

**NAME**

The importance of communications within project teams

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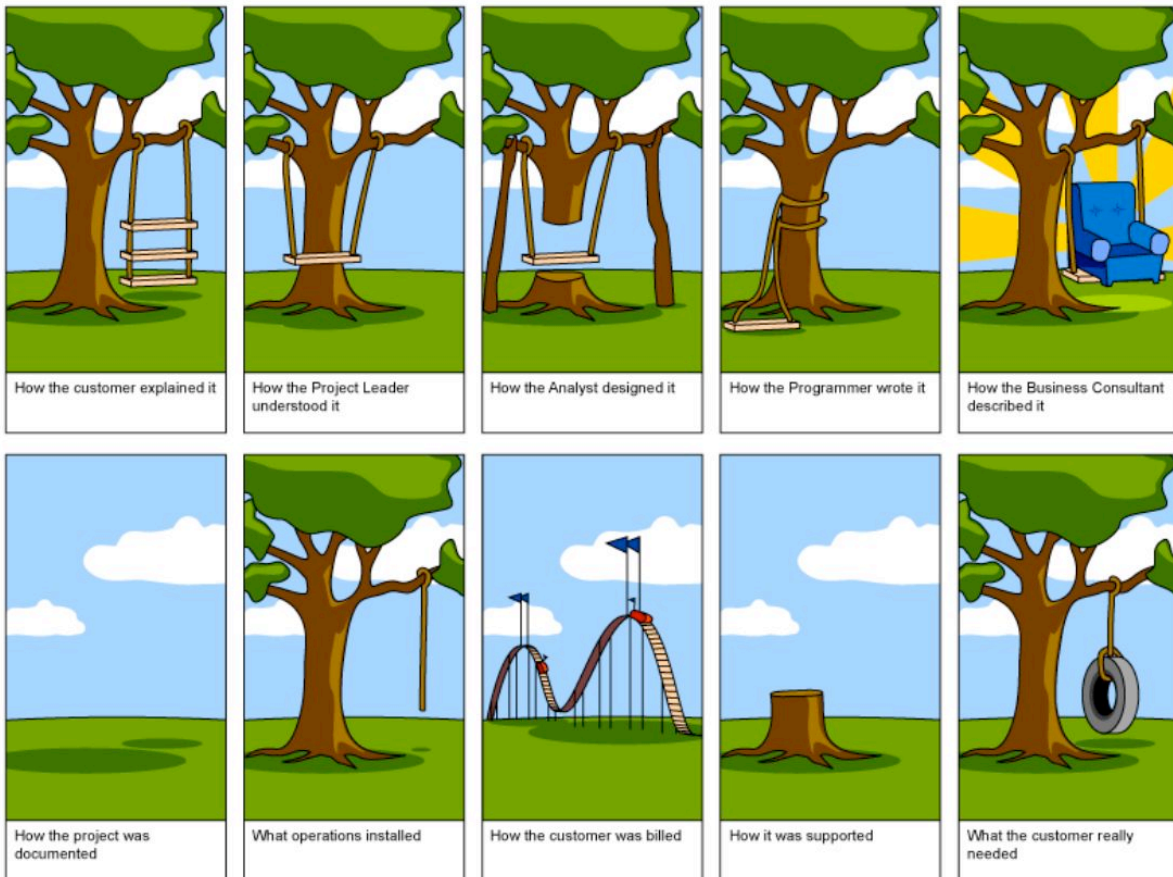
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## INTRODUCTION

Although intended as a humorous cartoon, the famous tree swing example illustrates the pitfalls of poor design, or poor service, and the dangers of not properly listening to users and agreeing their needs. The tree swing also demonstrates the dangers of departmental barriers and assuming rather than guessing!



## NOTES

People normally interpret the visual of the 'Quality of Design' tool in a way that is relevant to their organisation and current situation. However, it has a message that involves all members of your organisation and external people you engage with; communication.

Learning:

- Do not assume someone else knows what you know, even if they work in the same organisation or department
- Communicate with people you are collaborating with, internally and externally
- Research the needs of your users and don't assume you know what they want

For these reasons it is crucial to write a thorough brief for any design project. A guide on how to write a good brief and a template for what to include are available in the [www.shapebetter.eu](http://www.shapebetter.eu) resource.

Here are a few typical 'them and us' reactions just in case:

**Of marketing** - add unnecessary value, add complexity, bells and whistles, embellish, put their own mark onto things, fanciful, impractical, untested, untried, creativity for creativity's sake, subjective not objective, theoretical not practical, clever ideas, think they know what's best for the customers even if the survey feedback is utterly clear, fail to consult with engineering, production and anyone else in the organisation.

**Of management** - cost-conscious, process-led rather than output-aware, failure to understand and interpret real issues and implications, failure to ask questions, committee decisions produce impractical solutions, removed from reality, detached from customers and front-line staff, failure to consult with users and functional departments.

**Of engineering** - technical interpretation rather than practical, unconcerned with aesthetics and ergonomics, consideration stops after the 'can we build it?' stage, lack of consultation with specifiers and user representatives, meets specification but doesn't work properly, inappropriate materials and absence of styling.

**Of manufacturing** - production specification over-rides design considerations, a law unto themselves, you get what you're given, any colour you like as long as it's black, detached from users, specifiers, designers, and everyone else except other manufacturing staff, unconcerned with usability or functionality, certainly unconcerned with bells and whistles and added value, totally focused on production efficiency, cost and time, lack of liaison with all other departments.

**Of maintenance** - necessity is the mother of invention, very big tool-boxes, huge stocks of parts and ancillaries, materials, nuts, bolts and all other fixings known to man, happy to work all hours, especially evenings, weekends and public holidays at treble-time-and-a-half with days off in lieu, never consult with specifiers or customer specifications, enjoy quick-fixes, sticky-tape, mastic, bending bracketry, planks of wood and extended tea-breaks, never liaise with any other departments and think management are all useless idiots who can't even change a plug.

**Of customers** - if only we'd listened, understood, and checked with them once in a while.....

Uncertainty surrounds the origins of the tree swing cartoons. However, it is known that the history of the project management tire swing analogy goes back to the 1960s in the UK.

## USEFUL LINKS

- <http://www.businessballs.com/treeswing.htm>