

# Experience is the teacher of fools: Project management lessons learned

Frederick Zarndt

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# the problem

Experience is a dear teacher but fools will learn at no other. Benjamin Franklin

# the problem

in a March 2007 web poll conducted by the Computing Technology Industry Association "nearly 28 percent of the more than 1,000 respondents singled out poor communications as the number one cause of project failure"

# the problem

Roger Sessions estimates that the worldwide cost of IT failure is USD \$500 billion per month

Roger Sessions: CTO of ObjectWatch. He has written seven books including *Simple Architectures for Complex Enterprises* and many articles. He is a founding member of the Board of Directors of the International Association of Software Architects.

# the problem

the 2009 CHAOS Report (The Standish Group) reports that of all software projects surveyed, 44% are “challenged”, 24% failed, and only 32% succeeded

# the problem

in a recent survey of 1230 IT professionals conducted by Embarcadero Technologies, 2 of the 3 biggest project challenges cited by the IT pros are “poor planning” and “poor or no requirements”

# the problem

•in a white paper written for Project Perfect by Taimour al Neimat, he lists

poor planning

unclear goals and objectives

objectives changing during the project

unrealistic time or resource estimates

lack of executive support and user involvement

failure to communicate and act as a team

inappropriate skills

as primary causes for the failure of complex IT projects

# the problem

a recent tender from an (anonymous) government agency

- project to convert ~ 170,000 text images to xml
- value of project ~ USD \$180,000
- 19 pages of definitions, governing law, evaluation criteria, contractual conditions, instructions about tender response format, etc
- technical requirements description? < 1 page
- data acceptance criteria? not mentioned



# the problem

a recent program established by a prominent national library

- digitize more than 20 million text pages
- high level image and xml requirements
- value of work awarded? > USD \$5,000,000
- after award of work, METS xml technical requirements expand to 43+ pages from ~3 pages
- acceptance criteria? added as an afterthought and not well defined

# the problem

acceptance criteria for a digitization program at a prominent national library

character accuracy > 80%

word accuracy > 75%

significant word accuracy > 65%

the problem

communication  
requirements  
acceptance

# the illusion communication

The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion it has taken place.  
George Bernard Shaw

# the illusion

acceptance criteria for a digitization program

character accuracy > 80%

word accuracy > 75%

significant word accuracy > 65%

# the illusion

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# the illusion

## why (better) communication is necessary



the illusion  
what did you say?

“...in my opinion you will be very fortunate to get this person to work for you...”



# the illusion what do you see?

The young girl  
is turning away...



The old woman  
is very sad...



# the illusion perception

much of what you think happened or what you think you  
heard is based on misperception

# the illusion perception

- mother and daughter

# the illusion perception

- mother and daughter
- Innocence Project



- eyewitness misidentification is the single greatest cause of wrongful convictions, playing a role in more than 75% of convictions overturned through DNA testing.
- exonerated 258 wrongfully convicted men (as of Aug 2010)

# the illusion perception

- mother and daughter

- Innocence Project



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- Crab Nebula supernova



- in 1054 a star in the region of what is now know as the Crab Nebula exploded. For several days it was the 3rd brightest object in the sky, bright enough to be seen in daytime.
- the supernova was observed and recorded by Chinese, Japanese, and Arab astronomers and by native Americans. There are few and very obscure recorded European observations.

# the fix

Experience is that marvelous thing that enables you to recognize a mistake when you make it again. F. P. Jones

the fix  
why (better) communication is necessary

“projects are about communication,  
communication, and communication”

the fix

why (better) communication is necessary

no communication ...



the fix

why (better) communication is necessary

no communication ...

little communication ...

the fix

why (better) communication is necessary

no communication ...

little communication ...

poor communication ...

the fix

why (better) communication is necessary

no communication ...

little communication ...

poor communication ...

reduced communication ...

the fix

why (better) communication is necessary

no communication ...

little communication ...

poor communication ...

reduced communication ...

... all result in more assumptions about  
intent!

# the fix

## simple principles for (good) communication

- be impeccable with your word
- don't take anything personally
- don't make assumptions
- always do your best
- be mindful

# the fix

## how do you communicate?

- communication is at most 30% verbal!
- remainder - 70% or more - is comprised of gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, posture, odors, ...
- telephone communication removes gestures, facial expressions, posture, odors, etc. only words and tone of voice remain
- written communication - email, letters, etc - removes all modes of communication save for words

# conclusion

for all future projects give especial attention to

proper planning  
good communication  
clear acceptance criteria



We all admire the wisdom of people who come to us for advice. Jack Herbert

Frederick Zarndt  
[frederick@frederickzarndt.com](mailto:frederick@frederickzarndt.com)

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