

Monopolies and Dictatorships that Make Big Mistakes

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Abstract

This will be a book on bad bosses.

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<http://www.rasmusen.org/papers/entry-rasmusen-yoon.pdf>.

1 Introduction

This will be a book on bad bosses.

Hitler. Speer Inside the Third Reich.

Bill Gates

On monopolies being bad because the boss doesn't notice something important.

The only way to solve this is to have a takeover.

Or, to have more than one boss.

Or, to have an election. Or a competitive marketplace.

A board of directors can solve it. But they have weak incentives, because they are not the owners.

If there is just one owner, he might be the one with the problem. The owner NOT being the manager can help a lot though. We SHOULD separate ownership and control some.

Who will tell the boss he is making a big mistake? The boss will and should punish people who tell him that unpersuasively. The result is that the mistake is made anyway, and the boss looks bad too.

An Extended Example of Microsoft Windows Incompetence Printing Deletion

Windows is awesomely bad. How can as big a company as Microsoft do things so poorly? I do not mean that rhetorically. Rather, why don't they spend a little more money and make a far better product, for which they could charge more? I suppose Bill Gates must be blamed he controls the company, and he must not have a good feel for technology and so doesn't understand why good design matters. There is no market corrective for the problem of a monopolistic leader who fails to see something important. This matters for policy purposes, because such incompetence only survives because of a government-granted monopoly copyright and patent on software.

Here's an example, which I'll list so I can use it as a standard reference. What matters is not that this is so important to operation, as that it shows such incompetence in design.

I want to cancel all my print jobs, because one job is jamming the printer for some reason. Windows has a window that shows print jobs and supposedly allows the user to cancel any one of them, but as often as not, that command is ignored by the computer. Probably that's incompetent design too, but let's give Microsoft the benefit of the doubt maybe there is some technical reason why some print jobs can't be cancelled without restarting the machine. So I went to the Web.

It turns out that there is a command line command to cancel print jobs: `prnjobs -x`. This is

put onto one web page with various other commands.

Point one: Microsoft hides many of Windows features in command-line commands that go unmentioned in its standard documentation. It would be easy enough to link them to the standard help, but MS doesn't.

Point two: Instead of using HTML properly, MS slaps together a bunch of commands onto one web page just like a computer manual, except without professional typesetting layout.

There seems to be no way to cancel all jobs at once, though. The MS documentation instead says that the user must first find the job id of each print job that is to be cancelled, using a separate command, `prnjobs -l`.

Point three: There ought to be a command to cancel all jobs at once.

The `prnjobs -l` command fails, though. It turns out that you have to take the command-line window to a special directory for the command to work, though the MS documentation doesn't tell you that.

It's important to understand that running the printer utilities can be a bit tricky due to the terse rules governing command line scripts. TechRepublic, having billions of dollars less than Microsoft, but billions of brains more, tell us this:

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To begin with, the six printer utilities are located in the `systemroot\system32` folder, which on most Windows XP installations is `C:\Windows\System32`. Now, even though this folder is listed in the path by default, you must actually change to this folder in order to run the utilities. And, since these utilities are designed to run from the command line, you'll need to launch them from a command prompt, and you must run them using Windows Script Hosts command line script host (`Cscript.exe`).

Point four: Windows only lets the command be issued after moving to a particular directory.

Point five: The MS documentation omits this crucial part of the command.

Even TechRepublic fails to note another problem: the actual command is not `prnjobs`, but `prnjobs.vbs`. `Prnjobs` by itself fails. You need to issue

```
c:\windows\system32\cscript prnjobs.vbs -l
```

```
c:\windows\system32\cscript prnjobs.vbs -x 4
```

(if 4 turns out to be the job number)

Point six: The MS documentation gives the wrong command in all its examples.

Point seven: Windows requires the suffix *.vbs, for no good reason.

I should mention, too, that cut-and-paste doesn't work in the DOS-style command-line window, even though practically always when I use it, I am typing in commands that need to be typed verbatim from some other source.

Point eight: Windows blocks cut-and-paste into the DOS-style command-line window.

And also: if you make a mistake, although a window comes up to tell you, you can't simultaneously look at the help window for what to do and do it; you have to close the window first. (And remember no cutting and pasting allowed!)

Point nine: Help windows must be closed before you can use them. You presumed to have a photographic memory.

Finally, the command doesn't work. We're back to where we started.

I succeeded eventually. Disconnecting the printer's power and USB failed to work. But I tried deleting some plausible processes in the Windows Task Manager and got the job deleted (I also deleted the printer's operating process too, and had to get it started up again, though.)

See pp. 378-79 of Speer.

2 Concluding Remarks

Not written yet.

3 References

Speer Inside the Third Reich.