

REMOTE WORKING AT SPRY FOX Andrew Fray



3 2 1

Hey I'm Andrew Fray and this is Remote Working at Spry Fox

This is a case study of how Spry Fox makes high-quality indie games while being fully remote.

TODO

TODO

- Why Remote?

TODO

- Why Remote?
- The Archetypal Remote Developer

TODO

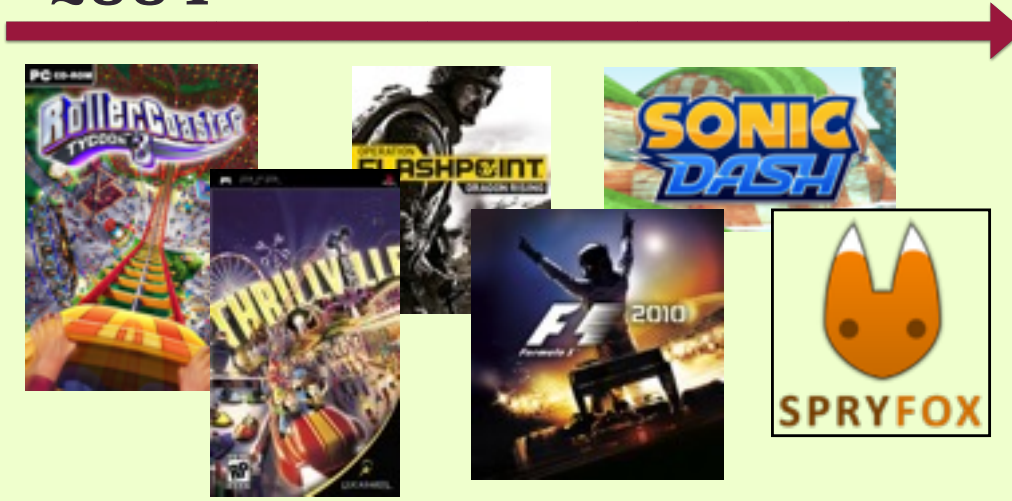
- Why Remote?
- The Archetypal Remote Developer
- Workflow and Tools

TODO

- Why Remote?
- The Archetypal Remote Developer
- Workflow and Tools
- Remote-Control Team Building

@tenpn

2004



I've worked in big 150 person co-located teams, 15 person co-located teams, and for the last 2 years I've worked from my dining room for spry fox.

DISCLAIMERS

- I am not the director of production or anything. We have a flat structure, and I like talking about this stuff. Some of it was in place when I started, some changes were made by me, some were made by others. We iterate.
- This is not a holy grail. It's what's working quite well for us. I know we could improve, and I know it might not be a good fit for all remote studios.

