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Rapid and Agile Stability

The family of software methodologies known as agile is a group of iterative and incremental development approaches where requirements and solutions evolve through collaboration between self-organizing, cross-functional teams. In all cases the goal is for teams to have the ability to respond to change while following an agreed-to plan, and applying an iterative approach in order to provide customers with early and continuous delivery of software. The stability is contained in teams that carry this out in a repeatable way based on a core set of principles.

While there is no single agile method, there are several methods that are influenced by agile principles in various ways. These span the spectrum from Extreme Programming to Scrum to TSP as well as others. In the end, the methods used to implement the process must be a good fit for the environment and the quality of the products required. Factors that influence the applicability of this "right fit" include size, complexity, safety, quality, cost, and schedule.

Agile principles may apply to projects that have development cycles that go anywhere from a few months to two or more years. Other factors that must be taken into account include the ability of an organization to adopt agile practices; the suitability of agile practices for a given product; and the suitability of agile practices for the organization responsible for product development. Agile principles embrace requirements changes, enable delivery of software frequently, emphasize the need for daily interaction between customers and developers, and value self-organizing teams. Agile processes provide sustainable development, call attention to the need for technical excellence and good design, and view simplicity as essential. In this environment, leadership must establish a regular drumbeat of face-to-face conversations with development teams to plan and track project status. To be effective at planning, tracking, and improving, these teams collect basic measures that reveal status during a project cycle and opportunities for improved future planning and other aspects of the methodologies being applied. Finally, these teams must decide together the priority of the products to be delivered according to the development environment and the needs of the sponsor and the user.

It is the attention to product quality plus the application of repeatable development methods that leads us back to the focus of this issue on Rapid and Agile Stability. I invite you to consider effective and repeatable software system development and maintenance approaches in both an agile and systematic way as you enjoy the articles in this month's issue of CROSSTALK magazine.

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