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Karl E. Wieggers



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Pretzels the Clown

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Contents

Figures and Tables xvii

Preface xix

Part 1: A Software Engineering Culture 1

Chapter 1: Software Culture Concepts 3

- Culture Defined 3
- Growing Your Own Culture 6
- A Healthy Software Culture 8
 - Individual Behaviors* 8
 - Team Behaviors* 8
 - Management Behaviors* 9
 - Organizational Characteristics* 9
- A Less Healthy Software Culture 10
 - Individual Behaviors* 10
 - Management Behaviors* 11
 - Organizational Characteristics* 11
- Organizational Options 12
- The Management Challenge 15
- Summary 18
- Culture Builders and Killers 18
- References and Further Reading 19

Chapter 2: Standing On Principle 23

- Integrity and Intelligence: With Customers 24
- Integrity and Intelligence: With Managers 27
- The Five Dimensions of a Software Project 28
- Summary 33

Culture Builders and Killers 34
References and Further Reading 34

Chapter 3: Recognizing Achievements Great and Small 35

The Importance of Being Visible 38
The Importance of Management Attitude 39
Rewards for a Job Well Done 40
Summary 41
Culture Builders and Killers 42
References and Further Reading 43

Chapter 4: So Much to Learn, So Little Time 45

What to Learn 47
Where to Learn 49
 Professional Seminar Sources 49
 Technical Conferences 50
 Publications 51
 Videotape Instruction 53
 On-Line Information Sources 53
 Professional Societies and Certification 53
Summary 55
Culture Builders and Killers 55
References and Further Reading 56

Part II: In Search of Excellent Requirements 59

Chapter 5: Optimizing Customer Involvement 61

Software Requirements: The Foundation of Quality 62
The Need for Customer Involvement 64
The Project Champion Model 66
Project Champion Expectations 69
When the Project Champion Model Fails 73
Summary 75
Culture Builders and Killers 75
References and Further Reading 76

Chapter 6: Tools for Sharing the Vision 78

Use Cases 79
Software Requirements Specifications 83
Dialog Maps 91
Prototypes 93
Requirements Traceability Matrices 96

From Requirements to Code	97
Summary	98
Culture Builders and Killers	99
References and Further Reading	100

Part III: Improving Your Processes 103

Chapter 7: Process Improvement Fundamentals 105

Principles of Process Improvement	106
Getting Started with Process Improvement	112
Summary	114
Culture Builders and Killers	115
References and Further Reading	116

Chapter 8: Process Improvement Case Study 117

Making Change Happen	122
Sustaining Momentum	123
Summary	125
Culture Builders and Killers	126
References and Further Reading	126

Chapter 9: Software Process Maturity 127

The Capability Maturity Model	128
<i>Level 1: Initial</i>	130
<i>Level 2: Repeatable</i>	131
<i>Level 3: Defined</i>	131
<i>Level 4: Managed</i>	132
<i>Level 5: Optimizing</i>	133
Dissenting Opinions	135
Process Assessments	137
Process Maturity and Culture	139
Summary	140
Culture Builders and Killers	141
References and Further Reading	141

Chapter 10: Software Development Procedures 146

Standards, Procedures, and Guidelines, Oh My!	147
Local Development Guidelines	149
Our Software Development Guidelines	151
IEEE Standards	155
Other Standards Sources	156
Summary	158

Culture Builders and Killers 159
References and Further Reading 160

Part IV: The Bug Stops Here 163

Chapter 11: The Quality Culture 165

The Cost of Quality 167
Assuring Software Quality 168
 How Dense Are Your Defects? 170
 Lines of Code versus Application Functionality 172
How Good Is Good Enough? 174
An Assault on Defects 178
Explicit SQA Responsibilities 181
Why Do We Think Quality Practices Pay Off? 184
Summary 185
Culture Builders and Killers 185
References and Further Reading 186

Chapter 12: Improving Quality by Software Inspection 189

Inspections and Culture 190
Benefits of Inspections 190
Inspections, Walkthroughs, and Reviews 194
Guiding Principles for Reviews and Inspections 198
Keeping Records 201
Making Inspections Work in Your Culture 204
Summary 207
Culture Builders and Killers 207
References and Further Reading 208

Chapter 13: Structured Testing 211

Testing and the Quality Culture 212
A Unit Testing Strategy 215
Cyclomatic Complexity and Testing 218
Test Management and Automation 220
Structured Testing Guidelines 222
Summary 224
Culture Builders and Killers 224
References and Further Reading 225

Part V: Methods, Measures, and Tools 229**Chapter 14: The CASE for Iteration 231**

- Types of CASE Tools 233
- Hypes of CASE Tools 235
- Lessons from Our CASE History 236
- Fitting CASE into Your Culture 244
- Other Benefits from CASE 247
- Culture Change for CASE 248
- Summary 249
- Culture Builders and Killers 250
- References and Further Reading 251

Chapter 15: Control Change Before It Controls You 254

- Benefits of a Problem Tracking System 255
- A Software Change Management Case Study 256
- The Software Change Control Board 261
- How Change Control Can Simplify Your Life 262
- Learning from Bug Detection Trends 263
- Proactive Failure Reporting 265
- Making Change Management Work in Your Culture 267
- Summary 268
- Culture Builders and Killers 269
- References and Further Reading 270

Chapter 16: Taking Measures to Stay on Track 272

- Why Measurement Programs Fail 273
- Metrics Programs Don't Have to Fail 276
- What to Measure 276
- How to Design Your Metrics Program 278
- Summary 282
- Culture Builders and Killers 283
- References and Further Reading 284

Chapter 17: Case Study: Measurement in a Small Software Group 287

- Software Work Effort Metrics 287
- Trends and Applications 295
- Metrics-Based Project Estimation 297

Lessons from Work Effort Metrics 300
Predicting Maintainability with Metrics 300
Summary 301
Culture Builders and Killers 302
References and Further Reading 302

Chapter 18: If It Makes Sense, Do It 304

Summary 308
Culture Builders and Killers 308
References and Further Reading 309

Part VI: What to Do on Monday 311

Chapter 19: Action Planning for Software Managers 313

Action Item Menu 315
Summary 318
References and Further Reading 318

Chapter 20: Action Planning for Software Engineers 319

Action Item Menu 320
Building a Healthy Workplace 324
Summary 327
References and Further Reading 327

Epilogue 329

Appendix A: Sources for Continued Software Learning 331

Appendix B: Contact Information for Selected Resources 337

Bibliography 339

Author Index 349

Subject Index 351

Reviewers' Comments 359

Figures and Tables

Figure 1.1.	<i>A software engineering culture.</i>	5
Figure 1.2.	<i>Characteristics of Constantine's four organizational paradigms.</i>	13
Table 1.1.	<i>Characteristics of a Structured Open Team.</i>	14
Table 1.2.	<i>Aspects of "Roman" versus "Greek" Software Engineering Cultures.</i>	15
Table 1.3.	<i>Software Engineering Cultural Principles.</i>	17
Figure 2.1.	<i>The five dimensions of a software project.</i>	29
Figure 2.2.	<i>Flexibility diagram for an internal information system.</i>	30
Figure 2.3.	<i>Flexibility diagram for a quality-driven application.</i>	31
Figure 2.4.	<i>Flexibility diagram for a competitive commercial application.</i>	31
Figure 2.5.	<i>Sample form for documenting the negotiated dimensions for a project.</i>	32
Figure 3.1.	<i>The simplest form of recognition.</i>	36
Figure 3.1.	<i>Priorities for the enlightened software manager.</i>	40
Figure 4.1.	<i>Growing better software engineers through continuing education.</i>	47
Table 4.1.	<i>Technical and Nontechnical Skills for Software Developers.</i>	48
Table 4.2.	<i>Professional Computing Societies.</i>	51
Table 4.3.	<i>Professional Computing Certifications.</i>	54
Figure 5.1	<i>"Specification" for a Stonehenge replica.</i>	62
Figure 5.2	<i>The software development expectation gap.</i>	63
Table 5.1.	<i>Effective Techniques for Requirements Engineering.</i>	64
Figure 5.3.	<i>Project champion model for a large project.</i>	68
Figure 5.4.	<i>The context diagram shows what is inside the system and what is not.</i>	70
Figure 6.1.	<i>Process and deliverables from the use case method.</i>	80
Figure 6.2.	<i>Use case flipchart created in a workshop with user representatives.</i>	81
Figure 6.3.	<i>IEEE template for software requirements specifications.</i>	85
Table 6.1.	<i>Characteristics of a High-Quality Requirements Statement.</i>	87
Table 6.2.	<i>Some Quality Attributes for Software Operation.</i>	88
Table 6.3.	<i>Some Quality Attributes for Software Revision.</i>	88
Table 6.4.	<i>Some Quality Attributes for Software Transition.</i>	89
Figure 6.4.	<i>Sample dialog map.</i>	92
Figure 6.5.	<i>Prototyping reduces the software development expectation gap.</i>	94
Figure 6.6.	<i>Sample requirements traceability matrix.</i>	96
Figure 7.1.	<i>Activities involved in the effective practice of software engineering.</i>	107
Figure 7.2.	<i>A process improvement task cycle.</i>	113
Figure 7.3.	<i>Template for action planning.</i>	114
Figure 8.1.	<i>Add new skills to your toolbox for future projects.</i>	120
Figure 8.2.	<i>Emotional reactions to pressure for change.</i>	122
Figure 9.1.	<i>Several evolutionary scales for software development.</i>	128
Figure 9.2.	<i>Software Engineering Institute's Capability Maturity Model for software.</i>	129

