Growing Hyper-Performing Teams

Developing Distributed Scrum Teams into Cohesive "Units"

October 2011
Introduction

- It’s all about Chemistry!

- In this workshop, we’re going to discuss how you can convert distributed mixed scrum teams into hyper-performing scrum teams.

- The intended audience is a manager or director of an Agile program that is seeking to adapt to the real-world distributed team scenario in a complex environment.

- When you depart today, you will understand:
  - What a hyper-productive scrum team is.
  - How to enable your distributed teams to reach the hyper-productive stage.
  - Tips and techniques for enhancing team performance.
Agenda

- Fundamentals
  - Scrum Team Stages
  - Behaviors of Hyper-performing teams
  - Distributed & mixed teams

- Developing Hyper-Performing Teams
  - Team Chemistry
  - The Model
    - Executive support
    - The Agile-friendly Eco-system
    - The Team
  - Key Success Factors
  - Strategies for Applying the Model
    - Without an agile-friendly eco-system
    - As a “skunkworks” project
    - With junior team members
    - As part of an enterprise transformation

- “Performance-Enhancing Stimulants” (a.k.a. Accelerators)
  - Best Practices
  - Techniques to build rapport
    - Introduction Brochure
    - Man-in-the-air
    - Celebration plan
    - Cultural Exchange
    - 360+5

- Take-aways
What is a Hyper-Performing Team?

The output of the team is greater than the sum of the work of the individuals on the team.
Scrum Team Stages

1 Much of the material in this first section builds on work by Lyssa Atkins in *Coaching Agile Teams* and Alastair Cockburn @ http://alistair.cockburn.us/Shu+Ha+Ri
Benefits of pursuing Stage 3

- **Hyper-productivity** – the team will be able to produce quality software at an amazing rate enabling a faster time to market and lower IT costs
- **Extremely efficient** – the team will efficiently estimate, plan, execute and report progress and impediments
- **Higher quality** – fewer defects will result from their work
- **Predictable and consistent** – their velocity is well known and consistent, allowing for greater confidence in future delivery estimates
- **Improved morale** – members want to work together more for the betterment of the team
- **Improved stakeholder satisfaction** – business sponsors working with these teams will enjoy working with the team
Definition of a Stage 1 team

- Stage 1 (SHU) is the stage where all teams start no matter how many team members have experience with Scrum.

- The team is a collection of skilled individuals, learning their roles, learning the process, learning to work together, and individually figuring out what they need to do on a daily basis. Personality conflicts may arise and could distract the team from their work.

- The team struggles with the practice of scrum. The scrum master and scrum coach provide oversight and facilitation to every activity. Some team members new to Scrum may question the basic practices and ceremonies. Principles and values seem too theoretical.

- Attributes of the team: follow the rules, mimic the practices, learn the process basics, and team members growing their rapport both professionally and socially

- At this stage, the team is taught “the techniques without modification and without attempting to understand the rationale”, following the practices with repetition, in an uncompromising fashion. SHU: follow the rule

- The team are sheep; scrum master is the shepherd.

- Any given day may appear to be seemingly chaotic, unpredictable, and uncomfortable.

- A team may state “that’s not our job,” struggling to discover workarounds for external impediments.

- Example 1: performing an orthodox Scrum stand-up every day.

- Example 2: facilitating the story creation sessions.
Definition of a Stage 2 team

- Stage 2 (HA) is the stage a team may reach when they become proficient with the basics of the scrum process. All team members are full time on the project.

- **The team has begun to move beyond a collection of skilled individuals toward thinking and acting as one unit.** The team understands the process, who they need to communicate with to get their job done, and what to do on any given day. They are “...coming to a deeper understanding of the art than pure repetitive practice will allow.” Personality conflicts are put aside for the betterment of the team.

- The team as a whole will develop its own personality and begin to question practices that seemingly may not work for them. They will attempt to “break the rules” of Scrum while staying consistent with the Medco principles and values; they will not always succeed but they will discuss in their retrospectives, inspect and adapt. However they still need guidance from the scrum master. HA: break the rules

- Attributes of the team: learning, growing, testing & tweaking the process, breaking the rules, flexible

- The team understands the practices, and the importance of the principles and values.

- Example 1: when the team begins to understand that the daily stand-up is more of a commitment meeting than a status update, they may begin to consider replacing the daily stand-up with something else entirely, where the replacement practice still supports the values and achieves the principle of the daily stand-up.

