Shipping Kills Studios
A study of indie team dynamics

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QCF Design
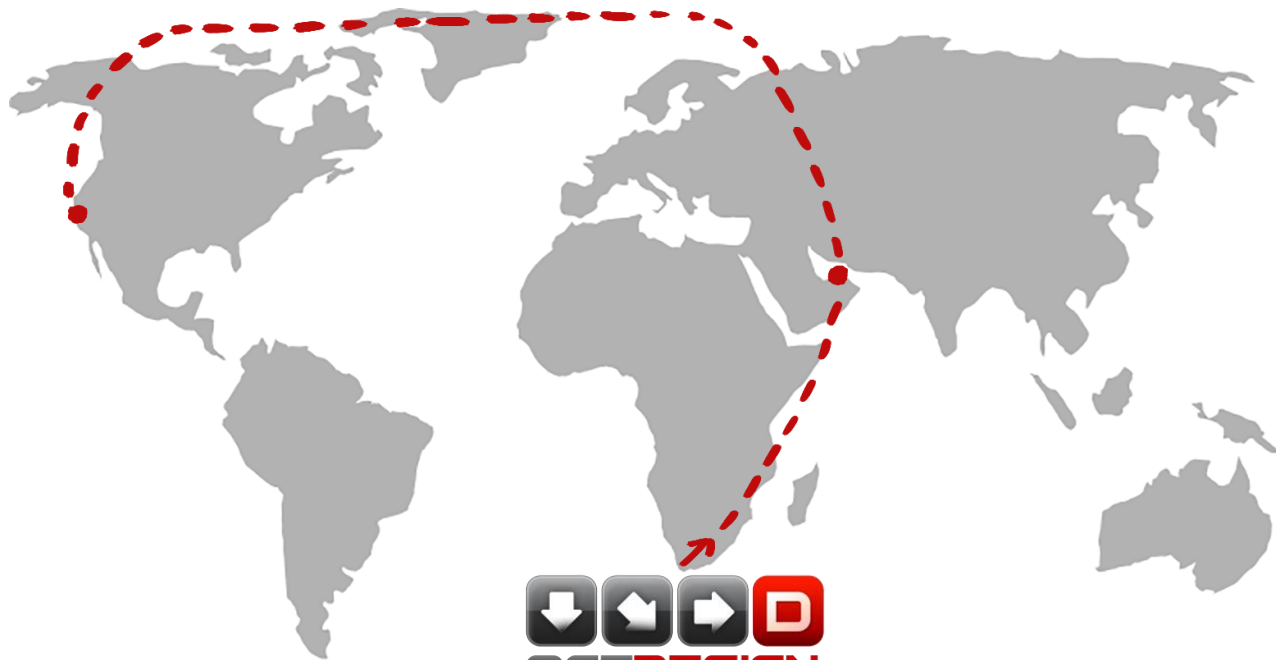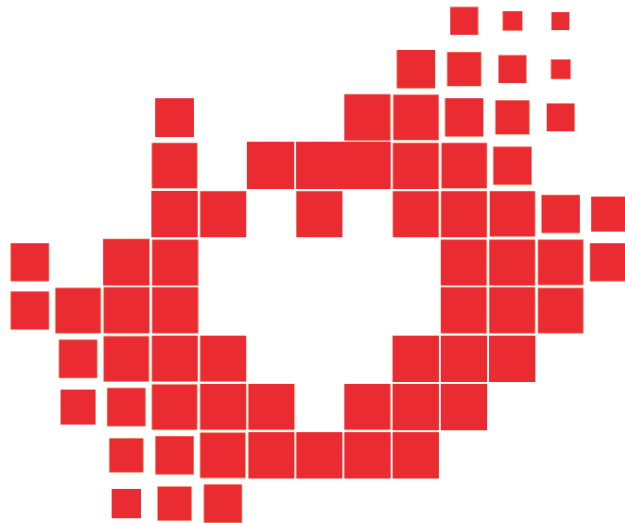
Let's talk about shipping

Shipping a game

- Indie perspective
- Is a nice problem to have
- Defined as:
  - Start = game released to public for purchase
  - End = in-house dev ceases (includes porting)

Shipping isn't

- Uploading to a store and hoping
- Early access launch, still has to ship

Shipping is a process!

