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How Does a Manager Need To Adjust Their Approach With Agile?

Even more as we kick off teams and trains, there seem to be a lot of questions about what the “leaders” in the new structure do. In transformations I've worked on I have often seen the pattern where teams are expected to “become agile” the leadership does not really change their mindset (agile is for the people doing the work). For example, you will often see the old hierarchical structure is mapped into a new hierarchical structure as a result of mapping roles to SAFe (for example) roles. Such a simple mapping will result in a new “king and court” structure where the existing controlling mechanisms still exist and the organization has not leveraged the promise self organization.

What an kind of mindset change we need to work as we work with leadership? It is easy to say “servant leadership”, etc., but that only really address behaviors and doesn't really capture the change in approach leadership needs to take.

This blog post below from Henrik Kniberg does a good job of describing what the different approach an “agile leader” needs to take. It starts by stating “Agile relies on self-organization, which is super-effective (when done right). But with more than a handful of teams, self-organization sometimes needs a helping hand – someone to create and maintain the environment that enables self-organization in the first place – things like a clear goal, a short feedback loop, effective communication channels, etc. Essentially, make “1 + 1 = 3” (because of synergies) instead of “1 + 1 = 1.5” (because of misalignment) ... the agile leader ... the main job is to create alignment!”

Notice the difference in approach. This is not about “controlling the alignment” of the organization but rather “creating and maintaining the environment” which enables alignment.

This is a difficult transition for traditionally minded leadership as they are (naturally) concerned that if they do not directly control the alignment, then the alignment will not happen. It will take them a while to understand that with increased collaboration, transparency, improved goals, short feedback cycles, and improved flow of information, alignment can naturally emerge and does not require “control”.

From a practical perspective this means that leadership will need to adopt a “trust but verify” approach so they can experiment with the new approach, but still feel safe that things are getting done. And then, once they overcome this concern, leadership needs to change their day-to-day work. They must be able to recognize where there is no alignment, and the actions they need to take to create the environment needed.

The remainder of the post talks about some specific examples of alignment that leadership needs to watch for and work. To do this effectively there is another significant change required in the behavior of the manager or leader. This means that the leader has to immerse themselves far deeper into the work than what they have traditionally done. If they do not do this, then they will not have to the context to be effective in changing the environment.

Want to Know More

- <https://blog.crisp.se/2015/11/10/henrikkniberg/what-is-an-agile-leader>

[FAQ](#), [Management](#), [SAFe](#), [Leadership](#), [agile](#)

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