- Example 2: when the team begins to understand that the sprint review (a.k.a demo) is more of a transparency and trust meeting than a simple show-off of functionality, the team may begin to consider how they might accomplish the same function differently and support the principles and values.
Definition of a Stage 3 team

- Stage 3 (RI) is the highest stage a team may reach. All team members are full time on the project.
- **The team consistently thinks and acts as a unit. Emergent properties are recognized.** The output of the team is greater than the sum of the work of the individuals on the team (the definition of a *hyper-productive team*).
- Attributes of the team: efficient, precise, confident, self-managing, transparent, trusted, proven
- The team follows the well-worn rules, but the team – as a whole – is progressing more through self-discovery than instruction.
- The team understands the principles and values and consciously applies the them to their daily practices.
- Despite changes in scope or new external dependencies, the team adjusts with little friction.
- The team and the scrum coach are peers, and the team becomes as skilled as the coach. The coach offers advice; the team considers it well and then does what it wants. The team has “internalized the rules”. RI: be the rule

- Example 1: the team may choose to replace the daily stand-up with something else entirely, where the replacement practice still supports the values and achieves the principle of the daily stand-up, yet takes it to a deeper level.
- Example 2: the team may choose to replace certain performance metrics with something they create that still support the values and principles of the replaced metrics.
# Behavior of a Hyper-Performing Team

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>High Performing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sprint Planning</td>
<td>Efficient; works together; breaks stories into tasks; confident in estimates</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Release Planning</td>
<td>Estimate epics and map those to future sprints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Forecasting future sprints</td>
<td>Able to forecast 2-3 sprints ahead</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Daily Scrum</td>
<td>Executed with precision; transparency &amp; truth values in-mind</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Producing &lt;10 defects per 100 story points</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Story Estimation</td>
<td>Able to estimate more than 6 stories per hour</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Story Creation Process</td>
<td>Able to draft stories with confidence; story creation rate is predictable</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Velocity</td>
<td>Trend levels off, is consistent and predictable</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sprint Review</td>
<td>Performed with confidence with business support</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Retrospective</td>
<td>Process improvement discussions are value-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Overtime Hours</td>
<td>&lt;5% of total team hours in a sprint are overtime trending across sprints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Accuracy of Estimates</td>
<td>Estimates are within 15% of actuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Accuracy of Commitment</td>
<td>Delivered exceeds committed but not by more than 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Release Frequency</td>
<td>Able to release software more often than the business needs it</td>
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Distributed and Mixed Teams

- In the REAL WORLD distributed and mixed teams are a fact of life for many.

- Distributed teams are those with team members geographically distributed.
  - It could mean team members spread across the same city, or across the globe.
  - Team members could be in clusters, such as 3 in NYC and 4 in Chennai.
  - Team members could be ALL work from home.

- Mixed teams are those with team members from multiple companies or vendors.
  - a mixed team could have 3 developers from Cognizant, 2 testers from IBM, 2 business analysts from Accenture, and a product owner from the client.
DEVELOPING HYPER-PERFORMING SCRUM TEAMS
In small companies or organizations, team chemistry is extremely important. It’s the glue that enables the team to deliver.

Team Chemistry = rapport between individual team members

Must Agile teams work in the same room, face-to-face every day for the project to succeed? **NO**

- Our findings support this controversial discovery published by Forrester Research (2010).
- The key is the rapport between the team members, regardless of geographical separation. Emotional distance is the problem – not physical distance.
The Model

Agile Executive Support  Agile-friendly Eco-System  Agile Team
Agile Executive Support

- Provide environment for innovation to thrive
- Include basic structure and guidance for metrics, reporting, and oversight
- Provide latitude and flexibility to Agile teams to support business stakeholders in best way possible
- Provide coordination for across-the-board issues
- Implement oversight at the senior leadership level
- Provide quick-to-the-top escalation path
- Operational drive at the portfolio level
- Drive the creation of the Agile-friendly ecosystem
- Identify and discourage anti-Agile behavior
Establishing the Agile-friendly Eco-system

The closer the role/group is to the agile team, the more they need to modify their own internal processes to support and enable the agile team to achieve their potential. Some level of training/awareness is required for all.

**Agile teams:**
- Composed of 7-10 people
  - Product owner
  - Scrum master
  - Business analysts
  - Developers
  - Testers
- Treated like a military unit
  - Deployed to successive projects
  - Members have a sense of duty
  - Peer pressure enables cohesion

Agile Governance is required to implement the eco-system
The goals of adopting Agile methods are best realized by the creation of hyper-performing teams.

