Engineers at Their Best

During my career, I have worked with many professionals but none more bright, hard working, and fascinating than engineers. Even though I am an engineer, many of my co-workers tell me that I'm not a typical engineer. Sometimes that bothers me. What is a typical engineer, and why are engineers stereotyped anyway?

Maybe it is because on the surface, many engineers are quiet and very studious. They are often confined to a cubicle as they perform their work solving difficult problems. They also spend many hours reading to continually learn the latest technology and trends.

I have worked with enough engineers to know that although they need their time alone, they have much to contribute. They often thrive in projects with team settings, and, due to their mathematical mindset, they absolutely love solving problems. I believe that engineers are at their best when they are looked upon to answer questions or to offer their viewpoints. More times than not, they just want to be asked.

As a manager, I have come to realize that effective communication with engineers and the many other professionals on my staff is the key to successful projects. I also realize that more times than not, almost everyone has his or her own opinion on project matters. Resolving differing opinions might be the toughest part of being a manager, but I believe that knowing the opinions is critical. It lets you listen to the pulse of your project firsthand.

The theme of this month's issue is "The People Variable" in which we focus on the most critical aspect of software development: the people. We all know that developing and sustaining a software-intensive system is difficult and that often the biggest project struggles are centered on the people and not the technology. This month's issue begins with *Destroying Communication and Control in Software Development* by Dr. Gerald M. Weinberg. This article is a clever look at how managing software projects can be like fighting battles. Weinberg stresses the importance of information integrity and protecting systems from disruption due to human error.

Next, Dr. Bill Curtis, Dr. William E. Hefley, and Sally A. Miller bring us *Experiences Applying the People Capability Maturity Model.* Assessment data from 49 organizations during the last seven years indicate that many are realizing the benefits of implementing practices aimed at attracting, developing, organizing, motivating, and retaining employees. We continue looking at the critical people variable with *Obedience Training for Managers* by Virginia Slavin and Paul Kimmerly. This article brings an enlightening parallel between change agents and animal trainers, and more specifically shows how managers can bring more discipline into an organization with a low maturity level.

If you are a program manager, don't miss reading *People Projects: Psychometric Profiling* by the Software Technology Support Center's Kasey Thompson. He introduces a Compatibility Identification Set as a new approach to forming effective project teams. As we continue to focus on the people element of software development, Jüris Kelley reminds us in *Prospecting for Knowledge* that we also need to consider the concept of knowledge management to succeed in today's information-based world. And finally, our issue wraps up with Diana Mekelburg's *Project Expectations: The Boundaries for Agile Development*. This article acknowledges that project scope management can be a formidable challenge with agile software development for traditionally trained managers. The author explains how to overcome this by managing project expectations instead of waiting for requirements and plans to stabilize.

As you strive to be the best you can, I hope this month's issue stimulates you to work and communicate more effectively with the people in your organization and project environments.

Tracy L. Stauder

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Publisher