Menlo Innovations: A New Approach to Workplace & Project Management

This case was written by Hadiya Faheem, under the direction of Debapratim Purkayastha, IBS Center for Management Research. It was compiled from published sources, and is intended to be used as a basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a management situation.
Menlo Innovations: A New Approach to Workplace & Project Management

“Our project managers do all the things you’d expect from most project managers in that they maintain all of the artifacts related to status, scope, budget, and schedule, but they are also very much a part of the people-part of the equation. They are highly involved with the software developers and designers as well as the key customer stakeholders.”


“Flexibility is a strategy. We don’t have flex options. We have a culture which embraces flexibility, for both employees and customers.”


“His (Sheridan’s factory) is quite remarkable. There are no private offices, conference rooms, doors, cubicles, desks, or interior walls. Rather, the building is light and airy with brick outer walls and long aluminum tables with an open ceiling. Teams are paired for specific projects. And once the project is completed, new pairs are created.”

- Ken Rogers, Executive Director, Automation Alley4, in 2007.

A NEW KIND OF WORKPLACE

On August 14, 2008, Menlo Innovations LLC (Menlo), a Michigan-based software design and development company, received the Alfred P. Sloan Awards for Business Excellence in Workplace Flexibility.5 The award recognized Menlo for nurturing a culture characterized by a high level of teamwork and flexible workplace practices that promoted work-life balance. Menlo had also received several awards earlier for its innovative work practices and creativity at the workplace.

The establishment of Menlo dated back to 2001 when the information technology (IT) industry was coping with the turbulent times as a result of the dotcom bubble burst. Richard Sheridan (Sheridan), co-founder, president, and CEO, Menlo, established the company in association with his colleagues based on Thomas Alva Edison’s6 (Edison) Invention Factory of 1876. Sheridan used

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4 Automation Alley was a Michigan-based association of businesses, technology, and government that served entrepreneurs.
6 Thomas Alva Edison (Edison), the inventor of the incandescent light bulb, set up the Invention Factory in 1876 at Menlo Park, New Jersey, USA. Edison employed around 200 people with specialized skills in his invention factory who worked in an open environment. Edison believed in teamwork and considered hard work to be a prerequisite for invention.
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extreme programming for software project management and also adopted an open, flexible, and collaborative working environment inspired by Edison’s Invention Factory. Analysts felt that this approach was path-breaking since it not only enabled Menlo to provide innovative solutions to its clients but also gave new meaning to workplace flexibility and work-life balance.

Sheridan placed a lot of importance on project management. “At Menlo Innovations, we’ve learned that project management is critical to successful innovation. It’s a concept that stands in stark contrast to the commonly held misconception that project management stifles innovation. Innovative projects naturally thrive on an “out of the box” attitude that easily can lead to a “no deliverables” result if formal professional project management is absent,” he said. Sheridan said that generally IT projects took twice as long as scheduled and cost twice as much as budgeted, and this was largely due to the time wasted in fixing mistakes. Moreover, in most IT organizations, employees worked in isolation and developed a high level of specialization, at times becoming “prisoners” of their specialties. But Menlo’s approach toward project management ensured that this did not happen. Mistakes were identified at the development stage itself and the fact that employees worked on all parts of the project and knew how the pieces fit together increased the quality of its offering dramatically.

“Attracting and building our team has involved paying close attention to all the intangibles that make Menlo a great place to work. A winning workplace makes work fun and energizes our team to create the software design innovations our clients expect from us,” said Sheridan.

Though the flexible work practices that Menlo adopted were in stark contrast to the corporate culture prevalent in many organizations, the company had tasted considerable success by adopting this approach. It gained recognition for creativity and flexible work practices as well as for project management. However, some critics were of the opinion that software development required a challenging work environment as opposed to the open and collaborative environment that was followed at Menlo.

