In-the-SPIN

Newsletter of the Boston SPIN

Issue 27, May, 1999

Editor: Carol Pilch

Editorial

If you've been attending SPIN meetings on a fairly regular basis, you undoubtedly have derived some benefit from the organization. Please remember that this is a volunteer organization and the Board members and committee members are volunteers. You need to think seriously about giving back to the SPIN by participating as a Board member or committee member. The SPIN organization is only successful if there are active volunteers who contribute some of their time to the organization. The last page of this edition has a message from Rick Brenner, the chair of the SPIN Nominating Committee. Think seriously about volunteering.

In this month's edition of In-the-SPIN Barbara Purchia provides the guidelines for ensuring that task forces will be successful. In addition, this month's Feature Article is a book review contributed by Johanna Rothman Johanna reviews "Bad Software" by Cem Kaner and Dave Pels. Those of you who attended our April meeting will already be familiar with Dr. Kaner's work and the subject matter. However, if you missed the meeting, take a look at the Meeting Summary provided by yours truly. The summary is brief by design because you need to read the book review, check out the web sites that are referenced, and think seriously about writing those letters that Dr. Kaner urges us to write.

In-the-SPIN is provided by the Boston SPIN as a means of supporting the free and open exchange of software process improvement experiences and ideas. The steering committee encourages feedback on the newsletter and broader participation in the content and production of the newsletter. If you have an article you would like to publish in this newsletter, send it to carol.pilch@gsc.gte.com.

Boston SPIN *Software Process Improvement Network*

Since January 1993

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We thank the Computer Science department of UMASS- Lowell for providing support and hosting our Web page

SPIN Perspectives

This month's SPIN Perspectives article is contributed by Barbara Purchia, Director, Engineering Operations, Kronos, Inc. Barbara is Chair of the Boston SPIN Steering Committee.

A task force can be a powerful tool in helping solve problems. It can also be a frustrating experience if expectations are not set for the task force members, sponsors, and leaders. Some common problems that I have encountered with task force implementation are:

- The expectation that task force activities get done in "magic time" without any adjustments to the participant's normal work load
- Participants are not held accountable by their managers for their task force contributions
- Performance reviews do not include an evaluation of the task force participants efforts
- Task force members do not participate
- Task force activities are not identified and measured
- Task forces fizzle out and never complete their efforts
- Task force efforts are not treated like projects
- There is no sponsor or the sponsor does not provide any guidance.

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One way to alleviate these frustrations is to provide structure for task force activities:

- Identify task force guidelines for sponsors and participants
- Provide task force steps before starting up a task force.
- Ensure that communications keeps flowing among all involved parties, including the managers of the task force participants.

Task force guidelines should identify the various responsibilities and expectations.

Task Force Sponsor guidelines could include:

- Ensure that a task force is needed
- Describe and establish the purpose of the task force
- Determine how task force member selection will occur
- Review task force minutes and progress
- Approve or reject task force recommendations at pre-determined milestones
- Determine if further action is needed after task force completion
- Determine if and when further maintenance activities are needed.

Task Force Leader guidelines could include:

- Identify and obtain task force members
- Notify managers of needed time commitments for the members
- Schedule task force training
- Hold regularly scheduled meetings with an agenda
- Ensure minutes are taken and distributed to the members and sponsor
- Ensure action items are documented, tracked, and managed
- Report task force progress
- Raise issues to the sponsor
- Provide input for the member's performance evaluation.

Task Force Member guidelines could include:

- Attend and actively participate in task force meetings
- Perform and complete task force assignments and action items
- Communicate task force activities to your manager
- Receive training and coaching as necessary.

In addition to these guidelines, a series of task force improvement steps should be developed to provide the framework and structure necessary to initiate and move through the life cycle of a task force. Each step would contain a logical sequence of elements that build from each other and a set of milestones that provide overall direction. The components of each step should be viewed as guidelines, not requirements.

