

THE PERILS OF TEAM WORKING

Title page

I've been asked to do a talk on the perils of team working! I am the project leader of a game that a team of us are writing in Multimedia Fusion called "Conquer" which is going to be a team-based online capture the flag game. **Screenshots of Conquer** We started designing the game in February when me and some friends were playing Tribes over the school network. Tribes inspired us to create Conquer, because we thought that we could improve on some of the aspects of gameplay. There are now 6 people involved in making Conquer including myself as the game director and programmer **Me**, Lewis who is the lead graphics artist **Lewis**, Dan who is also designing **Dan**, Joao from Portugal who is creating sound effects and graphics for the game **Joao**, AngryMouse from San Diego who is on graphics **AngryMouse** and Chris who is helping to market the game with his poster art. **"Insert picture here"**. Lewis, Dan and I have come up from Bristol.

Lewis and Dan who are here today joined me from the beginning. Dan because I've worked with him many times before and knew he occasionally has some bright ideas and Lewis because... me and Dan can't draw! **Examples** Joao soon joined us, after I'd talked about the game on a Jedi Knight 2 board. Someone else asked me if he could help soon after that, and that person wishes to remain anonymous for the moment. **Gaz with arrows pointing at his head!** AngryMouse and Chris also contacted me because I'd advertised jobs on my website.

When people applied for jobs they were reminded that it was a non-profit game (so they wouldn't be paid) and that we might not finish it, which is a slight understatement! **"Chance of finishing game: 426354:1"**

Problem #1: How good are the staff? The first real problem with building a team is not knowing how well they work and to what standard, because ideally we would want people with a bit of experience so they could do their job well. Fortunately everyone that was recruited to help was very good (with the exception of another Portuguese bloke who didn't produce any work whatsoever!) The way I tested this was different for everyone. I already knew what Lewis and Dan could do, and with Joao I didn't need any samples of his previous work because within minutes of saying he could help, he sent me a submachine gun sound which was very good. Infact Joao has been one of the best staff members. He's surprised and impressed me everytime! But, with some people I'd had to check their ability before I let them help. For example I asked "he-who-should-not-be-named" **Gaz again** to send me an application or game that he'd made with MOO or DirectPlay. When he did I was convinced that he'd be good enough for the game.

When I was sent graphics and sounds for the game I would always have some comments about how we could improve it. Then the file could be edited by the author and sent back to me. Joao soon got the idea and made several versions of his sounds and sent them all to me so I had some to choose from!

Problem #2: The leader's job! The next problem that I had was my own role in making Conquer! Initially it was mainly programming, but as the team grew I had to organize jobs and maintain the Conquer forums which the staff use a lot to talk to each other and get feedback. So overall, it hasn't actually been me that's done the most work for the game itself – it's probably been Lewis whose graphics work takes up about 99% of the screenshots.

Problem #3: Time and Effort The main problem with making a game as complex as Conquer and with a big team is that I'm not paying anyone to help make it, and so I don't expect the staff to spend all their free time doing it. I don't give anyone deadlines to finish work because they're not necessary. If I gave people deadlines and they don't meet them then what am I meant to do? I don't want to get rid of a good staff member. The problem with this is that I may not get material from the staff exactly when I want it and therefore the progress of the game is quite slow. If I realize that I'm never going to get the graphics or sounds in, I'll talk to the staff member involved and probably find someone else to do the job or have a go myself. The best example of this is just happens to be the case of "the other one" **Gaz again**. All I ever got from him was a small test program that failed miserably over our internet connection! Infact, this person disappeared for a few weeks and when I found him again he asked if he could have a go at coding another part of the game instead. I eventually put him on the map maker, but a few weeks later I got an e-mail from him saying that he was too busy and would like to leave the team. But to be quite fair he is very supportive and has helped me quite often in small ways. Anyway, remember the Portuguese guy I mentioned earlier who didn't do anything? Yeah well after waiting ages for him to do something, he ended up having an argument (in Portuguese) with Joao over MSN which I was having great fun frantically trying to translate online!

Problem #4: Quantity of Work Another problem is that some staff members have nothing to do for a long time while others have too much! Dan who is one of the designers finds it hard to contribute beyond the design stage as I had already done most of it. In the past I've given him other designing jobs such as the layout of the HUD, map maker ideas and the game's title page, but most of the time he has nothing to do at all. Our graphics department on the other hand always has something to work on because there are so many items to draw. We are still short of some item icons, but the biggest and most time-consuming part of the project is drawing map objects which are basically obstacles and backgrounds that give maps their detail and challenge. After the game's release we are hoping to issue more map objects, but players will be able to create their own for their own maps.

Problem #5: You Lot Although I'm the main designer of the game and in the end I have the final word, I try to get as many people as I can to vote on certain ideas. This is because whatever I think, I know that the majority vote will be what the average player wants from the game. A big problem though is getting opinions on these ideas. On the Conquer Forums there are many issues to discuss about the game, but only the staff and a few others comment on them. We really need lots more views so that we can give the

players what they want and hopefully by giving this talk a few of you will come and speak to us in the forums.

“General Tips:” Anyway – Hopefully I’ve spread some pretty good pointers across to some of you on how to create and manage a team of developers from all around the world! **“Advertise Jobs”** I had to advertise jobs (which I did on my website and popular boards). **“Make sure staff know the full story”** I had to explain their role and what I expect of them. I told them that it was a non-profit game and that we might not finish it. **“Encourage staff”** I had to motivate the team so that no-one would get board and give up. I did this mainly by commending the staff on the Conquer forums for good work and just being generally friendly to them and keeping in touch! **“Make sure they know what to do!”** Finally I had to communicate with them well by talking to them about ideas in some detail.

End Screen – Screenshots etc. If you are.....or were thinking of setting up a team of developers for your next project, please don’t let any of these so-called “perils” put you off! I would strongly recommend meeting the challenge. It is great fun to do and gives you so much experience.

It would be good to think that teamwork is everything in playing the game and making the game; but really teamwork is.... a lot of people doing what I say!

Anyway – Thanks for listening. And if anyone wants to help with the game especially with graphics or MOO programming, then please come and talk to me.