Asynchronous Decision Making – why and how?
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FOSDEM Brussels January 2018 - @bdelacretaz, grep.codeconsult.ch

“Of course we can make fast decisions ... once we have considered the 4872 factors.”

Images are from Adobe Stock, unless otherwise stated.
I will NOT attend your meeting!
I’m an Open Source person!

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Asynchronous decision-making: Helping remote teams succeed. Here’s how asynchronous decision-making can make it happen.

Better communication with fewer meetings isn’t a pipe dream. Here’s why it’s possible.

12 Dec 2017 | Bernard Dejardin

https://tinyurl.com/async-decisions
http://blogs.apache.org/foundation
https://apache.org/PMvk

The Apache Foundation Blog
by Bernard Dejardin

November 2017

The Apache Software Foundation is a non-profit organization of leading vendors and users of the Apache software...
Remote (software) teams need to make LOTS of decisions, all the time.

How can that happen without meetings?

How can we keep this process efficient and fun?

“shared neurons”
WHAT
is Asynchronous Decision Making?
Four steps to a decision

Unless formally required by your organization, none of these require people to be in the same “place” at the same time: *everything can happen asynchronously.*
Tools for asynchronous decisions

shared async comms channel

free-form, chatty

shared case management tool

structured, chronology

No meetings required
More time to think
More precise in a foreign language or if you’re shy
WHY

do we need Asynchronous Decision Making?
On a Maker’s Schedule, a one-hour meeting might waste half a day.

On a Manager’s Schedule it’s just another one-hour slot.

Credit to Paul Graham, blog post: https://s.apache.org/ms
Meetings are **(crazily)** EXPENSIVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 Engineers</td>
<td>$640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Managers</td>
<td>$370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room</td>
<td>$1280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renovation</td>
<td>$50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lots of $</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
failed
meetings?

are you on mute?

Bob forgot

what’s the goal?

Bob forgot

wrong topic

say again?

we’ll decide

unprepared

next week…

who’s in charge?
HOW does Asynchronous Decision Making work?
Apache projects (where I come from) use their **dev mailing lists** as a shared asynchronous communications channel and **issue trackers** for case management. Your mileage may vary - but the principles are not limited to software development.
Building consensus

Consensus: widespread agreement among people who have decision power.

Natural consensus is best. When that doesn’t emerge, clear voting rules can help!
ok, ok but in PRACTICE?
Suggested Process:
1. Create an issue with the description of the feature should be discussed.
2. Others can discuss about the proposal with issue comments.
3. Once there is a rough consensus, create a new file in this folder with the proposal details.

... *slightly different tools, similar process: brainstorm -> options -> consensus -> decision all asynchronous and traceable*

https://github.com/apache/cordova-discuss
And a project report header and discussion space is as simple as this:

E. Apache Blazinator Project [Bob Blazer / Bertrand]
   See Attachment E
   [ Blazinator.
      approved: bd, mm, dd, db, jc, ldv
      comments:
         bd: Not sure why LEGAL-123 blocks their release
         ldv: They are waiting for the committer to supply
              an updated iCLA as the received one was
              incomplete.
         bd: Ok, thanks, approving the report then.
   ]

Dead simple single text file + version control for case management.
https://www.apache.org/foundation/board

The agenda is presented in colour-coded form. The orange list contains uncontested items of business, which are usually approved swiftly. The blue list consists of responses to parliamentary requests. The items on the white list are discussed and decided one by one due to their political importance; occasionally, the discussions can be spread over a number of meetings. And the green list contains confidential items of business, which are also discussed in detail.

Color-coded lists of agenda items on paper to structure meeting.

Semi-async meetings - structured async preparation - similar principles!
coda
are we done yet?
This works!

...as demonstrated by some world-changing Open Source projects over the years!

Switching between tools requires practice - adapt to your culture!

The exact tools are not important but their roles are:

- Central async channel +
- Consensus building rules
- Case management

I'm @bdelacretaz, thanks!

Reading list: https://pinboard.in/u:bdelacretaz/t:collaboration

Requirements for open development channels:
https://github.com/bdelacretaz/opendev-channel-requirements

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