Empowering Leadership

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I'm passionate about creating work environments that truly enable and support your success. Feel free to call or email me for a complimentary mini consultation to explore potential opportunities to increase your capacity and support the success of your agile initiative. Just tell me what you think the issue is, and we'll start from there.

Leadership is creating an environment where everyone can contribute to solve the problem at hand.

Every team needs leadership, even teams without a formal leader and self-organizing teams.

When I make this statement, some people assume I mean that every team needs a designated leader. I can't blame them, most people are accustomed to thinking of leadership residing in a role or a charismatic individual—a "born" leader.

On self-organizing teams, there isn't one leader. Agile teams may have a coach; however, the coaches job is to help the team see where they need to improve and help them learn specific skills. The coach may lead at times, but the coach isn't *the* leader. In fact, if the team looks at the coach as *the* leader, they're in trouble. Holding up one person as leader will hamper team development.

Before we go any further, let's define leadership: leadership is creating an environment where everyone can contribute to solve the problem at hand.

On teams that function well, every member of the team leads. Each person takes responsibility for helping the team move forward.

But acting at random or on gut feel isn't enough. Empowering leaders can be more effective when they work out of a model that helps them make sense of what they see happening on the team.

One such model is the MOIJ model articulated by Jerry Weinberg.

1. Every team needs **motivation**—and I don't mean pep talks, cheerleading and extrinsic rewards. Teams do best when they are intrinsically motivated, when they derive satisfaction from the work and team relationships.

Team members lead when they work for appropriate harmony and consensus—and engage in constructive conflict. Leaders pay attention to how other team members are participating, so that everyone can use their talents and creativity. Leaders pay attention to how the whole team is working together, and building a team culture that supports achievement and good working relationships.

When only one person on the team pays attention to motivation, the team doesn't learn how to create the environment for their own success.

2. Teams need **organization**. Organization is more than the boxes on an org chart. Organization includes physical space, time, and structure.

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Leaders make sure that the workspace supports the team with appropriate equipment and information. Teams need someone to lead by pay attention to commitments and the ticking clock. They need to figure out how to allocate the work so that it gets done and there's a balance between people expanding their skills and relying on experts who can do the work most quickly. Teams need structures that help them work effectively together, for example, working agreements or configuration management.

When only one person pays attention to organization, he comes across as a nag. After a while, people ignore nags.

3. Teams need **information**. They need to see a vision, generate ideas, bring in data and analyze and connect the dots.

Along with a flow of ideas, sometimes, a teams need a Devils Advocate. A Devil's Advocate challenges habitual thinking, checks solutions against foundational principles and values. Without a Devil's Advocate, teams can slip into group think, or miss risks and weaknesses when they consider options. But like the nagging organizer, no one enjoys a habitual naysayer. When there's only one Devil's Advocate he's likely to be marginalized. Like all the other leadership activities, it's important to spread this one around.

Team members also need to know when they have too many ideas, and it's time to slow the flow. We usually don't think of

following as a leadership activity. But I've seen teams where everyone wanted to have his or her way. I've seen teams sidetracked when members keep throwing in new ideas each time they come close to a decision. Those teams argue and debate endlessly and don't make forward progress. Knowing when to zip the lips and follow is leadership, too.

4. Finally, every team needs people who can recognize when they are stuck and need a **jiggle**. My favorite jiggle is a paradoxical question: "How can we make the situation worse?" Simply commenting on the stuck-ness can sometimes shake a team out of their rut. Changing position—standing up if the team has been sitting–can jiggle the team into productive action, as well.

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What happens when only one person on the team—whether a formal or informal leader—tries to do all the leadership? I suppose there are the rare individuals who can do it all. But on most teams that aren't sharing leadership, are missing some leadership ingredients. When teams rely on one individual they flounder when the leader isn't available. Worse, they don't develop their own capabilities and slide into dependency.

Leadership is about making sure the team is functioning well and creating an environment where everyone can do his or her best work. And it takes a whole team of leaders to make a high performing,self-organizing team.