

Ethical Deliberation for Agile Processes

Software systems play an ever more important role in our lives. Especially when systems decide or support decisions about important issues regarding third parties, the call for “ethically sound” software becomes louder. Software engineers and their companies find themselves in a position where they are held responsible for unwanted outcomes and biases that unfold because of the use of software or the way it was created. However, software engineers are usually not specifically educated in moral philosophy. One way of helping software engineers to detect ethical questions that a particular program might encounter has been the publication of Codes of Ethics in order to give guidance to the engineer. Yet, they represent a more or less sufficiently complete and mature surrogate of various normative positions, values, or declarations of intent, which are to be implemented in the process of software development. Software development makes use of so-called agile methodologies, such as SCRUM. We propose to add ethical reflection steps to SCRUM. This integrates ethics into the core of product development. It is important that software engineering decisions are justified and easy to retrace. Unfortunately, there currently exists no method that integrates a structured ethical deliberation into software development processes. This paper introduces the Ethical Deliberation for Agile Processes (EDAP) Manual. Normative deliberation requires a structured, guided and systematic approach to the assessment of values, their trade-offs as well as their implementation. This tool tries to enable agile development teams to document the ethical dimension of their development decisions in a clear and concise way and thus enable sound and coherent deliberation that is easy to understand and verify by third parties.