

Clarifying the Role of the SEI: They Do Not Certify Assessors or Assessments

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Since the Software Engineering Institute (SEI) put up its web site, there has been significant confusion in interpreting the information posted there. This has led to the following two questions that I have been asked lately:

1. If you are not on SEI's official list of authorized Lead Assessors, does that mean that you are not qualified (sometimes they say "certified" by the SEI) to lead a CMM-based (Capability Maturity Model for Software) assessment?
2. Do I have to have the results of my assessment logged in the SEI's database in order for it to be recognized as a legitimate (sometimes they say "certified") assessment?

Both of these questions stem from a set of false assumptions about the role of the SEI in the software assessment community. The SEI is a Federally Funded Research and Development Center (FFRDC) existing under a University Institute umbrella (at Carnegie Mellon University). It is not chartered nor set up to function as a certification body, as TickIt is in the United Kingdom's ISO 9000-3 program. In other words, the SEI does not certify assessors or assessments. People who are looking for a stamp of approval from the SEI for their software capabilities will not find it there. They do not understand the SEI-led software process improvement (SPI) movement motivation, history, and objectives.

The SEI will not answer such questions as:

- is Company X a Level Z in the SEI database?
- is Person Q a qualified Lead Assessor?
- is CBA-IPI the correct assessment method for my situation?

The online list (on SEI's web site) of currently authorized Lead Assessors is misleading to the public because it only contains the most recently trained set of assessors, who wanted to become knowledgeable about the most recent version of the assessment method for internal improvement purposes. The list does not include many (or even most) of the most experienced assessors, who were trained by the SEI over the last 10 years, and who have been busy performing effective assessments since then. The on-line list contains those persons who have been trained within the last 2 years, and are now deemed as authorized to conduct software process appraisals using the CBA IPI Method (CMM-Based Appraisal for Internal Process Improvement - Version 1.1). The SEI's list unfortunately does not contain those lead assessors who have

been trained, and are qualified to conduct software process appraisals using other appropriate methods such as: Software Capability Evaluation, Software Process Assessment, Interim Profile, or other legitimate adaptations of CMM-based appraisal methods.

It is also the case that when a low maturity organization contracts with a CBA-IPI lead assessor they may be forced into an assessment that involves more formality than needed or advisable for their current state. This is because the CBA-IPI method was primarily designed for more rigorous use in higher maturity organizations.

The general public, specifically SEI novices, are being misled by the implication that those on the current Lead Assessor list are the most qualified to perform an assessment. In theory, you could hire someone from their list as a Lead Assessor who has led only a single assessment, and has very little overall experience is appraising or improving organizations.

In summary, buyer beware! SEI Authorized Lead Assessors are only authorized to use a specific appraisal method (CBA IPI), which could be inappropriate for your situation (especially if you are just getting started with SPI). If you are absolutely sure that you want a CBA- IPI appraisal, then it is strongly suggested that you do not accept the Lead Assessor's qualifications at face value. It is recommended that you perform your own screening by asking how many assessments have they led, by checking with their previous clients to see if they performed effective assessments in the past, and by finding out about their experiences in actual CMM-based SPI programs.

Errata: Issues in Designing an Information Model ...

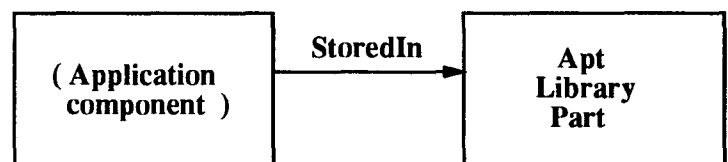
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(This paper appeared in SEN Vol. 22, No. 2, March 1997.)

Page 28, section 2.3: "are" should be "is."

Page 28, section 2.3.1: The sentence should say "... preferred Figure 2, the vertical diagram, over Figure 1, the horizontal one."

Page 29, Figure 4 was the incorrect version. The correct version is listed below.



COCOMO II Goes Public; Forum Scheduled for October

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A public version of the COCOMO II (COConstructive COSt MOdel) is now available at the USC Center for Software Engineering's web site:

<http://sunset.usc.edu/COCOMOII/Cocomo.html>

It includes a Java program and associated manuals.

The 1997 version of COCOMO II has been calibrated to 83 project data points contributed by the COCOMO II Affiliates, primarily large commercial and aerospace firms. Additional data points continue to be contributed; the COCOMO II project plans to issue annual upgrades as the model is calibrated to larger samples. COSTAR, a commercial version of COCOMO II, is also available from Dan Ligett (ligett@SoftstarSystems.com).

Experiences with usage, calibration, and extensions of COCOMO II and other software cost models will be presented at the 12th International Forum on COCOMO and Software Cost Estimation. It will be held October 9-10, 1997 on the USC campus in Los Angeles, CA. It will be preceded by a three-day, hands-on COCOMO II tutorial by Don Reifer, October 6-8, 1997.

Theme: Cost Modeling and Calibration Experience

Last year's Forum identified model calibration to an organization's particular environment as the most important property of a software cost estimation model. The recent COCOMO II calibration found that the model's accuracy increased significantly when each organization contributing data was calibrated to its own best-fit model coefficient.

This year's Forum particularly solicits presentations on experience in calibrating COCOMO II or other software cost models, on comparative evaluation or calibration of alternative software cost models, or on associated issues in software data collection and analysis. The presentations will include a summary of the calibration of the COCOMO II.1997 public-release model parameters, and experience to date in calibration the parameter for the COCOMO II.1998 annual release.

Persons interested in general participation should contact Jennifer Browning at USC (213/740-5703; browning@sunset.usc.edu) in order to receive a copy of the program and registration form.

New SW Engineering Opportunities

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Dear Colleagues,

I have started a new company, Software Methods and Tools, whose goal is to be a comprehensive WWW-based source of information and products related to software engineering and application development. I started this site because I couldn't find a web site that gave broad coverage to software engineering topics, and included information about both commercial products and research activities. The proliferation of new companies and new products has made it even harder for people to learn about new technologies, and for companies to get out their message about new products.

You are invited to visit this site at <http://www.methods-tools.com>. If you register, we'll add you to our mailing list and occasionally send out a newsletter.

We've just started, so there is a lot more to be done, and I hope that you will be able to provide some assistance in making the site better. I have several specific opportunities for you to add to:

1. There is a set of research links to organizations that are involved with software engineering research.
2. We would like to know about other valuable web-based sites of interest to the software engineering community.
3. We have contacted more than 150 companies and have listings for about 300 products. If you are aware of software engineering products that are missing from our list, please send me information about the product(s) and the company that builds them, and we will try to contact them.
4. We have an event calendar that tries to list both research-oriented and commercial events of interest to the application development and software engineering community.
5. We have a books section. The idea is to include all of the "best" titles on software engineering.
6. We plan to start discussion groups on various software engineering topics.

In summary, we hope to build a site that is useful to everyone in the software engineering community and where many people will contribute to the content. We have a lot of ideas for future activities, so I hope that you will visit the site, then send me your opinions and suggestions.