The following is a brief description of some steps necessary to undertake a task force effort. These steps are standard

problem solving steps including go/no go decision points at steps 2, 3, and 4:

1. **Identify the problem -** Identify the purpose of the task force activity. Document the problem, requirements, plans and goals.

2. **Analyze the problem -** Perform root cause analysis and determine problem cost. Obtain agreement with the task force and from the sponsor to proceed. Make sure you are solving the right problem.

3. **Identify the solution -** Evaluate solutions and solution cost. Obtain agreement with the task force and from the sponsor to proceed. Make sure you have identified a cost-effective solution.

4. **Select and plan the solution -** Select a solution and develop an implementation/project plan. Obtain agreement with the task force and from the sponsor to proceed.

5. **Implement the solution -** Solve the problem. Determine that the problem has been resolved. Review progress with the sponsor regularly.

6. **Review the solution -** Review and document the total task force effort, summarizing experiences and results.

During this process, keep communicating task force progress and raise issues as needed. It is important to provide task force visibility during the entire process. Communicate with the sponsor, the task force members, and their managers. Sometimes when additional help or guidance is needed, it may come from an unexpected source, like your boss!

Task forces can be a positive experience if they are used to solve problems with appropriate guidelines, training and communications.

Meeting Summary

Notes from the April Meeting

Contributed by Carol Pilch, GTE

Topic: "A Bad Law for Bad Software – and What We Can Do About It"

Speaker: Cem Kaner, B.A.,Ph.D., J.D. and lead author of "Testing Computer Software" and "Bad Software: What to Do When Software Fails"

The presentation at the April meeting, I am pleased to say, exceeded my expectations in every way. I found Dr. Kaner's presentation to be entertaining, interesting, and extremely informative. In fact, the information that he presented was a real eye opener.

Who is Cem Kaner? Roughly quoting Johanna Rothman, who introduced Dr. Kaner, "He is extremely well educated, having earned many degrees including a Ph. D. in experimental psychology and a law degree. He is one of the brightest people I know."

Approximately five minutes into this presentation, Dr. Kaner described himself as the only person who has authored a book that is endorsed by both Ralph Nader and Watts Humphrey. Dr. Kaner has, in fact, authored two books "Testing Computer Software" and "Bad Software: What to do When Software Fails." The second book has earned the endorsement. Ten minutes into this presentation, the reason for the dual endorsement was apparent.

Dr. Kaner, as an advocate for customers and for higher quality software, has been actively involved in the development of a new law for software contracts, referred to as Article 2B. After working with the Drafting Committee for nearly three years, Dr. Kaner and his associate have concluded that Article 2B is fundamentally flawed and he urged us to oppose it. Article 2B is a proposed amendment to the Uniform Commercial Code (UCC). If Article 2B is adopted, it will govern all contracts involving the development, sale, maintenance, support, and documentation of computer software and most contracts involving information that is stored in a digital format (e.g. on CD-ROM or downloaded). Dr. Kaner presented the legal issues that this presentation addressed in clear and concise layman's terms. The UCC is the primary law governing commerce in the U.S. Forty-nine states have adopted UCC Article 2 that governs sales of packaged software (and licenses). Basically, Article 2B rewrites all laws governing software contracts and virtually eliminates the accountability of vendors to customers (especially for COTS products).

What you can do:

- Become knowledgeable - check out these web sites – www.law.upenn.edu/bll/ulc/ulc.htm
  www.badsoftware.com
  www.2Bguide.com
  www.nccusl.org
- Read Dr. Kaner's book - a review of the book is in this edition of *In-the SPIN*
- Write letters to your state's National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws (NCCUSL) members.

Individuals with software knowledge are in the best position to write these letters to explain the problems and risks to those who are less knowledgeable.

