

Tutorial Notes

Building High-Performance Agile Teams

Effective Practices for Teams and Teamwork

Agile 2008 Conference, Tuesday, August 5th, 4:00-5:30 PM

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What Is This Tutorial?

Without a doubt, agile processes rely on effective collaborative teams. But we can't just throw a group of individuals together and expect an agile team to just happen. It takes knowledge of team strategies, skillful team building and ongoing coaching to build and maintain high-performing agile teams.

In this tutorial, we'll explore the very nature of agile teams and how they are formed. We'll discuss the nature of leadership within teams of peers, and how to motivate teams to take the initiative and self-organize. We'll cover how to run effective team meetings, how to reach agreements as a group, how to resolve conflicts and how to form a team that continuously learns how to better work together.

Throughout the tutorial we'll participate in targeted exercises that illustrate aspects of team skills, and help us to think differently about how to work together as a team.

This tutorial is intended for team members who need to work together as a team and for managers and leaders who need to form effectively agile teams. No prerequisites are required.

What Are These Notes? Where Are The Slides?

These notes are intended to serve two purposes: Firstly, if you are considering attending this session, the notes will give you an idea of the topics that will be covered and what you may learn. Secondly, if you have attended this session, the notes will help you remember what we covered.

Why didn't I just post the slide deck? I use slides in a presentation as a tool for guiding us through the tutorial. My slides are mostly pictures with a little text to provide a context for lecture and discussions. Looking at just the slides won't tell you very much. These notes cover the underlying information behind the slides, so I thought they would be more useful as a reference.

Also, these materials needed to be submitted to the conference weeks ahead of the actual conference date, and I am always tweaking on my slides right up until the tutorial to make the presentation the best I can make it. Immediately following the conference, you can download the actual slides used by going to Agile Logic's website at www.agilelogic.com. Look in the resources section for the slides.

Please note that we may not cover everything in these notes, we may cover additional material beyond these notes and we may cover things in a different order. I always respond to the interests of the attendees, so my agendas are never carved in stone.

Who Is the Presenter, Paul Hodgetts?

Paul Hodgetts is an agile coach and trainer, and the CEO and founder of Agile Logic. For over seven years, Paul has helped companies such as SAP, Yahoo!, Microsoft, Xerox, Cisco and Pricewaterhouse Coopers adopt and improve agile processes and practices. Paul has more than 25 years of experience in all aspects of software development from in-the-trenches coding to executive engineering management, on a wide variety of projects from embedded real time control to distributed internet business applications.



Paul is a recognized expert in agile development, a published author and a popular presenter at conferences and user groups. He is a Certified ScrumMaster Trainer, and actively contributes to the evolution of the Scrum process. His recent focus has been on large enterprise initiatives, and applying agile processes to large multi-product, multi-team projects.

Paul is a published author and a frequent and popular presenter at conferences (Agile 200x, SD East & West, Java One), professional organizations and user groups. He has served as a Program Director for the Agile Alliance and as a member of the Extreme Programming and Java/J2EE advisory boards at California State University Fullerton.

You can reach Paul at phodgetts@agilelogic.com or at (714) 577-5795.

Tutorial Notes...

Essential Characteristics of an Agile Team

Conventional Industry Strategies for Projects (Anti-Patterns)

Hierarchies

- Top-down Decisions
- Command and Control
- Class Systems

Silo-ed Organizations

- Separation
- Specialization
- Hand-offs

Zero-Sum Games

- Scarcity
- Competition
- Isolation & Individualism

Why Teams?

- Teams are better able to handle changing project conditions to reach goals
- Teams can make decisions faster and more effectively than a hierarchy
- Teams are closer to the core project feedback
- Teams are better able to coordinate varied resources and skills at the source
- Teams have access to broader and deeper knowledge and expertise

What Makes A Team?

A Workgroup...

- Members work on a common goal, mission defined externally
- Members accountable to a manager
- No stable structure, inherent conflicts
- Single-point, directive leadership
- Goal achievement disconnected

A Team...

