GDC 09 China

October 11–13, 2009
游戏开发者大会·中国

Game Developers Conference® China
Shanghai International Convention Center
Shanghai, China

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AAA Game Development in China

SPICY HORSE
★ 麻辣馬 ★

About American

MaJi (Lucky Horse loves Spicy = MaLaMa)

- In China since 2004 (5 years)
- 16 years making games
- id Software (DOOM, Quake)
- EA (Alice, misc others)
- Independent (Scrapland, Bad Day LA)
- Vykarian (art outsourcing)
- Spicy Horse (Grimm, Alice 2)

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About Spicy Horse

Largest independent foreign game studio in China.

- Established 2006 (Grimm project)
- 65 internal, built for “Core Competency”
- 45 external, 3D assets (99% outsourced)
- Chinese soul fused with Western process
- *Really* process driven
- Born from ashes (HK meltdown)
- Currently building sequel to “Alice”

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Who We Are

- Sr. Creative Director – American McGee
  - With over 15 years industry experience, American has working on such blockbuster titles as the DOOM and Quake series, and was lead designer behind the cult hit “American McGee’s Alice”.
- General Manager – Adam Lang
  - Adam’s years of experience with Shanda saw him involved in online content strategies, international partnerships, and technical R&D focused on the Chinese market.
- Executive Producer – RJ Berg
  - RJ spent nearly 15 years at Electronic Arts before becoming the Creative Director at Lucas Arts. He’s been involved with titles such as Star Wars (KOTOR) to his own Sherlock Holmes game.
- Development Director – Paul Kurowski
  - Working in the industry since 1996, Paul has contributed to a long list of major hits including GTA3, San Andreas, and Vice City. His roles included lead artist and game designer.
- Creative Director – Ben Kerslake
  - Combining a technical background in software development and education with creative work in film, animation, branding and illustration spanning a period of 10 years, Ben provides guidance across a varied selection of disciplines. Lead Concept Artist and Creative Director on Grimm.
- Tech Director – Chen Bao Wu
  - In his 14 years of game development Chen has worked for Ubisoft on such titles as Ghost Recon, Splinter Cell, and Rayman. He is an optimization and console expert.
- Art Director – Ken Wong
  - Ken has done visualization and art direction for games since 2003. His history includes work for Nival, Enlight, Art Asylum, and Waxploitation Records.
- Animation Director – Tang Ye Ping
  - After 16 years as an animator Tang can lay claim to an impressive work history. Most recently as animation leader at Ubisoft. Her list of titles includes Brothers in Arms (1&2) and Rainbow Six 3.

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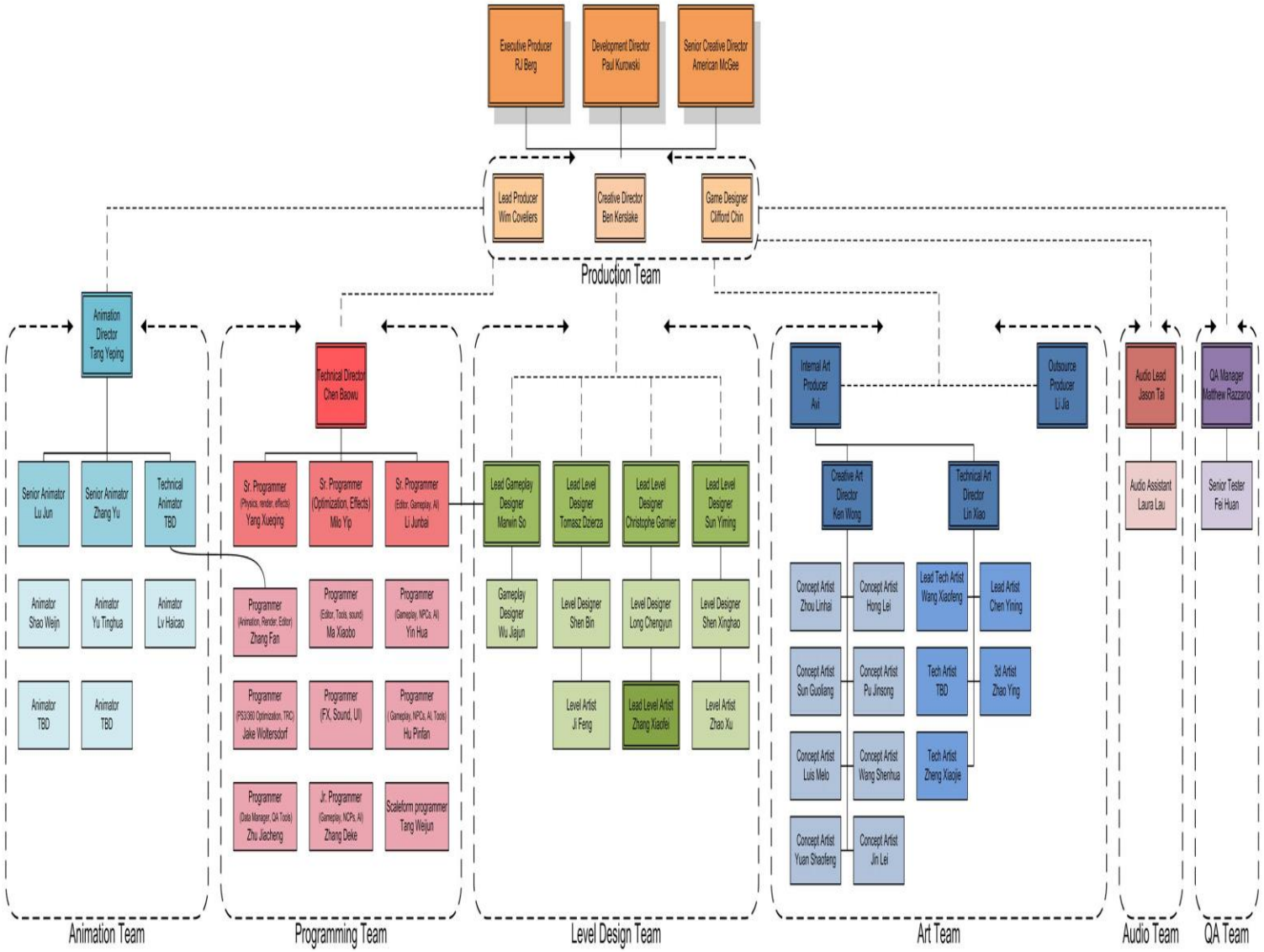
Alice II Development Org



