Agile values and principles - An asset towards project success!

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1. Abstract

In this competitive world where there are plenty of skilled workforce trying their best to survive and grow; there are equally good number who are losing this race. At the same time innumerable companies are also struggling hard to cope, thus shifting focus on innovation and developing new/challenging products so as to exist, sustain, and reap profitability.

To achieve this many IT companies are moving from the conventional Waterfall to Agile development model to be competent and connected with this fast-paced market. Agile methodology apart from being flexible, places more emphasis on people, interaction, customer collaboration, change, and working software. This is reiterated in the 4 agile values which are part of the agile manifesto and the 12 agile principles.

Irrespective of which development methodology a project team/company is adopting, the agile values and principles should be imbibed in every individual and at all phases of the development lifecycle to reap its benefits. As these values and principles are not confined to any domain, they are universal, reusable, and scalable.

The paper will deal extensively on mapping the agile values and principles in enhancing Intelligence Quotient (IQ), Emotional Quotient (EQ), and overall competency development of an individual thereby directly benefitting a project/organization. If we carefully look at the agile values and principles it has a good balance of IQ and EQ, which can be sharpened with experience and added to competency development. While IQ is a visible necessity in workplace and recognized as a key element to success; EQ is a critical invisible factor which is gradually gaining momentum.

Customer connect, agility, better relationship among individuals, motivated team, open communication, sustainability, technical and design excellence, simplicity, etc.; few learnings from these values and principles ensures better product, satisfied customers, and good business strategy to remain profitable/grow/expand/maintain.
2. Introduction

Constant learning and keeping oneself up-to-date with the latest technology/practice/trend/process etc. seems to be the secret mantra of success for an individual/organization. Hence, there is a continuous need to introspect the strengths, weaknesses, and core assets based on which the focus is shifted to embrace the competitive edge. This builds an immense pressure and huge expectation; resulting in either success or failure.

Why are individuals/businesses failing? Why is there a sudden awakening only when the problem is at the doorstep? Is there no solution to this severe long ailing problem? How is it that some are not impacted by this crisis? Is there some secret formula?

Well I have not come up with any new idea or best practices to resolve this issue of keeping a continuous pace of success and profitability; as the internet is already clogged with so many websites talking about principles/secrets/methodology on how to crack this complicated jigsaw puzzle. I have leveraged the existing agile values and principles detailed in the agile manifesto towards achieving success professionally and personally and thus be prepared/emerge as a winner always in this competitive world!

PS: Although agile values and principles almost always refer to software development, I have consciously tried to make it generic so that this concept is not restricted to any particular domain and is universal for individual and organizational development.
3. Overview of the concepts

In this section, I have provided a broad overview of agile values, agile principles, competencies, intelligence quotient (IQ) and emotional intelligence quotient (EQ).

**Agile values**
The four agile values which are part of the agile manifesto advocates:

“We value:

- **Individuals and interactions** over **processes and tools**
- **Working software** over **comprehensive documentation**
- **Customer collaboration** over **contract negotiation**
- **Responding to change** over **following a plan**

While there is value in the items on the right, agile manifesto value the items on the left more.
Agile values and principles - An asset towards project success!

**Table 1: Agile values**

**Agile principles**
The 12 agile principles are a subset of agile values, guiding and supporting the project teams in implementing agile projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Principle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Customer satisfaction by rapid delivery of useful product</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The highest priority is to satisfy the customer and establish confidence through early and continuous delivery of valuable product.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Welcome changing requirements, even late in development</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The whole purpose of delivery should be meeting the customer's needs, thereby giving them a competitive edge. Rather than blocking necessary changes to the product as requirements change, agile development is designed to cope with evolving requirements to supplement the customer's competitive advantage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Working product is delivered frequently (weeks rather than months)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agile development emphasizes fast, iterative deliveries rather than the &quot;big bang&quot; delivery after a lengthy development process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Agile values and principles

**An asset towards project success!**

4. **Close, daily cooperation between business people and developers**
   Rather than working for a customer, agile development encourages development teams to work with the customers, on a daily basis. In this way a better working relationship is established, problems are spotted and corrected more quickly, and customers can see the progress on a daily basis.

5. **Projects are built around motivated individuals, who should be trusted**
   Agile software development recognizes the importance of the team, the working environment, and stresses the need for support and trust in the team, as critical for the project's success. Such teams are highly engaged, motivated, and result-oriented.

