

Memo

date: June 24, 2022

to: Christel Colon

cc: Torre Wenaus, Lijuan Ruan, Hong Ma

from: Gene Van Buren

subject: Work Assignments for Dmitri Smirnov with the STAR Group

This Memo is intended to characterize some of the history of Dmitri Smirnov working with the STAR Group at Brookhaven National Laboratory. This will serve to justify the current stance of the STAR Group that it will not accept Dmitri Smirnov as an effective candidate for a supporting role within the STAR Software & Computing Production Team.

Dmitri joined the STAR Software & Computing Team at BNL in 2014 while I was a co-Leader of that group within the STAR Collaboration. In my contribution to his performance appraisal that first year, I wrote the following under the category of improvement needs:

"I would characterize Dmitri as prone to mildly over-extending his critical feedback, becoming un-constructive and negatively impacting his team relationships. This has occurred numerous times at tracking meetings and over emails. His manner of communication has raised additional barriers: interrupting others from time to time at meetings, commonly opting for emails over face-to-face discussions, and sometimes aggressively asking questions for which he has limited openness to answers which diverge from his own viewpoint."

With hindsight, I believe this initial "mild" characterization was an accurately principal concern. Following a period of improvement after that performance appraisal, Dmitri regressed over time and became more dogmatic and more difficult to work with on a team.

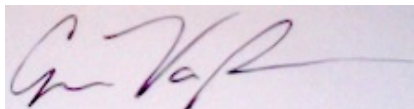
In particular, Dmitri became quite bold in determining his own work priorities, leaving important tasks assigned to the team unaddressed to pursue topics he found more interesting. In some cases, the time-consuming projects he pursued were unnecessary tangents to the critical work - overkill for the task at hand. Some leniency was given him in such instances to offer him the chance to make a substantive improvement while building his own expertise. A concrete example was a "vertex reconstruction" project for STAR which resulted in many weeks of fruitless studies.

In other cases, he became far too busy with low priority projects to make any meaningful contribution on the critical task. Here I would note the "forward tracking" enterprise to which Dmitri was assigned over 4 years ago. Without anything substantive from an experienced software engineer like Dmitri, that project lagged, missing notable delivery targets. Dmitri meanwhile poured nearly all of himself for many months into a solo "containers" project that duplicated others' work, choosing not even to work cooperatively with the prior authors.

In the most recent years, Dmitri has been afforded chances within the scope of STAR Software & Computing both to work on projects with others, and on his own. He has shown little motivation to invest himself in the former beyond minor fancies, but has devoted himself to the latter productively (though still generally obstinately and antagonistically, in the form of rejecting majority opinions).

Put simply, Dmitri does not take instruction well and does not work at all well with others, with subsequent damage to their morale and efficacy. If there is a work opportunity for Dmitri to deliver software with few constraints and essentially no teamwork involved, rare but not impossible as that may be, chances are clearly better that Dmitri will deliver. Becoming a member of the Production Team in STAR, currently composed of persons (myself included) impacted and frustrated by Dmitri's past choices, grants him neither of these liberties. It should also be considered that the work of the Production Team is a critical component of both the STAR Group's operational duties to the larger international STAR Collaboration, and the Department of Energy's mission objectives for delivering RHIC science at BNL. Consequently, this predictably mutually detrimental placement, or any such similar assignment, is not acceptable to the STAR Group.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Gene Van Buren", written on a light-colored background.

Gene Van Buren
STAR Group Liaison to the NPPS Group

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