

# Explanations in Software Engineering: The Pragmatic Point of View

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## Abstract

This article reveals that explanatory practice in software engineering is in accordance with pragmatic explanatory pluralism, which states that explanations should at least partially be evaluated by their practical usability. More specifically, I offer a defense of the idea that several explanation-types are legitimate in software engineering, and that the appropriateness of an explanation-type depends on a) the engineer's interests, and b) the format of the explanation-seeking question he asks, with this format depending on his interests. This idea is defended by considering examples that are representative for explanatory practice in software engineering. Different kinds of technological explanation are spelled out, and the dependence of their appropriateness on interests and question-formats is extensively illustrated.

**Keywords:** explanatory pluralism, pragmatism, explanatory power, epistemic interests, software engineering

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