The vision thing

One way to get a team working together is through shared vision. While "vision" may seem a bit abstract, vague or ephemeral it does actually have strong supporters who argue that creating a shared vision powerful tool for managers and teams:

> "Where there is a genuine vision (as opposed to the all-too-familiar 'vision statement'), people excel, and learn, not because they are told to, but because they want to." (Senge, 1990)

There is a brilliant example of the power of vision in an IT project by Conklin. He described the management of the Digital Alpha AXP project in the early 1990's. This project employed over 2,000 engineers both in hardware (chip design, machine design, integration) and software (at least two operating systems, compilers, editors, etc., etc.). He called this *Enrollment Management* and at the centre of it was vision.

This shared vision was not a weak, ephemeral thing but a strong substantial, lasting vision which moved people seemingly extraordinary work:

> "given the group's commitment to the larger result, we found more aggressive behaviour. For example, the OpenVMS AXP group publicly committed to their target schedule and stated, 'We don't know how to achieve this, but we commit to finding a way'." (Conklin, 1996)

Enrollment management used a simple four point methodology:

1. Establish and appropriately large shared vision;

2. Delegate completely and elicit specific commitments;

3. Inspect rigorously, providing supportive feedback;

4. Acknowledge every advance, learning as the program progresses.

The case study describes how the project management admitted they had no project plan. Nor could they possibly draw one up in the time available. Instead they took the difficulties as challengers and used each new problem as an opportunity to enforce the vision and increase the speed of development.

Perhaps most interesting about this is the similarities between many of Conklin's ideas and those of the Agile development proponents. Perhaps the biggest difference is that most Agile advocates duck the issue of large teams engaging in Agile development, but Conklin, in 1990, was going Agile development with 2,000 engineers.

Conklin, P. F. (1996) Enrollment Management: Managing the Alpha AXP Program, *IEEE Software,* **13,** 53-64.

Senge, P. (1990) *The Fifth Discipline,* Random House Books.