PAGER ROTATION DUTIES

BY DEREK LIVERMONT
MODULE 7, CSD 380

WHY DO WE NEED PAGER ROTATION?

- In critical IT systems, it's important to have a defined system for responding to system outages.
- When something breaks, a designated on-call engineer will receive a notification and begin initial investigation. What broke? Why? Is it something that's easily corrected or needs escalation to a specific individual or team?
- If escalation is necessary, the on-call engineer needs to quickly activate proper individuals and teams to minimize downtime
- This position should be rotated to maintain work/life balance

BENEFITS OF A GOOD ON CALL SYSTEM

Employee satisfaction – Effective rotation shares responsibility and reduces burnout. Managing that schedule well is important.

Improved reliability and customer satisfaction – Addressing issues and outages promptly makes a company and a team look good.

More accountability and transparency – Ultimately, an on calls systems not only makes sure that people know their responsibilities and schedules but will also provide metrics on how often people are paged, how quickly incidents are handled, etc.

WHO IS USUALLY ON CALL?

Depends on the type and size of organization but includes:

1. Helpdesk or NOC (Network Operations Center)
2. System Administrators or Operations Engineers.
3. DevOps Engineers/Site Reliability Engineers
4. Developer Teams themselves.

Bases on newer DevOps models, gone are the days of operations handling all after hours incidents. Instead, they are routed based on root cause. Most organizations have a first point of contact like a help-desk but many others are expected to step in based on type of emergency.

VARIETY OF ROTATION TYPES

There are several different ways to rotate depending on the team as well as the type of organization

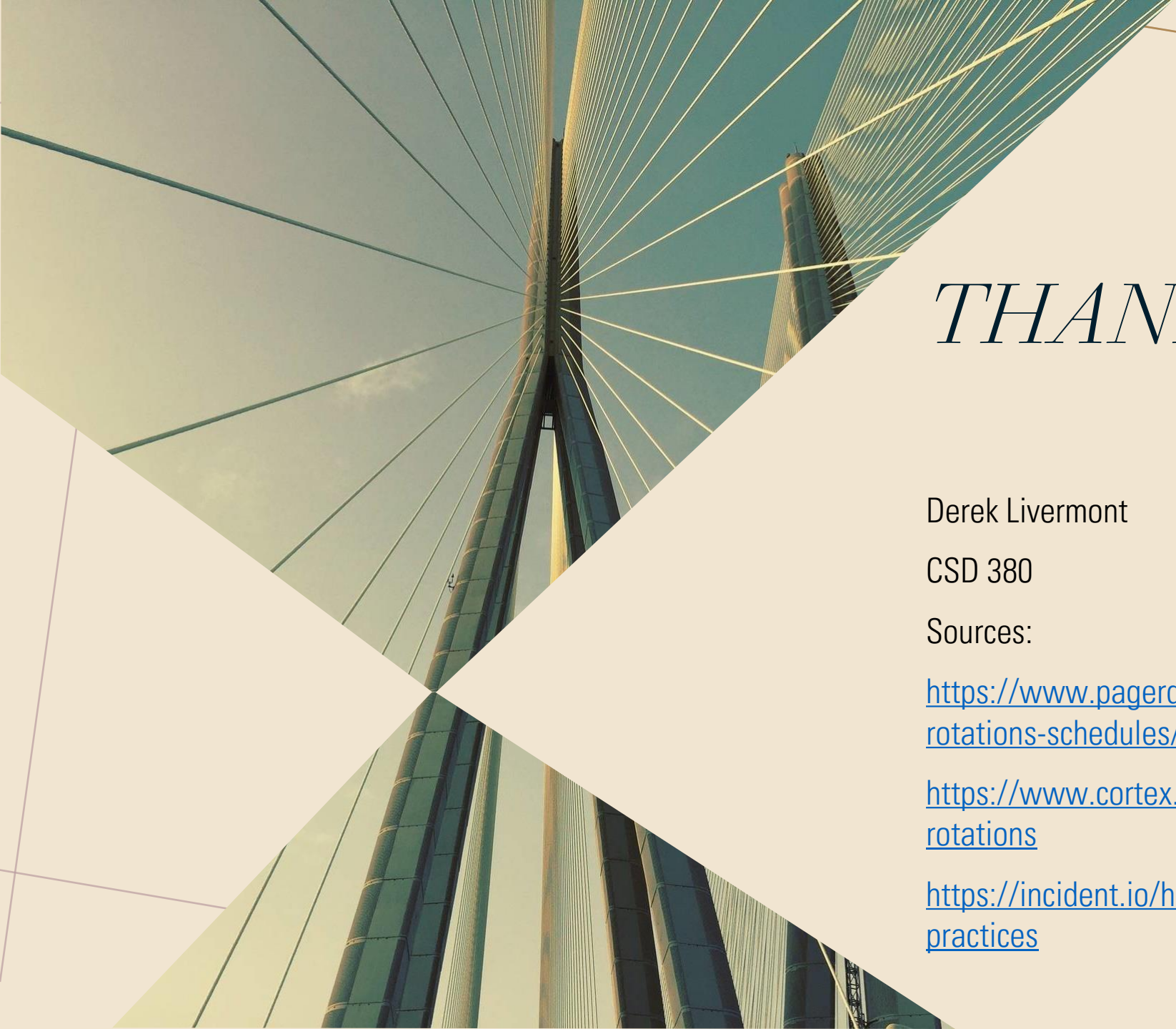
- **Bi-weekly** – An engineer takes the role for a solid two weeks. This means a longer time of being on-call but less frequency. Usually good for teams that don't receive a lot of after hours calls
- **Week and Weekends** – This is useful when overnight hours are involved and gives people more breaks especially when there's high call volume
- **Follow-the-sun** – This is useful in a global organization with team members spread across working time zones. Reduces or eliminates someone having to be first responder during their local nighttime.

HOW DO WE IMPROVE OUR ON-CALL ROTATION?

- **Assign Teams and Roles** – It's important to know who the right on-call engineer can be reached based on the problem. This should be documented or included in an automated system.

- **Automate what you can** – Email notifications for potential outages as well as institutionalized contact systems. There are many on-call software packages out there and most systems have some type of automated alerting.

- **Monitor on-call performance metrics** – Much like day-to-day activities, it's important that the organization understands how many calls are coming in, what causes the most after-hours problems, and how quickly issues are corrected. We can't improve what we don't measure.



THANK YOU

Derek Livermont

CSD 380

Sources:

https://www.pagerduty.com/resources/learn/call-rotations-schedules/

https://www.cortex.io/post/best-practices-for-on-call-rotations

https://incident.io/hubs/on-call/on-call-rotation-best-practices