Table 9.1.	Key Process Areas for the Repeatable Level.	132
Table 9.2.	Key Process Areas for the Defined Level.	133
Table 9.3.	Key Process Areas for the Managed Level.	133
Table 9.4.	Key Process Areas for the Optimizing Level.	134
Figure 9.3.	Where do you fit along the CMM philosophy spectrum?	137
Figure 10.1.	Software guidelines, procedures, and standards.	148
Figure 10.2.	Sample source file header documentation template.	153
Table 10.1.	IEEE Software Development Standards.	157
Table 11.1.	Some Components of the Cost of Quality for Software.	167
Figure 11.1.	Internal rework and post-release maintenance.	169
Table 11.2.	Source Statements, Assembler Instructions, and Function Points.	171
Table 11.3.	Defect Levels Associated with Different Sigma Values.	172
Figure 11.2.	Example of how to calculate defect detection efficiencies.	176
Table 11.4.	Reaching Six-Sigma Quality in a C Program.	177
Figure 11.3.	A customer/supplier process model for software.	179
Table 11.5.	Allocating Software Quality Responsibilities.	183
Figure 11.4.	Trends in defect-correction work effort over five years.	184
Figure 12.1.	Increase in the cost of fixing bugs throughout the life cycle [Boehm, 1981].	191
Table 12.1.	Benefits from Software Inspections.	192
Table 12.2.	Errors Found by Code Inspection or Testing.	193
Figure 12.2.	Stages in a formal software inspection process (adapted from [Ebenau, 1994]).	195
Figure 12.3.	Defects found versus inspection rate.	200
Figure 12.4.	Inspection summary report.	202
Figure 12.5.	Inspection issues list.	203
Figure 12.6.	Record of code reviews carried out.	204
Table 13.1.	Survey of Testing Practices Among Kodak R&D Software Engineers.	212
Table 13.2.	Myers' Software Testing Axioms.	214
Figure 13.1.	Data flow model for operation of an automated test driver.	221
Figure 13.2.	Sample test report from the Graphics Engine.	222
Figure 14.1.	Some upper-CASE and lower-CASE tool categories.	223
Figure 14.2.	Sample data flow diagram that will generate a validation error.	234
Figure 14.3.	Different platforms used for development steps.	243
Figure 14.4.	The data stores connected to a DFD process define its external interfaces.	248
Figure 15.1.	Architecture of the SWCHANGE problem tracking system.	257
Figure 15.2.	SWCHANGE entry submission screen.	258
Figure 15.3.	Example of reliability modeling from defect discovery rates [Walsh, 1993].	263
Figure 15.4.	Categorization of sources of software defects at Hewlett-Packard [Grady, 1993].	265
Table 15.1.	Top Level of Beizer's Taxonomy of Bugs [Beizer, 1990].	266
Figure 15.5.	Sample e-mail message from a trapped REXX error.	267
Figure 16.1.	A recommended starter set of software metrics.	277
Table 16.1.	Some Measurable Dimensions of Software Products, Projects, and Processes.	279
Figure 16.2.	Sample goal/question/metric strategy for a goal of early retirement.	280
Figure 16.3.	Goal/question/metric feedback model for software metrics.	281
Figure 17.1.	Work effort distribution over time for one software project.	291
Figure 17.2.	Sample work effort distribution report for one project.	295
Figure 17.3.	New development work effort distribution for one software group, by year.	296
Figure 17.4.	Development time as a function of number of requirements.	298
Table 18.1.	Relating Software Engineering Practices to Organizational Goals.	306
Figure 20.1.	Recommended configurations of a safe computer work environment.	326
Table A.1.	Some Suppliers of Software Training Seminars.	332
Table A.2.	Some Software Development and Quality Conferences.	333
Table A.3.	Some Software Engineering and Software Quality Periodicals.	334
Table A.4.	Sources of Information about Testing Tools.	335
Table A.5.	Sources of Information about CASE Tools.	335

Preface

Rarely has a professional field evolved as rapidly as software development. The struggle to stay abreast of new technologies, to deal with accumulated development and maintenance backlogs, and to cope with people issues has become a treadmill race, as software groups work hard just to stay in place. A key goal of disciplined software engineering is to avoid the surprises that can occur when software development goes awry. Software surprises almost always lead to bad news: canceled projects, late delivery, cost overruns, dissatisfied customers, and unemployment because of outsourcing.

The culture of an organization is a critical success factor in its efforts to survive, improve, and flourish. A culture based on a commitment to quality software development and management differentiates a team that practices excellent software engineering from a gaggle of individual programmers doing their best to ship code. In a software engineering culture, the focus on quality is present at all levels—individual, project, and organization.

In this book, I share a cultural framework that was effective in improving the results obtained by several software groups at Eastman Kodak Company. Most of our projects involved small teams of one to five developers, with typical durations of six months to two years. Each part of the book discusses several guiding principles that shaped the way we chose to create software. I also describe the specific software engineering practices that we adopted to improve the quality and productivity of our work. We believe a culture based on these principles and practices has improved our effectiveness as software engineers, the relationship and reputation we have with our customers, and our level of collaborative teamwork. Many of the experiences related and suggestions offered are most relevant to workgroups of two to ten engineers. Since even large software products are often constructed by small teams of engineers working together, these technical activities are applicable in a wide variety of organizations.

With this book I hope to reach first-line software managers, project leaders, and practitioners who wish to drive progress toward an improved, quality-oriented culture in their organization. My goals are to provide practical ideas for immediately improving the way a team performs software engineering, and to show that continuous software process improvement is both possible and worthwhile. I am assuming that the reader has the ability to actually change the culture of his software group, or at least to positively influence those who can drive changes.

I present here a tool kit composed of many ideas and practices for those who wish to improve the quality of the software they develop, along with case studies of how these methods really worked. Our groups have applied all the methods described, and I have used nearly all of them personally. Every anecdote is real, although the names have been changed. While not every team member has used every good method on every project, we invariably obtained better results when we applied these solid engineering practices than when we did not.

An organization grows a quality-directed software culture by blending established approaches from many sources with locally developed solutions to specialized problems. To help point toward useful sources in the voluminous software literature, each chapter provides an annotated bibliography of references and additional reading materials. The references I feel are particularly valuable are marked with a bookshelf icon.

Each chapter contains several “Culture Builder” tips (marked with a handshake icon), which are things a manager or project leader can do to promote an attitude and environment that leads to software engineering excellence. “Culture Killers” are also described, and are marked with a skull and crossbones warning icon. Culture killers are management actions that will undermine a team devoted to superior software engineering or prevent such a culture from developing. Sadly, many of these are real examples. You can probably think of other culture killers from your own experience, as either victim or unknowing perpetrator. Although both builders and killers are written in the form of recommendations, remember that the culture killers are tongue-in-cheek. Don’t rush into work next Monday with an agenda of action items selected from the culture killers!

