

CAT 2009 and Mouse

This year, CAT's experimentation with mouse based exam has been trapped in controversies. My only interest in this subject is purely based on my day- today function as a project management professional. I normally look at things that have failed/blundered for a lesson's learnt opportunity. So without blaming the people involved and keeping in mind that good managers have to fix the processes- and not the people, following are my list of lesson's learnt from this blunder called CAT Examination 2009, until now known as toughest (MBA) exam in India.

1) Have dry test run if you are doing a unique project. It's is not without reason that in our refinery business, the process licensors have Pilot Plants so that the equipment don't cry at site without any mentors if things don't work. In the case of CAT 2009, a lot of students have cried in many lots of centers that we cannot provide solace. If secrecy was the only reason the system was not tested, it should have been tested at least by KG students who could have told that- few questions had no answer to choose from (one poor gal had 4 such questions with no answers, test being closed down after clicking 'review test' option, and password not being accepted to start the test and the list is terribly long.

2) Delegate work- but don't shun responsibility: You cannot delegate work (or rather outsource) without keeping the ultimate responsibility with yourself. The outsourcing was done to Prometric is not the issue, but the project team did not worry about fact that Prometric will also use decade-old college PC's with all kind of viruses on them. I understand that the virus attacked the transitory scrap files that were temporarily storing the answers as they don't have shield on them. Even HRD ministry cannot hide away from responsibility since delegation concept does not include absolving your responsibilities

3) Don't have aggressive schedule if returns are not so high: Large number of candidates (more than 2.5 lacs) were scheduled in shorter time of 10 days. I know few oil and gas projects that can earn tens of million more if done on aggressive schedule (without compromising safety and quality.) But how one could have justified an aggressive schedule for an educational project which NEEDS to deliver high quality students as output (assuming the CAT exam is really looking for quality persons)

4) Have Quality Assurance system In place: Non-visible pictures for picture-based questions, non-visible answers choices and repeated answer options. In some of the cases, clicking on 'quick review' has also closed down the test.

5) Have fall-back options: CAT 2009 should have had provided for excess capacity of computers/centers if some computers/centre break down, provide for extra day or possibly have a back-up plan for a paper pencil paper to top it all.

I personally have had a terrible experience with Prometric-Gurgaon while taking PMP exam in July 2008 as their UPS kept failing on each power-cut (normal in Delhi region during summer). A test which was meant for 3 hours took longer than 6 hours.

I could feel the pain and agony while watching candidates crying/sobbing on camera that how bad this experience had been for them. We as project managers have the responsibility to embrace each lessons learnt from tragedies like this.