Facts and Fallacies of Software Engineering

By Robert L. Glass

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The practice of building software is a "new kid on the block" technology. Though it may not seem this way for those who have been in the field for most of their careers, in the overall scheme of professions, software builders are relative "newbies."

In the short history of the software field, a lot of facts have been identified, and a lot of fallacies promulgated. Those facts and fallacies are what this book is about. There's a problem with those facts–and, as you might imagine, those fallacies. Many of these fundamentally important facts are learned by a software engineer, but over the short lifespan of the software field, all too many of them have been forgotten. While reading *Facts and Fallacies of Software Engineering* , you may experience moments of "Oh, yes, I had forgotten that," alongside some "Is that really true?" thoughts.

The author of this book doesn't shy away from controversy. In fact, each of the facts and fallacies is accompanied by a discussion of whatever controversy envelops it. You may find yourself agreeing with a lot of the facts and fallacies, yet emotionally disturbed by a few of them! Whether you agree or disagree, you will learn why the author has been called "the premier curmudgeon of software practice."

These facts and fallacies are fundamental to the software building field–forget or neglect them at your peril!

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Editorial Review

From the Back Cover
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About the Author

Robert Glass is the founder of Computing Trends. He has written more than a dozen books on software engineering and on the lessons of computing failures. Robert is trusted by many as a leading authority on software engineering, especially by those who read his columns in *Communications of the ACM* and *IEEE Software.* Robert also publishes a newsletter, *The Software Practitioner,* and speaks frequently at software engineering events.

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When I first heard that Bob Glass was going to write this book and model it after my 201 Principles of Software Development, I was a bit worried. After all, Bob is one of the best writers in the industry, and he would provide tough competition for my book. And then, when Bob asked me to write his foreword, I became even more worried; after all, how can I endorse a book that seems to compete directly with one of mine? Now that I have read Fifty-Five Facts, I am pleased and honored (and no longer worried!) to have the opportunity to write this foreword.

The software industry is in the same state of affairs that the pharmaceutical industry was in during the late nineteenth century. Sometimes it seems that we have more snake-oil salespeople and doomsayers than sensible folks practicing and preaching in our midst. Every day, we hear from somebody that they have discovered this great new cure for some insurmountable problem. Thus we have oft heard of quick cures for low efficiency, low quality, unhappy customers, poor communication, changing requirements, ineffective testing, poor management, and on and on. There are so many such pundits of the perfunctory that we sometimes wonder if perhaps some portion of the proclaimed panaceas are possibly practical. Who do we ask? Who in this industry can we trust? Where can we get the truth? The answer is Bob Glass.

Bob has had a history of providing us with short treatises on the many software disasters that have occurred

over the years. I have been waiting for him to distill the common elements from these disasters so that we can benefit more easily from his many experiences. The 55 facts that Bob Glass discusses in this wonderful book are not just conjectures on his part. They are exactly what I have been waiting for: i.e., the wisdom gained by the author by examining in detail the hundreds of cases he has written about in the past.

The 55 facts that follow are likely to not be popular with all readers. Some are in direct opposition to the so-called "modern" ways of doing things. For those of you who wish to ignore the advice contained within these covers, I can only wish you the safest of journeys, but I fear for your safety. You are treading on well-trod territory, known to be full of mines, and many have destroyed their careers trying to pass. The best advice I can give you is to read any of Bob Glass' earlier books concerning software disasters. For those of you who wish to follow the advice contained herein, you too are following a well-trod path. However this path is full of successful testimonies. It is a path of awareness and knowledge. Trust Bob Glass because he has been there before. He has had the privilege of analyzing his own successes and failures along with hundreds of others' successes and failures. Stand on his shoulders, and you will more likely succeed in this industry. Ignore his advice and be prepared for Bob to call you in a few years to ask you about your project—to add it to his next compilation of software disaster stories.

Alan M. Davis, Spring, 2002

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