Some of the experiences of our software groups at Kodak were published originally in the following articles; material is included here with permission from the publishers:

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**CREATING A
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Recognizing Achievements Great and Small

Another major software player decided to “dangle” incentive money in front of its developers. . . . The dictated delivery date came and went and no product had been delivered. . . . Senior management withdrew the incentive and threatened jobs since developers were employed to deliver even without the need for extra compensation. Some of the software engineers (the good ones) left the company, morale was horrible, and by the time a product was delivered, the company’s market share had eroded. What a terrible lesson to learn.

—Ken Whitaker, *Managing Software Maniacs*

When I first became the supervisor of the Kodak software group in which I had worked for several years, I initiated a simple (and slightly corny) recognition program. When someone reached a minor project milestone or made a small contribution such as helping another team member with a problem, I gave him a package of M&M® candies, with a message tag attached expressing congratulations or thanks, as appropriate. Bigger achievements generated bigger bags of M&Ms, or something more tangible. It wasn’t much, but it was more than we were used to.

As I expected, the candy disappeared immediately, but I was pleasantly surprised to see that some people kept the message tags visible around their desks. To them, the important thing was not the bag of candy, but the words indicating that their manager noticed and valued the progress being made. It soon became apparent that group members preferred to have the presentations made publicly at our weekly team meetings, indicating their desire for peer recognition of even small achievements.

M&Ms worked with our group, but some other social recognition technique might work better for you. We also gave this sort of micro-recognition award to people outside the group who helped us in some way. It brought smiles to their faces and goodwill to our relationships. However you choose to do it, appropriate praise and commendation help to build the culture of teamwork and striving for excellence that we all want, and it can motivate your team members to do an even better job in the future, since they know you appreciate their efforts.

The form and extent of recognition and reward is a visible indication of an organization's culture. If managers believe the employees are lucky just to have jobs, they won't go out of their way to offer even small gestures of appreciation or congratulations. Conversely, in a market characterized by competitive hiring and high staff turnover, an effective recognition program can help retain talented developers. M&Ms won't make up for low salaries or unpleasant working conditions, but simple recognition is an important step in the right direction.

Software engineers are like other people (well, pretty much): We want to be appreciated, and we appreciate being wanted. Besides the internal satisfaction we obtain from interesting, challenging work and the tangible compensation in our paychecks, we want to feel that our efforts are noticed and valued by those around us. We all enjoy receiving compliments, especially when they come from various sources: peers, customers, team leader, senior managers, professional associates.

Praise for a job well done should be timely, direct, personal, and specific (see Fig. 3.1). If you are a manager, don't wait until performance appraisal or salary adjustment time rolls around to pass along some positive feedback. Tell the individual exactly what he or she did well and why you appreciate it. A mumbled "Keep up the good work" in the hallway is more likely to confuse than motivate the recipient. Your team members must know you are sincere when you offer compliments on their work. Though many people feel awkward when they receive a compliment, they appreciate that someone took the trouble to say how pleased he was with your work.



Figure 3.1: The simplest form of recognition.

Recognition can take many forms. Donna Deepröse presents more than one hundred ideas about how to select appropriate and meaningful recognition and rewards for your employees [Deepröse, 1994]. Ask the members of your team what kinds of recognition are important to *them*. Do they prefer a public pronouncement at the weekly group meeting, or are they more comfortable with private ceremonies? Should recognition come just from you, or is it meaningful to have higher-level managers participate in certain recognition activities? Tailor the reinforcement you offer to be significant to the recipients. The following paragraphs describe some of the things the groups in which I have worked have done to express appreciation and to build a positive culture. Some of these apply to individuals, while others are appropriate for teams of people.

Spend a few moments at weekly team meetings to give everyone a chance to pass along some positive reinforcement (“R+”) to others. Did a coworker help you solve a problem this week? Did someone take some action out of the ordinary that helped the team? If yes, say so! The group may be uncomfortable when you first try this, but they should warm to the idea over time. If group members are so isolated from each other that no one ever has any R+ to pass along, you may have some serious issues of team dynamics to address.

A traveling trophy that moves from project to project can be used to recognize team achievements. In keeping with the M&M motif, we used a framed three-pound M&M bag (empty, sad to say) as a traveling trophy. Recipients displayed the prize in their office area until another project reached a milestone worthy of recognition. The trophy was ceremoniously passed from one team to the next in our group meeting. If you try something like this, be sure to keep the trophy traveling every few weeks, or its significance becomes lost.

Food and entertainment are also good ways to recognize someone’s contributions or special achievement. Taking the team to a celebration luncheon when a milestone is reached can be fun for everyone involved. A gift certificate for dinner at a restaurant gives an individual recipient a chance to celebrate privately with friends or family. Whenever a member of my team earned a college or advanced degree, my wife and I took him and his significant other out to dinner. Maybe going to dinner with the boss is not everyone’s idea of a great time, but it worked for us. On another occasion, I gave each team member a pair of movie passes as a symbol of how much I appreciated their time and teamwork when, during an intense period of selecting new members for our group, the entire team of ten pitched in on short notice to participate in the interviews. It was a small gesture but a sincere way of saying, “Thanks for the help, gang.”

Recognize individuals outside your group for their contributions as well. It’s amazing how much future cooperation you can secure with a simple gesture of appreciation. As the recipient of a few such gestures myself, it always makes me feel good to know that someone really appreciated something I did, however routine it may have seemed to me. We have thanked project customer representatives by taking them to lunch, giving them certificates to hang on the wall, and bestowing restaurant gift certificates upon those who shouldered the most responsibility.

One customer even reciprocated, throwing a lunch bash for the development group. This sort of customer-developer interaction helps build a culture of constructive teamwork.

Be sure to recognize people for attaining minor milestones, as well as when they complete a big project. Interim pats on the back help provide team members with the incentive to keep pushing ahead. Again, it says to the recipient, "Congratulations on making progress toward your goals."

As a manager, you must actively look for recognition opportunities, and seize the moment as soon as you spot one. The manager who realizes an achievement is worthy of formal recognition but waits to figure out what he wants to do about it, and waits to execute his plan, may provide recognition too far removed from the achievement itself to mean much to the recipient. "Oh, so you finally noticed what I did," is a typical unspoken reaction to a belated recognition effort. A manager who expects such opportunities automatically to pop up in front of him will miss many of them, and will not deliver consistent recognition messages. Also remember that managers who fail to reward exceptional contributions are sowing the seeds of discontent. The absence of well-deserved recognition is highly demotivating.

The Importance of Being Visible

The antithesis of being recognized for your achievements is feeling that your managers do not know who you are, what you do on the project, how you do it, or what your contributions are to the company as a whole. When was the last time your supervisor stopped by your office just to say hello and to ask how things are going? How about a visit from a manager farther up the corporate hierarchy?

Some people are uncomfortable with an unannounced manager visit, but others welcome the opportunity to share their concerns and show the boss what they are working on. "Management By Walking Around" is one way managers express interest in the individuals in their organization; it can and should be practiced by managers at all levels. Think about it: If you are a first-line supervisor and you never see your boss in the engineering staff's offices, chances are you'll conclude that he or she is hopelessly out of touch with the group.

People are more motivated to put in extra effort when they know the higher-ups value it. We have all worked for managers who represented the other extreme, having a limited awareness of the group's challenges and contributions. How excited can you get about trying to please such managers? As a supervisor, make sure you really know what the engineers in your department are doing. Who are the contributors, the innovators, the leaders? Who is just along for the ride? The team members will have no confidence that they can get fair performance appraisals if they rarely talk to their supervisor. Your employees need to have adequate opportunities to explain what they do and the problems they face.

