

Project Managers

Project managers on an XP team facilitate communication inside the team and coordinate communication with customers, suppliers, and the rest of the organization. Project managers act as team historians, reminding the team how much progress it has made. Project managers need to be creative in packaging the project's information for presentation to executives and peers. To remain accurate, the information changes frequently; which gives project managers the challenge of communicating changes helpfully.

Planning in XP is an activity, not a phase. Project managers are responsible for keeping plans synchronized with reality. They are often in the best position to drive improvement in the planning process itself. Teams may start spending a day on planning every week; but with continual improvement, they can get better results in less time. The best teams accurately plan a week's worth of work in an hour, but achieving this efficiency requires practice.

Information flows both ways, into and out of the team. Project managers facilitate communication coming into the team from customers, sponsors, suppliers, and users. To facilitate communication, they introduce the right person on the team to the right person outside the team as needed, rather than act as a communication bottleneck. Project managers also facilitate communication within the team, increasing cohesiveness and confidence. The power gained from being an effective facilitator exceeds that of being a controller of even important information.

Product Managers

In XP, product managers write stories, pick themes and stories in the quarterly cycle, pick stories in the weekly cycle, and answer questions as implementation uncovers unspecified areas of stories. A product manager doesn't just pick a bunch of stories at the beginning of the project and then sit back. A plan in XP is an example of what could happen, not a prediction of what will happen.

When the team has overcommitted, the product manager helps the team decide priorities by analyzing the differences between actual and assumed requirements. The product manager adapts the story and theme to what is really happening now.

Stories should be sequenced for business, not technical, reasons. The goal is a working system from the first week. Product managers don't necessarily start at the beginning and work through to the end. I talked to the product manager for a planning tool. He wanted to try the editing features first. The programmers didn't think it made sense to modify information before the user could enter it in the first place. Since editing was the most valuable part of the product, the product manager defined a dummy data set that could be entered manually by the programmers. Then everyone could see what editing was like. This gave the whole team an early look at the heart of the product and gave them plenty of time to refine it.

The system should be "whole" at the end of the first weekly cycle. If you plan to process images, you should be able to process an image at the end of the first week. The product manager picks stories to make this happen.

Product managers encourage communication between customers and programmers, making sure the most important customer concerns are heard and acted on by the team. If the team is practicing Real Customer Involvement, product managers are responsible for encouraging the system to grow in a way that meets the particular needs of the customers who are picking stories as well as the market as a whole.