Seven Principles for Any Effective Agile Team, Collocated or Distributed: A Workshop

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Problems with Agile Teams

• “Agile” teams aren’t agile and they aren’t teams

• Many teams don’t practice transparency

• Many teams don’t establish a project rhythm

• Many teams don’t reflect on a rhythm

• Lock in a process instead of experiment

• Many teams work as “silos of one” instead of collaborating

• Many teams share on a “need to know basis” and no one needs to know.

• People are quick to point a finger when things go wrong instead of learning from the situation.

• Teams don’t persevere when they don’t have access to the right information or people.
Distributed Agile Teams Require Sufficient Hours of Overlap

Original hours of overlap

New, agreed-upon hours of overlap

• Not this workshop. Teams need to create their hours of overlap

• Ask team members to see how they can work for the betterment of the team

Hear more in Mark’s talk on Tue Aug 6 - Facilitating Distributed Teams or read about it at https://www.jrothman.com/distworkspace

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Agile Teams

- Have all the skills and capabilities they need to complete the work
- One team goal
- Affiliate with each other
- Interdependent work
7 Principles for Any Agile Team

1. Principle: Create transparency at all levels.
2. Principle: Create a culture of continuous improvement with experiments.
3. Principle: Practice pervasive communication at all levels.
4. Principle: Create a project rhythm.
7. Principle: Default to collaborative work, not solo work.
Organize Yourselves for the Workshop

- Consider working in teams of three people (two is okay, four might be too many)
  - If you’re here with other people from your org, consider working with them.

- We’ll work in 8-minute timeboxes
  - 1-2 minutes to explain principle
  - You get 5 min to answer questions to see how your teams measure up. (probably more than you have time for)
  - We’ll debrief quickly
1. Create Transparency at All Levels

- Agile teams need to see everything for the team: all the WIP, all the backlogs, roadmaps, issues, everything
- Does your team have a shared workspace (not just a board)?
- If your org has multiple teams especially working on the same product, can your team see your team’s boards, roadmaps?
- What kind of corporate transparency does your work require?
Activity 1: Create Transparency at All Levels

- Locate your team on the continuum

- Where does your team need to be? Make a list of what your team needs to see and when they need to see it.

- What would you have to do to make that list available to the team?
2. Create a Culture of Continuous Improvement with Experiments

- Agile approaches need experimentation (inspect-and-adapt)
  - Every team needs to experiment even if they’re doing “fantastic”
- Try is not an experiment
What Experiments Look Like

1. What is the reason you want to experiment?
   You might need to learn something, you might have a problem.

2. Create a hypothesis. Based on experience, you think you have a problem “here”

3. Test the hypothesis with an experiment. Create measurements in advance.

4. Timebox the experiment.

5. Measure the results.

6. Check your hypothesis.
Activity 2: Create a Culture of Continuous Improvement with Experiments

- Locate your team on the continuum
- What areas do you want to consider for experiments?
  - Do you have hypotheses? Write them down and discuss with the colleagues you’ve selected.
- Make a list of these possible experiments
3. Practice Pervasive Communication at All Levels

- Asynchronous communications are insufficient for agile teams
- The more async comms you have, the more you have to “overcommunicate”
- Even sync communications might require more-than-once messages
Communication Possibilities

• Rich: full duplex, synchronous

• Asynchronous communication is not rich

• Natural: see each other’s faces and bodies to see social cues

• Team backchannel: offers another channel when the team works together
Activity 3: Practice Pervasive Communication at All Levels

• Locate your team on the continuum
  • How do the team members choose to communicate? (How often do they use video?)
  • Does every member have the ability to use all channels? (Includes PO)
  • How do your managers communicate with the team(s) now?
• Make a list of communication challenges you’d like to address
4. Create a Project Rhythm

- You might think you’re using a timebox (sprint/iteration). Here’s a check:
  - The team always finishes (almost always) everything at the end of the timebox.
  - Nothing “rolls over” from iteration to iteration
  - The PO is able to change the next iteration’s contents based on the finishing from this iteration.
## Two Main Agile Approaches

### Iteration-Based Agile

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Each timebox is the same size. Each timebox results in running tested features.

### Flow-Based Agile

Feature: Clarify Req't, Analysis Design Build Test Release Deploy
Feature: Clarify Requirement, Analysis Design Build Test Release Deploy
Feature: Clarify Requirement, Analysis Design Build Test Release Deploy

Repeat as needed ...

In flow, the team limits the number of features active at any time with WIP limits for each team activity. There is no timeboxing built into flow.
Commonalities Between Iterations and Flow

- Limit WIP (Work in Progress)
- Timeboxes limit scope
- Flow limits team’s WIP
- Based on collaboration
- Focused on throughput
- Result in running, tested features
Activity 4: Create a Project Rhythm

- Locate your team on the continuum
  - Does the team always maintain a cadence of demos and retros? If not, what would be a better cadence?
  - If you could choose an approach on this continuum, what would it be?
  - Make a list of anything you might want to change
5. Assume Good Intention

- Especially with asynchronous communications, it’s easy to miss intention

- Neither blaming or placating is helpful
Congruence Helps

- When we take the other person, ourselves, and the context into account, we are congruent.

- Blaming: forget about the other

- Placating: forget about self

- Super-reasonable: only about the context; forget about the people involved

- Note: Just because we are technical does not mean we don’t have emotions. We do. We don’t always go to super-reasonable. Many of us go directly to blame. (Sigh)
Activity 5: Assume Good Intention

- Place each team member on the continuum as you experience them.
- What could you do as a leader to help people move more to the center?
  - In-person meeting, open space, retro, you might have other ideas
- Make your list of possibilities
6. Create Resilience with a Holistic Culture

- **Resilience**: ability to recover to move towards a change

- You need to change your board and the team can agree on the changes.

- Someone else needs to initiate the meeting and they have the ability to do so.

- Both are easier if we understand each other’s context
Activity 6: Create Resilience with a Holistic Culture

- Locate your team on the continuum
  - Where would you like to be?
  - How does resilience play into your team’s ability to experiment?
  - List three possibilities for increasing your team’s resilience
7. Default to Collaborative Work

- Agile teams do not “assign” work to individuals (no micro-silos)

- When teams focus on the same problem, they can create better flow and deliver value faster

- If you are part of a distributed team, and you have sufficient audio and video tooling, you can collaborate
Collaboration Definitions

- **Pairing**: two people (of any variety) work together. One (virtual) keyboard, WIP=1

- **Swarming**: team working together. WIP=1
  
  - Little planning, separate to do own work, check in on frequent basis (60 mins)
  
  - When done with own work, available to support/help others

- **Mobbing**: entire team work together. One (virtual) keyboard, WIP=1
Activity 7: Default to Collaborative Work

- Locate your team on the continuum
- Where would you like your team to be?
- Make a list of ways your team could collaborate
Activity (Last!): Make One Smaller List

• You each have several possibilities for each of the principles. That’s too much to manage.

• Find and circle ONLY 3 items on your worksheet that you are likely to try in the next month

• We’ll timebox you and we’ll debrief together.
Let’s Stay in Touch

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Johanna
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“Build Your Modern Management Mindset”
2 pm
National Harbor 12/13

Mark
presenting tomorrow:
“Facilitating Distributed Teams”
3:45 pm
Chesapeake 10/11/12