6. **Face-to-face conversation is the best form of communication (co-location)**
   The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation; although documentation and status reports are necessary evils in most businesses. Where this is a challenge (in case of distributed teams practicing agile), project details should be communicated, not diluted or insufficiently communicated.

7. **Working software is the principal measure of progress**
   In agile development, working software is the measure of progress and success. The team is judged against the product it delivers and therefore all other aspects are subordinate.

8. **Sustainable development, able to maintain a constant pace**
   Agile development proceeds at a more consistent pace, rather than suffering from lulls while waiting for decisions or approvals, followed by a flurry of activity to meet arbitrary deadlines. During sprint planning, the team decides how many stories it can accomplish and are not influenced by any pressure from the management (to sustain the pace and avoid any burn out due to over exertion).

9. **Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design**
   While agile methods improve customer satisfaction and quality of the product, striving for technical excellence and better code also promotes "agility".

10. **Simplicity—the art of maximizing the amount of work not done—is essential**
    Stressing simplicity in all aspects of development will help to ensure a simple, workable, more easily maintained solution. For example, in a smart phone the most frequently used features may be just 20% and the other 80% of the features may be used rarely by the population. In such a scenario, it is a good idea to first develop those 20% of the features first and deliver it. This not only helps in addressing the bare minimum functionalities first; it also helps to achieve business value and obtain customer's feedback early.

11. **Self-organizing teams**
    In an agile development environment, the team is empowered to organize themselves and come up with new ideas/solutions which allow them to be most effective and efficient. The best architectures requirement and design emerge from self-organizing teams.

12. **Regular adaptation to changing circumstances**
    At regular intervals, the team reviews/analyzes their progress, problems, obstacles, processes, etc. to ensure they are working efficiently and effectively. This reflection at the end of each iteration, helps them to become more effective, adapt better techniques, tune and adjust their behavior accordingly for the subsequent iterations.

**Table 2: Agile principles**

**Competency, IQ, and EQ**

**Competencies** are measurable/observable set of knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes and characteristics critical to successfully complete various tasks/job performance. It comprises of soft skills and technical skills which are required to achieve a real time
task, based on their position in an organization. Intelligence Quotient (IQ) and Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EQ) fall under this umbrella and are key to success of an individual and thereby an organization.

Competencies are broadly classified as knowledge, skill and ability, and behavioral; and play a significant role in recruitment, performance management, training and development, career and workforce planning, and compensation.

- Knowledge competency refers to an individuals’ aptitude towards practical and theoretical understanding of a subject.
- Skill and ability competency refers to an individuals’ inherent or learned capacity to perform an act.
- Behavioral competency refers to an individuals’ pattern of actions or conduct.

While the mastery level of knowledge and skill and ability competency raises with experience for the job types; behavioral competency matures with consistent adherence to a set of behavioral standards.

IQ is a measure of the intelligence of an individual derived from the results obtained from specially designed problem-solving tests. It literally refers to the intelligence a person possesses to understand, interpret, and implement one’s knowledge in varied situations leading to growth.

Both genetics (genes) and the environment (family, peer group, education, training, nutrition, culture, etc.) play an almost equal role in determining intelligence. Higher IQs indicate better cognitive abilities (power to reason, learn, and understand new situations). Therefore, people with high IQs are more likely to do well academically without exerting much mental effort as those with lower IQ.

With this legitimate reasoning, it is concluded that people with higher IQs are more successful at work and through life. However, this assumption is proven wrong, as there is more to success than simply being ‘clever’ and that is EQ.

EQ is defined as a measure of an individual’s ability to recognize and manage their emotions, and the emotions of other people, both individually and in groups. It is a combination of competencies like self-awareness, self-management, self-confidence, commitment, adaptability, motivation, empathy, social skills (communication, leadership, collaboration, influence, cooperation, synergy, interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, etc.), and trustworthiness.

Studies have shown that some have high IQs and low EI and vice-versa, some with high IQ and EI, and others with low IQ and EI. Is this so important and does this really matter? Yes it does! While each have their own judgment to prove their theory right (whether IQ or EQ is important); IQ and EQ are both instrumental in assuring a person's
happiness and ability to succeed. They are separate components which have their own significant role to mold and enhance an individuals' competency.
4. Project – Creating a website

To explain the concept that agile values and principles help in enhancing Intelligence Quotient (IQ), Emotional Quotient (EQ), and overall competency development of an individual thereby directly benefitting a project/organization, I have taken the example of project for creating a cookery website for Chef X.

