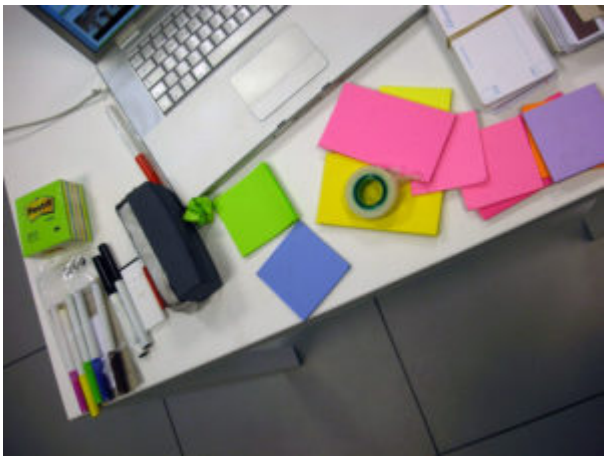
Reasons Why Agile Coaches Must Get Their Hands Dirty

written by Manoj Khanna | September 8, 2014



Agile coaches must be involved in the client's Agile process. Those who have the impression that coaching can be done from the sidelines are mistaken, for coaches must get their hands dirty if they want to bring about successful Agile adoption.

To better explain why Agile coaches cannot be observers, I will provide details about the possible mayhem within the Agile landscape, some twisted thoughts about coaching, and the high-level transition plans that Agile coaches should set in motion for their clients.

Mayhem within the Agile landscape

The landscape is rampant with companies trying to transition their teams to Agile while not implementing the method fully. Companies transitioning from a traditional method to Agile face obstacles in the process. Company leaders must fully understand Agile. On top of that, they then must convey the information to their teams and get everyone to coordinate. During the Agile transition, they may encounter issues such as working on too many projects at once, improperly allocating resources, and not forming truly cohesive teams. In certain companies, such transitions are major ones – a situation that

increases the difficulty of transitioning to Agile.

These obstacles are such that the move toward Agile likely will not be smooth and successful the first time around. Without Agile coaches to guide them, companies will fumble through trial-and-error projects numerous times before they attain full Agile implementation. Their Agile adoption process will require more time than if they had the assistance of an Agile coach.

Twisted thoughts about Agile coaching

Not any Agile coach will do, however. Companies who decide to enlist the assistance of a coach need help in laying a solid Agile foundation and smoothing their adoption process. In order to provide such assistance, Agile coaches must immerse themselves in the process as if they were part of the company.

Too many Agile coaches, however, are under the impression that coaching consists merely of teaching the company leaders the Agile components. They teach Agile instead of walking the companies through the process as coaches. Few deem it necessary to observe the leaders and teams or to provide insight into what is properly implemented and what needs to be done better. Yet Agile coaches cannot be sideline observers of their clients, because Agile implementation does not come with a guidebook. Each company will have a unique implementation process based on individual dynamics, and coaches need to understand each company and tailor their coaching appropriately.

The Agile coach’s necessary involvement

Agile coaches must coach hands-on. Companies know their transition to Agile would take significant time for them to sort through on their own, and often they want to thoroughly adopt Agile more quickly. Such companies enlist Agile coaches for their seasoned insight and experience, which coaches can

provide if they work properly within the company.

Coaches who stand on the sidelines, give advice on the Agile method, and then leave quickly do not assist much toward a successful transition to Agile. They need to remember the reason why the companies sought them out in the first place – to guide them through the Agile implementation and provide pointers along the way. Agile coaches need to understand the companies that they work with, provide insight into how Agile can fit into each company individually, and guide each company through the transition.

Agile coaches can become involved at any stage of the transition process. It depends when a client has deemed it necessary to enlist a coach's assistance. Ideally, a company would enlist an Agile coach from the beginning to reduce delay.

Transition plan

Agile transition is not a one-size-fits-all proposition; there is not one structured set of rules for the process. To assist companies in attaining the expected outcome of a quick, smooth Agile adoption, coaches should have transition plans tailored to each company. However, coaches can approach this in a general order, by first identifying and addessing the company's particular issues. For instance, if a company's team members do not work cohesively, then the coach should guide the leaders to focus on removing the impediments to good teamwork. Coaches must help pinpoint and address issues impeding Agile implementation.

This entails providing on-the-ground assistance in coordinating teams throughout the company to understand and use Agile, defining each company's process, aligning the entire organization with Agile, and guiding the company to see issues and solutions more quickly.

Summary

The key is that Agile coaches need to be part of their clients' Agile process. When coaches see themselves giving advice without taking time to observe the client's teams on multiple occasions, that is when they cease to be Agile coaches.

{Note: This article was originally published on Scrum Alliance. Image courtesy: Flickr/Bikolabs}