- Starts well before release day
- Continues after release
- Seems to be difficult for everyone

Team morale

All	START	50%	T-2M	SHIP	T+2M	DONE
INCREDIBLY POSITIVE	21	8	4	5	3	2
OPTIMISTIC	17	16	18	21	10	11
VANILLA	5	14	9	6	15	21
UNHAPPY	0	4	10	11	9	2
EXTREMELY NEGATIVE	0	1	2	0	6	7

Individual morale

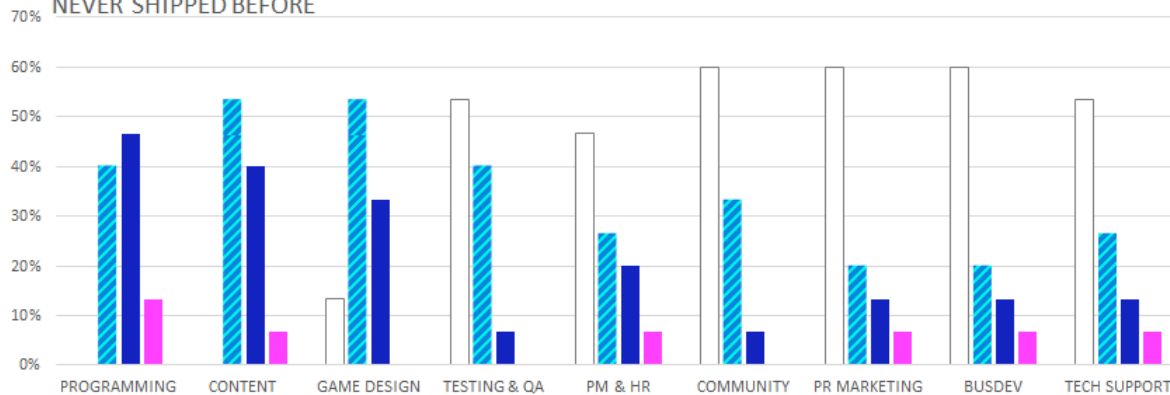| All	START	50%	T-2M	SHIP	T+2M	DONE
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OPTIMISTIC	20	19	14	18	10	13
VANILLA	3	6	11	5	11	17
UNHAPPY	2	4	10	11	8	2
EXTREMELY NEGATIVE	0	4	3	3	9	6

