"Lean Startup" – The Most Extreme Agile Method by Far

by Tom and Kai Gilb

We love "Lean Startup", the book by Eric Ries (2011). We are recommending it to all our adventurous and open-minded professional friends. We enjoyed reading it as an ebook alternately on iPad and iPhone. The length is nice and short, the practical examples still rich. The deep understanding of a high risk, high uncertainty learning process is impressive.

Eric believes in the same basic ideas of development that many of us have championed for years. Clear *quantified* ideas of real world progress, being tested rapidly and frequently in feedback cycles. The emphasis being 'learning what is real and true, asap'.

The difference is that Eric applies these ideas at an extreme that we personally have not dared to think or experience. He is operating at the 30 to 50 real changes a day being measured and learned from, from the real world. This is about gathering 'requirements' from the real world by continuously (every day) and frequently (dozens of measured hypothesis per day). This is about testing alternative *designs* just as early and continuously, and letting design and architecture emerge, as whatever *really* works in satisfying the *simultaneously* emerging requirements.

This is revolutionary! But for the sceptic, Eric documents in detail how it works in real named businesses. Eric is very clear about his sources of ideas, the classical gurus like Deming, Drucker, Toyota-Ohno, and many such more. He is equally clear that his method's role is primarily a framework to allow extremely rapid learning about what really works, and for whom it works.

He clearly positions 'Lean Startup' as a way of managing system-building processes such as agile methods like XP and Scrum. We and our professional friends have long campaigned for much better multidimensional quantified quality requirements, for a rich variety of stakeholders (gilb.com). Lean Startup makes these
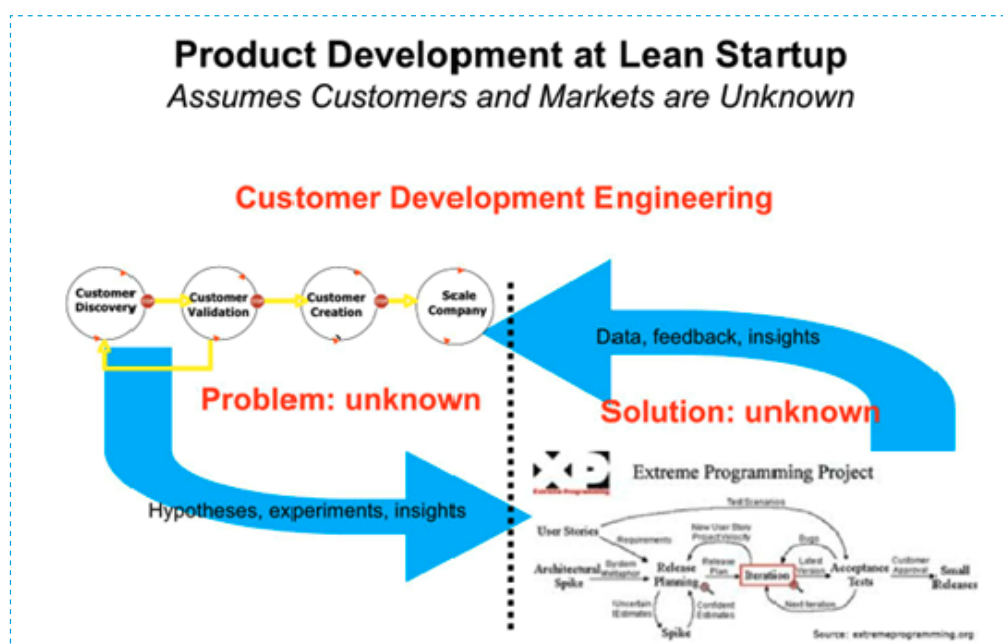
a centerpiece of the method.

However, the majority of 'agile' developers don't want to know about such disciplined quantified thinking. They would rather fail.

Eric speaks openly of his earlier failed projects (using conventional wisdom), and those of other businesses and clients. The conventional startup, and software development methods are inevitably highly failure-prone, and have been for decades.

