

Extreme Programming and Agile Software Development Methodologies

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As a stakeholder of a software project, how does this sound to you? You can have releases as often as you like. The small number of defects is unprecedented. All of the features in the system are the most valuable ones to your business. At anytime, you have access to complete, accurate information as the status of any feature and of the quality of the system as a whole. The team developing your project works in an energized space with constant communication about the project. You are not dependent on any one or even two programmers for the continued success of the project. If your needs change, the development team welcomes the change of direction.

As a developer of a software project, how does this sound to you? No one estimates your tasks but you, period! You always have access to a customer to clarify details about the features you are implementing. You are free (and required) to clean up the code whenever necessary. You complete a project every two weeks. You can work in any part of the system that you wish. You can pick who will help you on any given task. You are not required to work constantly long hours.

Does this sound too good to be true? Teams are achieving these advantages using a relatively new set of software methodologies. Collectively, they are referred to as Agile Software Development Methodologies. The most pervasive is Extreme Programming. This chapter will introduce you to these exciting, popular, yet controversial new approaches to software development.

BACKGROUND

Trends In Software Development

The last half-century has seen a dizzying progression of technical advancement in the areas of computer, software, and communications technology. With each advance came rapid changes in the way society works and lives. The impact of technology is increasingly pervasive. Even

as the current economic downturn limits capital investment, innovators and entrepreneurs are pushing the limits in areas of biotechnology and nanotechnology.

Supporting all of these advances is software running on some kind of computer. From the spreadsheets to anti-lock brakes to phones to toys, logic that was once implemented in mechanics, circuitry, or pencil and paper, is now a set of instructions

controlling one or many computers. These computers communicate with each other over networks ignorant to the limits of geography and even wires. The notion of a program running on a computer is largely a memory as the emergence of distributed computing models, most recently Web Services, allow many different computers to participate in the “running” of a program or system to yield a given output.

In this explosive environment, software professionals have the challenge to deliver a seemingly infinite backlog of software projects, while keeping abreast with the latest advances. The results are debatable at best. Survey after survey continues to confirm that most software projects fail against some measure of success. Most software developers have many more stories of failure than of success. Given the friction and finger pointing that accompanies the end of a failed project, it is difficult to research the causes of software failures. However, typically, projects fail for the one of more of the following:

- ? Requirements that are not clearly communicated
- ? Requirements that do not solve the business problem
- ? Requirements that change prior to the completion of the project
- ? Software (code) that has not been tested
- ? Software that has not been tested as the user will use it
- ? Software developed such that it is hard to modify.
- ? Software that is used for functions for which it was not intended
- ? Projects not staffed with the resources required in the project plan
- ? Schedule and scope commitments are made prior to fully understanding of the requirements or the technical risks.

Despite these delivery problems, strong demand seems to hold steady. Reports still suggest a shortage of software professionals and college graduates, despite the implosion of the Internet industry slowing the growth of demand and the emergence of offshore programming market increasing supply.

Improvement Remains Elusive

Efforts to improve the success rate of software projects have since the first bug was detected. Recently, these efforts have focused on four distinct part of the software development process: requirements gathering, designing and developing the software, testing the results, and overall project management. Formal requirements definition and analysis addressed the problem of requirements that were incomplete or did not reflect the needs of the customer. Formal design before implementation addressed the goals of reuse, consistency of operation, and reducing rework. Testing catches defects before they reach the users. Project Management addressed the problem of coordinating the efforts of multi-department teams. These areas of focus follow a logical approach to process improvement: improve the quality of the inputs (requirements), improve the quality of the output (designing and developing, project management), and improve the detection and elimination of defects prior to shipping (testing). Methods and tools focusing on these four distinct areas of software development have proliferated.

For some projects, these efforts have been effective. For others, it yielded silos of responsibility, with poor communication between the groups and distributed ownership and accountability. If a project is late, it is easy for the programmers to blame the requirements gatherers and vice versa. If

the users detect defects, finger pointing ensues between developers and testers. Project Management techniques try to better coordinate the activities of the multiple groups involved in delivering the project, but add yet another silo and area of accountability. The most popular project management techniques focus on developing a plan and sticking to the plan. This improves coordination, but reduces the ability of the project to adapt to new information regarding the requirements or the implementation details.

Emergence Of Agile Methods

The additional process steps, roles, and artifacts helped many teams to enjoy higher success rates and more satisfied customers. Unfortunately, many projects failed attempting to use the same techniques. Some projects got lost in the documents and never implemented any code, missing the window of opportunity for the software. Others did not leave enough time at the end for implementation and test, and delivered systems inconsistent with the documents and designs on which most of the project time was spent.

At the same time, numerous projects were very successful that did not follow methods with binders of documents, detailed designs, and project plans. Many experienced programmers were having great success without all of these extra steps. The determining factor of project success seemed more and more to be the people on the project, not the technology or the methods that were being used. After all, people end up writing the software at some point. To some, the developers that did not embrace the new methodologies appeared to be undisciplined and indifferent to quality, despite their successes at delivering quality software that people wanted to use.

