Impressions from the Architecture Clinic

In October we held the inaugural IDesign Architecture Clinic.

The Architecture Clinic was developed because we at IDesign wanted to provide a format where attendees will gain accelerated professional growth through the experience of addressing real-world architecture challenges using the IDesign Method. The clinic provides a unique environment whereby participants, under the guidance of an IDesign architect, are immersed in the activities of designing multiple systems in a collaborative environment, working together, and sharing and reviewing ideas. The week provides experience and insight that would take years to gain in normal work practice.

Each day was packed with a very full agenda, followed by additional evening training sessions. We began the week with a session on the IDesign Method to bring everyone up to speed on the techniques we were about to use, followed by the interactive clinic activities.

In turn, we chose one of the systems that the participants from each company brought in, and asked them to share the background with the rest of the students. We had the presenter act as the "customer" and explain their system needs in that manner. For the first system we designed, the IDesign Architect played a large part in the requirements gathering phase, sharing his techniques as to the subtleties of the interview and of discovering requirements while searching for volatility. Many commented on the huge value of being a part of this process.

Once we had the core system use cases, we assigned the participants into teams and each began to design the system. An incredibly useful part of the clinic was that we shuffled the teams to allow everyone to share their unique perspectives, and practice different team dynamics. This was done to address one of the objectives of the clinic -accelerate experience with the soft skills required by architects. The teams went on to produce their designs while continuing to ask the "customer" questions as needed. For the first system, the IDesign architect also produced a design that was presented along with the others as the "school's solution".


Once the time was up, each team presented their design, shared their reasoning for the decisions they had made, and were then subjected to a barrage of questions from the group. While this was going on, I

personally took a second to acknowledge the significance of what I was witnessing. As a previous IT leader, I would have loved to have given my team the experience of working with a room full of engaged architects to discover and design a system while sharing their decisions with others and receiving instant feedback. This simply doesn't happen at work.

What also doesn't happen at work is receiving immediate feedback and guidance from an IDesign Master Architect. For example, after each team had presented their design for the system, they were subject to a "review by the clinic master" where the critique was not only focused on the design the team produced, but also on the decision making process they used to arrive at their solution. This proved to be both highly insightful and a lot of fun, reminiscent of a Survivor episode. . Each time a review was given you could sense the anticipation of the group followed by joy of the team if they escaped the "FUNCTIONAL" stamp and were given the coveted "APPROVED" stamp.
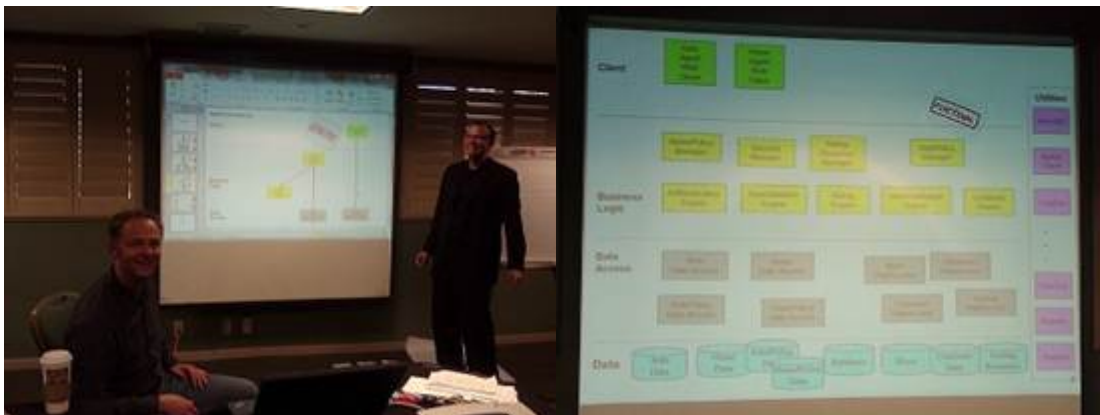
Throughout the week we worked on a diverse set of systems, which gave the attendees an opportunity to explore designing for multiple problem domains, exposing them to multiple techniques and approaches from queuing to scalability to modern security, much faster than can happen at work.

Some of the input given to me from the attendees, sums up the key takeaways. Many commented on the lessons they learned related to functional versus volatility based decomposition of a system. This to me was quite important. As a previous student of the Architect Master Class, I can tell you this is something that I wanted to have spent an extra week on just after the class. In the clinic, each time we

reviewed a system we discussed this at length which really drove the message home. Another frequent comment was related to the benefits of debating the design. This proved to provide great insight to the decision making process and had a big impact on accelerating knowledge and experience for the group.

In total, this was exactly the event we had hoped it would be. The high caliber of the interaction amongst the attendees was like nothing I had experienced prior. It was the perfect forum to share a diverse set of perspectives from a highly involved group, and significantly grow one's knowledge, perspectives, and world of insights.

If you are interested in participating in the next clinic, please contact us at sales@idesign.net.

Yours truly,
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