Teamwork and
Group Dynamics

A few tips on effective teamwork, meetings, and presentations

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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

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"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)