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Measuring Performance for Teams

ARTICLE

By Steve Berczuk | April 28, 2010

SUMMARY

If you've ever been in an organization that had performance reviews, you may have found yourself wondering whether the measurement process used to evaluate your (and your team's) performance made sense, and if there was a better way.

If you've ever been in an organization that had performance reviews, you may have found yourself wondering whether the measurement process used to evaluate your (and your team's) performance made sense, and if there was a better way.

Even if you have goals that can be evaluated quantitatively, rather than some metric that feels arbitrary, you may feel that your personal goals may run counter to the success of the your team. For example, you may wonder whether it makes sense to help your colleague on her high priority project and risk missing a deadline for your (lower) priority one. Sometimes the problems with measurement systems are because people just don't measure well. In other cases, it's because it's impossible to measure all of the things that matter.

Rob Austin's book **Measuring and Managing Performance in Organizations** gives you a model to understand why measurement systems become dysfunctional, and an approach to avoid dysfunction when you are measuring.

Austin addresses some core issues that agile (and other) teams face:

- How to evaluate and reward individual knowledge workers doing complicated things in teams
- How to motivate the individuals on the team to do what helps the team meet their goals, and
- What performance measurements are helpful, and which just add noise.

Austin explains why individual measures and goals may be counter-productive unless you can measure all of the aspects of a person's work, why most people want the team to succeed, and how that desire for team success is a key motivator, and why a staple of

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Much of what I learned from reading this book seemed obvious in retrospect, but Austin explains the problem with clarity and precision, making observations that only seemed obvious once I read them. Early in the book, for example he points out:

Employees true output (such as value to the organization) is intangible and difficult to measure; in its place organizations choose to measure inputs (such as the amount of effort devoted to a task...)

Which seems to be such an obvious problem with many evaluation systems that you wonder why so many organizations still do it.

Reading this book won't give you a cookbook for designing a motivation and performance evaluation system. This is a difficult problem, especially for those working in an industry where there is a strong desire to quantify and measure. But this book will help you to understand the problem and enable to evaluate and improve your current practices.

While Austin's book will help you understand the model behind effective performance measurement, there are also more day-to-day practices you need to help your team be successful. For these consider reading **Johanna Rothman** and **Esther Derby**'s book **Behind Closed Doors: Secrets of Great Management**, which is an excellent guide to the day to day process of people management.

Managing people can be intuitive, but it is also more difficult than many people realize. A desire to measure is useful, but it can be counter productive when you measure without understanding. Software development is a collaborative, human activity, and as such we need to understand that management and measurement and difficult, and doing either without without an understanding of the challenges can lead to unexpected results.

Topics: people metrics,

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Steve Berczuk is a Principal Software Engineer with experience as a manager, Scrum Master and technical lead in Boston, MA. The author of *Software Configuration Management Patterns: Effective Teamwork, Practical Integration*, he is a recognized expert in software configuration management and agile software development. Steve is passionate about helping teams work effectively to produce quality software. He has an M.S. in operations research from Stanford University and an S.B. in Electrical Engineering from MIT, and is a Certified ScrumMaster. Contact Steve at steve@berczuk.com or visit berczuk.com and follow his blog at blog.berczuk.com.

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