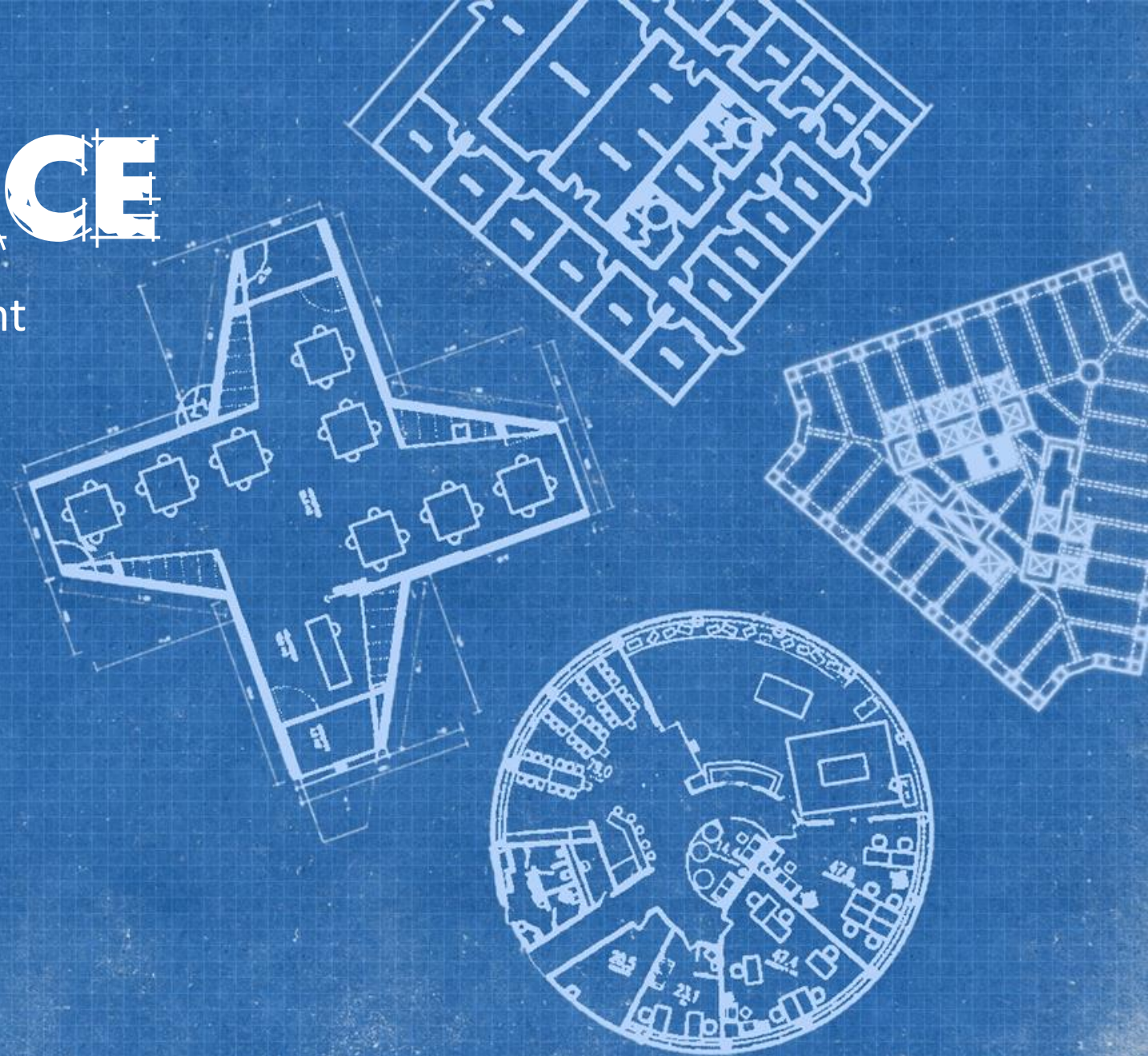


# OFFICE SPACE

Do's and Don'ts of Game Development  
Workplace Design



GDC 2015

Demetri Detsaridis

Wednesday, March 4 // 12 Noon



## HOW WE GOT HERE

Game development spaces draw on multiple traditions of workplace design.

