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ITB11769

This chapter appears in the book, *Skills for Managing Rapidly Changing IT Projects*
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Chapter I

Team Working

This chapter is based mainly on my experiences as a development member of industrial and research projects in which I have participated in the first years of my career. Team working is very different from acting as a single developer or consultant who has the entire responsibility and control of the assigned work. The main difference is that in individual work, you have to develop a single part of a project that matches your skills and knowledge, while in team working, the collective effort of different individuals with different knowledge and backgrounds can be mixed together in order to increase the mean value of the cultural level of the components. The knowledge and understanding of a team is greater than the mean calculated on all the individuals of the team, since each member benefits from the cultural level, skills, and suggestions of the other members.

Often, the chances for the success of a project are based on how well the development team and project group are created. Other times, the success of the company in developing projects is due mainly to the capacity of top management to create well-mixed teams with good team managers. The first part of this book is not focused on how to manage a company (that is obviously beyond this topic) but only on how it is possible to create a team (and also manage it) that can steer the project toward a success story. Team working, as well as other activities, is supported by some values. For team working and also for each of the other activities presented and discussed in this first part of the book, the main values will be evidenced in order to collect a minimum number of values that must be present in an IT project environment.

Values

Before starting to describe how to create a team or to share roles among team members, it is necessary to examine the values that must be considered as the milestones for the creation and the survival of a team in a real working environment.

The word *value* sometimes might seem to be misused in this chapter and in the following chapter, since some of what has been reported under the “value hat” is considered as an activity or an action several times. I prefer also to call value an activity such as communication, since it can give real added value to the project if exploited correctly.

Communication

Communication is the main value to be considered within a working group. The communication channel always must be kept open in order to react promptly to problems due both to people and to technology. Communication among team members can be developed and increased in several ways: frequent meetings, shared documentation, pair programming (discussed in detail in Chapter X, related to eXtreme Programming), collective ownership of the code, and so forth.

The experience I had in the past is that verbal communication increases communication, and since the main communication channel humans have is the spoken language, it is better to have frequent meetings in which we can discuss technical questions and sometime personal matters. A meeting is not a way to lose an hour by talking about projects, but it is, for example, half an hour spent to discuss a problem or to share a knowledge or idea that can save several hours of development or unsuccessful tentative problem solving. Communication then can be supported by other media, such as documentation, code, or programming practices such as pair programming (i.e., two developers in front of the same computer). The concept of meeting contributes to aggregate the group and the concept of standing-meeting (all people participating in the meeting do not sit down but stand up in order to finish the meeting in the shortest possible time without useless discussions), thus saving time and using time to the best. Communication also is the basis for other values that have to be developed in the team.

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