PS: I have considered an ideal scenario of a software development project, planned for a short duration, and handled by a small scrum team. However, this concept is not restricted and can be adopted (as a whole or in parts) by any - business, industry, development methodology, project, or individual.

A team of 5 (2 developers, 2 graphic designers, 1 content creator) with 0-1 years of experience were assigned to complete this project within 2 months and they used scrum methodology. An agile practitioner was assigned to this project who helped the team in learning, implementing, practicing, and preaching these values and principles.

The initial requirement was to create a website with the following tab navigation:

- Home – personal and professional details of the Chef
- Recipes – list of exclusive Chef recommended recipes
  - Vegetarian
  - Non-vegetarian
  - Vegan
  - International
- Tips – cooking best practices
- Social connect – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube

However, as the project got kicked off, new requirements started pouring in at the end of every sprint (some of them listed below):

- Language support (Hindi, Japanese, Chinese)
- Signature cookery product on sale
- Newsletter and Articles
- Videos
- Ask the Chef/Live chat
- Online cookery classes

Project execution and delivery
As the team was new each coming from varied background; they followed agile values and principles with great passion to accomplish the project.
**PS:** The impact of only the agile principles on an individual/team/project/organization success is explained here as agile principles are a subset of agile values with further refinement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agile Principles</th>
<th>Develop/Enhance IQ, EQ, and overall competency development of an individual/team resulting in project/organization success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customer satisfaction by rapid delivery of useful product</td>
<td>Competency of the entire team played a significant role in product delivery to gain customer confidence and satisfaction which is the secret to a project/organization success as ‘Customer is the King’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome changing requirements, even late in development</td>
<td>Although the mindset to accept change and be adaptable calls for EQ; achieving the new requirements bids for a high level of IQ. In this case, there was a lot of learning spikes which helped the team to learn new technologies/processes in order to achieve/deliver the product as per the customers’ need (incoming new requirements) and market demand. Creative innovation and adaptive change are important for any organization; else it would likely lose its competitive edge and loyal customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working product is delivered frequently (weeks rather than months)</td>
<td>While IQ works in the background to achieve this; key EQ characteristics like synergy, collaboration, confidence, communication, and motivation plays a substantial role to deliver the product sooner. Focus and clarity ensured on-time delivery of the features/product at the end of every sprint.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close, daily cooperation between business people and developers</td>
<td>EQ along with the behavioral competency takes a center stage with communication, inter and intra personal skills being key players resulting in a strong well informed team. Understanding customer frustration and requirement helps a business to be highly focused, capital and resource efficient, more product-market fit, along with guaranteed success. The team met the Chef and involved him in all major discussions which reduced rework and fulfill his expectations immediately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects are built around motivated individuals, who should be trusted</td>
<td>EQ competencies like self-management, trustworthiness, and leadership made each individual feel important and valued; this motivated feeling in turn contributed to the success of the project/organization. People are an organization’s strongest and invaluable resource. They are the intelligence, the skill, the decision makers, and the energy behind the success/failure of any organization. Although the product team was new, the trust and conducive environment kept them motivated and helped them to achieve any huge task with ease.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face conversation is the best form of communication (co-location)</td>
<td>Communication is a fuel and glue which keeps the team going and holds them together. Talking, active listening, timely information sharing, effective communication are all driven by IQ and EQ and form the bedrock of business. Communication flowing through the right channels at the right time ensures project success; else it may ruin the project miserably. With varied team composition and experience, communication becomes critical for everyone to be in sync.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agile value/principle</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working software is the principal measure of progress</td>
<td>Entire team with the knowledge, skill &amp; ability, and behavioral competency package focusses towards delivering a working software at the end of every sprint. With the target point well defined and clear, team strives to achieve it; in the backdrop acquiring new skills every time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sustainable development, able to maintain a constant pace</td>
<td>Increased amount of competition, heightened innovation and creativity, high expectation; all forces an individual/team to overcommit. For some time this situation can be handled, but beyond that it ruins physical and mental stability, quality of work, and changed attitude. In new teams like this one, management pushes hard to get things done than what is possible in reality. However, as the team matures with growing EQ they ensure to commit and deliver quality product within their capacity. This provides them sufficient time to sharpen their IQ through learning, research, and innovation rather than creating a huge imbalance in EQ by over commitment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design</td>
<td>The team from the beginning tries to achieve excellence and superior quality to make it as unique so as to have customer traction. During this journey IQ plays a substantial role as there is an immense learning and out of box thinking resulting in new product ideas/processes. As they progress along the sprints, the teams’ in-depth knowledge and mastery over the product remarkably increases and helps the product to shape better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplicity—the art of maximizing the amount of work not done—is essential</td>
<td>Simplicity and making a product intuitively obvious isn’t simple and is incredibly challenging! The more elegant and straightforward your product design; the easier it will be for you to attract customers and maintainability. Only a highly competent individual/team can create such a workable design. The design and layout of the website was planned in such a way that any user new to the internet usage will also be able to navigate through all the features easily.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-organizing teams</td>
<td>Aspects of EQ like self-management, self-confidence, commitment, motivation, leadership, and trustworthiness are high in self-organized teams. Ownership and identity of every team member propels them to scale up and give their best to the project/organization. Although in a newly formed team, this make take a little time but slowly it is achieved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular adaptation to changing circumstances</td>
<td>Team continuously learn/unlearn new skills from their experience at the end of every sprint which helps them in developing their overall competency. This ongoing process at regular intervals apart from learning also helps to think differently and innovate; a huge value-add to an individual/project/organization. The scrum ceremonies further aid the team to achieve this.</td>
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Table 3: Agile principles influencing IQ, EQ, and overall competency development of an individual/team resulting in project/organization success

