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Happiness and Agility

ARTICLE

By Steve Berczuk | July 7, 2011

SUMMARY

Agile development practices at their core, have a common theme of making better use of the time spent developing software. This starts at the project level and continues down to the developer day-to-day-activities. Consider an agile iteration. The team starts the iteration with a clear sense of the priorities for the sprint, and pretty good understanding of the project scope. Having estimated and committed to getting the work done, the team also has a sense that the goal is attainable. The team members then collaborate to get the work done as a team.

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While we can see how this might make for an efficient delivery process, consider how agile practices relate to enjoyment and morale on the team. In the paper **If Money Doesn't Make You Happy, Consider Time**, Jennifer Aaker, Melanie Rudd, and Cassie Mogilner discuss five principles for spending time in a happiness-maximizing way. Some of these seem like a bit of as stretch, but there is a lot to be said about the relationship between a workplace using agile practices agile, and the teams being effective and happy. Consider how the 5 principles could map to agile practices:

- *Spend your time with the right people*. If you on a collaborative, self organizing team, committed to reaching a common goal, it's hard to argue that you are with the wrong people.
- *Spend your time on the right activities*. The authors of the paper also use the phrase

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- *Enjoy the experience without spending the time*. The premise here is that one can feel pleasure by thinking of a good result. Activities ranging from planning, to test driven development to retrospectives seem to fit here.
- *Expand your time*. This principle is about having control over your time. Since the team is self organizing and decides how to get work done, you should have a fair amount of control over what you are working on and when.

Using an agile process can't guarantee happiness, or even that you team does all of these things. You can have a poorly defined product backlog, a less than collaborative team environment, or a micromanaging product owner or manage, for example.

But agile is more than just a product planning process that increases predictability It can also increase productivity and (as **Brian Marick** said during an Agile 2008 Keynote) *Joy*.

Topics: agile,

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve Berczuk

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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