

Position Paper for OOPSLA 2003 Workshop # 4:  
Agile Contracts

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My experiences are primarily as an employee, though I have had to negotiate a contract or two as an independent consultant. While the formality of the "contract" differs between the two roles there are some similarities. (below "client" refers to the employer or a "real client"):

- \* there is a need to define expectations of the work to be done so that the work can be evaluated.

- \* there are forces that make it likely that you will not be able to deliver all of the work that the client expects in the allocated time frame.

- \* what the client wants is often only loosely related to what they need to solve problems.

Few, if any, software projects seem to be finished to expectations, on time & on budget. Given this an agile approach to contracts has a lot of advantages if your goal is to have a realistic contract.

One idea is to make explicit some things that are often left implicit: that things will change over time.

With this in mind, the "what" part of a contract could:

- \* Set a broad goal for the project.
- \* Set detail goals every n weeks
- \* Require client participation in the feedback and reevaluation cycle.
- \* Specify whether the goal is features or a delivery date.

Many projects are not completed to a client's needs in spite of a rigid(non agile) structure. Let's acknowledge this and move forward to more meaningful agreements.