

Too Many Cooks...

An observation by Alan Sadowsky

There was an interesting segment on ABC's "20/20" news program recently. It dealt with the problems of bringing new products and ideas into the marketplace, and how bureaucracy often stands in the way of success. Presenting examples from both sides of the coin, the viewer was introduced to a case study from Hong Kong, and a case study from India.

In the Hong Kong study, there was minimal government involvement, few "rules and regulations" to abide by, and minimal paperwork or start-up expenses necessary to establish an active business presence. With the right mix of product and ambition, it is the norm (rather than the exception) for a new business to flourish in Hong Kong.

In the study done in India however, just the opposite was true. There is overwhelming government involvement coupled with never-ending paperwork to be completed. Approvals must be granted, licenses must be acquired, registrations must be paid, and the months and months of time it takes to accomplish all of these things usually puts the nail in the coffin for anyone trying to start a business. In fact in many cases, existing businesses are forced to close their doors due to the financial drain they face when just trying to diversify or expand.

The consequences of both scenarios are there for all to see. While Hong Kong thrives economically, and stands as a major player in the financial world, India continues to struggle with its many social and economic problems due to overwhelming bureaucratic involvement. Certainly there's something to be said for regulation and policy, but when the cure for the illness kills the patient, it's time for a new cure.

The TPF User Group is meeting for its Fall Conference October 16-18, in Tucson Arizona. One of the many positive things that come out of these user group meetings is the list of "requirements" presented to IBM by the customer community. These requirements are for the most part, requests for new features and/or enhancements to TPF. IBM reviews these requirements, determines whether or not the request warrants development, and either adds the item to its "To Do" list, or rejects the item completely. Most items that make the cut result in at least some small degree of customer

involvement. Others however, result in a task force being formed, cooperative design sessions between customers and IBM, and ultimately joint development, testing, and rollout. The RECOUP rewrite was such a project, and the results of that effort were outstanding. I would like to see the TPF User Group and IBM now take a bold step, and further expand on this process to encompass product marketing.

The thought occurred to me, that while IBM may have the best "cooks" in town, and the finest "kitchen" at their disposal, maybe they're just working from the wrong recipe. I don't mean they're using the wrong ingredients, just that the steps they're following are wrong. It's also quite likely, that the bureaucracy inherent within IBM is the one dictating those steps. So how do we fix this? How do we move away from a self-defeating tightly controlled framework, to one that's self-sustaining and entrepreneurial? How do we get from India to Hong Kong?

I believe that a joint IBM-Customer task force should be formed to develop a better recipe for creating new TPF customers. I believe that the combined talents and diversity of interests that would very quickly rise to the surface within such a group could very well result in a new recipe for success. It's the objective scrutiny of the existing process, coupled with the willingness to entertain new ideas that could very well solve our problem with growing TPF. And yes, it is our problem.

With the TPF User Group we have a strong organization in place whose only real purpose in life is to represent the TPF user community as a united and well-organized front to IBM. It's time to exercise some of this strength - not in an adversarial way, but rather in a gesture of "forced cooperation". There are more than just technical pieces to the TPF pie, and those other pieces should command equal attention on the part of the TPFUG. IBM hasn't been terribly successful developing new TPF customers over the years. It's time for the user community to stop lamenting about it, and put some skin in the game. It's time for the TPFUG to get involved with marketing TPF. It's the right move for the User Group, it's the right move for IBM, and it's the right thing for the business.