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tree swing pictures

the tree swing or tire swing funny diagrams - for training, presentations, etc

The famous tree swing picture (also known as tyre swing, tire swing, rope swing) depicting tyre (or tire) and rope swing in various states of dysfunctionality, illustrates the pitfalls of poor product design, or poor customer service, and the dangers of failing to properly listen to customers and interpret their needs. The tree swing also demonstrates the dangers of departmental barriers, and failures of departments to talk to each other, and to talk to customers. As such, the tree swing is perfect for training these areas of quality, communications, customer care and inter-departmental relations. If you are using the tree swing to highlight a training subject most people very readily interpret the pictures into their own organisational situations. Some tree swing discussion points are at the foot of the page.

See the new Businessballs tree swing cartoons - a specially produced collection extending the original tree swing theme to wider aspects of business and organizational daftness.

the tree swing

what marketing suggested

what management approved

as designed by engineering

what was manufactured

as maintenance installed it

what the customer wanted

tree swing (or tyre/tire swing) discussion points

Normally no pointers are needed - people very readily interpret the pictures into their own organisational situation. 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......

origins of the tree swing pictures

Uncertainty surrounds the origins of the tree swing cartoons. Several variations of the cartoons now exist, some extending to more than six pictures, in colour and in more elaborate detail, covering additional departmental perspectives. (See the specially designed series of Businessballs Treeswing Cartoons, for example.)

The simpler cartoons above are re-drawn from the old photocopied versions of the treeswing cartoon which hung on many office walls especially in the 1970s and 1980s.

Those 'original' drawings seem to have provided the basis for the version which appeared in John Oakland's book Total Quality Management, first published in 1989 (see right, added here Aug 2009).

In the first few years of the world-wide web I recall seeing a webpage reference which named a cartoonist who supposedly originated the tree swing cartoons in the first half of the 1900s, but regrettably I never kept and cannot find that reference.