### The Factory





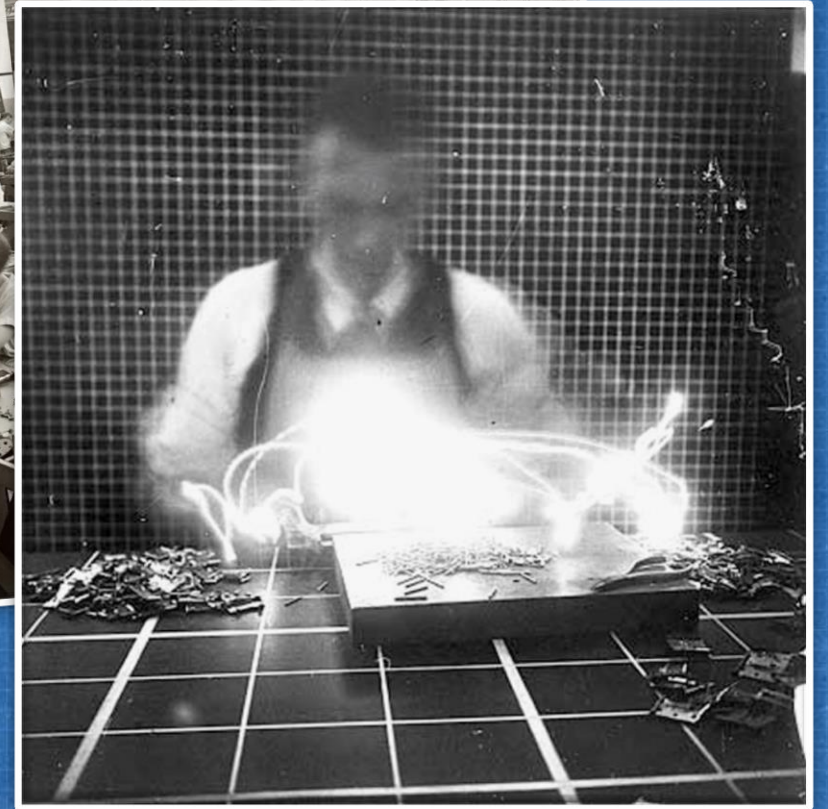
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The Factory



Time-and-motion studies +  
“scientific management”





