

## **Unmasking the Hidden Virtusa**

### **The contribution of Peer Reviews in Eliminating the 'Hidden Factory' Effect**

*The Hidden Company: A Love Story*

John is a smart QA Engineer; Mary is a pretty blonde Software Engineer. John was having a crush on Mary for a long time. When asked to join the Ramada project, little did he expect that it would fulfill his life long dreams. One cool summer evening, John is asked by the Project Manager to test Mary's code. John puts his best foot forward and manages to find some serious bugs. He personally meets Mary and tells her the issues, and He leaves her cube saying 'Mary, by the way, I haven't logged these anywhere'. Mary smiles the smile of her lifetime. And John makes sure that the bug is not logged anywhere. Mary then makes sure that the time she spends on fixing the bug – rework – is not logged anywhere either. In return for that favor John asks Mary out - and she accepts, not only the dinner but the person who provides it also. Finally they get married and 'worked happily ever after' in the most dangerous company – the hidden company.

The hidden company – is a set of ad hoc activities created to correct errors made during the system life cycle; They take up unnecessary time, space and resources. This company spends all its time in unaccounted rework. Consequently, processes are never fixed, while hidden activities become more efficient and less visible.<sup>1</sup>

Like defending against stealth fighter planes, companies cannot fight what they cannot see or trace. Even with a lot of input (resources, technology etc.), the productivity remains the same – or worse still – it becomes low. So somewhere down the line there must be a leak. The whole issue is not traceable because of the hidden company.

#### **Why is the company hidden?**

Mainly I believe is due to the blame culture that is prevalent amongst us. Unfortunately the Project managers can find it easy to blame their engineers and off-load their own problems on others. Someone suggested that instead of punishing the engineers for the mistakes they make, lets reward them for each mistake found and recorded. Not that we are encouraging errors, but this is the way towards deliverance i.e. in order to eliminate 'rework' we must identify, isolate and measure rework.

People feel threatened to publish their defects and the time taken to fix the defects. But unless its recorded it cannot be raised as an issue nor can it be addressed.

If there is unaccounted rework, one more question we have to ask is was the project planned properly?

#### ***Peer Code Reviews to the Rescue***

Peer Code Reviews, where one engineer reviews his peer's code, is one of the first steps that you can take to eliminate the hidden company. When your peer reviews your code and logs the issues, you are motivated to log the rework effort. Therefore, there is nothing hidden.

1. Firstly, we must understand the value of peer reviews. The fact that someone goes through someone else's code produces better quality, productivity, better management visibility – along with QA testing. One well-written article about peer reviews by Sue Peterson can be found at <http://www.cowgirlcoder.com/>. Peer reviews also help build team spirit. It is the first step towards accepting that your peer also knows equally well or better. It breaks the arrogance with which each of us is born. We do reviews to find the errors but eventually the process will help us to stop injecting errors into the code in the first place!
2. The second thing to do about peer reviews is to schedule them. Don't wait for free time to come. Don't listen to the devil when he says 'Look Mr. Project Manager, there is no time to label the code how can you think about peer reviews?' You will never get 'free' time. You have to make it free. Don't try to put more time into your life, put life into your time! (Mark Sinborn).
3. Make the peer code review religious. Aim at doing peer reviews every day, in this way the amount of code an engineer needs to review everyday becomes less. If done on a daily basis it can be finished in 30-45 minutes. If you gather all your code and review all of it as a 'big-bang review' then the amount of rework becomes high, i.e. the amount of work (rework) the engineer needs to put in to correct the flaws will be greater. If done on a daily basis the rework effort is minimal.

4. Most importantly, log the defects and the efforts. If not you will end up contributing to the hidden company. One good measure will be to see how much of raw code has been scrapped off each day.

Remember peer reviews are part of development. If a Project Manager instructs his engineers, 'develop and get the product out as quickly as possible, I will take care of the Process Reviews', they are not working for their company they are working for the hidden company.

### ***Better (Product) is Cheaper***

An old Chinese proverb states, 'good things no cheap, cheap things no good'. That is not true. Better is cheaper. Better products are the culmination of a good process and are actually cheaper as they eliminate the 'cost of poor quality' (COPQ). The cost of poor quality is the amount of rework that is done by the software engineer to correct the defects. Add to it, the amount of work done by the Quality Assurance Engineer to find those defects. When you convert the effort and time into money, what you will get is a shocking figure of the price we pay for poor quality.

"Costs do not increase in order for quality to improve, given a "Prevention" approach versus a "Defect and Fix" mentality"<sup>ii</sup>.

Do you know how much 'poor quality' in your project, costs the company? What is the average time Quality Assurance and Software Engineer spend on rework on a project? How many defects and how much time? If a Project Manager does not know the answers to these questions, you could well be contributing to the hidden company.

According to Capers Jones, only 37% of the US software workforce is doing new work, the others spend their time on repairs. What other industry would get away with treating quality in this way?

Which company are you working for? The true company or the hidden company? Lets make Virtusa invincible not invisible.

Lets not side with the managers who take refuge in one of more of the following beliefs:

"To err is human.

Excessive quality costs too much, takes too long.

Just beating last year's numbers is good enough.

Soft errors (like paperwork) are more excusable.

We are still better than our competitors

Firefighting our way out of a quality emergency in the nick of time is a badge of honor, it is even fun"

Robert Calvin

*Note: The characters mentioned in the above article are all fictional.*

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<sup>i</sup> Mikel Harry& Richard Schroeder, Six Sigma. This phrase is modified slightly by the author.

<sup>ii</sup> ibid