Why Your Agile Efforts Must Include A Strategy For Trust And Talent Development

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Careers

I write about the changing nature of work, workers and the workplace.

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One of the keys to success with agile is talent—how you attract and retain, but even more—how you engage and develop the best and the brightest.

Despite a potential recession, great talent is getting harder to find. In fact, the Korn Ferry Institute predicts a shortfall of 85 million workers by 2030. This dearth of talent is made even more challenging given the specialized skills required to support

agile—people who can handle the transparency, adaptability and constant learning necessary.

One of the primary things that will be necessary in this age of talent shortages is for companies and leaders to engage and nurture people—creating a culture where people feel valued and feel they can fully contribute and continually develop.

A Culture Of Trust

A culture that nurtures and engages people is a place where trust abounds. It's a plac they want to excel with new working methods like agile. Bob Brown, based in Flint, Michigan and Associate Director of the Center for Community and Economic Development for Michigan State University, says, "When people have high levels of trust they can pursue and achieve desired outcomes."

Trust makes it possible to try new methods and take appropriate risks—ingredients for finding novel solutions. Creativity cannot flourish without the ability to make mistakes and learn through failure. In addition, agile teams are more successful whe they can dialogue and constructively disagree to develop ideas and innovate. "Trust not about always agreeing, but about treating each other with respect and holding each other in respectful ways," Brown says. In this way, a culture of trust is critical t agile success.

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Fostering Learning And Development

Nurturing and engaging people also requires constant development, and this is especially true for agile team members whose skills must stay up-to-date. "Knowledg workers today need a bigger toolkit than ever," says Greg DeFronzo, Executive Director IT/IS at the Boston University Questrom School of Business.

Of course, trust and development must be part of a holistic approach. Todd Knowlton, Continuous Learning & Talent Development Leader at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, advocates for a "talent ecosystem." This is where people are supported in their development through all stages of their employment and through all kinds of learning, both formal and informal.

Successful companies support agile work with intentional, collaborative approaches to learning and development. Classic adult learning theory suggests people learn best when they compare their own ideas with others' and obtain feedback from group members with whom they are sharing experiences. Working with students every day has given DeFronzo a perspective on how we'll need to address this for the workforce. "Learning must be immersive. And learning through doing is more effective than more passive approaches," he says. Learning will also be most compelling when it is curated and personalized—when employees have plenty of choice about what they learn and the direction in which their career is advancing.

Fluid Talent And Full Pipelines

The companies which are most successfully embracing agile also find ways to share talent across the organization. This is possible through cataloging employees' skills and ensuring opportunities are transparent so people feel there is equity in seeking new roles.

Ideally, companies must make certain the project pipeline and talent pipeline are always full. Agile projects must be at-the-ready so team members can be immediately deployed against interesting projects that keep them committed to the organization. Likewise, talent should be available for multiple roles. Knowlton says, "I ask people what their aspirations are, not what job they want." This approach provides for more flexibility and facilitates talent matching. Based on their interests, people can be aligned to the roles that will best help them advance their career goals. Taking this kind of an approach results in people being engaged and more likely to stay with an organization because they can build their skills and careers.

Success with agile will be based on great talent. Members of agile teams will excel because they can contribute fully and are supported with a culture of trust and are constant learning. This kind of holistic system serves employees and the organization by fostering flexibility for people and projects—and creates places where the best and the brightest are clamoring to work.

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