



Awaiting the Big Delivery

You shouldn't wait too long to fill your children's lives with disappointment. If you shelter them too much, they'll never know how to handle life's hard turns, which is why when my daughter was born just a couple days ago, she wasn't even completely out of the womb when I decided to share what I'm sure everyone considers the most painful national disappointment since Lloyd Bentsen was replaced as secretary of the treasury: "I'm sorry, sweetie, but the CMMI initiative will delay CMM, Version 2.0 for months and may even absorb it entirely."

She cried at the news, but she's doing better now. Her nearly two-year-old brother handled the news fairly well, too, considering the impact capability maturity models (CMMs) he had on his life. For months, our bedtime reading has consisted of the latest ISO standard or someone's new CMM (Me: "Honey, he was out cold in six seconds flat—a new record!" My Wife: "No it isn't. He's faking it to make you go away."). Yet, somehow, he handled the news of this earth-shattering delay with remarkable restraint: "Oh." (yawn) [clunk!]

You'll see essentially the same reaction from software developers. But I know that somewhere, someone is miffed that they have to wait months to receive *even more* mandated best practices they really should follow, but do not. In the meantime, these people will have to wait in line at the local library in the wing set aside for all the good and not-so-good CMMs out there, including the T-CMM (Testing CMM), the P-CMM (People CMM), the VMR-CMM (Vending Machine Renewal CMM), the CMRDEDBDMNMs-CMM (See, 'Em Are De Eedy Beedy M&Ms CMM. Read it out loud. Har!), and The CMM of the Living Dead (formerly the Project Management CMM). And I'm assuming that to rate the quality and utility of all these CMMs, someone must have already developed a CMM-CMM (the Capability Maturity Model Capability Maturity Model).

In light of all the available CMMs, I think the Department of Defense has the right idea in wanting the Software Engineering Institute to combine a couple of its own CMMs into a CMM Integration (CMMI). However, this has delayed the release of the much-anticipated CMM, Version 2. The funny thing is, even among big CMM fans, I'm having a hard time finding anyone disappointed about this. The reason is simple: The Seventh Grade Pre-Algebra Principle.

Think back to your days in pre-algebra, a class of students ranging from the pre-pubescent equivalent of CMM Level 5—algebra whizzes like Joe S., the confident center of attention with his "dirty joke of the day"—to me at CMM Level 1—as relaxed and confident as a 98-lb. weakling at a sand-kicking contest, and who at year's end couldn't determine the area of a triangle any better than I understood Joe's jokes.

Now, imagine your teacher tells you the scheduled midterm exam has been postponed indefinitely. What are your emotions? Disgust? Disappointment? If so, I suppose that you were also one of the kids who left your corrected test in the corner of your desk so everyone could see the score. Maybe assessments are necessary, but if I'd heard there was going to be a delay in the next round of "tests," I'd feel like the class bully had just told me he'd decided not to beat me up after all, and that he was looking for someone to get me out of my locker.

So lack of disappointment about the CMM delay is understandable. Besides, a maturity level doesn't tell the whole story. For example, sure, Mr. Level 5 Joe S. showed up at our high school 10-year reunion as a high-ranking executive for one of the world's largest computer corporations, but what about Level 2 Sean M.? He was a success, too. In a two-page *Sports Illustrated* lead-in photo he was shown committing what must have been a second-degree felony in a story about flagrant fouls in NCAA basketball. (He also once stuck gum in my hair, although I've since reluctantly forgiven the unredeemable brute. And no, I didn't fit in my locker.) And little old me, CMM Level 1—not to toot my horn, but in college I was editor of one of the first 100 newspapers to pick up "Dilbert" in syndication.

So don't tell me there's a correlation between maturity and success. I have other examples, but I'd rather have you read them in my new Self-Rationalization CMM. Check it out in the CMM section of your local library. — Lorin May

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