

# Open letter to Management from the workers at Don't Nod



This letter is addressed to both the management of Don't Nod and its employees. Its purpose is to explain our consternation about the decisions taken by the studio over the last few years, which have now led to this PSE (redundancy plan).

Management justifies this redundancy plan, which will see up to 69 people dismissed from the company, on the grounds of the “difficult economic context in the industry, without questioning itself. However, as workers in the company, we know that these failures are due to a succession of management missteps and bad decisions. All of us have been pointing out these failings for years, without management listening to us. In the end, it is us who are paying the price for these absurd decisions with this plan.

**We, the employees of Don't Nod, are absolutely opposed to the application of this PSE which, far from saving the company, will be its downfall.**

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## A spiral of irresponsible decision-making

### Delusions of grandeur and short-term strategy

Management makes decisions impulsively, without measuring the consequences, and without long-term vision: constant, contradictory organizational changes, and a cancellation galore. Over the past two years, we've seen many departures: deputy general manager, production manager, financial director, studio technical director, business developer, narrative director, executive producer, several game directors, and most recently our HR director, who resigned a few weeks before the announcement of this PSE after denying it for months.

In 2018, Don't Nod's management decides to go public. In 2020, it creates a new studio in Montreal, in 2021 it goes into self-publishing, then into third-party studio publishing. In May 2022, Don't Nod announces 6 parallel in-house lines of production. **How can we cope with such delusions of grandeur?**

This strategic chaos is now leading to job cuts, at a time when finding work in the video game industry is particularly difficult.

And yet, Don't Nod benefits from substantial public funding: CIJV (six million euros per year), CNC, and France 2030, to which our CEO applied without consulting with the relevant teams, for a vague and meaningless project, notably promoting the use of generative AI.

How can we expect the company to function with an inconsistent studio management team, which doesn't learn from its mistakes, despite having already experienced a receivership in 2014?

**It is us, the workers, who suffer the consequences despite our numerous warnings.**



## A dangerous management of teams and projects

Management seems to launch projects without a long-term vision.

This leads to numerous changes in project direction, failure to meet planned scopes, and ultimately to projects cancellation. These incessant changes lead to massive loss of effort, team burnout, and projects that look like Frankenstein's creatures.

In February, following a quality of life at work internal survey and an external expert's report, Don't Nod's Works Council (CSE) noted a stagnation in recruitment and an increase in the size of projects. Worse still, intermediate and senior profiles are being replaced by junior ones, and the contracts offered are increasingly precarious. **The result is a company-wide loss of knowledge and productivity.**

**On the other hand, various reorganizations and project cancellations have sometimes resulted in significant overstaffing over long periods.** Some of us spent several weeks without an assignment, for example following the termination of the Jusant production line. Leads found themselves doubled up, and had no choice but to accept being "demoted".

Over the past two years, four of the six production lines at Don't Nod Paris have been dismantled, including the Jusant line. However, dismantling a team means dismantling organizational knowledge and skills that cannot be applied to other projects, or that have to be completely rebuilt. For the Jusant line in particular, making a sequel with the same team and the same technologies would have made it possible to build upon the game's success, at a much lower cost.

Likewise, the inter-project "professions directors" positions have been abolished, dealing a heavy blow to the exchange of knowledge and harmonization of practices between the studio's projects, which they guaranteed.

Keeping the same people in key positions over the course of several projects leads to them becoming quasi-stars. This leads to a lack of listening to the rest of the team, and even contempt.

**As a result, teams suffer, projects fall behind schedule and lose quality.**

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## The reality behind a progressive façade

### Workplace suffering

**It now seems clear that management and its corporate strategy are putting growth and profits ahead of working conditions and of our jobs security, despite our relentless warnings.**

Strategic and artistic shifts in projects, or even the complete closure of production lines, cause teams to lose their sense of purpose and motivation. It's impossible to project oneself confidently into a production, or to commit to new projects in the knowledge that they are most likely to be cancelled.