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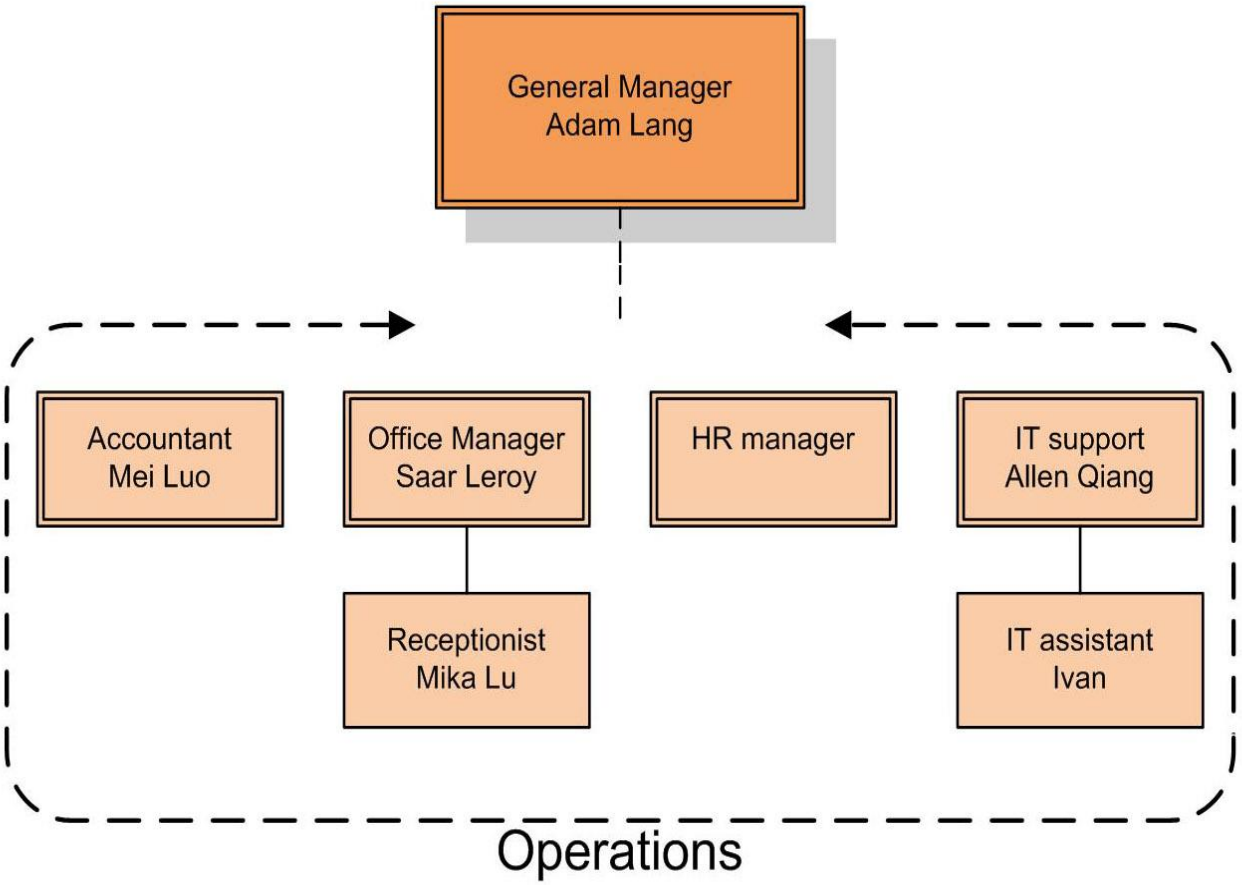
Spicy Operations Org



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Culture

"Development paradise in Shanghai"

- A Chinese company 1st
- Egalitarian pay and title structure
- Holistic management style
- Standardized interview process
- Standardized review process
- Company vision evangelizing
- Quarterly day, yearly weekend trip
- "Bonding events" (Ping Pong)
- Integrated foreign and Chinese
- Balanced internal competition

Spicy Horse Quality Mantra

No broken windows
Nothing is insignificant
Exceed expectations
Don't take things for granted
Take responsibility
Don't pass the buck
Immediately repair issues
Everything matters
Don't leave loose ends
Always finish discussions
Make full decisions
Implement quickly
Use information management systems religiously
Act on decisions
Don't sit on information others need
Deadlines are deadly serious
Read and understand project documents
Sweat the small stuff

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Vision

Clear vision = Ownership = Quality

- Studio goals clearly stated
- Product goals clearly stated
- Process protects our efforts
- Reward for our efforts
- Commitment to China
- Commitment to employees
- Everyone is free

Spicy Horse Vision Statement

Spicy Horse is an innovative game development studio.

The company *goal* is to produce games we can be proud of. Games that reward the time and effort we spent working on them by achieving high levels of quality and entertainment value. To that end we will protect our efforts by religious adherence to quality standards, best practices, and processes. Planning and process allow us to have creative freedom and avoid joy-killers like crunch time, slipped schedules, and bad products. We will maintain an environment where everyone has the ability to input, criticize, critique, and add value to every aspect of the company.

