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Agile in 3 Minutes

The simplest essays that could possibly work

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*For Nathan Arthur, who has always been teaching me how to think
about effective software development, and for Rebekka Schleier,
who has always been teaching me much more.*

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1: Effect

Why 3 minutes? Because 4 would be too many.

Why Agile? I don't care about Agile for its *own* sake, and I don't expect you to.

I *do* care about doing business effectively; meeting people's needs; making risks visible early, making informed decisions often, and delivering value early and often.

That's why I choose to care about Agile, and why you might care to.

"Agile" is just a word. I'm free to define it however I want, and so are you. But if we want to be understood, our best bet is to frame our definitions as interpretations of the local Constitution, the Agile Manifesto, a 2001 statement about the values of 17 software developers. Values, not practices: the Manifesto's authors knew there could be no such thing as software "best practices", only the most effective actions we've figured out for ourselves, thus far, in our own contexts.

When I read the Manifesto, I see it advancing the hypothesis that there *do* exist "best values" – that for superior software development outcomes, it is always necessary (and maybe sufficient) to emphasize the same small handful of values. In other words, I read the Manifesto as a claim that there exists no known context in which the wrong priorities are individuals and interactions, working software, customer collaboration, and responding to change.

Even if its claim is right, the Manifesto hasn't told us what to go do. That's no coincidence. Whatever "Agile" might mean, one thing's for sure: it's the opposite of telling people what to go do. The Manifesto simply offers a brief, considered opinion shared by the people who wrote it, and leaves us to think for ourselves.

So I won't tell you what to do either. Instead, I'll offer my own brief, considered opinions about mindset, emotion, values, principles, practices, and other Agile-related concepts. But I won't offer a precise definition of "Agile", because neither of us needs to judge whether we are or are not. We just need to make risks visible early, make informed decisions often, and deliver value early and often. We just need to do business effectively.