

Unified Commitment, and the Rule of 3rd's – an Agile Agreement Approach

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Overview

This paper is offered as an approach for agile software development teams to use as the simple basis for an agreement with customer's new to the workings of agile. The Unified Commitment, and Rule of 3rd's (UCR3) is based on the premise that the customer's:

- Will be reluctant or skeptical of an 'optional scope' environment
- Are both schedule and cost conscious
- Need to produce measurable business value using the developed software

UCR3 requires teams to:

- Put the right people on the team (customer and development)
- Determine or communicate business value up front
- Set a project completion date, based on the best information at hand
- Deliver a solution that delivers the business value in the simplest way possible in a duration equal to 1/3 of the planned schedule.
- Use the experience gained from the first third of the schedule to determine what should be delivered in the last two thirds of the schedule.
- Use the Planning Game to plan releases for at least the 1/3, 2/3 and project end milestones, and smaller (1-3 week) iterations in-between.

More Detail

The Right People on the Team & Business Value Determination

The inclusion of the right customers in a software development project is both critical and smart. Customer involvement in a software development project requires commitment, performance, and discipline – difficult things to muster for people who have little or no stake in the outcome. Only when there is stake in outcomes of a project will people show both passion and responsibility for its efforts. Passion and responsibility are a software development project's fuel, and only careful analysis of the business objectives being sought, and articulation of how and where the impact of their realization will be felt will surface the right customers. With the 'right' customers a software development project will have the best shot at engaging customers in a manner that allows them to focus primarily on the production of business value. A unified commitment to producing specific business value is the best environment for a team of customers and developers to play the software game. In this environment, agile software development can thrive.

How does a software development team ensure that the 'right' customers are on the team? By including in their agreement tasks who's deliverable is to identify the business benefit being sought by the project, and how the specific customer's identified for the project fit into the value proposition. Once business value is clear, and the stake each customer has is understood, the customers and development team are now striving for the same goals, even before specific software functional needs are on the table.

Set a Project Completion Date

Using the need for specific business value set a project completion date that would allow the biggest business benefit while allowing what the team believes will be enough time to deliver. Note that whatever information is available to the developer and customer teams should be used to set this date. Constraining the schedule is what's important.

Deliver a Solution in 1/3 of the Schedule

The goal here is to get at the most critical elements of a solution that will provide the most business value. The final product of this first third must cover the breadth necessary to achieve business value.

The premise is that customers will be okay with leaving some functionality out because they have 2/3 of the schedule left. Developers will get a breadth first look at the 'requirements', and the customer's ideas of what types of functionality will produce the business benefits they desire will be put to the test, resulting in valuable discovery for the subsequent thirds.

During the first third, the development teams goal is to show customers working software however simple and crude, at a regular frequency; to develop and show their understanding of the business value being sought; and to develop technical recommendations regarding the remaining two thirds.

During the first third, the customer teams goal is to constrain functionality to the most important features that will give them the breadth of functionality needed to produce the business value they are striving for and to learn from the process.

Plan and Deliver the Remaining Thirds

Using the knowledge gained through working software developed during the first third, re-confirm the following:

- The business value being sought
- The project end date
- The customer team resources
- The development team resources

Run the planning game. Conduct a release plan for at least the remaining thirds, and plan small iterations. Continually ask if the software being produced can be used to create the intended business value.