RICHARD SHERIDAN & HIS EARLY CAREER

Sheridan started working on software programming in his school days. At the age of 13, he worked as a programmer at Chippewa Valley High School. By the late 1970s, he had earned his bachelor’s degree in computer science from the University of Michigan. He then did his master’s in computer engineering from the University of Michigan. Soon after, Sheridan worked at Manufacturing Data Systems Inc. until the company was sold. He then worked with Winterhalter Inc., a software development company which was sold to Interface Systems Inc. (Interface) in the 1980s.

In the early 1980s, Sheridan worked as Vice President for software development at Interface in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. He served at Interface for 18 years and was content with the job, earning a six-figure salary. In 1999, Sheridan built a software development team for capturing a share in the online bill and statement presentment market. “When I became vice president for the

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7 Extreme programming is one of the new approaches to project management that requires two employees to work collaboratively during the creation and implementation of a software project.
10 Manufacturing Data Systems Inc. was a Michigan-based company that provided manufacturers with factory automation solutions.
11 Interface Systems Inc. was a leading company providing products and services related to Legacy-to-Internet (L2i) technology.
12 Online bill and statement presentment allowed consumers to view, receive, and pay bills online. The consumers also had the option of setting e-mail alerts for upcoming payments, bill arrivals, and due dates.
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software development division of Interface, I struggled with the problem of how to organize teams of motivated employees who produce top-quality products. For the first ten years of managing software teams there were just some itches I couldn’t scratch—some goals I couldn’t accomplish. It was often difficult to break new people into the team and get them up to speed fast enough. I wanted to have a team that was flexible enough to shift from one product to another over time,” recalled Sheridan. During this period, Sheridan developed the Java Factory Team, inspired by Edison’s Invention Factory which had an open and collaborative working environment. He practiced Edison’s principles of adopting a flexible work culture and was credited with bringing about flexibility at Interface. His use of extreme programming too attracted the attention of industry watchers and academics.

The dotcom bubble burst of March 10, 2000, resulted in one of the most difficult times for the IT industry. The fortunes of most IT companies and startups took a nosedive and companies with unproven and flawed business models were forced to close down. Many companies had to lay off employees. The situation at Interface also became worse and eventually it was sold to Tumbleweed Communications Corp.14 (Tumbleweed).

In January 2001, in an attempt to cope with the turbulent times in the IT industry, Sheridan was asked to fire half the employees at Tumbleweed. In April, Sheridan was himself asked to leave. He contacted several prospective employers but in vain. It was around this time that Sheridan got in touch with one of his college mates and colleagues, Thomas Meloche (Meloche). The two along with two other friends, James Goebel and Robert Simms, decided to start their own venture.

Some time later, the four of them met in Sheridan’s basement and decided to contribute US$ 25,000 each as an investment to fund their venture. In June 2001, Sheridan in association with his colleagues founded Menlo. Asked why Menlo had been chosen as the name, Sheridan said they had named the company after Edison’s Invention Factory, which was based in Menlo Park, New Jersey. This was because he placed a lot of importance on innovation. “Look back through history. We’ve passed through the agricultural age, the industrial age, and the information age. People ask me, ‘What’s left?’ I say it is what has always been there: innovation,” he said.15

MENLO INNOVATIONS

In June 2001, Sheridan and his colleagues set up The Menlo Software Factory and The Menlo Institute. The Menlo Software Factory was inspired by Edison’s approach to flexible practices at the workplace. As in Edison’s Invention Factory, the employees at Menlo worked in an open environment that allowed them to interact and share their beliefs and values while developing new products (Refer to Exhibit I for a picture of Thomas Edison’s Invention Factory and the Menlo Software Factory).

Menlo’s initial projects included developing a database for storage of medical information at the University of Michigan Health System and a store locator based on the web at Domino’s Pizza in 2001.

The Menlo Institute was set up to teach the principles drawn from Edison’s Invention Factory and the Menlo Software Factory to various corporates who aimed to adopt this approach. Menlo conducted training classes and workshops, and provided free resources in the form of articles, newsletters, white papers, etc. written by Menlo employees that helped other organizations to practice similar approaches in their organizations. Organizations could enroll for training sessions and a day-long training was also available to any individual for US$ 675.

