Agile vs. Traditional Project Manager Responsibilities

As we continue our look into the differences between Agile and Traditional project management, this month we will look at how a few of the roles and responsibilities of the project manager vary. First, we'll look at how project managers function in a Traditional project management environment.

In Traditional project management, the project charter formally authorizes the existence of the project and gives the project manager authority to run the project. This person is to lead the team responsible for achieving the project objectives. Once the project begins, the project manager becomes the link between the strategy of the project and the team. He or she is the driving force behind the project and controls and makes all the decisions.

There are three competencies the traditional project manager must possess:
1. **Knowledge** – What the project manager knows about project management
2. **Performance** – What the project manager is able to do or accomplish while applying his/her project management knowledge
3. **Personal** – How the project manager behaves when performing the project or related activity

Each of these competencies is important for the project to succeed. If the project manager doesn't have a strong knowledge of how to run a project, there won't be a firm foundation upon which it came be built. If he or she has the knowledge, but doesn't know to apply or communicate it to the rest of the team, there is no strong leadership to give direction. If the project manager can't relate or earn the respect of the team, it will be very difficult to motivate them to perform at their best.

The Agile project manager is focused on valuing the people working on the project, as can be seen in the Agile Manifesto. One of the Manifesto's statements states that it values "individuals and interactions over processes and tools". While Traditional project management focuses on the processes and tools of how the project is done, Agile seeks to develop the people doing the project. Early in the project, Agile focuses on developing the core personal values of their team.

There are four core personal values that Agile pursues to anchor into team members:
1. **Trust**
Agile Project Management demands a "trust first" attitude since people may not have worked together and do not know each other very well.

> *Do not ask people to do what you are not willing to do yourself.*
> *Phillip C. McGraw*
> *Psychologist and television personality*

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is using, communication is the glue that holds it all together. Effective communication not only requires delivering the information you want to communicate, but to also do it in such a way that you get the other person to have the desired response. Good communication skills will smooth the path between team members, stakeholders, and everyone involved in the project.

2. Collaboration

Collaboration is a willingness to work with others in a peer relationship. Through effective collaboration, meetings are run in an effective and efficient manner. Facilitating these meetings are important to allow all parties to explain their point of view.

3. Learning

The project manager should support the learning and adaptation on the team. He or she must construct an environment that allows the freedom to fail, but with the discipline of failing fast and learning from mistakes.

4. Courage

An Agile project manager deals with pressure which requires courage to:
• Say no to unrealistic demands
• Confront unpleasant realities
• Stand up to senior management on behalf of their team
• Deal with team conflict
• Accept criticism and learn from mistakes

While there are several differences between Traditional and Agile project managers, there is one extremely important skill that is required of both: **communication**. Regardless of the project management methodology your project

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