

Pairing as a Leadership Function

Driving performance and quality by working together

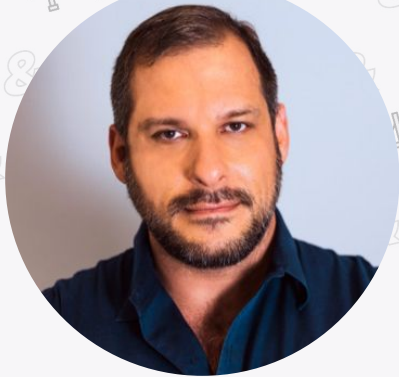


PNSQC

OCTOBER 10-12 2022

THE EVOLUTION OF QUALITY





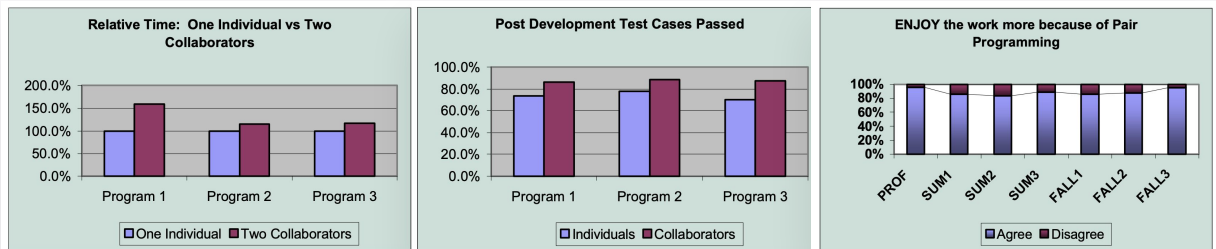
Dan Shupp

GM, Artium San Francisco



Dan is an international entrepreneur, and has built technology companies on 3 continents. He has a demonstrated history of scaling teams into high performing organizations through autonomy, mastery, and empowerment across a number of industries, in professional services, entrepreneurial, and enterprise contexts. He currently leads Artium's San Francisco practice, building new capabilities at scale for clients where high quality software is a requirement of their business strategy. Previously he ran e-commerce for Rakuten Viber, built an Agile outsourcing firm in Vietnam, and worked in IBM's Beijing Software Research Lab. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science from Johns Hopkins University, and currently resides in San Francisco, California.

Pair Programming



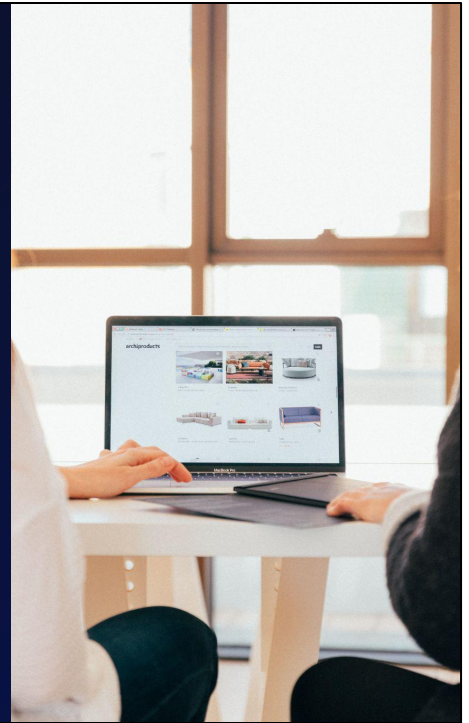
Reference: [A. Cockburn and L. Williams, The Costs and Benefits of Pair Programming](#)

Pairing is pretty known in an engineering context.

- **work more quickly, deliver higher quality, and enjoy the process more**
 - Great, but we're not here to talk about engineering
- **Pairing is highly leveraged - apply more resources, in a very targeted way, and you get outsize returns**
 - in engineering, pairing provides leverage by driving quality earlier in the production process
 - **SDETs in the audience will have seen this**
 - -> increasing quality early is orders of magnitude more efficient than catching quality issues later
 - **For leadership activities**, pairing provides the same immediate values....
 - Knowledge Transfer,
 - Skills Transfer,
 - Culture Transmission,
 - and of course quality of output,
 -but at even higher leverage, because leadership activities are supposed to be higher leverage
 - **In this talk, stories of targeted pairing on problems that scale the org**
 - **One biz, one delivery, one management**

