

# In-the-SPIN

Newsletter of the Boston  SPIN

Issue 38 Fall 2000

Editor: Carol Pilch

## Editorial

This issue of *In-the-SPIN* provides you with summaries of the September and October meetings. Here's a chance for you to catch up on what our speakers, Linda McInnis and Scott Jefferies, had to say if you were unable to join us at either of these meetings. Also in this issue, you will find synopses of the roundtable discussions that were conducted at our September and October meetings.

This issue also includes a feature article on the business value of sending employees to conferences. Boston SPIN member, Jack Hillman, contributes this article. If you're a regular reader of *In-the-SPIN*, you may remember the article that Jack contributed to the March 2000 issue entitled "Just Enough Process." In the current issue, Jack provides some insightful information about the value to companies when they send their employees to conferences. He also provides some helpful hints for "selling" conference participation to management.

If you're a reader of this newsletter, the Boston SPIN would greatly appreciate your feedback. The Boston SPIN, and in particular the editor of *In-the-SPIN*, would like to know if the readers' expectations are being met. The SPIN steering committee also encourages broader participation in the content and production of the newsletter and also in the SPIN organization. Send letters-to-the-editor, quips, quotes, anecdotes, articles, offers to participate in the newsletter committee, and general correspondence to Carol Pilch, [carol.pilch@GD-CS.COM](mailto:carol.pilch@GD-CS.COM).

**Boston  SPIN** *Software  
Process  
Improvement  
Network*  
Since January 1993

### SPONSORS:

**General Dynamics Communication Systems**

**Raytheon Company**

**Edelman & Associates**

We thank the Computer Science department of **UMASS- Lowell** for providing support and hosting our Web page

## SPIN Perspectives

This issue's *SPIN Perspectives* column features summaries of the Roundtable discussions conducted at our September and October meetings.



The following synopsis is contributed by David Heimann. David is on the Product Quality Assurance staff of Comverse Network Systems and an at-large member of the Boston SPIN Steering Committee.

### September Roundtable -- Minimizing Turnover

The Minimizing Turnover roundtable first raised factors that participants either believed or knew from experience led to turnover. Next, we identified actions that we either believed or knew from experience addressed these factors. The factors we identified as leading to turnover covered **change** (especially mismanaged or too frequent change), **personal conflict**, **roadblocks to productivity** and **no room for advancement**. Specifically the factors include:

#### Change

- Change itself, especially reorganizations and changes of managers, and changes of departmental missions.

*Continued on next page*

### IN THIS ISSUE . . .

Editorial .....	1
SPIN Perspectives .....	1
Meeting Summaries.....	4
Boston Spin Calendar .....	5
Feature Article .....	6
Boston SPIN.....	7

- Mismanaged change (e.g., sprung as a surprise, dragged on for months with rumors to match, autocratic with no respect for those affected, miscommunication)
- Too frequent change (e.g., a reorganization taking place 6 months or less after a previous one, or even a year or less) can be fatal.
- Imposed changes (e.g., the staff feels they have had no input or influence on what, after all, is a key part of their lives).

#### Personal conflicts

- With one's immediate manager
- With one's coworkers
- With how the organization does business:
  - Style -- "Start-up" employee in hierarchical organization, or vice-versa
  - Moral -- Individual's ethics and organization's ethics are significantly different.

#### Roadblocks to productivity due to the organization

- Unproductive meetings
- Too many meetings
- Unproductive and road-blocking bureaucracies in the organization
- Chaotic conditions (i.e., the opposite to the previous point).

#### No room for advancement

- Flatter organizations restrict the traditional up-the-ladder advancement-into-and-higher-management paradigm
- Many technical employees do not wish to become managers
- No significant technical-advancement ladder, or one that exists only on paper.

Many of the steps we brought forward as **how to reduce turnover** were obvious once we identified the above factors -- Get rid of those factors! We did identify specific actions, as follows:

1. Communicate with your employees, listen, and act on what you hear.
2. If considering a change or reorganization:
  - Communicate to employees what's under consideration and why
  - Allow employees a genuine voice in the change
  - Justify the change to your employees, just as you would a proposal to senior management or to major customers.
  - Obtain buy-in to the change from employees.
  - Demonstrate that there's something people will gain as well as lose (most anyone facing potential change will focus on the losses).
3. Run an organization which respects your people for the professionals they are.
4. Run a non-autocratic organization.

