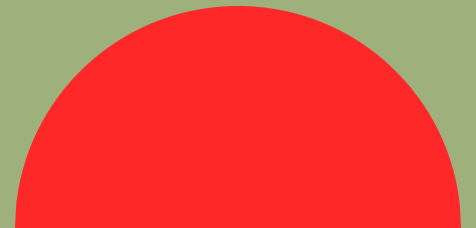
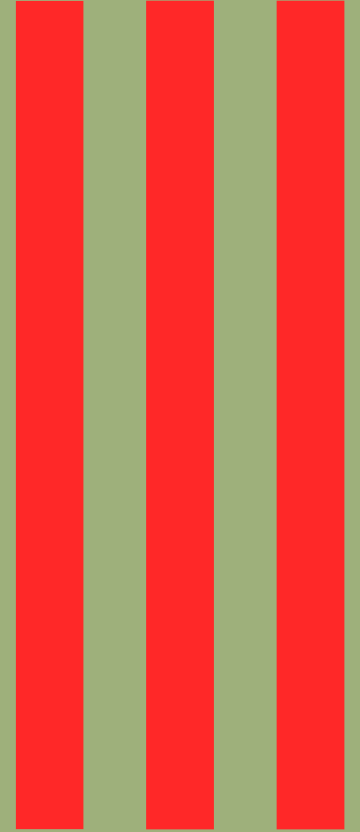


Mod 7.2 - Pager Rotation

by: Vincent Ryan

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Key Concepts

Pager rotation is how IT departments stay "on-call" to resolve software issues as they arise.

This job can be very stressful, so the engineers behind them are rotated in and out of this position to protect their mental health.

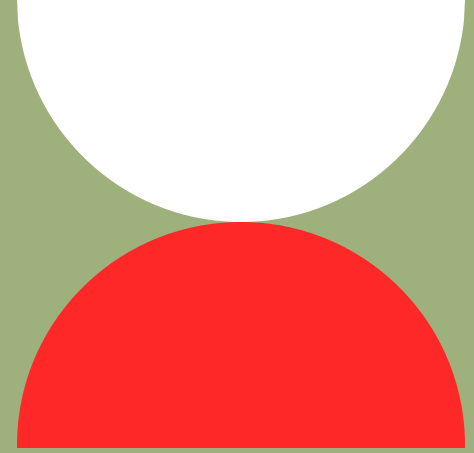
Like any other crisis response team, it takes practice and preparation so the companies who handle this the best are those that put the effort in to support their employees.



Setup



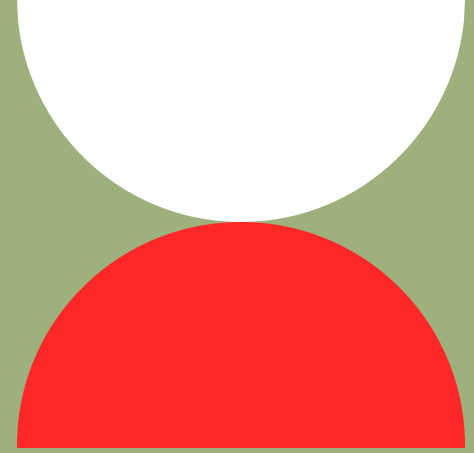
Get Prepared



To be successful in this job requires preparation.

- Google sets their teams through "Wheel of Misfortune" training exercises and spends time familiarizing themselves with the environments and programs they were intended to work with.
- It's important to narrow in on the response playbook. This reduces decision fatigue and increases efficiency that as issues come in they can be quickly and easily assessed based on clear guidelines.
- Part of this response playbook is having clear timeline and escalation guides.
- Automated software can assist with this, categorizing and transferring issues seamlessly.
- Team sizes need to be large enough to perform a task without overburdening any one person.

Stress



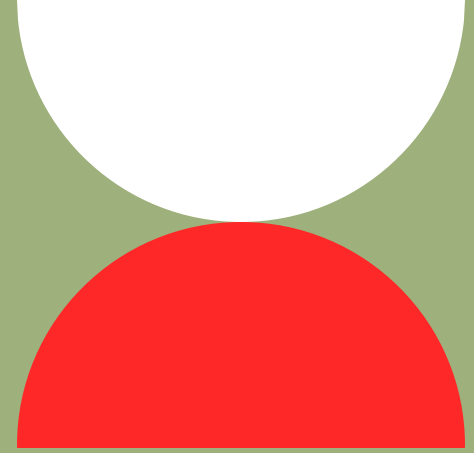
This job is very stressful. Turnaround times are as fast as possible, and the needs can be diverse and wide spread. This stress is a key factor in rotating who is in the hot seat at any one time.

- To counter act this, companies can limit the amount of time, number of days, and number of incidents any one employee is allowed to correct at any one time.
- As well as limiting interactions inside the role, understanding when it will happen on a consistent schedule also helps employees prepare for their on-call days.
- Too many interactions can cause alert fatigue, where issues get skipped over due to overstimulation.

Including Development



Ownership



Development has lucked out in the past, and the vision was that production engineers own the upkeep and service level actions. Recently the thinking on this has changed and development is just as much a part of on-calls as production engineers.

- Including development engineers promotes a higher level of ownership over their projects as they understand the impact and scope of their work.
- They gain a greater understanding of their customer basis and operations that might have gone overlooked that aren't "broken" but don't work well. This can include anything from UX/UI decisions, to underserved parts of the program that need attention.
- A higher level of focus on documentation happens, when you have to actively use your own product.

Citations

Cook, O., Smollett, S., Spadaccini, A., Donnelly, C., Ma, J., Plasky, G., Thorne, S., & Yang, J. (n.d.). *On Call*. Retrieved February 15, 2025, from <https://sre.google/workbook/on-call/>

(n.d.). *On-Call Rotations and Schedules*. Pager Duty. Retrieved February 16, 2025, from <https://www.pagerduty.com/resources/learn/call-rotations-schedules/>