- Members committed to a common goal and shared mission
- Members accountable to each other
- Trust and collaborative culture
- Shared, situational leadership
- Goal synergy: $2 + 2 = 5$

Self-Managing Teams

- Can set goals, make plans, schedule work, set standards, implement decisions
- Need cross-functional expertise and broad range of experience
- Are empowered to make decisions and direct their own work (managers support teams)
- Coordinate and cooperate with other teams and individuals affected by team's work
- Internal situational leadership based on facilitation, not control

Types of Teams

Managed Workgroup

- Performs tasks (project management, team design are external)

Self-Managing Team

- Manages and monitors their own work

Self-Designing Team

- Designs, forms and manages their own team

Self-Governing Team

- Designs the context (organization) within which their team operates

Teams Can Be Successful When...

- Work is complex and multifaceted, and quality is important
- Commitment is needed for successful implementations
- Sufficient time can be allocated for team activities
- Leadership can happen and the organization is supportive
- Cross-functional interaction is not restricted

Team Size

Smaller Teams...

- Develop better relationships
- Allow for even participation
- Engender mutual accountability

Larger Teams...

- Gain more diverse expertise and input

Best team size is 4 to 12, probably around 7

- Too small, team lacks perspective
- Too large, team loses productivity

Team Membership

Synergy of Abilities

- Members with high degree of ability
- Members with crucial abilities

Personality Characteristics

- + Sociability, self-reliance, independence
- - Authoritative, dominant, unconventional

Team Composition

- Diverse expertise is beneficial
- Diverse attributes can be detrimental

Forming Teams

- What information does the team need?
- What expertise does the team need?
- How can cross-functional collaboration be developed in the team?
- How can a learning environment be created in the team?
- How can relationship building be achieved in the team?

Developing an Effective Team

Classic Model of Team Development

Forming

- Uncertainty, “testing the waters”

Storming

- Conflict, resistance, control

Norming

- Relationships, cohesiveness, identity

Performing

- Functional, energy, synergy

This is largely viewed as a “one-pass” model

A Different Model

Formation

- Definition
- Adjustment

Development

- Cohesion
- Reinforcement

Renewal

- Learning
- Transformation

This model is cyclical and repeats as the team reaches new levels

Team Norms

- Acceptable standards of behavior
- Formal vs. Informal
- Types of Norms
 - Performance
 - Appearance
 - Social Arrangements
 - Resources

Team Norms

How Established?

- Suggested or dictated by a team member
- Spurred by critical events
- Primacy (first behavior sticks)
- Carry-overs from prior situations

Why Established? Which are important?

- Facilitates group survival, increases success
- Increases predictability of behavior
- Reduces interpersonal problems
- Expresses group values, clarifies identity

Conformity – team pressure, desire to conform

Who's to Blame?

- When something goes wrong, what is the typical response?
- It's not the person, it's the structure or process
- When teams fail, look to the team process
- It's not just management's responsibility
- As a team, we define ourselves
- But how?

Build Your Team Charter

- Why does our team exist?
- What kind of team do we need to be?
- How will leadership work in our team?
- What expertise do we need to succeed?
- How will team members be selected?
- What resources do we need?
- What are the boundaries for our team?
- What process will we use?
- How will we secure equal commitment?
- How will we plan for conflict?
- What will we need to do to achieve our mission?
- How will we evaluate our success and learn?

Work Expectations

Quality of Work

- Standards of goodness

Quantity of Work

- Work hours, productivity, tasks assignments

Timeliness of Results

- Deadlines, status, raising issues

Preparation for Team Activities

- Level and type of preparation

Reflect regularly on results and adapt

Confidentiality

Guidelines

- What topics are confidential?
- How will we identify confidential information?
- How should we treat confidential information?
- How do we portray team activities to outsiders?
- Who can be a spokesperson for the team?
- Who should receive minutes of our meetings?

Consequence

- How will the team address instances where a team member has violated our guidelines?
- What will be the consequence of such an action?

Ground Rules

- Prescriptions for team interactions
- Freely committed to by all team members

Examples:

- Listen with interest
- Keep an open mind
- No cheap shots
- Participate in discussions
- Ask for clarification
- Give everyone a chance to speak
- Focus on the present and future, not the past
- Be on time for team activities
- Deal with specifics, not generalities
- Don't be defensive
- Be prepared for group activities
- All comments remain in this room
- Everyone is a peer on this team
- Be polite – don't interrupt

What is important to you and your teammates?

