



INCEPTIONS

Starting a Software Project



BOOK 1

SERIES

*Software Craftsmanship
The hidden Toolbox*

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Preface

This book is a work in progress.

I started writing this book because, after running so many *Inception Workshops* over the course of a few years, I feel that I *must* share with others my findings and help them start their software projects better.

By purchasing this ebook you are supporting my effort to create a guide that will help you and others to start your next software project with a clearer idea of what the project is all about and why you should care about it.

I appreciate your feedback!

Any form of feedback is acceptable: a pint of beer in your local pub when I am in town, a nice email, gentle or harsh criticism, requesting more material, anything goes!

During my writing period I had a case of serious *writers block* and I am sorry that it happened (*specially for those of you who bought the book early on*). There is really no excuse for having writers block, it just creeps on you and you feel paralysed by the thought of sitting down to write.

Finally though, with a little push in my last Christmas break, I managed to get back into my writing and was able to finish the book!

As I mentioned before, if you find any typos, or miss some better explanation in any chapter of the book, send me an email and I

will reply to you (*and hopefully incorporate your feedback into the book*).

Again, to all of you who have purchased this book, **thank you so much!**

Enrique

Introduction

When we talk about *Software Craftsmanship* we always talk about techniques revolving around the act of software creation; how to write clean code, how to test drive, etc. These technical skills are *essential* and *mandatory*. If you want to make a living out of crafting software you will have to practice these on a daily basis.

A professional software craftsman has many tools under his belt. Many are technical in nature, but many others are considered *soft skills*. This book focuses on one such soft skill; *The Inception Workshop*.

The *Inception Workshop* described in this book is a tool that will help your team understand the nature of the project and create insights that will help you provide the maximum value to your customers.

The first part of the book will give you the common framework and setup to run an *Inception Workshop* more efficiently.

The second part of the book is a collection of activities that you can use while facilitating a workshop. The activities are presented in the format suggested in [Agile Retrospectives](#) to give the reader a sense of following a set of recipes. I have included comments, exercises and some advices gathered from my experiences facilitating numerous *Inception Workshops* over the past years.

You will find many of the activities in this book in [The Agile Samurai](#) a brilliant book by Jonathan Rasmusson. I took the liberty (*not without talking to Jonathan first*) to use some of his materials in his book in the adaptation of the *Inception Workshop*. You will find his book an invaluable asset in your library when it comes to learning great techniques on how to deliver great software to your customers.

Finally you will find, in the Appendices, further clarifications and in depth explanations of some of the concepts described in some of the activities. I did not want to include some of them in the activities itself as it would break the flow of a recipe you can follow.

This book is the first one of a series of books I am planning to write: **Software Craftsmanship: The Hidden Toolbox**. The aim of the series is to touch on practices and themes that are usually left untouched in the literature and the agile and software craftsmanship communities. Stay tuned!

Ready to explore the minds of your customers?

Activities

The activities described in this chapter will help you to facilitate a successful Inception Workshop.

I do encourage you to experiment a little with the activities so that you get used to them. During the workshop it is important that the flow is not interrupted because you do not know exactly how to explain an activity to the group.

Some of the activities are optional; as you saw in “Selecting Activities” in the previous chapter.

I have separated these optional activities, that are purely meant for a business or startup, into their own chapter as they are less common in most cases.

Inceptions are a wonderful tool that can be used to start almost any endeavour¹.

¹In fact we did a 3 day long Inception Workshop before we set up our company, patheleven, back in 2011.

Activity: Who is in the room?



You are going to spend the next couple of days locked up in a room conducting an Inception Workshop together, maybe it would be a good idea to get to know each other.

Purpose

Get to know everyone who is participating in the Inception Workshop.

Time Needed

Ten to thirty minutes, depending on the size of the group.

Description

Form pairs of people who have never worked together. Each pair has five minutes to interview the other person.

Steps

1. Introduce the activity: “Before we start it would be a great idea to get to know each other”. Then explain the process (see the description earlier).
2. Let them form pairs. Once the pairs have been formed and are sitting together hand each pair a pen and two index cards.
3. Describe the process: Each interviewer has to write the following about the person he is interviewing
 - Name
 - How to contact
 - Likes
 - Dislikes
 - Draw a picture
4. Start the timer and let the interviewing begin. You should make sure that you pay attention to the interviewing process to see if someone is stuck so that you can help them out.
5. Once the interviewing is done ask each pair to present the person he interviewed to the group by standing in front of the group.
6. Post all the interviews on the wall so that they are visible to the group during the course of the Inception (*you might want to look again now and then to learn something from the people you are working with*).

Materials and Preparation

Index cards and pens.

Observations

Conducting the interviews at the beginning of the Inception Workshop makes sure that you know everyone in the room before you start working together.

Knowing their likes and dislikes also gives you the opportunity to understand them better. During future conversations or during the activities to come you can make use of the information you gathered in the *Who is in the Room Activity* to be able to accommodate for everyone. Make sure you make a mental note about their *dislikes*, it will give you a clue of how to talk to that person.

Drawing the person you are interviewing helps to slowly let the right side of the brain to activate. We will need a lot of creativity in the following activities!



Try it out!

Try interviewing a friend or colleague using this technique. Who knows, maybe you find out something you did not know about them!