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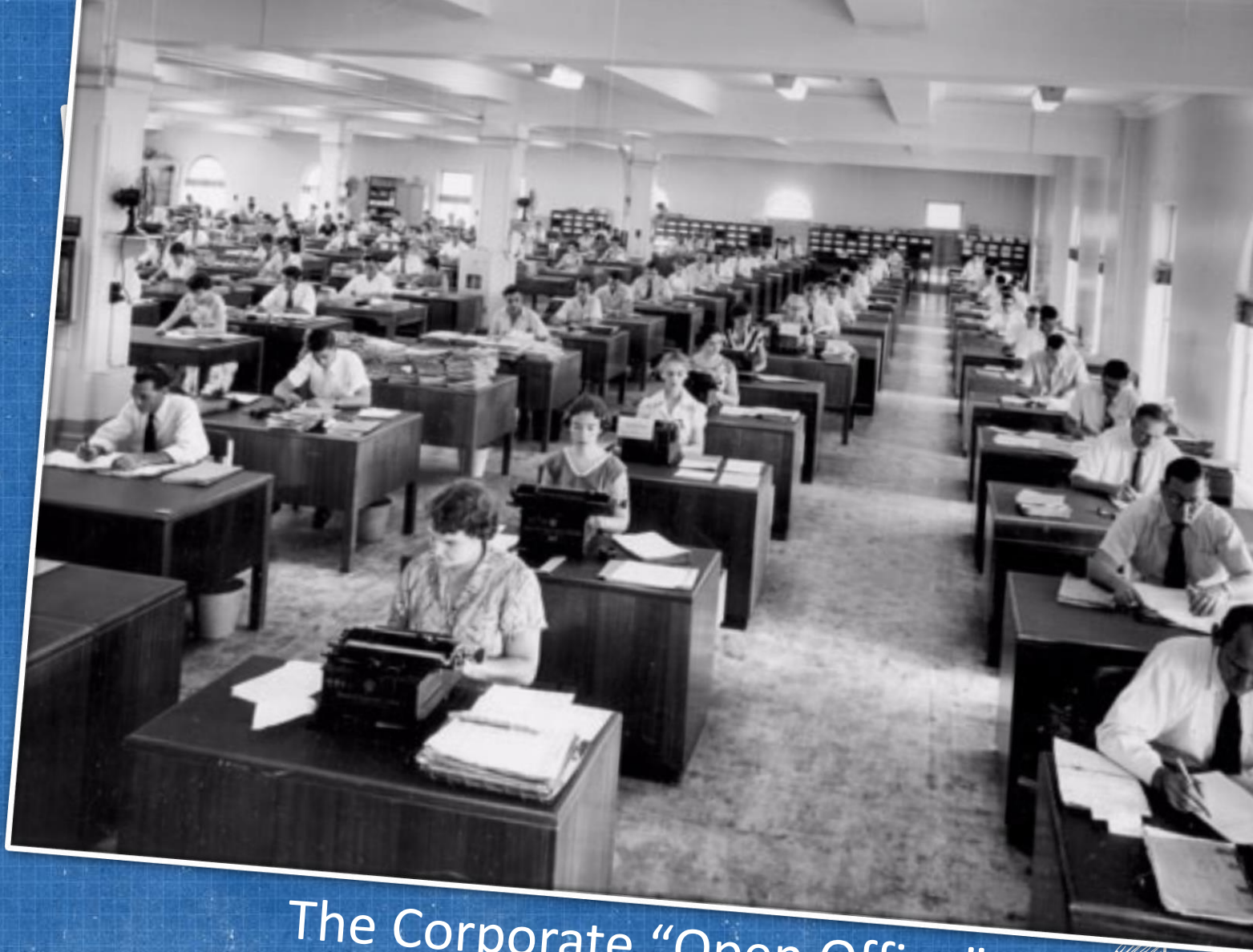
The Factory



Time-and-motion studies +  
“scientific management”



Surveillance + paternalism  
+ price per square foot



The Corporate “Open Office”





## HOW WE GOT HERE

Game development spaces draw on multiple traditions of workplace design.

### The Artist's Studio





## HOW WE GOT HERE

Game development spaces draw on multiple traditions of workplace design.

The Artist's Studio



Warhol's Factory -  
workplace + social space





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Warhol's Factory -  
workplace + social space



Workplace as  
design object



The Creative Studio



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### The Laboratory





## HOW WE GOT HERE

Game development spaces draw on multiple traditions of workplace design.

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Computers emerge in the scientific workplace





## HOW WE GOT HERE

Game development spaces draw on multiple traditions of workplace design.

