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Quality Performance Excellence: A Brief Biography of Kent Beck

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“Kent beck is the founder and director of Three Rivers Institute (TRI),” which is an organization devoted to monitoring the influence of agile methodologies in the software world (Beck, na). He is also the creator of extreme programming, a method of systems development which is a “highly adaptive approach to the SDLC” (Systems Development Life Cycle) (Satzinger, Jackson, & Burd, 2009, p. 63). Additionally, Beck has done a tremendous amount of work improving upon JUnit which “is a simple framework to write repeatable tests” in Java (JUnit.org, na). Beck firmly believes that quality comes from the group ownership, rather than the singular ownership, of code (Cunningham, 2003) (Beck, Extreme Programming wtih Kent Beck, 2009).

Professionally, Beck has “been programming for 35 years, 24 professionally” (Beck, Kent Beck, 2013). His strong family ties have him traveling with his family wherever he goes. This has likely lead to his increased support of paired programming in XP. Furthermore, he has worked in several high name international corporations which have had huge influences on market reactions. Notably is his time spent at Apple Computers where he helped develop Smalltalk, “a computer language designed specifically for a wide range of humans” (Beck, Kent Beck, 2013) (Lount, 2004).

Kent Beck is a signatory and founder of the “Manifesto for Agile Software Development” (Beck, et al., 2001). This manifesto promotes integrated quality improvement through a willingness to adapt and accept changing requirements in systems development. The Agile Manifesto proclaims “Our highest priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous deliver of valuable software” (Beck, et al., 2001). “Ever-improving value to customers and stakeholders” is a key component of performance excellence which the Agile Manifesto incorporates whole heartedly (Evans, 2010, pp. 6-7).

Further to this, through the invention/development of Extreme Programming (XP) and JUnit, Beck has ensured that quality remains at the forefront of systems development. One of the key factors of XP is the idea of two or more people working together on the same bit of code, thereby increasing the overall quality of the system through immediate recursive peer feedback (Beck, Extreme Programming wtih Kent Beck, 2009). JUnit on the other hand allows programmers to focus more on their code and less on their testing methodology, increasing code quality through immediate testing response (Beck, Welcome to JUnit Max, 2009).

Beck espouses that programmers should write tests before they write their code (Beck, Extreme Programming wtih Kent Beck, 2009). That is, programmers write just enough code each time to pass a test which they have written before hand, thus ensuring that their code “works.” After which the code is cleaned up to a human readable standard, or refactored, thereby ensuring both quality in system functionality, and quality in human readability. This is another example of Beck bringing performance excellence into code writing, ever improving upon even the lowest levels of system development through quality control mechanisms.

Beck’s long history and experience in computer programming have allowed him to effectively alter society’s perception of quality control in systems development. Moreover, his continued input into agile methodologies, extreme programming, and program refactoring ensure the continued development of quality code. While even Beck agrees that it takes many years, and input from many different individuals, for ideas to take hold, without Beck’s specific input a number of those ideas would likely have taken much longer. Beck is and will remain a key individual in the movement towards quality performance excellence well into the future.

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