A recent SEI blog post disputes the widely held idea that some programmers are leaps and bounds better than others. “Programmer Moneyball: Challenging the Myth of Individual Programmer Productivity,” by Bill Nichols, senior member of the SEI’s technical staff, challenges the supposedly superior productivity of the so-called x10 programmer, citing new data from the SEI.

“Our study concluded that the truth is more nuanced,” Nichols writes in the post. “The many studies that seem to show a x10 performance range conflate differences between programmers with normal programmer day-to-day variation.”

In other words, differences between programmers are as much due to normal, day-to-day variation as skill. The SEI study of nearly 500 student programmers also suggests that most productivity differences spring from low performance, rather than high performance, and that few programmers are very good or very bad.

Nichols also discusses the implications of these results for managers, including advice for improving programmer productivity.

Read the blog post.
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