



Three Levels of Agile Coaching

Agile Coaching means that an experienced Agile Coach will work closely together with an organization to improve the organization's product development agility. Agility is a broad term used for the flexibility in product development; the ability to respond to changes. This flexibility is achieved by shortening feedback loops and focussing on improved quality. This faster feedback cycle might also lead to other benefits such as higher productivity.

We define three levels of Agile Coaching:

Organizational coaching

A coach works with multiple teams and the management to improve the organization and its structure to increase its agility.

Team coaching (or Scrum coaching)

A coach works with one or a few teams to improve their team-working and Scrum practices. It is common for a coach to take on the ScrumMaster role.

Technical practices coaching

A coach works with (or on) a team on their actual codebase in order to improve the technical practices and adopt agile development techniques such as simple design, refactoring, unit testing, test-driven development and acceptance test-driven development.

A coach might work on more than one level. For example, it is common for a coach that does organizational coaching also to coach one team. Or a team coach might also coach some technical practices.



Organizational coaching

The goal of organizational coaching is to help management to structure their organization so that it gets the most amount of benefits from adopting agile development. A coach typically focuses on:

- Having a clear vision of how an agile organization could be
- Organizational structure and design
- Scrum scaling
- Role of management
- Facilitating change
- Target setting
- Managing an organizational impediments backlog
- Changing management practices from controlling day-to-day work to building capability
- Managing work: product backlogs and how the organization manages them
- Dealing with interruptions
- Human Resource practices such as appraisals and career paths
- Facilitating organizational release/roadmap planning and retrospectives

The coach works closely together with management. Typical activities of an organizational coach include:

- Training and workshops. It is important for an organization to have a very clear understanding of agile and lean development to build a vision of where their organization and structure might be over time. Basic understanding is often created in training and discussions whereas vision and initial actions are often created in a focused workshop.
- Joining management meetings. A coach can join regular management meetings to observe the discussion and decision making and give feedback on how to improve that and provide ideas to work towards their organizational vision.
- Observe on all levels. In many organizations, there is often a gap between what management sees and what is happening 'on the floor'. A coach spends a significant amount of time observing the results of management actions to close the feedback loop and help management to improve their actions.
- One-on-one coaching and discussions. Often people have questions or confusion about their role and work while transforming to a more agile organization. These often come out in one-on-one discussions with people which encourage learning, discussion and moving towards the organizational vision.



Team coaching

The goal of team coaching is to help the Team become a better self-managing team. This often also includes coaching the ScrumMaster so that s/he can keep coaching the team in the future. No team works without a context, so this type of coaching does also focus on the organization and the technical practices but does so from the team perspective.

A team coach typically focuses on:

- Team responsibilities with self-managing teams
- Facilitation
- Improving the team's decision making and conflict resolution
- Transparency in the team
- Making organizational impediments visible
- Improving the relationship between the Team and the Product Owner
- Product Ownership (of both the team, the PO, and other stakeholders)
- Role and contribution of the team's management
- Improve Scrum practices (and technical practices)
- Educate and coach the team's (future) ScrumMaster

The coach typically works in a similar role as the ScrumMaster, either acting as ScrumMaster or coaching the existing ScrumMaster. Typical activities a team coaching include:

- Facilitating Scrum events. Teams often have a lot of improvement opportunity in how they do their Sprint Planning, Daily Scrum, Review & Retrospective, and their Backlog Refinement. A team coach might facilitate these workshops to show how they could be done effectively and then tries to increase team ownership of these events.
- Training and workshops such as creating working agreements. A good understanding of Scrum and self-managing teams is necessary before a team begins their journey as a self-managing team. A coach provides training in this and helps the team improve by, for example, facilitating workshops to establish team working agreements.
- Shadowing ScrumMaster. A team coach is often a temporary ScrumMaster. But after a while, s/he typically hands over the ScrumMaster job to someone else. S/he spends a lot of time explaining and coaching the ScrumMaster by shadowing what s/he is doing and providing feedback.
- Observing and one-on-one discussion. A team coach will spend a significant amount of time simply observing how the team and its environment are doing, looking for improvement opportunities and providing feedback and asking questions to help the team to reflect.
- Discussions with the team on teams and Scrum and instilling an appreciation for teams and how they can work.



Technical practices coaching

The goal of technical practices coaching is to increase the skills of the team related to specification, design, development, and testing. A coach typically focuses on:

- Discovering “code/design smells”. Places where code/design could be improved.
- Explaining modern, “clean” code that is simple and easier to change and maintain.
- Refactoring “smells” into clean code.
- Writing unit tests.
- Test-driven development.
- Test Automation
- Continuous integration and continuous delivery
- Specification by Example (Acceptance Test-Driven Development)
- Efficient and effective working practices (IDE, automation)
- Applying design patterns.

The coach works closely with the team or joins the team to focus on these skills. Typical activities of a technical coach include:

- Pair programming with team members. This is perhaps the most common and effective technique where a coach works together with one person on some task or existing code and observes how the person works, helps him reflect and proposes improvements.
- General technical training in a certain area or skill.
- Specific technical training related to their specific situation. A coach frequently does training based on the technology or code to make it more relevant for the team.
- Building examples. A coach might work alone to build examples for comparison to show and discuss with the team.
- Preparing the environment. A coach might spend time working on the environment to enable the team to go faster. This often includes working on the build or implementing stubs.
- Code reviews. A coach might review code to suggest improvements.
- Discussions. A coach has a lot of discussions with the team members to instill a passion for development and promote people to take their profession seriously and keep up-to-date with the developments in the world.

Each coach has their expertise and practices which make the actual practices and skills different for each coaching session.