# How Scrum Helps Managers, Ver 14

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@ 2026 by Joseph Little

# REMINDER (to myself)

- I will send a PDF of this slide deck if I have your email associated with this webinar.
  - If you got a Google invite (via email), then you're all set.
  - Or send me an email (info@leanagiletraining.com) with your email.



# Intro



# Who’s the audience?

- Which group are you in?
  - Manager
  - Agile advocate wanting to influence a manager
  - Experienced Agile person
  - Less-experienced Agile person
  - Other?
  - **Tell me in the Chat, please**.



# What is the state of managers today?

- What are your thoughts?  — I'll start sharing, but you add in…

- I ask, because you cannot speak to a person effectively or usefully unless you know where they are coming from.

- Let's assume our business as managers is technology innovation.  (Of course, not true for all managers.)



# Some thoughts - Questions

- I’m going to share my thoughts.
- Where do you disagree?
- What did I miss?
- Tell us in the Chat please.  We might discuss a bit.



# Some thoughts -1

- AI is a big theme (for many managers)
- Under pressure for results
- Feel rushed; no extra time to think
- Concerned about quality (bugs, but also are we “fit for purpose” enough?, tech debt)
- Want a happy and engaged staff, which in general is more distracted than before
- Feel the need to be more competitive (as a business)
- See tons of problems that might be fixed



# Some thoughts -2

- See the need for “business agility” (adapting to change faster and better)
- Used to dealing with political reality
- Surprised by the political / economic changes, although maybe calming down
- Seen half-baked agile - not what expected. Unclear why
- Tried a “transformation”, but common that it has not worked out that well (many reasons, seen and unseen)



# Some thoughts -3

- Confused: what to do now?
- See a need to take an agile team and connect it better within the company's "business system". But how?
- Tried SAFe. Meh! (Anyone have an exception? Not our topic today, but looking for feedback.)



# For the future

- I want to discuss these issues more.
- I think the CEOs and managers need help.
- I think we agile people need to address their needs and wants better
- Open a conversation (or continue one)
- Equally CEOs and managers need help re-envisioning “agile” now



# For now:

- Let’s address an easier problem.



# Simple and Hard

- Scrum is simple and “hard to master”
- Why hard? (some reasons)
  - Changing the mindset (and we revert)
  - Requires new mindset (to get real value)
  - Incomplete; requires additions
  - Reveals our own weaknesses and the company’s



# Some Managers Love Scrum

- Quickly
- It is, or soon is, obvious to them
- They see it gives names and a structure to ideas they have already been using
- These folks probably need help getting more success (with agile).



# Scrum Not for Some Managers

- I think there are some managers who will never like agile-scrum.  Why?
  - There are some managers who prefer power and hierarchy
  - They are comfortable in those ways of managing
  - They may not like a real Team
  - They may not want to let the Team “self-manage” (lose too much power)
- Do what with these managers?



# Some Managers Need Help

- Scrum is not obvious to them.  To be fair, Scrum is not obvious to MANY people, and that includes some managers (and executives).
- But with explanation, they start to like it
- Do what?  Explain and help these managers to “get it”
- In general: We agile advocates do a poor job of explaining it to managers
- Understanding it and seeing that outcomes can be even more compelling



# Webinar particularly for you if…

- You are a manager who needs help understanding
- OR: You are an agile advocate who wants to try to help some of those managers
- Maybe for others too?



# The Main Points



# First: Scrum is NOT for everyone

- Not everyone wants to be on a Team.
- Similarly: Some managers will never like Scrum
- What to do?
- Don’t waste time
- Don’t “force” managers (who will never like it) to like it
- Managers have freedom, just like everyone else.  Let them be free.
- The best solution might be: Help these managers get a promotion to another company still doing waterfall. They will be happier there.



# Why not?

Here are some hypotheses:

- They learned waterfall, and they are stuck in it.
- For various reasons, they are not able to see the agile values-principles
- They prefer to manage from power.
- They prefer to have a “hierarchy”, and people lower in the hierarchy must “follow orders.”
- These ideas are contrary to agile-scrum.
- Agile is fundamentally different than Waterfall.  How to explain that is harder.



# Is there room for “non-Agile” managers?

I think: usually yes.  How many?

Some areas that will never be agile need a manager.

Concern: that a negative attitude toward agile has a bad effect on others.



# Now: the main points

- …for those who have ears to hear
- For those who can be educated

- First: ultimately, they must convince themselves.  Or at least decide to give it a fair trial.
- But you can help.



# Achieve “Business Agility”

- This is a big buzzword these days.
- We will define it quickly this way:  having the capability to identify incoming changes, to filter them, to respond quickly to them, and to maintain or achieve greater competitive advantage.
- So: respond more quickly and more effectively.
- Agile-scrum in teams is part of what can achieve this.  Commonly, more must be added or changed in the organization to be good at “business agility”



# Agile works with AI

- AI is a big theme
- If the manager can show that AI can work with Agile, that's often a win
- Don't think we have good "tools and tips" on showing how agile CAN work with AI
- Some strong Agile people are against AI
- My view: AI can help our Knowledge Workers learn faster.  In lots of domains.  AI is not a panacea.
- My view: AI does NOT replace coders (or testers) or product innovation people. Although we might need fewer (than ?)



