



People Are The Most Critical Part of Technology

The simple fact is that people are the most important part of technology. It seems obvious, doesn't it? Yet, many professionals, including myself, have built entire careers out of reminding business people of this fact and offering tools to uphold its significance. I believe this is so important that I have chosen to make teaching it my life's calling.

CHANGE AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT

I have participated in technology management since 1965. Since that time, technology has changed in dramatic ways, and at a speed that none of us could ever have imagined. Business approaches have shifted intensely and nearly as quickly as technology itself. Add to that new methods of communication connecting our civilization like never before. All of this equals change, change, and more change.

Amidst all of this change we find one constant: the people. People are creating,

managing, and using technology. Not only computer technology, but technology of all kinds. Technology refers to any non-human tool: the wheel, automobiles, airplanes, the space station, the concept of money, and most aspects of modern medicine, to name a few.

It is my mission to promote the creation of balance between these tools (technologies) and the people creating, using, and managing them. Without this essential balance, there is a disconnect which is the source of all kinds of problems; the most important is that our expectations are rarely met.

MS WORD IS A GREAT EXAMPLE

Microsoft Word is a great example of a tool designed with a balance between the user and the tool itself. As I finish writing this article, I close my Word

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document and the program reminds me to save. As you most likely know, this is just one of the many people-friendly elements in Word. The program is designed to interact with real people, recognizing foibles such as forgetting to save, or mis-spelling a word. (Now did you know that "mis-spelling" is not correct? According to Word, it should be "misspelling!" I learned something new from my technology in the middle of writing about it.) Promoting balance, Word incorporates the people factor to such a degree that it increases our effectiveness.

BALANCE IS KEY

More often than not, balance isn't present or consistent. Have you ever:

- played voice menu roulette with your favorite corporation?
- found the wrong prescription waiting for you at the drug store?
- tried to predict when your mission-critical new computer system will come online?
- experienced a power outage just before you hit Save?
- attempted to explain to the IRS that you just received two conflicting notices from them?
- discovered that a new software version lacks usability for a broad audience?

CHALLENGE THE POWERS THAT BE

These are a few examples where people are not the most important part of technology. Since humans

are not perfect, it makes sense that our technology isn't going to be perfect. But why should we allow the problem to increase exponentially? All it takes is consciousness and a small amount of effort in our own spheres to put the people factor back into the picture.

If a computer system needs to accommodate a particular human challenge, we should strongly support it. If a software development project cannot meet schedule because of scarce resources, we should buy more or accept that it can't be done within the present budget. When planning a particular technology, we should spend more time exploring and understanding the people factor before designing. When a business can't provide service because their system is down, we should ask for the manager and object to their failure to have a backup plan in place for emergencies.

WE ARE PART OF THE GROWING TECHNOLOGY

Rather than becoming a victim of technology, we need to decide that our actions will not perpetuate the paradox. We need to communicate our observations and proposed solutions to the right people. We are part of the growing technology; we cannot pretend that modern technology is being controlled by others. It is essential that we step in as co-creators and contribute to that formation. Insisting on people as the most important part of technology today ensures a higher level of balance for the future. ▲

Client Comments:

"Diane has written the clearest case for executive involvement in IT that I have ever seen."

- a state agency head

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