SPRY

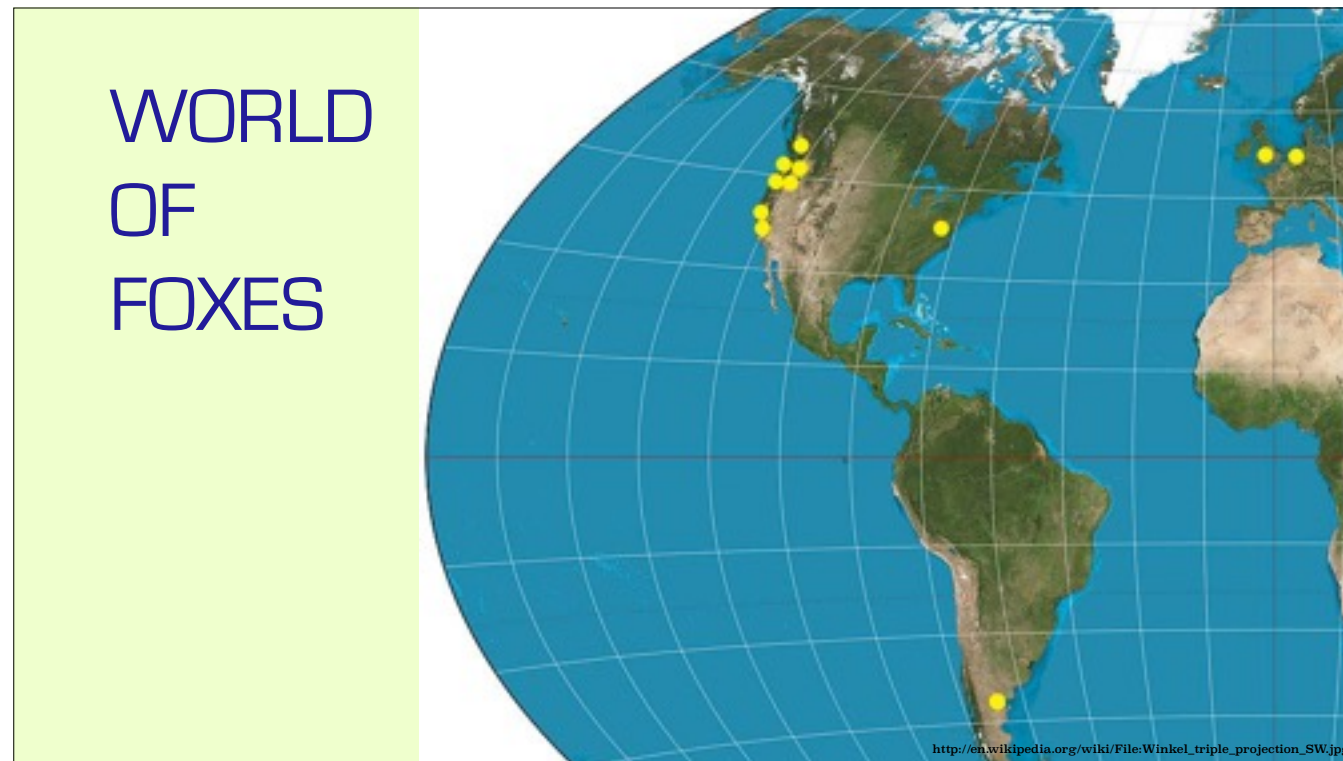
FOX

HISTORY

HISTORY



WORLD OF FOXES



Fully remote: 11 developers, 3 continents, 5 timezones.

Four all in Seattle, but there is no head office. They don't co-work except very occasionally.

Two in SF have recently started regularly co-working, but it's an experiment.



Don't have the cash for big company holidays. This is the most spry foxes that have ever been in the room together. Still 5 foxes I have never met in person.

WHY
REMOTE?

BAD OFFICES



<http://richg42.blogspot.co.uk/>

Big. Distracting. But weirdly, the default for most game studios.

POOR PRODUCTIVITY

- *<http://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/the-open-office-trap>*
- "Damaging to the workers attention spans, productivity, creative thinking, and satisfaction."

Peopleware dissed open-plan 30 years ago! It's nothing more than a hack to help communication, and a cheap way of housing people.

GOOD OFFICES



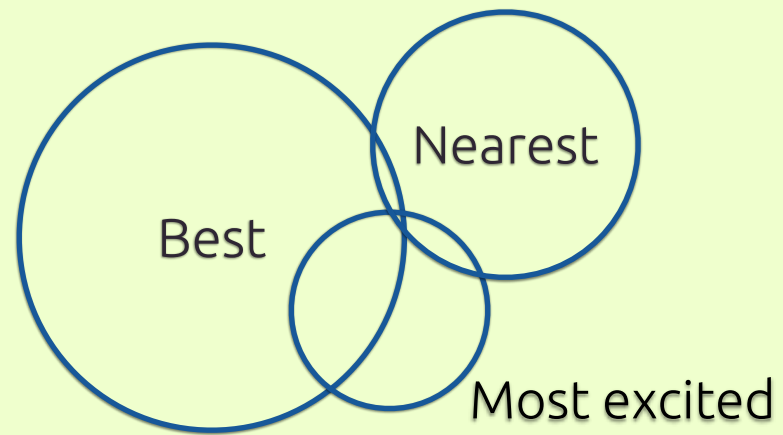
\$\$\$

Better offices, lots of space. Stack overflow in the bottom left have personal offices! But \$\$\$.