The Laboratory



Computers emerge in the scientific workplace



The ubiquity of PCs defines every type of workspace

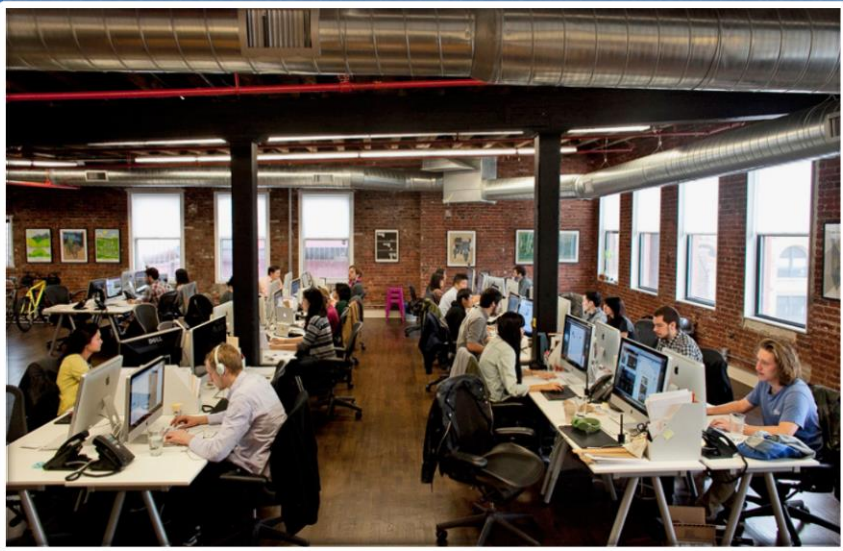


Where Engineers Work Today

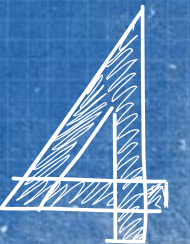




# CONVERGENCE...



*...on a now-familiar form*





According to a 2014 survey of game developers around the world, **less than 45%** are satisfied with the spaces in which they work.

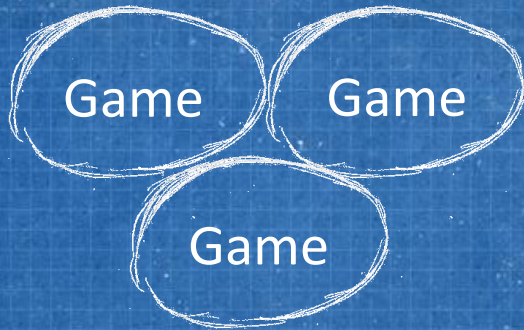
## GAME INDUSTRY WORKPLACE **BIG ISSUES**

- **Noise** / You're trying to 'collaborate' where I need to code
- **Personal space** / We're on top of each other without privacy
- **Layout** / Except we're never near the people we need
- **Collaboration space** / There is never a meeting room
- **Visual privacy** / Everyone can see everything *and* it's distracting
- **Ugly and Boring** / This office looks like placeholder art
- **Light level** / Lightswitch wars are not team-building



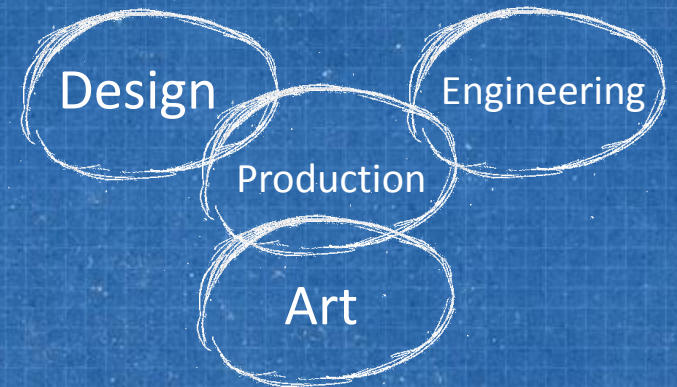


# GAME INDUSTRY WORKPLACE **BIG ISSUES**



**Organized by  
Game Team**

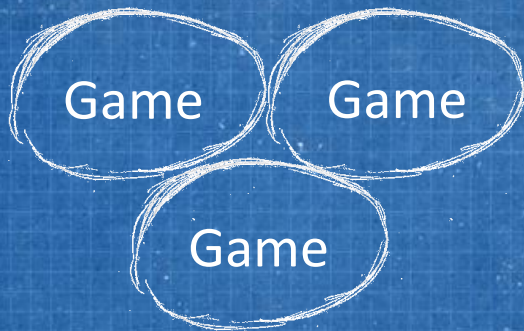
Although it's not the only issue, or necessarily the most important in organizing space for game development, one key factor that can inform the discussion is how the organization of a company is mapped onto its physical geography