No team survives

- Even if it's the same people
- Roles have to change
- THIS IS THE KILLER

HAS SHIPPED BEFORE

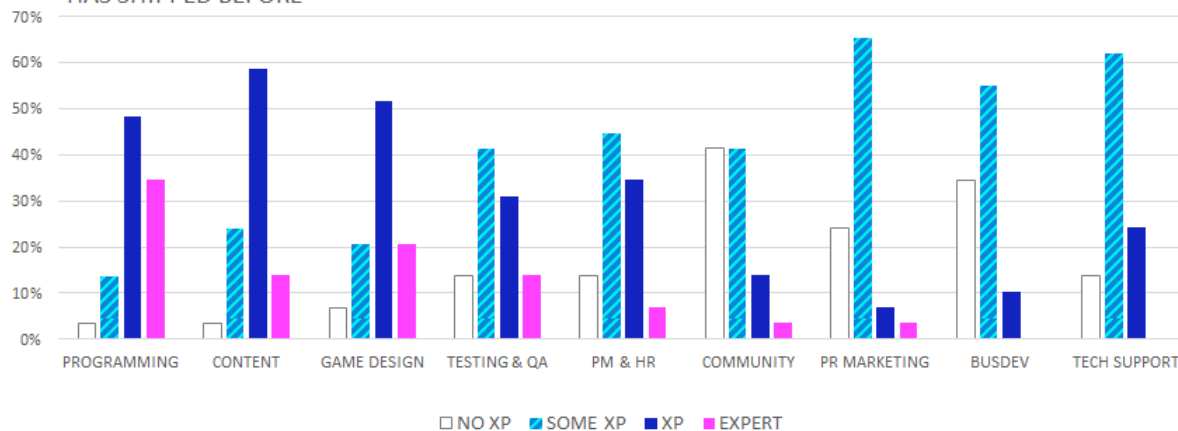NO XP SOME XP XP EXPERT
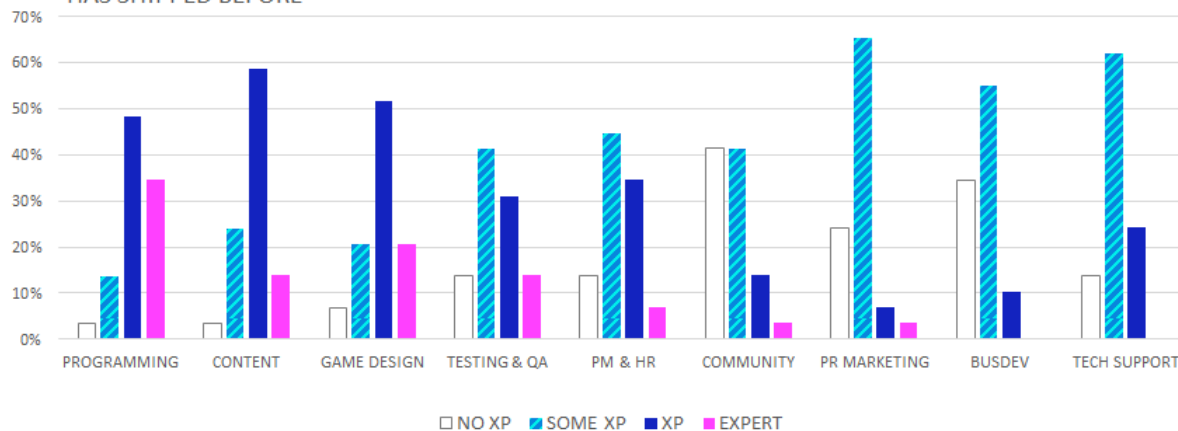
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Dev becomes Support

- Hands up everyone that loves bug hunts
- Testing is HARD to keep up
- Keep talking to horrible people
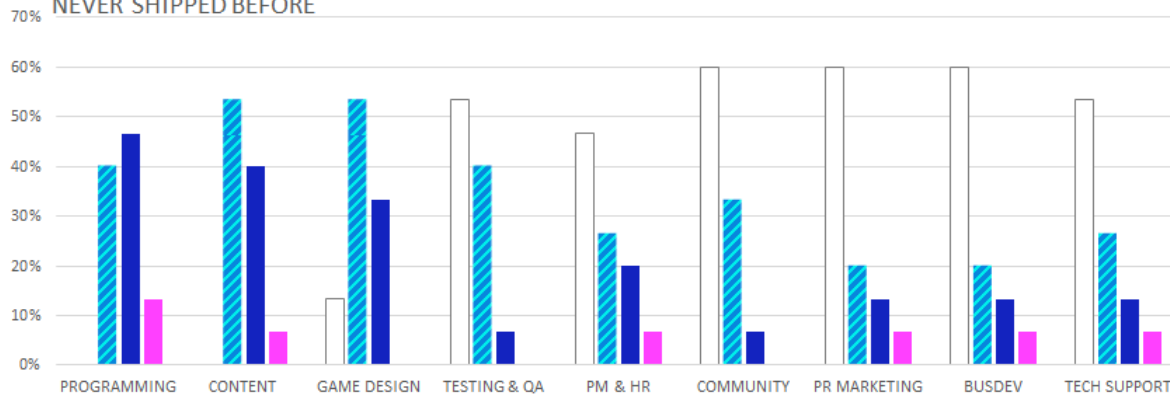
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Marketing loses immediacy