Boston SPIN Calendar

Information about Upcoming Meetings
by Johanna Rothman, Program Chair

May Meeting Announcement

Topic: Performance Measurement for Software Organizations
Speaker: Dave Zubrow

When: Tuesday, May 18, 1999. 6:30pm-8:30pm
6:30-7:00 Networking and Round Tables
7:00-7:10 Announcements
7:10-8:10 Featured Speaker
8:10-8:30 Questions and Answers

Who: Everyone (Academia, Government, Industry)

Abstract:
This presentation is for those seeking to get started using organizational performance information as well as those charged with producing organizational performance information. Today, organizations are increasingly engaging in performance measurement. Within the Federal Government, legislation has mandated that IT organizations conduct performance measurement. Additionally, the GAO, DoD, and other government departments are issuing implementation guidance. In the commercial sector, performance measurement is a rage and several books have been written on the topic. While measuring performance seems to be an old idea, the phrase is so overloaded that it is often difficult to understand what it means. And for those trying to implement performance measurement, there is often confusing and conflicting advice as to what to focus on and how to actually do it. This presentation reviews current definitions and approaches to performance measurement and provides practical guidance and examples for those struggling to get started in this area.

About the Speaker:
Dave Zubrow is Team Leader for the Software Engineering Measurement and Analysis group within the SEI. His areas of expertise include empirical research methods, data analysis,

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and data management. Since his arrival at the SEI in 1992, Dave has been a lead developer of the latest Software Process Maturity Questionnaire, part of the development team for the Interim Profile appraisal method, and manager of the SEI Process Appraisal Information System. He recently co-authored technical reports entitled "Software Process Automation: Experiences from the Trenches," "Moving on Up: Data and Experiences doing CMM-based Software Process Improvement" and "Benefits of CMM-Based Software Process Improvement: Initial Results."

Dr. Zubrow earned his PhD in Social and Decision Sciences and MS in Public Policy and Management from Carnegie Mellon University. He is authorized by the SEI as a Lead Assessor and as an Instructor for the Introduction to the CMM course. Dave is a member of the Editorial Board for the Software Quality Professional and he chairs the committee on Metrics, Measurement, and Analytical Methods for the Software Division of the American Society for Quality. He also is an ASQ certified Software Quality Engineer.

Location: GTE, 77 "A" St., Needham MA.

Directions: From Route 128 in Needham, take exit 19A onto

Highland Avenue East. Take your first right by the Ground Round and take your second left onto "A" Street. GTE is the last building on the right. Enter the parking lot by the GTE sign and come into the building by the cafeteria entrance, which is located to the left of the main entrance. There will be a security guard at the entrance.

Info: See our web page, http://www.cs.uml.edu/Boston-SPIN
For SPIN info, contact Johanna Rothman, 781-641-4046, or jr@jrothman.com

Looking for Interesting Speakers

We are always looking for interesting speakers. If you'd like to speak at Boston SPIN, please review these criteria before sending us an abstract:

Speaker Guidelines:

1. Boston SPIN looks for relevant topics facing software groups who want to improve their processes. Particular relevance to recent advances/ changes in this field are particularly welcome.
2. Preference is always given to speakers who present information pertaining to actual experiences in the field as opposed to purely theoretical presentations.
3. Our membership attends hoping to learn how they can enhance their own results. We request proven, practical detail in your presentation.
4. The presentation should be based on the presenter's personal experience.
5. If you are a vendor or a consultant, remember that the most effective presentations are those where you explain your area of expertise and show how to be effective. Please do not use your time at Boston SPIN as a sales pitch.

We developed a speaker checklist so that none of us would have to rely on our short-term memories. Please use the checklist to prepare for your SPIN talk.

Speaker checklist:

1. 60 days in advance of meeting: deliver 2 paragraph abstract, one paragraph bio to jr@jrothman.com
2. Within one week of meeting date: If desired, email copy of paper or overheads to heimann@world.std.com so that it is downloadable from the SPIN web page.
3. At the meeting: Speaker provides one copy of overheads to Charlie Ryan for our library.
4. Optional but highly recommended: bring 50-60 copies of overheads to SPIN meeting.

