Developing Cultural Intelligence

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+ Me: 33 years of creating software products at dozens of companies

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What you care about as a Technologist

Making things

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You care about

- Making good systems

- Making it scale

- Making good choices about leaders and teams

- Making money

- Making Hacker News

- Making it out alive

We're not logical, Mr. Spock

- Behavioral decision making research: deep cognitive biases

- Good software is still a lot of art

- No one picks only great, successful teams

- It's about people, trying to work together

- Or kill each other

- *Read Kahneman and Tversky*

It's all about People

So how do you develop that?

Why Culture matters

- Culture is what shapes how people work together

- Culture is what makes companies great

- Culture is to blame when people aren't doing the right things anymore

- Culture is a powerful tool that offers new solutions

- *Read "It's Your Ship" by Abrashoff*

What is Culture in our context?

Shared expectations for behavior

+ Cultural Intelligence

- Can't RTFM; it's rarely written out

- So learn to **recognize**, **reason** about, and **affect** culture around you

- In time, gain the confidence to create your own culture

Culture is event-driven

It's all in how you handle it

Culture happens in real-time

- At the boundaries between people, between groups

- Unexpected challenges

- Discovering what the rules are

- Rituals that reinforce

- Human interest: fear, anger, surprise, punishment, reward

- Stories are repeated

Leaders set culture

- As social animals, we look to our leaders first

- Leadership controls the crude rewards -- hiring and firing

- But if you set the culture, people look to you as a leader, even if you don't have that control

Learn to Recognize the Components of Culture

Elements of a language
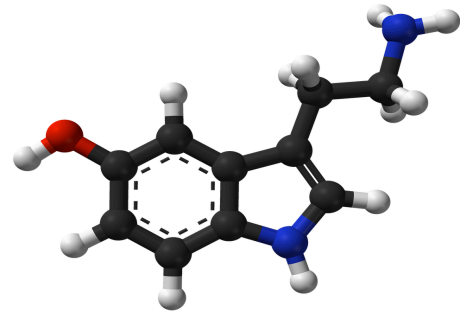
API Attributes and Values

Attribute	Default Value	Upper Bound
Control	Centralized	Distributed
Information	Private	Shared
Emotion	Ego	Empathy
Responsibility	Avoidance	Ownership
Dissent	Unacceptable	Encouraged
Motivation	Extrinsic	Intrinsic

There are many more...

- **Planning**: wish-based vs. reality-based

- **Humor**: serious vs. playful

- **Recognition**: taking credit vs. giving credit

- **Org structure**: static vs. dynamic

- **Collaboration**: fraught vs. effective

- **Risks**: avoid vs. engage actively

- **Truth to power**: dangerous vs. supported

So?

Make culture choices

- Figure out what culture matters to you -- what is your personal culture?

- When you interview for a job, ask questions about cultural elements

- Choose positive culture over other rewards

- *Read Drucker's "Managing Oneself"*

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+ Learn to influence culture

- Develop the confidence to speak when group culture conflicts with personal

- Have the courage to try and improve where you are

- Have the courage to leave when it's unhealthy

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Learn to create culture

- Choose people for their cultural fit

- Teach by modeling the values you want to establish

- Be clear – ambiguity sets a cultural value

- Doing the right thing when it's hard is what makes you a leader, and makes people willing to follow you

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