When appropriate, a manager should also show interest in professional activities that are unrelated to specific projects. It is discouraging to put in extra time to

prepare a presentation for a local software conference, then not to see your boss's face in the audience. Telling you he is pleased you are doing something extra is not nearly so meaningful as if he actually shows up for the event. Remember all those plays, dance presentations, and concerts you sat through because your children were on stage? Being a good manager demands some of the same actions as being a good parent. It means a lot to know your supervisor cares about what you are doing.

The Importance of Management Attitude

Here's a radical idea: Think of you, as a manager, working *for* the people who report to you, as opposed to the more traditional view of subordinates working for the supervisor. The people you supervise are the customers for your leadership and management services, including

- coaching and mentoring
- setting project goals and priorities
- resolving problems and conflicts
- providing resources
- evaluating performance and providing feedback
- career development
- leading process improvement efforts
- providing technical guidance when appropriate

Give your own people top priority over the demands of others for your time. Your priorities as a manager should be those shown in Fig. 3.2.

Unfortunately, too many managers are busy looking *up* the corporate organization chart, not down. The sequence in Fig. 3.2 is frequently inverted, with the key driver being what you think will make your own boss happy. In a healthy, congruent workplace, the boss should be thrilled if you are meeting the needs of your team and its customers. Not everyone is fortunate enough to work in such an enlightened environment; priorities are usually defined by the perception of who you think you have to please to keep your job.

One way a manager can tell if his priorities are straight is whether he ever receives any recognition from his team members. It meant more to me to get an R+ from one of the people I supervised than to get one from my own supervisor. If you are an individual contributor, remember to thank your managers for special

contributions they make or extra help they provide to you. Managers are people, too, with the same desire to be appreciated that anyone else has.

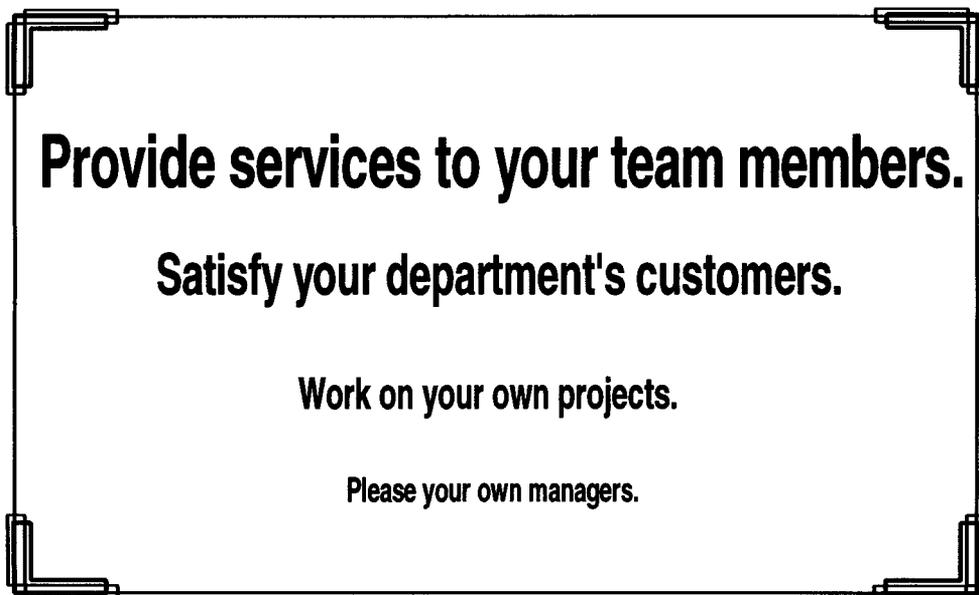


Figure 3.2: Priorities for the enlightened software manager.

Rewards for a Job Well Done

The skillful manager will use recognition and rewards to reinforce desired behaviors, rather than offering tangible incentives to individuals or teams to achieve specific goals. The main incentive for most software people to go to work each day is the opportunity to work on challenging projects with stimulating colleagues, in an environment that encourages quality work, in which software skills can be applied and extended.

Dangling extra cash as a carrot in front of a software engineer to try to get him to work faster-harder-longer can backfire [Whitaker, 1994]. If the ambitious goals are not met, and developers know the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow won't be forthcoming, how do you keep them motivated? Withdraw the incentives (thereby destroying morale), or renew the incentives (thereby showing that falling short of management's outrageous goals is just as meritorious as achieving them)? Either way, everyone loses. Instead of offering incentives, design a reward program that matches your organization's culture and means something to your team members. Motivate your team through frequent interim recognition activities, and reward them for a job well done when the job really is done. People should also be rewarded for taking intelligent risks, even if a great notion or great effort doesn't

pay off for reasons outside the development team's control. Public rewards indicate to the rest of the group those behaviors you feel are desirable.

Rewards can be monetary or non-monetary. Slipping a few bonus bills in the pay envelope may seem like a sure way to please an employee, but often something else would be preferable. Talk to your people and understand what rewards they feel are significant. The corporate culture will have some influence in selecting feasible rewards. It may be easier to give someone a substantial, but non-cash, award, such as a trip to a conference or trade show. Some companies reward employees with frequent flyer miles, which can be purchased from airlines for a few cents per mile. Some developers might enjoy extra vacation time; others might want to buy a special software package with which to experiment, just because they heard it was interesting. If someone does an exceptional job on a project, he might appreciate a mini-sabbatical, a couple of weeks set aside to work on whatever he likes.

Another kind of reward is the opportunity to work on an exciting new project. In some groups, only the old hands have the skills and knowledge to keep the legacy systems alive. Less experienced people may be assigned to projects involving newer technology, which are more fun than maintaining ancient applications. This is a good way to drive your senior staff members out of the group, to search for opportunities where they can learn contemporary skills and work on the kinds of projects they read about in computer magazines. Creative and experienced engineers don't want to be mired in legacy code for the rest of their careers. Look for ways to reward your best workers by keeping them stimulated with new learning opportunities and project challenges.

Summary

- ✓ People need to feel the work they do is appreciated.
- ✓ Receiving positive reinforcement from peers, managers, and customers is highly motivating to most people. Failing to recognize someone's exceptional contributions and major achievements is demotivating. Why do extra work if your managers don't care?
- ✓ Recognition says, "I appreciate your effort," "Congratulations on your accomplishment," or simply, "I noticed what you did."
- ✓ Find out what kinds of recognition and rewards are meaningful to your people, and tailor your R+ program accordingly to foster a culture of desirable software engineering behaviors.
- ✓ Recognize minor accomplishments and milestones, to motivate individuals to keep working toward their major objectives.

- ✓ Managers can build better relationships with their team members simply by understanding the work they do and showing a sincere interest in it. Talk to your people informally, to find out what they are excited and unhappy about. Sometimes, this approach will let you deal with a concern before it becomes a crisis.
- ✓ A software manager should regard the people who report to him as his most important customers. The manager's top priority should be to address the needs of his team members.
- ✓ Reward your staff members, whatever their job, for a good performance, rather than offering big incentives to induce them to do great work in the future.

Culture Builders and Killers



Culture Builder: Distribute recognition awards equitably to your group members. Don't reserve recognition events only for project leaders, members of high-profile project teams, or your senior technical people. The scale and frequency of rewards does not have to be the same for everyone—after all, people are different—but it is demoralizing for an employee to see the same coworkers being recognized repeatedly without anyone noticing his own achievements.



Culture Builder: Make sure you are accessible to the people who report to you. Schedule one-on-one meetings with those who desire them, at whatever interval is mutually acceptable to you and each individual. A general open-door policy is important, too, but your team members may be reluctant to bother you if they know how busy you are. They deserve a slice of your undivided attention at regular intervals.



Culture Builder: If you make a verbal commitment to someone for a reward, be sure to follow through on it. Forgetting that you made this promise demonstrates a lack of sincerity. Be sure to reward the right people for the right reasons. If you aren't sure who made key contributions to a successful project, find out before you present any rewards or recognition. Few things are more infuriating than seeing a person receive praise (or more) for work that was actually done by someone else.



Culture Killer: In an era of political correctness carried to an extreme, you don't dare run the risk of anyone crying "Discrimination!" on any basis. Therefore, it is safest to offer exactly the same kinds of recognition to

all of your team members, whether they excel in the performance of highly challenging work or they struggle to meet minimal expectations.



