

Achieving Agile Leadership

by

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This article introduces the concept of Agile Leadership and the Leadership Manifesto. Presents some well-known leadership concepts and models and problems that leaders face nowadays. The concepts of Agile Coach, ScrumMaster and Project Manager are presented as the article derives the concept of Agile Leader as the person living in the intersection of these three roles. It then discusses what Agile Leadership is about: giving a gift.

We can learn to be leaders by love or by pain

Anything in life subject to learn by humans is just like that. Leadership is not different. Bill George, Professor at Harvard Business School and author of several articles and books on Leadership says it can be learned and that the best leaders are those who experienced and tried leader roles. For those on the road for some time this is nothing new. Nevertheless these should be seen as great news since many leaders in the software industry today have a very strong technical background and due to this background most have immense difficulties in developing people skills.

Therefore, in order to develop emotional intelligence, IT leader today need to put their skills to the test by trial and error. Generally, errors will cause reaction (pain) and this is the point in the process when we learn: inspect and adapt in the very sense of Scrum. To diminish the probability of pain the person in a leader role can do the homework and **feel the environment** before any further actions are taken.

What is Leadership about? The Leadership Manifesto

We are living in the age of knowledge and transparency [1]. It is important to notice that there is no leadership recipe you can use and manage motivating people to perform activities and reach goals. The organization is a living being [2] we need to analyze and understand. People are becoming more and more aware of their importance as knowledge generators. Therefore if you don't really feel and believe in the action you perform and concepts you apply you are subject to only more pain. Carlos Ghosn, CEO of the Renault-Nissan Alliance, says about the success of the Alliance *"have different goals and a common strategy but remaining different. Diversity within uniformity, commonality with autonomy... and even for the sake of business sense, we do not violate human sense."*

Move away from technicalities, from results, from control: don't linger here. Focus on team development and needs and the rest is consequence. But... how? Putting company's needs and priorities into the team in a way they feel like doing it. Leadership and management are about making people to do what they don't want to. In order to accomplish this goal and be successful as an agile leader, you need to be able to inspire the team in the Agile way, based on the dynamics of the company. Before your next Retrospective, take a few hour of introspection and think about you

as a leaders. Remember the Agile Manifesto and how important collaboration, communication and people interaction are important. Now bring this to the organization environment. From the analysis of vertical and horizontal collaboration of organisms in a company, the Leadership Manifesto below may give you a hand in your introspection moment.

- Individual development over company's momentarily necessities.
- Team building strategy over tracking and monitoring team results.
- Take actions based on root values over taking actions based on best practices

There is no best leadership model

Situational Leadership has proven its values over time. Developed in the mid 70's by Prof. Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard [4] it establishes that there is no best style of leadership. The leader should act according to the level of maturity of his team. And then the theory goes on describing maturity levels and the leadership styles better fitting to each maturity level. This is great but then we come to the concept of *Servant Leadership*. This concept became popular with the book "The Monk and the Executive" by James C. Hunter. Servant Leadership is a more lightweight concept of leadership built around the idea that a great leader is the one that focus on the others making sure their needs are served. Bill George even enjoys the establishment of a few "steps" on how to become a servant leader [3].

The Agile Leader

For the Agile Leader, servanthood is the strategy. Situational actions are the tactics as the Agile Leader lives in the intersection of three roles: Agile Coach, ScrumMaster and Project Manager.

The Agile Coach is someone that tries to awake the best in a team member. Has a lot of stories to tell and has answers to give. He also know how to trigger the best in people according to the situation. The ScrumMaster is a servant leader of the Scrum Team. The good old definition: he is the one responsible for removing impediments from the team and makes sure the Scrum process is understood and correctly applied. He also has a fundamental responsibility: *develop the team*. The Project Manager is the company side of the leader. He is the one the company needs to manage financial aspects, develop reports and other internal processes documentation and couples company's needs with team's needs.

Agile Leadership is giving someone a gift: whatever you give has the same intention but has a different packaging. The Agile Leader is the one who wonders:

- a. What to give?
- b. What is the intention?
- c. What is the packaging?

What to give? Situational leadership tells you what to give. **What is the intention?** Only one: to please. But focus on the needs not on wishes! *Needs* are company needs, personal needs like self-improvement, etc. *Wishes* are those requests that can be overcome with improved communication

and do not aggregate real value to a project. **What is the packaging?** To choose the right packaging for you gift think about cultural differences, team diversity like different personal moments, different technical backgrounds and remember that people have limitations and “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Proverbs 15:1.

References

[1] *Leadership in the Age of Transparency*. Christopher Meyer and Julia Kirby. Harvard Business Review, April 2010, page 38.

[2] *If your company did not exist, what good would it make?* Mario Cortella. HSM Management, September-October 2010, page 92, Brazilian Edition.

[3] *How to become a servant leader*. <http://www.billgeorge.org/page/how-to-become-a-servant-leader1>

[4] *Management of Organizational Behavior*. Paul H. Hersey, Kenneth H. Blanchard , Dewey E. Johnson. Prentice Hall, 9 edition, September, 2007.