

TT notes - September 10, 2013

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Time: 3 hours 16 minutes

Topic: Why do we self-educate ourselves?

- Belonging to context-driven testing community where self-education is highly valued
 - Is there a pressure to spend time self educating yourself, and can that hurt *how* you self-educate yourself? (e.g. do high profile stuff to make self-education visible)
- Gaining respect for keeping learning
- Credibility: if you show you keep learning, you show that you adhere to the community values
 - Appearance? Showing others that you study something; feeds into credibility.
- Problem of focus and the quality of things to study; question of the degree of value: studying different things has different value and they require different effort (re: Erik's CAST presentation)
- Work: self-education makes work more fun and interesting.
 - Maybe it even helps to make work more meaningful? (Helena's example from "The Upside of Irrationality": putting together Legos)
- Challenges - opening up new avenues for interesting stuff at work and in the community
 - getting better/cooler tasks at work
 - more freedom at work: you know more, can do more stuff (hopefully....)
- Reward - do we work on self-education because there is something in it for us?
 - self-education can help achieve goals. Example: realizing the dream of becoming a test lead/coach/trainer
- Too many blogs: it's easy to feel exasperated because there are so many blogs to read.
 - Tactics: really good blog posts will crop up on Twitter if you follow the right people
- Mission: can self-education lead you to a specific mission (within the community)?
 - learning about a topic and going deep can make you knowledgeable enough to also teach others
 - can people with existing missions get into conflict with newcomers who may take up the same topic? Possible if competition affects income if mission becomes a way to earn money.
 - Difference between a calling (more primal) and mission (chosen?). Example: James Bach's calling is to help people "reunite with their alienated genius and to convince people they are actually smart enough and they have more skills they think they have.

Topic: Why do we send people (incl. less motivated ones) to courses/conferences?

- To start thoughts in the back of people's heads
- To inspire people to...
 - educate themselves
 - educate others
 - help drive valuable change
- To feed curiosity and thus self-education
- To build motivation
 - And by doing that hopefully raise the chance of keeping important talent within the company.
- To challenge the person
- To help him/her to break out of routine
- To bring in a new point of view helping the company to improve.

How to improve the value of a course/conference/similar

- Right attitude
 - I want to be here
 - I want to learn
- Try out what you learn

Personal motivation to attend

- Learn
- Help achieve better results
- New, fresh ideas
- Inspiration
- Help mapping out uncharted territories to support further learning

As long as people can accept there's no limit to their potential, there is no limit to their potential. You set your own!

Topic: How to improve the community? (collection of various threads and questions)

- Is it true that we have the power of an inclusive community (no need of certain education, status, money etc. just a willingness to be part of the community's values) or are there barriers protecting us (history in another community, personal relationships, very strict values)?
 - If inclusive: Can this be a problem with "wrong people" in the community/attempts to exploit?
 - If exclusive: Should we act more "inclusively" (not reject anyone)? What's the gain (discussed power of inclusive groups throughout the history we know of)? What are the dangers of accepting everyone and is such acceptance possible?
- What's the discourse like in context-driven community? Who gets to talk, what is talked about? What kind of thinking is expressed through the language we use?
- Do we want the power of:
 - Shine
 - being role models
 - excellent results
 - question with the purpose to improve (curiosity)
 - inclusive
 - Shadow
 - question with the purpose to humiliate/expose/attack (we're tired of this and it's time it stops)
 - close the community from people trying to exploit (ensure quality)
 - "wrecking ball"
 - "you're in or you're out"
 - Our view is that we look at ourselves as shining but often seems to come across as shadowing.
 - Ask with a curious intent (as opposed to the intent to "shut someone down")
- You need compassion to be able to influence. Making people feel bad is not helpful.
- The right to challenge is the only right not acceptable to challenge in our community.
- Have we built up fundamental opinions and values not acceptable to challenge anymore (exploratory testing, automation, education, possibility (or even responsibility) to challenge people)?
 - If so, are we afraid someone could bring down the community by asking the wrong question or are we just tired wasting time once again on the same discussion... or something else?
- Is there a lot of resistance when trying new ideas to solve a problem (e.g. exclusive) or a necessity for the community to stay professional?
- Do we accept more or less profound changes in people? E.g. someone known for believing in X changes their views. Change in ethics can be perceived as suspicious.
- How do we deal with dissenters? Learn, Burn, Ignore or Listen?
- Is there a risk we set labels on people within the community limiting their ability to try new things (e.g. you are known as the king of education and thus feel forced/limited/stressed to keep developing within education).
 - It's inspiring to see how including most "domain experts" seem to be when new people develop in that area. Example Erik: Meeting Michael Larsen or when speaking Observation with Ilari.
 - Being a "domain expert" could open spots for speaking, income and prestige. Takes passion to overcome those potential losses and focus on possibility.