Our *products*: Our products are innovative, creative, artful, soulful, story driven, and lead the marketplace. They provide quality entertainment to our audience. Our audience is global – anyone with a computer or game console and an interest in good story, great art, and accessible game play.

Our *reward* will come in several time categories: Immediate reward from a happy, healthy work environment, constant recognition of contribution, and feeling of ownership/importance for every person who contributes to the group effort. Near-term reward comes from improvement activities such as team adventures, learning programs, and career advancement. Medium-term rewards through the release of quality products – benefiting society through products that raise consciousness, improve quality of life, provide emotional outlet, and entertain. Long term reward from the establishment and maintenance of a mature studio –eventually placing the studio in a position to sell, be acquired, or continue being. Employees will be able to leverage these rewards to manage their own internal projects, start their own studios, retire, or just continue being happy doing what they re doing.

What makes us *different (why we will succeed)*: Our employees: We attain succeed through our people. This comes from our ability to attract and engage the talent of exceptional artists, technologists, and producers. Ours are hard working, principled people. Our culture: A highly rewarding and nurturing environment in which to work. Our location: China is a country on the rise, where new ideas have a chance, where something unique can be built, and where the frontiers are still open.

Commitment to *employees*: The Company takes responsibility of employee care seriously. People depend on the Company. The Company promises transparent review and reward process, reliable payment, and a focus on reward and advancement.

"Everyone is free" – if you aren t happy here, we ll help you get happy elsewhere.
Be good. Don t be evil. Maintain a strong vision. Take care of the team. Commit to quality.

The pleasure of work should be in the work, not only in the end product.

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Process

Process allows us to be creative.

- Clearly defined process for *everything*
- Heavy rotation meetings drive process
- A's & O's (weekly for every department)
- Task tracking and individual accountability
- Simple, fail-proof tools
  - Bugzilla (Deskzilla), Perforce, Wiki, WIP design
- Clear task assignments, priorities, scheduling
- Accountability for *everything*

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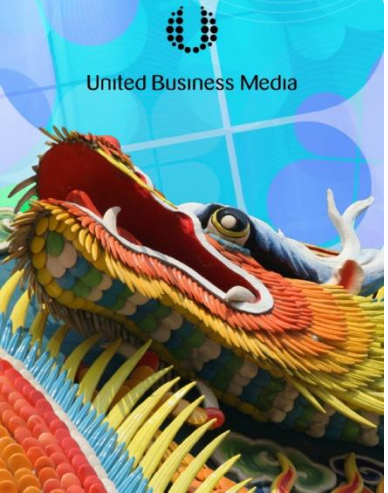
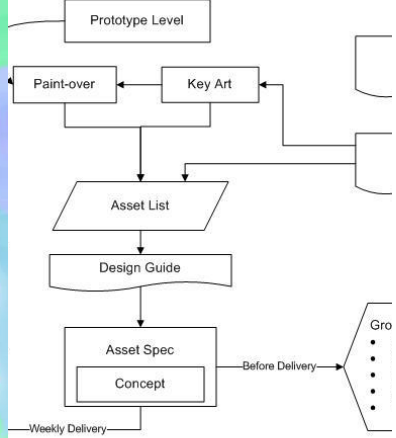
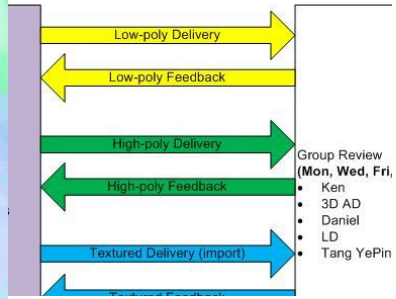






Grimm Asset Checklist

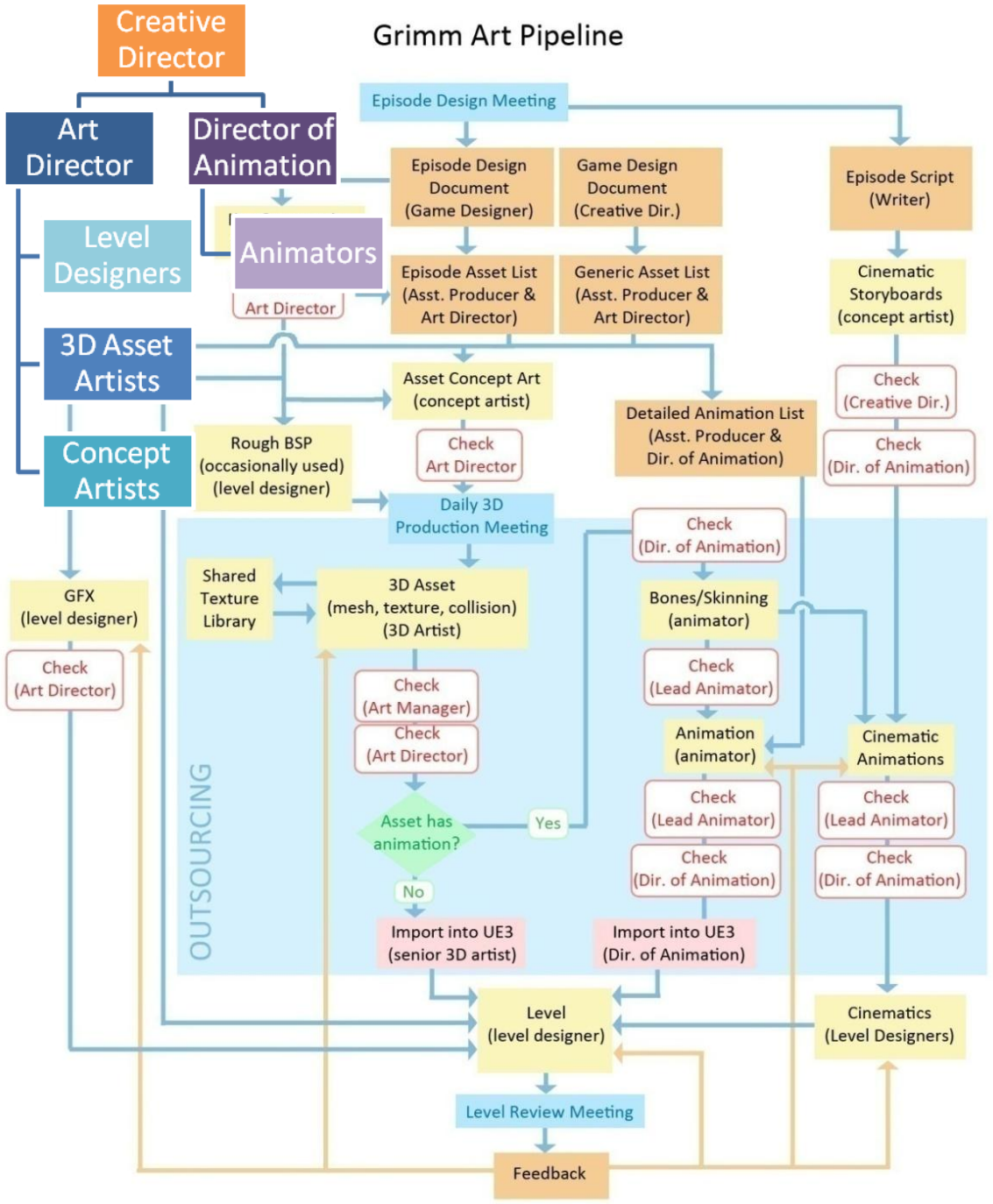
General
- ☐ Happy / scary feeling?
- ☐ Check every angle
- ☐ Matches concept art as closely as possible
- ☐ Correct filenames
- ☐ Correct material names
- ☐ Checked in engine
- ☐ Object makes sense / works