A few people started to author papers about these disciplined, yet lighter approaches to software development. They called them Extreme Programming, SCRUM, Crystal, Adaptive, etc. Different authors emphasized different aspects of software development. Some focused on approaches to planning and requirements, some focused on ways to write software that could be changed more easily. Some focused on the people interactions that allow software developers to more easily adapt to their customers' changing needs. These various efforts created a focal point for a community that furthered the set of practices that succeed without many of the activities and artifacts required by more defined methodologies.

In the fall of 1999, *Extreme Programming, Embrace Change*¹, was published and the trend had found its catalyst. In early 2001, the different innovators that were creating different agile methodologies held a retreat and scribed the Agile Manifesto for Software Development.² By the spring of 2002, Computerworld.com ran the following headline: "More than two-thirds of all corporate IT organizations will use some form of 'agile' software development process within 18 months, Giga Information Group predicted this week at its application development conference here."³

AGILE METHODOLOGIES

At the retreat in early 2001, a number of leaders of the agile software development movement held a retreat to discuss their approaches and to explore the commonalities and differences. What emerged was the Agile Manifesto for Software Development. The manifesto articulates core values and principles that guide agile methodologies.

Agile Manifesto

We are uncovering better ways of developing software by doing it and helping others to do it. Through this work we have come to value:

- Individuals and interactions** over processes and tools
- Working software** over comprehensive documentation
- Customer collaboration** over contract negotiation
- Responding to change** over following a plan

That is, while there is value on the items on the right, we value the items on the left more.

Principles behind the Agile Manifesto

We follow these principles:

- ? Our highest priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable software.
- ? Welcoming changing requirements, even late in development. Agile processes harness change for the customer's competitive advantage.
- ? Deliver working software frequently, from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, with a preference to shorter time scales.
- ? Business people and developers must work together daily throughout the project.
- ? Build projects around motivated individuals. Give them the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done.
- ? The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation.

- ? Working software is the primary measure of progress.
- ? Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.
- ? Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design enhances agility.
- ? Simplicity – the art of maximizing the amount of work not done- is essential.
- ? The best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organized teams.
- ? At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly.

Agile Methods

The number of methods that claim to align the Agile Manifesto will continue to grow with the popularity of the agile software methodologies. The early initial methodologies include⁴:

- ? Extreme Programming
- ? SCRUM
- ? Crystal
- ? Feature Driven Development
- ? Lean Development
- ? Adaptive Software Development
- ? DSDM

EXTREME PROGRAMMING

Extreme Programming (XP) is the most widely used agile methodology. XP shares the values espoused by the manifesto but goes further to specify simple set of practices. Where as many popular methodologies try to answer the question “What are all of the practices I might ever

need on a software project?” XP simply asks, “What is the simplest set of practices I could possibly need and what do I need to do to limit my needs to those practices?”

The significance of this difference cannot be understated. The most frequent critique of XP is that it is too simple to work beyond a narrow set of project criteria. Yet, the set of known successes with XP continues to stretch the breadth of projects applicable for XP. It would seem that the parameters that we use to determine what methods are appropriate for what project are still inadequate.

To many, XP is a set of twelve interdependent software development practices. Used together, these practices have had much success, initially with small teams, working on projects with high degrees of change. However, the more one works with XP, the more it is apparent that the practices don't capture the essence of XP. As with the heavier methods, some teams have great success with the XP practices, some less so. Some larger teams have greater success than smaller ones. Some teams with legacy code have success; others do not. There is something more than just the practices that enable teams to succeed with XP. This extra attribute of XP is the XP Values.

What Is Extreme Programming?

Extreme Programming is a discipline of software development based on values of simplicity, communication, feedback, and courage. It works by bringing the whole team together in the presence of simple practices, with enough feedback to enable the team to see where they are and to tune the practices to their unique situation.

In Extreme Programming, every contributor to the project is a member of the “Whole Team”, a single business/development/testing team that handles all aspects of the development. Central to the team is the “Customer”, one or more business representatives who sit with the team and work with them daily.

Extreme Programming teams use a simple form of planning and tracking to decide what to do next and to predict when any desired feature set will be delivered. Focused on business value, the team produces the software in a series of small fully integrated releases that pass all the tests that the Customer has defined. The core XP practices for the above are called Whole Team, Planning Game, Small Releases, and Acceptance Tests. There are specific recommendations for all of these, which we'll discuss briefly here, and as we go along.

Extreme Programmers work together in pairs and as a group, with simple design and obsessively tested code, improving the design continually to keep it always just right for the current needs.

The core XP practices here are Pair Programming, Simple Design, Test-Driven Development, and Design Improvement.

The Extreme Programming team keeps the system integrated and running all the time. The programmers write all production code in pairs, and all work together all the time. They code in a consistent style so that everyone can understand and improve all the code as needed.