5. Provide non-salary compensation -- bonuses, options, and awards. Be fair in awarding compensation.
6. Allow your people freedom to move from team to team within the organization, at *their* volition. There are two primary aims here, as well as others:
  - People can gain new experiences, new responsibilities
  - People to get out from under conflicts ("change of scenery").
7. Provide for advancement on an individual-contributor basis. Make this path real and prove it by actual pervasive use.
8. Take surveys, anonymous, external, effective ones, and follow through on the results.
9. Provide free coffee, soft drinks, ice cream, pizza, etc. (honest!).



*The following synopsis is contributed by Dolores McCarthy. Dolores is a Senior Process Engineer with Computer Sciences Corporation and Boston SPIN Secretary.*

#### September Roundtable -- Characteristics of Projects In Trouble

This evening's Roundtable drew an overflow group with no shortage of thoughts about the topic. Many nodded in agreement as the issues were raised, and some issues spurred an easy flow into related problems. Characteristics of projects in trouble were listed as:

- Allowing the customer to drive (control) the project - always a disaster
- Slow start
- Unrealistic estimates
- Developers too optimistic in estimates
- Missed milestones
- Charts may not show actual performance
- Requirements problems:
  - Not testable
  - Not stated
  - Ambiguous
  - Vague
  - Not well defined
- Requirements creep
- Late changes in business requirements
- Design by coding
- Prototype becomes real
- Customer says no configuration management
- No real configuration management
- Poor change control
- Not tracking defects
- No tools for testing
- Target hardware not fully tested
- Testing platform not suitable
- Poor test plans
- Adding functions before previous ones fully tested
- Communication not clear among groups
- Lack of expertise

- Not enough staff
- Staff turnover
- Loss of key people
- No Quality Assurance
- No proactive risk management.

Some conclusions about the issues were:

- Use a management technique to create good visibility into the project
- Avoid the temptation to allow the customer to drive the project and add requirements at will
- Plan for risk management
- Focus on obtaining clear, testable requirements
- Be aware that developers may underestimate schedules, unintentionally
- Plan enough staff with proper expertise for the project
- Raise planning for testing above an afterthought
- Test first functions thoroughly before adding new ones
- Improve communication among groups on the project.



*The following synopsis is contributed by Johanna Rothman. Johanna is president of Rothman Consulting, Inc. and is a regular contributor to In-the-SPIN.*

## **October Roundtable -- Challenges in the E-Business Software Product Development Process**

The roundtable first discussed the challenges of E-Business. The following challenges were identified:

- “The secret to success is speed” (NOT!)
- Do we do it fast or do it right?
- How do we get the horse before the cart?
- Many more product iterations
- Drive for speed produces lots of assumptions that don’t get checked (one of the participants likened this to the blind man describing the elephant problem).
- Lack of clear requirements definition. Lack of clear definition of when the product is done.
- Continually changing requirements
- Change management
- Maintain requirements docs, capturing requirements
- Standard requirements problems (not defined, assumptions).

### **What some of us have done to overcome these challenges:**

We took one of the challenges, **Changing Requirements**, and described some things that have worked:

- Using prototypes of screen mockups, come to consensus (sometimes this happens by wearing down users).
- Need right users to define requirements (senior management is NOT generally the right set of users)
- Staged delivery lifecycle

- Prove that delivered performance is at least 1% faster than current product
- Performance of use cases
- Tools can help. There is a tradeoff between the speed of current development and long-term requirements use.

We then took another challenge: **how to do things faster**, and described what worked for us:

- Integrated Product Development teams (IPDs). For a good description, see Chris Meyer’s [Fast Cycle Time : How to Align Purpose, Strategy, and Structure for Speed](#), Free Press, ISBN: 0029211816. Organize these teams in a way that makes sense.
- Access to information. Need a clear document management system
- The more Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), the easier it is.
- Having good methodologies: templates, how to handle change, rules of the road
- Use a configuration management system
- Learn lessons from previous projects.

### **Summary**

It appears that to have a successful e-business product development process, you need to do things even “better” than before, because you don’t have time to do them badly. Using a cross-functional team, starting and iterating on requirements, constant team communication, and doing things to prevent problems are the winners.