Getting Results from Collaborative Activities

Collaborative Meetings

- Effective collaboration takes time, patience, communication, organization and discipline
- Most meetings are dysfunctional – too many, too long, no clear results
- Taking care of a few basics can dramatically improve meetings
- Agile meetings have a clear purpose – know what it is and focus on it

Attendance

- Core team members must be able to regularly attend team activities
- For team activities, consider:
 - How often and for how long?
 - Where? Do we have good meeting space?
 - What is on-time attendance?
 - What is regular attendance?
 - What does it mean to really participate?
- How will we enforce the ground rules?

Substitutions

- Consider a core “no substitute” rule
- When necessary:
 - Appoint a specific spokesperson
 - Missing member must provide notice
 - Identify key team members needed for a meeting, don't proceed without them
 - Designate a team member to follow up with the missing team member
 - Have an understanding that decisions made will not be revisited due to missing member

Information Management

- Information is the gold mined during meetings
- Appoint a scribe for the meeting, who...
 - Records all relevant ideas and information
 - Ensures ideas get fully expressed
 - Uses a public format (whiteboard, flip chart)
 - Captures the exact language of the speaker
 - Is not a key participant in the discussion
- Consider what information needs to be recorded, and how to preserve and publish

Agenda Management

- Appoint a facilitator for each meeting
- Always have a public agenda beforehand
- Consider:
 - What issues really need to be addressed?
 - What time frame makes sense?
 - What meeting format is appropriate?
 - What information is needed in advance?
 - Who needs to participate?
- Be brutal about following the agenda, stay focused
- Avoid meeting for the sake of routine

The 4P Meeting Model

Purpose

- Identify, clear, appropriate, ROI on cost

Participants

- Who, size, expertise, availability

Plan

- Agenda, preparation, environment, scribe

Process

- Icebreaker, ground rules, facilitation

Participant Tips

- Determine if you need to be there
- Prepare
- Be on time
- Ask for clarification when unclear or ambiguous
- Be precise and to the point when giving information
- Actively listen
- Be supportive of other team members
- Ensure equitable participation
- Make disagreements factual and principle-based
- Act in a way that enhances the team's performance (it's not about me)

Participants' Rule for Meetings

If you are neither contributing value to the meeting, nor deriving value from the meeting, politely excuse yourself to generate value elsewhere.

Facilitator Tips

- Set and understand the objectives
- Have the right participants (and only them)
- Plan the agenda, do your homework
- Set the appropriate time and place
- Always start by reviewing the agenda
- Encourage ideas and problem solving
- Keep discussions on track and under control
- Drive to the desired outcomes
- Cleanly end the meeting

Making Decisions and Solving Problems

Decision-Making Process

- Is the decision within the team charter?
- Identify the type of decision
 - Major vs. minor impact
 - Task vs. people focus
- Use the appropriate decision-making process
 - Time frame
 - Quality of decision
 - Thought process – procedural vs. constructed
 - Steps to follow

Minor Impact – Task Focus

- Daily, operational decisions
- Time frame: Fast
- Quality of decision: Acceptable
- Thought process: Procedural
- Steps to follow:
 - Identify issue
 - Review facts
 - Consider choices
 - Decide quickly and move on

Minor Impact – People Focus

- People policies, individual focused
- Time frame: Fast
- Quality of decision: Consistent
- Thought process: Procedural, some constructed
- Steps to follow:
 - Identify issue
 - Consider current policies
 - Consider impact on others
 - Decide
 - Communicate decision and rationale

Major Impact – Task Focus

- Major goals or strategies, key process aspects
- Time frame: Moderate
- Quality of decision: Accuracy and acceptance
- Thought process: Constructed, w/procedural
- Steps to follow:
 - Identify issue
 - Gather comprehensive information
 - Search for options
 - Evaluate options (consistent, side effects)
 - Consult those affected
 - Decide
 - Advise those affected
 - Follow up during implementation

Major Impact – People Focus

- Team structure, HR, cultural aspects
- Time frame: Long
- Quality of decision: Involvement and acceptance
- Thought process: Constructed
- Steps to follow:
 - Involve those affected
 - Gather information on thoughts and feelings
 - Develop options
 - Consider options carefully (consistent w/values)
 - Decide
 - Communicate clearly and widely
 - Follow up with learning and development

