: What is the role of an agile coach?

by Daniel J. Power

Editor, DSSResources.COM

A job description for an agile coach is evolving and very loosely defined. According to Layton (2012), an "agile coach is someone who is experienced in implementing agile projects and can share that experience with a project team. The agile coach is responsible for providing feedback and advice to new agile project teams, and also to teams who want to perform at a higher level." An agile coach has a mentoring or coaching role and may or may not be part of a scrum or project team. The coach may be an outside expert, but he/she has worked in an agile project environment and has often successfully run agile projects. An agile coach provides objective, unbiased guidance. An agile coach teaches team members to be agile and to follow an agile process. An agile coach helps an organization embrace agile as a culture shift.

Coaching is a process that aims to improve performance. A good coach helps a person realize her/his performance and potential. A coach strives to help a person learn and understand. A coach is a guide who inspires and empowers people. Coaching is a helping relationship. A great agile coach creates relationships and builds trust, asks questions and listens, and provides feedback and helps celebrate accomplishments. A coach strives to improve performance of those who are coached and increase satisfaction while improving the effectiveness of the team and meeting client and stakeholder goals.

Kelly (2009) noted that "reports from Yahoo! suggest that coaches can make a significant contribution. In this study, Scrum teams without coaching support increased their productivity by 35 percent, while those with coach support recorded 300 percent or greater improvement." He argues "Much of the coach's work is about changing individuals' mindsets, mental models, and shortcuts they have built up over years."

A "scrum master" is an agile coach, but there are more specific role prescriptions. A scrum master is a facilitator for an agile development team and a team member. Scrum is a methodology that allows a team to self-organize and make changes quickly based on agile principles. The scrum master manages the process for how information is exchanged among the team members. For example, the scrum master leads the daily scrum meeting. The scrum master asks the team members three questions: 1. What did you do yesterday? 2. What will you do today? 3. Are there any impediments in your way?

A scrum master is a process coach rather than a project or team leader. A scrum master must understand project requirements, establish success metrics, assess and address risks, develop and implement communication and change management plans, monitor progress, and report project

status to key stakeholders. A similar and sometimes complementary role is a project lead or team lead. The leader manages the project timeline, resources, and scope in order to meet business goals and requirements. On small teams, people in both of these roles take on other tasks to help complete a project. Each person is what is known in some sports as a utility player, a versatile person who can take on multiple roles competently and multitask.

According to White (2018) in a CIO article, "Agile coaches help train corporate teams on the agile methodology and oversee the development of agile teams to ensure effective outcomes for the organization. They are responsible for guiding teams through the implementation process and are tasked with encouraging workers and leadership to embrace the agile method." She notes that the role of Scrum Master is an entry-level role. Experience as a Scrum master provides an agile coach real-world knowledge of the agile methodology and the intricacies of agile teams. Serving as a Scrum Master on an agile team gives a person a chance to encounter real-world issues and work with agile tools and software.

Depending upon past experiences, an agile coach may mentor executive teams, business analytics teams, consulting and IT development teams, or managers and employees in general. A coach is not a trainer, rather a coach is an experienced and trusted adviser and guide. A good coach offers support and assistance to those he or she is coaching to help them implement change and achieve desired goals.

An agile coach promotes understanding and adoption of agile principles and methods and is a catalyst for positive change in an organization.

References

Kelly, A., "The Role of the Agile Coach," Agile Connection, November 3, 2009 at URL https://www.agileconnection.com/article/role-agile-coach

Layton, M., "What is an Agile Coach? Overview," Platinum Edge, July 16, 2012 at URL https://platinumedge.com/blog/what-is-an-agile-coach

White, S. K., "What is an agile coach? A valuable role for organizational change," CIO, August 8, 2018 at URL https://www.cio.com/article/3294700/agile-coach-role-defined.html

: What is the role of an agile coach?

Author: Daniel Power
Last update: 2020-03-15 11:23