

## **Sun Microsystems, Systems Test Offsite**

### **Creative Self-organizing Inquiry - *Architecture for Teamwork***

As captured by Greg Walsh (HR Sun) from board work and tape recordings.

The architecture for teamwork as defined by Peter Stonefield (outside consultant) is a clearly defined Shared Purpose, a Shared Vision and Shared Commitments to make it happen.

#### **The Shared Purpose of Systems Test**

To provide cost effective systems test which completely validates the functionality of fully integrated Sun and partner products for our internal and external customers.

#### **Self-Organizing Inquiry**

Throughout the previous afternoon Peter had guided the management team through a creative self-organizing process involving alternating series of analytical and creative exercises to discover "what was trying to happen" in the evolution of Systems Test and create a rough draft of the emerging Shared Vision and Strategy. The board work and the symbolic, synthesizing images resulting from the creative imaging process were organized and posted on the walls.

#### **Vision Narratives**

Peter opened this segment by suggesting to the team that the power of a vision lies in the narrative, conversation or story one has with oneself and others about it. The images already have traction in the mind of the creator. To reinforce them and enroll others, the narratives need to be communicated to others. What is important is that each member of the team creates their own personal narrative about the vision and then tests it for congruency with the vision stories of the others.

After giving them 15 minutes to prepare, each team member presented their personal narrative about the emerging Shared Vision of the group. The energy of this segment builds dramatically as the group interacts with the vision narratives of each presenter, joining their thoughts and feelings with those of the individual as they displayed their images on the board.

As people shared their vision narratives, what emerged were image sets that revealed the dynamic motion and evolution of the enterprise. Some team members had visions that described complimentary aspects of a common theme. The narratives revealed a synthesis of convergent and healing images, where necessary components, previously missing are now found to be in place. Many of the metaphorical stories reflect the ethnic or cultural background of the storyteller adding to the richness, depth, and shared meaning of the process. The result is the organizational awakening to the increasing capacity and actualizing potential of itself and the uniqueness of its members. Everyone began to understand what Peter meant by ego transcending meta-motivation.

As enthusiasm built, people would add on or contribute to another's vision, eventually the group was so involved (and the quality of the tape recording so low) that I chose to abandon any attempt to identify the individual voices, and began to relate all of them as the expression of a single team voice. At that point, every change voice or viewpoint is listed only as TM (team member)

(What follows are 5 vision stories that are representative of theme and direction of all the others.)

#### **Kwan's Narrative: Building Bridges**

In my images, I see the two banks of a river, with water flowing between them. One bank is Sun, the other is Sun's customers. In the beginning many people tried to bridge the gap (in the drawing Kwan represents the individual organizations as a separate logs, or planks, with lots of space in between). You could get product through by walking or by wheelbarrows. But, because there was little unity the capacity to serve the customer was small. Now [the present] people are getting smarter, the individual efforts of various groups are becoming more aligned. The capacity increases, but there is still segmentation. They have not yet banded together. We can deliver bigger products, more products, but it is still not the ideal situation. But what we are moving towards is unity of all the groups, and then we have created a bridge that we can drive a wagon over. With this level of unity in System Test, even if one of the logs breaks it is not a problem. You can still drive a wagon over it; you can fix the log while continuing to deliver to the customers.

Jugal - System Test is the bridge, the critical link to the customer.

Peter - What I hear you saying is that if we make the planks complementary we can create synergy.

Kwan- Yes-definitely.

### Jugal's Narrative: Quenching the Customers Thirst

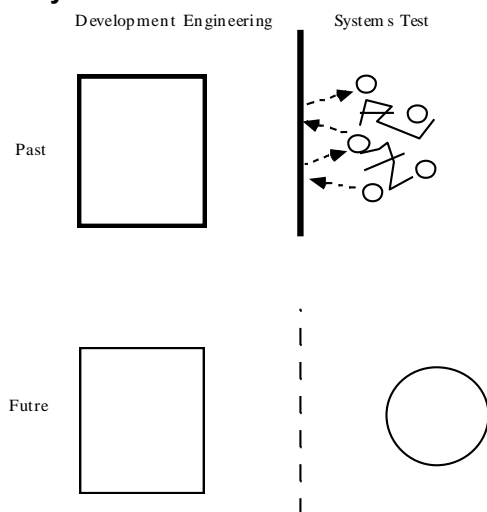
In the past, the task of Systems Test was to quench the thirst for quality of our customers. System test heard this and everyone ran off and started digging many small wells. This brought water, but too little, too late. The customer was still thirsty and everyone was tired. Yet somehow we survived. We come to the present, people recognized that their individual efforts could not dig a well deep enough and fast enough to satisfy the needs of the customer, so based upon common interests, likings or personalities, we grouped together. Little bigger groups with a little more focus. This is where we are today. Somehow, in some combination of these groups we get enough water to our customer to satisfy them in a timely manner. Yet we are experiencing a lot of pain digging the wells. We are digging the wells with primitive tools, wasting lots of energy, and have no idea how deep we will have to go to find water. We are coming to a future where we will see and use the right approach, the right technology and we will understand how, if we all dig together, we can reach a water level that can satisfy our customers thirst now and in the future without all of us feeling tired. Once we figure this out, our lives will be easier from then on. It is just a matter of continuing to improve it. When we are all working together digging a single well, we can all be looking at the same thing, thinking how we can do it better? Instead of fighting with each other, we have love and compassion for each other. We can think of how to make each others lives better.

