Organization in Rank-conscious and Reserved East Asia on the Bumpy Track to Team Health

SANGTAE KIM, HYUNGJONG LEE, HYEEUN JO
World Map

Homeland of BTS

<image source: https://ko.wikipedia.org/wiki/%ED%8C%8C%EC%9D%BC:World_location_map.svg>
Our Perceivings on Some Cultural Aspects...

- Status-conscious (Rank/Social)
  - Age:
    - How old are you?
    - Friend
  - Language: words different depending on seniority

- Socially Reserved
  - Shy on public scrutiny
  - Questions & Answers > Discussion
  - Decision > Discussion

* Not saying something is good or bad *
What makes a Great Team?

Looked into Hackman factors → Agile on selected software development teams

Hackman Model

Five Factors for Effective Teams

1. Team Org. & PO
2. Workshops & Events
3. Sprint Operation
4. Agile Training & Tools
5. Agile Coach & Agile Leader

We’ll talk about experience on each approach in the following slides

Onto Our Experience...

Disclaimer: Not One Rule to Rule Them All, but Our *Experience*
Starting the Agile Experience

Scrum offers a good starting point

- Cross-functional team members
- Product Owner and Scrum Master roles
- Scrum Ceremonies
- Agile support tools
- And so on...

Agile Coach will face:

- No Product Owner role
- Organized into functional teams
- Members assigned to participate in a project
- Not every one in the team on the same page on Agile

1. Team Org. & PO

- Couldn’t change structure, went with team operation

**Functional Organization and Process**

- Different groups serving each function
- Interactions with other functions

**Team Operation**

- Feel of a Product Team with all functional members
- Regular collaboration in same space
1. Team Org. & PO

Helps:

- Training to Product Owners and team members to understand team operation
- Reminder and emphasis that this is how our team agree to work
- Consistent communication between the PO and the team

Challenges:

- Unable to form co-located cross-functional teams
- The Product Owner empowerment
- Individual performance evaluation
2. Workshops and Events

- Organized set of workshops and events to share viewpoints

**Product Vision Workshop**
- to align and contemplate the *direction of product*
- share common objectives and discuss various viewpoints

**User Story Workshop**
- to identify *usage scenarios*, priorities, acceptance criteria
- discuss functionalities, non-functionalities and values

**Release Planning Workshop**
- to establish *milestone goals* that the members collaborate towards
- PO and members discuss recent changes/findings

**Half-time Locker Room**
- to *look back* at how things went so far, and *pep up* the team onwards
- held after about half of the project year has passed

*Ref: Rasmusson, J. “The Agile Samurai”, The Pragmatic Bookshelf, 2010*
2. Workshops and Events

Helps:

● Have everyone participate: gets people to talk more
  ▪ Meet up with participants prior to the event to gain consensus (value of different viewpoints)
    ✓ Make people feel more appreciated
  ▪ Have the functional groups take part in presenting information (‘we are in it together’)
● Location away from the immediate workplace
  ▪ Agenda/Timeline notification (people need to shift work schedules)
  ▪ Food and Beverages
● Timekeeping
3. Sprint Operations

- All the project members participated in planning, review, and retrospective
  - Even if in different locations
    - Reviews and retrospectives in a single day and planning the day after
      : to emphasize the end and start of a sprint
    - Often adjusted to having the review, retrospective, and planning all in a single day
      : request by the team members coming from far distances
      : Pre-planning using online tools prior to the review and made adjustments after the review
    - Daily meetings by conference call

- Use the same Agile support tools
  ※ such as Jira and Confluence, commercial Agile support tools provided by Atlassian company
3. Sprint Operations

- Expected some hustle and bustle... but many reluctant to speak out their minds openly
  - Many people conscious of status
    - Do not want to be considered impolite
    - Seem hesitant to be the troublemaker
  - Status-conscious
  - Socially reserved

- Sometimes, a project leader states that the team is already doing Agile activities.
  - Common practice so stated - the daily meeting.
  - However, we sometimes find an hour-long reporting session