The additional practices here are called Continuous Integration, Team Code Ownership, and Coding Standard.

The Extreme Programming team shares a common and simple picture of what the

system looks like. Everyone works at a pace that can be sustained indefinitely.

These practices are called Metaphor, and Sustainable Pace.

XP Values

The XP Values are Communication, Simplicity, Feedback, and Courage.

“The essence [of XP] truly is simple. Be together with your customer and fellow programmers, and talk to each other. Use simple design and programming practices, and simple methods of planning, tracking, and reporting. Test your program and your practices, using feedback to steer the project. Working together this way gives the team courage.”⁵

These values guide our actions on the project. The practices leverage these values to remove complexity from the process.

The impact of the XP Values is significant and unique. XP remains the only methodology that is explicit in its values and practices. This combination gives specific guidance on what (the practices) to do on a project, but also on how to react (defer to the values) when the practices don’t seem to be working or are not sufficient. Most methods are specific on practices, some specify principles, but few combine both⁶. For example, CMMI describes Key Practice Areas (KPA’s), but does not articulate a set of values or principles. RUP provides guiding principles, such as Develop Iteratively, but does not include values that give guidance beyond the software development practices. How these values are used to guide the team in its use of the practices is described later in the section Fitting XP to Your Project.

Methodology	Values	Principles	Practices
CMMI®	No	No	YES (KPA’s)
SA/SD	No	No	YES
RUP®	No	YES	YES
Agile	YES	YES	NO
XP	YES	YES	YES

CMMI: Capability Maturity Model Integration, Software Engineering Institute

SA/SD: Structured Analysis/Structured Design

RUP: Rational Unified Process, IBM Rational

TABLE 1: Comparison of Methodologies

Organization

On a project using XP, there are two explicit roles or teams defined: the Customer and the Programmer. In keeping with the value of simplicity, most of the XP literature describes the customer as a single person that can represent the requirements, acceptance criteria, and business value for the project. In practice, it is a team of people that communicate with one voice with The Programming Team. As such, this role is also referred to as The Customer Team. This chapter will use the term “Customer” to describe the role, whether acted on by an individual or a team. The Programmer is a member of the Programming Team that implements The XP Customer Team’s requirements. Again, the convention will be to use the term “Programmer” to describe an individual or the team.

On all but the smallest projects, there will also be a Management Team, which allocates resources for the teams, manages the alignment of the project to the goals of the business, and removes any obstacles impeding the team’s progress. Extreme Programming does not specify management practices. XP attempts to simplify

management by empowering the Customer and Programmer to make most of the decisions regarding the project. Often, XP teams are described as self-managing. As projects grow in size and complexity, more management is typically required to coordinate the efforts of different teams. Many of the other emerging agile methodologies are focusing more attention on management practices, such as Scrum⁷, Lean Development⁸, and Extreme Project Management⁹.

Rhythm Of An Xp Project

An XP project proceeds in iterations of 2 weeks in length. Each iteration delivers fully developed and tested software that meets the most valuable small set of the full project's requirements. Figure 1 shows the primary activities of the Customer and Programmer during the initial iterations of a project. The project proceeds in a steady rhythm of delivering more functionality. The Customer determines at what point in time the full system can be released and deployed.

