

***INFOGEM* at the age of ten  
– a personal introduction**

Jochen Ludewig, University of Stuttgart

*Jochen Ludewig is professor of Software Engineering at the University of Stuttgart. Before he was assistant professor at ETH in Zürich and worked at the research laboratory of BBC Brown Boveri & Cie. in Baden.*

## Disclaimers

A good chairman is

- almost invisible,
- rarely heard,
- and only present as a kind of pleasant background.

I am definitely *not* a good chairman! Nevertheless, our hosts asked me to do this job. Why?

Three hypotheses:

1. Our hosts decided to hire me as the chairman rather than any of the thousands of friendly, polite people who make the Swiss such a unique nation.

That means: Controversy beats harmony. OK, *let's argue!*

And they wish to run the conference according to schedule.

2. Our hosts decided to hire me as the chairman rather than somebody whose English is close to what people in the US and some other parts of the world use for communicating.

That means: They want to demonstrate that *nobody has an excuse for not contributing to the discussions.*

3. Our hosts decided to hire me as the chairman because they tried to avoid me as a speaker.

That means: They want to *protect the audience.*

I have to accept that. I will accept that. More or less.

*But* before I open the first session, I would like to tell the audience a little bit about the history of *INFOGEM*, a beautiful small enterprise in a beautiful small town in a beautiful small country in the heart of a beautiful small continent in the northern hemisphere of a beautiful small world.

## Once upon a time,

*Dieter Brösamle, Karol Frühauf, and Helmut Sandmayr*, three employees of a **Baden Based Company**, were sitting happily together in their office in the Limmat valley, a few miles downstream from Baden. Their branch was called **NLS**, which was usually translated into **Non deLiverable Software**.

In fact, NLS produced not only well engineered systems, but also a number of other important results, e.g. the explanation: "*We don't have the time to be efficient.*", which now has a permanent position in my lectures about software engineering.

Actually, they were not that happy, but considered doing all the things they dreamed of in their own little company. And a few months later, they had left their offices, and started their own business, a stock company named Institute for gentle masters (*INFOGEM*). That happened on January 27, 1987, precisely 10 years ago. And they were highly successful from the beginning.

While many a software business would die after a couple of years, *INFOGEM* is still in the market, and better off than ever. Their list of customers is a nice summary of the industry and administration in Switzerland and surroundings. How is that possible?

Most companies demonstrate Peter's principle at the organisational level: A company will grow until the average competence of its employees is insufficient in the market. *INFOGEM* is an exception because they do not grow though they easily could. *INFOGEM* is what the astronomers call a "white dwarf": *Big masses of substance squeezed into the brains of a few people.*

What is wrong with these guys? Why do they refuse to command large herds of coding slaves? Why do they insist on enjoying their life at work and at home instead of preparing for a heart attack? Why do they like to have dinner with satisfied customers rather than planning for a larger building? How could their socialisation fail so badly?

*INFOGEM* has given itself a "Codex", which is *not* a *hand-written book of ancient texts*, as the Oxford Dictionary pretends, but a list of twelve statements about "us", from

- we contribute to other's success.
- to
- we have fun being a sound firm.

Still, I have seen many companies with principles like these, and I have met many people who talk about quality in general, or software quality in particular. So, what is so special about *INFOGEM*?

It is so surprising, you will not believe it. When *they* talk about quality, or write down principles,

*they are not kidding, they are serious!*

I am very optimistic that we are attending a very good conference today (despite its chairman). Those who organised it, who made it happen, behave precisely according to their rule no. 8:

- we are present, staying in the background.

The world of Software Engineering is full of catastrophes, disasters, and bad examples. The bad guys do not always win (because there are too many of them), but the good ones most probably loose. I am happy to know that there are exceptions. There is at least one.