

Managing eXtreme Projects

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Keynote

Often people think at XP (eXtreme Programming) as a methodology where developers are free to do anything they want and take their life easy, in a nice and easygoing environment. It looks like as if requirement elicitation, analysis, design, and documentation had been abolished as useless. Moreover, project management had been buried as a damaging activity.

Such stereotype might have been somewhat supported by some extreme statements by the early proposers of XP and might even reflect some sort of truth. However, it falls short to describe the essence of XP.

Dante, the famous Italian poet, said in the well known poem "The Divine Comedy" that the living people on Earth could predict better closer events and felt short in predicting future situations, while died people in the Hell could predict better events farer away and were limited in understanding the current reality.

Well, XP acknowledges this well known fact and focuses on short term planning, quite in line with the prescription of lean management. However, such planning is very strict and aim at being extremely accurate. Developers are required to monitor their performance and to review it daily within the group and no less than monthly with the customer.

XP requires lots of discipline and commitment from developers. Such discipline is harder, even if less evident, than in other methodologies. Rather than filling forms, developers are required to behave in a totally different, more

supportive and collaborative way.

With the customer, developers have to focus on the needs, with a strong focus at a mutual understanding of what the customer really wants and when, without requiring the customer to understand complex formal documents.

With the fellow developers, XP developers have to share their work with a totally egoless approach: anyone can modify their code, refactor it, comment on it. Actually, they cannot even develop it alone, but in pairs.

Within the development practices, XP developers have to strictly adhere to the rule of test first, that is, to first write kind of pre- and post-conditions for the code to write and then to develop code matching such conditions. The code has to be formatted according to project standards, alternate standards, even if reasonable, cannot be adopted by individual developers as they may impair collective code ownership and refactoring. The code need to be documented in a very clean and concise way, using, whenever possible, the facilities provided by the programming language at hand.

XP requires a lot also from managers and project leaders. Each time you ask people to do more than what they were used to, you are really looking for a tough job. This is why XP introduces other, managerial-like, profiles, such as the coach, the mentor, etc.

Now, you may like or not XP, but please, do not say that it is a methodology made to make the life of people easy and nice