



The ObjectWatch Newsletter

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Now in Our Twelfth Year

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The Hunt for Complexity in New Zealand

by: Roger Sessions

As Paulo Rocha was inviting me to visit New Zealand, I could tell that there was some bad news hovering in the air. He waxed eloquently about the beautiful landscapes, the excellent beer, and the great business climate. All the while I could sense an unspoken “but” that was waiting to splat like bird droppings on a newly washed car. Finally it came. His voice dropped a full octave. And with a slight quiver, he said, “... but Starbucks isn’t really that big here.”

Ten days without a Doppio Macchiato! I could feel my hands starting to shake, my heart palpate, the beads of sweat form on my brow. After a moment of silence, Paulo came back, and, in a very tentative voice, said: “But we do have flat whites.”

I’m thinking to myself, what the heck is a flat white? And what can that possibly have to do with my Doppio Macchiato? Eventually, the lure of New Zealand won over the dread of missing my Doppio Macchiatos (1 sugar, no milk, extra foam, please!)

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And so I found myself on a plane, heading for Auckland, New Zealand, to discuss SIP with Paulo Rocha and Fronde, one of the top consulting organizations in New Zealand. This is not SIP as in how you drink a Doppio Macchiato properly. I knew I wouldn't be doing that for a while. This is SIP as in *Simple Iterative Partitions*.

SIP¹, for those of you who are unfamiliar with it, is a process I have developed to address a hugely important problem in enterprise and IT architectures – complexity. In my opinion, complexity is not just another problem for IT to address. *It is the highest priority of all.* It is actually more important than security, agility, performance, or reliability – four problems that IT spends endless hours worrying about. Complexity, in contrast, is rarely discussed.

How can I say that complexity outranks security as an IT issue? Simple systems that lack security can be made secure. Complex systems that appear to be

secure aren't. And complex systems that aren't secure are virtually impossible to make either simple or secure.

The same for agility. Simple systems, with their well-defined and minimal interactions, can be put together in new ways never considered when these systems were first created. Complex systems can never be used in an agile way. There are simply too complex.

So why do people ignore the pressing problem of complexity? Most IT organizations assume that complexity is a necessary side effect of trying to solve complex problems.

There is no doubt that the problems IT is trying to solve are complex. Businesses are struggling to adopt new technologies, dealing with increasingly strict regulatory requirements, trading in a world that is shrinking as we speak, and doing all of this in a technology milieu that demands interoperability and (it goes without saying) security, agility, performance, and reliability. All of these are complex problems, and only getting more so.

But to assume that complex problems demand complex solutions is wrong. Complex problems do not demand complex solutions. They demand simple solutions.

And this is where SIP comes in. SIP is a process that drives simple solutions for complex problems. It is about eliminating complexity from IT.

How much simpler can SIP make IT? The results can be startling. I have calculated theoretical reductions of greater than 90% complexity reductions for many IT projects and I have done this using two independent validation

Quotation of the Month:

Fuzzy Math

FBI Assistant Director John Miller stressed the positive, pointing out that the report showed a 349 percent reduction in the average number of weapons lost or stolen in a given month [from the FBI] and a 312 percent reduction in the loss of theft of laptop computers [from the FBI] when compared to the 2002 review.

From eweek.com: *OIG Report Criticizes FBI over Missing Laptops, Weapons*, by Brian Prince, February 12, 2007

approaches. Beverly, responsible for business development here at ObjectWatch, refuses to let me claim 90% complexity reduction. She says that people won't believe it. She insists I downplay the numbers and claim only a 50% reduction for the sake of believability.

So okay, 50%. A 50% reduction in IT complexity translates to a 50% reduction in development effort, a 50% reduction in maintenance costs, a 50% reduction in overall IT failure. Or, to look at it another way, a 50% reduction in IT complexity translates to a 100% *increase* in the return on your IT investment.

And this, in a nutshell is why Fronde was so eager to meet with me. It turns out that complexity is just as big a problem for IT in New Zealand as it is in the United States. And Fronde saw in SIP a methodology that could make a huge difference for its customers base, a base that includes some of the largest organizations in New Zealand. Fronde is also very focused on agility, and it saw an important relationship between making systems simple and making them agile.

So Fronde approached ObjectWatch with an offer. They would like the exclusive right to offer the SIP methodology in New Zealand. In return, we would have a partnership agreement with Fronde that included all the flat whites I could drink.

