Agile, From a Developer's Perspective

I remember a couple of years ago, when most people were going to the agile training bootcamp. It was during free beer day in the yard (commencement). I was at a table with a few other developers who were in the bootcamp currently. I think I had it scheduled for the following week. I was very interested to hear what they had to say about it.

It was resoundingly negative. Everyone had read different material online before about “what is agile” and everything they had heard (and were hearing from the bootcamp) were different implementations of scrum. An implementation that wasn’t what they had read about was “wrong”.

Even after the bootcamp, a lot of developers have what I would call a “bad feeling” about agile. The most prominent of complaints seems to stem around what is seen as culture of blame.

- When something lapses, the fault comes down on the developer for not reaching across the line more. I’ve heard it comes up a lot that developers are expected to do PM/QA work, but rarely are PM/QAs expected to do development.
- When estimations are off and something doesn’t get done, developers are treated as though they didn’t work fast enough. Developers don’t feel safe explaining context switching or being wrong about estimations.
- Agile is just another drive for managers to account for every hour of a developers day. (see daptiv) Development is time consuming and estimations don’t always make sense to people not doing the development. (image from here: http://georgestocker.com/2014/04/15/how-to-destroy-programmer-productivity/) Explaining that is difficult.
- Frequent interruptions slow development. Developers have the sense that management think “agile” means “faster”.

I actually don’t think scrummasters / PMs are doing things “wrong”. I don’t think developers are being directly persecuted in any way. It would be silly to even imagine a scrummaster in any group making a developer feel like they hadn’t done their work based on incomplete stories. But this is a general feeling based on how agile has been presented to developers. It hasn’t been presented as “their” process.

I look around this group and I see managers abound, but no developer representation. “Agile” was formed around software development. It has project management side effects, but that is not the purpose. Perhaps our drive to put the PM side effects first has worked to alienate developers.

Top down and bottom up are both important aspects of agile methods. Meeting them in the middle is how this works for everyone. How much are we thinking about agile as bottom up? How much are we thinking of it as top down? Are we polling ideas for implementation from the ground up? Do they feel like it’s their process?