Examining Product Line Readiness: Experiences with the SEI Product Line Technical Probe℠

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Today’s Presentation

Overview of the SEI Product Line Technical Probe (PLTP)

Experience Using the PLTP
  • Early experiences
  • Midcourse change
  • Recent experiences

Organizations’ Reactions to PLTP Findings

Conclusions
What Is the SEI Product Line Technical Probe (PLTP)?

A method for examining an organization’s readiness to adopt or ability to succeed with a software product line approach

- diagnostic tool based on the SEI Framework for Software Product Line Practice
- The product line practice areas from the Framework are the basis of data collection and analysis.
SEI PLTP Outcomes

Set of findings that portray organizational
• strengths
• challenges
with regard to a product line approach

Findings are documented in a findings presentation and in a formal PLTP Findings Report.

Findings can be used to develop an adoption plan or action plan with the goal of making the organization more capable of achieving product line success.
What is the SEI Framework for Software Product Line Practice℠?

The SEI Framework for Software Product Line Practice is a conceptual framework that describes the essential activities and twenty-nine practice areas necessary for successful software product lines.

The Framework, originally conceived in 1998, is evolving based on the experience and information provided by the community.

Version 4.0 – in Software Product Lines: Practices and Patterns

SEI Framework

Essential Activities

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Practice Areas

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Applying the Practice Areas in the PLTP

The PLTP process uses structured stakeholder interviews based on questions derived from the 29 practice areas.
Who Are the Stakeholders?

- Executives
- Managers
- Architects
- Developers
- Technical support staff
- Marketers
- Customers/End users
- Engineers
How is a PLTP Executed?

**Preliminary Phase**
- one-day meeting at customer site
- probe preparation

**Technical Probe Phase**
- data gathering
- data consolidation and analysis
- reporting
- four days at customer site

**Follow-On**
- report writing
- optional: facilitated development of action plan to address findings
- optional: tailored assistance
PLTP Applicability

When an organization
• is considering adopting a software product line approach
• has already initiated a software product line approach
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History of the SEI PLTP

The PLTP was created in 2000 in response to requests to evaluate the product line fitness of several organizations.

- original PLTP question bank was derived
- process was created
- other SEI diagnostics and earlier, less formal product line diagnostics were used as the basis
- question bank and process were continuously improved based on early applications
- team training materials and templates were developed

In 2002, we created the *SEI Adoption Factory Pattern* and subsequently modified the PLTP to use the Adoption Factory Pattern in both the PLTP data analysis and findings reports.

The PLTP has been used to examine a variety of government and commercial organizations.
## Sample Breadth of PLTP Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Size of Organization</th>
<th>Business Drivers for Software Product Line Approach</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>collaborative planning</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>Improve interoperability; reduce ownership costs; reduce development time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hardware diagnostics</td>
<td>small</td>
<td>Reduce ownership costs; reduce development cost and time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>military training products</td>
<td>medium</td>
<td>Ensure commonality across systems; reduce ownership costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>automotive multimedia</td>
<td>large</td>
<td>Reduce development costs; formalize approach to reuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>engine controllers</td>
<td>large</td>
<td>Reduce complexity and costs; enter other market segments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>automotive products</td>
<td>large</td>
<td>Reduce complexity; address staff shortages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>military command and control (two)</td>
<td>large</td>
<td>Reduce time to field; reduce maintenance costs; reduce duplication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>automated tellers</td>
<td>large</td>
<td>Improve productivity, performance and quality; reduce defects</td>
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Why Organizations Arrange For a PLTP

To take a baseline snapshot of the product line organization
To do a reality check
To avoid common pitfalls
To capitalize on strengths
To shore up weaknesses
To identify and mitigate risks early
To get stakeholder buy-in
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PLTP Findings

A PLTP team produces findings for each of the 29 practice areas
• based on the interviews and document examination
• expressed as strengths and challenges
• rated (High, Medium, Low) based on relative importance of the findings for the practice area at the time of the PLTP

In addition, the findings include recommendations and the caution that despite individual ratings, eventually all practice areas would have to be addressed thoroughly.
Early PLTP Findings: Common Themes

All of the early organizations were at the beginning stages of product line adoption or exploration.

In all cases, the management challenges included
- Building a Business Case
- Scoping
- Process Definition
- Launching and Institutionalizing
- Structuring the Organization

The software engineering challenges typically included
- Architecture Definition
- Architecture Evaluation
- Requirements Engineering
Early PLTP Findings: Tuning Needed

The findings were listed by practice area.

There was no higher level structuring.

The practice area ratings were derived largely from the expertise of the PLTP team.

As a result,
• The findings were difficult for organizations to digest.
• How to proceed was often not obvious.
• The process and results were not as repeatable as desired.