Texture / Material
- ☐ PSD uses base colors correctly
- ☐ PSD includes both L and D versions
- ☐ Colors / textures match concept art
- ☐ D version not too dirty, some areas dirtier than others
- ☐ TGA size

Unwrap
- ☐ No waste
- ☐ Keep stretching to a minimum
- ☐ Reuse texture area for similar polygons
- ☐ Use polygons slicing to make hard edges where possible

Mesh
- ☐ Ver
- ☐ Bui des
- ☐ Edg
- ☐ Obj
- ☐ Pol
- ☐ Sca
- ☐ Goo
- ☐ Piv
- ☐ Ori
- ☐ Sm
- ☐ No
- ☐ No
- ☐ Goo
- ☐ Res

Grimm Art Pipeline



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Meetings Drive Production

Just enough meetings with just enough people.

- Monday – all hands, level review, APB
- Tuesday – design, tech, sound, level art
- Wednesday – level review, animators
- Thursday – art, programmers
- Friday – animation, level review

- Monthly “WTF”
- Clock of DOOM!

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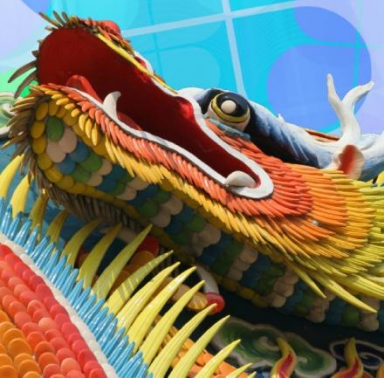

ALICE VS/FOUNDATION PEE-CHART

[redacted]

2/2/2009 MS1: Start Preproduction
3/14/2009 MS2:
4/25/2009 MS3
6/2/2009 MS4 VSP Delivery
VS DELIVERY
MS6: 50%
MS8: β
LAUNCH PARTY!!

2/2/2009 - 6/2/2009 PREPRODUCTION
6/3/2009 - 12/2/2009 VERTICAL SLICE
[redacted] PRODUCTION
Goin' gold

2/2/2009
3/1/2011

[redacted] VS Prototype
[redacted] VS Alpha
[redacted] VS Beta
[redacted] MS5: VS DELIVERY

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 [redacted] 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44

1st Playable Ch. 1-2-3
1st Playable Ch. 4-5
2nd Playable Ch.1-2-3
2nd Playable Ch. 4-5
3d Playable Ch. 1-5

FOUNDATION MILESTONES

1st Playable:
- Walkthrough possible
- Triggers set
- Placeholder interactions
- Placeholders characters
- First draft of puzzles

2nd Playable:
- All gameplay working
- Puzzles working
- NPC interactions
- Combat
- Collectibles

3d Playable:
- Layouts polished
- Gameplay tuned
- Finalize interactions and puzzles

VERTICAL SLICE MILESTONES

Prototype:
- Walkthrough possible
- Triggers set
- Placeholder interactions
- Placeholders characters
- First draft of puzzles

Alpha:
- All Assets in game
- VO+Music
- Rough AI
- Rough Combat
- All features in-game

Beta:
- All animations done
- Working UI
- Final gameplay
- All features finetuned

