the budget.

The budget for the audio was done a bit differently than for the visuals. There was a reserved sum for everything that was needed, and the audio lead knew what the budget was. A priority list was created so that the most important audio was created first and without worry. Then with any existing budget for the audio needs it would just benefit the project.

If the visuals would catch the initial attention, then the base functionality would be what really sells the idea. The budget for the mechanics were done similarly to the audio as we made a priority list, but the art needed to keep up with the mechanics. Once the core gameplay loop could be completed and all the visuals were implemented, then those features could be polished further. Afterwards new features could then be added till the budget runs out without worry.

4.2.2 Team Dynamics

My role as producer was made easier because of the team dynamics. The further we went into the project the more I could trust the skills and feedback of the team, my own included. Communication was key and we regularly playtested the game, discussed what was done, what would be worked on next and then everyone was given the freedom to work.

We were able to reach our milestones and set new ones appropriately. This became easier over time as we could each state what we thought the project needed and then clearly communicate this to the client. The client then confirmed our idea or gave their opinion on what could be different.

4.3 Mohavi Creative Company Oy

Mohavi Creative is a tech-savvy startup that was founded in February of 2020. We make interactive things. That can range from full on game development to individual services like animation and audio design. I am the CEO of Mohavi, and I run the daily operations of the company. When the need arises for project work, I also carry out art tasks and act as the producer for the project.

4.3.1 Client Work

Our focus since founding the company has been client work. I have had many roles when it comes to these projects including first finding the projects, client onboarding and updating the client about the progress made. These tasks can be included in the role of an external type producer. Depending on the type of projects I can heavily focus on just one part but usually I take on which ever role is needed for the project. I fill in the gaps in a more practical sense.

My role often includes that of a typical producer where I plan out the timetable, make sure we have the resources available, and keep everything in line with the budget. For short term projects this often does not consume a lot of time which is why I have been able to also take on other roles like being an artist. If a project

would require a larger team then this would likely mean I need to focus on the role of a producer more.

4.3.2 Game Prototyping

Mohavi would also like to develop its own games or intellectual properties. In order to make this happen we need to either self-fund the project from our success in client projects or get funding from an outside source. Generally, in order to get funding for a project there needs to be something to show to pique interest in the project or at least prove what can be done. Prototypes are great for games because it can be a vertical slice of the gameplay and really show the idea. Another method is to create a detailed game design document and then pitch decks can complement both.

During November of 2020 Mohavi created the base game design document with the core concepts for a game prototype called Hopped Up!. Then in January and February of 2021 Mohavi created a base prototype (Introducing Hopped Up!, 2021). This prototype could show off the potential for full release. Branding and documentation were created alongside the prototype with the focus being what resources were needed for funding applications. We also took part in the Finnish Game Incubator (2020) to learn in detail about having a game business.

When it comes to prototyping, regardless if it is for a client or in-house, there needs to be a limit. A prototype is not meant to be a full feature project. When I plan out the timetable, I need to know how much time we could put into the prototype in total. Then together with the team members we think of which features we want to show, and which art assets would be the most important to create.

It can be hard to justify which features and art assets are the most important. This goes beyond the role a producer usually takes on but the process of figuring out what can be done from the team and fitting that to a timetable is still common for the role. I feel that each project, even as short as a quick prototype, can give that valuable experience as a producer.

5 CONCLUSION

This thesis has been a great learning process behind what the roles of a producer are since it can depend on many factors. With the base roles I wrote about it was certain that communication is the most important skill to either be naturally good at or developed further. Every other skill and knowledge of the specific industry then tends to be a large benefit, but this does not limit a good producer from being able to work in multiple industries.

Some producers have very specific roles that they need to take care of. This is more often the case when working in larger companies or projects. More people involved means they handle more specific areas because the workload increases. This can mean a producer can end up making important decisions or leaving that to other leads or upper management.

The interviews lead to confirming many things the research covered and was valuable to this thesis and my future work. Many of them also felt they could always improve but I think that shows how much they care about their work. It was also helpful that communication is their top skill as it led to very smooth interviews that offered great information.

When I look back at my time in Games Academy, I can see that when I was communicating with everyone in different ways it was that important role a producer does. I did not understand what a producer was during my game projects and the thought of being a producer never crossed my mind. After the projects were completed and I reflected back on the roles I took on, that led me to think being a producer is something that I could do and be good at.

Now that I have practiced the role of a producer within my own company, I feel that I could continue this line of work successfully. I do need to develop myself further but that comes over time while working on more projects with different kinds of people. If others feel like becoming a producer it can take time. They may need to learn the industry but if communication and base project management skills are developed, then this gives them a great chance of landing a job as a producer.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview Questions

Main Questions for Producers:
What is your company and what does it produce?
What are the most vital tasks to keep things functioning?
What skills or qualities are important for your role as a producer?
What kind of programs and app do you use?
What tasks do you do that are outside the general role of a producer?
Do you think you could work as a producer in a different field?
Do you or did you enjoy working as a producer?
If you were going to hire a producer what would be the most important skills or qualities, would you look for?
How important is growing your professional network as a producer?
What skills of the industry should you learn before becoming a producer?