- Planning was less involved than expected
  - Few senior members of a team identified work needed to be done
  - Who does what was pre-determined even before the planning meeting
3. Sprint Operations

Helps:

● Mixture of Mandatory Activities & Comfortable Ambience

● Facilitate Conversations
  ▪ Ask seniors to speak last in cases where speaking first led to nobody voicing opinions
  ▪ Ask seniors to elaborate more when seniors seem to announce a decision crisply
  ▪ Ask juniors if they understood what was being discussed to catalyze participation
  ▪ Always give a chance for a participant from each functional group to voice opinions

● Have Conversations with Seniors and Juniors
  ▪ Have personal talks to explain why the coach is doing something
  ▪ Find ways to meet the team expectations
  ▪ Encourage Juniors to make inquiries to understand the particulars of the tasks.
    ✓ Sometimes juniors ventured to perform the task and identified additional related tasks
4. Agile Training & Tools

- **The full-day Agile Boot Camp**
  - Every member participation
  - 1st Half : Agile theory and lab sessions
    - Agile concepts, agile practices and roles
    - Agile boards and user stories
  - 2nd Half : Team building activities
    - Making team ground rules
    - Designing team activity flow

- **Agile Tools : Online board**
  - Distributed teams
  - Records
4. Agile Training & Tools

Helps:

- A beneficial event that doesn’t feel like “just another training session”
  - Having all the members participate together
  - Having activities discussing the actual project and team
  - Having an external agile coach as trainer/facilitator (imbues a more ‘official’ feel)

☞ Positive Feedback on the Agile Boot Camp

✓ “Having our actual team members made it more interesting and real”
✓ “A positive event that set the overall atmosphere of the project”
✓ “Great to have the lab sessions to understand the concepts”

- We usually use an online board, but an offline board is helpful for newly formed teams
5. Agile Coach & Agile Leader

- **Agile Coach Group:**
  - Direct Team Support
    - Daily interaction with the team
    - Workshops and events
    - Sprint operations
    - Agile Boot Camp
    - Agile tool training
  - In-direct Team Support
    - Agile training for newcomers
    - Agile Leader training course
    - Online community website
    - Agile Newsletter & Daily Clippings
    - Internal Agile Conference
    - Offline Meetups

- **Team Agile Leader...** (a member of the team)
  - provides agile support quickly within the team
  - promotes Agile and supports the members within the team
  - facilitates communication between PO and the team members
5. Agile Coach & Agile Leader

Helps:

● An external coach’s coaching support was a great help to the team
  - Able to talk about topics that members were cautious of
● Experience sharing amongst Team Agile Leaders through various channels
● A variety of agile training to meet specific needs

Challenges:

● Full-time Agile Coach role
● Team Agile Leader:
  - who to assign the role, the responsibilities of the role, and how it differs from a manager role
Results
What feedback did we receive?

Thankfully the teams we worked with replied that **working with us helped**

Survey on five categories before and after working with ten teams

- Increase in all five categories
- Higher in information exchange and communication
- Slightly lower in self-motivation, team work, and clear purpose

**The Good**
- Access to more information
- Able to divulge their thoughts and opinions more openly
- Better collaboration towards common goal

**Possible Limitation**
- Structure
- A matter of empowerment
- Awareness of structure and seniority
The following seems to help

If you ever find yourself in a similar situation as ours,

- Work to create a more **comfortable ambience** where people feel more at ease
- There always seems to be an **opinion leader** or two; talk and talk to win him/her over
  - May or may not be the official manager of the team
  - How that person interacts with the coach to show how much value is placed in Agile
- Agile Coach recognized as the **helper**: always keep members informed
- Show that you yourself **respect** everyone’s opinion and **value** participation
  - It’s not impolite; many of the juniors do put forward their opinions and like to have discussions
  - not losing face to say that you do not know something and need help from others
  - Show thanks when someone volunteers to help
- Having an **external Agile Coach** who does not directly answers to the manager
  - **Time keeping**, especially with seniors or supervisors
Thank You & The END