

Exploring the XP Customer Role – Part II

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The Customer is the only non-developer role in eXtreme Programming (XP). Initial XP literature [1, 2] provided little guidance concerning this role; however Beck & Fowler did acknowledge the risk associated with the Customer role:

*All the best talent and technology and process in the world will fail
when the customer isn't up to scratch [1, p.17]*

Our research [4] is beginning to explore the practicalities of succeeding in the implementation of the XP Customer role. We have used interpretative in-depth case studies [3, 4] to explore our research questions within their natural setting; software projects. We have interviewed a total of 39 people across six projects in New Zealand and the United States, and in all cases have covered the spectrum of core XP roles. We found that the customer must shoulder several implicit responsibilities, including liaison with external project stakeholders, while maintaining the trust of both the development team and the wider business. The existing XP Customer practices appear to be achieving excellent results but they also appear to be unsustainable, and so constitute a great risk to XP projects, especially in long-term or high-pressure projects. We are continuing to analyse the data from these cases, as well as collecting data from projects in England & Europe, to further explore the issues encountered and successful and unsuccessful coping strategies utilised. The key contribution of our research will be to describe the essential characteristics and skills required in the customer role, and to identify the crucial practices and values to carry out the role successfully.

References

- 1 Beck, K., & Fowler, M. Planning Extreme Programming: Addison Wesley, 2001.
- 2 Farell, C., Narang, R., Kapitan, S. and Webber, H., Towards an effective onsite customer practice. in Third International Conference on eXtreme Programming and Agile Process in Software Engineering, (Italy, 2002).
- 3 Fitzgerald, B. Systems development methodologies: the problem of tenses. Information technology and people, 13 (3). pp. 174 – 185.
- 4 Martin, A., Noble, J., and Biddle, R. Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on eXtreme Programming and Agile Processes in Software Engineering, Giancarlo Succi (Ed.), Being Jane Malkovich: a Look into the World of an XP Customer. Lecture Notes in Computer Science 2675, Springer-Verlag, 2003.