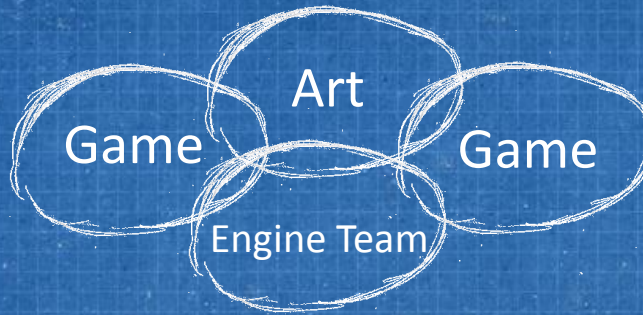
**Organized by  
Discipline**



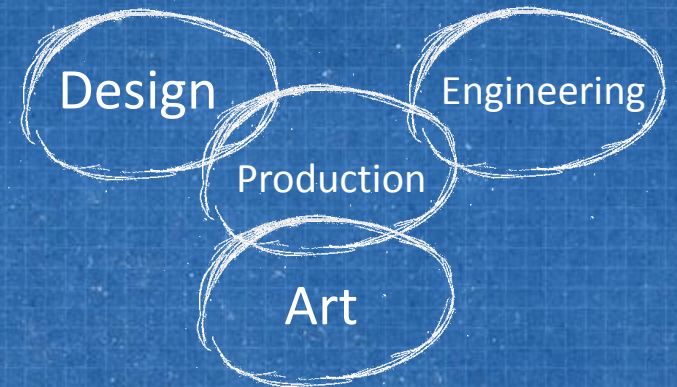
# GAME INDUSTRY WORKPLACE **BIG ISSUES**



**Organized by  
Game Team**



**Hybrid  
Organization**



**Organized by  
Discipline**



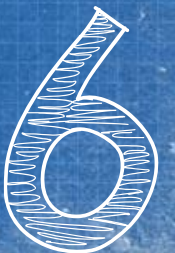
# CASE STUDY NO.1

## ZYNGA

Every game company tries to solve these problems in one way or another. Zynga had the advantage of very deep pockets – here's how they spent that money.



- **Almost purpose built /**  
Gut renovation of former wholesale apparel mart
- **Gigantic /** 670k sqft, though Zynga only occupies ~65%
- **Spacious /** At its peak, home to more than 2,000 employees @ 140 sqft per
- **Open-Plan + Group Rooms /**  
Organized mostly by game team in groups of 20 - 80





# CASE STUDY NO.1

## ZYNGA

Following the examples of advertising agencies in the 80s and 90s and Silicon Valley tech superstars like Google and Facebook, Zynga pushed the barriers of the “office as playground” trend.



- Message of “Play” reinforced everywhere
- Full-size Blue Bottle Coffee bar
- Arcade & table game room within a full bar
- Stadium-seating theater
- Basketball court and workout rooms
- Onsite massages, haircuts, reflexology, and acupuncture
- Daily catered breakfasts, lunches and dinners





# CASE STUDY NO.1

## ZYNGA

In the office suites themselves, open seating at modular desks is the standard. Each team meant to have access to two conference rooms and a “phone booth” room to enable caves-and-commons workflow

### Zynga's design solutions:

- **Noise** / High employee per sqft ratio
- **Visual Privacy** / Angled desk 'pods'
- **Collaboration space** / Many formal and very many informal gathering spaces
- **Layout** / Each game team physically distinct, central services groups also have their own spaces. Within these, arrangement is non-standardized and driven by team leadership





# CASE STUDY NO.1

# ZYNGA

**Design Thesis:** Create a space that's fun to be in. This atmosphere of fun and playfulness will show through in our games.



**Challenge:** This is very hard to balance and can create the specter of “forced fun”. In an era in which authenticity is prized, one of the worst possible outcomes is for employees to judge company culture as false and imposed from the top down.

## Other risks with Zynga's approach:

- **Cost** / When revenues are down, perks look very extravagant & management looks foolish
- **Scalability** / Adding more employees is difficult + expensive with this much “hard” infrastructure
- **Nesting** / Employees want agency over their space: seating layouts intended to be changed by and for teams were only ever altered by management



## CASE STUDY NO.2

# THREE RINGS

Gut renovation of a building is not possible for most game companies. San Francisco's Three Rings (now a SEGA studio, but an indie at the time) had a limited budget, but a fairly large "white box" open workspace.



- **Loft Interior Buildout /** Space as leased very typical former-industrial Class B loft
- **Mid-Sized /** 8,800 sqft, 4,500sqft "back room" is redesigned entirely
- **Intentionally Cozy /** Though the space permitted 225 sqft per 20 employees, design was for less
- **Small Group Workrooms /** Large open space purposefully divided into semi-partitioned pods of 4-5 desks



With a popular pirate-themed game in the market, Three Rings chose a steampunk/Jules Verne design theme and followed industry and local competition in the emphasis on amenities.