Culture Killer: Here are some good reasons to cancel, cut short, or interrupt a regularly scheduled one-on-one meeting with one of your team members:

- Someone else has already stopped by your office to chat.
- You need to work on one of your own projects.
- Your telephone rings.
- You have been invited to join a new committee that meets at that same time.
- Your boss calls another meeting for that time.
- You have to travel to another site to meet with someone else.
- You forgot about it.

Whenever anything short of a true emergency interferes with a scheduled meeting with someone you supervise, you are sending a clear message: “Everything else I have to do is more important to me than you are.”



Culture Killer: Offer recognition, such as a luncheon with several important managers, to an individual who has done an ordinary job on an ordinary assignment, but offer nothing to other group members for taking significant initiative that extends outside the boundaries of their assignment. Word will get around that recognition depends on who you are, not what you do.

References and Further Reading



Deeprise, Donna. *How to Recognize and Reward Employees*. New York: AMACOM, 1994.

Deeprise presents ten guidelines that can give your recognition program more impact. She lists one hundred ways you might provide recognition and reward, in the form of structured reward programs, spontaneous rewards, and day-to-day feedback. You can recover the cost of the book the first time you provide an employee with recognition that motivates him to work a little bit harder or smarter on the company’s behalf.



Whitaker, Ken. *Managing Software Maniacs*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994.

In Chapter 3, “Attracting and Keeping Developers,” Whitaker argues that managers should reward developers after the project is completed, rather than trying to motivate them by promising wonderful rewards in advance as an incentive. This book contains many horror stories of management actions that led to undesirable results.

Author Index

- Ambler, S., 82, 100, 339
Ash, D., 303, 340
Bach, J., 135, 141, 271, 339
Bankes, K., 200, 208, 339
Basili, V., 278, 284, 339
Beizer, B., 146, 211, 215, 216, 217, 225, 226,
264, 266, 270, 339
Bell, R., 252, 346
Bergin, T., 234, 251, 339
Binder, R., 126, 339
Boddie, J., 56, 339
Boehm, B., 19, 190–91, 208, 297, 302, 340
Bollinger, T., 340
Bond, S., 142, 341
Brooks, F., 11, 19, 231, 340
Card, D., 278, 284, 340
Carleton, A., 143, 343
Carmel, E., 76, 344
Carnegie Mellon University/Software
Engineering Institute, 128, 130, 134,
142, 149, 160, 169, 186, 340
Caswell, D., 285, 343
Chidamber, S., 279, 284, 340
Chrissis, M., 144, 345
Christerson, M., 102, 344
Clark, J., 252, 343
Cohen, R., 52, 57, 340
Coleman, D., 300, 303, 340
Constantine, L., 12, 13, 20, 79, 100, 340
Cornell, J., 93, 100, 341
Covey, S., 52, 321, 327, 341
Crosby, P., 61, 76, 127, 141, 165, 167, 187,
313, 341
Curtis, B., 136, 142, 144, 341, 345
Daskalantonakis, M., 138, 142, 273, 276, 281,
284, 341
Davis, A., 61, 78, 84, 95, 100, 341
Deepprose, D., 37, 43, 341
DeGrace, P., 14, 20, 86, 101, 233, 245, 251,
341
DeMarco, T., 3, 19, 20, 23, 45, 51, 57, 127,
254, 272, 273, 278, 279, 284, 292, 297,
303, 317, 318, 341
Deutsch, M., 86, 87, 101, 187, 341
Dion, R., 128, 142, 342
Dixon, R., 235, 251, 342
Dorfman, M., 77, 346
Dreger, J., 173, 187, 342
Ebenau, R., 192, 194, 195, 196, 200, 208, 342
Fagan, M., 192, 194, 209, 342
Falk, J., 226, 271, 344
Fenton, N., 342
Freedman, D., 201, 209, 342
Gause, D., 76, 342
Gianturco, M., 215, 226, 342
Gilb, T., 86, 89, 101, 192, 209, 342
Glass, R., 86, 87, 101, 187, 342
Goodman, P., 342
Grady, R., 192, 209, 264, 265, 270, 274, 275,
276, 281, 284–85, 342, 343
Graham, D., 209, 342
Harwin, R., 324, 327, 343
Haynes, C., 327, 343

- Hefley, W., 142, 341
 Herbsleb, J., 128, 143, 343
 Hetzel, B., 282, 285, 343
 Hughes, C., 245, 252, 343
 Humphrey, W., 105, 116, 127, 128, 135, 143,
 160, 166–67, 170, 187, 192, 196, 209, 343
 Iannino, A., 271, 345
 IEEE, 84, 101, 160, 211, 214, 226, 264, 270,
 279, 285, 343
 Ince, D., 156, 160, 343
 Jacobsen, I., 79, 102, 344
 Janos, L., 348
 Johnson, M., 216, 226, 344
 Johnson, M.L., 286, 346
 Jones, C., 63, 76, 136, 139, 143, 147, 154, 158,
 161, 168, 170–71, 173–74, 180, 188, 193,
 210, 215, 226, 273, 285, 291, 297, 303,
 316, 344
 Jonnson, P., 102, 344
 Kaner, C., 216, 226, 271, 344
 Karten, N., 26, 34, 344
 Keil, M., 65, 76, 344
 Kemerer, C., 284, 340
 Keuffel, W., 57, 271, 340, 344
 Kidd, J., 286, 344
 Konrad, M., 142, 341
 Kuzara, R., 346
 Lao-tzu, 319
 Layman, B., 161, 344
 Lazell, P., 252, 346
 Lister, T., 3, 19, 20, 23, 45, 51, 57, 127, 292,
 303, 317, 318, 341
 Lorenz, M., 279, 286, 344
 Lowther, B., 303, 340
 Mack, R., 345
 Maguire, S., 20, 34, 46, 57, 344
 Marose, B., 286, 346
 McCabe, T., 216, 218, 226, 344
 McConnell, S., 21, 34, 52, 57, 188, 210, 344
 McGowan, C., 340
 Miller, S., 142, 341
 Mosley, D., 217, 219, 227, 345
 Musa, J., 263–64, 271, 345
 Myers, G., 61, 181, 188, 213–14, 227, 345
 Nguyen, H., 226, 271, 344
 Nielsen, J., 345
 Okumoto, K., 271, 345
 Oman, P., 303, 340
 Overgaard, G., 102, 344
 Page-Jones, M., 128, 143, 252, 345
 Paulk, M., 128, 144, 345
 Perry, D., 303, 345
 Perry, W., 188, 345
 Pfleeger, S., 345
 Pirsig, R., 52
 Port, O., 287
 Pressman, R., 57, 139, 144, 345
 Raynor, D., 57, 345
 Rettig, M., 94, 102, 345
 Robertson, J., 234, 252, 346
 Robertson, S., 234, 252, 346
 Roetzheim, W., 158, 161, 346
 Rombach, H., 284, 339
 Rozum, J., 143, 343
 Rubin, H., 273, 274, 276, 286, 346
 Saiedian, H., 346
 Sellers, D., 324, 327, 346
 Shafer, L., 100, 341
 Sharon, D., 234, 252, 346
 Siegel, J., 143, 343
 Silver, D., 77, 347
 Spurr, K., 245, 252, 346
 Stahl, L., 14, 20, 101, 251, 341
 Staudenmayer, N., 303, 345
 Strauss, S., 208, 342
 Szmyt, P., 77, 346
 Thayer, R., 77, 346
 Tripp, L., 156, 161, 346
 Van Slack, T., 209, 343
 Verdago, G., 286, 346
 Votta, L., 303, 345
 Walsh, J., 263–64, 271, 346
 Weber, C., 144, 345
 Weeks, K., 217–18, 227, 346
 Weinberg, G., 3, 7, 21, 76, 128, 135, 144, 188,
 190, 209, 210, 272–73, 286, 307, 309, 317,
 318, 342, 346, 347
 Weller, E., 191, 192, 210, 347
 Whitaker, K., 21, 35, 40, 44, 347
 Wieggers, K., *xx–xxi*, 347
 Willis, R., 101, 187, 341
 Wilson, J., 244, 253, 347
 Wirth, N., 347
 Wood, J., 69, 77, 347
 Yeager, C., 16, 22, 348
 Yourdon, E., 22, 52, 58, 117, 188, 253, 309,
 348
 Zubrow, D., 143, 343