GO HOME

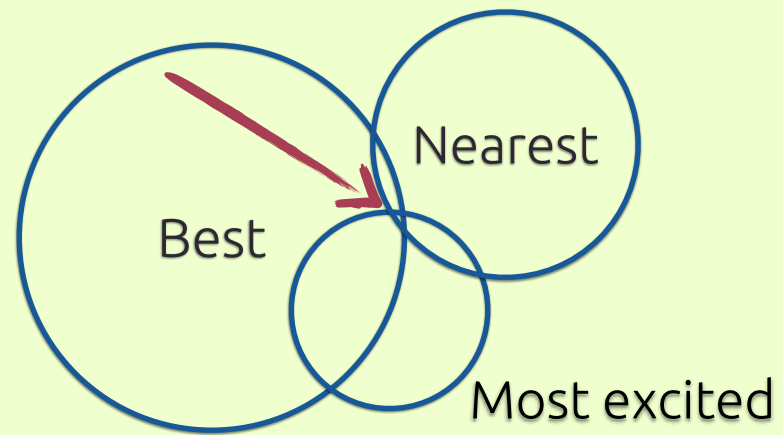
- *<http://www.theguardian.com/money/work-blog/2014/apr/30/what-happened-to-remote-working>*
- Remote workers: "13% more productive, fewer sick days, quieter working environment."
- *<https://hbr.org/2014/01/to-raise-productivity-let-more-employees-work-from-home>*
- "To Raise Productivity, Let More Employees Work from Home"

WIDE TALENT POOL



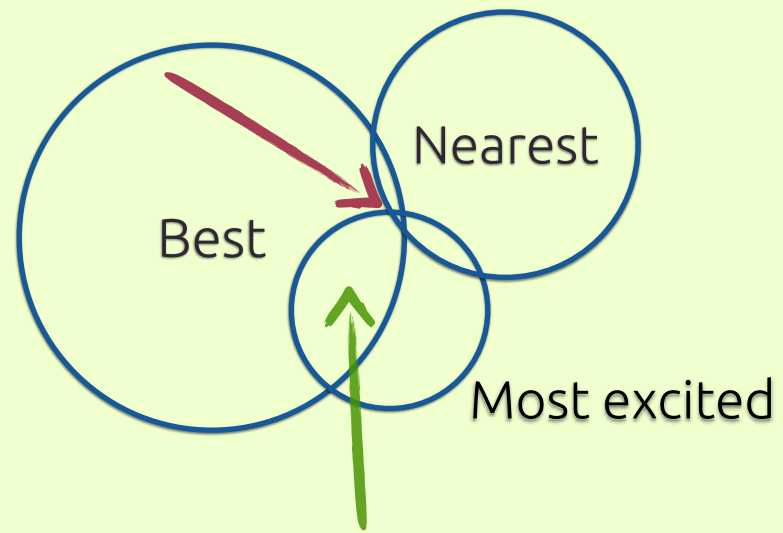
We want to work with high-quality people also excited about working for spray fox. This may be a small pool! So let's increase it by removing any locality restriction.

WIDE TALENT POOL



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We want to work with high-quality people also excited about working for spray fox. This may be a small pool! So let's increase it by removing any locality restriction.

BUT

NOT FOR EVERYONE

You need some additional skills to be a good remote developer. What are they?

THE ARCHETYPAL REMOTE DEVELOPER

THE SILENCE

- if working from home, might not see other devs for a long time
- _but_ can play music, sing, in underpants, at 3pm
- transition: have a good routine in-place for first few weeks
- extroverts may need more, co-working can help.
- not all co-working born equal - I occasionally work in a consultant/management office, where they can't offer the same kind of support network that other devs could.

THE SILENCE

- Extroverts may have issues

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AUTONOMOUS

Wood for the trees: when you can't see the bug despite walking through lines of code, because you're too close to the problem. Need experience to be able to step back without support.

Sometimes quicker to make the decision than wait to talk it through. Do you trust staff to do that?

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- Support network
- Taking decisions

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SELF-AWARE

Much harder to pick up on problems over skype than when you can walk past an obviously-frustrated dev.

SELF-AWARE

- Devs need to self-assess

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SELF-AWARE

- Devs need to self-assess
- Should not be self-conscious about sharing issues

Much harder to pick up on problems over skype than when you can walk past an obviously-frustrated dev.

COMMUNICATIVE

Once they've become self-aware of an issue, they need to share it.

