Introduction

The two IGDA Quality of Life roundtables gathered a total of approximately 25 people, including 15+ who were not already members of the quality of life committee. The discussion was quite constructive, although it did not really provide us with clear directions for our upcoming work.

Highlights

Gordon Walton says that the industry is caught in a culture of lying: studios lie about the real cost of development to get contracts, publishers pretend to believe them so that they can renegotiate a better deal when the studio fails to deliver, and everyone ends up working crazy hours to fulfill impossible promises. No one who quotes the "real" cost ahead of time will ever get a deal signed.

The industry has built constant unpaid overtime into its business culture, so much so that it has become impossible to be "competitive" without it, as demonstrated by the demise of the French development industry following the country's adoption of the 35-hour week.

Outsourcing to cut costs has become a major factor. How do we prevent ourselves from being made irrelevant by third-world sweatshops? No answer.

"You need a 50% improvement in efficiency to change a pattern that is perceived as successful, whether it is really successful or not." And since most studio managers learned the business in crunch-heavy environments, they have no other tools with which to manage their projects.

Bob Bates met considerable resistance at Legend Entertainment when he tried to show how ineffective the crunch cycle really was – and he was a founder of the company.

One participant cited psychological research that has found out that the more hours you spend at work, the fewer hours you spend *actually working*.

The constant inflow of rookies helps studios justify their bad practices, because burnt-out developers are easy to replace. "If you had to pay overtime, you would want better people."

According to the participants, the larger companies in the industry typically provide good benefits.

One of the sources of project overflow is that we have to "throw everything in there" because we can't know ahead of time which features are going to make the product successful. One way to alleviate the problem would be for publishers to fund separate pre-production agreements. Then, only the most promising pre-prods would get full production funding. As a result, more things would get tried out, and less money would be sunk into failed projects.

Suggestions from the participants

- If we run the roundtable again, some participants would like HR professionals who are present at the show to run Job Fair booths but don't have session passes to be allowed in.
- Look for churn rates in other related industries and compare them to ours. The ACM, Carnegie-Mellon University and software industry associations may have these numbers.
- Look for data on the effects of long hours on airline pilots, air traffic controllers and construction workers. This data exists.
- Gather metrics on true project durations, man-months, team sizes, percentage of successful projects that go over budget.