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IS THE AGILE TRANSFORMATION TOO RADICAL FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION? 12 STEPS TO INSTITUTE BLENDED AGILE

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TWELVE STEPS TO INSTITUTE BLENDED AGILE

The success of Agile is clear and documented. Thus there is a growing interest in using Agile to improve overall performance. However many companies for various reasons have difficulty making the transition to Agile. This change to Agile requires thinking, working and behaving in new ways. People tend to resist change, companies have legacy processes, thus obstacles may be in place that do not allow for the Agile transition in a timely manner, if at all. However there is an alternative; Blended Agile. This approach is not Agile in its purest form, but does utilize some of the Agile practices along with other practices from methodologies such as spiral, etc.

It is important to understand some of the core differences between Agile and Blended Agile to gain an overall understanding of the level of commitment your organization will make. As you read through this paper you will gain an overview of Blended Agile and understand how to begin moving in this direction.

The following questions and answers will aid you in understanding the Blended Agile Approach.

What is Blended Agile?

Blended Agile is a term used to describe a combination of Agile practices/techniques merged with more traditional practices. Thus, Blended Agile utilizes some of the Agile practices along with other practices from methodologies such as spiral, etc. Blended Agile will allow your organization to improve its current practices without a too radical change in the existing methods.

Why Use Blended Agile?.

Blended Agile is usually selected as an approach when an organization can not flip a switch and become Agile overnight. This scenario can be a result of any combination of reasons such as people, regulations, legacy processes, resources constraints, etc. When you find a combination of these reasons it is difficult to obtain the support needed to move to Agile. Thus Blended Agile is a less intrusive method that will allow your organization to improve its current practices.

In any organization people tend to resist change, collaboration is not always successful and existing processes are ingrained into the foundation of the organization.

One huge benefit of the “Blended Agile” path is that your organization has time to learn, adjust and determine which Agile practices will fit into the organization. Your company will slowly initiate Agile practices over time along with keeping traditional practices that bring value and thus improve the overall process. Therefore your organization will continue to improve. The perception of risk is reduced since there is less change upfront then in a purer Agile transformation.

Will I gain all of the benefits of Agile from switching to Blended Agile?

Blended Agile is not Agile in its purest form. Thus you will not obtain all of the benefits of Agile. However, Blended Agile will allow your organization to improve its current practices. Based on which practices you chose and when you institute them you will gain increased time to market, improved collaboration and increase customer Satisfaction.

How would I start to use Blended Agile?

There are two commonly considered paths to follow:

- 1.) The organization slowly initiates Agile practices, increasing them over time while combining with some of the traditional practices that still have value to the organization. At times some of these traditional practices may conflict with Agile practices. This is a journey to pure Agile with a roadmap.
- 2.) Recognize that it may be many years before your organization has evolved enough to go to the purer form of Agile. In this case just look to improve by implementing the Agile practices and best practices that make sense.

Whether you chose path one or path two, you will still need to know where to begin. Listed below are twelve steps to get started:

1. Know the existing processes.
2. Analyze what is working well and what you can improve on.
3. Gain knowledge of best practices from various methodologies
4. Review best practices and analyze which ones make practical sense to begin with
5. Obtain management support
6. Obtain team buy in
7. Select a pilot project
8. Begin with just one project
9. Collaborate with the team - Once the team is selected include the team in the planning and decisions
10. Advertise/communicate what you will do
11. Determine the strategy, Organizationally, Departmentally and Team
12. Constant retrospectives for lessons learned and Employ changes based on lessons learned

What are the key components of Blended Agile?

Consider three levels when thinking of key components. The teams, departments and the organization. Develop core commonalities for each of these levels. For example at the team and department levels; plan for multiple documentation drops, to obtain early feedback. AT the organization level have an informal user community; establish success criteria for the teams, etc.

Institute commonalities while allowing for variables by department and team. For example a commonality might be instituting retrospectives so you can always inspect and adapt. Possible variables per team might be collocation, toolsets and the time dedicated to the project.

Will Blended Agile solve my problems?

No. As in Agile, Blended Agile is a method in which to make change to achieve the goal of improvement. However Blended Agile will bring risk to light quicker and move you in the direction of solving problems.

Example of Blended Agile:

One of the most extreme and most successful was a team that could only dedicate 9 hours a week. This team was collocated most of the time; however the resources were not dedicated to the project. Was this team successful? Yes, because they improved their process, created an atmosphere of collaboration and continued to inspect and adapt, while they continued on their journey to a purer form of Agile.

Conclusion

The Blended Agile method while not pure Agile, can bring many benefits. Being Agile is the ability to move quickly and respond to change; this is a core principal in Blended Agile as well. Since most companies can not change their processes overnight this is an alternative to gain improvement. Continue to refer back to the Agile Principals for alignment and realize that this is an evolving process. Your journey will be different then others. Understand that training is not enough; you actually need experienced coaches to help you start your journey. Finally, always remember to keep it simple and use common sense.