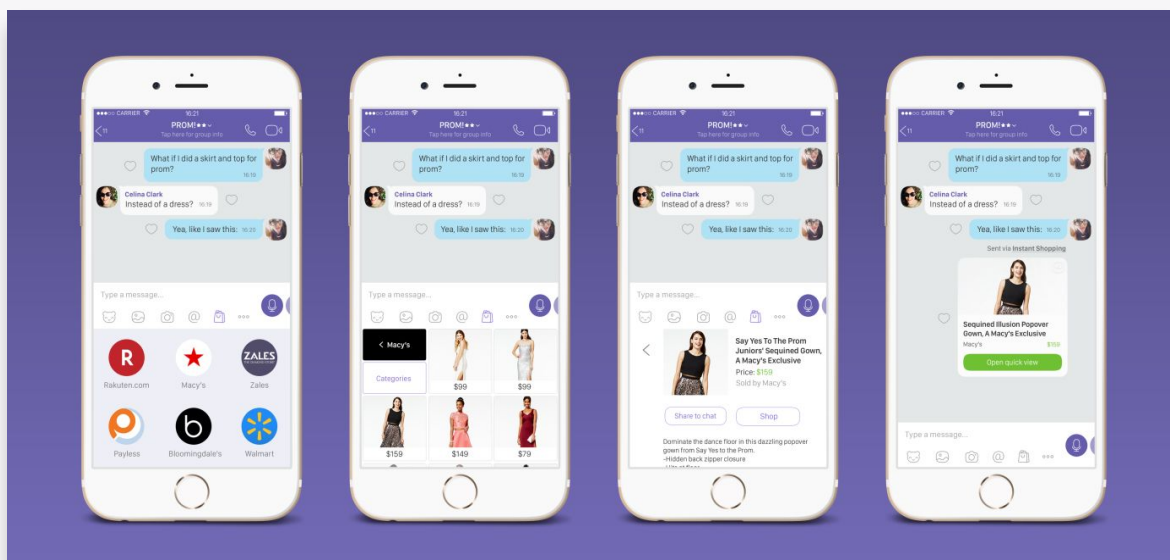
Pairing to Drive Action Across an Organization

Same-function pairing as a Product Manager



A little Background

- Dan was a PM at Viber running mobile e-commerce
- Viber is a messaging app, think Whatsapp except it's purple
- Multinational organization -
 - I was in San Francisco,
 - Most of Leadership in Israel,
 - Engineering in Belarus,
 - and sales was in 150 countries around the world.

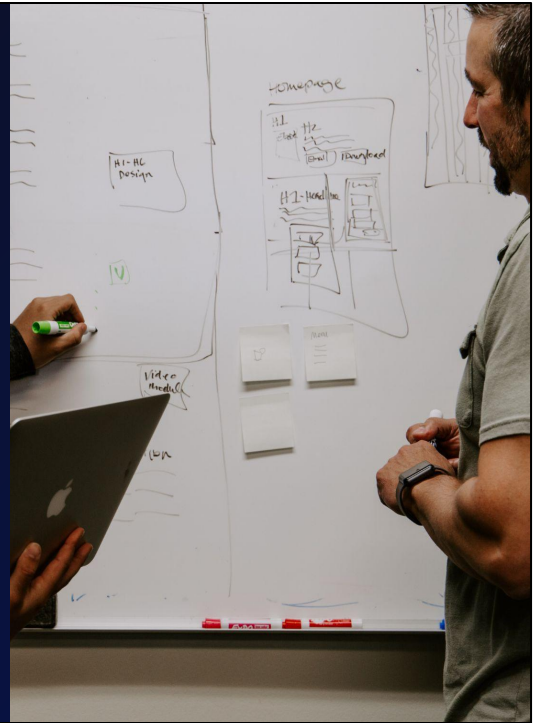


- Viber had acquired an SF startup....
- We launched the product globally
 - **local retailers in 100 countries**
 - **5 million MAU**
 - **and boy did our conversions suck.**
 - Centuries, not years, to recoup our investment
- Around this time I heard about an effort to investigate an Ad platform
 - **I was warned** they liked to plan top-down and shipped slowly
 - **I needed their help, but couldn't get blocked** by their process
- Our first meeting was a working session
 - **In 90m we had a lightweight PRD**
- Continued this pattern over time.
 - experiments, reports, roadmaps, and eventually the business case, and we got it approved and the the ad team got the green light to integrate a vendor
- **So what was the big success here?**
 - **The business case was obvious**
 - **Execution was hard**
 - Helping each other represent the work to our management chains
 - Areas were new to us

