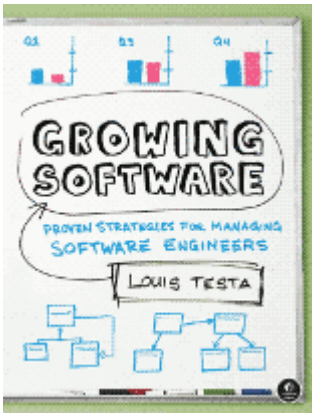
Book Review: Growing Software

written by Manoj Khanna | November 7, 2009



A little while ago I was contacted by No Starch Press and was asked whether I would be interested in reviewing a new book on IT management – Growing Software – Proven Strategies for Managing Software Engineers by Louis Testa. And since the topic was interesting enough for me to read through, I decided to give it a read and a feedback. So here it is.

First off, these are all my own personal opinions and observations about the book. I like the fact that the book is very well organized. It starts off with the understanding that a manager needs to first understand its development team, without the team there is no game that can be played. Then it dives into the tangibility and viability of that game for which everyone is working towards, that is the software product. Then it details on how to deal with the organizational framework typically the management above the manager. And then finally the processes and the working relationship of various objectives within a product development. The section about looking into the future is a classical example which most authors end up having, but as far as the life-cycle goes the changes today are so evident and quick that it becomes almost obsolete to have this into the book itself. I find that certain topics from this last section could have been easily absorbed in earlier parts of the book.

The “Additional reading” section at the end of each chapter is

somewhat helpful, and adds to a very interesting reading list – that is if you have enough time to read and research. Short stories, live examples and trivia's shared throughout also add to a reader's reading excitement.

As far as the imparted knowledge on understanding the team and management within the book is concerned, in my opinion, the author's thoughts are limited with his experience. In a generic sense, it would have been more valuable to focus on the management of engineers rather than making engineers learn about the management. That I believe was not the subject of the book. It is a simple oversight.

Providing a detailed description on product management is a nice addition to the book, which typically is not found in depth and detail in other books with similar subject matter. Good coverage is provided for the "Release Management" chapter.

I find a little too less emphasis on the collaborative framework, and for the teams working in an agile environment. Engaging the customer, and executives through that approach is somewhat an overlook in the "Outside of Engineering" chapter. Although, the author talks about the customer satisfaction, meetings, closing the deal (not necessarily for IT teams if your end client is not a purchasing customer), and support etc. but they seem to be too far and wide to be able to precept the product for collaborative product development.

The processes section is long, and has far more traditional approaches to manage a software team. Author suggests data collection throughout the various stages of the project, which is very normal, but doesn't reflect in-depth as to using what tools today will make a difference and how those tools can be helpful and effective in managing an engineering team. Review of existing software development processes such as waterfall, iterative, spiral, agile, etc. is not very in-depth. And everyone knows about the importance of quality assurance, and

for someone who’s novice in this side of the world then this chapter might be really helpful to them.

“Planning the future” section, the last section, is a small addition which I think the author decided to add at the very end of his book writing. As I said earlier that some of these chapters are already covered in the previous sections or should have been covered under those sections. But this section offers an interesting insight into author’s perspective in setting the direction, which is a very small interesting read.

Overall, if you are a project lead or development lead for a small group or a small software firm then this would be an interesting read for you. You might take away some really applicable learning examples and possibly be able to map out some of the processes mentioned within the book.

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