

SEIR Reaches 10,000 Users

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As a systems manager for a major telecommunications company in Mexico, Teodoro Cortés is searching for ways to improve the quality and maturity of his organization's software practices. Quite often, he finds the solutions in the SEI's Software Engineering Information Repository (SEIR).

The SEI developed the SEIR as a forum for software engineers in the field—from government, industry, and academia—to exchange lessons learned, pose questions, and submit materials that might help others to adopt improvement approaches. The SEIR provides a repository of information showing the impact of demonstrated software engineering improvement methods on organizational performance.

For managers such as Cortés, the Web-based SEIR provides the practical information necessary to successfully transition new software processes, and provides it in a global software environment where other engineers with similar interests can be tapped for their expertise. Since its launch in 1998 with a mere 104 users and minimal site content, the SEIR has grown to become one of the most highly visited areas of SEI-operated Web sites. Its members represent nearly 5,000 organizations in 80 countries, and it includes more than 10,300 Web pages and 300 documents. Recently, Cortés confirmed the SEIR's success by putting the site over the 10,000-members mark.

SEIR Contents

The SEIR is organized into six information domains: Capability Maturity Model® (CMM®) for Software (SW-CMM), CMM IntegrationSM, Measurement and Metrics, People CMM, Personal Software ProcessSM and Team Software ProcessSM, and Software Risk Management. Each domain features a general introduction to the topic, a list of frequently asked questions (FAQ), and information on impact implementation and results. The SEIR is of use to software practitioners and managers, Software Engineering Process Groups (SEPGs), Software Process Improvement Network (SPIN) groups, lead appraisers, and other sponsors of improvement efforts.

In addition to CMM-based software improvement information, the SEIR also features an interactive maturity profile. The maturity profile summarizes the aggregate appraisal results submitted to the SEI and shows the status and trends of process maturity for the software community. More than 20,000 copies of the current profile have been downloaded since its release in March 2001. Other active areas of the site include common organizational issues preventing SW-CMM key process area (KPA) satisfaction, information on cultural change in the workplace, and tips for defining and documenting software processes for the SW-CMM.

Involvement is Key

The growth and longevity of the SEIR depends upon the exchange and contribution of information from the software engineering community. “Most people go to a Web site, use the site’s search engine to hastily grab information that might not be right for them, and leave,” says Mike Zuccher, the SEIR’s Webmaster and project manager. “We are a little different in that we ask members to browse and examine the information to find what best suits their needs. The second difference is that we encourage members to share their experiences by contributing information to the site so that they can build a global knowledge base for improved implementation efforts for now and for the future.” Users must register to become members of the SEIR, and membership permissions are granted based on the contribution and exchange of information. Membership is free and open to the public, but a registration process ensures a level of information integrity. Members are rewarded for frequent contributions to the site by receiving special access privileges to additional information and permanent account activation.

From the beginning, Zuccher has paid close attention to the responses he receives from registration forms and feedback. As more and more members started asking for “real world” examples of software improvement, Zuccher realized that if the site could be developed around the exchange of best practices, members of the software community could help themselves. “It was the SEIR members who pointed the site in this direction,” he says. Now the site is populated with implementation data including lessons learned, case studies, return-on-investment information, and tips for encouraging upper management to adopt improvement efforts.

Registered members are asked to submit white papers, presentations, technical reports, executive summaries, or tutorials that demonstrate successful implementations. This information can help others in the software community make informed decisions when considering adopting an improvement approach. Users can also participate by answering other members’ queries in the “Ask the Group” section, a facility where SEIR members can post questions, view responses to questions made by other members, and exchange information.

New Directions

User feedback and submissions will continue to guide the development of the SEIR. Zuccher is currently investigating several interesting Web-based technologies to allow for easier collaboration among members for document exchange and “Ask the Group” communications.

The SEIR is also exploring ways to customize the site for its members. One project the group has discussed is the ability for each SEIR member to create a personal profile that lists their content and technology preferences for the site. Based on their preferences, they could be sent an automated list of documents that would best serve their needs.

Accessing the SEIR

The SEIR is currently free to the public, but you must register to become a member. To register, please visit the SEIR Web site at <http://seir.sei.cmu.edu?ns>.

For more information, contact—

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