Bad Machinery: Managing Interrupts Under Load

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Whut

- Google SRE since 2004
  - GMail
  - Google Apps Console
  - Reader
  - Google Accounts
  - Google Analytics
  - BigTable
  - Colossus
  - Spanner
  - Logs
  - MySQL
Interrupts vs. Projects

**Projects**
- Contribute to development of service medium/long term.
- Highly Creative.
- (Theoretically) fun to do.

**Interrupts**
- More tactical, immediate fixes.
- Usually not so much.
- More often not.
How Interrupts work in Theory
How Interrupts work in Practice
Why the model breaks down

- Interrupt load is too much for 1+2.
- Interrupts are specialised to a person or subset of the team.
- Intentionally.
Antipatterns

- "The Gauntlet"
- "The Busy Worker"
- "The Amazing Disappearing Category"
Things We Must Discuss

- Context Switches are Hard
Things We Must Discuss

- Cognitive Flow State is Hard

![Flow Diagram](image)
Things We Must Discuss

Oncall is a Project

Oncall does not care whether you consider it a priority. It just is.
Things We Must Discuss

Fairness is Easy to Program

...if you assume people are machines
Fundamentals

● Humans are Bad Machinery.

"Humans are bad machinery. They get bored, they have processors (and sometimes UIs) that aren’t very well-understood, and aren’t very efficient"

● Cognitive Flow is Precious.

● Time should be Polarised. Do one thing well.
Practicals

- Polarise Time

you can do anything,
but not everything.

-david allen
Practicals

- Think about Interruptibility
Practicals

Do For Tickets What You Do For Pages
Practicals

Respect Yourselves
Other Lessons Learned

- Email alerts are from the past.
- Consensus is nice.
- Policy is as powerful a tool as code.
- The A stands for agreement.
How Can I Apply this?

- Minimise time the individual can be interrupted.
- Do for Interrupts what you do for Oncall
- Respect the Customer and Respect Yourself.