## CASE STUDY NO.2

# THREE RINGS



- Nearly all of the furniture and fixtures in the studio are bespoke designs or alterations
- Even desk hutch panels are custom milled to the designs of Three Rings' artists
- Design whimsy extends to the presence of a "secret room" accessible via swinging bookcase

More common game-company perks are also included:

- Billiard room
- Videogame room with giant tentacle couch
- Card/boardgame table in lunchroom
- Wet bar





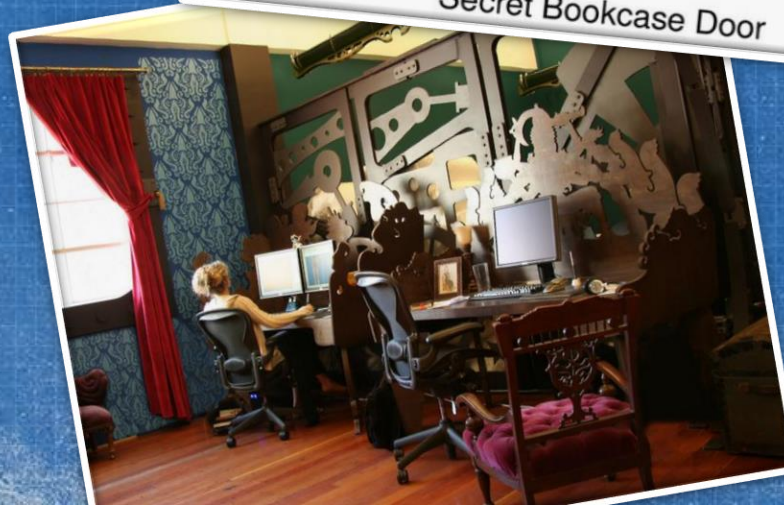
# CASE STUDY NO.2

## THREE RINGS

Unlike Zynga, the Three Rings “back room” lowered square footage per employee to maximize communal space. Private meeting space was downplayed in the design, and seating shifted from hybrid to organization by discipline over time

### Three Rings’ design solutions:

- **Noise** / Low number of employees
- **Visual Privacy** / Partitioned workgroups with desks facing walls
- **Collaboration space** / Most studio sqftage dedicated to informal gathering spaces
- **Light level** / Curtains and custom fixture-covers mute fluorescent glow
- **Layout** / Teams sit in separate spaces, though clustered together for easy cross-talk. Many areas available for public meeting, only one for privacy





## CASE STUDY NO.2

# THREE RINGS

### Other risks with Three Rings' approach:

- **Taste** / One designer's delightful quirkiness is another's odd affectation
- **Aspirational Layout** / Baking in team togetherness could have backfired
- **Flexibility** / Team size, hardware even production methodology is inflected by customization choices; "Anything works as long as it fits in a steampunk submarine"

**Challenge:** Distinctive layout, aesthetics and features can freeze your company in amber. Scaling custom space risks creating 2<sup>nd</sup>-class employees (in the "front room") or losing the group spaces that the physical workflow is built around



**Design Thesis:** Maximize a small budget by working with another small firm and create a unique space that's custom-fit to our company's organizational structure *and* culture.