14 Tumbleweed Communications Corp was a provider of advanced solutions to e-mail that helped companies in business communication.
The business broke even on a revenue of US$ 200,000 in 2001.\(^{16}\) Revenues reached US$ 2.5 million in the first 18 months.\(^{17}\) And in 2002, the company earned revenues of US$ 2 million and pretax profits of US$ 600,000.\(^{18}\) In addition to effectively using their contacts to get business for the startup venture, the monthly ‘Taste of Success’ seminars held by Menlo helped expand its business. Through these seminars, Menlo provided insights into why software projects failed so often. According to the company, 28 percent of all software projects failed, wasting more than US$ 70 billion a year. “This industry is in a crisis… It’s costing us our companies, it’s costing us our jobs, it’s costing us our self-esteem,”\(^{19}\) said Meloche. The company also provided insights into how to develop successful projects.

In 2002, Menlo aimed to expand and increase its productivity. Sheridan and his team decided to hire new people using an innovative interviewing technique called ‘extreme interviewing’ (Refer to Exhibit II for Menlo’s extreme interviewing technique). The company felt that this method was more reliable than the traditional interviewing technique since team members of Menlo were would be involved in recruiting new hires. Participation from team members was required since they would enable the new recruits to be assimilated into the working environment. Another important factor of extreme interviewing was creation of an actual working environment where the company got to know a candidate’s potential for a particular job and the candidate also got to know the actual tasks to be performed on the job. Menlo also gave importance to personal and technical skills while recruiting. The extreme interviewing technique helped Menlo increase its employee strength by 12 employees in 2002.\(^{20}\) In 2003, Sheridan became the Forbes’ cover page story ‘Hire Yourself’ for his ability to set up and successfully run his own entrepreneurial venture.

**High-Tech Anthropology**

Despite Menlo developing several successful products, there were a few products that did not appeal to customers because of reasons such as difficulty in implementing the software application, etc. Since Sheridan focused more on technology and less on the ease with which users could use his product, he thought initially that it was his users who lacked the competency to use his products and termed this as the ‘stupid users’ syndrome. However, he later realized that the real problem were his products and not the users or customers. In an attempt to create easy-to-use and successful products, Sheridan focused on building a system that would create a software product with a non-technical focus.

In 2003, Sheridan and his team focused on reading articles on people, business, process, and innovation. The studies revealed that the programmers lacked the skill to realize what would be an insightful interface for users. Sheridan involved many of the employees in adopting different approaches to various processes, techniques, and practices. It was found that most of the best practices came from anthropology rather than computer sciences. Sheridan and his colleagues came in contact with several anthropologists to study their discipline and techniques. Sheridan and his colleagues called this practice ‘High-tech Anthropology’ and their employees ‘High-tech Anthropologists’. The high-tech anthropologists studied the way users did their jobs and accordingly built their software applications. The products developed using this approach were considered to be a big success since users were able to use them with little training. Sheridan cited the example of a software program deployed at a factory. When Menlo’s high-tech anthropologists

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went to train the industrial users, they said “Don’t bother” and continued to implement it successfully. “We’ve since dropped the whole user training thing altogether. We now consider user training a sign of poor design,” said Sheridan. The high-tech anthropology approach also helped Menlo achieve success and resulted in it earning revenues of US$ 2.8 million in 2004.\(^21\)

In September 2005, Menlo acquired English Communications Inc. (English Communications), an accent reduction company. The company had initially approached Menlo to develop a software that would automate the accent reduction training sessions conducted by the President, Judy Ravin (Ravin) of English Communications. However, the meeting led to Menlo acquiring English Communications. Enticed by Menlo’s innovative workplace practices, employees of English Communications joined Menlo. Menlo had an employee strength of 40 people in 2005.\(^22\) In the same year, Menlo won the ‘101 Best and Brightest Companies to Work for’ award conducted by Michigan Business & Professional Association (MBPA) for practicing exceptional human resource practices at the workplace. Sheridan too had by that time gained a reputation as one of the most powerful individuals in the field of project management.\(^23\) In 2005, he was named by the Project Management Institute as one of USA’s top 50 project managers.

