

Creative week

Background:

Our section has 19 developers, one team lead, one verification engineer and me (the manager).



We used to have creative Friday once a month in our section – to encourage creativity and give the developers a chance to do something different from the daily hurdle.

I noticed that the developers were using the creative Friday differently from what I was expecting,

- some were working like normal, i.e. it was at the end of the sprint and they needed to fix a few tasks to meet their sprint commitment
- some were reading a book, trying to educate themselves
- some were working on super small coding projects

We rarely saw any demo, as very few people managed to implement something that they could show to the others.

We started a discussion about the concept and one of the complaints was that having creative Friday on a Friday often caused the developers to work with their normal work, so we tried to switch to Monday and called it crazy Monday instead.

Crazy Monday was much better than Friday, the psychological impact of using Monday rather than Friday was fairly big, I would say that it should work the same way Friday vs. Monday, but in reality it was much better, almost everyone was using crazy Monday to do something creative.

We continued the evaluation of crazy Monday – the feedback was that it was much better, but it was too short a time to get anything real done – almost like Hackaton – you never have enough time to finish the job, thus creating some frustrations among the developers...

Our discussions ended with a decision, we stopped our crazy Monday and booked a creative week instead! The ambition is to have a creative week twice a year; however we still have to execute the first creative week and prove to higher level management that our team of 21 people will create something useful – some people see this as 21 man-weeks, which potentially could be used to implement some of our “mandatory” features...

After we announced the creative week, one of the other sections - that we work very close with – asked if they could join, and sure thing, the more and the more cross-functional the better – we have also arranged support from a couple of graphical designers to help us!

Preparing for creative week:

My hope for the creative week is that everyone involved have a lot of fun, but also that some teams manage to create something cool that they can demonstrate to all of us, and who knows we might get some innovation as a spin off – I believe that the creative week can spread within the organization if we manage to create some cool demonstrations.

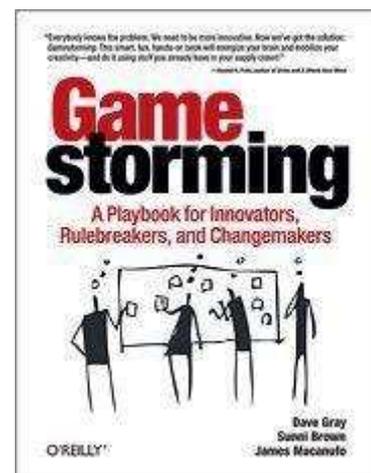
We did not want to close the 2 sections for one week – we have a strong focus on quality in our deliveries, but there are always issues to fix, either some translation issues or operators who want us to twist the functionality or we might even have missed a crash – so we decided to use week 39 and 40, the developers would have to select either week 39 or w40, we expect that we will have a split of 30/70, i.e. there will be at least 30% doing normal work, so those who have the creative week can focus completely on their creativity!

You all know the feeling when you go on vacation without any plans, it takes a couple of days to get into the vacation-mode, we don't want this to happen with our creative week, it would be a disaster if the developers came to work Monday morning, starting their creative week trying to find out what to do, building teams etc...

We started to talk about the creative week in week 17, meaning that we had 22 weeks to prepare ourselves for the coming event – We had small brain storm sessions at our section meetings and posted the outcome on our wiki-page – when we reached week 36, we had collected 17 ideas on the wiki page and it was about time to be more structured in our planning.

We arranged a meeting with the 2 sections and was using ideas from “Game storming” from O’Reilly – we wrote the 17 ideas on big-post-it and put one card in front of each participant, we explained the rule of the “game”:

- Read the post-it in front of you
- If you do not understand the idea, please ask the author (written together with the idea)
- Write any comments or ideas that comes to your mind
- Write a new post-it if you get a new idea and add your name
- After 2 minutes the facilitator will ask everyone to rotate the post-it to the next person in line



The benefit of this exercise was:

- Everyone get to know the all ideas
- 2 minute limit force them to act fast
- 2 minute secure that no one get too bored, most developers does not like meetings, as they are often boring and they tend to start working on something else....
- We added value to all ideas
- We created new ideas

Everyone had a lot of fun during the 1 hour that we used, there were a lot of good discussions and the energy level was high – always fantastic to participate in this kind of activity!

After the exercise we had 35 ideas, i.e. we increased the number of ideas with 100%!

At the end of the meeting, we did a short summary of the “rules” for the coming creative week, each person had to select a week, a topic and a group before Thursday in week 38 – this gives us Friday to follow up on those who “forgot” to get this done. The size of the group is not important, i.e. you can be alone or together with others, several teams can work on the same idea, either collaboration or “competing”.



Picture from our meeting in week 36 where we went through all ideas.

I will post another article when we have had creative week with a description of how it went – but without the actual outcome, as some might end up in coming products, meaning that they are confidential until released... ;-)

Reference:

<http://www.onextrapixel.com/2012/08/20/fostering-tried-and-tested-creative-and-innovative-solutions/> - borrowed the scramble picture at the beginning of the article, it is also a good article worth reading!