*The following synopsis is contributed by Donna Johnson. Donna is President of LOGOS International, Inc. and a member of the Boston SPIN Steering Committee.*

## **October Roundtable -- Significant Lifecycle Differences in E-Commerce Software**

The participants at the Roundtable felt that it was important to pin-point the demands of the e-business environment on the development effort before discussing the ways the software lifecycle is affected by those demands. Two of the participants were from an e-business environment and shared their experiences with other participants, who work in more traditional software development environments. The identified e-business demands and their impact on the life cycle are summarized in the following paragraphs.

### **Shorter and faster cycle for product turn-around**

The software life cycle in an e-business environment is often 2 – 3 months at most in duration. The group felt that it was still important to document requirements even in this fast-paced

environment where products need to be turned around quickly. It was observed that management feels it needs to maintain control in this environment, but it is a difficult task faced with the rapid growth patterns experienced by some companies. Management no longer understands the environment and often loses focus.

### Higher demand for change

Technology is changing at a rapid pace, along with the customer base and customer needs. In order to accommodate the continually changing environment, software development has adopted an iterative life cycle to respond quickly to the changes. Customer feedback is solicited continually, thus necessitating an emphasis on GUI interfaces and tools to build them quickly. Because of the numerous and frequent changes, change management becomes an integral part of the development process. Configuration Control Board reviews by necessity become more frequent in order to look at all the issues and filter them. More people need to be involved in the decision-making process, since there are now more players in the development effort (e.g., IT groups, Web designers, transaction support). Another noted impact on software development is the higher learning curve for developers because of the numerous and continual technology changes.

### Market-driven development

Because of the rush to beat the competition to market, many e-business companies are cutting corners and as a result are in trouble – they are unable to finish their products. The consensus of the group was that these companies still need to take the time to “do it right”, by scoping features and balancing the amount of testing, documentation, and research needed to produce a product that can go to market. Automating as much of the process as is feasible is a goal, but it necessitates the hiring of staff or consultants to do the automation.



## October Roundtable -- E-Commerce Risk Management

*David is on the Product Quality Assurance staff of Comverse Network Systems and an at-large member of the Boston SPIN Steering Committee.*

The major items discussed by the E-commerce Risk Management roundtable include the following:

- Approach to risk encompasses:
  - Identifying potential problem areas, especially their likelihood and impact
  - Prioritizing the risks
  - Addressing risks by developing countermeasures
  - Having a plan (what will you do with these risks and countermeasures?)
  - Having a contingencies for surprises ("residual risk", "the unforeseen")
- With timeliness, an important factor for e-commerce, so is planning; both for business and for marketing.

- Good business decisions are very important in the e-commerce arena -- there is no substitute for leadership, wisdom, and good judgment.
- One role/responsibility is needed for risk, its prioritization and management. This responsibility most likely falls on the CEO or COO for the overall business, and on the Project Manager for an individual project.
- Despite the importance of timeliness in e-commerce, being the first to market is not as important as it was awhile back. People and investors have been burned by a tendency to rush an idea to market.
- E-commerce risk is beginning to converge towards traditional software risk considerations.

In a way, the participants were of the opinion that the considerations of e-commerce are operating in Internet time, just as much as e-commerce operations themselves, and that traditional business considerations are beginning to make themselves felt.

# Meeting Summaries

## Notes from the September Meeting

*Contributed by Barbara Purchia, Quality Engineering Director, Configuration Management Business Unit, Rational Software and Boston SPIN Vice Chair*

### Topic: The Future through the Past, Using Post Mortem Data for Process Improvement

**Speaker:** Linda McInnis, Noble Associates, Inc. and SPIN Chair



Linda McInnis, the featured speaker of the September SPIN meeting, started her talk by asking the audience about their experiences with post mortems. Audience feedback indicated the following:

- There was no follow-up after a post mortem
- The information went into a box (never to see the light of day again)
- There was no impetus to do something with the information

Linda described some simple techniques to improve post mortems. She contends that effective techniques are simple

and that they need to be simple to be successful. First, team members should determine if they are comfortable with managers in the room. If they aren't, the managers should be asked to leave. Honest, real, and objective feedback should be encouraged. In addition, the meeting should not be a blame game but should focus on the project and not on any individuals.

There are five basic questions that were asked at the meeting:

1. What did we do right?
2. What did we do wrong?
3. What makes your job hard?
4. What makes your job easy?
5. What obstacles do you see for future development?