Hyper-performing teams can only be achieved when the team becomes “one cohesive team”.
Becoming One Cohesive Team

Properties of a Hyper-performing Team

- Stage 3 (RI) is the highest stage a team may reach. All team members are full time on the project.
- The team consistently thinks and acts as a unit. Emergent properties are recognized. The output of the team is greater than the sum of the work of the individuals on the team (the definition of a hyper-productive team).
- Attributes of the team: efficient, precise, confident, self-managing, transparent, trusted, proven
- The team follows the well-worn rules, but the team – as a whole – is progressing more through self-discovery than instruction.
- The team understands the principles and values and consciously applies the them to their daily practices.
- Despite changes in scope or new external dependencies, the team adjusts with little friction.
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Principles & Practices:

- The team succeeds or fails together
- Everyone is on the team for a specific purpose
- Everyone is expected to “pull their weight”
- Everyone is expected to have a shared sense of duty and purpose
- Exercise the strengths of the individuals of the team, and work to minimize the weaknesses
- If one team member becomes “stuck,” other team members have a responsibility to help them – to the best of their ability and skill
- If the team fails to meet their commitment, they are expected to learn from their failure and adapt
- There is no change in team composition or structure for an extended duration
- The team should expect to be “deployed” to successive projects, one after another
Key Success Factors to Achieve Stage 3

**Caveat:** Many teams never achieve Stage 3, and there is no average timeline for a team to achieve the highest stage despite extensive research on this point. Many factors must come together before it is possible.

- The scrum team must have no departures or additions for a period of time.
- The person in the Product Owner role cannot change on a project.
- The team is small; 10 people or less.
- The team is empowered to change its process.
- The team incorporates the core values in their work.
- *It’s difficult for a team to reach stage 3 that has not failed at least once.*
- The team must bond via a difficult challenge (similar to the boot camp experience).
- Team members are committed to shared success (i.e. success/failure as a team).
- The team is able to stay intact and move from one project to another.
- Team members must be hungry to learn, willing to accept change, and eager to experiment with new ideas.
- Business and Technology leadership provide necessary support and are helpful in removing impediments.
Dealing with Failure

- We need to educate executives and management on the model, and the consequences of their actions.
  - Failure of one sprint is ok – maybe even a good thing for the team.
  - A failure trend is not good. A Coach should be brought in to assess the situation.

- Specifically, in the scenario where a team realizes that they will fail (i.e. not meet their commitment) in a sprint, the team should:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
<th>+ / –</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Extend the sprint</td>
<td>Team perceives that they will always be bailed out when they overcommit. Members are not invested in success of the team. Estimation becomes less important. Metrics become meaningless. Predictability decreases. Team growth toward stage 3 is limited.</td>
<td>Sprint boundary becomes unpredictable. –</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ask management to add people to the team</td>
<td>People aspire to join the “swat team” – the elite group that “saves” other teams.</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reduce the scope of the sprint</td>
<td>The commitment the team makes becomes meaningless.</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Admit failure and discuss improvement options in their retrospective</td>
<td>Team members perceive that they are “on their own” – working “without a safety net” - and that they must get along with each other and discover each other’s strengths/weaknesses if they are to succeed.</td>
<td>The team will grow into acting and thinking more like a unit, progressing towards stage 3. +</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For a team to progress toward stage 3 – the Scrum team should be like a *Marine combat team*.

» A combat team may be composed of specialists (like an explosives expert or expert marksman) and/or generalists (like a rifleman), but *everyone is on the team for a specific purpose*.

» Each team member must support the others for the mission to succeed.

» The drive to succeed for a common goal increases group cohesion.

» Peer pressure pushes individuals to perform their best.
Applying the model in the REAL WORLD is challenging:

- Working in an agile-unfriendly eco-system
- Feeling the need to run your Agile project as a “skunk-works” project (i.e. under the radar; executives don’t know that you’re using an Agile methodology)
- A portion of your team are junior team members (or “freshers” lacking key skills)
- Leadership is exhibiting anti-agile behavior

The team can decide on its own that it will follow these principles & practices, regardless of the difficulties.

