: What is agile leadership?

Daniel J. Power

Editor, DSSResources.com

Some may be skeptical about agile and others may think the term is overused. In reality, becoming more agile in one's behavior, in completing team tasks, and in competing with other organizations creates value and improves other outcomes. Agile training should help leaders be more effective in complex, uncertain and rapidly changing task/work environments. Agile leaders are needed from the project management level to the C-suite, including the chief executive officer (CEO), chief financial officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO), and chief information officer (CIO). Mersino (2018) explains that there are four key things agile leaders must do, including 1) establishing teams, 2) shaping the culture and environment, 3) coaching, and 4) leading organizational change. Senior leaders must protect and encourage agile teams. Also, senior leaders must coach agile team members to solve their own problems. Some more specific duties of a project team lead and scrum master for projects using an agile framework are explained in subsequent paragraphs. Agile leaders are servant leaders with limited "formal" power. Scrum is one of many frameworks for managing software development processes and projects in general.

A team lead is an important member of a collaborative project team. With an external client, a team lead is the internal product owner for the project backlog. This person is ultimately responsible for planning, executing and promoting the activities needed to complete a project. A team lead or project lead works with the team and key stakeholders to set key goals, schedule, and major objectives. A Team leader helps the team perform at its highest level. This involves removing any impediments to progress and facilitating meetings. A Team leader is a coach for the team, helping the team do the best work it possibly can. Finally, a Team leader is a servant leader who with the Scrum Master helps her team self-organize, self-manage, and deliver a project. The Team leader communicates with more senior managers.

A Scrum Master may be the team lead and the person in that role does anything possible to help team members perform at their highest level. This role involves removing any impediments to progress, facilitating meetings, and doing things like working with the Team Lead to make sure the product backlog is in good shape and ready for the next sprint.

A Scrum Master usually emphasizes: 1) Facilitating (not participating in) the daily standup; 2) Setting up retrospectives, sprint reviews or sprint planning sessions, 3) Shielding the team from interruptions during the sprint, 4) Removing obstacles that affect the team, 5) Walking the product owner/team lead through more technical user stories, 6) Encouraging collaboration between the Scrum team and client. A Scrum Master may also perform a specialized technical role.

Almost everything that ties into Scrum will be directly facilitated by the Scrum Master. A development team should stay focused on the task, i.e., software or website development. The ScrumMaster is often considered a coach for the team, helping the team do the best work it possibly can.

A Scrum Master is responsible for making sure a Scrum team lives by the values and practices of Scrum. The Scrum Master is often considered a coach for the team, helping the team do the best work it possibly can. The Scrum Master can also be thought of as a process owner for the team.

Often a Scrum team is self-organizing. The Scrum Master role involves helping other team members communicate, coordinate, and cooperate. This person assists in meeting delivery goals. The Scrum Master is a servant leader who helps her team self-organize, self-manage, and deliver effective agile practices. A Scrum Master communicates with management, including the team lead, and other team scrum masters.

As Mersino (2018)notes "Managers and Leaders are often the biggest impediment to transformation. It is an interesting conundrum – managers and leaders say they want to be more Agile, yet they are often the ones who hinder adoption or transformation." Agile leadership is critical to organization and process transformation.

An Agile team leader often has limited authority usually focused solely on ensuring the team follows the Agile framework process. A ScrumMaster's role can be more difficult than that of a typical project manager. Project managers often have the fallback position of "do it because I say so." The times when a ScrumMaster can say that are limited and restricted to ensuring that Scrum is being followed, cf., https://www.mountaingoatsoftware.com.

Agile transformation is not easy or painless, but organizations can gain the benefits of agility, flexibility, and increased team productivity. The path to an agile organization transformation is to start with one's own agile transformation, cf., Mersino, 2018.

References

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Author: Daniel Power
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