Panel

Agile Management – An Oxymoron?
Who needs managers anyway?

Lougie Anderson
(Chair)
Sabrix, Inc.

Glen B. Alleman
CH2M Hill

Kent Beck
Three Rivers Institute

Joe Blotner
Sabrix, Inc

Ward Cunningham
Cunningham & Cunningham

Mary Poppendieck
Poppendieck, LLC

Rebecca Wirfs-Brock
Wirfs-Brock Associates

ABSTRACT

"Self-directed team" is one of the mantras of Agile Methodologies. Self-direction means that the team's manager is relegated to a facilitator role with little or no influence over day-to-day activities. For example, Kent Beck has written that the manager of an XP project can do four things: ask for estimates on cost and results, move people around among projects, ask for status reports, and cancel the project. Agile literature in general says that managers shouldn't be directly involved in analysis, design, coding, testing or integration. They may (but only occasionally!) facilitate the process between the customer and the developers – and it would be nice if they provided food and toys to keep the team happy. It appears, then, that the agile manger is expected to hover on the fringes of a project asking a few questions and throwing in goodies – but with ultimate power (cancellation) in her hip pocket.

tute. She has over 20 years experience in the computer industry, having managed product groups involving internet technology, object technology, databases, and interactive multimedia. She has published papers on database benchmarking, data modeling, database user interfaces and tools, corporate digital libraries, and object technology. She served as the General Chair for the OOPSLA'96 Conference in San Jose and was a past board member of the OMG.

2. Glen B. Alleman, glen.alleman@rfets.gov

An operational definition of the management role is the "removal of impediments to progress." A typical set of functions performed by a manager includes: planning and budgeting, organizing and staffing, controlling and problem solving, and producing predictability, order, and consistency. The environment for these activities is rarely found in software development in the way intended by the author,

networking, and server operations for the Rocky Flats site. Prior to CH2M HILL, Glen was the Chief Technology Officer of Niwot Ridge Consulting specializing in enterprise application integration, system architecture, business process improvement, and project management applied to manufacturing, electric utility, petrochemical, aerospace, process control, publishing, and pharmaceutical industries.

3. Kent Beck, kent@threeriversinstitute.org

Diana Mekelburg describes three axes of project expectations:

- Product – what features are in the product

- Business – what business effects you expect to see from a product with the expected features

- Conduct – what behavior the rest of the organization expects from a well-run project.

The first two sets of expectations are manageable for the team. Presenting a reassuring and honest face from a project that is running internally quite different from the rest of the organization is a job requiring nerve, perspective, communication, contacts and creativity. In other words, the same skills that get managers made into managers.

Ordinary internal operations on an Extreme Programming team do not require management intervention. Daily business is covered by the team's rules, but more importantly the social contract implicit in the rules. Extraordinary events and foreign relations, though, are inevitable and an absolutely appropriate venue for the exercise of of managerial responsibility, or, as we geeks say, "Do some of that manager stuff…"

Kent Beck is the founder and director of TRI. He has pioneered

team members by being active and involved with the team and the rest of the company.

Joe Blotner has been involved in building software since 1996, as an engineer and a manager (in most cases, at the same time). He has performed these tasks for Timberline Software, Tektronix, Xerox and MeasureCast. In these organizations, he has worked in Waterfall, Iterative and Extreme Programming(TM) environments. He is currently in the trenches as the Senior Engineering Manager at Sabrix, Inc., a start-up software company delivering enterprise class transaction tax software to Global2000 customers. At Sabrix he reined in the chaos by developing and implementing a unique Agile development methodology as reported in his experience report "Agile Techniques to Avoid Firefighting at a Start-Up", presented at OOPSLA 2002. He started out his adult life as a stage actor, which dovetails nicely with his management career.

5. Ward Cunningham, ward@c2.com

There is more to management than handing out assignments and taking notes in the weekly status meeting. That more is the part that remains when you adopt an agile method. Extreme programming, for example, says nothing about capital purchase approval or salary administration, but that doesn't make these "downward looking" responsibilities go away. There are also "upward looking" responsibilities such as budgeting and strategic planning that are probably best if shouldered by an individual.

Still agile teams take time-consuming management activities and make them their own. That means a manager does more oversight than day-to-day "managing" of the programming activities. Can we therefore expect the role to change? Certainly. Every XP value: communication, simplicity, feedback and courage, suggests possi-

Mary Poppendieck, Managing Director of the Agile Alliance, is a seasoned leader in both operations and new product development with more than 25 years of IT experience. She has led teams implementing solutions ranging from enterprise supply chain management to digital media, and built one of 3M's first Just-in-Time lean production systems. Mary is currently the President of Poppendieck LLC. Her book Lean Software Development: An Agile Toolkit brings lean thinking to software development.

6.1 Rebecca Wirfs-Brock, rebecca@wirfs-brock.com

I've always done what's needed. I don't like to be pigeonholed as just being good at one thing. So as an engineer I've happily planned, documented (gasp), and made tough choices. Coding or design for me has never been the end goal—just the fun part. Satisfying complex problem within a limited time, budget, and with changing customer needs is the real goal.

I've also had the title of software manager. Even in those jobs I jumped in and did what was needed. It startled people that I would write and read code, and wanted to weigh in on design alternatives. You might not have liked me as your manager. But as a manager, I had added responsibilities that were never officially part of my non-managerial jobs. People and political and organizations issues were front and center. Accountability and getting the group to gel were my responsibilities. So while I'd like it if everyone would just assume the right attitude, play well together, and do what's best, I believe there is an important role for managers in an agile world. In this agile world, I think there are even more managerial challenges. As a manager, you can't just follow a standard recipe for success—you must adapt, reflect, and lead by example.

Rebecca Wirfs-Brock is lead author of Object Design: Roles, Responsibilities and Collaborations, Addison-Wesley 2003. She is a recognized innovator in practical object analysis and design techniques. She invented the set of development practices known as Responsibility-Driven Design. No wonder why she thinks being responsible and accountable (whether object or human) is important! She spent 17 years as a Software Engineer at Tektronix, where among other accomplishments; she managed the first commercial Smalltalk effort and was the technical lead for the development of Color Smalltalk. She has been involved in the design and architecture of a telecommunications framework, an online banking system, and has mentored teams in design, architecture, and managing incremental, iterative object-technology projects.