THE AUTHOR

A biography slanted toward explaining Preston's interest in flexibility

from

Flexible Product Development

by

Preston G. Smith

The Author

Preston G. Smith received a Ph.D. in engineering from Stanford University and for the next twenty years held engineering and management positions in the aerospace, automotive, highway safety, defense, and diversified industries. In 1984 he initiated a corporate time-to-market program, and for the next twenty-nine years, he was a Certified Management Consultant specializing in accelerated and flexible product development techniques. Consulting and training engagements for products as diverse as semiconductors, heavy-duty trucks, and packaged food have taken him to hundreds of venues in thirty-one countries.

Preston's interest in development flexibility has been brewing for years. His first book, *Developing Products in Half the Time* (with Donald Reinertsen; originally published in 1991), covered the core of flexibility—iterative and incremental development—in its fourth chapter.

Another part of flexibility, responsive experimentation (Chapter Four of this book) includes rapid prototyping (RP), which Preston started following in 1988. More important, super-rapid prototyping machines, often called 3-D printers, appeared in 1996. Although some people denigrated 3-D printers as a "poor man's RP system," he saw the very low costs and quick response of such systems as opportunities to radically change how organizations develop new products by harnessing this quick, inexpensive feedback. He led these developments by keynoting at an RP conference in Australia in 1995, and he has participated in six other RP conferences in Australia, the United Kingdom, South Africa, and the United States since then.

Preston has urged the community to transform product architecture (Chapter Three of this book and the sixth chapter of *Developing Products in Half the Time*) from a solely technical matter to a business strategy topic, although its role in enhancing flexibility during development is still not widely appreciated.

The tipping point for him was in 2004, when the Agile Development Conference (ADC) invited him to keynote. Agile development aims precisely at flexibility, except that it only pertains to software development. Having started his career in the 1960s immersed in programming, he had been observing software development for years. It impressed him that software development projects have experienced more than their share of spectacular failures, but this community has studied its failures, done impressive research on methodologies, and improved—to a greater extent than non-software product development, he believes. Although software developers have a lead in understanding their methodologies, the 2004 ADC invited Preston to speak— characteristically—to see what they could learn from an allied field. They rather confused who was the teacher and who was the student. As a result, he has attended other agile conferences since then, joined the Agile Alliance, and was a founding member of the Agile Project Leadership Network (agileprojectmgt.com)—and he took plentiful notes. As a result, what the agilists have achieved in software development inspired him to write this book, which provides comparable means for developing other types of products flexibly.

Preston retired in 2013 and resides in Portland, Oregon USA.