What does tailoring mean when agile method ‘tailoring’ is considered? A concept-centric analysis of existing understandings of agile method tailoring

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Purpose: To challenge the understanding of ‘tailoring’ and the process of ‘tailoring’ when agile method tailoring is considered. More thorough, cost-effective agile methods will be achievable by appropriately considering the tailoring process in projects.

Methodology: The systematic literature review is applied to investigate the aspects of tailoring that are being ignored by the current tailoring processes. The analogic reasoning is chosen for the transfer of knowledge from the tailoring in the fashion industry to the tailoring of agile methods in project management.

Findings: This paper develops an analogical process model for tailoring agile methods. The results show that the project manager, customer and project team members have misaligned understandings and conflicting objectives towards the ‘tailoring’ in different project settings. Some trial-and-errors happened and cost increased after applied tailored agile practices. The critical stages and key roles of agile method tailoring process
need to be clarified to relevant project members. Also, some tailored agile methods are aiming at transferring the agile thinking from IT to other industries. However, people are not thinking it through when it comes to adaptation of agile methods in other industries.

Research limitations: The model presented in this paper is dependent on existing researchers’ observations of agile method tailoring, and the findings have not yet been validated by empirical studies.

Practical implications: This paper put forth a new perspective of understanding on ‘agile method tailoring’ to project managers. The analogic process of ‘tailoring’ also facilitates project managers in balancing the requirements on tailoring collected from the customer and project team members.

Originality/value: This paper fills in the conceptualization of the agile method tailoring and offers practical help to the management of projects by open the thinking of project managers involved in adapting the method to ensure a better ‘fit’ to their project context.

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Fangyuan Shen is a PhD student of Management of Projects in the School of Mechanical, Aerospace and Civil Engineering in The University of Manchester. Her PhD project focuses on agile project management and its application on smart cities. The project includes: transferring of agile technology from software development to construction projects, agile method tailoring (techniques, roles and responsibilities, procedures), and comparative evaluation of smart city project management between China and UK. Before joining the PhD programme, Fangyuan held two Masters’ degree in Public Administration & Policy and Commercial Project Management, and she has worked as an analyst for a UK consultant firm.

Dr Ian Stewart is a Reader in Management of Projects Education, Programme Director of the Manchester MSc in Management of Projects and is Head of the Management of Projects Research Group in the Department of Mechanical, Aerospace and Civil Engineering, University of Manchester. He is also a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and has won various institutional and international awards for his work in projects education. His PhD was a combination of historical research into the descent of the role of ‘Commercial Manager’ into project-led organisations such as BT, RR & BAE and the practice of innovation within the project commercial role in those firms. This subject first bought him to the school in 2001 through teaching on the bespoke UMIST BT MSc in Commercial Management. From this, he claims the distinction of holding the final UMIST PhD. His current research interests are around the impact of AI and digitalisation on the activities and professional status of project managers, institution/private sector relationships in CSR on construction projects and the human cost of simulations and games in large-class pedagogy.