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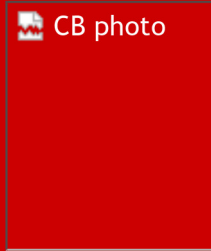
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→ Pragmatism vs. Theory

"I can see that it works in practice, but does it work in theory?" is an old joke at the expense of academics who scorn the practical application of a science. Two recent encounters reminded me of this joke.

The first one was a discussion with my colleague Bob Benson, who was going to apply his "strategic IT planning" approach to a client to whom I had been teaching an enterprise architecture model in order to align their IT projects with their business strategy. Bob started by giving me all the reasons why he thinks EA frameworks are bad, because they "give you a nice conceptual model but don't tell you what to do." By the time we arrived at the client, we had luckily found that we were essentially doing the same thing, presenting it somewhat differently. My purpose in teaching EA was not just to show colorful diagrams, it is also to generate an IT roadmap.

The second encounter took the form of an early June article by Paul Harmon in BPTrends, in which he criticizes the work of the Object Management Group's Business Modeling and Integration Task Force, basically judging most specifications to be obsolete, useless, conflicting, or lacking adoption. Well, creating standards is a contact sport, not something you can judge from afar. And to take the Business Motivation Model (BMM) as a single example of Mr. Harmon's scorn, the model is simple and elegant enough that it can be used in practice without requiring modeling tool support, as we verified recently with a couple of clients. And if it works in practice...

→ Webinar: Simplifying Big Data with Hadoop

The ACM Learning Center presents this webinar on July 23 at 1:00 pm Eastern US time (10:00 am Pacific, 17:00 GMT). The speaker will be Denny Lee from Data Platform. You need to register to attend (or to receive the link to the recording if you cannot attend but are interested).

→ Project 18F: "Delivery is the Strategy"

Project 18F is part of the US General Services Administration, the procurement arm of the federal government, feared by suppliers and not quite famous for its ability to innovate or move fast. But 18F is different. Staffed from the ground up by a lean team of (mostly young) technologists, including the Presidential Innovation Fellows, it "builds effective, user-centric digital services focused on the interaction between government and the people and businesses it serves." Their slogan is "delivery is the strategy." For example, it took them just 17 days (in government terms, that's a nanosecond) to deliver from scratch a Web site, notalone.gov, designed to track reports of sexual assault on campuses.

Another project, myusa.gov, is a sort of "social API" for e-gov applications. The idea is that a citizen will create a profile once, and government applications that use the API will no longer need to ask people to re-enter their data each time they fill a form online; once the user logs in, the required data will be pulled from his or her profile (nowadays, this description inevitably invites the joke, "you don't need to do this -- just ask the NSA").

PIDX Conference on Standards in Oil & Gas

PIDX International (Petroleum Industry Data Exchange) announced its semi-annual conference, to be hosted on Sept. 11 by Baker Hughes next to Houston's Intercontinental Airport. The theme is "How Standards Accelerate the Realization of Value in Oil & Gas" and is therefore broader than the strict scope of PIDX, which is e-business and supply chain integration. It is also indicative of a "better late than never" situation, since O&G companies have been notoriously reluctant to adopt standards (and when they did, they were low-level data formats). There are still a few days (until July 21) to submit a paper... and help push for change.

Seen Recently...

"I know, it's 'only' meta-data. What could anyone possibly do with that? #sarcasm"

-- Tweet from Richard Paige, referring to the attempts by U.S. intelligence agencies to downplay their privacy intrusions

"Hackers only need to get it right once; we need to get it right every time."

-- Chris Triolo, HP, in a VentureBeat guest post