

The Two Types of "Easy"

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10 Mar 2023 01:42 PM

Vague Labels on Specific Things

I got this idea during on a team SCRUM meeting. While assessing prospective tickets, the label "easy" was applied verbally to a few of them. As I listened and participated, I realized that depending on who applied the label and the nature of the task represented on the ticket, that the label "easy" meant something different case to case.

Theory: There are two distinct ideas around the label "easy" that are applied to prospective tasks. Each idea reflects the nature of the group and the tasks themselves.

Helpful Easy

The first type of "easy" can be described as follows:

"This is simple. It is so simple that I can help you with it. Together, we will get it done efficiently while also empowering you understand it and do it without help in the future by teaching and training you along the way".

This is the good form of "easy" tasks in team-oriented work. It facilitates teamwork, cooperation, and engagement between mentors/experts and mentees/initiates. When this form of "easy" in play, tasks are completed while while at the same time knowledge spreads across the team and overall competence rises.

If only that were the only form of "easy" that is meant when it's applied as a label.

Problematic Easy

The second type of "easy" can be rationalized as follows:

"This looks simple, but it's not really my thing or I don't like doing it. You should be able to handle it by yourself. Don't ask me because it's simple and should not require my help or input. Don't reach out to me because I don't like doing it. I expect it to be done efficiently by you without bothering me with it at all".

This type of "easy" is dangerously toxic to a team-oriented environment. It isolates the initiate, giving them specific expectations without assistance. The relational disconnect implied in the "don't bother me" aspect ensures that knowledge is not transferred between team members and therefore must be acquired elsewhere - outside of the team. Searching for knowledge on the internet becomes a significantly more valuable skill to the individual than relational practices within the team such as teaching or learning skills. This toxicity shapes what could potentially be a cooperatively working team into a rather isolated collection of parallel laboring individuals. Knowledge is isolated to the individual. Overall competence is distributed to the capability of the individual to learn from sources outside the team. Growth is a private matter, not a shared experience.

To Be or Not To Be a Team

The latter, toxic idea of the "easy" label is the very antithesis of team-oriented work. In a healthy team-oriented environment, mentoring (with reasonable limits) is essential to processing teammates from initiate to expert. In a toxic team-oriented environment, mentorship is viewed as a tax on overall progress and avoided unless absolutely necessary. Under this heuristic, growth is acquired by self-motivated people from external sources. The team itself is neither nurturing to the initiate nor sharing across team members.

So, reach out and help where you can and ask for help where and when you need it. This is, after all, how people work in a team.

This post is an [Aside](#) and is to be regarded under those conditions.

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