Production Culture
How Two and a Half Artists completed the FX for Gears of War 3

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Why me?

• I’m not a producer
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• Looking at Epic’s production efficiency from an artist’s point of view
Why me?

• I’m not a producer
• Looking at Epic’s production efficiency from an artist’s point of view
• 10 years production experience in large VFX studios
Gears of War 3 FX Stats

• 8,299 hand-placed FX systems
• 2,137 Unique Particle Systems
• 95 minutes of FX intensive Real Time Cinematics
Just Two and a Half FX Artists

• 2 artists in production for a bit over a year
• 1 new hire joined the team for the last 5 months
• Standard working days until the last few weeks
Our AAA industry peers typically have FX teams that are 2 to 6 times larger!
How did we do it?
Yes, we have an awesome tool!
..with an efficient workflow

- Asset modularity
- Easy experimentation
- Fast iteration times
- Visual scripting
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• Asset modularity
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• Fast iteration times
• **Visual scripting**
But that can’t be all!?

• Other AAA studios use the Unreal Engine
  – Still need much larger FX teams
• It just felt easy to be productive
  – Cog in a well oiled machine
  – Motivated and invested
• Other things must contribute to efficiency
  – Less tangible
  – But no less important
  – Harder to define
• I group these things under the theme of:
‘Production Culture’

• The components that make a production conducive to being efficient.
• A production’s ‘heartbeat.’
• It’s what’s beyond the obvious stuff..
Key Influencers

1. Developer Qualities
2. Production Structure
3. Team-building
4. Joint experience
1. Developer Qualities

- Sharers
- Culture fit
- Driven
- Experience
2. Production Structure

- Thin hierarchy
- Role-playing
- Best person for the job
- Joint ownership
  - Touch what needs work
3. Team-Building

- Work in proximity
- Facilitate impromptu meetings
- Big family feel
  - Epic M.O.M.
  - Lunch date and beer runs
- Small size keeps it personal
4. Joint Experience

• Keeping the teams together
• Facilitated communication
  – Go to people
• Self-running
  – Especially for sequels
• Little ramp-up time
If you’re going to take away anything..

• Efficient tools are important
• And so is Production Culture
• Those intangibles enable your devs to be more efficient and better at their job.
Questions?