The Use Case Pattern Language

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Use cases are a wonderfully simple concept, describe a system’s functional requirements by telling stories about how its usage delivers value to its actors. Yet, for such a simple concept, good use cases are really hard to write. Use case authors frequently must deal with the difficult questions of:

- Where is the system boundary?
- What should the scope of a use case be?
- What is the level of detail I should express in the use case?
- How should I structure the use case description?
- When should I create "include" and "extends" use cases?
- Why am I doing this in the first place?

Usually the answers to most of these questions must be prefixed with a very unsatisfying "Well it depends..."

Starting with OOPSLA 98, a group of use case practitioners began contributing to the development of a use case pattern language. The pattern language tries to capture the knowledge and experience of successful use case developers such that it can be easily re-used by other use case developers. Patterns can capture of the solution to a difficult problem and cope with the fuzziness necessary with the answers to these questions.

Topics covered
- Patterns and Pattern Languages
- Common use case pitfalls
- Patterns for determining the purpose and objective of a use case model
- Patterns for discovering actors and use cases
- Patterns for structuring use cases
- Patterns for writing use case contents
- Patterns for use case style

Benefits
- Participants will receive a set of patterns they can use to write good quality use cases and avoid common use case pitfalls.
- Participants will gain an understanding of how to use the patterns to create use cases that are effective for their specific environment.
- The patterns provide practitioners with a common vocabulary for discussing good use case principles.

Audience
This topic is of benefit to anyone who has tried to write use cases and has found it difficult, frustrating, and has not been satisfied with the results. This includes: developers, technical managers, business analysts, product managers, requirements engineers and anyone else who has a need to prepare or understand use cases.
Steve Adolph is a senior consultant with WSA Consulting Inc. His development experience includes systems for cellular telephone call-processing, mobile dispatch, railway signaling, and direct-to-plate system for the printing industry. He knows firsthand the problems with creating Use Case models. He has been helping clients adopt Use Case modeling and has repeatedly witnessed the frustration that comes in creating what appears as a simple task and yet not so simple once you start.