Which brings me back to my initial question. What is a flat white?

As soon as Paulo met me, he knew he couldn't avoid this issue indefinitely. Maybe it was the look of quiet desperation in my eyes as I glanced

anxiously back and forth, looking for the familiar Starbucks logo. So before we ever discussed SIP, complexity, or partnerships, Paulo guided me over to the Café Melba, a delightful, cafe on a winding side street in Auckland and ordered two flat whites. I was skeptical, but kept my silence.

Even before the flat white arrived, I felt hopeful. The smell of the freshly ground espresso beans announced with great pungency that this was a country that took its coffee seriously. And when my flat white arrived, it was not just a coffee. It was a work of art.

A flat white turns out to be espresso coffee served with a thick layer of milk. The approach to steaming the milk is critical. It is not just heated, as would be a latte at Starbucks or foamed, as would be a cappuccino. It is actually steamed to a state that can only be described as velvety smoothness, an ethereal state just past milk and not yet foam.

And the milk is not just *poured* over the coffee. It is *decorated* over the coffee. Coffee shops in New Zealand compete on their flat white designs, as you can see in the following flat white montage.

Okay. So maybe I would survive this trip after all.

Unfortunately, my time to enjoy flat whites was sharply curtailed by Paulo's hectic schedule of meeting clients (although Paulo claims to have counted 56 flat whites consumed over the ten days).

To say that my message about the peril of IT complexity struck a chord with Kiwi's (as they call themselves) would be an understatement. My visit was actually



covered by Computerworld New Zealand. Here are a few extracts from their article:

Simplicity guru Roger Sessions met little resistance to his “simple” theory when he visited New Zealand last week — but putting simplicity into practice in IT is another matter, he says.

On the face of it, arguing for IT simplicity seems obvious, but Sessions says simplicity is almost never an overt objective of IT implementations or architecture design.

Sessions is working on his seventh book, tentatively titled Simple Architectures for Complex Enterprises. His aim is to control complexity by adding a theoretical background to the search for simplicity, he says.

The consultant and author was here for a series of briefings with local IT services firm Fronde and discussed his theories with two local CIOs. He found little disagreement.

Sessions wants to create what he calls a “science of simplicity”, through the creation of mathematical models for what complexity is all about, and then use this to create and, most importantly, validate architectural solutions.

The Kiwi interest in SIP was strong with different organizations interested in SIP for different reasons. A transport company, for example, was most interested in SIP’s ability to analyze existing IT architectures and check them for complexity hot spots. A healthcare provider was more interested in using SIP to design shared health services across regional clusters. A government agency saw in SIP an intriguing approach to structuring a large review of their security systems. And a large insurance company was fascinated by the use of Set Theory, Probability Theory, and Equivalence Relations within SIP to validate architectural decisions.

All in all, I spoke to more than 28 different New Zealand organizations. All of these organizations had stories to tell of the crushing cost of complexity. And all but one saw in SIP a potential answer to their problems.

Who was the lone holdout to SIP? It was an organization (that shall go nameless)

that seemed comfortable in its state of analysis paralysis, or perhaps, just resigned.

I am not surprised by my reception in New Zealand. The story of complexity is, after all, one without borders. It is a story that I hear replayed endlessly, in every country, in every type of organization. But I am gratified by the warmth of my reception and the near total embrace of the message that complexity control must be elevated to job number one. And, perhaps best of all, I am delighted to have built a partnership with Fronde so that we can not only discuss the problems faced by New Zealand IT organizations, but we can offer real solutions.

So I can tell that this will not be my last visit to New Zealand. There is a lot of complexity to be eliminated there. And there are a lot of flat whites yet to be consumed.

So for my readers in New Zealand, I have two pieces of good news for you. First, we have a new partner relationship with a top notch consulting firm, Fronde. They are ready and willing to help you leverage SIP to slash your IT complexity and boost your IT productivity. And second, you have the best darned coffee in the universe. But you already knew that.

And to my Barista's at my local Starbucks, I can only say, I'm sorry. I have sinned. But the fact is that I will never again look at a Doppio Macchiato

without thinking back with great fondness to the National Drink of New Zealand, the flat white. It is simple yet marvelous. The way IT should be.

- Roger Sessions
Houston, Texas
November, 2007

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