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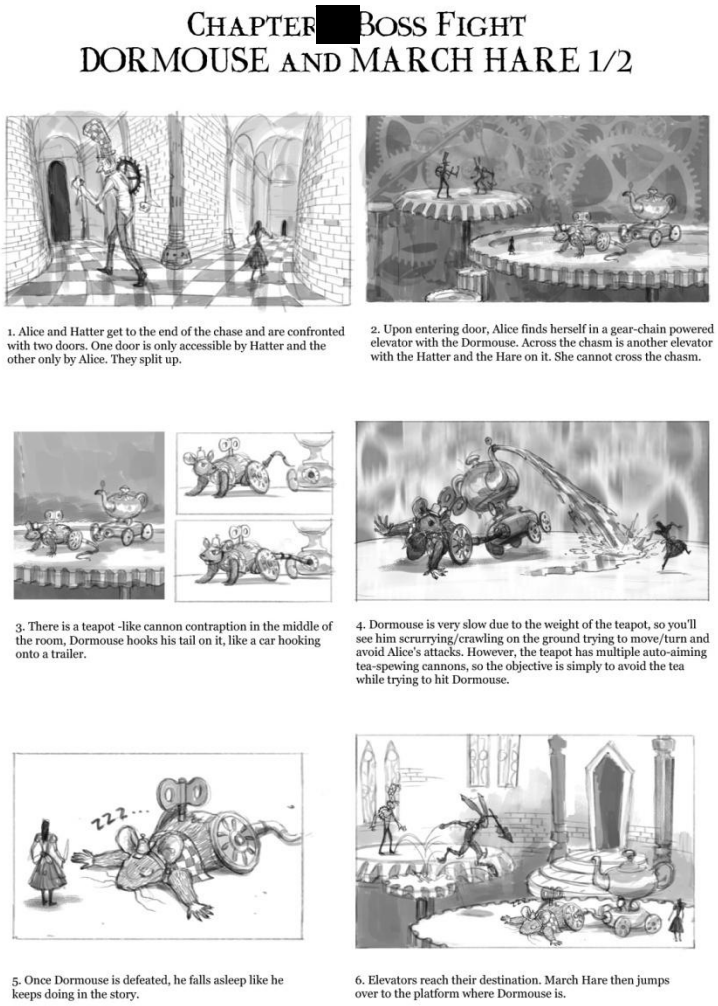
Design + Production

A Democratic Dictatorship.

- Western design leads
- Driven by requirements
- Design group:
  - Creative / Development / Art Directors
  - Producers
  - Writer
- Supported by Concept



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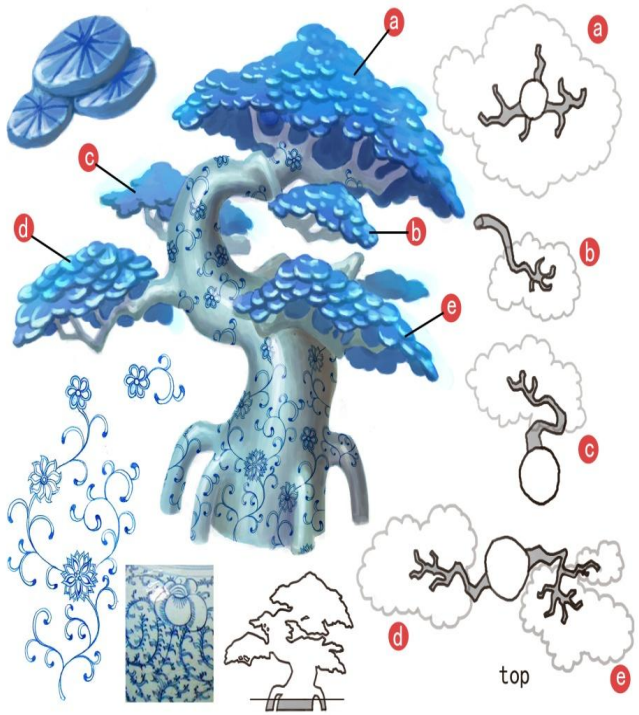
Concept Art

The headwater (河源)of production.



- Western ADs
- Internal core + work for hire
- Design drives asset lists
- Asset lists drive concept art
- Concept art drives outsource

Concept Art Supply

Concept artists:	8									National Holiday				CNY									
Avg Concept to 3d ratio	6	6	6	6	6	6	6.5	6.5	6.5	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
										0.6				0.6									
Concept MM: Assets	3	4	5	6	6	5	5	6	6.5	6.5	6	6.5	6.5	7	6.5	6	5	5	5	4	2	0	
Concept MM: Keys						3	3	1															
Concept MM: Paintovers								1	1.5	1.5	2	1.5	1.5	1	1.5	2							
Vendor MM	3	5	5	12	13	19	29	37	38	38	41	41	40	40	40	40	40	37	36	30	9	8	
Concept Surplus					0	11	14.5	16.5	20.75	10.05	11.05	15.55	21.05	10.45	15.95	17.95	12.95	10.95	9.95	7.95	12.95	4.95	
Actual Surplus						12.5	11.5	24.25															total outs

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Outsource

Key to a small, agile internal development team.

- 99% outsource reliance drives safeguards
- Near-sourcing eliminates common problems
- Blended approach (multiple vendors)
- Focus on quality, reliability and cost
- Well established pipeline (3rd generation)

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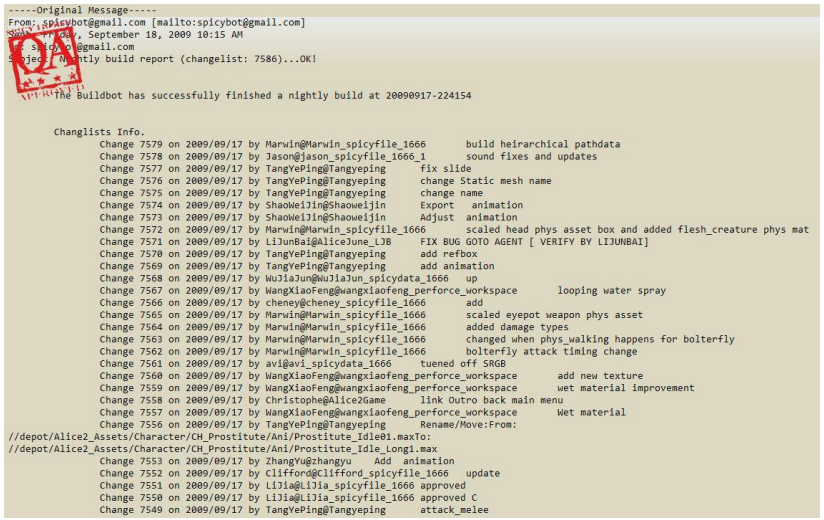
Tech

Work with constraints and existing tech, not against.