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- Launch spikes make everything else seem downhill
- Where actual marketing skill comes in

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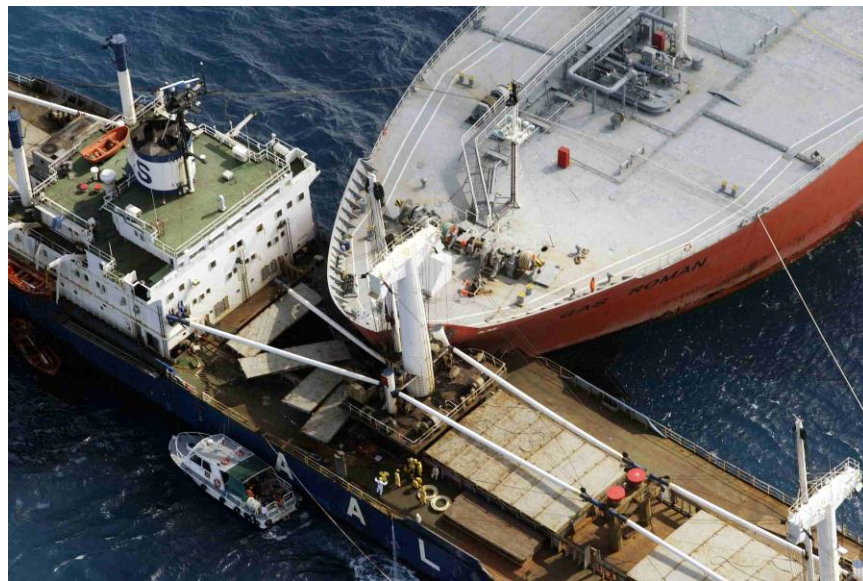
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This causes problems…

CAVEAT

- If your game flops, you probably don't have to deal with the following things
- But you have a completely different set of issues to handle, so yay!

Lack of creativity

- Support can feel stagnant
- Desire to create "next thing"

Burnout adds up

- Any burnout pre-launch doesn't go away
- Teams tend to ignore issues
- Post launch depression exists

