



Atlanta SPIN

Software Process Improvement Network

The Atlanta SPINaker

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Scott Banks

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Problems: The Flip Side of an Opportunity



Scott Banks Opening the Meeting

Scott Banks, a Research Engineer at Georgia Tech Research Institute and a Board Member of Atlanta SPIN gave a highly interactive presentation on Problem Reporting. Scott has presented this talk to a variety of forums and the Atlanta SPIN audience, like several other groups he had spoken to previously, found it a very engaging discussion.

Scott looked to simplify the discussion by treating the various problem reporting mechanisms (such as bugs, change requests, engineering change notices, etc.) as a single class that could be dealt with in a common manner. He adopted the position that every change should be documented, regardless of the point in the project it arose and the nature of the defect.

Scott spent some time discussing the advantages of a systematic problem reporting process. He believes that this helps ensure that everyone on the project is aware of the changes, and that there is a record of what was changed when, so that the history of changes can later be examined when questions arise regarding why. He also saw this as a good mechanism for capturing potential enhancements those suggested themselves during a project but were clearly out of scope.

There was also discussion from the audience that insight could be gained from this information on project status. A good mechanism could serve the purpose of ensuring that there was widespread knowledge of what was changing during a current time period and who was working in these areas. This could help ensure that others were not blindsided by changes late in the project. Scott believes that this record of changes should be included as part of the Release documentation.

He noted that this can be a particularly difficult problem when the team is geographically disbursed or when there are pieces of work that have been subcontracted to others. Scott recalled a project where his team was dealing with an external group. The firmware interface specification was being constantly modified with little or no communication of the revisions.

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What's Next? - June 20th



Michael Workman - Associate Professor

Florida Institute of Technology

Success Factors in Virtual Working

Scott Banks Highlights - continued

His team kept spending half of their cycle time debugging and then redeveloping functionality that had been already delivered, with the consequence of course that their new development began to seriously be delayed. The customer was unaware of these dynamics until the team adopted a policy of writing a problem report for every issue that arose from a change in this interface. Within a relatively short time period, the customer began to understand what was happening and relief was obtained.

Scott noted that a process for handling changes in a project is required for CMMI certification. There needs to be a Configuration Control Board that approves the disposition of all problem reports on a project. He stressed the importance of using any measures in this area for evaluation of process and organizational performance, and not as a means to assess the quality of individual's work. There was a comment from the audience that their experience was that the engineers with the most problem reports were typically the people doing the most work, and hence the notion of a stigma was genuinely not appropriate.

Scott noted that for third-party software, it was just as important to document problems, in part because it made it clear to the customer that the issue was beyond your control and in part as a formal means to drive the vendor to address the issue. He also noted that documenting process problems could help ensure that changes that were made in processes or procedures were in fact corrected organization-wide versus just locally within the project.

Scott also warned that there can be traps here. He recounted one project where the testers were challenged to find more problems, while the developers were driven to fix more problems. The teams involved quickly sorted out this dysfunctional management direction, and both optimized their measures!

There was considerable discussion and debate within the audience and with Scott regarding some of the details associated with implementing a problem reporting process. There was discussion of whether it was appropriate to start problem capture at the start of a project, or at some point (several were suggested) later on. The differences in handling between a change request and a defect report also led to some head scratching and soul searching. There was an observation made that with a bug defect, the most important issue was *when* it would get repaired, while with a change request (out of scope functionality), the key issue was *if* it should be fixed. The extent to which problem report statistics could be used by project management as a measure of actual progress was also raised.

There was also discussion of the push back that is often experienced when one attempts to get the problem reporting discipline established. A typical concern is that doing so takes too much time – “it takes less time to fix the problem than it does to write it up.” There was also the concern expressed that a company would not want its customers to see the number and nature of fixes that were done, as this might lead to judgments critical of the company.

Scott concluded his presentation with a discussion of problem reporting tools and reports. There was a strong consensus that it was very important that the tools for problem reporting had a very friendly user interface. There was also quite a bit of discussion, based on the audience's experience, regarding the kind of information that was important to provide as part of the problem documentation. The criticality of enough information to enable the developer to replicate the problem was one theme here. The reporting tools needed to be consistent with your process – having the “latest and greatest” tools that the project team simply won't use has to be avoided.

More information can be found in Scott's slides, which are available at <http://www.atlantaspin.org/meetinginfo.htm>



Watts Humphrey BLOG !!!!!

Watts Humphrey has started a new blog where he plans to discuss current issues and invite comments and suggestions from SEI Partners and other users. The topics should stick relatively closely to software and systems development and the practices, careers, attitudes, and issues faced by the developers, their managers, and other associates.

The BLOG can be found at http://tspusergroup.org/watts_up

Atlanta SPIN—Member Feedback Synopsis

Atlanta SPIN requests feedback at each meeting for both our presenters and for the Board. Presenter feedback is provided directly to the speaker for their use. Board feedback is reviewed each month and assigned for consideration by either a specific Committee or by the Board as a whole. Feedback over the past seven meetings can be summarized as follows:

Logistical/Procedural Concerns: (70%)

A number of basic issues (slide copies, audio issues, presentation on website, reminder emails) have been handled already.

Room size and setup have been addressed to some extent by the move of the meeting to the LaQuinta Inn. We continue to work on optimizing the number of tables that we use, depending on the RSVP results, to maximize tables while ensuring enough chairs for everyone to sit. We are working to further improve RSVP processing.

We continue to get suggestions on how to refine the food and drink selection - this remains under evaluation.

We have gotten various feedback on the ideal location for the meeting. There's no pattern that suggests a major change is needed.