By October 2005, the company had completed about US$ 8 million in projects.\(^24\) In July 2006, Sheridan moved the Menlo office downtown in Ann Arbor Michigan as part of its business expansion plans. According to him, the office moved downtown because he liked the ambience and it made Menlo, “a more interesting company to work for.”\(^25\)

In 2007, Menlo ranked 420 on Inc’s magazine’s, ‘500 Fastest-growing Private Companies’. Commenting on the ranking, Sheridan said, “The Inc. 500 award is a dream come true for every entrepreneur. Our growth is the result of a great team working within a great community delivering value to our clients every day.”\(^26\) In the few years since its launch, the company had also attracted the attention of the industry watchers due to various other aspects of its business practices. For instance, for clients facing a cash crunch, Menlo was even ready to cut its usual rates by half in return for equity in the client’s business or royalties for custom software.

MENLO’S APPROACH TO PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Sheridan advocated the use of project management since software development was an incremental and iterative process that required careful planning and implementation. According to Sheridan, “Project management is a key element of our ability to scale our organization to handle more projects simultaneously without having to create inordinately complicated and expensive management hierarchy.”\(^27\) Around 15 percent of the budget set for the implementation of a particular software project was spent on project management practices at Menlo.\(^28\)

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\(^{22}\) “Innovations (Creativity),” http://original.britannica.com.


Menlo adopted agile project management practices that helped it simultaneously run several projects successfully (Refer to Exhibit III for a note on agile project management). Using software development techniques coupled with effective project management, Menlo employees were required to develop a major software application once in six months and a minor one in ten days. Sheridan made use of extreme programming practices in its software development process (Refer to Figure I for a schematic diagram of extreme programming). Regarding extreme programming, Sheridan explained, “It has a number of unusual tenets. One is that you work in an open environment, as opposed to offices and cubes. The programmers no longer own certain pieces of the software. Rather than code ownership, extreme programming espouses code stewardship. That means we all own all the code and each of us may work on the other’s code. Traditional programming is a very personal activity, because you're essentially writing down the way you think about the problem. With extreme programming you share the thinking process… This is a pretty radical way to do software development, very different from the way the whole industry was practicing it.”

Extreme programming made extensive use of paired programming principles that required the involvement of two employees during the creation and implementation of a software project. At Menlo, the employees worked in pairs sharing a single computer, mouse, and a keyboard. This helped them learn from each other and at the same time, catch any errors that occurred while developing the coding program for a software project. This process was called collective ownership where the quality of the code increased and the defects in the code decreased. Menlo followed a coding standard that made it appear as if the resultant code was written by a single competent individual. After the development of the code, the team passed it through a ‘test-driven development’ stage where the programmers received feedback immediately of how well the program worked. The code was developed in such a way that it was of business value. In case of any discrepancy in the design of the software program, the programmers improved the design using a process called refactoring. Refactoring was supported by continuous testing in order to ensure the credibility of the new design.

Menlo’s extreme programming required that the customer be closely involved with the programmers. The customer provided the requirements for the software project to be implemented. The team also included analysts who helped customers define their requirements for a software project. The software development project was supervised by a coach. Together the developers, customer, and the coach formed the ‘whole team’. The team involved in extreme programming used a planning game for planning and keeping track of details of what should be implemented next. The team then released the software and passed it through various customer tests in order to ensure that the software could be implemented efficiently. The members of the team developed a vision called the metaphor that described the working of the program.

