

Lecture 24 The Mythical Man-Month (Part 2)

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Foundations of Software Engineering
CSCI 5828 - Spring Semester, 2000

Today's Lecture

- Discuss additional issues from The Mythical Man-Month
 - The Second-System Effect
 - Passing the Word
 - Why Did the Tower of Babel Fail?
 - Calling the Shot

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The Second-System Effect

- An engineer is careful in designing a system the first time
 - He or she realizes that they are working in uncharted territory
 - Extraneous features get delayed until...
- The Second System!
 - Now, you've got some experience and you want to throw everything into the design!

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Symptoms of Second-System Effect

- Functional Embellishment
 - to an unnecessary degree
- Optimizations to obsolete functionality
 - OS/360 linker had sophisticated program overlay functionality
 - The problem: the application architecture no longer depended on overlays!
 - Side-effect: linker is slower than it otherwise would have been; slower than the compilers whose usage it was meant to reduce!

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How to avoid it?

- Must employ extra self-discipline
 - avoid functional ornamentation
 - be aware of changes in assumptions
 - strive for conceptual integrity
- How do manager's avoid it?
 - Insist on a senior architect with more than two systems under his or her belt

Passing the Word

- Communicating Design Decisions
 - Written Specifications
 - “The Manual”
 - Answers questions
 - Conceptual Integrity
 - Demands high precision
 - Formal Definitions
 - Natural language is not precise
 - Formal notations have been developed to help

Formal Definitions

- Notations help express precise semantics
 - However, natural language is often needed to “explain” the meaning to the uninitiated
- What about using an implementation?
 - Benefits: Precise specification
 - Disadvantages: Over-prescription, potential for inelegance, may be modified!

Communicating Design, continued

- Meetings
 - Weekly half-day meetings
 - Problems and change proposals distributed beforehand
 - Chief architect has final say
 - Annual “Supreme Court” sessions
 - Typically lasts two weeks
 - Agenda typically had 200 items!

Communicating Design, continued

- Multiple Implementations
 - Inconsistencies between implementations can identify problems in the specs;
 - With only one implementation, its easier to change the manual!
- The Telephone Log
 - Or, be sure to capture all decisions made by the chief architect!
- Product Test
 - An external test group keeps the implementation honest

Why Did The Tower of Babel Fail?

- Communication, (the lack of it)
 - This made it impossible to coordinate
- How do you communicate in large project teams?
 - Informally (telephone, e-mail), meetings, workbook
- Workbook
 - It is a structure placed on a project's documents
 - Why is it important? Technical prose lives a long time; best to get it structured formally from the beginning; it also helps with the distribution of information

More on the Workbook

- OS/360
 - *Each* programmer should see *all* the material
 - Each book was updated quickly (one-day)
 - Problem
 - The workbook grew to 5 feet thick!
 - They switched to microfiche; we need to take advantage of on-line artifacts, information management techniques like open hypermedia, information retrieval, and the WWW

Reducing communication paths

- Communication needs are reduced by
 - division of labor
 - specialization of function
- A tree structure often results from applying this principle
 - However this serves power structures better than communication (since communication between siblings is often needed)
 - So communication structure is often a network

Organizational Structure

- Brooks outlines
 - mission, producer, director, schedule, division of labor, and interfaces between the parts
- The new items are the producer and the director
 - producer: manages project and obtains resources
 - director: manages technical details
- Microsoft's program and product manager
 - former is director, latter does more marketing than Brooks specifies for producer but has some overlap

Calling the Shot

- Discusses Estimates and data from real projects
 - Estimates for Programming in the small don't scale
 - You need to add planning, documentation, testing, system integration, and training in large projects
 - Nanus and Farr at System Development Corporation
 - Found that effort vs. program size increases exponentially (1.5)
 - Portman's Data
 - Tasks taking twice as long as estimated; number of technical work-hours was being vastly overestimated
 - Downtime, higher priority tasks reduced amount of productive work hours towards the project's goal