Subject Index

- Action plan, 113–14, 123, 124, 138–39, 311, 313ff.
for software engineers, 319ff.
for software managers, 313ff.
template for, 114
- Analysis, 97, 238, 242, 249
iteration during, 232
paralysis, 89ff., 232
structured, 238
- Applied Computer Research (ACR), 52, 337
- Appreciation, need for, 36, 41
(*see also* Recognition; Rewards)
- Assess-Plan-Do-Verify, 112–13, 115, 316
- Assessment, process, 103, 125, 137–39, 140, 149, 151
CMM-based, 137–38, 139, 140
mini, 138–39
Software Productivity Research (SPR), 139, 143
- Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), 50–51, 53, 334
- Books, *see* Software literature, books
- Brainstorming, 112, 117–20, 122–24, 125, 137, 140
- Bugs, 163, 165, 189, 256, 258
(*see also* Defects; Errors; Fault, software)
categories of, 264–66
cost of correction, 190ff.
inspections and, 192, 205
seeded, 175–76, 207–8
taxonomy of, 264–65, 270
trends in detection, 263–65
- Capability Maturity Model (CMM), 63, 128ff., 137ff., 148, 149, 151, 169, 186, 305, 340
key process areas (KPAs), 129–34, 136, 138, 140, 149
levels of, 129–34, 151
objections to, 135–37
- CASE tools, 93, 96–97, 231, 233ff., 246, 335
benefits from, 236, 237, 241, 244, 247, 322
communication and, 235–36, 238ff., 249
culture change and, 241, 244, 248–49
integrated, 234, 243, 251
iteration and, 237, 321
lessons, 236–44
lower-, 233, 235, 242, 246
success with, 244, 245–46
training and, 245, 249–51
types of, 233–35
upper-, 233, 237–38, 241, 244, 247
vendors, 235, 335
- Certification, *see* Training, professional certification
- Change, 6, 12, 16, 107, 109ff., 120, 122ff., 313ff.
(*see also* Change management; Software change control board)
agent, 107, 122, 314

- assessments, 258–59
- control, 149, 262, 254ff., 313
- cultural, 16, 107
- goals and, 109–110, 112, 124, 314
- incentives for, 109–110
- measurements and, 111
- mini-projects, 112, 115, 118, 120, 123
- need for, 120
- pain and, 110, 112, 130
- process, 18, 313
- reactions to, 6, 122, 314
- request, 254, 256, 269–70
- request process guidelines, 153
- resistance to, 109, 110, 314
- sustaining momentum,
- Change management, 71–72, 89–90, 134, 229, 254, 256ff.
- culture and, 267–68
- system, 181, 268
- Communication:
 - software engineers and, 78, 108
 - tools for, 64, 78, 98, 235–36, 238, 240, 242, 321, 335
- Conferences, 50–51, 55–56, 126, 313, 333
- Congruent behavior, 7, 16
- COntstructive COst MOdel (COCOMO), 297ff., 302
- Context diagram, 69, 70, 239, 240
- Control flow diagram, 239
- Control flowgraph, 217, 226
- Coverage, test, *see* Test coverage
- Culture, *xix–xx*, 1, 4, 6–8, 18, 46, 107, 109, 125, 131, 135, 137, 229, 313ff.
 - (*see also* Software engineering culture)
 - definition of, 3–4
 - inspections and, 190–93, 204–6
 - organizational paradigms and, 12–13, 122
 - of quality, 165–88
- Customer:
 - (*see also* Customer/supplier model for software)
 - change requests, 269–70
 - failure reports, 265, 268
 - integrity with, 24–26
 - involvement in requirements, 9, 17, 59, 61ff., 64–66, 74, 75, 119, 180, 306
 - needs, 5, 24, 25, 33, 61, 66, 78, 79–80, 84, 232, 317
 - product errors and, 166, 168
 - projects without, 69
 - quality and, 166, 175, 329
 - representatives, 25, 37–38, 65, 66, 68, 10, 90, 232
 - satisfaction metric, 277
 - software expertise, 25, 33
 - voice of, 24, 59, 63, 66, 75, 79
- Customer/supplier model for software, 178–79, 214, 320
- Cyclomatic complexity:
 - basic, 218–20
 - extended, 218–20
 - testing and, 216, 218–20
 - tools for, 220
- Data dictionary, 236, 246, 247
- Data flow diagram (DFD), 66, 86, 90, 234, 236, 239, 246, 247, 248
- Defects, 124, 254, 256
 - assault on, 178–81
 - classifying, 201–2, 264–65
 - correction of, 184, 270, 290, 296
 - culture and, 254–55
 - density of, 61, 170–72, 185, 186, 204, 277
 - found by peer, 168, 190, 207
 - per function point, 170
 - names for, 165
 - opportunity, 170–71
 - prevention of, 133–34, 167–68
 - removal efficiency, 193, 203, 224
 - six-sigma quality and, 171–72, 175
 - tracking of, 181, 254, 268
 - units of, 170
- Design, 5, 97–98, 133, 231–32, 238, 242, 249
 - iteration and, 232, 319, 320
 - measured aspects of, 289
 - modeling, 232–33
 - object-oriented, 233, 234
 - structured, 244
 - tools, 234
- Dialog map, 91–93
- Documentation, 5, 10, 71, 78, 133, 255
 - CASE tools and, 236, 242–43, 320
 - errors in, 165
 - guidelines for, 152–53, 156

- inspection of, 191
- procedure definition and, 149
- templates for, 152
- work effort metric, 290
- Dogma, 17, 111, 120, 135–36, 229, 240, 305ff.
- Education, professional, 9, 46–47, 49, 54, 55
(*see also* Training)
- National Technological University, 53, 55, 337
- on-line information, 53
- resources for, 331–35, 337
- Entity-relationship diagram (ERD), 86, 234, 239
- Ergonomics, 11, 311ff.
- environment and, 311, 314, 317, 323ff.
- recommended configuration, 326
- Errors:
 - acceptable level of, 175
 - healthy engineering culture and, 166
 - by user, 259
- Estimation:
 - and change, 90
 - metrics for, 27, 297–300
 - of projects, 27–28, 33, 106, 124, 130, 132, 297–300, 323
 - tools, 233
- Expectations gap, 63, 93–94
- Fagan inspection, 189, 194–95, 197
- Fault, software, 165, 255
 - objections to term, 165
- Features, 28–32, 34
- Flexibility diagram, 29–31, 33
- Function point:
 - backfiring estimates, 174
 - counting scheme, 172–74, 187
 - defects per, 170
 - International Function Point Users Group (IFPUG), 173, 337
- Functional metrics, 173, 275, 297
 - vs. LOC counts, 173–74
- Goal/question/metric (GQM) paradigm, 278–82, 283, 292, 316
 - definition of, 278–79
 - feedback model, 280–82, 292
- Guidelines, software development, 147–49, 151–55, 158
 - areas omitted from, 151–52, 154
 - glossary section, 154
 - local development, 149–51
 - review of, 155, 158
 - as suggested approaches, 148, 151
 - team involvement in, 150, 158
 - for user interface, 154
 - for user manual, 154
- IEEE Computer Society, 50, 51, 53, 64, 161, 334
- IEEE standards for software development, 150, 154, 155–58, 159, 182
 - as guides, 149, 151, 154, 305
 - for productivity metrics, 173
 - for quality metrics, 285
 - for software anomalies, 270
 - for software quality assurance plans, 182
 - for software requirements specification, 84–86
 - for test documentation, 182, 214
- Inspection, software, 180, 193, 194–96
(*see also* Fagan inspection)
 - benefits of, 190–93, 207, 321
 - of code, formal, 193, 201
 - culture and, 190–93, 204–6
 - efficiency of, 175–76, 177
 - etiquette, 199
 - failure, reasons for, 205–6
 - formal, 189, 194–98
 - forms used in, 200, 201–4
 - guiding principles for, 153, 198–201
 - management involvement in, 195, 205
 - participants, 194–95, 205–7
 - rates, 199–200, 203
 - records kept, 201–4, 207
 - seeded errors for, 207–8
 - of software requirements specification, 190, 191, 193, 207
 - stages of, 195–98
 - summary report, 202–3
 - time for, 191, 193, 205, 206
 - training, 205, 206
 - unit testing and, 191, 193
- Iteration, 229, 231ff., 249, 319