Work within the process dictated to you and the hurdles imposed, but **resolve to improve the team’s estimates, metrics (like velocity), and meet your commitments.**

**What else can you think of?**
ACCELERATORS
KEYS TO SUCCESS: build rapport, talk daily, and be social

- When a distributed team is first formed
  - Attend *jumpstart training* together in-person
  - Use the *introduction brochure technique*
  - *Name* the team and decide on a mascot
- Host the entire team onsite (or offsite!) to build rapport
  - When they start a new project
  - At least once per year (the 360+5 plan)
- Use video conferencing whenever possible
- Plan for and perform a *cultural exchange* with each location
  - Celebrate exchanged holidays – Indians celebrate Thanksgiving; Americans celebrate Diwali
  - Learn words in the native language of other team members
- Take pictures of team members and post them on the wall at each location
- Establish a team Facebook page
- Use the *man-in-the-air technique* to build rapport
- Create the *celebration plan*
- Spend time together away from the office – playing, performing or watching events with a common interest
- Provide incentives through *friendly* competition with other teams
- Have fun!
The Introduction Brochure Technique

- The idea of the Introduction Brochure is for team members to shorten the discovery cycle of team member strengths and extracurricular activities.
- The purpose is to build rapport.

Introduce yourself to your team members using a “brochure”.

Follow these three steps:

1. Identify 3 things about your life outside of work
   - I cook / hike / fish
   - I play Cricket / Baseball / Soccer
   - I love to spend time with my kids / I love to travel and see new places
   - What do you love to do when you are not working?

2. Identify 2 of your work skills that you are really good at
   - Great at bug-finding
   - Great at designing a UI
   - What skills do you bring to this team?

3. Identify the one area that you want to learn more about – what new technical thing really interests you

Each person on the team should present themselves to their colleagues.
The idea of the man-in-the-air technique is to frequently have one team member flying to visit other team members to build rapport.

» This technique is especially helpful if you have clusters of team members in 2 different locations, e.g. offices across the US (like Atlanta, Chicago) or across the globe (NYC and Chennai)

Establish a travel plan (and budget!) for each team member, regardless of usual work location, to visit other team members.

» A team member should volunteer to plan the travel schedule
» One team member travels each month, staying for one full sprint cycle
» No more than one trip per year for each team member when flying solo
» Each visit should be coordinated with sprints or releases to avoid a disruption in delivery
» Hosting team members must plan activities and be good social hosts for the visitors
The Celebration Plan Technique

- The idea of the celebration plan is to *celebrate the art of the possible*, celebrate social events like birthdays and holidays, and celebrate delivery events like the end of a sprint, quarter or release. The purpose is to build rapport.

- Establish a plan (and budget!) for frequent celebrations
  - A team member should volunteer to own the plan
  - All team member birthdays
  - Collective Team Holidays (Thanksgiving, Christmas, Boxing day, etc.)
  - The end of “killer” sprints
  - Successful major delivery releases
  - Overcoming significant technical hurdles
  - Achieving hyper-productive status!
Cultural Exchange Technique

- The idea of the cultural exchange is to learn about the other cultures of the team members that you are working with. The purpose is to build rapport.

- Establish a cultural exchange plan
  - A team member should volunteer to own the plan
  - Plan a holiday exchange: as a whole team, determine which holidays the team should celebrate. Some examples are Thanksgiving, Diwali, or Day of the Dead.
    - The entire team should gather for the feast in their respective locations, if possible on a video conference
  - Plan to learn a few words in the native language of the other location.
The idea of the 360+5 plan is for dispersed team members to gather as a whole team at least once per year for 5 days – like a mini-conference.

Recognizing that distributed teams are normal, and that the best minds for a project may reside in different locations, the 360+5 plan enables teams to physically work apart but to grow socially and emotionally close. The purpose is to build and repair the rapport between team members.

Establish a plan to gather for 5 days once per year as a team

- A team member should volunteer to plan the event
- Determine an agenda – what the team will focus upon – either work-focused (delivery) or not (convene for a vacation-in-common)
- Determine logistics for the location (e.g. hotels or homes)
- Perform at least one team event, like attending a Cricket match or baseball game
- Meet for dinner as a team at least once
FINAL DISCUSSION
Take Aways

- Discuss around your tables one item that you can take back to improve your projects
  » 5 mins for the discussion

- Select one person to be your table spokesperson

- The spokesperson should present to others in the session the one item that your group feels is most valuable to them.
Wrap Up

- It’s all about Chemistry!

- In this workshop, we’re discussed how you can convert distributed mixed scrum teams into hyper-performing scrum teams.

- We covered:
  - What a hyper-productive scrum team is.
  - How to enable your distributed teams to reach the hyper-productive stage.
  - Tips and techniques for enhancing team performance.
Thank you

For more information, you may reach the author at Brian.haughton@cognizant.com