

Grow Up Dude! (vol #2)

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“Grow Up Dude!” articles are based on some personal experiences and talk about various random aspects that can be bettered in a software services company.

I am a software developer working for a reputed organization (with around 300 employees) in Bangalore. We are a Services company. What I present in here is the first in the series of articles under “Grow Up Dude!” and contains my personal views and the company I work for has no explicit endorsement for any of the views mentioned in this article.

Prototyping Activities

We should do a lot of prototyping activities if we need to be prepared for the coming ‘tomorrow’. Also, focus is very essential for such prototyping activities. The teams should be educated to demand a business case before starting off any prototyping initiative. Also, the business group should clearly identify the space they want to initiate prototypes.

Prototyping activity needs to happen before we propose anything new and big. When you want to venture into a new space or technology, do a prototype first. It has numerous advantages. First, it gives the team confidence to build the actual system. Second it forces the designers of the actual system about the details. And then, it also lets you play around and collect some metrics and answer questions specially those related to performance and scalability.

Speak Up! And Listen!

Every team is involved in doing some different kind of work. As a result of this every team picks up a

lot of special skills and knowledge. This knowledge should not be restricted only to the team but should be shared with a greater audience. To facilitate this, it should be mandated that at regular intervals every team should present its activities and share its skills in a forum, which members from other teams should attend.

By sharing knowledge it can have a synergic effect. Better proposals can come up, better solutions can evolve and at the end we have a better business conversions.

Have a forum where people give lectures and share their ideas with others. This should open to all. Also, the people who are giving the talks should be suitably awarded. This will give people an incentive to come out and talk to people and share what they have learnt and/or they are good at. It might even be made a compulsory event for all the employees to do such a thing. This will not only help in sharing of knowledge but also help hone the presenter’s presentation skills.

Special mention must be made of the interaction between the business and the engineering groups. If steps are not taken to ensure that these groups are in synch then engineers might have no clue about the real business case for their solution and may ignore any business implications that their engineering solution might have.

Also by encouraging constant communication between the engineering and business groups, generating ideas would then be seen as a collective responsibility of both the groups.

In order to do this effectively, it is necessary that the business groups make presentations to the engineering teams as to what they are looking for. They should clearly indicate and highlight the domain and type of applications that they think will be a commercial hit. This will help engineering team to focus on particular areas and try to come up with some solutions in that area.

White papers can be another interesting thing the business group should come up with. Not only will it give the engineering team a good understanding of what they should concentrate on, these white papers when put on net, will enhance the company's image.

Similar responsibility to update the business and sales groups about company's technical capabilities lies with the engineering group. This helps them make better sales pitches and equips them to plan the business aspects more accurately.

Recruit right people

People make organizations – not just processes! Here is how I look at the two.

Take the case of construction of a strong, robust building. A building is strong only if the bricks used as well as the cementing material is strong. A process can merely act like cement – the bricks (people) need also to be strong for a successful and long lasting building to come up!

No methodology, no process can ever be a substitute to people's abilities. I have had the opportunity to interact with Martin Fowler and posed a question to him. "Martin, every methodology tries to address something or the other... Did you ever think of a methodology that can take care of in-competency?" He just was wild when I asked him that... and to quote him verbatim "If some methodology claims that it can take care of in-competency, then they are just Bull Shitting". According to Mythical man months, a smart performer is a whooping 10 times more efficient than a mediocre.

Poor quality recruitment is of serious implications. Considering the fact that people will always leave for better opportunities, and also the probability of the performers getting these being higher, an organization might end up losing their quality people. And if care is not taken to replenish the work-force pool with equally talented people, it might just be left with non-performers, which will definitely hit the company's bottom line.

Now, since we realize how the importance of recruiting quality people is, let us try to see how we can possibly achieve effective screening. The simplest solution is to make the recruiter accountable. Let the performance of the new employee during his probation period (around 6 months) affect the performance appraisal of the person who recommended him.

Lack of technical leadership can be a serious hurdle for a services company. It is wise to identify the same, and make efforts to recruit people with strong technology background as compared to technically challenged people!

Some campuses are known for churning out real quality products. The IITs, IIMs BITS, RECs and many such colleges fall in this elite group. It is very important that we get some representation from these colleges into an organization.

To do this, an organization needs to make their presence felt in these colleges. There are several ways it can advertise in these campuses. For example, a company's representative can go out to these campuses once in a while and give talks on the latest technologies in the industry. Another way of being popular is by sponsoring some of the cultural/technical events happening there. These technical events are quite popular in some of the reputed

colleges (specially in the IITs). Also it should be noted that all the people attending these technical functions are tech-savvy and definitely these are the people we want to target for our advertising.

Contribute to society... you get what you give!

Everyone for instance knows about a few companies that are socially conscious company. These enjoy the good will of lots of people.

Any organization can make a small starting by promoting some social activities like making Bangalore green, or in literacy programs in terms of finance and awareness among employees. It can be supplemented with other activities like donating waste paper or old computers, etc. Encouraging such activities helps the employees of the organization feel good. A happy, relaxed and content person is definitely more productive at work! Also the company earns a better image. It will have a positive affect in the eyes of the people and it will make more and more people wanting to work with the company.

These have been some random thoughts that I believe can make difference to any software services company. Some of these are applicable to any organization (not necessarily software services). More to come in the next article in the series!