Chapter 16
Human Resource Management in Agile Scrum Processes

Matthew Zingoni
University of New Orleans, USA

ABSTRACT

The value agile scrum process can generate is not guaranteed simply by mere adoption. Rather the process creates an opportunity for improvement in the development process. Mismanagement of the approach by an organization can reduce the potential added value or in extreme situations have a negative impact. Therefore, appropriate management procedures are necessary to realize the full potential of the agile scrum approach. This chapter focuses on the human resource challenges the agile scrum approach creates for an organization. The dynamic pace, cross-functional composition, and self-directed team approach requires special consideration in the development of most human resource functions. In particular, the authors will review changes to the employee selection, performance management, and learning and career development processes. These changes will better align these functions with the values and principals of the agile scrum approach and help organizations manage this sometimes chaotic approach to innovation without constraining it.

INTRODUCTION

The benefits of an Agile Scrum process have been well established in the software development field (Rigby, et. al., 2016) and other organizations have taken notice. Today an Agile Scrum process approach can be seen applied to fields beyond information technology such as marketing and financial (Oprins, et al., 2019; Sherman, et. al., 2017). Essentially an Agile Scrum process approach is increasingly being applied to situations where innovation is needed to respond to rapidly changing customers' demands (Rigby, et. al., 2018). This creates a challenge to organizations to not only implement an agile scrum approach but to also create processes and procedures to manage the Agile Scrum process and also cultivate the proper organizational climate needed to realize its full benefit in a sustainable manner (Mahajan, 2013; Rigby, et. al., 2016).

Like previous process innovations such as total quality management, the Agile Scrum approach offers an opportunity for a competitive advantage but not a certainty. In what has been described as a chaotic approach to innovation (Rubin, 2012) the Agile Scrum approach to development generates several challenges for organizations to overcome. Just like a sailor cannot control the wind but instead must try to direct and harness it, managers must direct Agile Scrum teams without containing the sometimes-chaotic process of innovation. This chapter will address some of the human resource challenges an organization must overcome to successfully implement the agile scrum approach to innovation and other dynamic endeavors in a sustainable manner. Specifically, this chapter reviews and offers recommendations for an organization to consider in the areas of talent acquisition and management, which are vital to implementing an Agile Scrum approach effectively (Gilles & van der Meer, 2017).

Human resource management addresses who works for an organization and how work gets done. In particular human resource processes (i.e. employee selection, performance management, talent deployment, and employee career development) play an essential role in the acquisition and cultivation of the main raw material needed to utilize the agile scrum approach, which is the individual. The Agile Scrum approach requires a cross functional team to self-navigate a demanding, fast pace, dynamic environment (Beck, et. al, 2001; Rubin, 2012; Rigby, et. al., 2016). The Agile Scrum approach has a set of values and principles that human resource functions need to be aligned with to be successful. Specifically, agile processes are built around people over process and tools, emphasize working prototypes over excessive debate, respond to change than follow a plan, and focuses on customer collaboration instead of structured contracts (Beck, et. al, 2001; Rigby, et. al., 2016). It is important that organizations have human resource practices that reflect these values and principals so the Agile Scrum approach can be effectively managed but not constrained. However, human resource practices have traditionally been slow to involve (Cappelli, 2015) at the organizational level so it is important that organizations make adjustment to the procedures used to manage employees directly involved in the Agile Scrum approach to innovation. This will allow the organization to maximize the benefit of the Agile Scrum approach and develop human resources practices that may be suited to be expanded company wide. In short organizational level human resources changes may be slow to evolve but if companies can successfully create human resource practices to accommodate their Agile Scrum involved employees it could lead to a more agile approach to human resources at an organization wide level.

This chapter will review the major aspects of human resources that will need to be adjusted to accommodate the Agile Scrum approach. First, it will review adjustments needed to the hiring process for employees who will directly participant in work utilizing the Agile Scrum approach. Next, it will review how changes to the performance management procedures an organization uses will be necessary for employees to make the corrective changes in their work behavior that is required by such a dynamic process. This in turn will transition to a discussion on talent deployment which is how an organization should determine what Agile Scrum team an employee should be involved with next. A review of the changes to how an organization handles career development of their Agile Scrum involved employees will then follow. Lastly. it will discuss how adjusting human resource practices used to manage Agile Scrum involved employees will assist in the evolution of a more agile approach to human resources at the organizational level. During these discussions examples not only from the technology field but also other innovation focused industries such as the entertainment industry and fashion industry will be used.

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