COMMUNICATIVE

- A **vital** skill

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COMMUNICATIVE

- A **vital** skill
- Err on over-sharing

Once they've become self-aware of an issue, they need to share it.

TIMEZONES

Working on GMT, I do some work in the evening to overlap with most of spry foxes' hours.

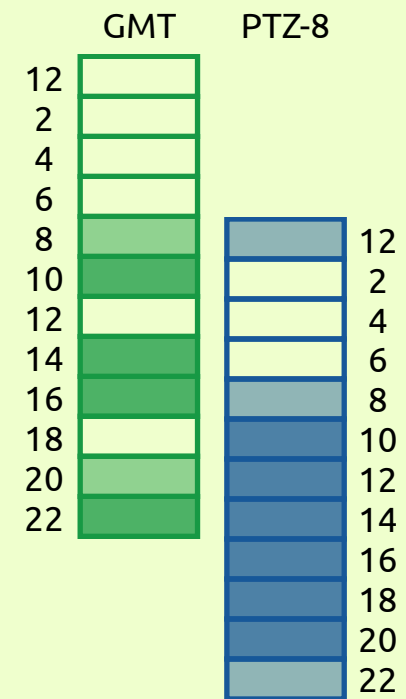
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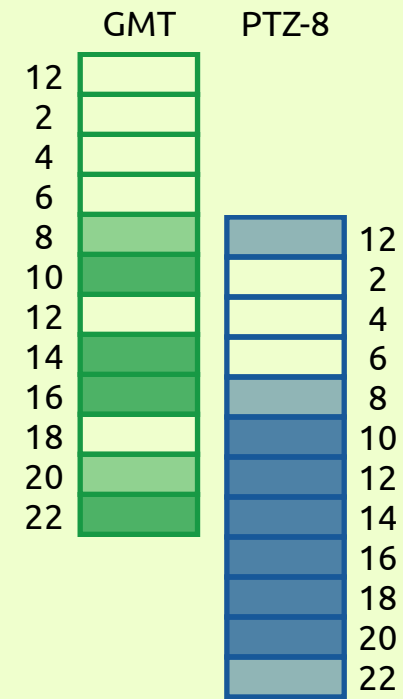
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TIMEZONES

- Overlap
- Private life impact



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REMOTE ARCHETYPE

Almost the definition of a senior or principle developer

REMOTE ARCHETYPE

- Autonomous, Trusted, Self-aware, Communicative

Almost the definition of a senior or principle developer

REMOTE ARCHETYPE

- Autonomous, Trusted, Self-aware, Communicative
- Hard to be a remote junior

Almost the definition of a senior or principle developer

COMMUNICATION BANDWIDTH

TEXT SUCKS

interleaved conversations/delayed responses

COMMUNICATION BANDWIDTH

- eyes direction
- hands
- posture
- pauses in speech
- tone of voice

TEXT SUCKS

- Weak threading

interleaved conversations/delayed responses

COMMUNICATION BANDWIDTH

- eyes direction
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- tone of voice