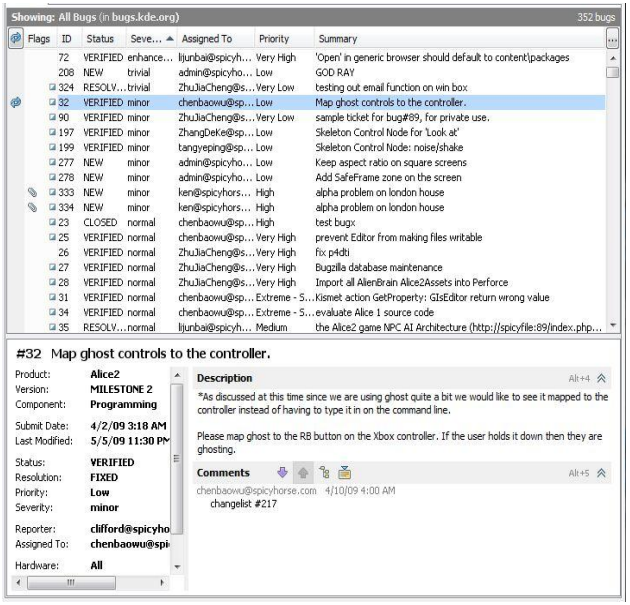
- Three leads (best of class in China)
- Tasks generated by design requests
- Nightly builds (+QA approval)
- Distributed skills



```
-----Original Message-----
From: spicybot@gmail.com [mailto:spicybot@gmail.com]
Sent: Friday, September 18, 2009 10:15 AM
To:   spicybot@gmail.com
Subject: Nightly build report (changelist: 7586)...OK!


        The Buildbot has successfully finished a nightly build at 20090917-224154


      Changlists Info.
            Change 7579 on 2009/09/17 by Marwin@Marwin_spicyfile_1666       build heirarchical pathdata
            Change 7578 on 2009/09/17 by Jason@jason_spicyfile_1666_1       sound fixes and updates
            Change 7577 on 2009/09/17 by TangYePing@Tangyeping      fix slide
            Change 7576 on 2009/09/17 by TangYePing@Tangyeping      change Static mesh name
            Change 7575 on 2009/09/17 by TangYePing@Tangyeping      change name
            Change 7574 on 2009/09/17 by ShaoWeiJin@Shaoweijin      Export   animation
            Change 7573 on 2009/09/17 by ShaoWeiJin@Shaoweijin      Adjust  animation
            Change 7572 on 2009/09/17 by Marwin@Marwin_spicyfile_1666       scaled head phys asset box and added flesh_creature phys mat
            Change 7571 on 2009/09/17 by LiJunBai@AliceJune_LJB     FIX BUG GOTO AGENT [ VERIFY BY LIJUNBAI]
            Change 7570 on 2009/09/17 by TangYePing@Tangyeping      add refbox
            Change 7569 on 2009/09/17 by TangYePing@Tangyeping      add animation
            Change 7568 on 2009/09/17 by WuJiaJun@WuJiaJun_spicydata_1666   up
            Change 7567 on 2009/09/17 by WangXiaoFeng@wangxiaofeng_perforce_workspace       looping water spray
            Change 7566 on 2009/09/17 by cheney@cheney_spicyfile_1666       add
            Change 7565 on 2009/09/17 by Marwin@Marwin_spicyfile_1666       scaled eyepot weapon phys asset
            Change 7564 on 2009/09/17 by Marwin@Marwin_spicyfile_1666       added damage types
            Change 7563 on 2009/09/17 by Marwin@Marwin_spicyfile_1666       changed when phys_walking happens for bolterfly
            Change 7562 on 2009/09/17 by Marwin@Marwin_spicyfile_1666       bolterfly attack timing change
            Change 7561 on 2009/09/17 by avi@avi_spicydata_1666     tuened off SRGB
            Change 7560 on 2009/09/17 by WangXiaoFeng@wangxiaofeng_perforce_workspace       add new texture
            Change 7559 on 2009/09/17 by WangXiaoFeng@wangxiaofeng_perforce_workspace       wet material improvement
            Change 7558 on 2009/09/17 by Christophe@Alice2Game      link Outro back main menu
            Change 7557 on 2009/09/17 by WangXiaoFeng@wangxiaofeng_perforce_workspace       Wet material
            Change 7556 on 2009/09/17 by TangYePing@Tangyeping      Rename/Move:From:
//depot/Alice2_Assets/Character/CH_Prostitute/Ani/Prostitute_Idle01.maxTo:
//depot/Alice2_Assets/Character/CH_Prostitute/Ani/Prostitute_Idle_Long1.max
            Change 7553 on 2009/09/17 by ZhangYu@zhangyu    Add  animation
            Change 7552 on 2009/09/17 by Clifford@Clifford_spicyfile_1666   update
            Change 7551 on 2009/09/17 by LiJia@LiJia_spicyfile_1666 approved
            Change 7550 on 2009/09/17 by LiJia@LiJia_spicyfile_1666 approved C
            Change 7549 on 2009/09/17 by TangYePing@Tangyeping      attack_melee
```