That is because there is too little clarity of purpose (clear quantified quality requirements), and too little understanding of the variety of stakeholder values.

The Lean Startup ideas convincingly show how to avoid the embarrassing pervasive development project waste. History shows that the developers themselves, while intelligent enough to use these disciplined Lean Startup methods, are not likely to jump in and adopt them on their own initiative. They (developers) clearly prefer to get well paid to code fast – using Agile methods alone, using relatively little engineering discipline (and Lean Startup is a rigorous scientific method and engineering discipline). They seem to feel no real responsibility for successful outcomes. Failure still gets well paid, at their level.

Source: http://www.slideshare.net/venturehacks/the-lean-startup-2

So this brings up the question of who this book is for. And who will in fact make sure the ideas are implemented. This has to be the people laying the investment on the table, hoping to get a return for it: directors, CEOs, CTOs, angels (startup investors).

They need to demand, as a precondition for their investment, the kind of rapid learning, and rapid early 'pivoting' (major changes in architecture, stakeholders, markets, product design) that Lean Startup teaches. It is this level of power and responsibility that needs to understand the basics of Lean Startup, and to demand their use.

We think this executive level has for far too long, in the history of software development, totally abdicated their responsibility to ensure serious management of IT and software projects.

Our extensive experience shows they rarely bother to even have clear quantified trackable requirements for massive (like $100 million) investments. Business schools have not been helpful in training managers to deal with multi-dimensional critical project requirements. If history is any guide, we are not going to change our irresponsible software investment culture in the short term,

but Lean QA is a clear opportunity for the wiser top managers to make sure THEY will succeed, and hopefully in the longer term the amateur, non-scientific, non-engineering methods of the current software culture will die out.

Get the book, read it now, spread the word, and see Eric's many good presentations and videos as a supplement (see references).

References

- www.theleanstartup.com/
  The official website of all things Lean Startup presented by Eric Ries.

- www.slideshare.net/venturehacks/the-lean-startup-2
  Eric Ries' presentation on lean startups. From Steve Blank's Customer Development course at Berkeley. Learn more and hear the audio at http://bit.ly/ 3qsvJ.

- www.startuplessonslearned.com/2008/09/lean-startup.html
  8 Sep 2008 – (Update April, 2011: In September, 2008 I wrote the following post in which I (ER)published my thoughts on the term "lean startup" for the first time

- http://eng.wealthfront.com/2011/03/lean-startup-stage-at-sxsw.html

- http://www.slideshare.net/venturehacks/the-lean-start-up-2
  Slides by Steven Blank and Eric Ries. "The Lean Startup, Low Burn by Design, not Crisis"

- http://www.slideshare.net/startuplessonslearned/2009-05-01-how-to-build-a-lean-startup-step-by-step/download

> About the authors

Tom Gilb and Kai Gilb have, together with many professional friends and clients, personally developed the methods they teach. The methods have been developed over decades of practice all over the world in both small companies and projects, as well as in the largest companies and projects.

Tom Gilb

Tom is the author of nine books, and hundreds of papers on these and related subjects. His latest book 'Competitive Engineering' is a substantial definition of requirements ideas. His ideas on requirements are the acknowledged basis for CMMI level 4 (quantification, as initially developed at IBM from 1980). Tom has guest lectured at universities all over UK, Europe, China, India, USA, Korea – and has been a keynote speaker at dozens of technical conferences internationally.

Kai Gilb

has partnered with Tom in developing these ideas, holding courses and practicing them with clients since 1992. He coach managers and product owners, writes papers, develops the courses, and is writing his own book, 'Evo – Evolutionary Project Management & Product Development.'

Tom & Kai work well as a team, they approach the art of teaching the common methods somewhat differently. Consequently the students benefit from two different styles.

There are very many organizations and individuals who use some or all of their methods. IBM and HP were two early corporate adopters. Recently over 6,000 (and growing) engineers at Intel have adopted the Planguage requirements methods. Ericsson, Nokia and lately Symbian and A Major Mulitnational Finance Group use parts of their methods extensively. Many smaller companies also use the methods.

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