

Journey Lines



Purpose

- Let a team get started on their path toward more self-management.
- Let a team learn more about each other's when it comes to
 - working history,
 - skills,
 - what each person enjoys doing and not.
- Deepen the level of communication by having other team members confirm that they have seen each other and appreciates each other's skills and experiences.
- Usually this brings in also some conversations on a more personal nature. This enhances the basic emotional safety on the team. "It is ok to be human rather than being a professional robot at work". (This aspect was found by Google to be the most important predictor of team success).

Source

This exercise is very well described in Lyssa Adkins' book "Coaching Agile Teams". She attributes it to Tichy N 2002, "The Cycle of Leadership: How Great Leaders Teach Their Companies to Win".

Time required

- 5 minutes intro

- 10 minutes for each person to prepare
- After that about 1 hour per 5 persons in the team
- 10 minutes wrap up (optional)

Preparations

- Get materials
 - Flip chart paper
 - Whiteboard markers to draw “Journey Lines”
 - Post-its
 - Markers for posits
 - A timer to keep track of time boxes for presentations
 - Paper tissues (it can sometimes be emotional)

Intro

Example

In most agile setups these days we have this concept with self-managed teams. How many have heard about that? (Hands up).

One thing that self-management means is that that the team, not a project manager or team leader, decides how to work together, who does what etc.

To be able to do this is good for us to know a bit more about each other’s experience and what each of us we enjoy working on and not, so that is the purpose of this next exercise.

This is how it will work:

- *Step one is 10 minutes. In those ten minutes I would like you all to take one of these flipchart papers and create a short presentation of your journeys through your working lives. <Show them your pre-created example>. When the line goes up it means you enjoyed it, when it goes down, not so much. Feel free to include more personal events also if you want, because life at work and off work usually has an impact on each other.*
- *Then we will start working through the presentations, person by person.*
 - *For each person we will first get a presentation of the line. While listening, the rest of the team makes notes about what you find interesting, defining, or useful about the person presenting. After that each team member goes to the poster one by one and presents their observations as they put them on the poster. <Show them what you mean by doing it as you explain>.*

Ok, let’s take 10 minutes to prepare some posters.

When they are done, move on to next section...

Facilitating the flow

If you want to, think about if there is one person in the team that you think may be more comfortable being open with problems/issues/feelings with the team and ask that person to go first. If someone sets a personal tone first it make the exercise even better. You could also do this yourself if you want.

If you think it will be needed, keep a timer running to manage some time boxes. Especially some people can go on for quite a while when presenting.

In your own comments, focus on seeing the whole person rather than commenting only on the professional skills-related part.

You can also comment from the point of the agile coach/Scrum Master, i.e., if the person enjoys working in teams, close to customer, fast feedback, fast decisions etc, comment that this is a match with what the team will be asked to do.

Wrap up (optional)

If you do this exercise stand alone, i.e. not part of a longer session then this wrap up might be useful. After every person has presented their “Journey Line”, invite everyone to think about what they will bring from this session. If they want, they can also share it with the others.