Showing: All Bugs (in bugs.kde.org) — 352 bugs

Flags	ID	Status	Seve...	Assigned To	Priority	Summary
	72	VERIFIED	enhance...	lijunbai@spicyh...	Very High	'Open' in generic browser should default to content\packages
	208	NEW	trivial	admin@spicyho...	Low	GOD RAY
	324	RESOLV...	trivial	ZhuJiaCheng@s...	Very Low	testing out email function on win box
	32	VERIFIED	minor	chenbaowu@sp...	Low	Map ghost controls to the controller.
	90	VERIFIED	minor	ZhuJiaCheng@s...	Very Low	sample ticket for bug#89, for private use.
	197	VERIFIED	minor	ZhangDeKe@sp...	Low	Skeleton Control Node for 'Look at'
	199	VERIFIED	minor	tangyeping@sp...	Low	Skeleton Control Node: noise/shake
	277	NEW	minor	admin@spicyho...	Low	Keep aspect ratio on square screens
	278	NEW	minor	admin@spicyho...	Low	Add SafeFrame zone on the screen
	333	NEW	minor	ken@spicyhors...	High	alpha problem on london house
	334	NEW	minor	ken@spicyhors...	High	alpha problem on london house
	23	CLOSED	normal	chenbaowu@sp...	High	test bugx
	25	VERIFIED	normal	chenbaowu@sp...	Very High	prevent Editor from making files writable
	26	VERIFIED	normal	ZhuJiaCheng@s...	Very High	fix p4dti
	27	VERIFIED	normal	ZhuJiaCheng@s...	Very High	Bugzilla database maintenance
	28	VERIFIED	normal	ZhuJiaCheng@s...	Very High	Import all AlienBrain Alice2Assets into Perforce
	31	VERIFIED	normal	chenbaowu@sp...	Extreme - 5...	Kismet action GetProperty: GIsEditor return wrong value
	34	VERIFIED	normal	chenbaowu@sp...	Extreme - 5...	evaluate Alice 1 source code
	35	RESOLV...	normal	lijunbai@spicyh...	Medium	the Alice2 game NPC AI Architecture (http://spicyfile:89/index.php...

#32 Map ghost controls to the controller.

Product:	Alice2
Version:	MILESTONE 2
Component:	Programming
Submit Date:	4/2/09 3:18 AM
Last Modified:	5/5/09 11:30 PM
Status:	VERIFIED
Resolution:	FIXED
Priority:	Low
Severity:	minor
Reporter:	clifford@spicyho...
Assigned To:	chenbaowu@spi...
Hardware:	All

Description

*As discussed at this time since we are using ghost quite a bit we would like to see it mapped to the controller instead of having to type it in on the command line.

Please map ghost to the RB button on the Xbox controller. If the user holds it down then they are ghosting.

Comments

chenbaowu@spicyhorse.com 4/10/09 4:00 AM
changelist #217

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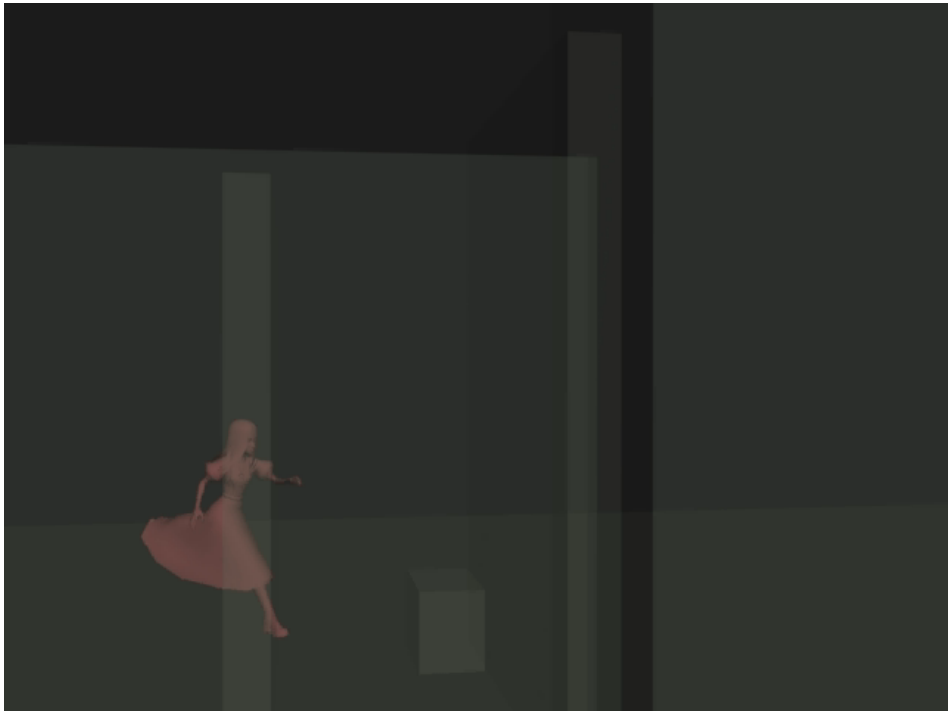
Animation

A high touch, high emotion discipline.

- Core team of hand animators (best of class in China)
- Augmented by local motion capture (outsourced)
- Higher fidelity through roto-scoping, costuming



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Level Design, Art, Tech

Where the rubber meets the road.

- “Pod” structure (LLD, LD, LA)
- Rapid iteration process
- Bi-directional design loop
- Internal 3D Artists (the 1% “real art”)
- Tech Artists (effects, particles, magic)

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Sound

50% of the entertainment experience.

- Western trained Sound Director/composer
- Internal sound facilities
- Outsourced “special” VO, star composers

Fall - Short

Hatter Tense

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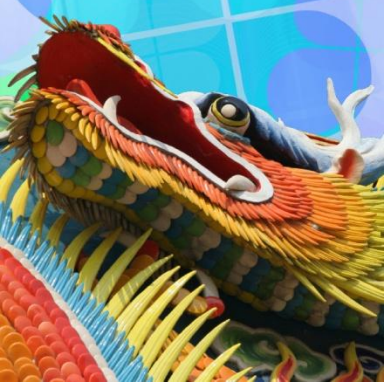

Operations

Employees first.

