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Good Read: The Dry and the Wet

- Steven Jackson, PAL LTER/UCSD Science Studies Program

Joseph Goguen, "The Dry and the Wet", in Information Systems Concepts, eds. Eckhard Falkenberg, Colette Rolland and El-Sayed Nasr-El-Dein, eds. Elsevier North-Holland, 1992, pp 1-17.

This is a somewhat older piece (first published 1992) that nevertheless raises questions dear to the heart of LTER information managers. The paper points out challenges and outlines strategies for addressing long-standing tensions between 'formal, context-insensitive information' and 'informal, situated information' - the dry and the wet - in the design and maintenance of complex systems. Goguen argues that failures to address this divide (and the general failure to account for the social lives of technology 'in the wild') play an important part in the surprisingly high failure rate reported by complex system developers. The paper provides a good and accessible overview of the field of Requirements Engineering from one of the leading figures in the field. For links to this and other pieces on similar themes, check out Goguen's website at: <http://www.cs.ucsd.edu/users/goguen/>.