2-8-2008

Editor's Comments

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EDITOR'S COMMENTS

"Of course, if your people aren't smart enough to think their way through their work, the work will fail. No Methodology will help. Worse still, Methodologies can do grievous damage to efforts in which people are fully competent. They do this by trying to force the work into a fixed mold that guarantees a morass of paperwork, a paucity of methods, an absence of responsibility, and a general loss of motivation."

Thus speaks one major critic of CMM as quoted by Paul Adler and his colleagues in their article "Enabling Process Discipline: Lessons from the Journey to CMM Level 5" in this issue of MISQE. Ah, for the old free-flowing days when programming was an art, artists did their thing, and life somehow felt freer. Those of us who remember back to the 50s and 60s can still reminisce over the good feeling, perhaps even thrill, as a program that we developed finally ran error-free, did the job and was ready to put into production. It was a one-person problem-solving exercise. And, it was fun.

Looked at in one sense, the fifty-year history of computer use is one of increasing constraint of both developers and users of systems. Most recently, the constraints have become ever more evident. For users, forget the old days when IT wrote programs to "fit the needs of their customers." Today, plain vanilla ERPs (with a few workarounds) are implemented and users change their work processes to fit. In like manner, programmers are increasingly subjected to increased discipline. The apex of this discipline is the SEI Capability Maturity Model (CMM).

It is still a matter of debate as to which of the five levels of CMM is appropriate for particular organizations. In the 1990s, Computer Science Corporation (CSC) made a decision to move to CMM and to move to the top level in parts of the organization. Adler provides an insight into the journey of two CSC organizations as they made their way to CMM Level 5. CSC's four "success factors" are interesting. All involve people, both management and programmers. The most novel and, according to the authors, the most important is "organizational socialization" of the development staff – the process of learning and inter-

nalizing the customs, attitudes, and values of the organization.

Process Discipline Once More

Like programming, the process of outsourcing has increasingly become more disciplined in the ways that organizations approach it. In this issue Sara Cullen and her colleagues present a four-phase, nine-building-block process model that arose from 100 cases the authors studied from 1994 to 2003. The model was tested in a further seven cases and provides an insightful set of steps to follow. While the process is not as detailed as CMM, it does provide the basis for a more disciplined managerial approach to outsourcing.

Centralization is best?

Staying with the discipline-versus-freedom theme, although perhaps a stretch here, it can be noted that the freedom of decentralized suborganizations to manage their own data is increasingly being imperiled. Centralization of customer data, in particular is proceeding at a fast pace in large organizations. There are many reasons for this as Goodhue and his colleagues pointed out in Realizing Business Benefits through CRM: Hitting the Right Target in the Right Way in the June 2002 issue of MISQE.

In a study of German and Swiss financial institutions, Malte Geib and his colleagues found three different approaches to customer data. Each was driven by different strategies, different organizational forms, and the impact of privacy laws in these European companies. A "best practice" case is presented.

Security

Hackers, viruses and possible terrorist interventions are now forcing more attention, and more discipline, to the process of IT security. An increased focus on security is thus evident in IT organizations. We will say more about this in future issues of MISQE.

In this issue, David Biros and his colleagues report on the results of a field study that examined the effects of alternative way to increase employee sensitivity to the possibility of manipulated data. Interestingly, the authors point out that a simple warning at the time of a suspected incident is more effective, and far less expensive, than formal training.