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From: edmb Thu Feb 7 18:35:38 1991  
To: daven  
Cc: mikenp  
Subject: Re: please answer this mail tonight  
Date: Thu Feb 07 18:35:29 1991

1) Is there someone at Borland who would be willing to talk to us about their development process? I would share information about MS if I did this. I would ask them the following question and share with them how we do similar things. I wouldn't expect to get information about them without telling them a little about how we do things. Do you have a few names, what they do, and phone numbers?

I strongly doubt it. You can ask Brad Silverberg, of course, but by and large Borland view MS as the enemy. You might try Rob Dickerson but I doubt you would have my luck.

2) How are the projects organized? Development, testing, program management, etc?

It has changed a lot since I was there. In those days there was a central R&D group run by Brad with QA and RLD reporting to him (including what we would call program managers and Dickerson running the Product Manager). Now it is organized by product type and has a general manager per product with all functions reporting to the general manager. Borland has never had separate Program Managers. The development managers can much of that responsibility. I don't know if that has changed. And the Product managers owned some of the rest, with some UI ownership and feature control than our product manager. There used to be a core development team but that is gone too I believe.

3) How are the development teams organized?

4) Do they have a typical development process? Specs, designs, etc? No, absolutely not. It is run by each development manager at his/her discretion but with far less than we have. There usually are design and technical documents, but they aren't at the direction of the development team and the Quattro team for example never had either. The development process was always code, test, fix, test, ... until the development leads, Philippe, and Brad blessed it.

5) How is Phillip involved?

He used to be intimately involved, being an expert on every product. I don't think he still is. But Phillippe is VERY VERY involved in user interface of each product and is generally regarded as an expert.

6) What is the overall mission that permeates every project? eg: a computer on every desk running Microsoft software is ours. What is the message that Phillip sends directly or indirectly to the development staff?

There is none. It is an intense tactical company. The closest thing to a mission is that the products should be VERY fast and very fun. At least when I was there, there was no overall strategic vision at all!

7) What are the rules of thumb that they use? # of people on the project? Tech leads, project leads?

None. It is all ad hoc. The only rules of thumb were, small teams are good. Big teams are bad. Everybody programs. There is only one manager. I don't know if this is still true.

8) Who makes what decisions and when using what data? It used to be exclusively development leads and Philippe. The data was the opinions of Philippe and the development leads. Note that this leads to an amazingly fast decision making time. It changed to include marketing as an integral component about the time I left. It also slowed down, but not much because developers were still in control of the process so marketing was dependent on either making a good case to development or to Philippe/Brad if they were really unhappy. Development leads used to work closely with user groups, authors, key accounts, and the press to gather their data.

9) How do they generate product ideas? Philippe plus development manager plus any programmer in ANY group with a good idea.

10) How do they do their hiring? Do they focus on campus hires or experienced hires? From where? With what kind of experience? No campus hiring at all. Only senior experience developers from other companies were typically hired. They were hired from all over using lots of recruiters and ads and unadvertised resumes.

11) How do they get their new folks up to speed? Jim or Edna. No formal process. This has not changed.

12) What tools do they use for development and testing? Development: Turbo C++, Turbo C, some assembler (not much anymore I believe) and for Quattro Pro a homebrewed horrible Module 11. Everybody uses whatever editor they want. They use Borland's debugger, Borland's profiler, and Borland's assembler. Paradox didn't used to do this, but I believe they have switched.

Testing: I varied from project to project but typically was the macro language of the product in question or a journaling tool if no language existed.

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13) What project management tools and methods do they use?  
Most people I know used Quattro Pro to keep track of deliverables.  
There were no formal tools required.

14) What percentage of their code is native assembly?  
Quattro 1.0 was 90% assembler and here cost Turbo Pascal. Today,  
almost all new development is Turbo C++ and Turbo C with a drop  
down into inline assembler when needed.

15) How much do they share code between projects?  
It used to be done informally but widely by projects for formatting,  
help, parsing, numerical stuff... The core technology group was  
providing UI tools when I left along with YACOW and special linkers  
and debuggers (which Borland has since shipped), but I believe this  
was stopped and I believe there is a lot less shared technology these  
days.

16) What investments in the development process are they making now to be  
used in the future?  
Never saw any except in internals, (YACOW, ..) but I gather today  
this is all changed and all new projects are being written for the  
future with generic strong class libraries.

17) Do they have a group that provides proprietary tools for their  
development efforts?  
No. This is regarded as a bad thing. Instead, the developers often  
act in essence as beta testers for the next generation of Turbo tools.

This is just a start. These questions will generate more questions,  
I thank you in advance for any help you can give me on this.  
Thanks, Dave

In general, Borland, when I was there, was an intensely hardworking  
(average 40 hour weeks compared to the 60-65 here) focused tactical  
pragmatic and unstructured company with a lot of very senior very  
bright engineers. Philippe drove the entire process very hard with a  
total focus on tactics, on beating the competition, on speed, and  
on every fast UI's.

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