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GOING ALL IN
LESSONS LEARNED IN AGILE IT AT HARVARD BUSINESS PUBLISHING

Elizabeth Ross
Corporate Learning
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The premier source for business education materials: cases, articles, book chapters, and elearning programs for instructors and students.
Who I Am

- Joined HBP in 2013
- Part of EIT Senior Management in 2014
- Career in enterprise software support, project management, and software development
Concept

MANAGING YOURSELF

Managing Oneself

by Peter F. Drucker

FROM THE JANUARY 2005 ISSUE

- Write down intention
- Review in 6 or 9 months
- Did the results match your intentions?
Background

What were we doing before going agile?

- Functional managers directly managing people and work
- Managers meeting with every stakeholder and were escalation point for all work
- Everyone needed to be able to support any of our 70+ systems based on the next request
- People assigned to both projects and maintenance/enhancements and expected to do both
Background

Started with traditional work teams. Work would queue between teams. Work always flowed down from management.

Re-organized to cross-functional teams around portfolio of systems or services.
Background

- What was the intention of “going Agile” for us?
- What were the intentions behind our decisions:
  - Choosing Scrum or Kanban
  - Staffing Scrum Masters
  - Making Senior Management a team
- How did they play out?
Choosing Scrum or Kanban

- Trained on both
- Teams chose their approach
  - 3 Scrum, 3 Kanban
- Intention
  - Collaboration, Transparency, Self-Organization
- Unexpected Outcome
  - Learned about determining the maximum appropriate involvement for decisions
Staffing Scrum Masters

- Initial opt-in approach
  - Long J-curve
  - Struggled with split responsibilities

- Senior Management decided to bring in experienced Scrum Masters

- Intention
  - Improved communication & process
  - Help teams without scrum masters

- Unexpected Outcomes
  - Hurt feelings of people opting-in
  - Skepticism among teams who hadn’t had them
Making Senior Management a Team

- **Commitment to do, not just say**
  - Included Purchasing & Security so everyone in Org was on a team
  - Played Kanban, including WIP limits & measuring lead/cycle time

- **Intention**
  - More focus of senior management as a team
  - More work-sharing and alignment on vision

- **Unexpected Outcomes**
  - Board didn’t reflect the actual work
    - Purchasing/Security was a distraction
  - Willing to scrap it and start again
Lessons Learned

- **Choosing Scrum or Kanban**
  - Some things don’t matter. How decisions are implemented does

- **Knowing intentions doesn’t always lead to expected results**
  - Senior management perspective not always same as teams’ or individuals’
  - Methods & frequency of communication highly important

- **Experimentation is key**
  - Keep trying. Keep everyone open to change
Lessons Learned

- Senior management commitment & engagement is critical to success
  - Frequent communication
  - Understanding struggles facing the teams because going through them as well

- Senior Management as a team
  - A lot more alignment within our team
  - Know more about initiatives outside of my own group
  - Able to swarm or share responsibilities more easily
Questions?
Thank You