

Exploring the XP Customer Role

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1 RESEARCH QUESTION

eXtreme programming (XP) is one of a new breed of methods, collectively known as the agile or light methods, that are challenging conventional wisdom regarding systems development processes and practices. One of the core roles within the XP team is the Customer role. Beck and Fowler [1] describe a good customer as someone who understands the domain well and know how to use software in that domain to achieve business value using the technique of regular delivery.

The central question of this research is “How is the customer role addressed on XP software development projects?”

2 CURRENT SOLUTIONS

Information Systems Development (ISD) methodology researchers have expressed a growing concern that existing ISD methodologies and ISD methodology do not meet the needs of today’s business and software development environments [2, 4]. Studies in this area have begun to explore practices in natural settings in order to begin to address these issues [3], but practitioners have not waited for this research and have instead established agile methods.

No research, of academic rigour, has been undertaken that specifically addresses the use of the customer role in agile methods on software development projects. The proposed study will fill this gap and will do so by applying some of the suggestions coming from methodology researchers, including the use of rich descriptive studies that explore actual practice. The proposed study will also specifically address practitioner concerns regarding the practicality of implementing the customer role.

3 RESULTS ACHIEVED SO FAR

My initial research used an interpretative case study to explore a successful XP project. We obtained multiple perspectives on the implementation of the customer role within the planning process and found the following:

- The XP customer role, especially within larger organisations, is a demanding role. It requires preparation, skills, attention to detail, and the ability to make critical decisions.

- Obtaining regular feedback during the project allows the customer to make effective business decisions concerning the system.
- The development team must carry out key XP practices in order to provide the feedback necessary to enable the customer to make effective decisions. The customer role is a core role within XP.

4 PROPOSED FUTURE RESEARCH

The initial study was exploratory in nature and it provides an initial foundation from which future research can be conducted. Suggested research would include:

- Increasing the depth of this study with a follow-up longitudinal study on the project from the initial study in six months time. We will want to find what further experiences have been undertaken by the team to facilitate the effectiveness of the customer role?
- Increasing the depth of this study by widening the perspectives. A full 360 degree review of the system and process which would include the perspectives of the project sponsor, the users of the system, the acceptance testers and the outsourced facilities management personnel.
- Increasing the breadth of this study by exploring multiple cases using a maximum variation sampling technique to increase the validity of the findings of this research.
- Increasing the breadth of this study by undertaking a quantitative investigation using the findings of this study.

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