Quality as a multicultural phenomenon

Risks and opportunities
of multicultural co-operation

Peter Prónay, Bratislava

INFOGEM Conference, Baden

Quality as a multicultural phenomenon

⊛ Various cultures assign quality a different importance
⊛ This ranking is observed in:
  ⊛ Quality of business requirements and concepts
  ⊛ Quality of deliverables and acceptance procedures

⊛ Quality is the Sacred Writ in globalization of software industry.
⊛ Quality is the litmus-paper for different perceptions of business ethics in various cultures

A disclaimer:

* When describing the encounter of software cultures, we use an allegory reminding of cruel colonialism. Bushmen, Sahibs.

* The encounter was rather friendly, although based on commercial motivation.

Two parts of the observations:

- **Cultivating the bush:** How the bushmen perceive the attempts to bring software civilization to the developing world.

- **Cultivating the market in the bush:** How does the market in the new economies perceive quality in IT projects.

Part one:
Importing software culture to the bush

* ### The scene:
  * #### 1991: Siemens PSE Vienna discover the neighbour countries as a source of cheap programmers and decide to civilize them
  * #### 90 % of the involved staff in Austria have never visited these countries before. Hic sunt leones?

  * #### Some companies operate on global scale when globalizing the economy.

60 km
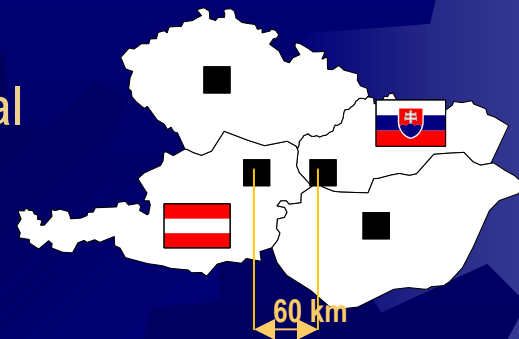
Importing software culture to the bush – who are those who meet at forest edge?

- The "bushmen":
  - University education from good universities
  - General IT education on a sufficient level
  - No deficiency in mastering operating systems, programming languages, DB systems
  - Approaching software development as a matter of creative art

- The "sahibs":
  - Mastered notions: project organization, quality assurance
  - Distinguishing different roles : high/low level design, coding, various levels of testing, configuration management, …
  - Sometimes forgetting about necessity of real talent

The two cultures meet: no major clash – the bushmen get organized

- ☀ (+) Project organization is inevitable
  - ☀ However: the sahibs stayed on the rule, no projects were managed by bushmen for many years

- ☀ (-) Project management is about keeping effort under control
  - ☀ However: meeting deadlines is the top priority of the most successful SW companies
  - ☀ It is necessary to combine it with claim management in order to meet the deadline and budget

The two cultures: the bushmen see that even the sahibs may fail

* (+) Software development tools are great

* (-) Totally OO design / development will save us
    * How pity: it did not work always

* The morale
    * Both sahibs and bushmen got equally charmed and drawn into technological traps
    * Talent and experience may fail to overcome intercultural barriers

What would I do different if I was head of sahibs instead of chieftain of bushmen

* ☀ Limit "sahib rule"
  * ❊ Install bushmen to different roles in software teams including project management and roll-out
  * ❊ Cultivate vertical industry know-how in talented bushmen

* ☀ Insist on implementing lessons learned
  * ❊ Avoid the creation of master-slave parasitic pairs
  * ❊ Very correctly: A local Quality Assurance organization was set up immediately in the bush

Summary of part one

- The business model of the sahibs was based on
  - enabling the bushmen for software engineering
  - keeping them out of the reach of the customer

- In general, the mission succeeded.

Part two:
Dancing around IT-quality in the former bushland

- ✴ The message:
  - ✱ The notion of quality of IT solutions is accepted in major parts of the market
  - ✱ Smart local capitalists did their job in the private industry
  - ✱ There are still several large industrial enterprises privatized on political principles

  - ✱ The customers in some market segments still buy IT-cloud-castles

Quality as a measure of business ethics enters the scene

- Sales departments of many IT solution providers live in clinch with the delivery departments

- Standard mechanism to avoid misunderstandings:
  - Risk assessment and mitigation according to a defined methodology
  - Corporate Risk Review Boards

- These corporate rules are a nightmare for sales folks in charge of the Public Sector in the bush countries

How can a major IT player sell junk solutions and not lose face / reputation / money / ... ?

* The public sector market sometimes requires exactly "junk solution"

* Where is the problem?
  * Usually a local subcontractor is strongly, but not officially recommended
  * The role of the recommended local subcontractor is often not only financial, but also technologically fundamental

What are the options of major IT companies?

* To enter such a tender decorated with top reference projects, having a vision of what are the "best government practices" and architectures.

* If the tender is written clearly to favor a "bad or unclear government practice", a major company is needed "just" to
  * Provide its logo as an alibi for the big spenders
  * Bear the risk

* The major IT company can either join the game or beware its face

Some obvious statements that may fit the issue

* Quality is a tender bloom. It cannot blossom in projects initiated by government officials with personal interests.

* Quality of implementation can only be a farce if there is no quality of concept.

* If a major company is forced to accept a mistaken concept, it can just forget the vital attributes of a sound solution.

Some questions that arise

- Should the EU really fund so many IT projects without being able to supervise them?

- Do the EU and the NATO intend to let the former bushlands learn by trial-an-error method ?
  - Is it worth it? Does it not just mean, that someone is taking it too easy?
  - Why do the international IT companies also play the game and behave like bushmen?

The morale:

* There ought to be a mechanism in allocating public funds that would stop bad concepts on the purchasing side before tenders get started.

* Commercial subjects have an intuitive notion of quality combined with a sense for recognizing "best business practice".
Public subjects often miss these notions.

* The only way how to avoid bad concepts is to make the project initiators just as accountable for the results as their counterparts in the commercial world.

Thank you for your attention

INFOGEM Conference, Baden