Through this journey, the team coped with all the changing and improved requirements from the Chef and were successful in releasing the website to the audience as planned.
The effort by the team was extremely appreciated by the Chef (stakeholder/customer) and had all the modern features to meet the ever changing market.

A lot of coaching and mentoring from the agile practitioner throughout the project phase provided the necessary confidence and expertise in embracing these values and principles. With immense learning (IQ and IQ), the team acquired a lot of skills which helped them in overall competency building. The enriching experience and high motivation level was evident in them along with a fruitful project delivery.

**Adapting to this paradigm shift**

Agile values and principles are designed to bring more agility and reduce red-tapism in project management. The greatest challenge in adapting to this paradigm shift is the change in mindset of every individual; as the tendency is to bring legacy thoughts within agile practices thus diluting the very purpose of its genesis. With a huge endorsement from the organization and support from a true agile practitioner, the teams can shift to this development methodology or adopt the values and principles in their existing projects. The thought of adapting to something new and its repercussion in terms of disturbance to the organized norm results in a lot of resistance. However, this should not dilute the focus and consider it as yet another attempt by the organization to move into another methodology; but rather it should stress and reap the underlying benefits (enriches and enhances the teams’ competency to such an extent that they become highly skilled to face/handle much more challenging projects) the agile values and principles have in store.

Initially every individual may experience a huge paradigm shift from their earlier setup to this change due to the increased visibility, continuous delivery of working product, changing requirements, close customer interaction, constant focus on maximizing stakeholder ROI, reduced management interference, self-organized teams, and incremental technical excellence (better design/process every time). Gradually the team will accept this and will sooner become a norm.
5. Conclusion

Project success drives/demonstrates an organization’s ability to add/expand new products/services, increase profit margins, improve organizational functioning, establish competitive edge, and to have a strong/satisfied customer base. On a very broad level the key elements which differentiate successful organizations from others are:

- Strategic focus
- Creativity and innovation
- Adapting to change
- Customer relations
- Managing and developing people
- Effective ceaseless communication

To achieve this, project teams/project manager have a huge responsibility and a magnanimous goal to handle/suppress all roadblocks/challenges to guarantee project success at all odds through adopting effective and efficient project management principles and practices.

Project managers with their magic wand are often considered as a means to transform an idea into reality. With this herculean task of managing complex projects, large teams, and demanding stakeholders; they follow/apply all the best practices of project management, experience, and historical information to guarantee project success. What works best for one project may not for another and vice versa! Therefore, there is a constant look out for that secret formula which will assure project success.

The more the search and change in the project management strategy; greater the chaos, unrest, and the fear of failure. Instead why not try, implement, and traverse through the proven path to success by complying agile values and principles. You or your team may not be working in an agile environment or your product/business may not be suitable to follow this development methodology; well that should not deter you from complying at least a few of these values and principles at work. Look at each one of these values and principles in-depth. At a point you will realize that they are not just guiding principles for agile projects but are universal to personal/professional growth, small-sized/big-sized business, and agile/legacy projects. Instead of reinventing the wheel on best practices for project management, why not adopt and adapt them and you can see a visible change!
6. References

- http://www.hr.wa.gov/WorkforceDataAndPlanning/WorkforcePlanning/Competencies/Pages/default.aspx
- http://agilemanifesto.org/