TEXT SUCKS

- Weak threading
- Lacks vital audio/visual cues

interleaved conversations/delayed responses

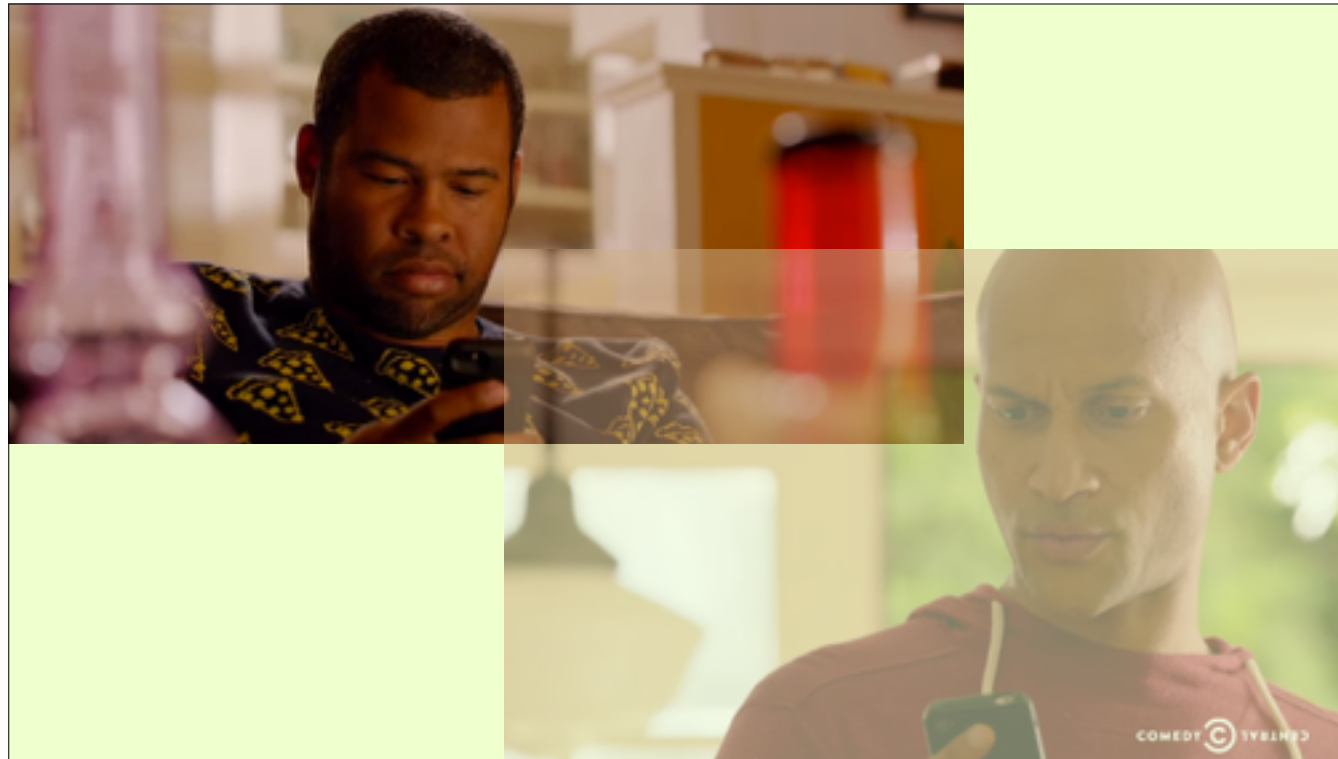
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Peele: “Assumed we’d meet at the bar. Whatever. I don’t care.”

Key: “Whatever? I don’t _care_?”



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Peele: "Assumed we'd meet at the bar. Whatever. I don't care."

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TEXT BLOWS

More thought, more time.

Because of that, becomes more formal.

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- Not only *missing*, but *misinterpreted*

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TEXT BLOWS

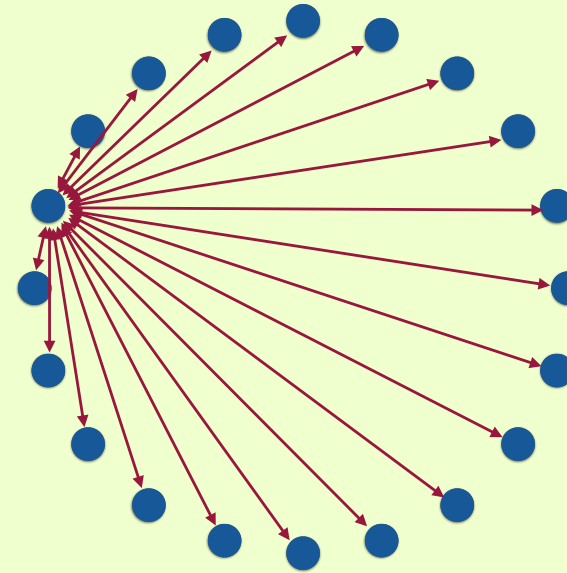
- Not only *missing*, but *misinterpreted*
- Text-based takes more effort

