What is Agile Coaching?

In the world of traditional waterfall-based project management, there is no official coaching role. But in Agile, the role of Agile coach has developed over time to become a key member of the organization. While the Agile coach is not a member of the Agile team, the coach plays a critical role in helping the team leverage Agile to optimize the techniques and seek continuous process improvements.

The coach is a resource available to instill the Agile mindset for the team but also for the organization. With the transitioning of teams from a traditional “command-and-control” model to a more “self-organizing” team who is responsible and accountable to the decisions and execution of project goals. This represents a major culture shift for many organizations. It is the job of the coach to explain the benefits of this shift and drive this mindset through the teams.

The Agile coach also helps functional-area managers (people managers) to understand their continuing role in Agile and how they assist in the big picture of project management in an Agile world.

Per Lyssa Adkins, an Agile (or Scrum) coach is:

- Someone who appreciates the depths of agile practices and principles and can help teams appreciate them
- Someone who has faced the big dragons, organizational impediments, and has become a coach to managers and other outsiders in the course of addressing them
- Someone who can help management at all levels of the organization to understand the benefits of working agile
- Someone who has brought ideas from facilitation, coaching, conflict management, mediation, theater, and more, to help the team become a high-performance team.

The Agile coach can assist the organization in not only transitioning to Agile but also in helping to maintain the correct mindset. While often the Scrum Master’s role is limited to his or her team, the Agile coach tends to work more at the organizational or enterprise level across multiple teams with specific techniques, such as Scrum of Scrums or the Agile Release Train to help teams with cross team communication and coordination.
The Agile coach coaches the Scrum Master, the Product Owner and senior management in regularly reminding and advising them on Agile’s principles and help inspect and adapt practices as necessary.

There is another key role that the Agile coach can play- to make sure the teams are prepared to embark on the new Agile delivery approach. Often, Agile teams are thrown together before they have been properly trained and coached, with a clear understanding of what it really means to be self-organizing or even how to run a daily stand-up. Our roles as coaches is to help ensure Scrum team readiness before the first Sprint.

Planning an Agile transformation before the first Sprint is very important. Team members have to understand their roles and responsibilities, as well as how they interface within the Scrum Team to optimize their overall experience and project delivery.

What does Research say about Agile Coaching?

According to a 2014 study, “The companies that used an Agile Coach consider the adoption to be a success and they would all use an Agile Coach again.” Other companies said that while their adoption of Agile was a success without a coach, there was a significant learning curve and they would recommend that other companies use a coach.

According to respondents, other findings were that:

- The benefits brought by an Agile Coach exceeded the financial costs
- The value Agile Coaches provide is that they significantly reduce the risk of failure of agile adoption and speed up the adoption process

If you’re going to adopt Agile into your organization – or if you’ve already done so or are struggling, consider having an Agile Collaborative coach be part of your team.

Your Call to Action: Start Now

Agile tells us that we don’t have to wait to have a plan for absolutely everything before we begin our work. Our approach begins with a diagnosis of key issues, challenges and impacts. Once we have identified this backlog, we work with you to identify the high-target challenges we want to prioritize based on business value impacts.

We are experienced Agile coaches. We have implemented Agile projects and can share that experience with your project teams. We observe meetings, provide feedback and advice to your teams and help them perform at a higher level.

For example, if you are struggling with alignment of the features of your next product release, we can work with your product owners to help on prioritization techniques, like MoSCoW and others, and recalibrate to a more business-value-focused prioritization process. This becomes critical since, most likely, this prioritization issue is causing delays in product releases, with large opportunity costs which impact your bottom line.

How do you get in touch?

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