Decision-Making Process

- Needs to be more than the “survival of the fittest” idea (politics, persuasion, power)
- Follow the steps:
 - Clarify the issue
 - Decide to decide
 - Analyze the issue
 - Generate options
 - Evaluate possible resolutions
 - Decide, implement, evaluate

Generating Ideas

- Generating quality ideas is vital to the effectiveness of the team
- Need a recording structure or method for all ideas to be considered
- Consider ideas on their merit, not position power of the suggester
 - Discourages full participation
 - Generates few new ideas
 - Won't likely generate innovative ideas

Brainstorming Techniques

- Intensive spawning of new ideas without critique
- Capture ideas, prioritize, discuss, choose
- Nominal Group Technique
 - Define opportunity, rapid round-robin generation of ideas, clarify/clean-up ideas
 - Discussion, “dot voting,” top candidates
- Affinity
 - Write down ideas, post them, migrate into affinity groups, decipher groups
- Delphi
 - Poll for suggestions, collect, sort common and unusual
 - Use results as agenda for discussions

Thinking Process

Received

- Authoritative, dualistic, quantitative
- “The boss said.” “He’s wrong about that.”

Subjective

- Experiential, own authority, “gut feelings”
- “I know it will work.” “I’ve seen this before.”

Procedural

- Answers given, analysis made, argumentative
- “Let’s vote.” “There are 3 options here.”

Constructed

- Questions raised, synthesis sought, exploration
- “No one has tried this before.” “What other ways?”

Challenge assumptions

Verbal Behaviors

What and how we say things is very important

+ Propose

- Suggesting a course of action

+ Building

- Expand and develop proposals of another

+ Clarify

- Assure that an idea is clearly understood

- Ridicule

- Criticism focused on the person, not the idea

- Argue

- Challenge and cut off ideas

Deciding on Actions

- Making choices = narrowing paths to follow
- Justified Decision Making
 - Based on facts and logic, weighed against criteria
- Mindful Decision Making
 - Choose or synthesize decision process
- Consensus Decision Making
 - Based on agreement and acceptance

Obstacles to Decision Making

- Loss of focus
- Rushing to accomplishment (“satisficing”)
- Rigid mindsets
- Intimidating environment
- Unwillingness to deal with difficult issues
- Domineering or reluctant participants
- Process disruptions

Handling Conflict

We can help ourselves prevent conflict by:

- Putting the situation in the right perspective
- Keep speculations realistic – examine the best and worst case scenarios
- Understand our personal attachment to the outcome

Handling Conflict

We can address the emotion of teammates by:

- Not being involved in conflicts that do not concern us
- Not allowing it to draw us into emotional, irrational behavior
- Recognizing the futility of dissolving anger with logic
- State what we want as clearly and pleasantly as possible
- Be reasonable, but follow your principles

Handling Conflict

Use these strategies for communication that involves conflict:

- Avoid being judgmental – present behavior only, not past or potential injustices
- Pay attention to non-verbal content
- Avoid interpreting motives, don’t project
- Use questions of clarification
- Refrain from giving advice
- Summarize points of agreement and disagreement, create a balanced picture

Handling Conflict

If things escalate:

- Maintain a non-threatening body posture
- Never touch a person to calm them down
- Use distracting questions to diffuse some tension
- Speak calmly, firmly, friendly, sincerely

Team Decision-Making Pitfalls

Group Think

- Group pressures, consensus, blind spots override priorities and judgment
- Watch team size, viewpoints, time pressure

Escalation of Commitment

- Sticking with a losing course of action
- Set limits, watch for blind spots, bystanders

“The Abilene Paradox”

- Members adopt position because they think others desire it
- Confront issue as a team, try a private vote

Group Polarization

- Group dynamics intensify group opinions

Team Environments

Place and Time

Same Place / Same Time

- Richest possible form of communication
- Easier, more likely to occur, non-verbal
- Closeness of location is vital

Same Time / Different Place

- Loses informality, feedback, engagement

Different Time / Same Place

- Information radiators

Different Time / Different Place

- Asynchronous, email
- Loses social norms, restraint, richness

Team Workspace Environment

Open Workspaces

- Team rooms, “Caves and Commons”

Flexible Workspaces

- Reconfigurable areas, flexible furniture

Virtual Workspaces

- Dynamic assignment of space to teams

“Hoteling”

