Teamwork and Group Dynamics

A few tips on effective teamwork, meetings, and presentations

What do software developers do?

• One way to measure: how do they spend their time?
• IBM study (McCue, 1978):
  - 50% team interactions
  - 30% working alone
  - 20% not directly productive

Technical excellence is not enough
"Egoless" design

(Weinberg, *Psychology of Computer Programming*)

- Investing ego in group
- "Letting go" of ego investment in code, design, ideas
  - No winning or losing design debates
  - Once contributed, ideas belong to the group
- Criticism is aimed at ideas, not people
- The best designers criticize their own designs!

... but we are not egoless people

- Ego investment is normal
  - be aware of it, be in control of it
- Consider the egos of others
  - What are you attacking? Why?
  - What is motivation of the other person?
    - Do they need an ego stroke?
    - Are they feeling ignored?
- Pride in accomplishment is ok, unless it interferes with accomplishment
Consensus decision making

- Consensus is not counting votes
  - Democracy is 51% agreement
  - Unanimity is 100% agreement
  - Consensus is neither
    - It is “buying in” by group as a whole, including those who disagree
- Everyone has their say
- Everyone accepts the decision, even if they don't prefer it

*Consensus takes time and work, but is worthwhile*

Conflict

- Can be healthy and productive
- Can destroy a team if not carefully managed
- Manage conflict constructively
  - Soothe and protect egos
    - everyone's job, but especially the manager's job
  - Keep conflict on a technical level
  - Consider reward structures
    - Are you rewarding trouble?
Notes on effective meetings

• Have a goal, and a plan
  - known to all
• Plan to goal:
  - Participants
  - Schedule
  - Intended outcome
• End with concrete, specific action items
• Prepare
  - Cost of wasted time = Time x people x hourly cost
  - Cost of individual prep time is much less

Managing a presentation

• Someone is in charge (usually the speaker)
• Deal with short clarification on-line
• Take extended discussions off-line
• This is part of having a plan:
  - Presentation has a goal, and must proceed to that goal
Presentation materials

• Consider your goal
  – What information is necessary?
  – Organize appropriately
• Handouts
  – People cannot read and listen; avoid handouts when possible
  – If handouts are necessary:
    • Control pace - hand out what’s needed
    • OR: hand out well in advance
  – (e.g., previous day or week)

Answering questions effectively

• Be sure you understand it
  This is most often done badly!
  – Ask for clarification
  – Back up if necessary
• Manage the time
  – If short, answer or deal with it
  – If a diversion (or when it becomes a diversion), push it offline
• Ask for confirmation
  – “Is that what you asked?”
  – “Does that make it clear?”
  – “Does that address your concern?”
Speaking up

• Always consider:
  – How will this contribute to the goal?
  – Is this the right time and forum?

• Don't hold back
  – out of fear of looking stupid
    • (people will remember the smart things more than the dumb)
  – out of fear of attack
    • (yes, it happens, but you'll survive)