I have seen suggested sources of the tree swing that would place the origin in the last two or three decades, and while most of the suggested sources often carry amusing versions and interpretations of the tree swing, the true origin is earlier.
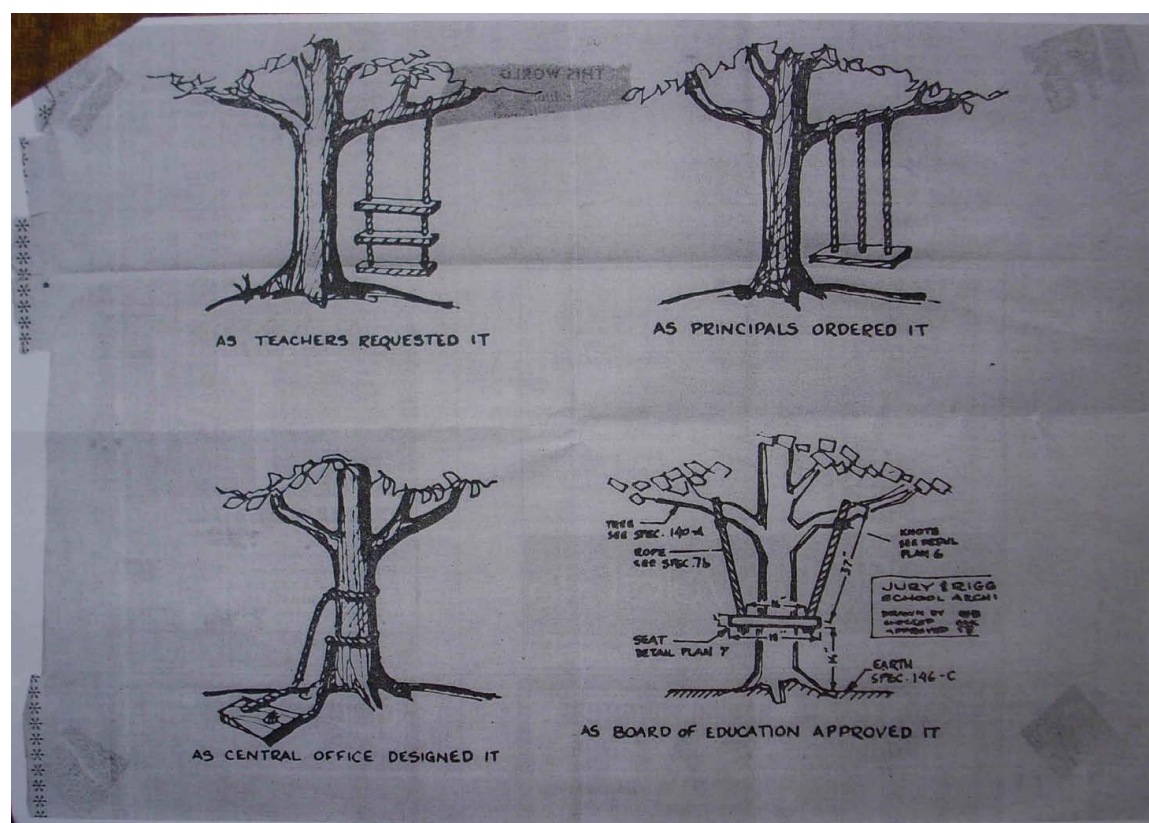
Total Quality Management, J Oakland, 1989.
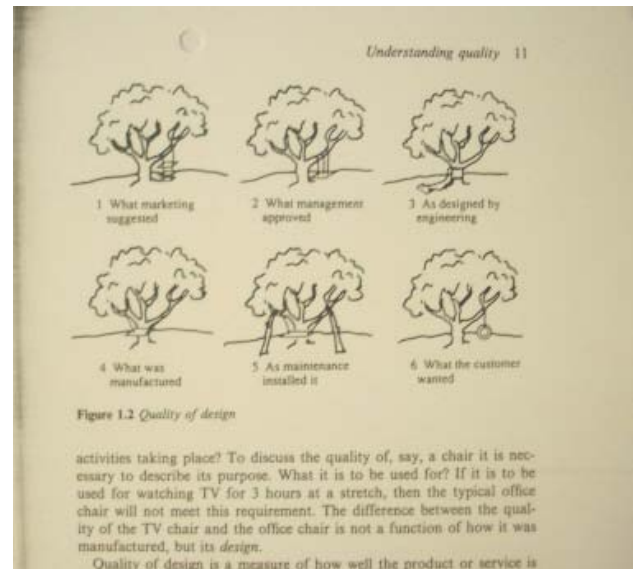
I received this information (April 2007, thanks C Winter) which supports the view that the tree swing cartoon was circulating in UK offices in the 1960s, if not before: "In 1969 I worked for the Customs & Excise in Southend writing the original VAT accounting system. At that time, the Civil Service had a regular internal newsletter called 'Red Tape'. I have a page extracted from a copy of that newsletter that has at least six of those exact tree swing pictures..."

More recently I received this recollection (thanks S Hytche, 29 Oct 2010): "As a college student back in 1968-69, I worked part-time in IT key punch operations. The tree swing was around then to show what end-users got from 'systems people' and to make the point that the users needed to be involved in all phases of the development process..."

And this submission (May 2007, thanks Mark Linton): "...I have a copy of 'variations on a tree swing' that was printed in the San Franscisco Examiner on Sunday, October 12, 1975, with the accompanying text - 'A sometime publication, The Teaching Paper, is produced by Portland teachers who somehow have escaped the smothering coccon of pedagogy. In this excerpt from their admirable sheet, they cast a bemused glance at the befuddlements of a bureaucratic school system and composed a hypothetical example of how various school entities would face a minor construction problem...' "

Mark kindly sent me photocopies of the San Francisco Examiner article which refers to a publication called This World, in which the tree swing model is shown in a different sequence than commonly represented, featuring 'students' in place of 'customers'; 'teachers' in place of 'marketing'; 'principals' in place of 'management'; 'central office' instead of 'engineering'; and a magnificantly detailed diagram 'as board of education approved it' instead of 'what was manufactured'. The photocopied newspaper cartoon includes a (spoof?) reference to 'Jury and Rigg School Archive'.

Unfortunately the San Francisco Examiner article does not give a year for the Teaching Paper/This World publication of the teacher versions of the treeswing cartoons. My feeling was

initially that the teaching version was an adaptation of the original customer/supplier-based cartoon. I am less certain now, but on balance still think that the 'original' was produced before the Teacher Paper version. Here the San Francisco article photocopies sent to me by Mark Linton.

From the San Franscisco Examiner on Sunday, October 12, 1975, with reference to The Teaching Paper, apparently produced by Portland teachers. With acknowldgements to Mark Linton.

