Chapter 2

Agile Coaches and Champions: Two Hidden Facilitators of Agile Transition

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ABSTRACT

Prevalence of Agile methods in software companies is increasing dramatically. Software companies and teams need to employ these methods to overcome the inherent challenges of traditional methods in software development. However, transitioning to Agile approach is a topic of debate. This is mainly because software companies are facing with many challenges, obstacles, and hindrances when leaving traditional methods and moving to Agile methods, as shown in previous research studies. Conducting a large-scale research study showed that Agile transformation need to be supported by several facilitators and identified its most important facilitators. The main aim of this chapter is to present two hidden facilitators of Agile transition, Agile coaches and Agile champions, which rarely have been taken into consideration. Both of these facilitators directly impress the people involved in the transition. People-intensive nature of Agile methods and critical role of the people in the transition process reflect the importance of these facilitators when a software company doing its transition.

INTRODUCTION

Agile software development as a reaction to disciplined software development, known as traditional software development, has been introduced to software industry by creating Agile manifesto (Beck, Cockburn, Jeffries, & Highsmith, 2001). Agile methods in software development have focused on different values compared to the traditional methods, including early and frequent releases, light-weight documentation, higher quality, customer satisfaction, embracing changes in user requirement, low ceremonies and so forth (Cohen, Lindvall, & Costa, 2004).

Unlike traditional methods, Agile methods mainly focus on people and human interactions. People-centric nature of these methods has led to some difficulties when software companies are changing their...
Agile transition requires involvement and collaboration of all of the software practitioners such as developers, business experts, project and department managers, senior managers, customers, etc.

Various problems and challenges are faced by software companies during their Agile transition (Gandomani, Zulzalil, Ghani, Sultan, & Nafchi, 2013; Nerur, Mahapatra, & Mangalaraj, 2005). Most of the problems and challenges have roots in the people’s behaviours and mindsets as well as their roles in development process. Most often people prefer to do their roles as they are trained previously and adopted for a long time. So, most often resistance to change is a common challenge, as reported by many scholars. Clearly, changing traditional mindset of such people is not easy and needs enough time and effort (Cockburn & Highsmith, 2001; Conboy, Coyle, Wang, & Pikkarainen, 2011). Providing appropriate facilitators and supporters would help software companies and development teams to adapt to their new roles and responsibilities (Gandomani, Zulzalil, Abd Ghani, Sultan, & Sharif, 2014).

The previous studies identified several facilitators, enablers, and success factors to support Agile transition (Bayona, Calvo-Manzano, & San Feliu, 2012; Misra, Kumar, & Kumar, 2009; Pikkarainen, Salo, Kuusela, & Abrahamsson, 2012; Vijayasarathy & Turk, 2012). However, most the identified facilitators are straightforward and it seems that there are more serious facilitators which are not clearly identified yet. This chapter presents a small part of large-scale empirical study on Agile transformation. This research studied the whole process of Agile transformation and tried to explore its various aspects and dimensions and showed that although several supporters and change facilitators can be taken into consideration, Agile coaches and Agile champions as two hidden facilitators play a critical role in pushing the transition process forward. These facilitators directly impress the people involved the transformation and can highly support them when facing a challenge during the change process. This chapter solely describes the role of aforementioned facilitators in Agile transition and identify responsibilities of these roles in real environments.

Adopted research methodology advised the researcher against conducting an up-front major literature review (B. Glaser, 1992). This mainly helps to reduce the researchers’ biases in data collection and analysis. However, tying the results with literature review reflects the importance of the findings and brings more benefits for readers. To adhere to the applied research methodology, this chapter presents the literature after presenting the research results by providing a discussion on them.

AGILE TRANSITION CHALLENGES

Agile transition process is considered as an organizational mutation in which all aspects of the organization will be affected. Changing the software development style as expected by Agile approach, is a socio-technical change (Conboy et al., 2011). This fact makes the transition more difficult than expected. Software companies need to be aware of the transition challenges and provide appropriate strategies to cope with the challenges and barriers.

The main problems and challenges are related to the people involved in the transition. After several years using traditional methods, software practitioners are accustomed to disciplined methods and their processes. All the involved people really adapted to their roles and activities. Hence, they may resist against Agile transition. For instance, Agile methods emphasize on self-organizing teams and shared-
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