Linda then presented some of the raw data she had gathered at post mortems. For example, some of the things that were done right included teamwork, code reviews, development and QA providing mutual support, and having stable and consistent releases. Some of the things that were done wrong included no specifications or documentation on architecture, poor time estimates, no real schedule, and the team churned a lot. Level of stress, unstable systems and networks, and getting between buildings were contributors to making the job hard. Making the job easy included good teamwork, status meetings, and creativity. Some of the obstacles for future development included new people on the team, lack of configuration management/release management, reliance on extended work hours, and knowing when to say "No."

Linda then analyzed the information from the post mortem to identify trends and similar types of problems. This is an area where post mortems had fallen down in the past. She categorized these problems as follows and developed an issues grouping chart:

- People
- Tracking
- Vision
- Design
- Testing
- Process

She described three types of trend analysis:

- Back of the envelope method – Simple identification of the trend and who should be responsible for resolving the issue
- Statistical analysis – This method is good for data from multiple projects and when you have a distributed workforce. Identify the trend, the responsible function and the number of projects that encountered the issue.
- Weighted analysis – Identify the trend, the responsible function, the number of projects that encountered the issue, and the importance to the organization

Then Linda recommended presenting the trend analysis information to upper management (without the importance information) and asking them to validate the information. Try to open a dialog with the Vice President and determine what they think is important. Then identify any discrepancies between the team and the Vice President. All information should be presented anonymously and without assigning

blame. Then use the weighted information to make choices as to what improvements to tackle. Linda suggested that the trend times the weighting indicates the importance.

Make goals that are doable, measurable, supportable, and have a timeframe. Linda suggests that to make progress you should find a proof-of-concept project, get support for your ideas, talk money, and get help. For example, use any data that you have such as calculating the cost to fix a bug. Getting management support or improvements will be an uphill battle. When you're thinking of quitting, get management to help.

Review your progress periodically. Listen to people and probe for specifics. For example, in status meetings, ask if everything is going the way you thought it would. You can do course corrections. Categorize and identify trends. Only pick one or two areas to work on.

Post mortems are also good for team building. They can help projects get back on track. And they can be fun!

Here are questions from the audience and Linda's answers:

Q: How much time do you allocate to the post mortem process?

A: Meetings last 1 to 1 ½ hours. There is also some pre-work. Questions are sent out before the meeting. Food is served at the meeting. One positive by-product has been that schedules get more accurate when the whole team is involved.

Q: Was a manager ever asked to leave a post mortem?

A: Yes. The manager was told ahead of time and submitted input to the meeting. However, after the first post mortem, the manager was never asked to leave again.

Q: Do you find that a company that had a disaster is more likely to want a post mortem?

A: Almost all companies want a post mortem after they have seen it. Cultural change is hard and this can help start it. A key factor is that people own the post mortem and they help pave the way to do a good job.

Q: Did you create an on-going repository? How did you categorize and get the information out to the general population?

A: The raw data was put on the web and had the team leader present the data analysis. All information was made public and presented, including successes.





## Notes from the October Meeting

*Contributed by Carol Pilch, Senior Member of Technical Staff and SEI Authorized Lead Assessor, General Dynamics Communication Systems*

### **Topic: A Requirements-Based Approach To Delivering E-business and Enterprise Applications**

**Speaker:** Scott Jefferies, Technology Engineering Manager, Technology Builders, Inc.

Our October speaker, Scott Jefferies, provided a broad agenda from gathering and defining requirements, to managing requirements, designing test cases, and defining test completion criteria. The message was that good requirements definition and management are more important than ever in the e-business and enterprise application arena. There's a need to get e-business and enterprise applications out faster (i.e., "rush to development"). Without a good and unambiguous understanding of requirements on the part of the user, the project management, and the developer, the results will not be the right product.

According to Scott Jefferies, requirements management is part of our lives. We do manage requirements. However, requirements elicitation is still a challenge. The way we do requirements elicitation is through user interviews, brainstorming, facilitated sessions, and specifications. What we're seeing is more ways of using the web to do this. For example, as a way to eliminate or minimize meetings.

An important aspect of the requirements gathering and defining process that Scott Jefferies described is **Ambiguity Reviews**. The purpose of an ambiguity review is to look for and find:

- Traceability and inconsistency errors
- Imprecise terminology
- Ambiguously stated requirements
- Logical errors
- Undocumented assumptions.

The best people to invite to ambiguity reviews are the people who are new to the project since they have the least bias about what the requirements mean. The speaker quoted a rate of 50% fewer software defects on projects that perform ambiguity reviews as opposed to those that do not perform ambiguity reviews. He recommended building lists of words that should not be used to state requirements. Also, attaching a glossary of terms to the requirements.