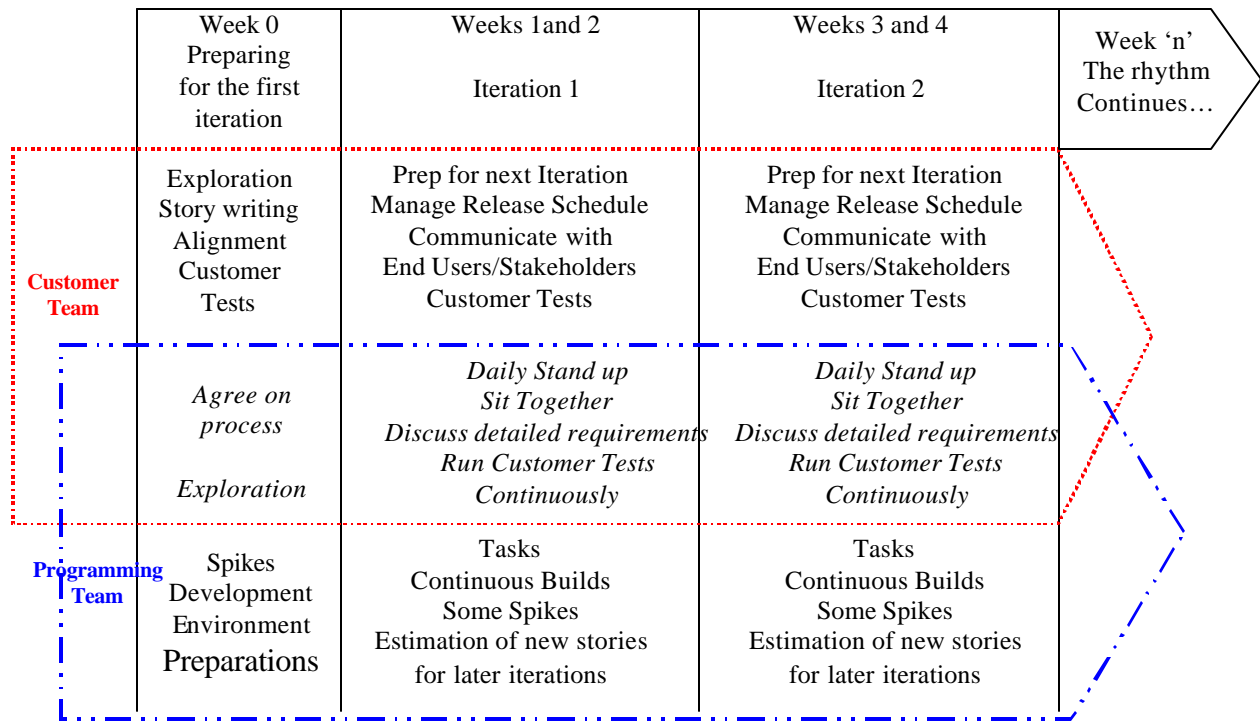


FIGURE 1: The Rhythm of an XP Project

CORE PRACTICES

There are twelve core practices that define Extreme Programming. Teams new to XP should focus on using and developing skill with these practices. Over time, as the team matures in its use of XP, it will continue to check its proficiency with these practices, but will also tailor the practices to their project needs. XP teams are encouraged to

use feedback from their project to adapt, add, and eliminate practices as needed. A number of other practices are popular on XP teams and some of these are described later.

The practices can be described as a cycle of activities. The inner circle describes the tight cycle of the Programmers. The outer loop describing the planning cycle that

occurs between the Customers and Programmers. The middle loop shows practices that help the team communicate

and coordinate the delivery of quality software.

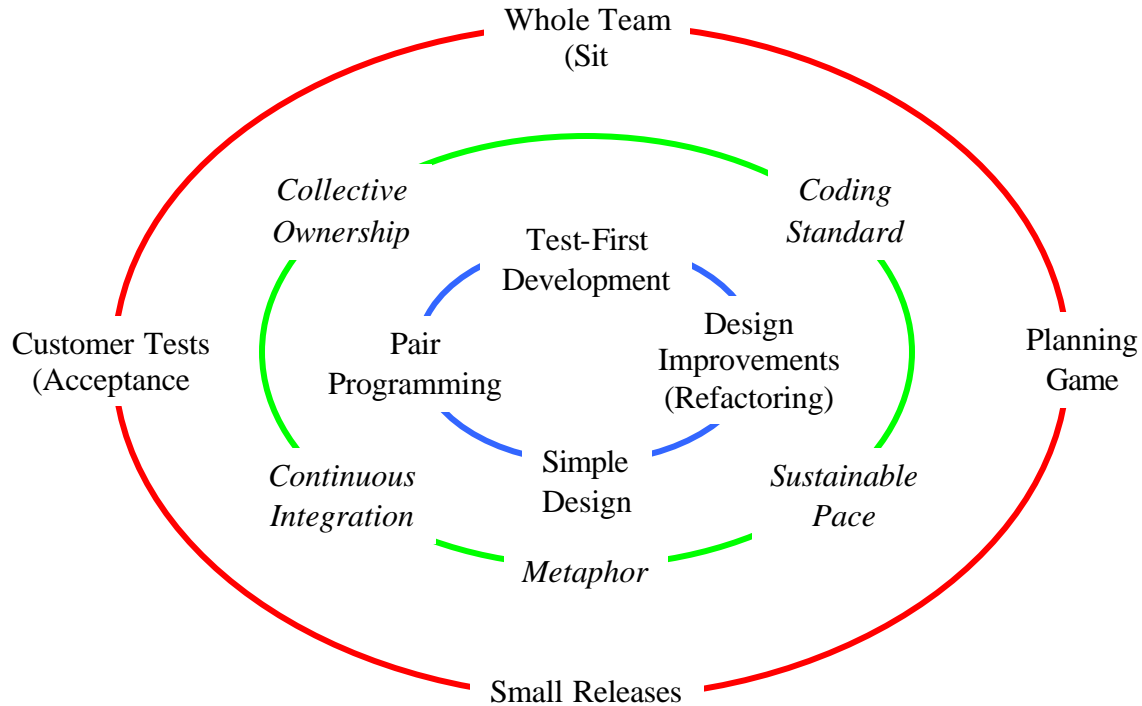


FIGURE 2: XP Practices and the Circle of Life

Whole Team

All the contributors to an XP project sit together, as members of one team. This team must include a business representative -- the "Customer" -- who provides the requirements, sets the priorities, and steers the project. It's best if the Customer or one of her aides is a real end user who knows the domain and what is needed. The team will of course have programmers. The team will typically include testers, who help the Customer define the customer acceptance tests. Analysts may serve as helpers to the Customer, helping to define the requirements. There is commonly a coach, who helps the team keep on track, and facilitates the process. There may be a manager, providing resources, handling

external communication, and coordinating activities. None of these roles is necessarily the exclusive property of just one individual. Everyone on an XP team contributes in any way that they can. The best teams have no specialists, only general contributors with special skills.

