Tips for the new Project Managers

Hi, I'm Jonna / deliwien, a PM of the Tamagotchi project. Here are a few tips I've learned from leading our project and from previous experiences in leading different kinds of projects. Contact me if you have any questions, or if you need help with leading your project. My email is wildeem@gmail.com and my IRC / Reddit nick is deliwien. :)

1. Choose a lead developer (and if needed, a lead designer) for your project

The organization of the project takes a lot of time especially at the beginning of the project, so you probably won't have enough time to be the lead developer as well. The lead developer should be firstly the most experienced developer, and secondly, someone who has enough time for the project and is committed to the project. We had to change the lead developer because the previous one didn't have enough time, which took some time to get things really started. Depending on your project, you might need a lead designer as well. It's good to have someone who has a final say in graphical styles and who leads the designers. The same requirements apply in choosing the lead designer as choosing the lead developer.

2. Arrange weekly meetings

Weekly meetings are a useful way to check the status of the project and to answer to any possible questions the project members might have. It's also a good way to keep the team together, as the project members are usually around the world and won't be online at the same time. We have a weekly leaders meeting for the PMs and the team leaders and a weekly developers meeting for the developers, PMs and the lead developer. Soon we're going to have weekly designers meeting as well. The meeting place is our IRC channel, the leaders meeting is on another channel that only the PMs and team leaders know about.

http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/fixedform.html is a good tool to use when notifying the team members about the time of the meetings. It sorts out the time zone issue by showing the event's time in different cities around the world. We've found out that 7PM GMT on Sundays is a good time for the meetings, but this might be different for your project.

2.1 Write weekly update messages after the meetings

Weekly updates are a good way to notify others about the status of the project, and they're also useful if some of the team members can't attend the meetings. Here's an example of our weekly update messages: http://redmine.redditandroiddevelopers.com/boards/7/topics/143

3. Tools

3.1 IRC

IRC is the best method for group discussion. It's easy to create a channel, and if you have a bot on the channel, people can view the previous logs when they join the channel. Logging is also useful for you when you write the weekly update messages after the meetings, so you don't have to write notes as the meeting progresses.

3.2 Redmine

Redmine is useful as an issue tracker. We're using SCRUM as our development method, and Redmine has a SCRUM plugin that's very nice. We're using the forum on Redmine as well, but it isn't very active and most of the discussion happens on IRC.

3.3 Google Groups

We're using Google Groups to notify people about important or urgent news. Make sure that all the members change their email settings on Google Groups so they'll get an email from every message right after it has been sent.

3.4 Github

It's possible to use Gerrit for code reviews. We quickly found out that this wasn't the right way for our project, as it was difficult for the developers to work on multiple computers, and the review process just wasn't fast enough. So we started using just Github, and it seems to work quite nicely. Your lead developer should choose the right method for your project. We're using multiple branches for the development, and only merging with the master branch when there has been enough process and there aren't problems with the code.

4. Documents

4.1 People and skills spreadsheet

We've created a "People and skills" spreadsheet on Google Docs. It contains all the important information about the team members, such as their nicknames, real names, Github usernames, email addresses, location and time zone, technical skills, and the amount of hours they're willing to spend on the project in a week.

4.2 Requirements specification

Requirements specification is an important document which contains all the requirements of the project. Creating the document and keeping it updated during the project will mostly be your

responsibility, but you should give the editing rights at least to the team leaders as well. You can view our requirements specification here: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sLDQkcoDs5xYPKr-luaSfaY2cG0M-Nm8a_jZ80wK-d0/edit

4.3 Information document for the new members

This is a document that we haven't written yet, but it will be my next task. As the team members come and go, it's useful to have some kind of a document which contains all the important information about your project, such as the links to Redmine, Google Groups, Github and IRC channel, the organizational structure of the project, information about the weekly meetings, and other things of that nature.

5. Risks

5.1 Disappearing team members

Because of the nature of the projects, it's very likely that some of the members will disappear without saying anything, or they stop working in the project. This is a very big risk for the project. It has happened to all of the current Reddit Android Developers projects (ours as well) so it will most likely happen to your project as well. When this happens to your project, it's important for you to stay active. The weekly meetings and Github graphics (for example: https://github.com/RedditAndroidDev/Tamagotchi/graphs/impact) are a good way to find out who are still working and who are not.

If you start to notice that the amount of work done in a week starts to decrease, or if there are any other hints that this might be happening, you need to act fast. Contact the disappearing team members and ask if they need help with their tasks. If you don't get a reply, or you think more members are needed, start recruiting more members to your project before it's too late. Write messages to different subreddits, and contact the other PMs in case they have members who could do some work in your project as well. You can also ask help from the RAD mods. Also, when people join your project, ask them to let you know if they later decide that your project isn't the right for them or if they just don't have enough time to work on their tasks.

6. General tips

6.1 Team spirit

A good team spirit is an important part of keeping the team together. We have members who tell us that they would still stay on the IRC channel even if the project failed because of the team spirit.