- Driven by employee needs
- Process, full accountability
- Multi-cultural “services”
- Closely integrated with studio (family)
- Emphasis on quality of life, individual improvement
- NO overtime, crunch
  - 8 hr work days
  - 5 days per week
  - “nice weather” days

2009 Outlook

Project/Studio Related (Healthy Projects)
•Clear assignment of goals and roles
•Clear understanding of value contributed
•Clear understanding of return on investment (to individuals)

Studio growth for coming year (new hires, projects)
•New studio plans
•Individual Improvements (Healthy Employees)
•Continued learning
•Flexible hours
•Mandatory relaxation / study
•Mental/Physical Health

Achieving Individual Goals (Empowered Employees)
•Understanding of goals (state them!)
•Goal timelines (roadmaps, schedules, dependencies to produce results)
•Goal tools (loaner consoles, game library, book library, learning subsidies)
•Aligning company goals with individual goals (internal teachers, financial mechanisms)

Office Improvements (Healthy Environment)
•Ways to be more effective and efficient (seating plans, time sinks)?
•Current distractions or annoyances (noise, email, web, pollution)?
•Tools we could use to work better?
•Methods we could use to work better (better meetings, face-to-face)?
•Furniture, decoration, environment to improve (chairs, desks, lights)?
•Hygiene, sanitation, physical influences?

Getting to/From Work (Easy Transportation)
•Shared or pooled transport
•Transport incentives or subsidies
•Bike/e-scooter allowances

HR/Payroll (Healthy Operations)
•Review process
•HR in general
•Payroll processing

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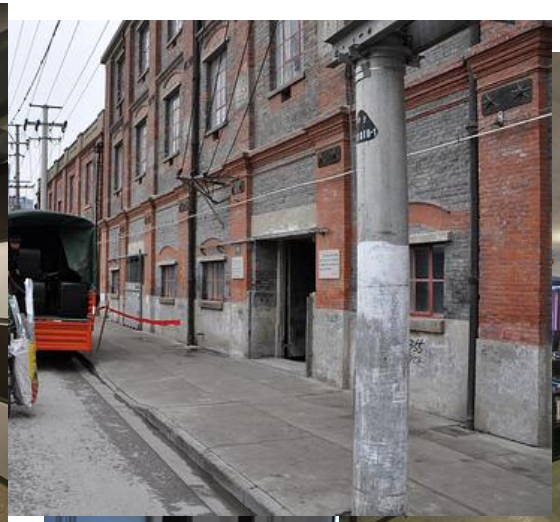
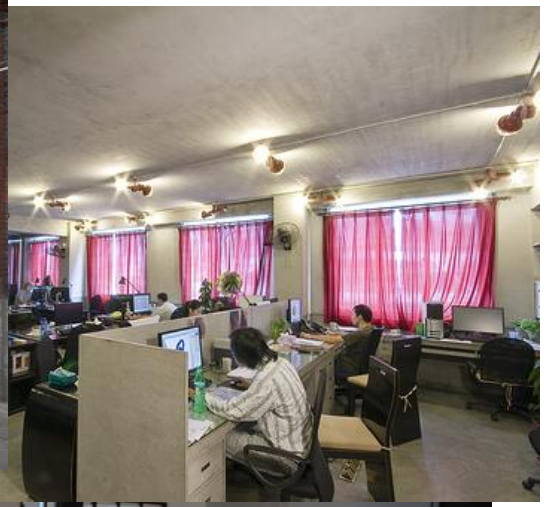
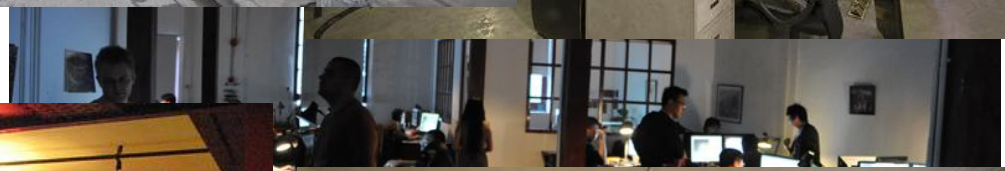
Studio







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Conway's Law

Conway's Law: Any piece of software reflects the organizational structure that produced it. Vice-versa, the organization structure reflects the software it developed.

- First projects are critical
- Changing an existing team is difficult
  - burn it down
- Trust in change
  - allow environment and project to shape
- Don’t force assumptions and fears on formation

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Xiao is Hao

Smaller teams building similar content with fewer total man hours.

Smaller teams are more efficient "combinatorics teaches: as number of agents involved in a process increases, the communication links between those agents increases exponentially - allowing for potentially N(x) communication-link breakdown."

- Lower cost
- Better Communication
- Clearer responsibilities
- Less “by-stander” problem
- 10 is the optimum number
- Trust & Communication are still issues

Alice 2 Core Team

- 6 production directors
- 6 development directors
- 6 animators
- 12 tech
- 11 level design
- 8 concept art
- 5 tech art
- 1 sound assistant
- 1 testing assistant
- **56 core development team**

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Rules for China

There are few rules exclusive to China, none have to do with business – all have to do with the individual.

- Ride a bike, walk – EXPLORE!
- Build something with your hands
- Live IN the city (cook, learn, seek)
  - BaoShan, Beijing Lu,Construction Markets
  - Factories, villages, farm houses
  - Eat, drink something new (Baijiu!)
- Speak the language (talk to people!)
- Have a sense of humor, be flexible
- Embrace Mafan – GROW!

Embrace Mafan

Don't waste a good crisis!

- Get everyone on board, talk to the employees
- Be honest with employees.
  - Don't sugar coat.
  - Emotional connection is key
- Use crisis to create change
- Communicate the changes (short-term & long-term)
- Make individuals understand their unique role in the change
- Have a very clear plan for how to change
  - Usually turns into more process

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Rules in General

Be human, act humanely.

- Don't try to solve problems with money
- The larger a company grows the more likely you are to treat human beings like objects
- Stop growing when too big to know everyone’s story
- Judge slowly - people are hurting & struggling in ways that we cannot see
- Worry is a wasted emotion – Don’t worry!

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