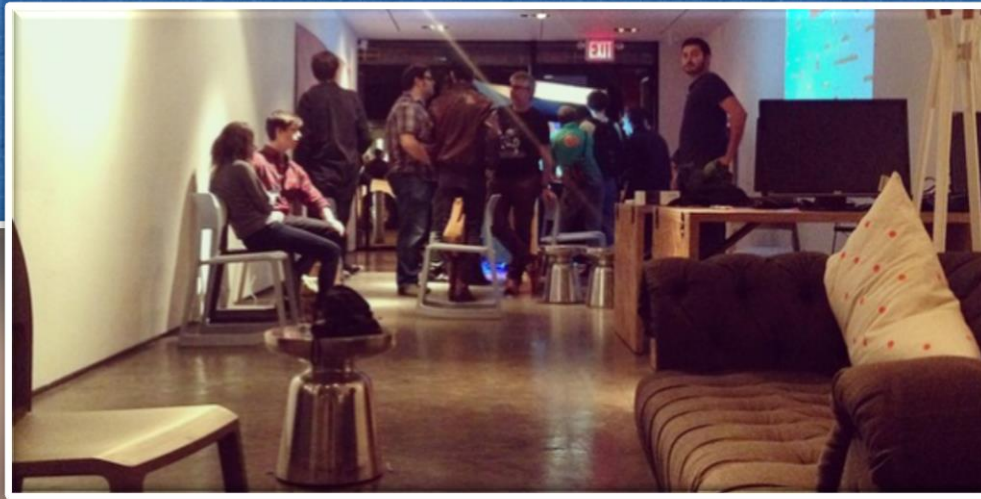
## CASE STUDY NO.3

## WAKA WAKA

- **Storefront As-Is** / Long, narrow storefront with large front window, converted in white-box state
- **Small** / 2,000 sqft, L-shaped first floor, small yard + rectangular lower level – all open plan
- **Difficult Layout** / Too narrow for most desk layouts, both space and business model require small teams
- **Flexible** / Both floors can be reconfigured inside a day to suit teams, but walls are not an option



Most small companies have to work with the spaces they get, even if the space is a former storefront tattoo parlor on New York's Lower East Side, as it is for Waka Waka, an indie game incubator + co-working space





Real estate in New York is tremendously expensive and small indie game companies often find it easiest to share space. Waka Waka is a co-working space run by the game development veterans and expert visual designers behind This Is Pop

GAME INDUSTRY WORKPLACE

## CASE STUDY NO.3

# WAKA WAKA



- Furniture and fixtures are high quality, often design objects
- Architect Nathalie Pozzi planned the conversion of the space from tattoo parlor to game studio
- Space optimization is key, while minimalist aesthetic conveys spaciousness in tight quarters

Even here, perks are highlighted:

- Rare-to-Manhattan outdoor space
- Movable bar for receptions/parties
- Game systems with high resolution projectors
- Gallery-style lighting
- Playable indie game installations



## CASE STUDY NO.3

## WAKA WAKA

Because Waka Waka only knows team sizes and composition on a month-to-month basis, layout flexibility is the primary design objective. Everything is on wheels or small enough to be carried. As few as ten or as many as thirty could work here.

**Waka Waka's design solutions:**

- **Noise** / Small teams, multiple spaces. Gallery-like main area encourages quiet conversation
- **Visual Privacy** / 2.5 levels allow some amount of separation between teams
- **Collaboration space** / Studio amenities and infrastructure are shared between teams. Business model also demands cooperation
- **Layout** / Changes from one day to the next depending on team needs. Little solitude is possible, however.



**Design Thesis:** Using smart spatial design and deep industry experience, create a workplace in which small game dev teams can work and collaborate with like-minded colleagues before they are capable of sustaining their own offices.

**Challenge:** Assuring that a rotating cast of teams in a small space with no walls shares a vision of how best to use a communal workplace is non-trivial. Seating can move or change, but there is little provision for multiple areas for conversation or silent work.



## CASE STUDY NO.3

# WAKA WAKA

### Other risks for Waka Waka:

- **Scalability** / If even one of two or three resident teams experiences a success requiring expansion, they will likely leave randomizing the critical team mix and contributing to a trying air of transience
- **Materials** / Although polished concrete floors and smooth surfaces = sophistication, they also enable noise levels that discourage collaboration and frustrate teams
- **Curation** / The value of a spot at Waka Waka is space + access to expertise. This must be constantly maintained and refreshed.





There is no standard design of game development space, but certain best practices are emerging as the industry matures

## GAME INDUSTRY WORKPLACE

# TAKEAWAYS

- **Disciplines Differ** / Different spaces *or* environmental flexibility
- **Privacy** / Need is directly proportionate to amount of communal space
- **Collaboration space** / Does not have to be meeting rooms *but it can*
- **Design** / This is where working with your team can pay big dividends
- **Personal space** / Needs vary with work style + layout
- **Layout** / Understand its impact on your workflow
- **Crazy Perks** / Good for reach, meaningless for retention



# CONTACT ME

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