Planning Game

XP planning addresses two key questions in software development: predicting what will be accomplished by the due date, and determining what to do next. The emphasis is on steering the project -- which is quite straightforward -- rather than on exact prediction of what will be needed and how long it will take -- which is quite difficult.

There are two key planning steps in XP, addressing these two questions:

Release Planning is a practice where the Customer presents the desired features to the programmers, and the programmers estimate their difficulty. With the costs estimates in hand, and with knowledge of the importance of the features, the Customer lays out a plan for the project. Initial release plans are necessarily imprecise: neither the priorities nor the estimates are truly solid, and until the team begins to work, we won't know just how fast they will go. Even the first release plan is accurate enough for decision making, however, and XP teams revise the release plan regularly.

Iteration Planning is the practice whereby the team is given direction every couple of weeks. XP teams build software in two-week "iterations", delivering running useful software at the end of each iteration. During Iteration Planning, the Customer presents the features desired for the next two weeks. The programmers break them down into tasks, and estimate their cost (at a finer level of detail than in Release Planning). Based on the amount of work accomplished in the previous iteration, the team signs up for what will be undertaken in the current iteration.

These planning steps are very simple, yet they provide very good information and excellent steering control in the hands of the Customer. Every couple of weeks, the amount of progress is entirely visible. There is no "ninety percent done" in XP: a feature story was completed, or it was not. This focus on visibility results in a nice little paradox: on the one hand, with so much visibility, the Customer is in a position to cancel the project if progress is not sufficient. On the other hand, progress is so visible, and the ability to decide what will be

done next is so complete, that XP projects tend to deliver more of what is needed, with less pressure and stress.

Customer Tests

As part of presenting each desired feature, the XP Customer defines one or more automated acceptance tests to show that the feature is working. The team builds these tests and uses them to prove to themselves, and to the customers, that the feature is implemented correctly. Automation is important because in the press of time, manual tests are skipped. That's like turning off your lights when the night gets darkest.

The best XP teams treat their customer tests the same way they do programmer tests: once the test runs, the team keeps it running correctly thereafter. This means that the system only improves, always notching forward, never backsliding.

Small Releases

XP teams practice small releases in two important ways:

First, the team releases running, tested software, delivering business value chosen by the Customer, with every iteration. The Customer can use this software for any purpose, either for evaluation or even for release to end-users (which is highly recommended). The most important aspect is that the software is visible, and given to the customer, at the end of every iteration. This keeps everything open and tangible.

Second, XP teams release software to their end-users frequently as well. XP Web projects release as often as daily, in-house projects monthly or more frequently. Even shrink-wrapped products are shipped as often as quarterly.

It may seem impossible to create good versions this often, but XP teams all over are doing it all the time. See the section on Continuous Integration for more on this, and note that these frequent releases are kept reliable by XP's obsession with testing, as described here in Customer Tests and Test-Driven Development.

Simple Design

XP teams build software to a simple design. They start simple, and through programmer testing and design improvement, they keep it that way. An XP team keeps the design exactly suited for the current functionality of the system. There is no wasted motion, and the software is always ready for what's next.

Design in XP is not a one-time thing, or an up-front thing, but it is an all-the-time thing. There are design steps in release planning and iteration planning, plus teams engage in quick design sessions and design revisions through refactoring, through the course of the entire project. In an incremental, iterative process like Extreme Programming, good design is essential. That's why there is so much focus on design throughout the course of the entire development.

Pair Programming

In XP, two programmers, sitting side by side, at the same machine, build all production software. This practice ensures that all production code is reviewed by at least one other programmer, resulting in better design, better testing, and better code.

It may seem inefficient to have two programmers doing "one programmer's job", but the reverse is true. Research on pair programming shows that pairing produces better code in about the same time as programmers working singly. That's right: two heads really are better than one!

It does take some practice to do well, and you need to do it well for a few weeks to see the results. Most programmers who learn pair programming prefer it, so we highly recommend it to all teams.

Pairing, in addition to providing better code and tests, also serves to communicate knowledge throughout the team. As pairs switch, everyone gets the benefits of everyone's specialized knowledge. Programmers learn, their skills improve, and they become more valuable to the team and to the company. Pairing, even on its own outside of XP, is a big win for everyone.

Test-Driven Development

Extreme Programming is obsessed with feedback, and in software development, good feedback requires good testing. XP teams practice "test-driven development", working in very short cycles of adding a test, then making it work. Almost effortlessly, teams produce code with nearly 100 percent test coverage, which is a great step forward in most shops. (If your programmers are already doing even more sophisticated testing, more power to you. Keep it up, it can only help!)

