Collaboration Is the Better Way

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Introduction

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Agenda

• intro
• communicating in tech
• communication magic
• empathy as a skill
• shared goals
• inclusion - collaboration across cultures
• q & a
Collaboration as art/discipline?

“the practice of an art requires discipline”
— Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* —

- **Discipline** — not rigid, but “an expression of one’s own will”
- **Concentration** — requires reflection, listening to others
- **Patience**

Just going to work, having meetings, working on teams, doesn’t make us disciplined or collaborative.

Hierarchies don’t make us collaborative either — they inspire rebelliousness.
Common problems in tech projects

- missed deadlines
- low productivity ("we need more time")
- poor quality (rush to finish)
- high turnover (people keep leaving)
- difficulty recruiting (can’t find good people)

“it’s always like this, all projects are like this, it’s the cost of doing (tech) business”
Collaboration gets things done

- of course EVERYTHING on the previous slide is TRUE
- BUT that doesn’t get things done
- COLLABORATION does
Communicating
Which channels are most challenging to you?

- GitHub issues
- PRs/code
- Slack
- Meetings
- Meetups
- Google docs
- Social media
- 1:1’s
- Mailing lists (not so much anymore)
10 principles for collaboration

• Self-aware = resilience
• Self-disciplined = high-performance
• Head over heart = waste reduction
• Mindful empathy = retention
• Keep learning = growth mindset
• Use different modes = flexibility
• Focus on activities = results-orientation
• Values and ethics drive = integrity
• “Client defines success” = profitability, customer focus
• Cultural competency = diversity and inclusion

Source: Intentional Relationship Model Clearinghouse, http://irm.ahslabs.uic.edu/what-is-the-irm/
Why be intentional?

reduce or eliminate:
- conflicts, drama
- waste, delays
- confusion
- misalignment

- protects collaboration
- builds trust
- reduces cognitive load
- drives experimentation
When we’re not intentional

We...

• make assumptions, jump to conclusions
• don’t ask for what we need
• become frustrated, ruminate
• lose opportunities
• rely on mind-reading powers we don’t have.
Communicating better with text

• Exercise — create 2 scripts we can use to help us diffuse our triggers and communicate with empathy

• Example — “Thank you for trying to understand my point. However, I think where we’re still misaligned. Is … what do you think?”

• Example — “Thank you for your enthusiasm! I’ve noted your concerns and believe we might handle this concern/situation by [alternative idea]...”
Communication
Magic
...the more magic, the better...
• increased communication **frequency**
• increased communication **freshness**
• archival history (for those jumping in)
• wide **sharing**
  – across time zones
  – across geographies
  – across organizations
• ...and more...
Empathy as a Skill
empathy

[em-puh-thee]

Synonyms   Examples   Word Origin

See more synonyms for empathy on Thesaurus.com

noun

1. the psychological identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another.

2. the imaginative ascribing to an object, as a natural object or work of art, feelings or attitudes present in oneself:

   By means of empathy, a great painting becomes a mirror of the self.
Empathy audit

- On a scale of 1 to 5 (low to high), how would you rate your empathy?
- When you aren’t communicating “empathetically enough,” what does that feel like in your body/mind?
- When you are communicating empathetically, how does that feel?
- Do you reflect on your communication to improve collaboration?
Empathy exercise: Pause

- When you’re frustrated, stop.
- But what if you’re so busy you can’t stop?
- Can you find a way to build in pauses?
- **Example** — journal or talk to a peer about your stress.
Meditation Minute

• Count your breaths.

• As you inhale, silently think 1, exhale 2, inhale 3, exhale 4 … all the way to 10. Repeat 3 times.
Personal README

My answers to first 1:1 questions

What makes you grumpy?

- If I feel like I don’t have challenges to work on - when I’m challenged, I’m happy! One other thing is folks doubling down to defend mistakes (all humans make mistakes, we just need to learn from them). Environments where we’re not learning from our mistakes make me grumpy.

How will I know when you’re grumpy?

- I will probably tell you if something is up!

How can I help you when you’re grumpy?

- Talking about something interesting (like you!) will usually pull me out of it.

How do you like feedback - slack, email, in person, etc?

(Katie Womersley, Buffer): https://github.com/KatieLo/README
Shared Goals
Teams != Me + Me + Me + Me + Me

_Five Dysfunctions of a Team_ (Lencioni)
— Absence of trust
— Inattention to results
— Avoidance of responsibility
— Lack of commitment
— Fear of conflict

Put the **US** in trust.
teams gotta have goals...
..but what goals?
iterate them...
getting to goals

• customer focus
  – user experience as an equalizer
• brainstorming
  – the group agrees, not top-down
• task breakdown & tracking
  – agile, sprints, epics, epochs
• revisit assumptions
  – ...and adjust
Inclusion
Exercise: Have cultural curiosity

• What’s one thing you can do to increase your awareness?
• Do you ask people about their backgrounds and lives?
• Do you approach people as a mentor?
• Do you consider people’s mood, circumstances, stress levels, working conditions?
• Right Now - ask your neighbor to tell you TWO cultural things about them that are not obvious.
inclusion

• diverse backgrounds
  – diverse experiences
  – diverse approaches
• everyone has a different lived experience
• more perspectives improve the results
  – ALWAYS improve the results
• breaking down the rockstar mentality
  – consider the view as the “rockstar”
  – consider views from the rest of the team
• “ancillary” items are critical
  – docs, design, user experience
  – not enough hours in the day, going to burn out
Resources

- **Artwork**
  - large stock photos are all from pexels.com (royalty free)

- **Manager README**
  - Katie Womersley, Buffer [https://github.com/KatieLo/README](https://github.com/KatieLo/README)

- **Maintainer README**
  - [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Fd-rkENsKyxoVlU00IUIHnsJnS5_B7krEE1GVdAwwnl/edit#](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Fd-rkENsKyxoVlU00IUIHnsJnS5_B7krEE1GVdAwwnl/edit#)
  - Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

- **10 principles for collaboration**
  - Intentional Relationship Model Clearinghouse
  - [http://irm.ahslabs.uic.edu/what-is-the-irm/](http://irm.ahslabs.uic.edu/what-is-the-irm/)

- **Brainstorming for goals, projects, designs**
  - Brainstorming - 8 Rules, Interaction Design Foundation