Affinity

Defining Affinity

- Work is often broken down into five categories:
- **Reactionary:** Work that happens in response to something else (such as responding to emails or incoming tickets) rather than proactively
- **Planning:** Putting effort into scheduling and prioritizing of other work
- **Procedural:** Maintenance work such as following up on previously sent emails or filling out expense reports
- **Insecurity:** Work that we do in response to our own insecurities such as checking our personal or organizational reputations online
- **Problem solving:** Work that requires creativity and focus

Defining Affinity

- There is a sixth category of work, called **relationship work**.
- Relationship work is a social catalyst, facilitating work so as to shorten the time to get other work done, reducing communication barriers, and building trust based on regard.
- Affinity is the measure of the relationship strength between individuals, teams, business units, and even companies.

Interpersonal Ties Within Teams

- A team with too much conflict might not have enough internal stability to accomplish its goals, but too much conflict avoidance leads to a homogeneity of thought that reduces creativity and problem-solving skills.

Defining Affinity

Strength of interpersonal ties can be measured by several factors:

- **Shared time**: Simply spending time working together can help to strengthen workplace relationships.

- **Intensity of the relationship:** Overcoming challenges and resolving the conflicts, especially in intense experiences such as resolving a production outage, can bring people together.

- **Reciprocity of shared stories:** Opening up and sharing both personal wins and adversity is a great way to get to know each other.

- **Reciprocity of support:** Taking on-call over holidays, covering a shift when a teammate is on vacation, or assisting someone with an issue they're working on are all great ways to support each other.

Benefits of Improved Affinity

Increased empathy and communication:

- – Helps people feel that their voices are heard and their concerns appreciated
- – Creates a cycle of improved morale and productivity.
- – Create more robust and productive organizations that are able to offer more creative solutions
- – Work more effectively across business units, and iterate more quickly.
- – Improved affinity is good not only for the people working for your business, but for the business as well.
- Shortened Cycle Time
- Reduction of Communication Barriers
- Trust and Innovation

Requirements for Affinity

- Organizational affinity does not happen overnight, without effort, or without the right circumstances to allow it.

- what circumstances and characteristics are required for affinity to take place
  - Slack
  - Explicit Values and Goals
  - Space
  - Collaboration and Cooperation

Requirements for Affinity

- Slack
  - a state of not actively working
  - Often this idleness is perceived as not productive or efficient, but in reality, planning intentional slack is necessary to avoid over-assigning work.
  - Any work that is unplanned or takes longer to finish than anticipated.
  - To figure out how much slack you need, first you need to understand how variable the work is and then add some buffer on top of that.
  - If you experience exactly 20 hours of unplanned work every
  - week, plan for 20 hours plus the amount of time needed to care for the social network and individual growth.

Requirements for Affinity

- Explicit Values and Goals
  - Many teams find that if they don't explicitly plan for something, it won't get done.
  - Both individual contributors and their managers need to understand that relationship work is a valued and important part of the
  - building and maintaining relationships provides many benefits for both individuals and teams.
  - It is necessary to make this work explicitly valued, so that expectations are clear.
  - Managers and team leads should express the expected outcomes, and then make sure to celebrate individuals accomplishing these outcomes.

Requirements for Affinity

- Space
  - Within a company, create a shared break space that allows for collaboration across teams with the right infrastructure for ad hoc creativity and problem solving.
  - These shared spaces should not come at the cost of individual working spaces, as that
  - encroaches on territory and identity. In-house coffee bars are a good option, providing
  - a mental break from the current tasks, as well as a physical break area.
  - Creating these small spaces to gather and work encourages individuals and teams to work more autonomously to collect the information they need.

Requirements for Affinity

- Collaboration and Cooperation
  - In addition to providing space and encouragement for employees to cooperate and collaborate with one another, an organization needs to have a culture that really promotes and rewards relationship-building work and behaviors if it wants to realize all the associated benefits.
  - This means rewarding behaviors that involve or encourage cooperation while making sure to avoid either intentionally or unintentionally fostering a competitive environment.

Measuring Affinity

- Setting explicit goals and clearly defining values around affinity and collaboration is a solid and necessary step toward achieving those goals, and defining those goals within employee feedback mechanisms is part of that.

- A good skills matrix or review tool will place an emphasis on areas such as how well an individual communicates

- the quality of communication matters much more than the quantity, and where peer feedback can be quite useful.

Measuring Affinity

- It is hard to measure affinity.

- Outcomes of affinity can be measured, but not affinity itself.

- keep an eye out for signs that members of your organization are growing and developing relationships both among and between teams, as well as fostering connections outside your organization

- Employee Skills and Evaluations

- Inter-team Interaction

- Giving Back to the Community

Measuring Affinity

- Employee Skills and Evaluations
  - Do people know who to direct their questions to?
  - Are they willing to ask the right people, even if those people are outside their team?
  - Are they unwilling to ask for assistance even if their refusal means slowing down their own progress or even blocking someone else?
  - Are they known for derailing meetings, code reviews, or email threads with arguments that most people view as unnecessary or counterproductive?

Measuring Affinity

- Inter-team Interaction: track projects
  - How many teams are involved in a given project?
  - What was the breakdown of work between teams?
  - How evenly was it divided?
  - Did those divisions make sense, or did one team or team member seem overworked compared to others?
  - How much time was spent in various stages of the project's lifecycle? In particular, how much time went into planning and what was the team breakdown during that stage?
  - How frequently did misunderstandings occur between teams or project members?
  - Were these misunderstanding specific to a particular group or method of communication?

Measuring Affinity

- Giving Back to the Community
  - A large part of what makes the DevOps movement so strong is its community, the willingness of practitioners to come together and talk about how and what they are working on.
  - Etsy, well known for their engineering blog Code as Craft and the numerous tools they have open sourced
  - This generosity includes writing public blog posts about work, speaking at industry conferences, or making open source contributions, and employees are encouraged to participate in at least one, if not more, of these yearly to make sure that they are continuing to enrich and give back to the community.

Measuring Affinity

- Giving Back to the Community
  - Any organization that gets use and value from conference talks, blog posts, meetups, or open source projects should make a concerted effort to return those favors in kind.
  - It is people being willing to share their work and ideas freely and openly that makes the community not only strong but also valuable.
  - When people communicate their ideas via media such as Twitter, LinkedIn, or various meetups and conferences, we can make connections and ties
  - Only taking from the community and never giving anything in return is not cooperative behavior