Peter - How would you characterize the gap between where we are now and where we want to be?

Jugal - The customer is confused now, depending on which group is serving them. Sometimes the customer is happy and satisfied, sometimes not, sometimes partially satisfied again and again. We are better than we were in the past, but we do not have a consistent supply.

Fred - I would say the water is inconsistent, the delivery is not always timely and most important, the customer is no longer beginning to identify use for water. We are not looking for additional uses for water because we are only able to deliver the minimum of what is required now. Were there to be an abundance of water, we and our customers together could identify many new uses for it (Systems Test's work).

### Jody's Narrative: The Circle



(Pointing to her drawings on the board) In my imagery I saw the Past like this: This is a wall - and this is [System] Test (small circles on the side of the wall) - and this is Development Engineering (large squares on the other side) - and Test is represented by the small circles. This stands for how we interact with each other, (crossed lines) how complicated and how hard - and this is how we interacted with the individual people in the development (large boxes ignoring small circles - no fit - different world views) - and the size does the talking, and how people give respect - you can see the contrast. You can see how we interact is very complicated, a result from how we acted in the past - so complicated - can't even tell who is doing what, who is saying what. Eventually it migrates to this - because we start helping each other, start interacting the shape (the individuals of

system test) starts growing bigger and round - and we become a very big circle, not a square - and no personal ego, that is how I view it. We cannot even tell this is you or this is me - but over here (the development side) - they see a big circle - you can see the size - but we don't care because we are good - we are! - We know it in our mind. We feel we have internal value - and we know we contribute to external value - we actually feel that way - because the destruction from their treatment of us in the past is not so strong anymore - we feel it less and less every day. We feel our hearts pushing us -- expanding the circle.

Peter - In the meta-mind, the circle usually represents wholeness, unity, loss of ego, harmony - where the boxes (development) represent individualism, fragmentation, separation and ego.

Jugal - If I understood you correctly Jody, what you are saying is that once we become a circle, our strength comes from teamwork, the values and commitments and trust within each individual will join together to become a bigger force, which is represented by the last circle? Is it a combined coherent force?

Jody - (Responding to Jugal, gesturing toward the board) Yes because you see, before it was individual lines.

Peter - Incoherent forces.

Jody - And you see the lines going every way...But here you can hardly see anything like this discordant communication - We are really connected!

Peter - You can't break a circle easily. A square collapses if you press on a corner, but a circle flexes or rolls when pressured. It is stronger, more adaptable.

Jody - (gesturing in three dimension) It's a circle.

Jugal - It's spinning - with high energy.

### **Alan's Narrative: Genetic Evolution**

What I noticed in all my drawings is there is a progression an evolution. In the very early days you have a wagon train coming down out of the mountain. In the next one you have a frog emerging from the marsh and losing its tail. When you (Peter) were speaking of the evolution of the group as a self-organizing organic process my mind went back to the days in biology studying DNA. The structure of DNA is almost ladder like. The cyanine and thiamine connected by chromosomes, but the connectors, instead of being chromosomes are things like our employees, and teamwork and accountability. The customers are at the top of the strand. In the past, the pieces of this ladder were missing so we had difficulty connecting with our customers. None of the pieces went all the way up. Eventually we figured out how to connect with them, but it was still incomplete. What I see as the future is a complete DNA structure that goes all the way to the top. If you think of the System Test as one element in a larger organic structure (Sun) then the health of its DNA contributes to the overall health and continuing evolution of the greater organism.

Peter - Here is a corollary or metaphor to consider: DNA is to our biological development as purpose, creative vision is to our psychological and organizational development. Hermes Trismegustus, an old Egyptian hermetic philosopher, postulated a law of correspondence: "As above so below." In other words similar patterns tend to co-exist at different levels in a system. Creating a shared vision this way is evolutionary learning in an organization. Innovation provides the breakthroughs in test strategy and process improvement provides the discipline for the continuous refinement learning that follows.

TM – If we collaborate and share our knowledge we can innovate, enhance each others DNA, Sun's and our customers. Wow!

### **Fred's Chart: The 12 key Indicators**

Well, being the verbal guy I am, I don't have a picture, I have a chart. In terms of the activities we do, the focus was on execution, now it's got to be on development and innovation. In terms of how we view our world [outcomes] it was win-lose, zero sum. Now it's my-gain your-gain, win-win.

