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## Carnegie Mellon University Software Engineering Institute



SEI Bulletin — February 5, 2020

# Challenging the Myth of the x10 Programmer

A recent SEI blog post disputes the widely held idea that some programmers are leaps and bounds better than others. "[Programmer Moneyball: Challenging the Myth of Individual Programmer Productivity](#)," by [Bill Nichols](#), senior member of the SEI's technical staff, challenges the supposedly superior productivity of the so-called *x10 programmer*, citing new data from the SEI.

"Our study concluded that the truth is more nuanced," Nichols writes in the post. "The many studies that seem to show a x10 performance range conflate differences between programmers with normal programmer day-to-day variation."

In other words, differences between programmers are as much due to normal, day-to-day variation as skill. The SEI study of nearly 500 student programmers also suggests that most productivity differences spring from low performance, rather than high performance, and that few programmers are very good or very bad.

Nichols also discusses the implications of these results for managers, including advice for improving programmer productivity.

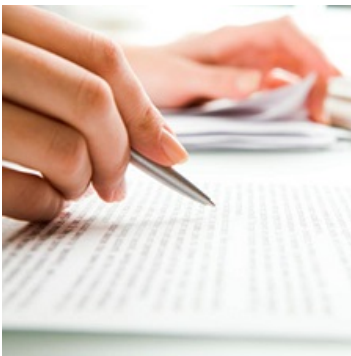
[Read the blog post.](#)

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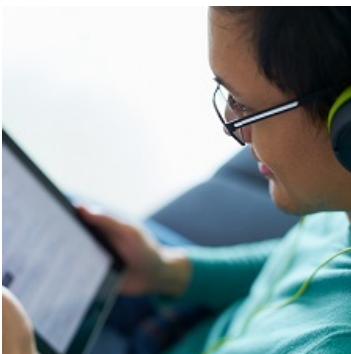
- [Comments on NISTIR 8269 \(A Taxonomy and Terminology of Adversarial Machine Learning\)](#)
- [Secure Acquisition Curriculum](#)
- [Software Acquisition Curriculum](#)



## SEI Blog

Recent posts

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- [Maturing Your Insider Threat Program into an Insider Risk Management Program](#)
- [Programmer Moneyball: Challenging the Myth of Individual Programmer Productivity](#)
- [Performing the DevOps Assessment: Fourth in a Series](#)
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March 16-17, 2020 (SEI, Pittsburgh, Pa.)
- [Software Architecture Design and Analysis](#)  
March 18-19, 2020 (SEI, Pittsburgh, Pa.)



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## About the SEI Bulletin

The SEI Bulletin is a biweekly newsletter designed to keep you up to date on SEI news, events, research, and other matters of interest to the SEI

community. We hope you find the SEI Bulletin useful and informative.

## Send Us Your Story

Do you have a story about how an SEI technology has positively affected your team or organization? If so, the SEI would like to hear about it. Send a short summary of your success to [info@sei.cmu.edu](mailto:info@sei.cmu.edu), and you could be featured in a future issue of the SEI Bulletin.



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