STUDENT: I'm Matt Susskind. And for this game, we are a team of eight people working on forecast-based financing, which is a technique using forecasts in order to make decisions about what to do in response to incoming disasters.

Currently, a lot of techniques are we're going to build long-term protection for cities in terms of dams or disaster preparedness. Or, after disaster happens, we will react to the disaster. But there's not a lot of work done in terms of we see that there is a 50% chance of disaster within the next week. Let's start mobilizing to prepare for that.

And part of the reason for that is because if the disaster doesn't happen you end up wasting money. But if you actually do an analysis, you'll realize that the money that you waste is actually way less expensive than trying to make up for your lack of preparedness after the fact.

So Paolo had come in from the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Center. And he pitched a couple of different concepts that they wanted games around in order to educate either members of the Red Cross or people out in the world who they wanted to show these different ideas to. And so what he showed us was actually just a PowerPoint with a couple of different slides, where on each slide was a different concept. Ours was forecast-based financing. But then, there were also ones like cholera, or Ebola, or preparing for heat waves, things like that.

And so he gave us a quick pitch of this is what the concept is, this is who we want to educate with this, and these are some of the characteristics that we think are really important. And we actually weren't assigned to any topics. He put those topics up on the board and let teams form around them, depending on what you're interested in.

And so beyond just the idea of this is forecast-based financing, and this is how it works and who we want to teach it to, we got no further instructions. Paolo did come in throughout the class to teach us a little bit more about who we would be talking to, or to work over the ideas that we had been exploring. But on the whole, we just

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got the general topic, and came up with the game ideas on our own.

One of our biggest challenges was with forecast-based financing, it's an understandable topic, but it's sort of abstract. And it doesn't quite lend itself to a game. It's very easy to come up with we're going to take forecast-based financing and hide it as a game. But that's not a fun game to play. So a lot of our challenge is figuring out how are we going to work? How are we going to create a game around forecast-based financing that explains the ideas that we want, that teaches people something new, and is a game that we're actually proud of?

Another compounding factor was that originally our target audience was policymakers, which was a very difficult audience, because they don't generally play games, which meant that we were starting with trying to teach them everything from scratch. Whereas when you're creating for somebody who has experience with video games, you can take a lot of things for granted-- that they're going to know how to drag and drop things in order to change things, or what the various design ideas you're using actually mean to them. So that was a big challenge for us, was designing for this new consumer.

And we also had a lot of design challenges with getting the forecast-based financing game to work. And the way that we approached it at first was by creating a whole bunch of different prototypes of lot of different types of games, and trying them out with people, seeing what they understood, what they liked about them, what didn't work, what they learned from them, which was really good in terms of exploring different ideas and learning more about the subject area.

But it created a new difficulty in that we were all over the place for the first couple weeks of the project. We got to the point about halfway through-- we had about eight weeks to do this project, I think, and halfway through, we still didn't end up with our final idea yet. Instead, we were exploring all these different ideas, and pulling in various parts of them in order to make our game.

And then, we realized that our game lacked a coherent vision. We had been working on a couple prototypes. We didn't like any of them. It didn't feel like players

had a connection to them, both in terms of what was happening in the game, but also a mental connection of I understand exactly what's happening here.

So we decided to take everything we had learned and some of the systems we had built, and package them into a new UI, which was this side view of the rising water, which everybody just understood intuitively. You see a village. You see someone standing there. You see the water rising toward it. And it doesn't matter who you are. You understand that this is something that's in danger. And you're going to need to do something about the rising waters.

And once we hit on that idea, everything became much easier. Of course, there were still ideas we had to explain, concepts we had to design into the game in an understandable way. But for the most part, the game was actually there. The mechanics themselves didn't change very much between the prototype we had before and this idea of the rising waters. But just packaging it in a new design changed the game, the feel of it, completely.

So I had game design experience beforehand. So I like game design a lot. I was hoping to work more on that. But also to get some interesting games made. I think I did get some of that.

But probably the thing I learned the most that I didn't expect coming in was just how to work with a team. We're all busy MIT students. And so we would have weeks where all of a sudden, everybody would have a test. And we had no time to do anything else. And so it was a lot of learning how to work with people who are extremely busy and who have a lot on their plate. And so it's really easy for things to slip, for things to get forgotten, fall through the cracks.

So it taught me a lot about project management, basically, and solving problems as a team, and learning how to get everybody-- I don't want to say herding cats, because it's not like people didn't care. But it's just that we were so busy. It taught me how to work with these busy people to get to where we need to be.