Topic: Avoid having skill as a blocker to improvement

- "I was young and stupid" - a phrase we both repeated several times during the session until we decided to stop using it
 - Stupid should be something else like adventures, curious, experimenting.
 - What we call "stupid" in that sentence is what we try to influence more mature people to start doing.
 - Beginners Blessing: plunging into and throwing yourself at things you don't know how to do - risk taking without fully understanding what's involved

- As “grown-ups” we often expect/encourage ourselves and others to experiment *but we have to succeed every time*.
- We set our own level. If we want to achieve greatness, seeing no limit is a good start.
- “I want to be as good as ...”
 - Why limit yourself?
 - That person will change
 - How do you compare skills, what aspects should be equal?
 - Change to “I want to become great.”
- The better we get the further we *think* we will drop when taking risks (experiment, ask, try, change). Do we have any proof except we can think of a worse outcome?

Topic: Deal with the pressure to “progress”

- What does it mean to progress?
 - The feeling of learning something new
 - Being able to solve new problems
 - Being presented with new problems (thanks to old ones solved)
 - The ability to explain something you once couldn’t understand
- Most common presenters at conferences (that we identified) have recurring stories. Is there a risk of getting stuck in the past and stopping yourself from progressing? Stuck in your comfort zone. Learning plateaus.
- It’s a risk we focus too much on progress which makes us do high profile stuff that either hurts motivation (not “our decision”) or efficiency (focus on presentation rather than execution)
 - This begs the question: what is progress in self-education?
 - It’s okay to be publicly silent for a while (no blog, Twitter, conferences, speaking...)
 - It’s easy to compare yourself to whoever is in the spotlight at the moment getting lots of attention. Remember the person you compare yourself to often changes and if you keep monitoring the old spot light people some keep developing but in a different way, some disappear, some disappear for a while etc. No matter what you do you will never stay in the spot light 24/7.
 - It’s easy to see what everyone else does but forget you’re doing/progressing in a high tempo as well. You might even look at the world as “you” and “everyone else”. With that view you will never (or rather extremely unlikely) be as productive and quickly developing.
- It’s key to realize your own value.
 - Other people can help you with this.
- Pressure is much up to you. Integrity enough to say “no, I won’t do this to impress someone else / follow someone else’s rules” is important. Doing it once can help you see your value.
- Be realistic. It’s easy to feel behind in an area someone has spent 6 years to develop in and then expect yourself to reach that same level within a month. There are no shortcuts, learning takes time! Focus on what’s important because you will sure not learn everything.
 - Important to ask: what were you doing while the person you look up to worked on the skill you want to have. You may have been doing/working on something else that was useful and that you simply don’t recognize as such.
 - This can be important for people entering testing field without IT background.

Topic: Candy

- Erik ate an obscene amount of American candy and Helena could do nothing but look at it. Could this have affected her thinking?

Format

- Would be interesting to record and share a session like this
- It could be useful to stay more disciplined at one topic (worth trying as topic hopping is very tempting)
- Useful for working through some questions while not achieving complete closure on a topic - loose ends left to explore
- This was a really cool initiative, let’s do it again!