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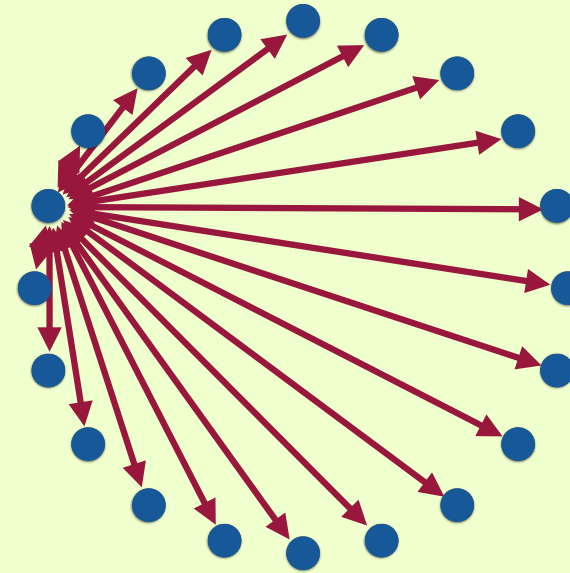
WORKFLOWS AND TOOLS

TEAM SIZE



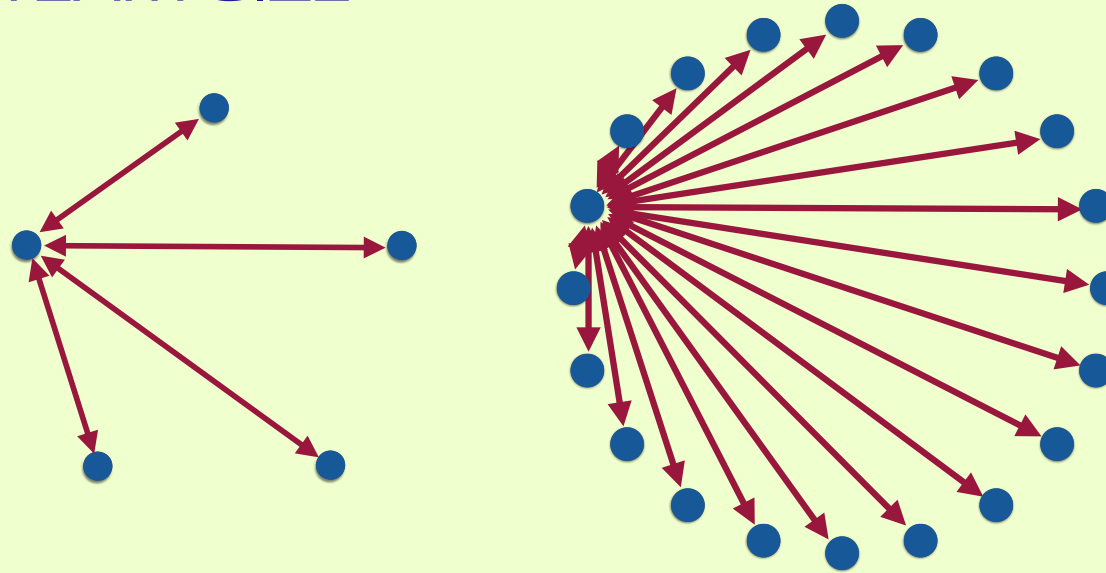
2-5 to avoid communication bandwidth issue. Once 10 and no-one liked it.

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TEXT FEATURES

In priority order from high to low.

- rooms keep notifications and noise low, by putting everyone on a project in a room together.
- mentions good for pulling in those who span projects

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TEXT FEATURES

- Rooms
- Persistent, searchable history
- Mentions
- Guests/external accounts
- Jump to VOIP/video

In priority order from high to low.

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- mentions good for pulling in those who span projects

GOOGLE DOCS

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- Great comments, history, collaboration

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- Blog-post style design docs:
- [http://www.lostgarden.com/2011/05/
game-design-logs.html](http://www.lostgarden.com/2011/05/game-design-logs.html)



TRELLO

...whatever project management suite you use, update it!

TRELLO

- Some better at updating it than others!

...whatever project management suite you use, update it!

DROPBOX

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- Internal builds

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- Internal builds
- Screengrab-to-link

TIMEZONES

overnighters: log log log.

TIMEZONES

- Be ready for handover

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- Communicate presence

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cheatable build and clear Needs Eval, then roll a non-cheatable build and certify it for release.

I'm still afk so fed could confirm, but I think 869 android should be cheats + everything.

