

Rock Climbing and Extreme Programming

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the implementation of XP in rock climbing. The author discovers that most of the ideas of extreme programming are quite suitable to rock climbing. The author also implements these ideas in rock climbing.

Keywords

Coach, XP, pair, Test First, Pair, Keep Stable, Coverage, Not overtime.

Contents

There is a place for indoors rock-climbing, located in the center of Brussels. Although I have always wanted to try rock climbing, the climbers on TV can very easily climb the highest walls... but I have never tried it before. I'm totally new to rock climbing.

Anyway, I think that I would like it; and that **I'll have a lot of fun with it.**

Winston is an expert in rock climbing; he has 5 years experience in it. He suggests us to do rock climbing this Saturday. On Saturday, four people join the rock-climbing group. Except Winston, three of us, Massimo, Gifford and me are new to rock climbing. All of us are IT guys in EuropeLoan Bank.

EuropeLoan Bank is a young, dynamic and rapidly growing global web bank. It was created in November 1999, with only three people and one office located in Brussels. This company has been growing very quickly: currently we operate on five countries, with different offices in each country and about 50 direct and indirect employees. Its capital reaches 3,000,000million BELGIUM FRANCS. EuropeLoan Bank is offering residential mortgage loans at very competitive rates.

Due to rapid user-requirement changes, extreme programming methodology has been successfully implemented for about one year. All of us like XP very much, although some people felt very surprised about it at the beginning. And we like programming very much. **Programming is fun.** Winston is the CTO, sometimes, he also plays the role of **coach** in the development team.

Winston is a good **mentor and coach** in rock climbing. He explains some basic knowledge: e.g. How to make a tire 8, how to release the wire smoothly, how to grab the protected wire when people fall. Then we practice it on the ground **in pairs**: one person acts as the climber, the other person acts as the blocker. Later we **exchange pairs**, and practice on ground again and again. We find that the size of the team is really nice, **not too big** and not too small. It is really very efficient to change pairs and ideas. Whenever we forget something, e.g. how to make a tire-8, we can just ask three other people, we can get feedback very quickly. (Communicate very well). We finish the practice in half an hour.

Now, all of us have learned the basics about rock-climbing. It's time to really climb on the indoor-wall. There are a lot of stones on the wall with different colors, and symbols on the wall: e.g. 3A stones are green, 4B stones yellow, 4C red and 5A purple. Winston tells us that the colors represent different levels, from basic to difficult. Of course, we choose the green color first; we **do the most easy and simple things first.**

The climber and the blocker double-check each other's ropes, whether the knot is a double 8-knot, whether the safety lock is secured. Then the climber climbs about one meter high, he falls down on purpose, to test whether the blocker can safely catch him. We **test everything** about the security system. **If one of the tests fails, we have to fix it immediately.** We have to be absolutely sure that the security system is working, when we are climbing to the top of the wall.

Now the climbers start to climb. The basic level is really easy, and we climb to the top of the wall without any difficulty. We try again, and then switch pairs: climber changes to blocker, and blocker changes to climber.

We are eager to try a difficult one. So we move to the other side of the wall. Massimo climbs first, and I block. Unfortunately, Massimo falls when he reaches the middle of the wall. He tries again, but still falls on the middle of the wall. I suggest that maybe he's climbing too fast, and that's why he falls.

I try to climb. Climbing up step by step. This level is more difficult than the previous one. When I reach the middle,

the stones are so small that I cannot keep the balance. I fall down. I try again. At this moment, I keep in mind that I should **always stay in a stable state**. When I plan to move to the next stone, I try to free one hand, test whether I can still stay stable. If so, I reach for the next stone using this free hand, then try to free one foot. If I can still stay stable, then I reach for the next stone using the free foot. I try again and again, try to **move slowly**. Sometimes I cannot stay stable when I try to free one hand or one foot. I immediately realize that something is wrong with the movement. Then I **adjust the position smoothly, even go back a little bit, and undo my previous move**. **The principle of always keeping in a stable state forces me to move smoothly, and do a lot of possible tests before moving to the next stone.**

The coach is impressed about me, because it is the first time I do rock-climbing.

I successfully reach the top of the wall. I feel tired. When I slowly lower to the ground, I eat something sweet and drink some cola. And sit down on the ground, have a rest. **I don't have the pressure that I have to climb over the most difficult level; I only enjoy the fun of climbing.**

When I recover, I get back and try the most difficult level. Ohhhhhh, It is too difficult.... I fall when I reach just one meter high. Try again, but still fail. The coach instructs me when I try the third time. But I still fail at the beginning.

I ask the coach to try himself one time, so I can learn some tricks from him.

I find that he looks at the wall for a few seconds, his eyes scan from the ground to the top of the wall slowly. Then he starts to climb. He climbs to the top of the wall easily and quickly. I find that he uses one small stone in the wall at the

place where I fell, but I didn't find that small stone when I was climbing. I ask him how he can do it. **The coach tells me that I should make a simple plan. (Make a simple design before coding).**

I agree with him. I look at wall and try to make a simple plan. I try to identify the best route to climb. I do find some small stones, which are difficult to discover.

Then I try again. Voila, I climb over the place where I fell previously. I try to climb to an even higher place. But it is really too difficult, I fall at two meters high. I try again, but still fail.

I give up. I need more energy to climb. I should **not be too tired**. So we leave the indoor rock-climbing.

When I leave, I feel that I should be able to climb the most difficult route. I failed because I don't have enough experience, no well-kown patterns to rely on. **I have the courage. I don't feel very tired when I leave because I did not climb overtime. I feel that the climbing is so much fun.**

When I go home, I review the rock-climbing experoence, I think that I really like it, so I have to try hard to learn a lot of tricks (design pattern) in order to climb over the most difficult paths, just as a movie hero. I also think that the rock climbing is not just climbing, actually, it is a kind of team work, we should have **enough planning, know enough tricks, have strong muscles, a good coach and a good partner**. It is really like the software development process, we should have a good methodology, good planning, good experiance and know a lot about design patterns.