



**LUNATECH**  
**RESEARCH**

# **The Myth of the On-Site Customer**

Peter Hilton • Talk About IT, Amsterdam, 24 May 2011

## About the speaker

- Peter Hilton (UK)
- Based in Rotterdam, since 2000
- Software developer at Lunatech Research, since 2004
- Lunatech Research Operations Director
- Two parallel interests in computer software:
  - technology
  - development methods



→ Student of  
mathematics,  
languages &  
music

→ Programmer



Software  
Developer



Solution  
Architect



Technology  
Expert



Student of  
Methodology



Project  
Manager



Operations  
Director



**37** IT projects

**29** external customers

**12** industries

**6** countries



0 real Scrum projects

... but each project more like the ideal Scrum project than the last



## Agile software development at Lunatech

- We manage the high risk and uncertainty of using cutting-edge technology to solve hard and messy problems on difficult projects
- We use agile software development techniques, within the bounds of what is realistic and acceptable
- We use the best agile approach possible

This presentation is about a single question...



**How  
involved  
is my  
customer?**

“ We already wrote the specification

Financial services, Amsterdam Zuid





## Situation

- Business unit was not used to software development
- Mature management organisation
- The weekly status report
- Old-school meetings
- External project manager and application manager (FAB)
- Existing requirements specification



## Task

- Automate spreadsheet financial calculations
- Develop a new online product
- Start with a fail-fast proof-of-concept
- Conceive a user-interface from scratch
- Achieve faster development than weekly status meetings would allow
- Deliver for a fixed-price



## Activity

- Long meetings about the details - working out the calculations
- Writing the real specifications - in far more detail
- Project phases, with first delivery after six weeks
- Web-based (extranet) task management (JIRA)



## Result

- Successful development project
- Detailed specifications discovered and documented
- New priorities after initial iterations
- Additional budget for follow-on iterations



## Lessons learned

- My customer will take all the transparency he can get
- My customer (seriously) underestimated their own hours to describe details
- Online tools can contribute to remote transparency and fewer status meetings
- Accountants can be agile too



“ We were on a mission

Government, Washington, DC



## Situation

- Busy customer on another continent
- Vaguely-defined requirements
- Very little information about the project available
- Fixed six month window for project delivery



# Task

- Customise our own product
- Define the project road map, requirements and functionality
- Deliver incremental development milestones, linked to the contractual payment schedule
- Deliver on-time





## Activity

- Zero ongoing interaction
- Face-to-face meetings only at project start and end
- Self-managing agile software development team



## Result

- Non-customer aspects remained agile, eg documentation
- Prioritised on-time delivery
- My customer accepted the final software delivery without raising any issues



## Lessons learned

- The exception proves the rule
- External factors can prevent use of agile techniques
- (This was my least agile software project for years)
- Less customer involvement meant we needed more internal discipline within the team

\* ‘prove’ as in *proeven*, not ‘demonstrate to be true’



“ They don't know it's Scrum  
Marketing automation, Rotterdam





Wall

Info

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## Bram van der Vlugt moet Sinterklaas blijven

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Public figure

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[Bram van der Vlugt moet S...](#) · [Top posts](#) ▼**Wendeline de Cuba-Wilmink**

Hoewel ik Bram absoluut een vrije dag gun op 5 december, zal ik hem toch heel erg missen als Sint. Ik mis de verslaggeving door Aart Staartjes ook nog steeds!

Saturday at 20:36

2 people like this.

**Erika Zijderveld** Ja Aart was echt zooo leuk... Die waren met de oude hoofd- en wegwijspiet echt een geweldige combi...

Yesterday at 10:19

**Wendeline de Cuba-Wilmink** Dat bedoel ik, echt weergaloze humor, ookal was ik nog zo klein! Ik hoop dat de nieuwe Sint een masterclasje heeft gekregen van die corifeen!

Yesterday at 10:22

**Sasha DeMonaco**

Was het trouwens al iemand opgevallen dat 21-5 achterstevoren 5-12 is?

Saturday at 19:19

3 people like this.

**Chantal van Pinxteren**

neeeeeee...er is MAAR 1 ECHTE sinterklaas !!! en dat is Bram !! dat is de sinterklaas die ik ook uit mijn jeugd ken....hij mag niet stoppen hoor...

23 hours ago

## Situation

- Proxy customer - a marketing-focused team member who represented the business
- Commercial team layer between dev team and customer
- Scrum project with a newly-trained Scrum Master



## Task

- Assist product owner - document and communicate requirements and functional design
- Assist Scrum Master - develop the Scrum process for a new team
- Assist development team - develop the software
- Become unnecessary



## Activity

- Scrum with all the trimmings, except one thing...
- Development team members never met the customer
- Single product owner uses Scrum to produce and implement customer specifications





## Result

- Successful Scrum iterations based on a Scrum backlog
- Additional functional specifications for the end customer
- More effort than pure Scrum to produce the additional documentation (but less than traditional development)
- More complex planning to make sure that implementation follows documentation



## Lessons learned

- *Sinterklaas* is really just someone's dad
- Proxy *Sinterklaas* (*hulpsinterklaas*) is still good, however (you still get presents)
- Scrum can bridge a gap within an organisation
- No access to the actual customer was still a pain



“ You guys know what you’re doing  
customer confidential



## Situation

- Off-site entrepreneurial customer
- Less local customer, but a more involved one
- Remote Scrum
- Limited budget



# Task

- Develop a new product from scratch
- Develop code with an open-source model so my customer can access the code
- Minimise development costs
- Develop with a slow burn rate



## Activity

- Use an on-line tool (a wiki) for product backlog
- Publish daily Scrum board photos
- Skype to discuss features
- My customer downloads daily builds



## Result

- Highly cost-efficient development
- Constant interaction with my customer
- Constant feedback
- Interaction facilitated by e-mail, wiki, github, Skype and Twitter



## Lessons learned

- Scrum's daily interaction is valuable
- Not being face-to-face is a disadvantage
- This interaction is more effort when working remotely
- I will take all the feedback I can get





## Conclusion

- Involvement from ‘the business’ is a key success factor on a software development project
- This works best when my customer is a single person
- Agile software development means focusing on customer collaboration
- Scrum defines efficient but effective collaboration
- A full-time on-site customer is a myth, in my experience
- Agile software development is possible despite this



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