



CERTELLUS LLC

A Plethora of Panaceas

by Jerry E. Durant, Managing Director

I believe that I have finally reached the end of my tolerance for businesses hyping solutions that will solve ills and can be carried out in an effortless fashion. We have seen the effects of this ranging from get rich schemes to effortless exercises. To a large extent, even the rise in crime can be blamed on the wanting desire of individuals to get rich quick and totally overlook the impact of risk. We might wish to draw a parallel to the snake oil merchants of the 1800s and our contemporaries in the software industry. Nothing comes without a price, suggesting that solutions are effortless either involves ignoring risk and getting lucky in the face of danger. Let me be the first say that those making such claims are 100% correct. However, let me also say that in order to make such claims that ideal conditions must exist. Long periods of process improvement are often required in order to make process cultural, and effortless is the result of routine behavior. When companies seek new solutions during periods when chaos is knocking at their door, stand clear because the solutions will be used as an excuse for failure. With this said, how well can we expect a new solution to be ushered in?

Solutions, are solutions are solutions. Some are better than others. There may be a multitude of reasons ranging from general product/discipline immaturity to shoddy engineering. When coupled with your own corporate chaos, is it any wonder that we are surprised by the outcome? Issues that we have are magnified by the introduction of new technology and solutions. Before venturing into new tracts of opportunity our house needs to be placed in order. This does not mean that we complete reformation is needed, but the instrumental areas should be. A logical starting point is an assessment of our operations. This includes review of processes, resources both intellectual and human, applications, project initiatives, and organization history as it relates to present status. This may not involve a whole lot of formality, if things are messed up then there really isn't much reason to do a whole lot of analysis on the "how" but more on the "why" did things get that way. While an organization has the capability to carry out the self-evaluation questions of available resources and independence come into play. Often it's best to obtain the opinion of an unbiased party making sure that the criteria used for evaluation is sound, relevant and current. One must consider that our current state reflects the era in which the practice was put into play. There may be many strata. Each strata having it's own appropriate merits based on when it was created and the current maturity of the organization.



As each area is examined a wellness score card is kept. Some, such as Software Design or Code Engineering may be part of a more far reaching area as Development, others like Disaster Recovery may monopolistic. Whatever the case, the final score will not only determine the priority of change, but also drive what needs to be corrected. This is where the Plethora of Panaceas comes into play. I'm sure that all of you have been involved with new initiative implementations. Were they based on a reason or on a trend? Were they successful or unsuccessful, even with repeated attempts in the area of interest? If they succeeded, did they fit the bill for the majority of activities engaged in for a particular topic? There are two basic axioms that I follow; 1. Keep it simple and 2. Solid Change must be engineered.

Like many consultants I have engineered processes and implemented them in cases where they fit for a specific client. I have even adapted these same processes and implemented them in other organizations that have similar issues. Each time I learned something new about the original model and it's ability to work under different circumstances. There is a very natural process which is not out of the ordinary. What is a bit disturbing is that solutions are hyped as the panacea to all problems. "If you use xyz methodology/process, then the results will be nirvana." The fault in this paradigm is that the results from one or two, very unscientific experiments does not correlate to the method or process being put forth. This would be equivalent to saying that if you use a particular software language or technique that you will always attain the same result. If I drive a particular brand of automobile will you inherit my driving habits (my wife is hoping not)? So while we have a multitude (aka plethora) of solutions, they aren't always appropriate or applicable to a particular problem.

The good news is that with the bandwagoning of new solutions, a broader base of experience is emerging quickly. In our organization, one must never lose sight of the reason why change may be appropriate, or not. Recently, I asked several of my long time colleagues to collaborate and develop a book. The theme of the book, sage advice from the oracles, would have each retired expert offer their views on a topic of their choice. Only one person in fifteen was interested in participating. At first I thought it was because they had retired but as I soon learned it was because of their disappointment in the state of software engineering today. A lot has to do with change being based on popularity and so little to do with an appropriate rationale. We have choices and those that rise above will lead, and the rest will enjoy the company of misdirection.