It isn't enough to write tests: you have to run them. Here, too, Extreme Programming is extreme. These "programmer tests", or "unit tests" are all collected together, and every time any programmer releases any code to the repository (and pairs typically release twice a day or more), every single one of the programmer tests must run correctly. One hundred percent, all the time! This means that programmers get immediate feedback on how they're doing. Additionally, these tests provide invaluable support as the software design is improved.

Design Improvement

Extreme Programming focuses on delivering business value in every iteration. To

accomplish this over the course of the whole project, the software must be well designed. The alternative would be to slow down and ultimately get stuck. So XP uses a process of continuous design improvement called "refactoring".¹⁰

The refactoring process focuses on removal of duplication (a sure sign of poor design), and on increasing the "cohesion" of the code, while lowering the "coupling". High cohesion and low coupling have been recognized as the hallmarks of well-designed code for at least thirty years.¹¹ The result is that XP teams start with a good, simple design, and always have a good, simple design for the software. This lets them sustain their development speed, and, in fact, generally increase speed as the project goes forward.

Refactoring is, of course, strongly supported by comprehensive testing that ensures that as the design evolves, nothing is broken. Thus the customer tests and programmer tests are a critical enabling factor. The XP practices support each other: they are stronger together than separately.

Continuous Integration

Extreme Programming teams keep the system fully integrated at all times. We say that daily builds are for wimps: XP teams build multiple times per day. (One XP team of forty people builds at least eight or ten times per day!)

The benefit of this practice can be seen by thinking back on projects you may have heard about (or even been a part of) where the build process was weekly or less frequently, and usually led to "integration hell", where everything broke and no one knew why.

Infrequent integration leads to serious problems on a software project. First of all, although integration is critical to shipping good working code, the team is not practiced at it, and often it is delegated to people who are not familiar with the whole system. Second, infrequently integrated code is often -- or usually -- buggy code. Problems creep in at integration time that are not detected by any of the testing that takes place on an unintegrated system. Third, weak integration process leads to long code freezes. Code freezes mean that you have long time periods when the programmers could be working on important shippable features, but that those features must be held back. This weakens your position in the market, or with your end users.

Collective Code Ownership

On an Extreme Programming project, any pair of programmers can improve any code at any time. This means that all code gets the benefit of many people's attention, which increases code quality and reduces defects. There is another important benefit as well: when code is owned by individuals, required features are often put in the wrong place, as one programmer discovers that he needs a feature somewhere in code that he does not own. The owner is too busy to do it, so the programmer puts the feature in his own code, where it does not belong. This leads to ugly, hard-to-maintain code, full of duplication and with low (bad) cohesion.

Collective ownership could be a problem if people worked blindly on code they did not understand. XP avoids these problems through two key techniques: the programmer tests catch mistakes, and pair programming means that the best way to work on unfamiliar code is to pair with the expert. In addition to ensuring good modifications when needed, this practice spreads knowledge throughout the team.

Coding Standard

XP teams follow a common coding standard, so that all the code in the system looks as if it was written by a single -- very competent -- individual. The specifics of the standard are not important: what is important is that all the code looks familiar, in support of collective ownership.

Metaphor

Extreme Programming teams develop a common vision of how the program works, which we call the "metaphor". At its best, the metaphor is a simple evocative description of how the program works, such as "this program works like a hive of bees, going out for pollen and bringing it back to the hive" as a description for an agent-based information retrieval system.

Sometimes a sufficiently poetic metaphor does not arise. In any case, with or without vivid imagery, XP teams use a common system of names to be sure that everyone understands how the system works and where to look to find the functionality you're looking for, or to find the right place to put the functionality you're about to add.

Sustainable Pace

Extreme Programming teams are in it for the long term. They work hard, and at a pace that can be sustained indefinitely. This means that they work overtime when it is effective, and that they normally work in such a way as to maximize productivity week in and week out. It's pretty well understood these days that death march

projects are neither productive nor produce quality software. XP teams are in it to win, not to die.

OTHER COMMON PRACTICES

The core practices of Extreme Programming do not specify all of the activities that are required to deliver a software project. As teams use XP, many find that other practices aid to their success, in some cases as significantly as some of the core practices. The following are some of other practices commonly used on successful XP teams.

Open Workspace

To maximize communication amongst the Whole Team, they work together in an Open Workspace. This is a large room, with tables in the center that can typically seat two to four pairs of developers. Figure 3 for shows an example of an XP workstation for 3 pairs of developers. By sitting together, all of the team members can establish instant communication when needed for the project. Teams establish their own rules concerning their space in order to ensure that everyone can work effectively. The walls of the Open Workspace are used to display information about the project. This will include big visible charts of metrics like passing acceptance tests and team productivity. There may be designs drawn on whiteboards. Project status will be displayed so that any participant or stakeholder of the project can always see progress.

