

# THE FOUR PERSONALITY TYPES ON AGILE TEAMS

## *Understanding Your Agile Team's "Cast of Characters".*

In his recent article, Matthew Francis says:

*"We've all worked with them... people who achieve outstanding results, but leave a trail of destruction behind them in the process! While their 'results' (typically financial) might bring short-term gains, these individuals can cause a long-term world of pain culturally (and therefore, financially), which begs the question... why do we refuse to see the forest for the trees, and allow ourselves to be held to cultural ransom by high performing jerks?"*

He goes on to say:

*"Overall, the business world has matured (yes, some industries more so than others), and organizations understand that how you treat people (both customers and colleagues) is just as important, if not more so, than the financial results you achieve."*

It's not just about "high performing jerks". The article made me think about the different types of people that I have worked with during my career. Personalities, and how they interact with one another, become even more important in self-organized, Agile teams. A single person can have a significant impact on the performance of the entire team. Recognizing the four main types of personalities and understanding how they interact can help address issues before they become critical.

## FOUR TYPES OF PERSONALITIES

The four types of personalities are divided along two axes: competence and affability. The first type of personality is "Captain America" and is highly competent and highly affable. Everyone wants to work with people like this. They deliver quality work and are usually good communicators and mentors. For example, a Captain America Developer not only writes great code but also makes a wonderful pair programming partner. You can't have enough of these people.

The second type of personality is "Groot" and is less competent and highly affable. They usually have very positive attitudes and are willing to do whatever they can to help the team. Because of their attitude, other team members are willing to mentor them to help improve their skill level. I've seen some wonderful things happen. A good example is the Groot QA Engineer that goes out of their way to test everyone's code but doesn't have the skills to become a programmer. Not everyone can become a full stack developer.

Unfortunately, if a person cannot be mentored and is assessed to be truly incompetent, there are some difficult decisions that need to be made. In some cases, it may be best for both the individual and the team for that person to be removed from the team. In other cases, the team may want to support



their team member, knowing that other options will need to be explored. The main key is to be honest with everyone involved while taking care to protect the privacy and dignity of the individual.

The third type of personality is “Iron Man” and is highly competent and unfriendly. They are the brilliant jerks described in Matthew Francis’ article. The classic example is Iron Man Programmer who knows more about the system than everyone else. No one else should be touching their code and they cannot be bothered to work with anyone else. Although they may be viewed positively by some because of the value they are able to deliver, great caution must be taken to avoid damage to the team. Unfortunately, in many cases, these people are arrogant and very difficult to mentor. Again, some difficult decisions may need to be made.

The fourth type of personality is “Toad” and is incompetent and unfriendly. People like this should not be included on Agile teams. An example is the Command and Control scrum master who thinks they know more about software development than everyone else. They provide no value and tend to poison the teams they work with. In many ways, not including this type of personality may be one of the easiest decisions to make.

In summary, for great Agile teams, include as many type Captain Americas as you can, mentor the Groots you have, be very cautious when including Iron Mans, and avoid Toads at all costs.



This TIP was written by Lorenzo De Leon, who specializes in Financial Services and Healthcare & Life Sciences. Lorenzo welcomes comments and discussion on this topic and can be reached at [Lorenzo.deleon@trexin.com](mailto:Lorenzo.deleon@trexin.com).

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