Industry and Academia: Can they agree on Best Practice within Software Engineering?

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In 1999 the International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) released a document entitled “Harmonization of Professional Standards” [1] which had been developed by a small working group within the Technical Committee for Education (IFIP TC3). The purpose of the document was to set out what could become an international standard for professional practice in Information Technology. The IFIP Harmonization document highlights six areas for consideration with regard to professional standards. These are:

- Ethics of professional practice,
- Established body of knowledge,
- Education and training,
- Professional experience,
- Best practice and proven methodologies, and
- Maintenance of competence.

Since 2000 a wide range of activities have been undertaken to publicise and appraise the proposals within the IFIP document and in particular consider their applicability to the field of Software Engineering [2]. The activities have ranged from formal conference presentations, followed by question and answer sessions, through panel sessions addressing particular aspects, to highly participative workshop events that allowed in-depth analysis of the document. Many results of these activities were reported in a paper presented at Compsac 2002 in Oxford entitled “Closing the Circle on Software Engineering Professionalism and Free Movement of Labour” which highlighted that addressing the area of Best Practice and Proven Methodologies was seen as particularly problematic [3].

Unfortunately it appears that although in Software Engineering reference is often made to “Best Practices”, identifying those of clearly proven worth is far from easy. The failure of many software projects to meet their objectives, or indeed the termination of partially completed projects, is an all too often common occurrence. These are real indications that if best practices do exist they are certainly not as widely used as they should be, nor does it appear that they are being developed in the light of actual practical experiences.

The panel has been requested to consider the area of Best Practice and address the following (in particular with regard to Software Engineering):

- Recognition of existing proven examples of Best Practice within Industry
- Transfer of information on Best Practice between Industry and Academia and vice versa
- The definition of mechanisms for identifying and proving Best Practice
- To identify roles for national and international bodies and the actions they should be undertaking to advance Best Practice in Software Engineering.

References