Figure I
A Schematic Diagram of Extreme Programming

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Project management was considered to be a core part of Menlo’s delivery model and business strategy. The project managers worked in conjunction with the software developers and provided guidance to their clients. Menlo used the extreme programming approach even at the client’s site for training them in effectively implementing the software. Sheridan said, “We don’t just come in and train them — we actually help them do their work better. It’s like mentoring.”

According to Sheridan, project management was a prerequisite for innovation. Project management implementation at Menlo was a mandatory clause with every software implementation. Soon after the initiation of the software development project, the planning phase of project management began where the scope of the project, various alternatives, estimated costs, time, budget, etc. were predicted. In the execution phase, work was authorized to employees using agile project management tools like storyboards, story cards, planning sheets, planning games, etc. These tools helped employees gain an understanding about the desired outcome of a project, the estimated costs of implementing a software development project, tackle issues related to requirements and project functionality, etc.

Story cards were mostly used by teams involved in extreme programming. They used work packages as written descriptions of user functionality on an index card. These index cards enabled the team involved in the project to describe the functionality of the project in the form of a story rather than describe its technical activities. The story cards helped in identifying the estimated time and cost of a project, schedule project activities, delegate tasks to the team, and report the status of the ongoing software development project (Refer to Exhibit IV for a sample story card used at Menlo).

Before the start of any iteration of a software development project, the developers estimated the story card. If the story card exceeded the limit for the completion of a particular project, the story card was decomposed into two or more story cards. These were then estimated and assembled into releases that helped in reducing the risks associated with a project or added value to the user in the implementation of the project. Each release was decomposed into development iterations of two weeks and story cards were assigned to each iteration. These simple paper tools could also be used to do ‘what if’ planning exercises with the client firm.

In the controlling phase, the work packages were completed and integrated into a project. The controlling phase was considered to be a critical stage in project management since the actual performance achieved was compared with the standards. In case of any deviations from standards, corrective action was taken and they led to the closure of a software development project (Refer to Figure II for phases of project management at Menlo).

All the employees wrote down the status of their work by hand on sheets of paper and these were put up on the press-board walls. This allowed anyone else to view the progress on a particular project. “Everything is about process. Having the process handwritten on paper makes everything more engaging. I don’t have to stand there breathing over their necks to find out what kind of progress they are making. I can just walk up to the walls and find out for myself. There is little wasted time here, and in turn, everybody is free to pursue the work they love,” explained Sheridan.

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ADOPTING A ‘FLEXIBLE’ APPROACH

Inspired by Edison’s Invention Factory, Sheridan adopted a similar approach at Menlo and there were no cubicles, walls, or doors in the office. It was an open style brick and beam office which resembled a workshop rather than a corporate office. The employees were not even assigned personal computers to work on. Neither did they work in isolation. They worked in pairs for a particular project and were then reorganized into different teams the next week. This ensured that all the employees worked on a project at one time or another. This also helped employees increase their knowledge base by collaborating with different team members. Working in pairs also ensured that the new recruits could work on projects right from the time they joined the organization.
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The employees had the flexibility to come and go out of office according to their needs after coordinating with their weekly partner. They also had the flexibility to take days off to go on a vacation. The company’s flexible work practices allowed employees to bring their families to the workplace and working mothers to bring their babies to work. There was no one doing overtime or working on the weekends at Menlo. “I don’t want my software engineers to be heroic. Heroics are not allowed on our functioning teams. We don’t want programmers working long hours developing software in clear violation of best practices. It is not a good way to run a delivery organization. It is a good way to fail,” wrote Meloche.

Though Sheridan did not share his computer with anyone else, he too worked on the same floor and shared his desk with some other employees.

Another attraction at Menlo was its lax dress code. Employees sported Oxford shirts, fanny packs, and charity race sweatshirts. The employees were allowed (even encouraged) to communicate loudly and to take suggestions from other team members during the creation of a software product. Sheridan said, “Edison counted on people overhearing each other so they could share ideas without more meetings.”