Several refinements on how the meeting is conducted have been made and acted on, including streamlining the pre-presentation discussion and ensuring adequate time for questions afterwards. We remain very sensitive to adhering to the posted schedule.

We have added a sponsor section on the website as a step to improve sponsor visibility. This complements the Newsletter section.

Program Suggestions: (30%)

The Program Committee continues to welcome members' suggestions for potential presenters. The Program Committee is considering the suggestions received on Process Improvement and Project Management.

We will continue to make information on free or subsidized Training offers for our members available as they arise.

One member suggested making a blog available - while not our initiative, the SEI-sponsored blog that Watts Humphrey has initiated may well address this interest and need.

A request for small group discussions are under consideration by the Program Committee.

A request for a job board has been flagged as a future study item.

Project Management Institute - Professional Development Day

The Atlanta Chapter of the Project Management Institute (PMI) will host its second annual Professional Development Day (PDD2007) event on August 25, 2007. PDD2007 provides an opportunity to learn from qualified project management practitioners, view the latest in project management tools and applications; and network with project management professionals.

Last year's PDD was a great success, attracting over 400 participants from a wide geographic area. This year's theme is "Practicing the Project Management Profession". One of the keynote speakers is Dr. Francis Hartman, principal creator behind the development and testing of SMART Management®, which is used to enhance the effective management of a growing number of projects, programs and businesses in Canada, the United States and internationally.

More information on this entertaining and informative day, including registration is available via the following link:

<http://www.pmiatlanta-pdd.org>

Recent News from the Software Engineering Institute

[New SPIN Wiki !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!](#)

A new SPIN WIKI (a wiki is website or similar online resource which allows users to add and edit content collectively) has been created. Please see the following URL: <http://seispin.wikispaces.com/> I hope we can turn this into a great resource for us all to us! Please pass this along.

Thank you,
Shane McGraw
SEI SPIN Coordinator
412-268-2358

[Misjudging Cause for Interoperability Failure Makes Problem Worse for Large System of Systems](#)

A new case study reports that choices made to solve problems resulting from bad or untimely information exchange between systems in the acquisition phase of a large, complex system of systems negatively affected cost and schedule. The cause for those problems was perceived to be ineffective communication. However, the remedy applied did not improve the quality of information and caused decisions to be further delayed.

In "Topics in Interoperability: Structural Programmatic in a System of Systems", a newly issued report, the case study is used to illustrate how significant differences between traditional systems and systems of systems have profound implications for acquisition. The report also proposes workable mitigation strategies for the problems identified.

This report <<http://www.sei.cmu.edu/publications/documents/06.reports/06tn037.html>> is the most recent in a "Topics in Interoperability" series from the Integration of Software-Intensive Systems (ISIS) Initiative. In previous reports, ISIS staff members have examined issues arising from the characteristics of systems of systems---including ownership, evolution, and infrastructure upgrade risks. To download this report, other reports in this series, and additional ISIS reports, go to <http://www.sei.cmu.edu/isis/publications.html>.

Spotlight on our Sponsors: MDI



The alignment of IT with the business demands requires the proper processes to suit the organizational climate and maturity; the organizational support to act as the foundation and support for these processes; and the tools to achieve efficiencies and accuracy for the processes.

MDI's (www.mdigroup.com) specialization in Project Governance (PG) provides its clients service across all three of these areas. PG critical skill sets encompass Project Management, Business Analysis, Quality Assurance, and Information/Instructional Design. These skills govern the project lifecycle, driving the tight coupling of IT's activities with business vision, strategy, and objectives. Without these skills, there is a high risk of not properly translating business needs into the appropriate IT solution.

A flawless link between business and IT is no easy task, and there is no one solution. A company's environment, its process maturity, and its strategic plans must all be factored into a workable solution. MDI's ability to leverage its cross-industry view of best practices across the nation's top companies gives MDI the knowledge and experience to create customized frameworks for any company around all of the PG disciplines, regardless of whether the framework being implemented or incorporated is ITIL, Six Sigma, CMMi or OPM3.

Atlanta SPIN's focus on and promotion of software process improvement is a logical fit with MDI's services, and a key reason why MDI supports Atlanta SPIN.

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Atlanta SPIN Sponsors—They Make Our Efforts Possible!



And our 18 Individual Contributors!

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Process Improvement Sites:

Software Engineering Information Repository

<http://seir.sei.cmu.edu>, has over 30,000 registered users and is a forum used to contribute and exchange information about software engineering improvement activities, including CMMI.

The CMMI Process Improvement Yahoo! discussion group

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/cmmi_process_improvement/ is a forum used to contribute and exchange ideas about CMMI-based improvement.

BSCW Shared Workspace <https://bscw.sei.cmu.edu/pub/bscw.cgi/0/79783> is a forum used to contribute and exchange CMMI-related materials.

Information courtesy of SEI Customer Relations. Find out more about SEI Membership online at www.sei.cmu.edu/membership
customer-relations@sei.cmu.edu

About Atlanta SPIN

The Atlanta SPIN organization was chartered in 1991. This group has been a force for software process improvement in the Atlanta area since then. The organization has a growing membership list that currently numbers 850+ members. The group typically meets every third Wednesday of the month. Our meetings typically attract audiences of 40 – 50 people. These meetings provide a forum for like-minded people, interested in learning from others and sharing their own experiences. There is time allowed before and after the meeting for networking among the participants, including a review from the audience of any job openings that are available. The Board, through its work with Sponsors, ensures that food and drinks are also available at no cost to the membership.

Ron Wojcik, editor