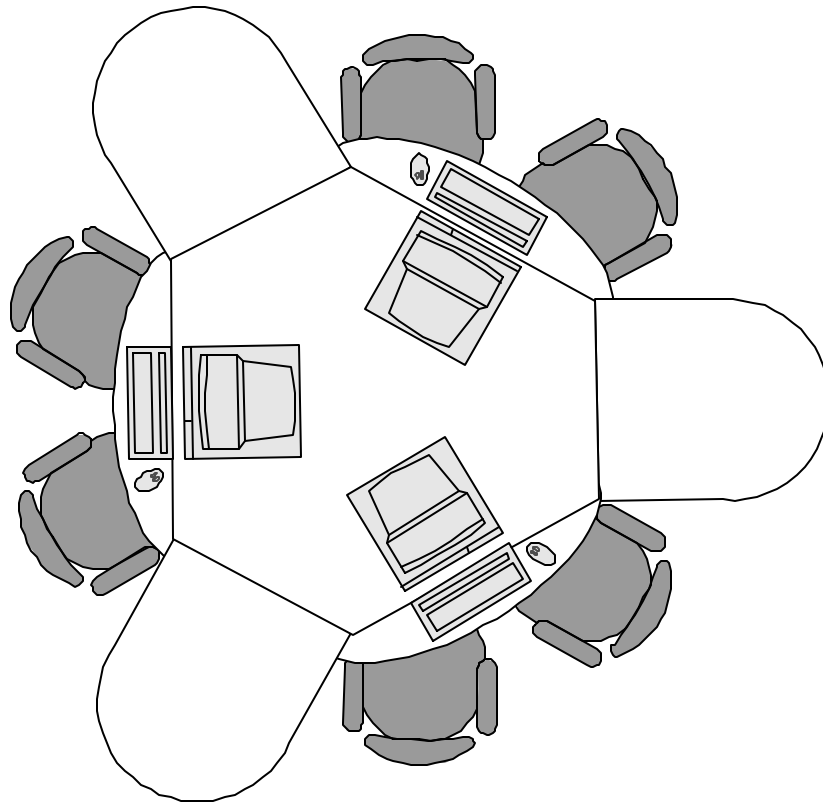


FIGURE 3: Extreme Programming Workstation¹²

Retrospectives

The XP practices provide feedback to the team as to the quality of the code and its alignment to the Customers needs. The team also needs feedback on how it is performing. Is it following the practices with discipline? Are there adaptations to the practices that would benefit the team? The practice commonly used for this is the Retrospective¹³. After each iteration, the team does a short reflection on what went well during the iteration and what should be improved in the next iteration. After a release of the product, a more in depth Retrospective is performed on the whole project.

Self-Directed Teams

A practice that is common amongst most of the agile methods is self-directed teams. The best people to make decisions about the project are those closest to the details, as long as they have an understanding of the overall goals of the project. Open communication allows team members to have the information required to make decisions. Managers are part of the communication loop, but are not bottlenecks in the decision making flow.

Customer Team

As XP is used on projects with more complex requirements, a team performs the Customer function. For larger or more complex projects, the Customer team may even exceed the Programming team in size. Some of the challenges faced by the

Customer team include communicating with and balancing the needs of multiple stakeholders, allocating resources to the appropriate projects or features, ensuring feedback to ensure that the requirements implemented achieve the stakeholders' goals. The specific Customer Team practices are still emerging in the agile community. The practices are guided by the same values as the other XP practices.

FITTING XP TO YOUR PROJECT

Is My Project A Good Fit For XP?

Probably the most commonly debated question regarding Extreme Programming is whether it can be used successfully on a particular type of project. Experience is proving that, as with other approaches to software development, the limitations often include both the characteristics of the project, the people on the team, and the organization in which they work. To evaluate whether the XP practices can help a team achieve greater success on their project, consideration must be given to the project characteristics, the people on the team, and the cultures of the organizations involved in the project.

The XP Values can be used as a template to test the fit of XP to a project, team, and organization. Simply evaluate the degree to which each value is current held by the team and the organization.

Communication

Does the team communicate constantly and effectively? Does this communication extend to their customer? Is the team's software readable and understandable (i.e. is it easy for Programmers to communicate with the code)?

Simplicity

Is the team comfortable with simple solutions? Can the team implement without a complete design the system prior to coding? Is the team comfortable with some ambiguity as to the exact requirements and designs? Can the team adapt often to changing requirements? Is the team working new code or code that is well designed and refactored?

Feedback

Can the team get feedback on its tasks and deliverables often? Does the team accept feedback constructively? When there are problems, does the team focus on the process to identify root causes (rather than the people)? How often does the team integrate, build, and test the complete software system?

Courage

Does the organization encourage individuals to not fear failure? Are individuals and teams encouraged to show initiative and make decisions for their projects? Are organizational boundaries easily crossed to solve problems on the project?