Peter - This is where we are going, because it's now versus future?

TM - How about old and new? Our self esteem has been low, and now it will be high. Automation will go from low to high.

TM - I would suggest another category; Value added.

Fred - What would you put in here?

TM - Low to medium – lukewarm.

Fred - Great I love it, because you know what over here is...Hot!

TM - What about a category called "Core Competencies?" Going from mediocre to...

TM - Stellar!

TM - I want to add communication and teamwork. They go from poor to...

TM - Most excellent!

TM - I have another category to add, "Customer satisfaction".

TM - and "Quality of life".

Fred - Hold on. So what would you put in the boxes under customer satisfaction?

TM - Luke warm and Hot!

Fred - And what would you put under the "Quality of life?"

TM - In the toilet, and we want to be flush with success! When things are going well, you won't see the toilet on top of my work station.

TM - I would like to say that the Self Esteem bullet that you have put down is a function of some of the things we have mentioned here. As we increase adding value, as our core competencies go up and communication and teamwork flourish, the self-esteem will increase proportional to that.

Peter - I would like to add a category about energy. The thought I had was that in both old and new there is high energy, but in the old it's dysfunctional and scattered. High energy that results in unproductive stress. The new way is high energy, with a certain synergy to it.

TM - From distress to eustress. Going from entropy to syntropy.

Peter - Yes, you could say incoherent to coherent, the point is that it [the energy] will be much more focused, like going from incandescent light to a laser.

TM - The metaphor is like this: The 'before' is like a pot of boiling water, all its energy is escaping, whereas the future is like a spinning wheel. The energy is organized so that you can capture it and have it perform useful work for you. That is what I see, one is disorganized energy and the other is organized energy.

TM - I would also add a category, on the "Quality of deliverables".

TM - That's a test coverage issue.

TM - Well, in the future we should know that.

Peter - From unknown to known and high.

## **Suggestions for Communicating the Narratives**

After hearing all the vision narratives and checking for alignment, everyone expressed their enthusiasm and excitement about going back to their departments and engaging their employees in a vision conversation about the evolution of Systems Test. Peter said that “the power of the process would continue by repeating the narratives back in the work place.” Each manager was encouraged to share their vision narrative with associates in casual conversations throughout Systems Test and beyond. “You don’t need any arm waving charismatic performance, just be yourself. You will find that refinements and subtle but important nuances get added as you repeat the story and the creative self-organizing process continues. You will be expressing your creativity and building your own intimate connection or identification with the vision and the values embedded in it. The result is that the “energy” expressed with the narrative will have the integrity, heart, and enthusiasm that effects the listener while building your commitment to act congruently and make it happen.” Peter also recommended we start our management staff meetings with people reporting their experiences of telling their stories and of employee feedback.

## **Self-organizing New Leadership Roles, Identities and Acknowledgments**

This segment was originally intended to clarify current and future leadership roles that the group members envision themselves as playing in System Test. Using a self-organizing creative process similar to the group process each individual discovered and image of what was trying to happen in the evolution of their individual leadership. Peter thought that it would provide contextual frame for understanding the behaviors and personal sharing of the various team members when refining the vision statement, strategy, and future collaboration.

Each member presented their ‘next step’ leadership “success strategy” or role, ie., director, clarifier, visionary, talent scout, thought leader, systems thinker, architect, collaborative leader etc. Peter expanded the dialog to include perceptions of each others uniqueness and special contributions based on who they are (attitudes, qualities, and characteristics) as well what they did (skills and experience in their management / technical roles).

The session quickly developed into a spontaneous expression of collaborative interests from within the group. This relates to homework assignments from "Natural Leadership" in several ways. Who we are as leaders is every bit as important as what we do. It points out that in spite of all the conflict and tension within the management team before the offsite what has really been “trying to happen” or self-organize was group harmony and cohesiveness. If you consider the whole group as a metaphor for a single mind (a collective meta-mind where each individual represents a unique attribute set) the conversation illustrates concepts of integrating the uniqueness of each person into a coordinated harmonious team capable of functioning at a higher and higher levels of performance.

You could see integration take place at both an individual and team level almost simultaneously. Keep in mind we came here to create a vision and what we ended up with is a solid connection between each other and to what Peter talked about as the drive in all living systems to integrate and perfect itself. To paraphrase from Peter's article, "As leaders, our personal evolution must pace organizational development. ....We can do this by facilitating the natural Personal Integration processes that are already trying to get us there. If you block the expression of who you deeply are...and your natural evolution as a leader and try to fit your self into one of those ‘one size fits all’ leadership models, the organization will never receive the benefits of your natural leadership abilities. The more permission we have to express more of ourselves, the more flexible and situationally appropriate we will become, enabling us to liberate our employees’ full potential as well as our own and bring our organization to an entirely new class of performance.”

After you read over this section, you might want to reread Peter's essay in your offsite binder. Finally, have fun reading this over, it was a wonderful moment. Enjoy!