

PM WORLD TODAY – VIEWPOINT – APRIL 2011

Agile: To Be or Not to Be

By Dr. James T. Brown, PMP

I was the guest speaker for a leading software development organization and the topic of Agile was being discussed in a workshop during the day before my speech. They had some early successes with Agile and were now briefing the entire organization on the principles and how they could be used as they transitioned to a more “Agile” shop.

One of the presenters was saying very bad things about the waterfall methodology as if it was useless. Since they had not mailed my check and I was a guest I just clenched my teeth as it was not my place to comment. Towards the end of the presentation a respected senior leader stood up and said “I hear you...but what you are describing we have been doing for over twenty years...”

BINGO! Agile is simply a form of iterative development.

For you younger readers out there software developers have been doing iterative development since the 1960's. Below is my opinion. Please note it is just that.

A. The ends of the methodology spectrum are iterative and waterfall.

B. You can have many versions in between iterative and waterfall. Each organization has to strike a balance on where they want to be in this spectrum based on their capability, customers and critical nature of the project.

If a pilot told me the plane's navigation software was developed with Agile I would unbuckle my seat belt and head for the door. If a smart phone app was being developed with the strict methodology used for navigation software in aircraft it would be obsolete when released.

It is not always the same answer for every project or organization.

All the arguments about which methodology is “better” are pointless because it is situation dependent. Each comes with risks and benefits that must be weighed.

C. I agree with what is in the Agile Manifesto BUT **the overwhelming majority of what is in there is not new or even close to being new.** It is assembled just like quality principles were assembled into TQM and Six Sigma for that matter. Nothing new in TQM or Six Sigma.

The Agile manifesto is just the combination of things into a methodology to make it easier for some organizations to embrace and implement... just like a diet plan provides a framework for you to eat less.

D. No organization really has to have TQM or Six Sigma or "The Flavor of the Day" to execute the principles of quality, just like no organization has to have Agile to do iterative development.

E. It is a tried and true consultant revenue generating model to take existing knowledge...massage it into a "system," give it a catchy name and sell it to the masses. You know you have done this at the highest level (Cha-Ching) when people get certified in your system. I am not throwing rocks at the ScrumMasters and Six Sigma Black Belt holders out there, as a PMP I am living in a glass house.

Project management is simply Structured Organized Common Sense (SOCS). You can use different structures successfully...just don't violate the common sense part. Violating the common sense part is how you get into real trouble.

About the Author:



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Dr. James T. Brown, president of SEBA[®] Solutions Inc., a Registered Education Provider for the Project Management Institute, has provided training and consulting services for dozens of companies nationally and internationally. SEBA[®] Solutions also provides OnePdu.com <http://OnePdu.com> for online project management training. A recognized authority in project management, Dr. Brown is a frequently invited speaker on project management areas of interest. He is the author of ***The Handbook of Program Management*** published by McGraw Hill and is a member of the Project Management Institute, the National Speakers Association and the National Association of Corporate Directors. Dr. Brown has a patent for a project scheduling methodology, and has received numerous awards including "Engineer of the Year" from the Cape Canaveral Technical Societies and is a recipient of the "NASA Public Service Medal" for exceptional contributions to NASA's mission. He has a Ph.D. in Industrial Engineering from the University of Central Florida, a MS in Engineering Management from Florida Institute of Technology and a BS in Electrical Engineering from Tennessee State University. He is a licensed Professional Engineer (PE), a certified Project Management Professional (PMP) and a certified speaking professional (CSP). To learn more about SEBA[®] visit www.SebaSolutions.com. You can contact James directly at jtbrown@sebasolutions.com.