If you know any more about The Teacher Paper tree swing, especially who produced/adapted this interpretation of the tree swing cartoons please contact me.

In January 2008 I received from Tom Fleet (on behalf of his father) the following wonderful picture of the tree swing cartoon, apparently from the 1970s. The summary line at the foot of the picture 'Communication means: Saying and hearing have the same message' aptly decribes a crucial aspect of communications which modern trainers strive to convey today. Tom informed me that his father probably acquired the picture during his training as a tire (tyre) store manager with a major chain (USA). The style of the picture suggests that the cartoon was perhaps already firmly in the public domain during the 1970s.

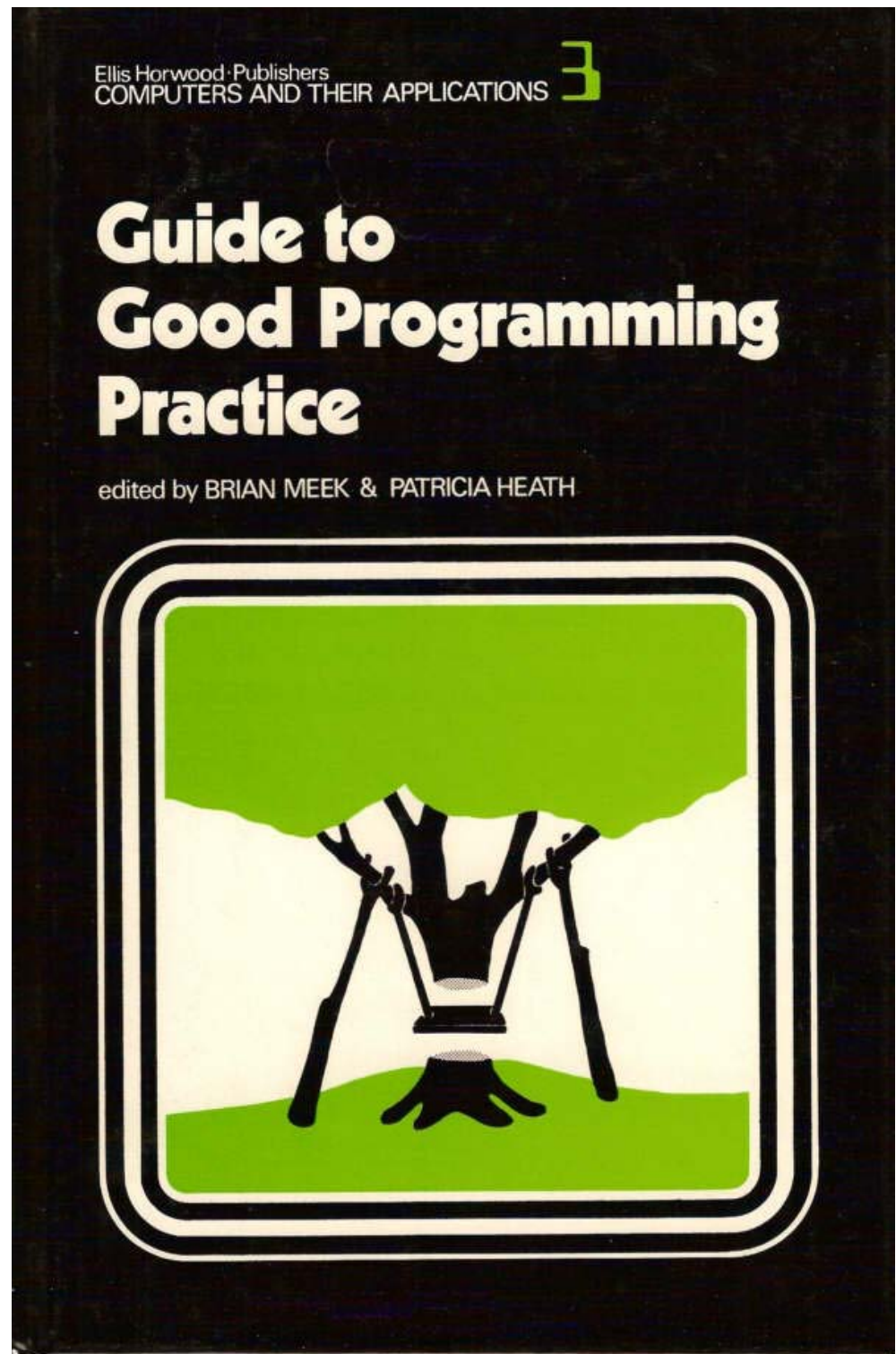Tree Swing picture from 1970s - Businessballs.com (Ack T & W Fleet)
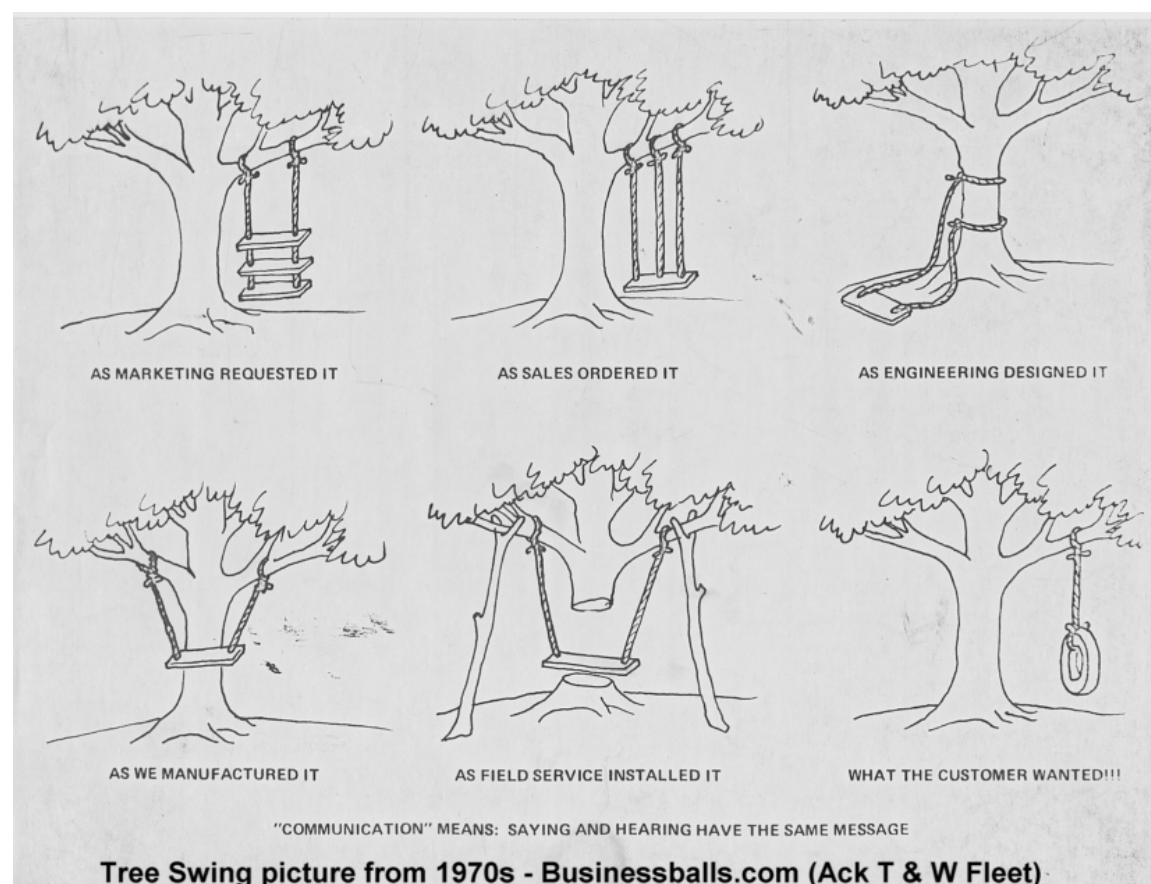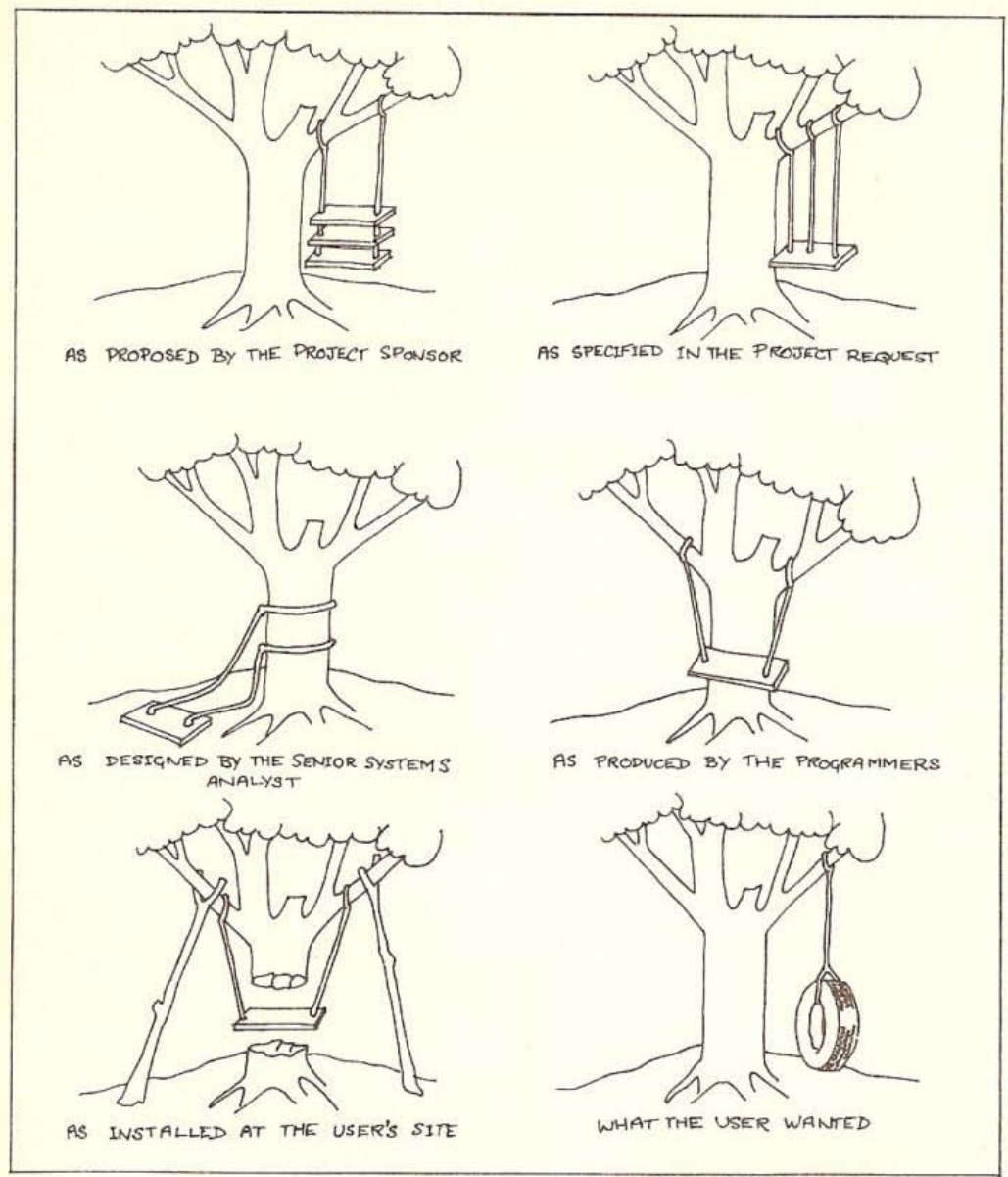
With acknowledgements to T and W Fleet.

