Workshops for software developers

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I will not share any identifiable information you give me without your prior permission. For example, if reporting in an academic paper that a team used it as part of their onboarding process and found it helped to expose and address some misunderstandings, I would not name the company or any identifying details such as distinctive product areas.

Preparation

- Print the quotes double-sided on A4 card. The tangible media are important; do not use electronic copies.
- Use a meeting room with a large table. Spread the cards out on the table before starting.
- Book 4-8 developers for one hour, plus an independent facilitator. I don't recommend management involvement as this is intended to be a reflective discussion among developers about their own working practices.
- Provide a visible reminder of the question "How does this affect ME?", e.g. written on a whiteboard or flipchart or on a tent card on the table.
- Prepare a reminder of the rules. The models of a cow, donkey and steamroller proved to be a gentle and memorable way to introduce them, but you are welcome to use the photograph from my slides if you don't have these props.

Notes for facilitator

- Read the instructions below to participants and ask if they have any questions.
- Allow them as much time as they need to select one card each (typically 5-10 minutes).
- Once everyone has chosen a card, invite someone to read their card aloud and explain why they chose it. If necessary, remind them to explain its impact on them rather than its 'good practice' status. The workshop is an opportunity to reflect specifically on peer practices that make their job easier or harder.
- Allow discussion to follow the presentation of the card. Manage the time so that everyone will be able to take their turn presenting their choice. You should not need to intervene a great deal but depending on the discussion you may want to prompt participants occasionally, e.g. to get them to expand on the nature of the impact or to consider potential solutions.

- The workshop process does not currently include a formalised element for follow up, but there *should* be some recorded outcome. Agree a next step with participants. Possibilities include but are not limited to:
  - Selecting a discussed topic for subsequent action or deeper discussion.
  - Displaying the cards that were selected.
  - Identifying 'tough decision' cards which participants could not pick due to the one card limit. These could be the starting point for a future session.
- If necessary, enforce the rules.

Instructions to participants

These cards are direct quotes of things experienced developers have said about how they are affected by things other developers do. They represent common themes that came up across a range of companies.

Please spend some time looking through the cards and ask yourself: **How does it affect ME when someone does this?"** This is not about good practice; it's about the impact on **you**, good or bad, when someone behaves in a certain way.

I'll give you time to choose a card that reminds you of something you've experienced. Think about why it speaks to you. When everyone has one, I'll ask you to explain its significance. That should not be good practice, or code performance, or profit, or anything like that. You should be entirely self-interested about its impact on you!

Others might not necessarily have experienced it the same way so there are a few ground rules for talking about the cards:

1. Try not to assume anything is "obvious". *Explain* the impact this thing has on you. The "side-effects" of doing something aren't necessarily obvious unless you're the one affected, so explain why this thing matters. (The ass is here to remind you that there should be no ASSumptions!)

2. No-one is "wrong" about how *they* experienced something. If your personal experience is different, you can explain how and explore the circumstances that might account for the differences (e.g., context). (The steamroller is here to remind you not to steamroller anyone's account of what they've experienced!)

3. Remember, the question is not "is this good practice?" but "how does it affect ME when someone does this?" Choose a card for the impact that practice has on YOU, and not because it reflects some "good practice" principle. (The cow is here to remind you: no sacred cows.)

Questions or suggestions?

Please email me at gollis@bournemouth.ac.uk. I'll be happy to discuss it with you.