Experience is the teacher of fools: Project management lessons learned

Frederick Zarndt

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

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"

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

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"

•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

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

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

acceptance criteria for a digitization program at a prominent national library

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character accuracy > 80% word accuracy > 75% significant word accuracy > 65%
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communication requirements acceptance

the illusion communication

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

George Bernard Shaw

the illusion

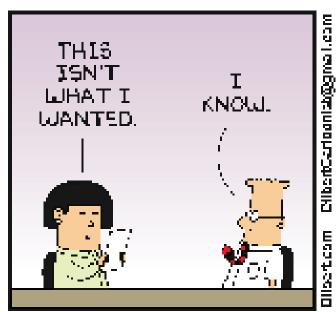
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the illusion what did you say?

"...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...



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

mother and daughter

- 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)

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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

"projects are about communication, communication, and communication"

no communication ...

no communication ...

little communication ...

no communication ...
little communication ...
poor communication ...

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no communication ...
little communication ...
poor communication ...
reduced communication ...
```

```
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

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