Overall benefits from performing ambiguity reviews relate to improved requirements. The requirements become:

- Testable (deterministic, unambiguous, complete, non-redundant, traceable, explicit and feasible)
- Easier for developers to work with
- Easier to manage.

With respect to managing requirements, responsibility needs to be clear. Someone should own every single requirement. Also, it's important to document the rationale for decisions and changes. This is a time and money saver. You can spend a lot of time and money trying to recover this information when you need it.

The nature of e-business and enterprise application development is to "get it out quickly." However, major changes to web sites and applications take 4-9 months. And there are high defect rates. By the nature of e-business, customers see the defects, and the defects could have a direct impact on the revenue stream. Good requirements definition and good management practices, along with good tools to support these practices, will enable development organizations to get things done more quickly with fewer defects.

## Information about Upcoming Meetings

*by Anna Allison, Program Chair*

### **November Meeting Announcement**

**Topic: Process Improvement from the Ground Floor - A Case Study**

**Speaker:** Alex Marchicelli, NewLane

**When:** Tuesday, November 21, 2000. 6:30pm-8:30pm  
6:30-7:00 Networking and Round Tables  
7:00-7:10 Announcements  
7:10-8:10 Linda McInnis: Noble Associates, Inc.  
8:10-8:30 Questions and Answers

**Who:** Everyone (Academia, Government, Industry)

**Location:** General Dynamics, 77 "A" St., Needham MA.

**Abstract:** Through a case study approach, this presentation explores the successful rags-to-riches story of software development process improvement at a communications giant. It examines the steps necessary to re-shape a less than perfect in-house product development lifecycle into a repeatable, reliable, sustainable process that improved time-to-market and software quality. Mr. Marchicelli will provide the steps that it took to help this company to make the changes necessary to achieve these goals. Through this case study approach, we will explore strategies, tips, and tricks that any software project can use to see improvements to quality and completion time.

**About the Speaker:** Alex Marchicelli is a partner with NewLane, the "Quality on Time" consulting company. Prior to working at NewLane, Mr. Marchicelli spent 12 years at IMI, Renaissance Worldwide, Inc., and Arthur Anderson. He is an accomplished IT professional with expertise in business unit management, full lifecycle software development, client-server project management and development, software quality assurance and testing. Additionally, he has helped Fortune

1000 companies in strategic management consulting specializing in IT strategies. Mr. Marchicelli has an extensive track record in helping companies achieve success in improving software development processes and productivity in order to achieve faster time-to-market, reduce costs, increase ROI, and increase development productivity. He has been involved with some of the largest banks and telecommunication firms in the U.S. such as Bank of America, NationsBank, BankBoston, MCI, Sprint, and Lucent Technologies.

**SPIN Roundtables:** Roundtables are focused group or "birds-of-a-feather" discussions, with a facilitator, to stimulate and moderate discussion. Roundtables are held during the Networking portion of the SPIN meeting. See our web page, <http://www.cs.uml.edu/Boston-SPIN> to see which topics are selected for this SPIN meeting.

**Directions:** From Route 128 in Needham, take exit 19A onto Highland Avenue East. Take your first right by the Ground Round and take your second left onto "A" Street. General Dynamics is the last building on the right. Enter the parking lot by the General Dynamics sign and come into the building by the cafeteria entrance, which is located to the left of the main entrance. There will be a security guard at the entrance. See <http://www.gd-cs.com/needham.html> for directions.

**Info:** See our web page, <http://www.cs.uml.edu/Boston-SPIN> For SPIN info, contact Anna Allison, [anna\\_allison@yahoo.com](mailto:anna_allison@yahoo.com)

**Cancellations** (including weather cancellations): We will notify the membership via email to the SPIN distribution list, post the notice on the SPIN web page, and send the cancellation announcement to Channel 7 TV and radio, WRKO AM 680 starting at 3pm.

***SPIN '00-'01 Program and Speaker Schedule  
as of 11/1/00***

Date	Speaker/Topic
Dec. 19, 2000 @ General Dynamics	Capers Jones "Software Benchmarking"
Jan, 16, 2001 @ General Dynamics	TBA
Feb. 20, 2001 @ General Dynamics	TBA
Mar. 20, 2001 @ General Dynamics Thursday!	Joint ASQ Meeting
Apr. 17, 2001 @ General Dynamics	Johanna Rothman "The 4R's of Software Process Improvement"
May 15, 2001 @ General Dynamics	TBA
June 19, 2001 @ General Dynamics	TBA

**Looking for Interesting Speakers**



We are always looking for interesting speakers. If you'd like to speak at Boston SPIN, please review these criteria before sending us an abstract.

