

Program Name

Agile Narratives

Program Type

Gathering and sharing personal stories relevant to Agile software development and mining them for knowledge.

Program Directors

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1st August 2005

Description

Gathering and sharing personal stories relevant to Agile software development and mining them for knowledge.

How will the program advance the mission, goals, values of the Agile Alliance? We believe that one of the most expressive media for communicating and influencing among people is narrative: stories about success and failure. We all have such stories, whether we work under the Agile banner or not, but because Agile development is not the mainstream approach, the stories are relatively few and are scattered.

Most people in the Agile community already recognize the legitimacy of techniques with a narrative element like appreciative enquiry and project retrospectives. These help people in teams articulate, share and learn from their experiences and provide the shared emotional energy to create positive change.

The goal of this program is to extend that idea to people previously outside the Agile community, drawing them in and helping them articulate arguments for change in their companies by drawing on the experience of others who have been in similar situations.

This program aims to collect narratives (stories) relevant to the concerns and interests of the Agile community. We hope to pool the diverse knowledge about software projects (Agile and non-Agile), problems, lessons learned, etc. in the form of narratives to create a searchable resource for the wider software community. To make the database searchable we plan to ask participants to answer simple questions to index their own stories.

The database is intended to be completely open, i.e. Agile Alliance members and non-members alike and people in any role can contribute to or search the database. There will

be no restrictions other than the minimum required to stop abuse of the database or its data.

Our primary goal is to:

- * Make existing knowledge more accessible and increase its spread. In particular, we want anyone to be able to answer their own questions about Agile development, its counterpoints such as chaos, migration, risks etc. using the stories told by others.

Our secondary goals are to mine the narratives to:

- * Understand and track the emergence of Agile development into the mainstream.
- * Look for beneficial techniques that have not yet been recognized by the Agile community.
- * Establish compelling business cases to try Agile development.

We feel that the database could potentially assist with future projects as well, and it is our intention to continue to encourage its use. We hope to make the database as self-managing as possible. Once set up we anticipate our role being to promote awareness of it and to mine narratives from it.

This program is proposed with the support and cooperation of the Cynefin network (<http://www.cynefin.net/>) and the Extreme Tuesday Club (<http://www.xpdeveloper.com/xpdwiki/Wiki.jsp?page=XtC>).

Main Activities

1. Design a narrative enquiry to elicit narratives relevant to the concerns and interests of the Agile community. A set of indexing questions will also be developed.
2. Set up a narrative database to store and query the narratives. We request Agile Alliance resources (e.g. space on the website, database) to do this.
3. Provide a web interface for narratives to be entered into the database by a storyteller and indexed on entry by the storyteller.
4. Provide a web interface for querying the database by answers to the indexing questions.

Requested support from the Agile Alliance

1. We would like to do this under the Agile Alliance banner and identity because:
 - a. it will help raise awareness of the program which will increase participation;

b. we feel appearing to be linked with commercial or geographical interests would reduce participation.

2. We would like to integrate with the Agile Alliance website for the above reasons and to provide a place to host the database and its interface.

3. We would like the Agile Alliance to help promote and maintain awareness of the program through its website, conferences, mailing lists and any other resources.

4. We would like to request funding in principle to cover the costs of transcribing verbal narratives. We don't yet know to what extent this will be required, if at all.

(By the way, I would also suggest the addition of this section to all your program proposals in future to clarify the anticipated relationship between the program and the wider Agile Alliance and to make clear what actions on the Agile Alliance are being requested. -- Duncan)

What are the commercial aspects of the program? None.

The Extreme Tuesday Club is a volunteer-run not-for-profit organization set up to explore and disseminate Agile thinking in London and the UK.

The Cynefin network (www.cynefin.net) is an open source consultancy network dedicated to improving organizational knowledge management.

The program will be open to whatever organizers or participants wish to take part. All the data gathered will be openly available. If the program is successful, we hope to develop a succession plan to bring others in to replace those who set the program up.

Describe the program quarter by quarter over the next year

We anticipate most work will occur in the first quarter, with efforts to set up the narrative database, formulate prompting and indexing questions and spread awareness of the existence of the program. The assistance of the Agile Alliance will be particularly helpful during this time. We plan to launch the initiative and begin the process of creating indexing questions at Agile 2005.

After the first quarter, maintenance efforts will be required to ensure the database continues to operate and to establish an on-going effort to raise awareness of the program.

Depending on how rapidly narratives are collected it may be possible to begin to draw useful information from the database during the year, in line with our goals stated above and such goals as we or others may decide to use the database for. Various organizers

will try to use the database to perform their own enquiries and we hope to present results back at various Agile and related conferences, perhaps in the form of experience-sharing sessions that prompt the collection of more narratives.

What products will the program create and what are the associated prices?

The main product is the narrative database. Its use will be free - both open and gratis. We hope that less tangible products will come from this, as mentioned in our stated goals.

