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INF 43: Week 1: Small Assignment #1

The article “Overhaul of California government payroll system at risk of collapse” from the Los Angeles Times website briefly touches on a new payroll system that the state of California is trying to implement, but due to numerous complications and delays the project is now five years behind schedule and many times over the projected cost. The article states that the project has already cost $254 million dollars with no end in sight. The project has already dismissed one company contractor in 2009, and the current company contracted, SAP, will also be dismissed if results are not met [in subsequent articles, SAP was also dismissed]. What is worse is that this is not the only budget blunder for California, the DMV is also going through technology upgrade woes of similar magnitude.

These technology upgrade issues affect every person in California, and perhaps beyond. It is a huge waste of tax-payers monies, and there’s no real consequence for these failures. Another glaring issue is if this was even necessary or if the new system would have been better than what was implemented before. Yes, the old system was slow, but it works, and it still works while they dump more and more money onto the new system that remains broken.

Software engineering is difficult, that goes without question. But what does need to be asked is if software engineering is always necessary for the problem at hand. And also if goals and outcomes are realistic. More than likely, the efficiency of these grand software constructions are over-estimated. Perhaps they should have implemented and improved what was already in place piece-wise. Perhaps the solution may not appear as pretty as a whole new system, but the company could probably deduce what and where really needs to be fixed and keep what works. And more than likely, a lot worked, mostly since we’re still stuck using it.