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The
Pragmatic
Programmers

Agile & Coaching



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Introduction

It seems that everyone wants to be *Agile*, but how do you get a team started? When you look at the literature or take a training course, becoming Agile sounds easy. But how do you take a team from understanding the theory into practicing it?

This book is all about how to help teams get the best from Agile. It focuses on practical advice, tips and techniques for coaching teams to improve their effectiveness. It's for anyone who wants to coach their team in agile development—whether you are a project manager, a technical lead or simply working in a software team.

An agile coach doesn't need to have all the answers. The art of agile coaching is understanding the situation, the values underlying agile software development, and how the two can combine. It can take time and a few experiments to hit on the right approach. We've worked with teams who've come up with great solutions and we learn from every team we work with.

We'll be talking you through the whole spectrum of agile practices from creating plans to deploying software. We've chosen to explore a wider set of practices, both planning and technical, because they work together in a reinforcing system. However, in our experience the hard part is not the mechanics of agile practices but how to coach people in adopting them. That's what this book is about.

Generic Agile

Most teams we work with are using a mixture of Scrum and Extreme Programming (XP) so throughout the book we'll refer to this as *Agile*.

A simplified life cycle for this Agile process is shown in Figure 1, on the following page. In this diagram, the team works in cycles that open with *Planning* based on *User Stories* and close with a *Demo* and *Retrospective*. The team works in a shared workspace and starts their day with a

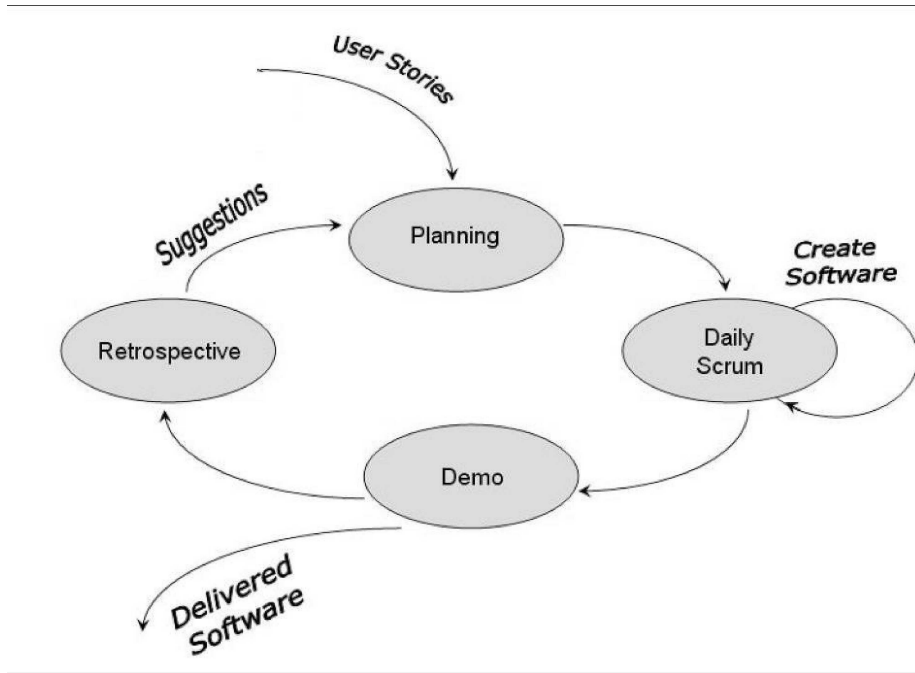


Figure 1: Generic Agile Life Cycle

Daily Scrum around their *Team Board*. Software is created using *Test-Driven Development* and *Continuous Integration*. We make no assumption about the period of this cycle, some teams work in weekly cycles while others use monthly cycles.

As agile coaches, we work to establish a healthy collaboration between a cross-functional development team and their business stakeholders. We use the term *Customer* for the business representative who works with the team (equivalent to a Product Owner in Scrum) without going into responsibilities of team roles which in our experience varies from one organization to another.

The life cycle shows how these agile practices join up but you don't have to start implementing agile from the top, your team could get started with any practice in this cycle then fold in more practices over time.



Rachel Says...

Showing not Telling

Imagine if you found someone using a hammer to bang in a nail, but they were using the handle to hit the nail. You'd offer to show them how, then turn it round and hit the nail with the hammer head. Now they know how the job becomes easier and they're happier using the hammer because they understand how it works.

I often meet teams who are trying to follow agile practices but what they're doing is quite odd and not a good use of their time. I don't say "That's wrong, here's the correct way to do it." Instead, I show them *how* they could do it slightly differently. I can explain the principles later after they've got a little more experience.

I don't think it's possible to talk purely about coaching without getting into how agile practices work. Showing how agile practices work is one of the main thing we do as agile coaches. You're there to help the team—to de-mystify, to remove confusion, to make what was difficult easy.

The Aim of this Book

Coaching is all about working with people. These people work on projects and in teams, and these teams are within an organization. Every person, project, team and organization is different, so we can't prescribe exactly what you should do in your situation. Instead, we give general guidelines to follow and ideas on different options you can apply.

Depending on team context, we might give opposite advice to one team than another. For example, we would normally recommend that the project manager attends the daily scrum, but there have been times when we've recommended that he doesn't. We can't give you formulas to follow that will always work because no two situations are alike. Some factors to consider are: team size, pressures on the team, and experience of team members.

We'll share stories about what we did in different circumstances, along

with some more specific tips that you can use if your situation happens to match the one we describe. You'll need to decide whether to apply our advice to your teams.

Time and experience are necessary to become an effective agile coach. Reading this book will add to your knowledge. It will help you avoid making a few mistakes, show you techniques that work, and ways to improve your coaching. It will give you inspiration and ideas to apply what you learn with your team.

How to Read This Book

We've encountered many hurdles that we had to overcome when coaching agile teams. We've share these at the end of each chapter together with our advice on how to clear them. They're not meant to be an exhaustive list but we hope they'll give you some inspiration if you get stuck.

Each chapter is relatively self-contained. Feel free to dip in or read the book sequentially. We start with discussing general coaching principles, and then move on to how to apply them to coach specific agile practices. Take time at the end of each chapter to review the checklist and reflect on how you could apply what you've read with your team.

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