Building Cultural Agility

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Purple Agility
Enterprise Agile, Innovation & Organizational Transformation

Former salesforce VP, coaching at Yahoo!, learned agile with ThoughtWorks in 2004

Consulting clients include eBay, Twitter, Zendesk, British Telecom

Focus on people and culture over process.
What is cultural agility?

Three different company tales

Culture cues and agility
What is Cultural Agility?
Being Agile versus doing agile

How you behave

What are your principles and values
Culture defined

The behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that we accept, generally without thinking about them.
Cultural Agility - where the norms of an organization are inherently agile …or have become agile
Systemic blockers are routinely addressed
Leaders & managers make better decisions
Teams have more ownership & success
Company has better outcomes
Three Company Tales
Company 1 - “Acme”
Where we started:

Command & Control
Silo’d organizational structure
No standards
Lots of specialization and tacit knowledge
Low morale
Find the friendliest pockets of agility

Help some teams use scrum for improved delivery results

Keep them unblocked, transparent and celebrate successes
Our results:

Teams who use scrum are happier and have improved delivery.

Overall culture is still not agile. Teams can get blocked when working with other teams.

Leadership behaviors do not change.

It’s progress…
Company 2 - “Beta”
“Agile” terms used but teams operate in waterfall

Pressure to estimate & hit deadlines with fixed scope. History of poor delivery

Managers responsible for planning, design, resourcing
What was done:

Everyone trained at all levels, including HR Managers become ScrumMasters

Persistent teams all use scrum & bottom up plan

Mechanics exist but it is not yet ingrained and it’s fragile
Our results:

Teams aligned and work together more easily

“Bad news” earlier allows for better trade-offs and decision making

High visibility, but trust is slow to build

Leadership has more honest conversations about capabilities
Company 3- salesforce
Successful rollout of scrum but teams execute by the “book” with waterfall residue

Leaders hedge their bets with competing teams

Cross functional collaboration is only at the scrum team level
What was done:

Trained everyone and deepened understanding of the “why”

Lots of feedback loops so dysfunction or blockers get exposed and resolved

Cross functional teams at all levels – PCTs- decisions are debated and aligned

Decision making pushed lower in the organization
Our results:

Ability to make large product pivots quickly

Very high quality software

Most teams are mid to high performing, although there is always opportunity to improve

Agile is part of the culture.
Finding cultural cues and improving agility
Understand the culture

Gather data – retros, interviews, observation

Provide objective data to the most senior layer who will listen

Give people time to absorb

Be empathetic and kind
Change is hard – and it’s nearly impossible to change culture without top down and bottom up cooperation

People resist change

Agile is all about people

Dysfunction must be addressed
Align changes to existing cultural values
Focus on the “why”
Remember to address “what’s in it for me?”
Be honest about what’s possible
Continuously improve
Take bold steps. Fail fast to learn.

Focus on removing systemic blockers & improvement.

If things go wrong, gather more data to understand why and adapt.

Understand changes will have negative and positive consequences.
Warning - Don’t forget the “frozen middle”

Managers and mid level leaders are often the last to change

Give them a role where they have skin in the game
Stay honest and curious. If it feels too easy, you are not going deep enough for long lasting change. If it feels too hard or there is backlash, you may not be able to push change further...right now.
Find the “pockets of goodness” to show what’s possible.
Lead by example. Don’t preach.
Celebrate success and use it to build evangelists and seeders for change.
Don’t argue. Experiment and show results.
Stay focused on outcomes. They may change over time.
Always go back to the data to measure results.
Look for progress and improvement.
Final Thoughts
Genuine transformation takes time – remember it’s culture change

Not every organization will be able to change dramatically. Ensure expected outcomes are aligned

Do what’s possible today. Continuously improve
Questions?