Thanks also to N Burgess for the following recollections (April 2008): "...I remember seeing a version of this when I worked for British Steel Corporation. The labels were slightly different – 'What the Plant Manager wanted,' etc., to suit the steel industry but basically it was the same. I cannot remember the exact date but it would be sometime between 1969 and 1975, more likely 73-75..." (Thanks N Burgess)

Thanks to W Farmer (22 Oct 2008) for this: "...I have a copy of a book, published in the UK and distributed in the US, which used one of the tree swing pictures on its cover, and then included the sequence of six tree swing pictures on the first page. The book is: Guide to Good Programming Practice, Editors: B L Meek and P M Heath ISBN 0-85312-145-1 (Ellis Hoarwood Ltd, Publishers) ISBN 0-470-26869-7 (Halstead Press, a division of John Wiley & Sons, distributor in the US). The six pictures are the same style as the ones on your website, but the captions are different, being directed toward software development:

1. As proposed by the project sponsor
2. As specified in the project request
3. As designed by the senior systems analyst
4. As produced by the programmers
5. As installed at the user's site
6. What the user wanted

The pictures include the caption: 'Acknowledgements to Unknown Author'. The book's source for those pictures is given as the University of London Computer Centre Newsletter No. 53, March 1973. I've included scans of both pages below..."

