SOFTWARE TEST MANAGERS' ROUNDTABLE

A FORUM FOR SHARING INSIGHTS

ABOUT THE MANAGEMENT OF SOFTWARE TESTING

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For more information, contact

- Cem Kaner at kaner@kaner.com, or
- Brian Lawrence at brian@coyotevalley.com.

The Software Test Managers' Roundtable is a periodic gathering of senior practitioners (typically, test managers). Our meetings differ from traditional conferences because we focus on a single topic and run the meeting as an open discussion among all attendees, rather than as a series of time-limited presentations. This lets us dig into the topic in depth. It lets us question each other, and explore each other's ideas in detail.

The Roundtable is based on the Los Altos Workshop on Software Testing (LAWST), which has been meeting three times per year since February, 1997. We've attached the LAWST ground rules memo at the end of this paper. The Roundtable will run pretty much the same way as LAWST. This memo will point out a few differences. Some others might develop as we go forward.

MISSION

Improve the state of the practice of software test management by sharing insights, data, and practical experience in the context of a series of structured, focused discussions among a diverse group of managers and other senior practitioners.

We formed LAWST (and now STMR) out of a belief that we need more cross-pollination of techniques and approaches across companies. People run into the same problem in company after company, but don't realize that they're dealing with a widespread problem. Instead, they think that something is wrong with their group or their company. Facing these problems, different groups try different partial solutions. If you could combine their thinking, everyone would have make progress. To achieve this, we've developed a structure for exposing people to successful techniques and ideas that they might not have otherwise considered, in a setting that lets them explore the ideas in depth and challenge the advocates to demonstrate that their approaches are useful and that they really do work.

Another important benefit of these meetings is the development of a sense of community and collaboration among the participants.

OPERATION

At twice-yearly meetings held in conjunction with the STAR conferences, participants will discuss and analyze well-focused topics critical to test management success.

Meetings will be managed by Cem Kaner and Brian Lawrence, the co-hosts of LAWST.

Topics will be drawn from issues or areas like these:
- Recruiting and training
- Risk identification and management
- Creating effective strategies
- Achieving buy-in
- Managing automation
- Working with development and with users
- Test process improvement
- Defect management strategies
- Measuring test
- Testware configuration management
- Alternative roles, responsibilities and organizations

- Managing internal test labs
- Managing independent test organizations
- Surviving the politics of testing
- Assessing the effectiveness of testing and test organizations

EXPENSES

Software Quality Engineering is providing the meeting room, breakfast and lunch on both days. It is also reimbursing Cem and Brian for their airfare and hotel expense, but is not paying them for their time. You will be responsible for your own transportation and lodging expenses, but there is no charge to attend the meeting.

We're keeping money out of this meeting (you don't pay for the meeting; Cem and Brian don't get paid for running it) to reinforce the sense that this is a voluntary collaboration among everyone in the room. Your contribution to the meeting will be measured in terms of your participation, not your cash.

PARTICIPATION

We understand that some people are quieter than others, but we hope that every person will contribute in some way to the intellectual content of the meeting, or to the output from the meeting. As we note in the LAWST process memo (below), we encourage publication of the ideas raised in the meeting. Any attendee can use any information that was presented at the meeting in her or his paper, so long as she acknowledges the meeting attendees.

We aren't putting people on a schedule and saying, "If you attend the meeting, you must speak at least X% of the time or publish a paper within N months." We've found at LAWST that some people are used to publishing their work, and they start writing papers right away. Others take a few meetings before they co-author a paper with one or two other attendees. Others never publish, but they find a way to contribute valuably to the discussion in the meeting itself.

SELECTION CRITERIA

We look for people who can be have the following characteristics:

- Experience in test management.

- Professional focus is on test management.

- Congenial and collegial in demeanor.

- Possess a sense of professionalism about testing.

- Willing and able to actively participate in the meetings.

SQE (and other people) will recommend candidates to Cem and Brian, who will make the final selections and invitations based on their subjective impressions of the people involved.

A person who attends one meeting is normally invited to attend the next two (one on each coast). However, the decision to re-invite someone is a discretionary one, made jointly by Cem and Brian.

DE-SELECTION

People can make themselves unwelcome at the Round Table in different ways, such as by:

- Unprofessional or inappropriate conduct.

- Publishing the group's materials without appropriate acknowledgements.

- Not showing up after committing to.

Additionally, we might choose to rebalance or diversify the group, which might mean that we cannot re-invite some people simply because there is not enough room for everyone who deserves to attend. Re-invitation might well happen through no fault of the person who has not been re-invited.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is limited to about 15 people per meeting.

Based on our experience at LAWST, we expect that (once these meetings get rolling), many more people will want to attend each meeting than we can accommodate.

SCHEDULE

The meeting will typically run the Sunday and Monday before the associated STAR conference. Several of us will also meet to socialize on Saturday evening. The meeting itself will start at 9 a.m. Sunday (continental breakfast starts at 8:00), break for lunch, and continue until about 6:00 p.m. The Monday meeting will run from 9:00 to about 4:00 p.m. (maybe later, the group decides).