From Chaos to Successful Distributed Agile Teams

Collaborate to Deliver

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Practical **ink**

11. Lead Your Distributed Agile Teams to Success

We started this book discussing the three mindset shifts required for successful distributed agile teams: manage for change; emphasize communication and collaboration; and use agile principles in *Distributed Agile Teams Are Here to Stay*. We also discussed how to *Think in Flow Efficiency* to support a team's frequent delivery of value.

Throughout the book, we have discussed the eight principles to support the three mindshifts in *Focus on Principles to Support Your Distributed Agile Teams*:

1. Establish acceptable hours of overlap.
2. Create transparency at all levels.
3. Create a culture of continuous improvement with experiments.
4. Practice pervasive communication at all levels.
5. Assume good intention.
6. Create a project rhythm.
7. Create a culture of resilience.
8. Default to collaborative work.

Leaders who live these organizational principles are able to coach, serve, and create a successful distributed agile environment. That environment allows the entire organization to succeed.

How can you serve your teams?

You'll notice we used the plural of team—teams. That's because we don't know of any organization that has only one distributed agile team. Organizations we work with have multiple agile teams. The exception is one-team startups and they quickly grow into multiple teams when they are successful.

Teams don't succeed on their own with these principles. The decisions managers and executives make affect how well these teams can succeed.

Let's start with how a manager's actions are amplified—and how you can use that to create successful distributed agile teams.

11.1 Cultivate Affinity Between People and Teams

Team affinity is not sufficient for a distributed organization. Successful distributed agile managers cultivate affinity between teams and managers as a key management practice.

How can you help teams discuss issues at the team level? How can you ensure that the right communications pervade the entire organization? How can you monitor delays or misunderstandings?

"Cultivate affinity" signifies that you are never really done with encouraging affinity within and between teams. As a leader in your organization, consider how you can monitor, encourage, and connect people to grow the affinity in your organization—and possibly with your customers and suppliers. If not, you will quickly build up other forms of organizational debt that will slow you down. (See *Set a New Direction* for more information.)

As a leader, you can amplify or destroy distributed agile teamwork. *See Your Team Type Traps* for problems we encounter most often.

Let's discuss actions you can take to create an environment that works for your teams.

11.2 Create an Environment to Amplify Distributed Agile Teamwork

Distributed agile teams need organization support in the form of tools and culture to answer these questions:

- How can we form distributed agile teams with acceptable hours of overlap to leverage worldwide expertise, support collaboration, and enhance value delivery?
- How can we create sufficient transparency so any distributed team member not only understands what they are working on but how it helps the business and customer?
- How do we encourage continuous innovation through experimentation so teams are always improving how they deliver and generate new market-disrupting ideas?
- How can we keep teams and team members aligned by encouraging open communications of problems and successes, weaknesses and opportunities, and how to best leverage the strengths of the different individuals and teams?

As an executive or leader, think about how your answers to these questions. Might you change the supporting environment for your teams through experimentation? Such exploratory changes can amplify the agile culture and create a successful distributed agile environment.

If you can, invite the teams to collaborate with you on creating an environment in which they can help answer these questions. In an agile organization, managers don't need to have all the answers.

What if you can't create teams with acceptable hours of overlap? Or, you can't create sufficient transparency? Or create experiments? Or any of the other necessary conditions for an agile team to succeed? See *When Agile Approaches Are Not Right For You.*