
Customer Communication Boot Camp: What the Customer is Thinking, But Not Saying

Tutorial Description

Agile teams interface with the customer more often than in any other style of software development. However, quantity without quality is just more of the same. How do we increase quality and effectiveness of customer communications in addition to the quantity? What are the best ways to communicate with the customer in order to reap the most benefits from this increased interaction?

This tutorial will give developers an opportunity to practice customer communications in small, video-taped, meeting simulations. Participants will not only be able to watch themselves interact with customers on video, but will also receive concrete feedback from customers on their communication and meeting skills. Additionally, participants will learn common mistakes in meetings with customers, and techniques that can improve the quality of their interactions.

Audience

Anyone who works closely with customers, from developers to project managers, can benefit from the opportunity to watch themselves in meetings and receive feedback on communication and meeting skills.

Benefits

This tutorial will give participants the opportunity to see what they do and how they come across in meetings with customers, in order to improve the effectiveness of their communications. Additionally, participants will have the chance to see meetings from the customer's view and put themselves in the customer's shoes.

Tutorial Background

Interested in bringing more customer perspective into the Agile community, Ms. Bowers presented "A Customer's Perspective of an Agile Team" at the APLN Leadership Summit at Agile 2006. That session, a case study of her experience in filling the customer role on an agile team, was well received and generated much interest. This spawned more ideas for venues to bring more of the "client perspective" into the agile community. The proposed tutorial, a hands-on simulation with real customers, seemed a great way to give participants a chance to hear concretely about their meeting and interaction skills from customers.

About the Tutorial Leaders

Backgrounds

Alexia Bowers is co-founder and COO of Ternary Software, Inc., a leading provider of custom software development services to early-stage technology companies, and a pioneer of Agile methods for both software development and overall corporate structure. Her leadership at Ternary has helped the firm become the 30th fastest-growing privately-held company in the Philadelphia region. In addition to corporate management, Ms. Bowers has lead numerous projects at Ternary, including managing and implementing custom e-commerce sites in Java and JSP, developing applicant tracking systems for Fortune-100 clients, managing and developing large-scale web applications within the Pharmaceutical industry, and acting as product manager on internal projects. Ms. Bowers holds a Masters Degree in Cognitive and Neural Psychology from the University of South Florida, and a Masters Degree of Software Engineering from Penn State University. Her academic background also includes four years of teaching undergraduate-level courses in Learning & Behavior and Motivation, and significant lab work as a Neuroscientist and Ph.D. student.

Brian Robertson is the founder and CEO of Ternary Software, a provider of outsourced software development services and agile process consulting. Ternary is one of the Philadelphia region's fastest-growing private companies; the firm has won numerous awards for fast growth, sustainable environmental practices, and for being among the best places to work in the region. Mr. Robertson is known internationally for pioneering Holacracy™, a system for harnessing agility in all aspects of corporate organization. He frequently teaches and speaks at conferences, occasionally as a keynote, and his published writings have been translated into several languages. His 20-year background in software spans many roles, and he was pioneering agile processes before "agile" was coined. He began programming at age six, and launched his first software-related business at twelve.

In addition to his work at Ternary, Mr. Robertson spends significant time helping others. He often advises promising local companies and entrepreneurs, sometimes as a board member, and he serves on a key advisory committee for an early-stage investment fund run by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Mr. Robertson also shares his expertise at a few conferences each year; recently he presented at SD Best Practices 2005, spoke at Agile 2005's Executive Summit, and delivered a keynote address on Technology and Education at a regional conference of the same name.

Contact Info:

Alexia Bowers
Ternary Software, Inc.
180 Sheree Blvd., Suite 3800
Exton, PA 19341

e-mail: lex@ternarysoftware.com

Web: <http://www.ternarysoftware.com>

Brian J Robertson
Ternary Software, Inc.
180 Sheree Blvd., Suite 3800
Exton, PA 19341

e-mail: brian@ternarysoftware.com

Web: <http://www.ternarysoftware.com>
Blog: <http://enlightenedbusiness.blogspot.com>

Content Overview

The Customers

The panel will consist of 3 people representing the customer space:

- Clients/Customers: These panelists will have filled the role of an internal customer on an agile project.
- Account Manager / Client Liasons: These panelists will have acted as internal champions for external customers of agile projects.

Outline

This 180 minute tutorial will consist of four parts: introduction, video-taped simulations of meetings with customers, video review and feedback, and concluding comments. The outline follows:

	Phase	Description	Length
1	Introduction	The tutorial leaders will introduce the tutorial and set up the simulations.	20 min.
2	Video-taped Meeting Simulations	The audience will be split into 2 groups – one for each project meeting simulation. Three to four people from each group will participate in one 20 minute meeting simulation and the rest will observe. In each meeting simulation, the customer will present a small project that he/she would like developed, and the team will have to gather user stories and provide estimates for them.	30 min.
3	Video-tape Review and Feedback	The audience will watch each video-taped meeting, the customers will provide feedback, and the audience will debrief. Each review will be timeboxed to 45 minutes. There will be one 15 minute break.	90 min. + 15 min. break
4	Concluding Comments	The customers will provide concluding comments.	25 min.