- Pre-configured areas for teams or members

Handling Virtual Teams

- Must have clear shared goals and vision
- “Collaboratory”
- Face-to-Face – initial and renewal
- Audio and Video Conferencing
- Frequent Synchronization
- Schmoozing
- Exploit Location Attributes

Teams That Learn

Effective Team Attributes

- Small size
- Complementary skills
- Common purpose
- Specific goals
- Common approach
- Mutual accountability

Obstacles to Effective Teams

- Weak sense of direction
- Infighting
- Shirking of responsibilities
- Lack of trust
- Critical skills gap
- Lack of external support

Strategies for Building Teams

- Create clear purpose and goals
- Go for small wins
- Build mutual trust, openness
- Honestly assess strengths and weaknesses
- Fairly appraise group and individual performance
- Ensure necessary external support
- Offer team building training and coaching
- Adjust the team membership when needed

Team Renewal and Learning

- Learning is the most important team skill
- Learning is frequent and ongoing
- The retrospective practice is key to learning
- Retrospectives should be built into all activities
- Retrospectives are a development activity, not a fault-finding activity

Measuring Our Team

Performance

- Delivery to plan, productivity

Quality of work

- Customer focus, delivery of value

Team knowledge

- Skills, flexibility, learning

Initiative, ability to move forward

- Decision-making, contributions

Collaboration

- Team dynamics, follow our ground rules

Leadership and Followership

Leadership

- Leadership is a role (can be filled by different people at different times)
- Leadership is situational
- Leadership is all about helping to move from the current situation to a better one
- Leaders can either provide the spark, or better, draw the spark out from others
- “The art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations.”

Leadership Practices

Challenge the Process

- Embrace change, innovate, experiment, support ideas

Inspire a Shared Vision

- Envision the future, enlist others in vision

Enable Others to Act

- Foster the team, gain support, empower

Model the Way

- Set example, “walk the walk,” make progress (never stall), achieve wins

Encourage the Heart

- Recognize contributions, celebrate success, care about things

What Do We Want from Leaders?

Attributes desired of leaders:

- Honesty
- Forward-looking
- Inspiring
- Competent
- Fair-Minded
- Supportive
- Straightforward

It's all about Credibility

Followership

- An interactive role that complements the leadership role, and is equivalent in importance for achieving team performance
- Effective followership requires:
 - Enthusiasm, cooperation, effort, active participation, competence, critical thinking, support
- Everyone (even a leader) spends some degree of time in the followership role

Followership Behaviors

- Demonstrate job competence and autonomous performance
- Demonstrate independent critical thinking and creativity
- Build positive relationships with leader and team
- Accurately represent leader's interests
- Goal setting with concern for team performance
- Span team and organizational boundaries
- Offer information and share viewpoints
- Take on responsibilities, participate and complete projects

Ineffective Followership

- Cynical, sarcastic criticism, withholds efforts, disgruntled acquiescence
- Conformist, intellectually lazy, do what they are told
- Passive, only act when prodded
- Overly pragmatic, ignore things they see as wrong, don't disturb the status quo
- Apathetic, spectators, invite exploitation
- Expect learning to be served to them

Increasing Your Competence

- Assess how I contribute to team's success
- Evaluate current skills, seek feedback
- Seek out information and attend training
- Observe others who are effective and seek to emulate them
- Gain broader experience, other roles
- Volunteer for work that expands boundaries

Building Relationships with Leaders

- View your success as interdependent
- Understand the vision and goals at all levels
- Recognize and complement limitations
- Keep leaders informed
- Clarify my role in respect to the leader
- Adapt to the leader's style of leadership
- Show up prepared to perform

Building Relationships with Your Team

- Lend a hand to help others with an issue
- Acknowledge shared interests, goals, values
- Establish information communication links
- Show a willingness to actively listen
- Think the best of others

Recommended Reading

“Software for Your Head” – Jim & Michelle McCarthy

“Constantine on Peopleware” – Larry Constantine

“Teamwork Is an Individual Skill” – Christopher Avery

“How to Make Collaboration Work” – David Straus

“Tools for Teams” – Leigh Thompson, et. al.

“The Discipline of Teams” – Jon Katzenbach, Douglas Smith

“Stewardship” – Peter Block

“Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team” – Patrick Lencioni

Enjoy the Conference!