



Who Needs John Wayne ?



The Software Technology Support Center (STSC) Web site gets more than 80,000 hits per month, most of which are on *CROSS TALK* articles, past and

present. Often, the most popular article subject is configuration management (CM). The STSC Web site also has pages dedicated to CM resources, and CM receives nearly double the number of hits of any other technology area. Professionals are obviously looking for answers to CM questions they face every day. Ironically, the CM consultation service we offer to defense organizations is the least requested of all our services. I can conclude one of two things from this: CM is not glamorous enough to attract the funding it needs for implementing improvements, or CM managers are all rugged individualists. The latter, if true, can probably be explained in terms of our cultural mind-set.

We seem to be heavily influenced by the John Wayne rugged individualist approach to life. We struggle to be tow-

ers of individual strength and isolation. To a large degree, we work alone, face crisis alone, and grieve alone. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the way we learn. We read alone, review alone, solve problems alone, and create alone. We pursue this individualistic drive in the face of overwhelming evidence that teams are more productive than individuals because the whole is better than the sum of its parts. Study groups in school find solutions to problems more accurately and in less time and increase the rate of learning.

Our rugged individualist approach to learning is also prevalent in our work habits. How many of us, for example, got together as a group to learn the latest version of Windows? It is more likely that we pursued a frustrating path of learning it on our own, on the job, and as we needed it and only learned what was immediately required to be semi-functional. What an inefficient way to learn. Educators have long understood that we remember 10 percent of what we read, 20 percent of what we hear, 50 percent of what someone coaches us

through, and 90 percent of what we do. Reading this publication, for example, is only the beginning of the process you must follow to assimilate and effectively apply the CM principals and concepts introduced here.

To internalize any new concept, you must first go through a discovery process of contact and awareness followed by an understanding of what is to be gained, followed by evaluation and trial usage. Finally, after much effort, the new concepts are mastered, adopted, and institutionalized. CM is no different. New habits must be formed to effectively apply CM principles. This is a difficult process even when we are committed to the change; a halfhearted effort will take much longer. Because organizations have many people in varying degrees of resistance to change (who by definition are halfhearted), it becomes even more imperative to use a tutor or consultant to stimulate organizational change. To rely on individualism to train a team in CM techniques may satisfy your inner John Wayne, but it will not get the job done. ♦



Outsourcing's Hidden Costs Deserve Closer Inspection

I read "Outsourcing and Privatizing Information Technology – Re-examining the Savings," *January 1999*, with particular interest. As a former Marine Corps comptroller now heavily involved in information technology (IT), I have seen this issue from both sides. Although there is real pain in forcibly pushing our high-technology public servants from public to private industry, the real issue is finding the best value (in the long run) for the taxpayer. If outsourcing can lower costs, it is worth examining.

Michael Brower's article contains contradictory points. If government cannot compete with the high-wage

private sector for workers, how does outsourcing to that sector save money? Yet, Mr. Brower argues that government workers have to worry about low-cost civilian jobs. Juxtaposing the two arguments, it is clear that one is wrong. You cannot have it both ways.

Still, I agree with Mr. Brower's main point. Office of Management and Budget Circular A-76-style outsourcing tends toward failure in IT. An A-76 study should determine whether maintaining government IT resources is more costly than maintaining effective management and control of contracted resources. Traditional A-76 clearly quantifies the former. The latter is usu-

ally severely underestimated. So, even high-performance, high-quality government organizations risk being dismantled. The government then finds that it must hire another set of contractors to supervise the first set because too much in-house expertise is gone. Sometimes, even a third set of contractors is hired to manage the second set. Such recursively determined additional cost is seldom budgeted. A-76 "savings" disappear and so does effective mission performance. (These opinions are mine and should not be attributed to my employer or to any government agency.)

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