- Joint Application Design (JAD), 69, 77, 79
- Key process area (KPA), *see* Capability Maturity Model
- Kiviati diagram, 29–30
- Kodak software groups, *vii*, *xix–xx*
development guidelines, 151ff.
Graphics Engine testing example, 220–22
IEEE standards and, 86, 155, 182
measurement programs and, 275, 276, 281, 287ff.
metrics, 180, 292
- Magazines, *see* Software literature, periodicals
- Maintainability, predicting, 300–301
- Maintenance, 124, 133, 259
bug-fixing, 163
goal to reduce, 287–88, 300
of orphan software, 185
phases, 289, 290
post-release, 169
reduced by initial quality, 178, 180
- Management:
behavior, 9, 11
consensus, 109, 110
goals, 287–88, 299
leadership, 15–16, 39, 109–10, 241, 274
measurement programs and, 274, 275, 283
priorities, 4, 39–40
problem tracking, support for, 268, 270
role in leading change, 16, 314, 317
services to staff, 39–40
visibility, 38–39, 274
by walking around, 38
- Manager:
action planning and, 313ff.
attitude toward quality, 166
education, 121, 245
expectations, vague, 147
inspections and, 195, 205, 207, 208
integrity with, 27–28
personal improvement and, 48
process improvement and, 314, 329–30
quality-related tasks vs., 168
tracking QA activities, 183
- Maturity, software process, 127–45
(*see also* Capability Maturity Model; Process, software)
culture and, 6, 139–40
- Measurement, software development, 119, 123, 140, 229, 272–86, 287–303
culture and, 272, 273, 290
dimensions of, 274, 278, 279
failure of, 273–75
vs. of performance, 274, 283
programs, 273
reasons for, 272, 282
stakeholders and, 274
- Methodology, software development, 7, 11, 69, 75, 147, 159, 239, 304ff.
(*see also* Dogma)
CASE tools and, 234, 236–37, 245
- Metrics, software, 131
database, 276, 294, 299, 300, 301, 302
functional, 173–74
guidelines for, 153, 155
Halstead, 220
indicators, 278
individual evaluation of, 229
maintainability and, 300–301
of maintenance efforts, 184
privacy of, 274, 294
of productivity, 288
starter set, 277–78
trends in, 263–65, 275, 288, 295–97, 301, 302
work effort, 184–85, 287–95, 296, 297, 300, 301, 303
- Metrics programs, 203, 229, 273ff., 276ff., 287–303, 335
accounting system vs., 293, 302
designing, 276–77, 278–82
failure, reasons for, 273–75
to monitor progress, 314, 316, 335
for project estimation, 297–300
reporting options, 294–95, 300
as self-controlling process, 294
standards for definitions, 275
- Modeling, 232ff., 236ff., 249
CASE tools and, 231–53
- Object-orientation, 79, 233, 234, 239, 250, 284

- PC-Metric, 220
- Peer deskcheck, 197–98, 203, 206, 320–21
- Peer reviews, 133, 136, 189, 190, 206, 207, 208, 231, 301, 314, 316, 319, 320
(*see also* Inspection, software; Fagan inspection; Reviews, by group)
- People Capability Maturity Model (P-CMM), 136, 142
- Performance:
 self-assessment by manager, 314, 315
 of software developers, 3, 124, 208
 of software groups, 3, 313ff.
- Personal Software Process (PSP), 134–35, 143, 166–67, 187
- Problem tracking system (PTS), 255ff.
 commercial, 256–57
 as communication tool, 259, 268
 culture and, 259, 260, 264, 269
 databases used in, 257, 261
 philosophy of using, 260–61, 268
 reports from, 256, 258–59, 261, 269
 repository, 255–56
 response time, 260, 269
 rules for, 260–61
 submission example, 258–59
 testing, uses with, 263ff.
- Procedures, software development, 103, 146–62
(*see also* Guidelines)
 documentation of, 149
 engineers, new, and, 159
 project schedule and, 160
 realistic, 155
 resistance to, 150
 as step-by-step formula, 148
- Process, software, 103ff.
(*see also* Assessment, process; Maturity, software process; Process improvement, software)
 customer/supplier relationships, 178–79
 defect prevention and, 168
 evolutionary scales for, 127–28
 maturity, 127–45
- Process improvement, software, 4, 7, 8, 16, 17, 103ff., 106, 114, 117ff., 120, 125, 134, 137–38, 141, 149, 254
 culture and, 103, 106, 114
 errors as indicators for, 166
 evolutionary, 108–109, 114, 130
 goals for, 108, 139, 278, 313ff., 319ff.
 objectives of, 136
 principles of, 106–112
 problem tracking system and, 259–60
 time and, 106, 120
- Productivity:
 CASE tools and, 321
 quality and, 163, 185
- Programmers, 160, 168, 287
 reviews and, 190, 208
 standards and, 150, 307
 testing and, 181, 214, 225
- Programming, egoless, 8, 190, 210
- Project, software development:
 change request tracking, 268
 customer/supplier relationships, 178–79, 214, 320
 dimensions of, 28–33, 34
 estimation metrics, 297–300
 improvement goals, 313ff.
 internal rework and, 168–69, 292
 measurement of, 272–73
 negotiation, 27, 29, 33
 peer-review activity and, 189, 314, 316
 pilot, 150
 planning, 5, 28, 69, 124, 131, 132, 149, 205
 schedule, 28–32, 34, 186
 work effort distribution, 291
- Project champion, 59, 64, 66ff., 73–74, 75, 79, 81, 90, 91, 246
 change management, 258–59, 260, 262
 change requests and, 256–57
 characteristics of ideal, 67
 expectations of, 69–73
 resource team, 68–69
 responsibilities, 66, 152, 153, 194, 258–59
- Prototypes, 64, 69, 89, 93ff., 95ff., 231
 expectation gap and, 93–94
- Publications, 51–52, 334
(*see also* Software literature)
- Quality, 23, 28–32, 33, 59, 175, 186, 193
(*see also* Conferences; Quality control; Six-sigma quality; Software literature; Software quality; Software quality assurance; Software quality engineering)