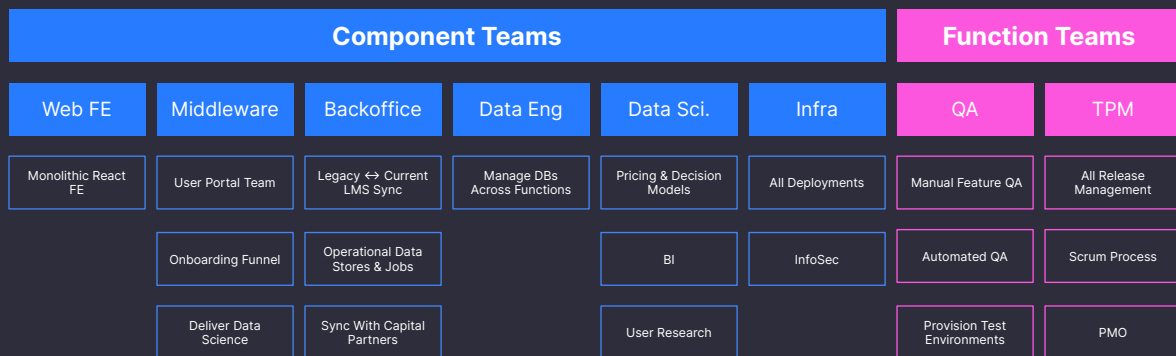
- But it was easier cause we kept the focus on work products and outputs
- I never gave them the chance to start broadcasting worries until we were showing them their successes

Pairing to Build Alignment

Pairing across functions to drive alignment on a tricky process change



- I worked with a client, series D Fintech, 200+ engineers
- Our job
 - move them into the cloud
 - in the process, move their delivery process to 100% IaC
 - teach their DevOps team how to manage it



- Here is their organization at the time
 - Not X-functional
 - Imagine being a PM trying to move work through these teams
 - Now imagine there are 10 PMs
 - Now imagine you're an SDET or an Engineer with 5 PMs chasing your team at any given time
 - This typically results in some defensiveness when things move slowly but it's not clear why
- Right before our first component is set to move into AWS, Surprise! VP Eng wants Trunk-Based Development, not Git-flow
 - Aside - TBD = more maturity
- So now we had the task of aligning middle management on a new feature branching strategy
 - Middle mgt is super uncomfortable with risk
 - And you have about 2 weeks of buffer in the schedule to get alignment
- **2 weeks of pairing with directors**, starting with an empty doc
 - **Walk through every risk they see and get it into the doc**
 - **Write a progression of validations for those risks**
 - **Walk through all the ways their teams add value in the new process**
- Result: Every manager got complete coverage in the nebulous failure and

- ownership in the success if it worked

Pairing for Skill & Culture Building

Pairing into your team for enablement



- This one is my favorite
- IMO Management and Leadership often doesn't get taught well
 - **People love to characterize**, but it's very rare that people are actually shown what to do, especially as you proceed higher up into management
 - Managers do their best, often without real skills mentorship
 - **How do I build them with the infinite variety of humans on teams?**
 - **How do I give feedback to people with different values?**
 - **How do I coach someone who's a better executor on the task at hand?**

