

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear **CROSSTALK** Editor,

In my experience, **CROSSTALK** is the best practical software development journal bar none. I have personally found it useful on many occasions, and assign it as reading for my teams.

In the December 2003 issue of **CROSSTALK**, Barry Boehm is absolutely correct in “People Factors in Software Management: Lessons From Comparing Agile and Plan-Driven Methods” in that people are the most important factors to success. My personal experience with agile methods leads me to strongly concur in valuing individuals and interactions over processes and tools. However, picking the right people is not always an option. Too often in either government or contractor shops, the front-line team leader has little choice regarding team membership – regardless of how well the current pool of talent matches the new task – because the first task is always job security for existing employees. My experience is that in such situations, success is average, but true excellence is hard to come by.

I also liked Dennis Linscomb’s article “Requirements Engineering Maturity in the CMMI,” also in December’s **CROSSTALK**. He has in me a kindred spirit in regards to the poor state of affairs in requirements engineering. He has an excellent idea with his requirements engineering maturity levels, but I disagree that Capability Maturity Model® Integration (CMMI®) has the cart before the horse in putting

management before technical execution. CMMI is good at telling us *what* but less good at telling us *how*, and even worse at telling us how to get from where we are to where we need to be. This was one of my first revelations about CMMI.

In deciding to implement CMMI, the first thing an organization has to do is figure out and write down what they are doing in each process area. The second thing to do is figure out where the organization needs to go. The third thing is how to get there. Success is achieved one step at a time, one change at a time. Once the change process is in place, the organization can work on optimizing technical performance. Individuals who have the shirt sleeve, dirty-fingernail knowledge of how to implement specific best practice techniques in the day-to-day work environment are worth their weight in gold. Few people can give you tips on precisely what best practices to implement in getting to Level 2 and higher. When you find such people, pay them a lot to keep working for you.

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CROSSTALK invites readers to submit their thoughts, comments, and ideas on its themes and articles as a “Letter to the Editor.” Simply e-mail letters to <crosstalk.staff@hill.af.mil>.