**The teams had to cope with increasing understaffing, and then with the reduction of collective events that were so crucial for a a mostly remote studio.** On top of that are the problems of intense delivery cycles where overtime hours pile up, and more generally a workload so heavy that it leaves us in a permanent state of tension.



At the same time, over the last few years, we've seen a rise in the precarity of our jobs, with the transformation of permanent positions into short, fixed-term contracts, or freelance workers.

Some of the most senior employees are choosing to leave the company, tired of not being listened to and no longer knowing how to provide their team with reassurance. Management is doing nothing to halt this exodus of senior employees, announcing no intention of improving salaries or working conditions.

Despite the fact that the CEO promised an investigation into psycho-social risks 8 months ago, management is backing away from this as it launches a PSE, contenting itself with redirecting people to a psychological hotline, a largely insufficient and impersonal solution.

### Company values and corporate culture

Management regularly shows how lightly it deals with very important issues, simply making hollow statements and providing completely outdated anti-SGBV and anti-racism awareness campaigns. **In-house, management confines itself to the minimum on all subjects related to minoritized people, in contradiction with the message of our games and the studio's public image.**

We are still a long way from achieving gender parity, and women are generally employed in more junior positions (employee rather than executive status). Despite figures close to the national average of 24% of women in the industry, the reality is very different in the production teams, where women are grossly under-represented. The vast majority of the studio's key positions are held by men, and there has never been a single female game director.

**However, Don't Nod Montréal is making progress on these topics, such as the introduction of a menstrual leave, but these advancements are not transposed to Paris.**

Yet the studio's website states that "Caring for each other is at the heart of everything we do and is the central theme of our values".

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## An out-of-touch management that no longer listens to anyone

### Management's disdain for workers

Despite claims to the contrary, management does not listen to workers. They ignore our suffering, give vague answers to our questions, and systematically try to clear their name when a reproach is made.

In 2023, an internal survey showed that barely 35% of employees were in phase with the company's strategic direction. Management's only response was that employees didn't understand the strategy, and that this would be resolved by yet another reorganization.

**This constant use of doublespeak only accentuates the lack of transparency towards employees, who feel that they are not being listened to, and are being taken for fools.**

At the same time, management gives itself gifts in the form of promotions, bonuses, shares and luxury seminars, while our salaries are kept ridiculously low and our contracts are becoming increasingly precarious.



## Sabotaging social dialogue

The Works Council (CSE) is also actively engaged in reporting back from the workplace, both in its regular meetings with management and in the opinions it issues. Management systematically dodges the issue, or responds with arrogance, infantilization, and patronizing behavior.

Management acts as if the CSE did not exist, regularly leaving their communications and the results of their inquiries for dead letter, despite the legal obligation to respond to them. Their other prerogatives are regularly infringed upon, or require the argumentation of elected representatives, particularly when it comes to informing and advising on issues affecting working conditions.

During the entire period of the announcement of the redundancy plan (PSE), only the work council was able to respond to employees with transparency and a plain-spoken approach, while management muddled through its narrative.

## What's next for Don't Nod?

### A redundancy plan that will doom the company

The company has been understaffed for a long time now, as the latest working conditions survey once again highlighted the issue. Management's only response is to lay off almost a third of the workforce, which can only be seen as an attempt to reassure investors.

What's more, this loss will not be limited to 69 employees, as the non-renewal of short-term contracts, freelance and intermittent work will also be a factor. How can we hope to release projects under these conditions without questioning their scope or schedule?

These redundancies, without any further self questioning on the part of management, simply confirm the company's determination to continue with its current strategy, while jeopardizing the working conditions of the remaining employees. This can only lead to further layoffs following this first one, and may even doom the company once and for all.

### Let's fight for our Don't Nod

Don't Nod is one of the few video game companies to offer full-time remote working, has in the past been able to offer permanent contracts, and defends a much more progressive editorial line than its competitors. It's for all these reasons that we want to fight to ensure that the company's values can one day match its aspirations.

Management needs to listen to employees, recognize its mistakes, and at last assume its responsibilities so that they can take concrete action on all the issues raised in this open letter.

We want to save our company, but not at the cost of unjustified lay-offs or worsened working conditions.