Ellis Horwood·Publishers
COMPUTERS AND THEIR APPLICATIONS 3

Guide to Good Programming Practice

edited by BRIAN MEEK & PATRICIA HEATH

AS PROPOSED BY THE PROJECT SPONSOR

AS SPECIFIED IN THE PROJECT REQUEST

AS DESIGNED BY THE SENIOR SYSTEMS ANALYST

AS PRODUCED BY THE PROGRAMMERS

AS INSTALLED AT THE USER'S SITE

WHAT THE USER WANTED

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS TO UNKNOWN AUTHOR

From the *University of London Computer Centre Newsletter* No. 53, March 1973

Thanks to W Farmer for the pictures above, from Guide to Good Programming Practice, Editors: B L Meek and P M Heath (1979) ISBN 0-85312-145-1 (Ellis Hoarwood Ltd., Publishers) ISBN 0-470-26869-7 (Halstead Press, a division of John Wiley & Sons, distributor in the US).

Thanks to A Allen (Aug 2009) for sending the treeswing cartoon example below. This particular version has been adapted for an IT system project situation. The year and origin are unknown. The diagrams are just like those seen in the late 1970s and 1980s but the caption terminology indicates more recent interpretation of situation:
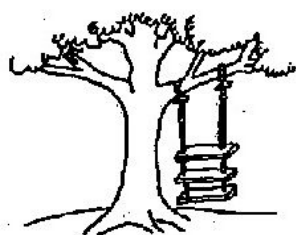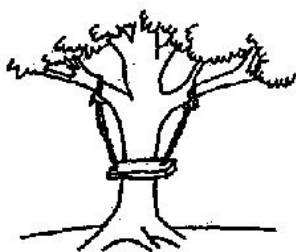
As proposed by the project sponsor.
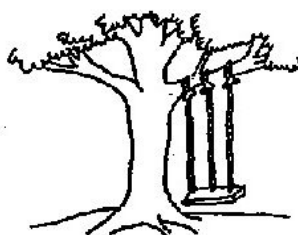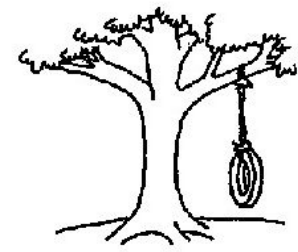
As specified in the project request.
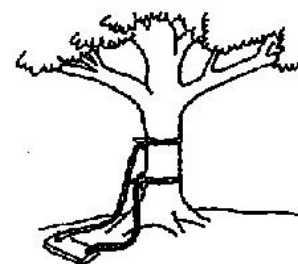
As designed by the senior analyst.

As produced by the programmers.