If you have information you'd like us to hear, please send an abstract to Johanna Rothman, jr@jrothman.com. Or, contact Johanna at 781-641-4046.

Monthly Round Tables

What: These are focus group or "birds-of-a-feather" sessions. They provide a professional forum for sharing information and experiences, for learning about other techniques, and for finding out that you are not alone.

Do you need or want to share information about handling thorny situations at work? Do you wonder what metrics are most important? Quality, scheduling effectiveness, time to market...? Would you like to know how to manage a project that you have just been thrust into in mid stream? Could you benefit from leading edge approaches and innovative solutions for handling current project challenges? In an effort to elevate your organizational ranking from SEI CMM Level 2 to Level 3, are you in search of Lessons Learned from other survivors? Would you like feedback from the diverse backgrounds (Government, commercial, industrial, consultants) on topics related to your projected career moves?

Propose your wish list or questions as a Round Table and get your information from the movers and shakers in the software community. Round Tables are generally informal discussions, with a facilitator, to stimulate and moderate discussion.

A member of the SPIN Steering Committee will assist as Scribe for the discussion. Round Table proposals may be submitted by posting a sign-up sheet with the SPIN Steering Committee Round Table Coordinator, Caroline Starita (staritac@amp.com). Proposed Round Table sessions will be

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posted for sign-up prior to the monthly meeting in order for attendees to register their interest.

When: 6:30 - 7:00 PM, before SPIN Meetings
For further roundtable information, contact Caroline J. Starita,
978-442-4004 or staritac@amp.com or see the Boston SPIN web site, http://www.cs.uml.edu/Boston-SPI.

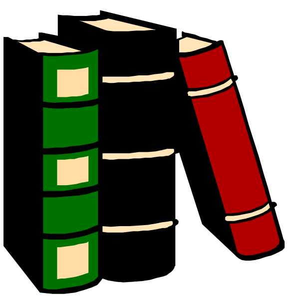
Future Program and Speaker Schedule

Date	Speaker/Topic
June 15, 1999 @ GTE	Paul Lanzoni "Why Good Requirements Are Key to Successful Projects"

Feature Article

This month's Feature Article is contributed by Johanna Rothman. Johanna is president of Rothman Consulting, Inc. and is Vice-chair of the SPIN steering committee.

Book Review: Bad Software by Cem Kaner and David Pels © 1999 Johanna Rothman



You bought some software. You unwrap the disk, pop it in the drive, and install it. It doesn't quite do what you want it to do. Maybe it destroys a whole set of files. Worse, maybe it even erases your hard drive. What should you do?

You should read Bad Software, before you do anything. Cem Kaner and David Pels wrote a readable, understandable, helpful book to help you solve your bad software problems. Kaner and Pels walk you through a set of activities designed to help you either solve your problem or get some form of satisfaction from the software publisher.

The book addresses what to do before you call the software publisher, knowing what to ask for, and how to make the call. If you don't get satisfaction from the publisher, the book then discusses some legal possibilities: dealing with consumer protection agencies, lawsuits and lawyers, and small claims court.

If you work for a software publisher—you create software that is sold commercially to more than one unique customer—read the section entitled "Software Quality and the Law". I was quite surprised to find out that what the marketing people say may be a real warranty of how the product works. I was even more surprised to discover that the documentation IS the represenation of what the product should do (even if it does not reflect the product)!

This has serious implications for software publishing organizations. If your consumers know that the documentation is the definition of what the product is supposed to do, and they want what the documentation promises, you may have to provide it free. An even better reason to be very clear about what you're putting into a given product release. After all, if you're intentionally too vague, your customers might assume you *did* want to sell them the software equivalent of the kitchen sink.