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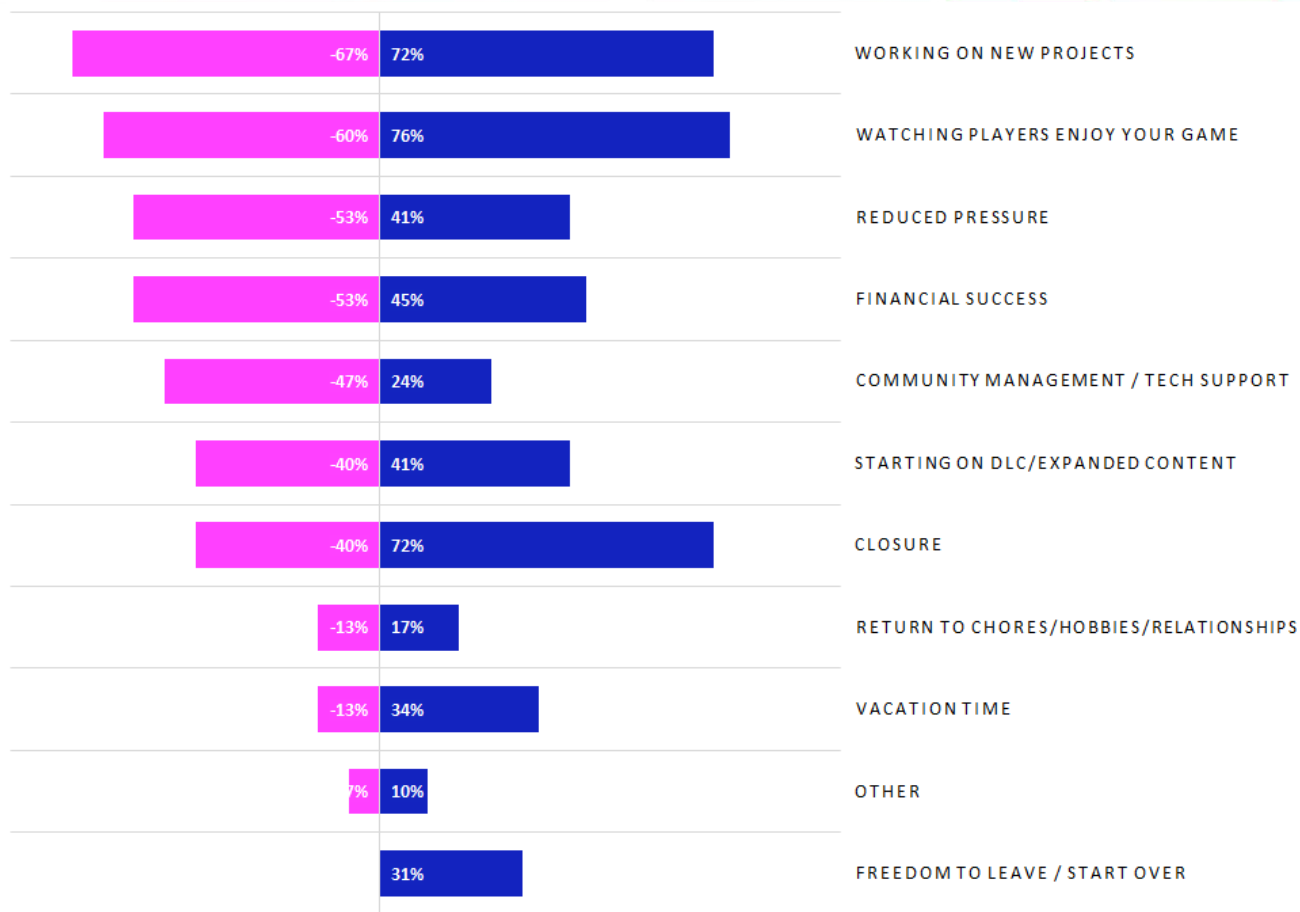- Post launch depression exists

People. So many people

- Devs often aren't people-facing
- Support means angry people
- People write things about you and your work

Small teams get hit harder

- The skills change is going to be harsh
- Less time off options
- Future work will never be support-free

-67%	72%	WORKING ON NEW PROJECTS
-60%	76%	WATCHING PLAYERS ENJOY YOUR GAME
-53%	41%	REDUCED PRESSURE
-53%	45%	FINANCIAL SUCCESS
-47%	24%	COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT / TECH SUPPORT
-40%	41%	STARTING ON DLC/EXPANDED CONTENT
-40%	72%	CLOSURE
-13%	17%	RETURN TO CHORES/HOBBIES/RELATIONSHIPS
-13%	34%	VACATION TIME
7%	10%	OTHER
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Experienced devs…

Expectation management

- Realism, don't assume shipping is easy
- Track perceptions of success
- Plan ahead for AFTER shipping

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- Testing, testing, testing

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- Know where the money (if any) is going and how
- Have your contracts set up properly
- Be aware that things might go south
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- Be aware of issues from team perspective
- Culture and communication matter
- Handle problems early
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Surviving and Thriving!

Skills!

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- Perspective is everything
- Things you hate mean skills are lacking
- Allow people to change

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- Your studio is a garden
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- Publishers are an option
- Budget for time AFTER shipping
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Look back and learn

"Just one more thing...."