Although the PLTP was deemed useful, more was needed.
• Organizations wanted some sort of a product line roadmap.
• The PLTP Findings Report needed better organization.
• The themes that emerged from the early PLTP experiences provided powerful input.
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A Roadmap and an Aid for the PLTP

The SEI had defined *software product line practice patterns* to assist in planning and effecting product line adoption.

One of these patterns, *the Factory Pattern*, already provided a high-level view of the a product line organization in terms of sub-patterns, which are ultimately expressed as practice areas.

We created a variant of the Factory Pattern with some useful views to provide both a generic product line roadmap and a new organizing structure for PLTP final analysis and report of findings.
The Adoption Factory Pattern

- **Establish Context**
  - What to Build
  - Process Definition
  - Cold Start

- **Establish Production Capability**
  - Product Parts
  - Assembly Line
  - In Motion

- **Operate Product Line**
  - Product Builder
  - Each Asset
  - Monitor

Product

Process

Organization
## Associated Practice Areas

### Establish Context
- Marketing Analysis
- Understanding Relevant Domains
- Technology Forecasting
- Building a Business Case
- Scoping

### Establish Production Capability
- Requirements Engineering
- Architecture Definition
- Architecture Evaluation
- Mining Existing Assets
- Component Development
- COTS Utilization
- Software System Integration
- Testing

### Operate Product Line
- Requirements Engineering
- Architecture Definition
- Architecture Evaluation
- Mining Existing Assets
- Component Development
- COTS Utilization
- Software System Integration
- Testing

### Product
- Scoping
- Requirements Engineering
- Architecture Definition
- Architecture Evaluation
- Mining Existing Assets
- Component Development
- COTS Utilization
- Software System Integration
- Testing
- Make/Buy/Mine/Commission
- Configuration Management
- Tool Support
- Data Collection, Metrics, Tracking
- Technical Planning
- Technical Risk Management

### Process
- Process Definition
- Launching and Institutionalizing Funding
- Structuring the Organization
- Operations
- Organizational Planning
- Customer Interface Management
- Organizational Risk Management
- Developing an Acquisition Strategy
- Training

### Organization
- Launching and Institutionalizing
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- Data Collection, Metrics and Tracking
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- Customer Interface Management
- Organizational Planning
PLTP and the Adoption Factory Pattern

We still use practice areas as the primary reference for data collection and analysis.

We do a final analysis against the Adoption Factory pattern using all of its associated views (practice areas, phases, focus areas, roles, and outputs).

We report findings using the Adoption Factory pattern as an organizing structure.

We demonstrate cross-practice area challenges using the Adoption Factory pattern.
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Recent Findings: Common Themes - 1

The organizations that are requesting a PLTP are for the most part better informed about software product lines.

Engineering organizations tend to jump right into architecture and component development activities without doing a proper scoping and business case.
  • Frustration and waste result.

There is still a pervading assumption that product lines involve a new technical approach only.
  • There is too little awareness that a product line approach is both a new technical and business approach.
Recent Findings: Common Themes - 2

Most organizations vastly underestimate the management commitment and involvement needed. They fail to have

- a responsible product line manager with authority to oversee the product line effort
- a product line adoption plan
- a product line concept of operations
- a training plan
- an appropriate funding model

Organizations with more product line sophistication struggle with

- configuration management
- appropriate variation mechanisms
- a production plan used to build all products
- appropriate data collection, metrics, and tracking activities
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## Typical Challenges (shown in red)

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Reactions to PLTP Results: General

Interviewed stakeholders universally have more buy-in to their organization’s product line effort.

Managers/sponsors of the PLTP have in every case been satisfied that they received a helpful and better understanding of their product line readiness and what is needed to get to full product line operations.

All organizations engaged the SEI to conduct follow-on planning sessions to determine how to proceed based on the PLTP findings.

Organizations have found the Adoption Factory pattern to be a very helpful organizing structure and guide for planning.
Reactions to PLTP Results: Specific

Of the nine organizations depicted earlier
  • One decided to abandon the product line approach; the challenges were too daunting.
  • One deferred work on the product line effort in order to establish a firmer basis of process discipline.
    - The product line effort was reactivated after successful process improvement activities.
  • Two are struggling in the initial stage of launching a product line.
  • One has incorporated its product line effort into the context of a larger, subsuming enterprise effort.
  • Four are making aggressive progress in their product line efforts.
  • Two are planning on a second PLTP to measure their progress against their initial baseline.
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The SEI Product Line Technical Probe is an effective means for understanding an organization’s readiness to proceed with a product line effort.

The PLTP provides a solid basis for developing a product line adoption plan.

The PLTP led the SEI to create the Adoption Factory pattern.

The Adoption Factory pattern is an effective roadmap for product line adoption and for reporting and prioritizing PLTP findings.

Most organizations who have applied the PLTP currently have product line efforts underway.
Questions – Now or Later

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