**Speaker Criteria:**

1. The topic must be timely, an issue of concern to our membership.
2. We want to hear about real-world topics. If you have an academic topic, we're interested in how it applies to the real world.
3. If you are interested in creating a panel, please write an abstract, and suggest at least one panelist. We can work with you to find other panelists.
4. The topic should either explain how to *do* something, or bend our brains in another direction.
5. The presenter should be intimately involved with the "hows" of the thing that got done.
6. We are not interested in sales pitches.

If you have information you'd like us to hear, please send an abstract to Anna Allison, [anna\\_allison@yahoo.com](mailto:anna_allison@yahoo.com).

We developed a speaker checklist so that none of us would have to rely on our short-term memories. Please use the checklist to prepare for your SPIN talk.

**Speaker Checklist:**

1. 60 days in advance of meeting deliver: 2-paragraph abstract, one paragraph bio, and picture to [anna\\_allison@yahoo.com](mailto:anna_allison@yahoo.com)
2. Within one week of meeting date: If desired, email copy of paper or overheads to [heimann@world.std.com](mailto:heimann@world.std.com) so that it is downloadable from the SPIN web page.
3. At the meeting: Speaker provides one copy of overheads to Linda McInnis for our library.
4. Optional, but highly desired: Send a copy of overheads, paper, etc. for our web page as of the day of the meeting. If possible, provide 50-60 copies of overheads at the SPIN meeting. (The attendees really appreciate this.)
5. Optional: If you've written a book and are willing to donate it to SPIN, we'd be happy to offer the book as a door prize by conducting a free drawing.



# Feature Article

The following synopsis is contributed by Jack D. Hillman, IT Project Office Manager, Amica Mutual Insurance Company, Lincoln, RI . [jhillman@amica.com](mailto:jhillman@amica.com)

## What Value Is There to Attending a Conference?



A senior manager at a local company recently posed this question. The question got me thinking about why we had such an obvious gap in our appreciation of the value of attending a conference and why that value was not apparent to senior management.

*It's not the 'good old boy' conference anymore*

Perhaps the answer can be found in the experiences of our executives. It has been years since many of them have attended a conference. As those of us who have attended conferences and symposiums in the past few years can attest – times have changed. Gone are the days of open bars, golf events, and sessions that end at 2 in the afternoon.

Today's conferences tend to be jam packed with numerous options to entice all attendees. I see several reasons for this. One reason is the competition for our conference budget dollars. With so many conferences to choose from each year, each one strives to offer the widest variety of topics for discussion to attract a large cross section of the populace. A second reason would be the demand on attendees to justify the expenditures to attend a conference. Only the lucky few are able to attend the conference of their choice without some kind of justification. What will we get out of it? Can we get that somewhere else? Is there a cheaper solution? And lastly, I think we attendees have demanded it. If the expenditure of our time and energy to attend is not equal to the return we will get from attendance – we won't be there either!

### **Professional Development**

The value of in-house or off-site vendor courses for in-depth training on specific topics is obvious. While no one can argue that the costs of bringing someone in-house to talk to or train a particular subject to 20-25 people, not only creates fewer expense reports, it usually presents a singular topic of discussion for all attendees. A conference presents the opportunity to explore a variety of training topics. It is almost impossible to offer this same training opportunity in-house. When traveling to a conference one is usually presented with 6-12 options to choose from during the breakout sessions. This is ideal when several employees from one company are attending the same conference. Attendees can tailor the focus of the experience to those areas of interest to them. And in this way, a group of employees can travel to the same conference and come away with completely different educational experience.

### **Networking with other professionals in your field**

Today more than any other time, attendees at conferences are able to take full advantage of the relationships they can develop by attendance at a conference. In the age of the Internet, opportunities to establish e-mail connections, chat room discussions, bulletin board topics and discussion groups are often hatched over lunch, breakfast or a reception at a conference. This is an additional advantage to conference attendance that is almost impossible to replicate in your working environment. Attending a training course with all the same people you see everyday does not generate this type of synergy. Many times the only stranger in the room is the instructor. This severely reduces the possibilities for interaction when you consider that some conferences attract 2,500 attendees. This makes these networking possibilities a very important advantage. We can not underestimate the value gained through these connections. A chance meeting at a conference can often lead you to a valuable resource of information that you would never have found on your own sitting at your desk.

