Culture from the Bottom Up

Using inter-team communication to build a culture that makes change happen
Seth A. Roby
UC Recruit Tech Lead
@TALlama on Twitter
TALlama on UC Tech Slack
sroby@uci.edu
You are already doing something awesome
Share it
Web Author’s Learning League

“WALL”

• The grand-daddy

• First met in 2013, still going strong

• Started as a “brown bag session,” grew

• Focus is on **sharing what’s awesome**
Web Author’s Learning League

• 10-20 participants each meeting plus 1 presenter

• Challenge is **keeping the presenter pipeline full**
Web Author’s Learning League - Sample topics

• Using Circle CI for continuous integration  NEW!

• Productivity Lightning Talks  ROUND TABLE

• Introduction to Elm  NEW!

• Technical Debt  ROUND TABLE

• CSS Grid  NEW!
Web Author’s Learning League

1 hour, monthly

Presentation

Questions

Planning
Web Author’s Learning League

Discussion

Planning

1 hour, monthly
Web Author’s Learning League

• Slack channel for **coordination**
• Public post for **topic queue**
• Reminder update to **juice participation**
• Reminders to **avoid panicked presenters**
• Track **impact** to report to higher-ups
Agile Forum

- Started as a “birds of a feather” group
- First met Nov 2014
- Focus is on **sharing what’s hard**
Agile Forum

- 3-7 participants in each meeting
- **Committed attendees**
- Collaborative discussion
- Challenge is finishing on time
Agile Forum - Sample topics

- Scrum ceremonies
- Team balance
- Onboarding team members
- Story prioritization
- Agile sailboat
Agile Forum

½ hour, weekly

What’s New?  Topic
What’s New?

½ hour, weekly
Agile Forum

½ hour, weekly

What’s New?  Planning
Agile Forum

½ hour, weekly

Experiment

Reflections
How It Works

• Another “birds of a feather” group

• First met July 2017

• Focus is on sharing what’s working
How It Works

• 4-10 participants in each meeting

• Combines formats

• Challenge is keeping up with the group
How It Works - Sample topics

• Design in sprint
• How It Looks
• User research
• Color theory
• Design Systems
What's New?  
Topic  
Presentation  
Planning

How It Works

How It Works

½ hour  
1 hour  
twice monthly
Commonalities

• **Regular**: it’s on your calendar already

• **Open**: new attendees are always welcome

• **Safe**: trying out new stuff is encouraged and welcome

• **Episodic**: miss any meeting and it’s fine
Commonalities

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Focus

- WALL: Focus on what’s **awesome**
- Agile Forum: Focus on what’s **hard**
- How It Works: Focus on what’s **working**
Real Focus

- Real focus is on getting people to talk to each other
- Real focus is making change happen
The Overton Window

Crazy

The Thinkable

Crazy
The Overton Window

Crazy

The Thinkable

Crazy
The Overton Window

Crazy

The Thinkable

Crazy
The Overton Window

Idiots  My speed  Maniacs

Crazy  The Thinkable  Crazy
The Overton Window

Idiots

My process

Maniacs

Crazy

The Thinkable

Crazy
The Overton Window

Idiots  My process  Maniacs

Crazy  The Thinkable  Crazy

Oh, I get it!
The Overton Window

Idiots       My process       Maniacs

Crazy

The Thinkable

A better way!
What else looks like that?
Gaming Group

- First met in 2016
- Started as a lunch break, grew
- Focus is on **sharing a fun time**
  - Real focus is on getting people to **talk** to each other
  - Real focus is **making change happen**
Commonalities?

- **Regular**: it’s on your calendar already
- **Open**: new attendees are always welcome
- **Safe**: trying out new stuff is encouraged
- **Episodic**: miss any meeting and it’s fine
Agile Software Development

- Started in 2010ish
- Experiment, ScrumMaster torch passed 4 times so far
- Focus is on sharing decision making and progress
- Real focus is on getting people to talk to each other
- Real focus is making change happen
Agile Software Development

• 5 participants at start, 10 now

• Ceremonies
  • Daily Standups - “what’s new?”
  • Biweekly planning - “what’s next?”
  • Biweekly retrospectives - roundtable

• Challenge is juggling priorities
Commonalities?

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What is a forum, anyway?

- Center of Rome
- Surrounded by formal institutions
- The common area
- Where people meet and talk
Your boss

• His focus:
  • Make the **trains** run on time

• Your focus:
  • **Talk** to him about a record of success
  • **Make change happen** by leveraging that record
Your stakeholders

• Their focus:
  • The **new features**

• Your focus:
  • **Talk** to them about priorities, best practices, and how best to earn their trust
  • **Make change happen** by giving them what they need, not just what they want
• Their focus:
  • Doing their jobs, and what you can do to **make their lives better**

• Your focus:
  • **Talk** to them about pain points, confusions, training, and easy wins
  • **Make change happen** by empowering them: ask their opinion and listen

Your users
• Their focus:
  • Do their jobs, which is easier if you never change anything

• Your focus:
  • **Talk** to them about friction, expectations, and tradeoffs
  • **Make change happen** by coordinating better processes to free up time
Your focus is always talking about making change happen.
Focus, continually applied, becomes culture.
Focus • Culture

• Do you have a culture of **talking** to each other?

• Do you have a culture of **making change happen**?
ROSE is culture

• **Regular**: it’s on your calendar already

• **Open**: new attendees are always welcome

• **Safe**: trying out new stuff is encouraged and welcome

• **Episodic**: miss any meeting and it’s fine
You are a change agent
Your team’s culture is up to you
Your organization’s culture is up to you.
Make it awesome
#forum-facilitators

Changing culture by encouraging people to talk and make change happen

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