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- Google Calendar for appointments, or *worldtimebuddy.com*

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TIMEZONES

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- Communicate presence
- Google Calendar for appointments, or *worldtimebuddy.com*
- "Spry Fox Time" is Seattle time

overnighters: log log log.

REMOTE CONTROL TEAM BUILDING

INVISIBLE HAND

“space for personality” in all of our workflows, to help get to know people through collaboration rather than socialising.

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- Good teams have trust

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- "Space for personality"

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VIDEO

Hard when you're all loners!

space for personality in the sense that people are more likely to joke, and you can see their dress sense, their personal mannerisms.

VIDEO

- Vital for tone and body language

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VIDEO

- Vital for tone and body language
- No dress code

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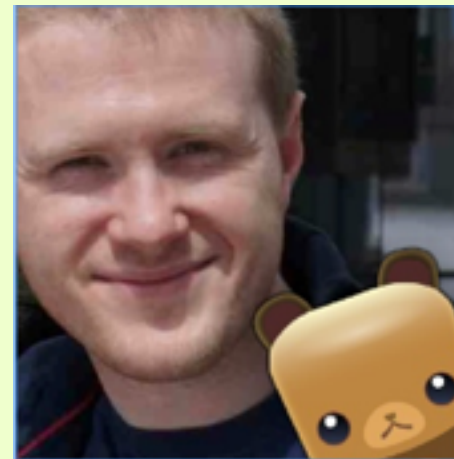
VIDEO

- Vital for tone and body language
- No dress code
- Voice calls distant second best

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space for personality in the sense that people are more likely to joke, and you can see their dress sense, their personal mannerisms.

CHANGE AVATAR



Easy hack! change your default avatar to show your face and mouth. This helps communication because people can “look you in the eye” even if you’re on text.

BI-WEEKLY COMPANY CALL

Chance to ask Qs too. Much higher frequency of 1-on-1s than most companies, because these issues are harder to surface.

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- Cross-silo info

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BI-WEEKLY COMPANY CALL

- Cross-silo info
- Bi-weekly 1-on-1 with Dave or Daniel

Chance to ask Qs too. Much higher frequency of 1-on-1s than most companies, because these issues are harder to surface.

GLOBAL CHAT ROOMS

- Global random, global company biz

Links, discussion. Noise.

“GOOD MORNING”

space for personality! do it how you like - links, jokes, quotes, in different languages.

injects some noise into global chat.

on jukebox tuesdays, say good morning by announcing what you're listening to right now.

“GOOD MORNING”

- When you are ready for work, no expectation of reply

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“GOOD MORNING”

- When you are ready for work, no expectation of reply
- Presence

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- When you are ready for work, no expectation of reply
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- Flavours: Jukebox Tuesdays

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BIRTHDAYS

Birthdays are great socialising opportunity. But we have no kitchen in which to cut cake!

Instead everyone but birthday fox gather in private room to draw silly birthday pictures.

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- Little bit special

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BIRTHDAYS

- Little bit special
- Secret chat group

Birthdays are great socialising opportunity. But we have no kitchen in which to cut cake!

Instead everyone but birthday fox gather in private room to draw silly birthday pictures.

BIRTHDAYS

- Little bit special
- Secret chat group
- Collaborative drawing tool

Birthdays are great socialising opportunity. But we have no kitchen in which to cut cake!

Instead everyone but birthday fox gather in private room to draw silly birthday pictures.



As much for everyone else as the birthday fox, as we joke about pictures.
space for personality!

WEEKLY MULTIPLAYER

Timezones make this hard
(Potential market!)

WEEKLY MULTIPLAYER

- Not really stuck

Timezones make this hard
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WEEKLY MULTIPLAYER

- Not really stuck
- Something collaborative and chatty.
Minecraft > TF2

Timezones make this hard
(Potential market!)

RECAP

SUMMARY

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- Team-building is hard, needs "space for personality"

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- Communication takes effort
- Does not scale well beyond 10
- Productive environment
- Trusted, talented team from huge talent pool
- Great games

RESOURCES

- Wide Teams Podcast
- *workplace.stackexchange.com/*
- *reddit.com/r/telecommuting*
- *github.com/lukasz-madon/awesome-remote-job*

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