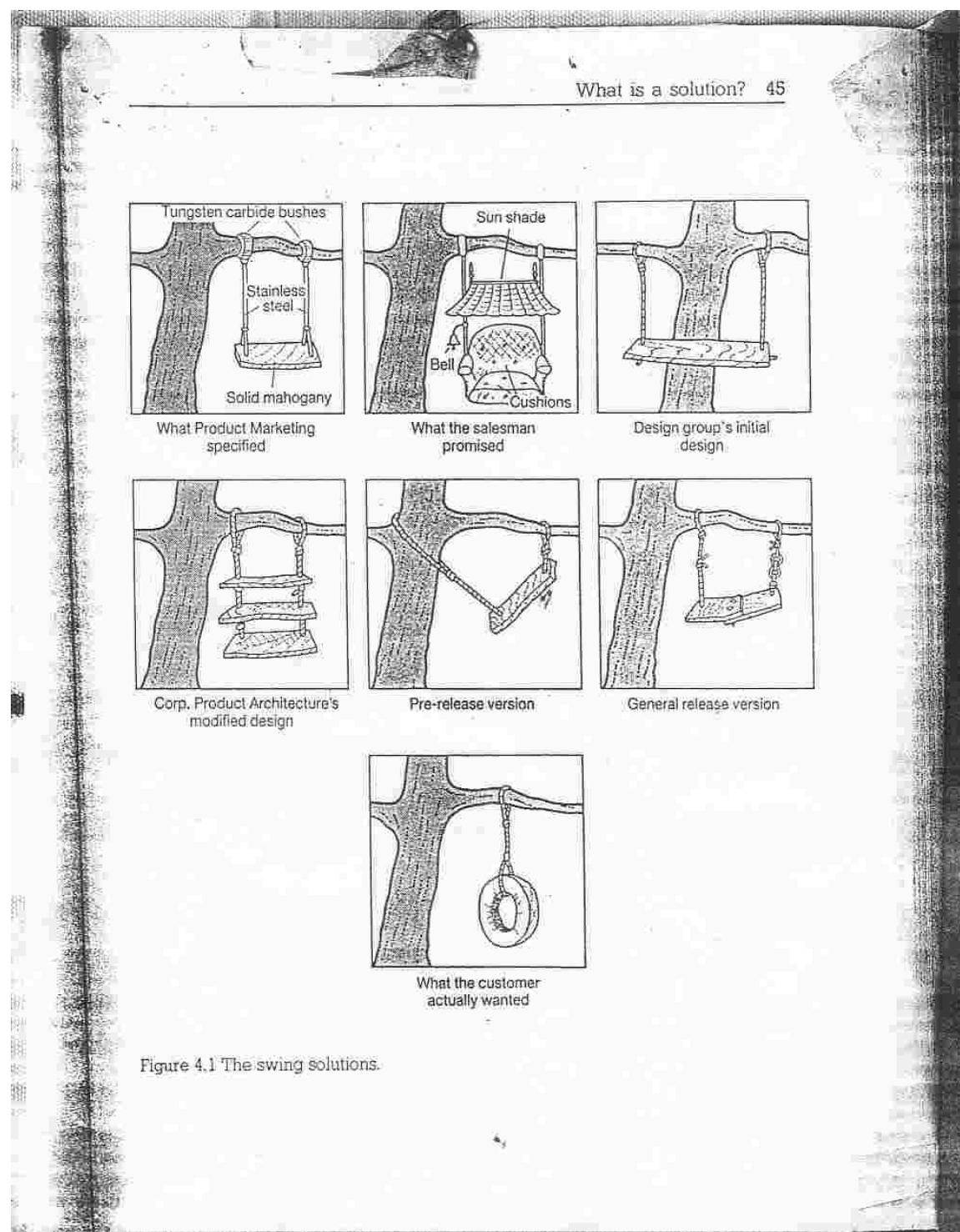As installed at the user's site.

What the user wanted.

With acknowledgements to A Allen.

Thanks to D Barrans (Jun 2010) for the following recollections: "... My dad brought home a copy of the tree swing cartoon sometime during my high school or junior high school years, which would have been sometime 1967-1973. It was a six-panel version, but I haven't found the exact variation on the captions. I do know they were not software-related... This was in the USA. He was working as a nuclear physicist at the National Bureau of Standards (now known as NIST) at that time..."

Thanks to M Tsao (Jun 2010) for the following: "... Although this is relatively new (I photocopied it from a co-worker's cubicle in 1992), it's a bit different from the ones you have on your site. I don't know what the book was, but this was at a large Silicon Valley software company, and the terminology suggests that the book discusses software development..."

Here's the copied page - if you can identify the book it comes from (seemingly about software development, published no later than 1992) please let me know:

What is a solution? 45

Tungsten carbide bushes
Stainless steel
Solid mahogany
What Product Marketing specified

Sun shade
Bell
Cushions
What the salesman promised

Design group's initial design

Corp. Product Architecture's modified design

Pre-release version

General release version

What the customer actually wanted

Figure 4.1 The swing solutions.

With acknowledgements to M Tsao for the picture above. The source book will be attributed when/if identified.

If you know anything more about the origins of the tree original swing pictures - especially any memory or evidence that the cartoons existed during the 1960s or earlier - please let me know - both to clarify the origins, and to give proper credit to the very first originator if he/she ever becomes known.

See the new Businessballs tree swing cartoons - a new collection of redrawn pictures for the modern age of organizational ridiculousness.

see also

Other enjoyable training and learning resources on this website:

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