

CHAPTER 7

CONTRIBUTIONS OF CUSTOMER AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES

This chapter will describe about the role of customer involvement on agile software development projects. The customer support is sought for clarifying the requirements, for prioritizing requirements that are gathered and for obtaining feedback through frequent demos. Online access between the customer and the team should be a welcome feature. These roles are represented diagrammatically in Figure 7.1.

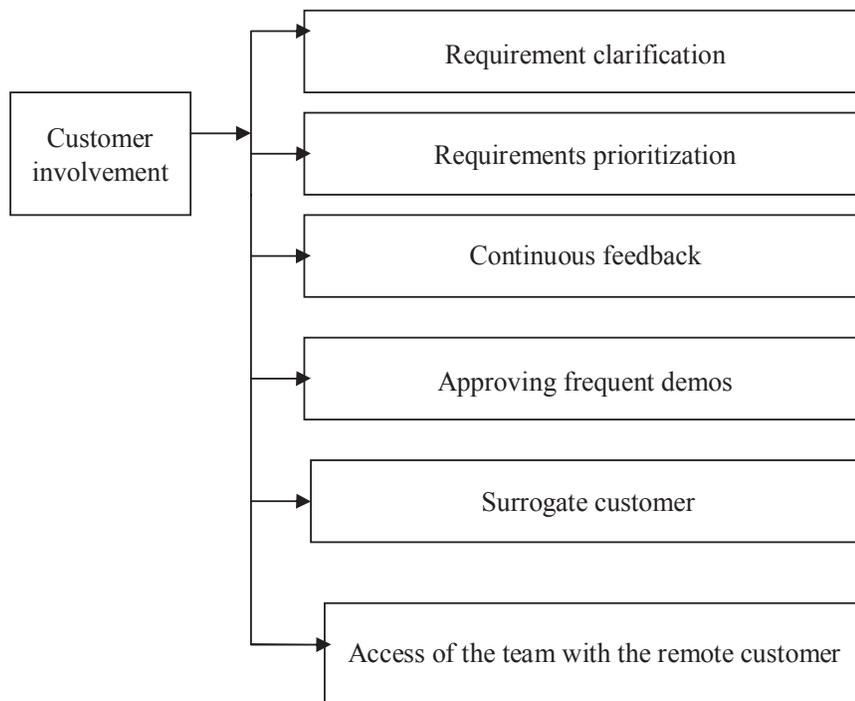


Figure 7.1 Role played by customer and their representatives

7.1 REQUIREMENTS CLARIFICATION

The customer or their representatives are responsible for clarifying the requirements which are in the form of user stories. Retrieving requirements from the customer is posed as a major challenge in agile software projects. An experience was shared by an agile coach as, “It is very difficult to get the detailed requirements from a customer who is remotely located and it consumes a lot of time. A local customer representative would be a welcome alternative for this. At times, the customer representative may not be in a position to clarify all the requirements. Then again following delayed customer feedback we need to take a risk of making (our own) assumptions” — Prac 38. The teams are forced to mid-course changes in requirements. This may lead to rework and hence additional payment from the customers.

7.2 REQUIREMENTS PRIORITIZATION

The requirements obtained from the customer have to be prioritized. If there are multiple customers and each one gives their own priority, then a meeting has to be convened for negotiation with them and the user stories has to be prioritized accordingly.

7.3 CONTINUOUS FEEDBACK

Absence of continuous feedback from the customer will result in the difficult of assessing the team’s work with respect to the requirements stated by the customer. The team that gets feedback from the customer is prone to have better and frequent communication with the customer. The obtained feedback will be incorporated into development cycles. Continuous integration with continuous delivery with continuous feedback and proper follow up will result in better software quality product.

The continuous integration practices include the maintenance of a single source repository. The build has to be self tested and automated. The team members should integrate the code as many times possible in a day. Testing has to be carried out on clone of the production environment. On a remote team member who is trying to integrate the code with the other remote member, then any member of the team should be able to get the latest executable file and the deployment has to be automated.

7.4 CUSTOMER FEEDBACK THROUGH FREQUENT DEMOS

The agile teams use demonstrations as a way to obtain the customer feedback. The demos are presented by the team to the customer or his local representative at regular intervals and feedback is obtained. Continuous follow up will also be made by the team with customer for any unsolved issues. Demos are useful for clearing any assumptions made by the development teams in lieu of the customer not providing clear requirements. For the customers who are geographically distributed, the demos are shown through video files and the feedback is obtained using chat engines and electronic mails.

7.4.1 Surrogate Customer

Customers may be busy with their own business and might not list their entire requirements. Gathering requirements from the customer consumes most of the time. Few persons from the customer team may be identified as customers themselves and demos or the assumptions in delivering the demos will be discussed with them. Such customer representatives are called as surrogate customer.

7.4.2 Access of the Team with the Remote Customer

The remote customer can be accessed through various means such as video conferencing, chat engines, email communication and through telephones. A developer has shared his experience as, “In the recent days, video conferencing has become the order of the day for communicating with the customer located at a remote place. This solves the communication gaps to a considerable extent and increases collaboration” — Prac 26. The above said access points can be an alternative to the face to face discussion with the customer.

7.5 RESEARCH FINDINGS RELATED TO LITERATURE

Boehm and Turner (2003) claim the involvement of knowledgeable customers to be collaborative, responsible, authorized and committed. Our research suggests the levels of customer involvement on agile projects either directly in person or from remote locations interacting through video conferencing.

In few cases customer and their representatives may be absent when gathering the requirements. Our research explains the mediator role played by agile coach who acts as a spokesperson in interpreting the requirements stated by customer to the development team members.