Organization-wide Agile Expansion requires an Organization-wide Agile Mindset

Hidde van Manen, Hans van Vliet
VU University Amsterdam

Agile-in-the-large
• Agile in bigger projects/more teams
• Agile across bigger organizations
• Chains of Scrum teams
• ...

Collaboration in a chain of Scrum teams

Research question
• Identify factors that affect the expansion of agile development in large organizations
• Expansion: from one unit to others, from initial small project to more complex ones

What’s in a word
• Agile has different definitions/meanings
• And so does Scrum

Research method
• We selected two large multi-nationals in the Netherlands, based on availability
• Scope of study: one business domain, and one change program (again based on availability)
• Face-to-face interviews ~9 persons per company
• One researcher made onsite observations, and documentation was studied
• Stepwise coding/abstracting issues
Results

• Issues grouped in two sets:
  – Agile mindset
  – Contextual dependencies

Agile mindset

• Collaboration (mentioned 17 times): between everyone in the organization
• Trust (44 times): people should take responsibility, and be allowed to do so
• Continuous improvement (24): open attitude towards each other

On trust (1):

• “Beforehand [management] states how many story points a team has to earn in each Sprint. If the team does not reach its goal, the partner company gets a fine. I do not think that is not very agile-minded. The team needs to earn at least 80% of your contract points, or the partner will not get paid.”

On trust (2):

• “Our organization needs a planning. When we file a project plan, we still need a Project Initiation Document (PID) with a decent reasoning on how long your project will take. And you cannot deviate from that too much. Another example is that IT development now wants to count with story points, but we are paying in Euros, so you still need a translation back from story points, to working hours, to budgets.”
Contextual dependencies

• Analyze context and adjust (6 times)
• Balance agility and discipline (57 times)
• Pay attention to agility at all levels (19 times)

On balancing agility and discipline:

• The most mentioned influencer of agility along the whole delivery chain is the negative effect that traditional governance and procedures have. In both of our companies participants addressed the issue of a mismatch between the existing processes and the new agile development method. A good example of this are the extensive project-initiation and planning processes that are in place in both companies, which have to be completed before development can actually begin. These processes can “easily take three months, or more”

Agile governance?

• Governance: related to control, responsibility, authority
• Agility: related to informality, simplicity, self-control
• Can the two exist together, or is it an oxymoron?

How to improve?

1. Agile governance: from engineering governance to economic governance?
2. Governance across teams/projects?
3. Improve collaboration culture?
Questions?