Menlo conducted stand up meetings every weekday morning after an employee call out. There were also daily 10 o’clock meetings at the company which was called out by an electronic dartboard, when everyone stood up and a plastic Vikings helmet was passed to every employee, granting them the right to speak about their day’s plan and strategy of work. In addition to this, at any point of time any employee could call a meeting by calling out ‘Hey Menlo!’ The meets generally got over in 13 minutes.

The company gave every team member the essential choice of striking a balance between their professional and personal lives by giving them freedom and a sufficient number of holidays and a chance to exercise their creativity and innovativeness, and work with other like-minded individuals. It was an environment in which employees seemed to be genuinely enjoy coming in to work. “I think the intangible [perks] are most important to people… [It’s] about this being a place people want to come… This is just a very satisfying place to work,” Jim Rodgers, a Menlo employee. Analysts contended that Menlo’s innovative and efficiently working office environment didn’t require a heavy budget; rather it depended on common sense, creativity, and a willingness on the employer’s part to risk doing something different. According to Sheridan, such workplace practices bred loyalty and also energized the employees. “You can feel the energy. You can feel the spirit of the space… It’s like a one-room schoolhouse for innovation,” he said.

RESULTS

As of 2007, Menlo had achieved revenues of US$ 2.7 million. In 2008, it made it to the Inc 5000 list with a three year growth (2005-2007) of 72.3 percent. It was also a finalist in the Top Small Workplaces. Analysts felt that though Menlo did not do too well on the growth front, it had excelled in other areas such as putting together a vibrant and cohesive organizational culture and engaging employees through effective team building initiatives. It had also demonstrated its ability to retain talent. Menlo’s success was mainly attributed to Sheridan’s approach to innovative workplace and ability to lead people. In September 2007, Automation Alley awarded Sheridan as the Emerging Leader of the Year.

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Analysts felt that the flexible work practices helped Menlo in successful employee engagement and employee retention. Moreover, employees who quit the organization due to several reasons frequently came back. Sheridan explained, “We have an interesting, what I call, ‘negative attrition rate’. Every once in a while somebody on my team will leave for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they get an offer they can’t turn down. They think they want to add something to their resume that’s different than what we have — like, ‘I’m going to go work for the ‘Big Three’ or that sort of thing. And what’s amazing is how often they come back. I could point to several stories here of people who left and came back, and we embrace that.”

Menlo also received several awards for its innovative work practices and creativity at the workplace (Refer to Table I for a list of awards received by Menlo). In addition to adopting flexible work practices, it was credited with creating job opportunities for people in the US since it did not offshore its work to countries such as India. Another noteworthy thing about Menlo was its ability to implement the software of companies which failed to implement it through offshoring. Sheridan said, “About a third of the projects showing up at our door recently are second tries after failed attempts at offshoring.”

Table I

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* The list is not exhaustive.

Adapted from www.menloinnovations.com and other sources.

Though Menlo was appreciated for its efforts to create a flexible working environment in the challenging field of software development, a few industry observers wondered whether this could also apply to larger organizations. Some people felt that the work environment espoused by Menlo led to loss of privacy of employees. For instance, Matt Scully (Scully), director of business and technology solutions for AAA, Menlo’s client firm, said that though its top management was

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totally committed to setting up a similar collaborative atmosphere at AAA, it had met with some resistance from the rank and file. “You lose privacy. You’re sitting closer together. It’s a challenge,” said Scully. Another concern was that IT professionals were generally introverts by nature, and analysts wondered how such people could work in the open collaborative atmosphere at Menlo.

According to the company, for the first half of 2008, its revenues were running 70 percent ahead of the corresponding period of 2007. It said that as of 2008, about 10 percent of its annual revenues actually came from training others on how to develop a workplace and culture such as that at Menlo and about its agile development process. Another potential revenue stream for Menlo was the investments in client organizations. Sheridan felt that revenues from royalties and equity in other companies would account for about half the company’s revenue in the future. As of July 2008, Menlo had 50 employees and expected to employ 25 more by fall-2008. Sheridan said that it was committed to introducing further changes in the workplace and work practices to foster innovation. “We’re always making changes here. Part of our innovation in our culture is to innovate the culture itself. And so there’s always something we’re experimenting with to try new things, see how it worked,” he said.