- as conformance to requirements, 61, 76
 - CASE tools and, 235, 241, 249
 - cost of, 46, 167–68, 180, 187, 191, 303, 329
 - culture and, 4–5, 163, 165–88, 301, 315
 - filters, 90, 224
 - improvement, first initiative, 186
 - individual concern for, 163, 166, 178, 319ff.
 - inspections and, 189–200
 - Management Maturity Grid, 127
 - methods, 193
 - productivity and, 163, 168, 184–85, 186, 313ff.
 - schedules and, 186
 - work effort metrics and, 184–85
- Quality Assurance Institute (QAI), 332, 333
- Quality control, 170, 175, 181, 268
 - defined, 169–70
 - efficiency, 175–76
- Recognition, 35ff., 112, 313ff., 317
 - (*see also* Rewards)
 - culture and, 35–36, 40, 41, 123
 - forms of, 36–37
 - importance of interim, 38, 40
 - M&Ms, 35–37
 - of outside contributors, 37–38
 - timeliness of, 36
- Repetitive strain injuries (RSI), 11, 311, 324
- Requirements, 26, 59ff., 62–64, 102, 105, 131
 - (*see also* Requirements specification, software)
 - analysis, 63, 66, 76, 79, 91, 97, 133, 233
 - vs. business rules, 81, 82
 - changing, 26, 65, 89, 97, 98, 132, 254
 - correlation with effort, 297–99
 - creeping, 63, 76, 97
 - culture and, 5, 59, 63, 75, 98
 - cursory understanding of, 231
 - customer involvement with, 9, 17, 59, 61ff., 64–66, 74, 75, 119, 180, 306
 - documenting, 83–89, 256, 306
 - engineering, 61, 64
 - essential vs. chrome, 70
 - external functional, 215
 - gathering, 69–70, 256
 - inspection of, 190, 191, 192, 207
 - marketing department and, 65–66
 - new, 32–33, 66, 90
 - quality attributes negotiation, 175
 - tagging, 86
 - techniques for, 64
 - traceability matrix, 64, 96–97, 99, 183
- Requirements specification, software, 5, 62, 64, 71, 73, 76, 82, 83–90, 91–92, 96–100, 105, 119, 124, 125, 149, 150, 180, 243, 289, 296, 297–98
- IEEE, 84–86, 99, 101
- inspection, 83, 90
- iteration, 232
- pitfalls, 89–90
- quality attributes in, 86–89
- Reuse, 84, 87, 98, 115
 - benefits of, 322–23
 - modeling and, 247
 - testing and, 214
- Reviews, 10
 - (*see also* Inspection)
 - abuses of, 190
 - of development guidelines, 155, 158
 - development guidelines used in, 159
 - of documentation, 159
 - formal technical, 189
 - guiding principles for, 198–201
 - by group, 197–98, 203
 - impact on quality, 180, 321–22
 - of requirements specification, 90
 - by team, 192
- Rewards, 40–41, 46–47, 107
 - (*see also* Recognition)
 - examples of, 41
 - instead of incentives, 40–41, 42
- Rework, 167–69, 292
- Risk, 188, 193, 221, 223, 232, 285
 - analysis and quality control, 175
 - based decision after testing, 264
 - of failure, 175, 245
 - laboratory process control example, 175
- Six-sigma quality, 171–72, 174, 175, 177, 315
 - vs. more realistic goal, 186
 - ways to achieve, 177
- Skills, professional, 48, 119–20, 140, 244
 - assessment, 47, 55, 319ff.

- Software change control board (SCCB), 256, 261–62
- Software configuration management (SCM), 149, 154
- Software development:
(*see also* Measurement, software development; Methodology, software development; Procedures, software development; Process, software; Standards, software development)
- incremental, 89, 93, 231
- lifecycle (SDLC), 152, 290–91
- phases, 289–90
- Software engineering, 139, 146
(*see also* Software engineering culture)
- practices vs. goals, 306
- process group (SEPG), 132
- vs. quality control, 181
- standards and, 146ff.
- Software engineering culture, *xix–xx*, 1, 4–5, 6, 8, 55, 112, 125, 229, 231, 264, 304
(*see also* Culture; Quality, culture and)
- CASE tools and, 241, 244–46, 249, 321, 335
- change management and, 229
- changing, 117, 307
- through consensus, 151
- defined, 1, 4–5
- ergonomics and, 311ff.
- errors and, 190
- Greek versus Roman, 14–15, 251
- healthy, 4, 8–10, 46, 106, 108, 307, 311
- measurement and, 273, 283, 288, 307
- outsourcing and, 5
- peer deskchecks and, 198
- principles, 16–17
- problem tracking system and, 259, 260, 264, 269
- procedures, written, and, 158
- process maturity and, 137, 139–40
- quality and, 163, 329
- standards and, 147, 306–7, 308
- testing and, 183, 212–15, 307
- tools, adoption of, 304
- unhealthy, 10–12
- Software Engineering Institute (SEI), 127ff., 134, 136, 137, 140–42, 144–45, 332, 337, 340
(*see also* Capability Maturity Model)
- Software failure, 165–66
proactive reporting of, 265–67
- Software literature, *xx*, 8, 45, 51–52, 126
books, 48, 51–52, 55, 56, 119, 304, 314, 319
periodicals, 52, 55–56, 119, 314, 319, 334
- Software quality, 59, 61–62, 75, 119, 123, 181
acceptable level, 174
attributes, 175
code quality and, 174
customer and, 166, 175, 329
engineering, 182–83
good enough, 174–78
initiatives, five major, 180–81
low, causes of, 180
responsibility for, 183
- Software quality assurance (SQA), 132, 168–74
as auditing function, 186
coordinator role, 182
defined, 169
function, 159, 168–69
goals for, 160, 313ff.
guidelines for, 153
plans, 182–83
responsibility for, 180, 181–83
- Software reliability, 263, 269, 271
- Standards, software development, 7, 11, 146ff., 150–51, 306–7
(*see also* IEEE standards for software development)
- Department of Defense, U.S., 148, 158
- ISO, 147, 156
- ISO 9000-3 guidelines, 156, 158
- ISO 9001 registration, 111, 149, 156, 158, 160
sources of, 155, 156–58
- State-transition diagram (STD), 86, 93, 234, 239
- Team, 125
behavior, 8–9, 10
guidelines, involvement with, 150
interactions, 319, 329–30
leadership, 13–14
reviews by, 192
structured open, 13–14

- Technologies, new, *xix*, 8, 9, 41, 244, 249, 250
- Test cases, 71, 80, 83, 84, 96, 214, 219, 220–22
 benefits of, 82–83
 review of, 232
 software quality engineer, written by, 183
 SQA coordinator, written by, 182
- Test coverage, 216
 branch, 215, 217
 condition, 215, 217, 225
 path, 216, 218
 statement, 215ff., 225
- Test plans, 182, 214
 process, guidelines for, 153
- Testing, 106, 123, 125, 133
 (*see also* Test cases; Test coverage; Test plans)
 alpha, 263, 268
 automated, 220–22
 baseline method, 218ff.
 beta, 123–24, 263, 268
 black box, 215, 216, 217, 224
 cyclomatic complexity and, 218–20, 224, 226
 defined, 211
 documentation, written, 211–13, 223
 efficiency of, 175–76, 177
 Graphics Engine example, 220–22
 gray box, 217, 224
 guidelines, 153, 222–24
 vs. inspections, 193
 integration, 186, 191, 213, 225
 management of, 220–22
 measured aspects of, 289–90
 need for, 181
 quality, impact on, 180
 vs. quality assurance, 170
 quality culture and, 212–15
 regression, 217, 225
 responsibilities for, 181–83
 schedule delays and, 186
 software quality engineer and, 183
 structured, 180, 211–28, 319, 320, 322
 system, 10, 180, 191, 213, 216
 target quality level, 264
 testers and, 186, 224
 tools, 216, 217, 335
 unit, 212–13, 215–18, 222, 224
 white box, 215, 220, 223, 224
- Tools, 229ff.
 CASE, 233–36
 problem tracking, 256–61
 testing, 216, 217, 335
- Training, 45–58, 119, 133, 332
 (*see also* Conferences; Education)
 as investment, 49, 51, 55
 CASE, 245, 249–51
 culture and, 46
 vs. education, 50
 for inspections, 205
 for metrics, 276, 282, 283
 professional certification, 46, 53–54, 55
 professional societies, 45, 46, 53–54, 55
 seminars, 9, 48, 49–50, 55–56, 126, 332
 for testing, 211–12
 value of, assessing, 317
- U.S. Government, as standards body, 156
- Use cases, 64, 79, 83, 90, 95, 99
 definition, 79
 requirements, 79, 81–82, 83
 test cases from, 80, 82–83
 workshops, 79–81, 90
- Usenet newsgroups, 53, 235, 256
- User interface, 64, 79, 83, 91
 graphical, 91, 154
 guidelines for, 154
 modeling, 91–93
 prototyping, 93, 125, 256
- User manual, guidelines for, 154
- User needs, 64, 66, 231, 329
 (*see also* Customer, needs)
- UX-Metric, 220
- Videotape instruction, 53, 55
- Vision of the product, 59, 63, 73–74, 78ff., 82, 83, 91, 98
- Walkthrough, 98, 189, 194, 197–98
- Work environment, health and, 311, 323, 324–25
 (*see also* Ergonomics)
- World Wide Web, 50, 53, 235