The appendix has very timely information about Article 2B, proposed revisions to the Uniform Commercial Code. At the time this newsletter went to press, the proposed Article 2B would allow publishers to:

- Limit your use rights, far beyond what other mass-market publishers, such as book publishers, can do. For example, 2B will make it easier for publishers to block customers from reverse engineering their products, something that Kaner says manufacturers of no other type of mass market product can do. We often reverse engineer software to make our products compatible with competitors, or to work around other products' defects. 2B will help a large publisher block a small competitor from achieving compatibility.

- Prevent you from seeing the sales (or license) contract until after you've bought the product. According to Kaner, this ability to hide terms like the length and scope of warranty and the cost of technical support allows publishers to avoid competing on quality-related promises. It also encourages harsh contracting because publishers can hide the bad news until after the sale is complete.

Article 2B will encourage publishers to produce "not quite bad enough" software. Kaner says: "This bill helps larger publishers to avoid or limit competition based on quality and customer satisfaction. It helps them sneak harsh terms into their sales contracts, to an extent not allowed in the rest of the mass market. […] This is a short sighted bill, favored by Dilbert's boss's lawyers. As software developers, we have the knowledge and the credibility to make this bill go away, and we should."

Bad Software is informative and entertaining. There are a number of examples of how to work with a publisher's technical support staff, and how they should work with you. You can use these tips no matter what your level of expertise.

Kaner supports the book with a web site: http://www.badsoftware.com. The publisher, Wiley also has a web site: http://www.wiley.com/compbooks.

Boston SPIN

The Boston SPIN is a forum for the free and open exchange of software process improvement experiences and ideas. Meetings are usually held on third Tuesdays, September - June. Boston SPIN welcomes volunteers and sponsors.

For more information about our programs and events contact:

Charlie Ryan
ESC/DIB (Building 1704, Room 202)
5 Eglin Street
Hanscom AFB, MA 01731-2116
Telephone: (781) 377-8324
Email: ryan@sei.cmu.edu

For information about SPINs in general including ***HOW TO START A SPIN*** contact:
Dawna Baird of SEI (412) 268-5539, dbaird@sei.cmu.edu.

IN THE SPIN is available on our Web page.

TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF NEW ISSUES send email addressed to danallen@danallen.com.

We have 2 separate email lists: one for this newsletter and one containing announcements that we receive from other process organizations and forward out.

TO ADD YOURSELF TO THE ANNOUNCEMENTS LIST send email to ryan@sei.cmu.edu.

Send letter-to-the-editor, quips, quotes, anecdotes, articles, offers to participate in the newsletter committee, and general correspondence to Carol Pilch, carol.pilch@gsc.gte.com.

Send job postings to heimann@world.std.com.

Back issues and other information about Boston SPIN can be found at our WEB HOME PAGE:
http://www.cs.uml.edu/Boston-SPIN/

A Message from the SPIN Nominating Committee

Each year at the June Meeting, we elect the Board of Directors for the following year. The Board of Directors consists of six officers: Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, and two At-Large members. The Nominating Committee is now accepting recommendations for the various offices to develop the slate. You may recommend yourself or any other member of the SPIN organization.

Please contact your nominees before submitting their names. The nominees should be aware that if elected to a steering committee position, they are accepting an obligation to attend the Steering Committee meetings held before the monthly open meetings. At the June election, additional nominations will be accepted from the floor.

Please make sure you include each nominee's daytime telephone number and email address. This helps us when we contact them for their acceptance of your nomination.

List your nominations (in the format below) and send email to rbrenner@ChacoCanyon.com
Or US mail to

Rick Brenner
10 Emerson Place #16A
Boston, MA 02114.
Phone: (617) 263-1112
Fax: (617) 263-1113

I nominate the following members for the positions of:

Chairperson:
Email address:
Daytime Telephone:

Vice-Chairperson:
Email address:
Daytime Telephone:

Secretary:
Email address:
Daytime Telephone:

Treasurer:
Email address:
Daytime Telephone:

At-Large Member:
Email address:
Daytime Telephone:

At-Large Member:
Email address:
Daytime Telephone: