

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear **CROSSTALK** Editor,

Paul McMahon's article, "Bridging Agile and Traditional Development Methods: A Project Management Perspective" in the May 2004 edition of **CROSSTALK** on bridging between agile and traditional development methods may have missed the real point. An on-site customer representative for a subcontractor in an environment where the customer is encouraged to change requirements can have serious risks, not only for the prime, but also for all of the other subs that have to adjust to those changes. Integration is far harder than straight development precisely because the communication cost of keeping the various pieces working together is large.

Often embracing change means never having to get it right. This has been a primary cause of failure on many so-called agile projects. (The most famous XP project was what should have been a routine payroll system at Chrysler that was cancelled prior to completion due to cost overruns and late deliveries of needed functionality.)

Good up-front architecture and good design mitigate the risks. Both the architecture and the implemented design need to allow for managed change. McMahon does this by adding process weight to agile methods in the form of his recommendations.

Actually, I believe that his modification to the waterfall model, or some other similar modifications, are

pretty common to successful development regardless of whether any subcontractors are agile or not.

So, I would contend that the real point of McMahon's article is that successful development is not about adapting to XP by moving toward the middle. It is about the middle being in the right place in the first place because extremes in either direction create extreme risks. The XPers need to move toward the middle as well. If they ever want to build in a true system-of-systems environment, they will recognize that while change is itself a requirement, it needs to be accepted, managed, and controlled, but not embraced.

For a humorous, yet capable, description of the pitfalls (and positives as well) of XP, check out the book "XP Refactored," by Matt Stephens and Doug Rosenberg. It is a combination of clinical dissection and gossipy tell-all about XP. And the only thing extreme about it is the humor.

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The opinions in this letter are the author's and do not represent Battelle Memorial Institute as a whole.

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