### **Broad overview or heavy concentration**

What I have found to be of great value at today's conferences is having the option of choosing my level of concentration. At a recent conference, I was able to get some exposure to some high level discussions on metrics and critical chain management while also being able to focus in more detail on project office and risk topics. Many conferences are organized with tracks that offer a wide variety of sessions on a single topic. In addition, since a different presenter usually gives each presentation, the attendee has an opportunity to hear different views on the same topic or confirm facts heard at an earlier session.

### **"Can't we just send one person to come back and educate the rest of us?"**

Many of us have heard this battle cry from our chief financial officers trying to reduce travel costs. The truth is that the conference experience is almost impossible to replicate in-house. However, some topics can be easily transported back home and shared. I've found that usually one presentation at each conference can be taken home and easily shared. But the vast majority of the benefits in attending come not only from the actual presentations themselves but also from the questions asked, discussions generated and informal debate that take place following a presentation.

### **Helpful hints**

When preparing to justify or attend a conference there are a couple of steps you can take to make the experience a successful one.

### **Preparation**

In preparing your "sell" to management it is always wise to study the conference agenda. Choose your breakout sessions before you leave the office. Make sure you have backup sessions planned in the case of cancellations or as a last minute replacement for a particularly painful session. What is often helpful in selling the concept to management is to identify numerous sessions that seem



appropriate for each time slot. This can also help sell multiple attendees from the same organization.

### Organization

Have your schedule mapped out in advance. Know what you are attending and when. Don't be afraid to leave a session if it looks like it won't meet your needs. During the conference keep a separate list of those really great ideas you pick up. This way you can act on them as soon as you return to the office. This avoids searching through reams of materials, handouts and white papers to act upon the idea you were looking for.

### Feedback

In addition to the normal feedback you should supply upon returning (was it appropriate?, should we go next year?, written report, etc.), it is also a great idea to take active steps to utilize the information you obtained at a conference. Point co-workers to research results, white papers or websites that add to the issues being discussed at work. Share a presentation from a conference with appropriate work groups. Be sure to give full credit for where you "found" the material. This can be a living illustration of where the value of conference attendance is making a difference.

For individuals with responsibilities for project management, project office roles, process work and strategic planning – this is our training. By attending conferences and symposiums we will gain an understanding of how others accomplish the same challenges we face and possibly will be in a position to influence how our jobs will be performed in the future. Hope we meet at the next conference!

## Boston SPIN

The Boston SPIN is a forum for the free and open exchange of software process improvement experiences and ideas. Meetings are usually held on third Tuesdays, September - June. Boston SPIN welcomes volunteers and sponsors. There is no charge to attend the meetings.

For more information about our programs and events contact:

Linda McInnis  
80 Harris Street, Suite 2  
Acton, MA 01720  
Telephone: (978) 635-9281  
Email: [Boston\\_SPIN@yahoo.com](mailto:Boston_SPIN@yahoo.com)

For information about SPINs in general including \*\*\*HOW TO START A SPIN\*\*\* contact:

Dawna Baird of SEI (412) 268-5539,  
[dbaird@sei.cmu.edu](mailto:dbaird@sei.cmu.edu),  
<http://www.sei.cmu.edu/collaborating/spins/spins.start.html>.

IN THE SPIN is available on our Web page:

<http://www.cs.uml.edu/Boston-SPIN>.

TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF NEW IN-THE-SPIN ISSUES and Boston SPIN specific notices send email addressed to [withall@mediaone.net](mailto:withall@mediaone.net).

We have 2 separate email lists: one for this newsletter and one containing announcements that we receive from other process organizations and forward out.

IF YOU WANT TO ADD YOURSELF TO THE ANNOUNCEMENTS LIST send email to [Boston\\_SPIN@yahoo.com](mailto:Boston_SPIN@yahoo.com).

Send letters-to-the-editor, and general correspondence to Carol Pilch, [carol.pilch@GD-CS.COM](mailto:carol.pilch@GD-CS.COM).

Send job postings to [heimann@world.std.com](mailto:heimann@world.std.com).

Back issues and other information about Boston SPIN can be found at our WEB HOME PAGE:  
<http://www.cs.uml.edu/Boston-SPIN/>