What's different about Agile Methodologies?

I believe agile methodologies represent a return to the idealistic notions of people like J.C.R. Licklider, Norbert Wiener, and Douglas Engelbart, who valued computers more for their human capability enhancement than for their economic or military benefits. While early researchers dedicated themselves to removing the time barriers posed by batch interactions with the computer, agile methodologists seem to be working towards removing the process barriers to true interactivity between the problem solver and the computer. This is accomplished by involving customers as full and valued partners on the project team and acknowledging the support of their work as the primary goal of the team's effort.

According to R. W. Terry (2001), our history contains both the seeds of our future possibilities and the limitations of our ultimate potential. Historical context provides the foundation for our action and is one of human action's seven dimensions. Software development practitioners could learn much from Terry's leadership model, which he built on these seven concerns by synthesizing decades of leadership research. Unlike many development models, his does not suggest that progress consists of advancing from one leadership zone into another, but that progress is achieved only when each concern is given its due. Every feature must be addressed in every action to the extent that it is relevant.

As shown in figure 1, relevance is determined by balancing two factors – certainty of outcome and agreement on direction. Agile methodologies are poised at the boundary between chaos and certainty, where meaning must be created – the point at which Terry calls for leadership rather than management. As the certainty of outcome becomes lower and agreement on direction becomes vaguer, agile methodologies become crucial. Their acceptance of the idea that the proper solution will emerge from dealing with concerns as they express themselves builds confidence in the team's ability to deal with uncertainty.
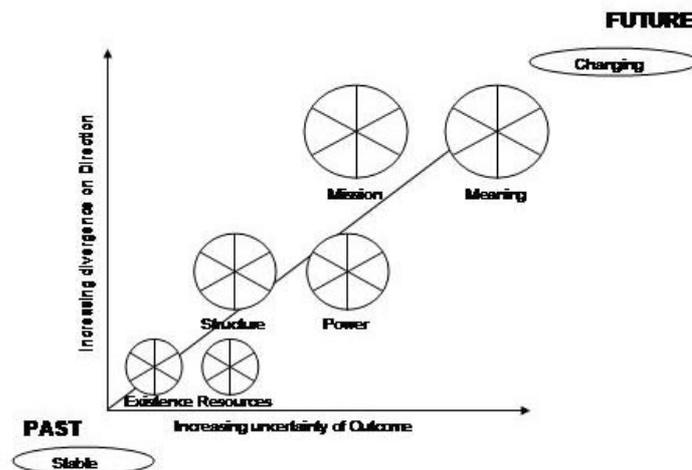

Figure 1 - 7 Zones of leadership (Fulfillment comprises and extends the others)

Each zone comprises aspects of all the other zones, but exists independently as well. Fulfillment represents the ultimate expression that results from integrating the other

six zones, reflecting on the wisdom gained there, and drawing inspiration for further action. Figure 2 shows how Terry illustrates their relationship.
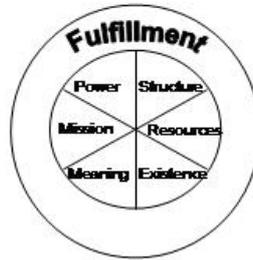
Figure 2 – Action Wheel developed by Robert W. Terry

Terry's seven dimensions, which resolve to 11 zones, are:

Zone	Concern	Description	Software Development Implications
1	Existence	Emphasis on probing the historical background of the present situation	Traditional methods emphasis on repeatability vs. agile emphasis on applicability
2	Resources	Emphasis on building core competencies, tools, scientific method, research, practical experience	Traditional emphasis on tools vs. agile emphasis on people
3a	Structure biased towards form	Emphasis on interconnected sustainable systems, defining roles and responsibilities, building infrastructure	Traditional segmentation of roles and responsibilities vs. agile generalists
3b	Structure biased toward process	Emphasis on affirmation of core values, strategic planning, coherence between what is said and done, team-building	Traditional emphasis on step-wise definition of process vs. agile emphasis on team to figure it out.
4	Power	Emphasis on creating ownership, participation, negotiation, empowerment	Traditional development team vs. agile cross-functional teams
5a	Mission biased towards ends	Emphasis on participatory direction-setting, framing the future, convergence	Traditional emphasis on meeting the spec vs. agile emphasis on meeting the need
5b	Mission biased towards means	Emphasis on developing anticipatory wisdom to deal with change, pattern recognition, metaphorical thinking	Traditional emphasis on pre-determined milestones vs. agile emphasis on continual progress toward customer satisfaction
6	Meaning	Emphasis on creating meaning in chaos through co-creation and centeredness	Traditional methods don't go here; agile methods have made inroads.

7a	Fulfillment focused on wise choices	Emphasis on authentic discernment of problems and application of appropriate solutions	This remains a goal for all development methodologies.
7b	Fulfillment focused on puzzle-probing	Emphasis on tensions among the six previous dimensions, their dependencies, and polarities	This remains a goal for all development methodologies.
7c	Fulfillment focused on living the promise	Emphasis on servant leadership, spirituality, ethics, values	This remains a goal for all development methodologies.

Agile methods represent a foray out of the systems world into the world of complex adaptive systems where accepting the destination motivates the journey, but the journey itself may demand a renegotiation of the final objective. Agile methods look both inward and outward for inspiration. They resonate with Terry's concept of authenticity - "action that is both true and real in ourselves and in the world." Authentic action fosters a resonance between a person or community's values and its surroundings while at the same time ennobling its spirit and engendering authentic action by others "in the commons" (p.112). Actions are authentic to the extent that they both express intent and enable positive growth in the world. The agile emphasis on constant feedback guarantees consistent attention to congruence between the project team's intent and its results. Thus, agile methods, while each addressing slightly different problems, enrich the software development community through their emphasis on underlying values rather than specific tools and through their reliance on people to provide whatever is needed to deliver value to the user.

References:

Terry, Robert W. (2001). Seven Zones for Leadership: Acting Authentically in Stability and Chaos. Davies Black Publishing, Palo Alto, CA.

Terry, Robert W. (1993). Authentic Leadership: Courage in Action. Jossey-Bass Publishing, San Francisco, CA.

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