Typically, The greater the degree to which the team can answer, "YES" to these questions, the fewer changes are required and the easier it is for the team and organization to adopt XP. Some specific project and team guidelines for getting started are provided next.

GETTING STARTED

When selecting an initial project on which to try XP, consideration must be given to the challenges of using the new practices. New practices introduce risk to a project. Care must be taken to select an initial project that is not burdened by all of the most difficult obstacles to using XP, but does address enough typical obstacles such that the

success of the initial project can provide the basis for expanding to the rest of the organization.

Although most initial XP projects are not this fortunate, ideally, the initial project will have many of the following characteristics:

- ? Primarily new code versus legacy updates
- ? An identified and available source of requirements and feedback (i.e. on-site customer)
- ? Delivers important business value and has management visibility
- ? Uses an OO language/environment
- ? Is typical of the projects the organization will be doing in the future
- ? Has a co-located team in an open workspace
- ? Can be delivered to the end-user incrementally, at least every 4-6 weeks

In selecting the initial XP Project team, the main attribute of the team members should be a strong commitment to delivering the project and achieving its goals using the new practices. Some healthy skepticism about XP is acceptable, as long as the team members are willing to use the practices and let data and experience from the project guide any adaptations. The team ideally will have a few technical leaders familiar with other projects in the organization, but it is not desirable to have a team full of the most senior people. XP is a collaborative approach to development and as such, the initial project will benefit from members with strong “soft” skills, who prefer collaborative work environments. Beyond these characteristics, the team should be representative of teams that the organization will use in the future.

The simplest way to reduce risk on an initial project is maximize the skill of the team as quickly as possible. This can be achieved through recruiting team members that are already skilled in XP, training, or experienced coaching for an inexperienced team.

ADAPTATIONS

As teams begin adopting the XP practices, numerous obstacles and constraints must be confronted. The team may have trouble having access to the Customer everyday. The team may have trouble co-locating to an Open Workspace. The team may be so large that communicating without formal documentation is not feasible. How do we adjust? Must we abandon XP? The XP Values guide teams in solving these process problems on their projects.

The Courage value guides us to aggressively confront and remove any obstacles that would add steps, artifacts, or complexity to the process. This often means letting common sense outweigh bureaucracy. For example, teams sometimes do not feel empowered to change the physical work environment to have an Open Workspace (i.e. change the cubicles). Often, a little courage, negotiating, and a power screwdriver will remove this obstacle. Some teams struggle to have a Customer sitting with the team. The programmers develop from a requirements document and have never spoken to a Customer. Although the thought of having a customer present is desirable, the logistics can seem impossible, particularly if the best person to sit with the team does not live near the team or is constantly traveling. Often, with a slight reorganization and a modified communication infrastructure, a customer

can be identified that can sit with the team on a frequent basis.

Of course, courage can only take us so far. There will be constraints that interfere with our ability to implement the practices as described. A common example is legacy code. Many teams work with large code bases that do not have tests and are in dire need for Design Improvement. We want to aggressively move to the state where all of the code has passing tests, is understandable and well designed. The initial attempt is to rapidly get the code up to our new standard. Can we toss it and rewrite it? Would it really be that expensive and time consuming to fix it? Is there other, cleaner code available that we can replace it with? Very often, the answers are NO, YES, and NO, leaving the team no choice, but to live with the smelly code and improve as they can.

The XP Values give the team a helpful, simple tool to deal with this difficult, yet inevitable challenge. The constraint that causes a practice to be modified or abandoned is reviewed against each of the XP Values, using the following question: *“how will the influence of this XP Value be diminished as a result?”* In the case of our un-testable legacy code, a quick brainstorm

by the team might yield the ideas in the Impact column of Table 2. The team discusses ways to adapt the process that is guided by the values, yielding something like Adaptation Alternatives column.

Each alternative that the team considers is checked for its alignment to the values. As misaligned example, an alternative that states “all legacy code changes must be approved by a Change Control Board (CCB) prior to implementation” may be viable, but it is not Simple to implement; it reduces the frequency of feedback while we wait for the CCB to meet; and takes empowerment away from the programmers, reducing their Courage. Other alternatives that address the constraint that align closer to the XP Values are preferred.

By using this simple technique, teams adapt the XP Practices to their project and team needs. The importance of starting with Courage cannot be overstated. Many teams have been able to achieve a level of simplicity in their practices beyond what was thought possible. Although this may appear to introduce risk, Retrospectives after each iteration mitigate that risk by helping the team understand where additional adaptations are required.

SUMMARY

The pace of change in the software development industry remains at a high rate. People continue to push the boundaries of known techniques and practices in an effort to develop software as efficiently and effectively as possible. Extreme Programming and Agile Software Methodologies have emerged as an alternative to comprehensive methods designed primarily for very large projects. Teams using XP are delivering software often and with very low defect rates. As the industry continues to evolve, we are likely to see additional insights on how to leverage collaborative work on more and more types of projects.