# Agile helps you adapt to what AI (broadly) will change

- There is more to Business Agility than Teams, BUT Agile Teams are an important component



# Achieve business goals

- Agile-Scrum helps achieve business goals, better.
- Ex: “deliver the product more quickly with higher ROI over the time-frame (eg, 1 year)”
- If a Manager believes that Scrum will do that (or usually), often that is all they need



# Business goals

- Such as:
- More business value
- More productivity
- Happier people (staff)
- Higher quality
- Faster releases
- Better Time-To-Market
- More Business Agility (adaptation to market or changes) [partial]
- Higher retention of people



# Greater visibility

- The agile-scrum word is transparency.
- Visibility of team progress (or not)
- Visibility about the product
- Visibility of things that can be improved
- Just the sense that “I understand what is happening”
- Managers have told me: “If I only get more visibility and nothing else improves, that is enough!”



# Less Stress

- Both for the Team and the Manager
- The stress is more “even” over the project duration, and lower for several reasons
- The Visibility partly reduces the stress
- Fun partly reduces stress
- Learning reduces stress



# The Manager can focus on the biggest Impediment

- Easier to identify the most important thing
- Greater confidence that it is the most important thing
- Greater satisfaction when that impediment is fixed or mitigated
- Manager feels more effective. A more satisfying job



# Manage the Team

- As a Manager, you focus on the Team, not on the Individuals
- You expect the Team to manage themselves fairly well
- You manage the Team to help them be more successful overall
- Simpler!
- Related: I am assuming a front-line manager manages 4 teams. (Maybe 2 to start.)



# Motivate, not Push

- Managers motivate, and help.  They should not push (knowledge workers).
- This is a big difference.  Some managers like motivating. They respect people as adults.
- This does not require believing that the Team makes no mistakes.  Everyone makes mistakes.
- Pull, not push.  Mostly.



# It all fits together

- This is a key issue, especially for some, and may take time.
- In waterfall, they had a notion of how it all worked, end-to-end.
- Scrum gives only a partial picture of this. Scrum is only a bare framework.
- In some situations or with some managers, they must see (or fairly soon see) how the bigger picture all works together.
- The bigger picture must fit the situation reasonably well. This requires active manager engagement (maybe by several managers).



# What's my new job?

- We must explain how the manager's job is different in agile.
- And better.
- Enable self-managing by the Team.
- More Guide; promote Team's internal emergent leadership.
- Help 4 Teams fix their impediments.
- Help 4 Teams find the right "chickens" in the organization.
- Build morale, get better feedback, deliver higher business value, learn to deliver faster.
- Tight collaboration with the Business side and with other areas of the firm.
- Manager is now responsible for both Technical success and Business success



# How to do the change



# Let the “Agile” managers talk

- As peers, they are likely to have credibility
- They are advocates, and seen as unbiased



# Give Time

- Give some reasonable time
- This is not just an intellectual process
- It includes an emotional decision
- Some people just need time to adapt to change



# More than just Explain

- Yes, do explain some. A lot. And explain again.
- Try experiments!
- Sometimes the Managers must get involved to see the Value
- Helps if they have good Teams (and the Team wants to do agile-scrum)
- We need:
  - An emotional change
  - A will to act further in this way



# Some Specific Things to Explain to Managers



# Values / Principles

- Some managers like the values and principles of agile-scrum. Or will.
  - Agile Manifesto
  - Agile Principles
  - Empirical Process
  - 5 Scrum Values
  - Lean Thinking (a lot to this!)



# Values / Principles

- Team self-organizes
- Team self-manages
- “The bad news doesn’t get better with age.”
- Manager must help the Team (some)
- Manager cares about overall business success.  Full “responsibility”
- It is more Fun!
- Many others!



# Explain Basics

- A Manager needs like and see value in:
  - The 3 Roles
  - The 4 Meetings
  - PB Refinement
  - Key Artifacts

- Not just what they are. But WHY they work or how they help.  Do NOT assume this is obvious to a manager.  Do NOT assume a manager remembers the why.



# How Explaining Helps

- A Manager may say “I know it when I see it”
- So, explaining helps. More than a name and a few ideas
- Explaining by showing examples of success, or other examples that are compelling
- For some managers: only when they see the Team and see it being successful, are they convinced.



# Suggestion about structure

- Manager manages 4 Teams
  - Too busy to micro-manage
  - Managers works to make the teams more successful
    - Helps fix their impediments



# Explain - Summary

- Explain the WIIFM
- Explain the Agile Manager job (duties, etc). It is (somewhat?) different than many expect
- Ex: The Manager should encourage self-organizing and self-managing
- Show the Manager how the Manager can be successful



# Manager’s role

- To help the Teams (maybe 4) be more successful
- Help motivate
- More transparency
- Work on (some) impediments
- Organization will help and will change over time. Manager helps here.



# ACTIONS (of advocate)

- Explain
- Try an experiment; connect dots that experiment got SUCCESS
- For negative group:
  - Prepare to move some managers out (eg, to another Dept)
  - Maybe prepare to “promote" a few people
- For most: the Managers, if you give sufficient attention, should soon be quite happy



# Promoting people to another company

- Agile is not a religion.  Not liking Agile does not make you “bad”.
- But, at some point, you need to be in or not.
- Being “into” agile does not mean you can’t argue and complain about some things.
- Treat all people with respect.  Give them a chance to “get it”.  But at some point, HELP some people have a better career at a waterfall company (or a different LOB).
- Reminder: you probably have some manager jobs where being into agile is not relevant.



# Discussion, Questions



# Discussion, Questions

- Don’t be shy!
- Turn off the mute
- OR: Type questions in the Chat



# Other webinars

- Two Types:
  - About courses and workshops (30 mins)
  - About agile questions or issues (60 mins)

- Where:
  - LeanAgileTraining.com
  - MeetUp (Lean Agile Training Webinars - group)



# Contact Info

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