How to Stop Deterioration of Agile Coaching Quality: Organizationally, Industrially

by Gene Gendel
Problem Statement

Today, on-average, industry-wide, quality of agile coaching, training and guide-level agile leadership... has gone down.
...there is lots of low quality coaching out there...
Understanding This Problem

➢ What is the problems’ origin?

➢ Examples of the problem’s manifestation?

➢ How can we solve the problem?
Upstream Systemic Dysfunctions leading to This Problem

- Lack of clarity and strategic vision by organizational leadership

- Lack of understanding what Agility really means (“faster”, “cheaper”)

- **Lack of desire to get Agile education** by organizational leadership (seniority-based “exemption”)

- Blind Pursuit of KPIs and **Maturity Metrics**

- **Peer Pressure** and Internal Competition

**Note:** the above links will take you to articles and blogs
Upstream Systemic Dysfunctions leading to This Problem
(example)

GOAL:
45.3734999 % Agile by EoY!!!!

(Пере)выполним годовой план за три квартала !!!

Old Soviet Era Economic Slogan: “We shall exceed expectations, by completing our original yearly plan in three quarters”
Problem Coming from Outside
Problem: Vicious Cycle of Coaching Quality Deterioration

Preferred vendors lists are outdated

Organizations are not looking for real changes

Companies create weak coaching role descriptions for new hires

Companies are comfortable with having a low coaching bar

“Centaurs” settle in and drive low a coaching bar

Many “centaurs” get lucky and get hired

Companies are flooded with resumes of weak candidates (“centaurs”)

Agencies hunt for weak candidates (“centaurs”)

Positive (+) Feedback Loop (Reinforcing Cycle)

Note: Today, there is no single point of entry into the cycle; there are many.
Problem: Bad Job Descriptions

Job Title: Senior Agile Coach/ScrumMaster/Program-Project-Portfolio Delivery Manager

Responsibilities: In charge of leading organization-wide transformation of 500 people program. Coaching and managing Scrum of multiple teams. Implementing best practices of Scrum across multiple projects. Scheduling and running daily stand-ups, sprint reviews and other Scrum ceremonies. Leading release planning sessions. In charge of planning and executing on deployment strategies for each release. Collecting and reporting metrics to senior leadership and business at project, program and portfolio level. Working closely with PMO to manage scope and timelines.

Key Skills: Expertize in configurations and use of Jira, Version1, Rally, TFS/VSTS, Scrum, Kanban

Certifications: CSM, CSPO, PMP, PMI-ACP, SAFe, Prince 2, Six Sigma
Middleman Problem: Low (very) Value Proposition

By:
- Sr. Managing Directors of Staffing
- Sr. Professional Recruiters
- Sr. Technical Recruiters
- Sr. Head-Hunters
- Sr. Talent Acquisition Specialists
- Sr. Resource Managers
- Sr. Job Placement Experts
- Sr. Sourcing Specialists

In the form of:
- Misunderstanding clients needs
- Misrepresenting client needs to candidates
- Misrepresenting candidate abilities to clients
- Inflating a mark-up

Client - Company

Coach
Middleman Problem: What Does it Look Like From Inside?

From “The Boiler Room”
Problem Coming from Inside
Problem: Repurposing “Left Over” People

Larman's Laws of Organizational Behavior

(Russian translation here) (Japanese translation here)

After decades of observation and organizational consulting, here are Larman's Laws of Organizational Behavior. These are observations rather than laws to follow ;)

1. Organizations are implicitly optimized to avoid changing the status quo middle- and first-level manager and "specialist" positions & power structures.

2. As a corollary to (1), any change initiative will be reduced to redefining or overloading the new terminology to mean basically the same as status quo.

3. As a corollary to (1), any change initiative will be derided as "purist", "theoretical", "revolutionary", "religion", and "needing pragmatic customization for local concerns" — which deflects from addressing weaknesses and manager/specialist status quo.

4. As a corollary to (1), if after changing the change some managers and single-specialists are still displaced, they become "coaches/trainers" for the change, frequently reinforcing (2) and (3).

5. Culture follows structure.

“Job Security – OK. Role Security – not OK”
(One of Large Scale Scrum (LeSS) ideas)
Problem: Agile Career “Fast-Tracking”

Newly baked “Senior Agile Coach”...since he/she has lots of years (seniority) with a company 😣😣

Attention: This graphic is a cartoon and its purpose is to expose a dysfunction through irony. This is NOT an invitation to experiment the presented case 😞.

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Problem: Internal “Power Tower” of Coaches

The “Power Tower”/Country Club of Centralized Coaches

Avoid Local Optimization

Centralized Coaching

Maturity Metrics

Best Practices

BoKs

Progress Reports

RAG
Better Working Alternative to “Power Tower”

Decentralized Coaching

Senior Leadership

Coaching & Consulting of individuals that are in charge of organizational design and making executive decisions

Gemba/Go-See, Impediments Removal – to support coaching efforts at team level

Community of coaches, deeply imbedded with teams

Coaching & Consulting of individuals that are in charge of organizational design and making executive decisions

TRY
Key Suggestions: What to Avoid in Coach?

- Resumes ‘tailored’ to jobs
- Long resumes with bold keywords
- Jacks of all trades: “Ace Pilot and Submarine Captain”
- “I have transformed 1000 people” stories
- Great “scaling” success stories
- Metrics and tools specialists
- Certifications collectors
- “DDT and MDT experts”
  - DDT = “Deck-Driven Transformations”
  - MDTs = “Metrics-Driven Transformations”
- Blind Outsourcing to external vendors
- Settling for Wholesale Elephant-Size Body Shops
- “We have a request from our Direct Client”
- “We have an exclusive right to fulfill this req.”
Key Suggestions: What to Look for in Coach?

- Understanding the coaching role (e.g. vs. training, vs. consulting)
- Well-articulated, one’s own learning journey
- Contributing to “open source” agility (communities)
- Blogging, publishing, podcasting
- Written case studies
- Public presenting, conference speaking, paneling
- Well-rounded, educated, self-starters
- Mentorship: giving and taking

Mark of Quality

One of the best kept secrets in the world…still…but things are changing…
Additional Recommendations

➢ To Companies - Clients:
  ➢ Stop using underqualified external recruiters and ‘preferred vendors’
  ➢ Do Not use existing but unsuitable Org. Structures (to ‘host’ coaches)
  ➢ Improve your own internal recruiting / HR practices
  ➢ Leverage payroll/benefits companies that will charge a fraction to ‘process’ a person, instead of paying a fortune to a sweat shop
  ➢ Stop using Wholesale Elephant-Size Body Shops

➢ To Coaches-Opportunity Seekers:
  ➢ Do whatever it takes, to cut through organizational layers, towards decision makers
  ➢ Don’t feel obligated to “meet recruiters’ expectations”, when meeting a client
  ➢ At interviews: ask hard questions, challenge job descriptions, take ownership of your role definition
  ➢ If hired, share with a client what it took you to be selected in the process

➢ To Internal (Client-side) Recruiters:
  ➢ Educate yourself on a subject matter
  ➢ Don’t be just conduits/gatekeepers. Become matter experts. Deliver real value.
Q & A

Reference links:

Appendix
Looking at Marketplace: Understanding Supply & Demand

- **1**: Coaching Supply
  - Trend: Companies compete for coaches

- **2**: Coaching Supply
  - Trend: not clear

- **3**: Coaching Demand
  - Trend: not clear
  - Quality
  - Compensation

- **4**: Coaching Demand
  - Trend: Coaches compete for positions and salary
  - Equilibrium