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How Do We Reduce the Effect of Team Churn on Our Ability to Deliver Value?

We've now "admired the problem" that Team churn creates. But the reality is that for many shops there is no appetite to change the situation or it will take some time for the change in approach to occur. For these situations need to work to reduce the impacts as much as we can. For example:

- Timing of staff actions: We need to set things up so that we give time to Teams to establish their culture. This is especially important for new Teams - new Teams also include Teams with more than 2 staff actions in a year. For example, if a staff action is required for a particular Team, perhaps an idea is to let the Team settle down for 6 months before doing the staff action.
- Expect lack of predictability: We expect that commitments will not be met. We need to ensure that there is no negative consequence for Teams that do not meet commitments made as a result of the churn. Teams will naturally try to do their best and we should let them try. But if we insist on them meeting the Team's commitment, then Teams will see this as "you (management) made us change, and you then don't want to deal with the consequences" which will further reduce engagement and therefore our ability to produce value. In particular, encourage awareness how change impacts their capacity and therefore the commitments they make.
- Awareness and collaboration on staff actions. We need to ensure that as changes are made that everyone is part of the decision so that we can ensure ongoing support of the product. This means, for example, that there is a discussion with the Product Manager and the Release Train Engineer of the Train effected as well as the Product Owner and Scrum Master.
- Supporting initiatives: For example:
  - Put in place ways for people to find out who to talk to (a map to the organization) and keep it up to date,
  - Create dashboards so people can get information for themselves and so don't need direct communication with individuals,
  - Add additional ceremonies should help people get work into our Trains and then understand progress on that work will help without necessarily needing to know individual people.
- Help people see the change as something positive: Improved communication of the "why" the change and a clear description of "what's in it for me." We need to make this concrete and be very wary of internal marketing speak (no posters with soaring eagles etc.) If we don't have a specific benefit for the person, we are better of just saying that rather than making something up.

While these approaches will help, in the final analysis if we expect these changes to continue, we need to become good at it. In other words we need to set things up so that the Teams are more resilient to change and so that if change happens there are tools and practices in place that help Teams recover without the need for a coach. The general term for this is "re-teaming". Some ideas to start this discussion:

- We need to have a way to educate named roles in the basics of working a Team toward being high performing. The education needs to be self-service as much as possible so that we increase our need for coaching. The education needs to be just-in-time so that named roles can work use it immediately with whatever Team they are working with, in whatever new role they have just completed.

- Education of named roles means that we need to have a curriculum for re-teaming with the aim of quickly working toward high performance. In general Agile says "stable Teams" (and for good reason) so the general literature say "don't do that". That's not to say that there are no discussions on re-teaming although the general discussion is mostly aimed at reducing effect of stale (Teams that have spent too much time together and aren't improving) Teams or dysfunctional Team Members, as well as the idea of letting people work on whatever Team gives the individual satisfaction. We can use these ideas developed to work this style of re-teaming but also work in other approaches more in response to our on needed such as:
    - Using permanent buddy system to integrate new Team Member on existing Team,
    - Increasing the frequency of feedback by using hyper-sprints so that the rate of improvement increases,
    - Driving a Team through a relentless focus on improvement metrics to kick start a Team,
    - Reduce the expectation of learning and more prescriptive approach to kicking off a Team to get started,
    - And so on.
- Named role education will provide a way to maximize return on coaching investment but we should also expect that some level of Team Member education is required. We may be able to do this through named roles (e.g. Scrum Master delivers message to Team).
- We need to develop strong Team sustainability practices so that when churn events occur the Team can leverage "this is how we work around here" to re-integrate faster and keep stakeholders informed about impact of changes. One idea is for Teams to maintain a Team Page useful information. See What Content Should Be Considered To Start a Team Page? for ideas here. Also, to help integrate new Team members into a Team, you might want to add in Private Team information such as working agreements, decision register, any form of back-channel communications, and so on.
- We need to offer improved ways for Team Members to become involved in re-teaming so that change is not done to them but rather they are part of the change and so more supportive and engaged.

Want to Know More?

- What Is The Effect of Changing Team Members on Velocity?
- What Kinds of Problems Do You See When Agile Teams Churn Team Members a Lot?

FAQ, team, organization, structure, churn