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Exhibit I

Thomas Edison’s Invention Factory and Menlo Software Factory

Edison’s Invention Factory, 1876

Menlo Software Factory, 2001

Source: www.menloinnovations.com
Menlo adopted the extreme interviewing technique for recruiting. Unlike other organizations, it interviewed candidates in pairs. During the interview process, the company observed the effort made by a candidate to showcase his/her partner in a better way. This was done since the company followed extreme programming principles that required them to work in pairs. According to Sheridan, he did not just look for employees with an engineering degree. “I look for people with great kindergarten skills, people who can get along, play well with others, and communicate,” he said.

Menlo’s extreme interviewing required communication with consultants to identify the right candidate possessing excellent communication skills, energy, and enthusiasm toward a job. Around 50 candidates were invited for the interview at the same time.

The interview process also involved team members who were already working at Menlo. Around 12 members were given training in the process of interviewing. They were required to work on the exercises that would be given to the interviewers. The team members were entrusted with the responsibility of identifying candidates with good interpersonal and communication skills, and ability to work in a team.

After the candidates were identified, they were exposed to Menlo’s method of extreme programming. The candidates were evaluated based on their critical thinking ability. The candidates were then sent to the actual working environment in pairs. This helped Menlo identify a candidate’s ability to help others. During this period, the interviewers noted their observations. After these exercises, the candidates were divided into three groups such as strong teamwork skills, adequate teamwork skills, and poor teamwork skills. Fifteen candidates who had demonstrated the strongest skills for teamwork were invited for a second round of interview.

In the second round of interview, the candidates had to work with existing Menlo employees on actual tasks. This helped the interviewers to identify the technical skills of the candidate and his/her ability to fit into the organization. This also helped the employees understand the actual tasks to be performed at Menlo.

After the successful completion of the second round of interviews, the team members gathered to know the results of the extreme interviewing process. The candidate’s name with his/her experience was listed on the whiteboard. The team members then discussed those candidates who had strong technical skills, focusing on his/her ability to adapt to the extreme programming environment. At this point, the vice president gave rankings to the candidates and made job offers to the selected candidates.

Soon after the candidates joined the company, the existing team members worked in pairs with them in an attempt to integrate them into the company’s work culture. The new recruits worked on the coding of a software project and after a period of one month were involved in the hiring process of new recruits.

Agile Project Management is a new methodology and one of the most widely discussed topics in the field of project management. It includes a set of practices and principles that help project managers complete their projects faster and to respond aggressively to customers. It capitalizes on the idea of TEAM (TEAM – Together Everyone Achieves More). The team consists of developers who work in collaboration in a software development project. The members work in an open and collaborative work environment and exchange information on plans, objectives, and progress of a project.

Agile project management methodologies help a company deliver timely results to its clients. It also enables employees and project managers to adapt to changing circumstances in contrast to formal controls in traditional project management practices. Agile methodologies also helped companies to work in the volatile business environment characterized by changes in market, technology, etc.

Several software development companies make use of agile methodologies like extreme programming, scrum, lean development, feature-driven development, adaptive software development, etc. to be successful in terms of budget, schedule, business value, and customer satisfaction.

Compiled from various sources.

Sample Story Card Used at Menlo

Add A Guest

After a couple logins, provide a button that allows them to enter data about a guest. Allow the couple to enter the following: family name, first name of each family member, if an unnamed guest should be included on the invitation, a mailing address, an e-mail address, dietary restrictions, and a field for notes.

See mockups provided by design team.

References & Suggested Readings:

Menlo Innovations:


40. http://findarticles.com

41. www.mdsi2.com