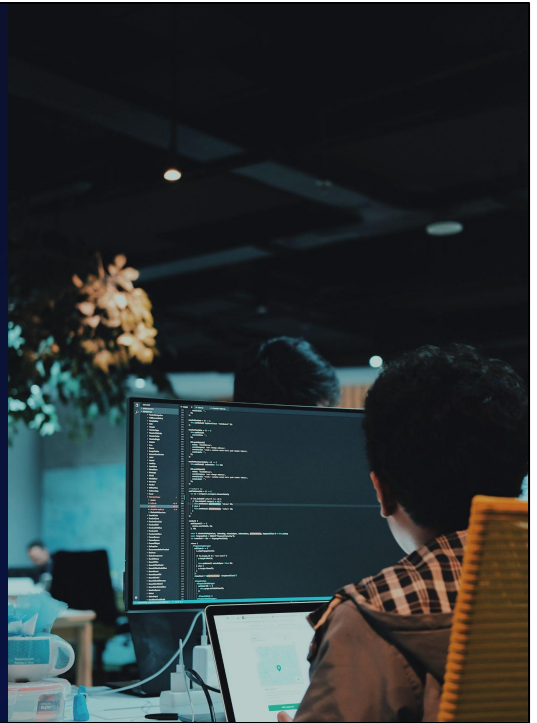


- **This is what you wind up with**
- **Most managers' first few years** are spent making the same new manager mistakes.
 - **Know what the outcomes should look like,**
 - **Don't know the theory and practice to get there**
- **Pairing is the answer to everything, right?**
 - **Fewer pairing opportunities - 1-1s**
- **The opportunities that do exist are golden** though.
- **Pairing on performance reviews** really unlocked this concept for me
 - **My first Director role** was at a startup in VN. The market was **mostly outsourcing, high turnover, micromanagerial culture**
 - **At 30 people,** I rolled out **levels doc** that Included specific tests for skills, **PDP template,** and **went to quarterly reviews**
 - **If that seems like a lot,** you're right, and you don't know the half of it
 - **Every quarter**
 - **I'd pair to prep the PDP**
 - **They'd pair with the staff to update it**
 - **I'd pair to finalize**
 - **When I paired with my managers** we'd work through the performance analysis and framing problems for each staff member together:

- how can we really specifically describe what we mean about someone's performance?
- Why are we comfortable with someone else's reports?
- How can we productively discuss a topic with an individual?
- **The first meetings were always very uncomfortable**
 - **It continued to feel exhausting** until we'd done this process 2x with each
 - After that it was breathtaking
 - It felt like flying, because we had so much more time to focus on the work
- **By the time our firm got to 100 staff**, our turnover was 25% the national average
 - **Surprise resignations became very rare**
 - **Hostile salary negotiations basically stopped**

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Pairing Techniques



- Must haves for successful pairing sessions
 - It's not a meeting, it's a working session - you're collaborating together to create an artifact rather than planning.
 - Both people are entirely focused on the session
 - It's a zoom call where you can see each other's faces and the artifact you're working on
 - Interruptions happen, but they're temporary, and one person holds context for the other
- Mutual Purpose ⇔ Mutual Respect- we have a shared goal and both of our opinions are valued contributions toward achieving it
 - It's a Collaborative exercise
 - Mutual respect - each person recognizes the value that the other is bringing to the table. The collaboration is opt-in/mutually desired by both parties
 - Coming in with "the solution" ahead of time is a smell
 - This is the difference between micromanagement and pairing
 - Pairing vs Pontificating
 - If they're there to listen to you give them the real answer, not achieving this value
 - Disagreements are met with questions, popping the stack on

- why opinions might be correct, then
 - collectively prioritizing the current approach and how to test which hypotheses
 - Soliciting & sharing relevant context

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Talk on Leadership Pairing Working offline

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OUTLINE

Framing

Examples

Closing

a united front when pitching it to leadership. Everyone got a piece of the credit for pitching in on a push for quality rather than getting bogged down in uncertainty about maturity

Slide 10 - Conclusion 1 - Techniques review - Graphic - text for Mutual Purpose/Attention/Respect

- Must have for successful pairing sessions
 - Mutual Purpose => we have a shared goal
 - It's not a meeting, it's a working session
 - you're collaborating together to create an artifact rather than planning.
 - Mutual Attention => Both people are entirely focused on the session
 - It's a zoom call where you can see each other's faces and the artifact you're working on
 - Interruptions happen, but they're temporary, and one person holds context for the other. Short of a Red Alert that would pull you out of any meeting, you should be giving this important collaboration your full attention
 - Mutual Respect => Both of our opinions are valued contributions toward achieving it
 - How many of you have ever had a boss come to you, framing something as your decision, when it's actually quite obvious that only one answer is acceptable?
 - "Pairing vs Pontificating" - This is the difference between micromanagement and pairing
 - If they're there to listen to you give them the real answer, not achieving this value
 - Coming in with "the solution" ahead of time is a smell
- In Pairing, each person recognizes the value that the other is bringing to the table. The collaboration is not-in and mutually desired by both parties

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Pairing as a Leadership Function

Driving performance and quality by working together



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Thank you

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