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THE STATE OF MIND MODEL

The ScrumMaster should adjust her approach according to the state of the team and the status of the company's Agile adoption. There is a useful model that can help the ScrumMaster decide which approach to take. It's called the ScrumMaster State of Mind [3], and it includes four core approaches:

- Teaching and mentoring
- Removing impediments
- Facilitation
- Coaching

I will describe them individually in the following pages.

Based on the maturity of the team and the fact that every team has different needs, the ScrumMaster will apply some approaches more frequently than others. Although all of them are useful at every team development stage, ScrumMasters should focus on the approach that helps them reach their current aim and supports the ultimate goal of enhancing self-organization.

After I describe the model, I'll give you a few examples, from real situations, of how the ScrumMaster State of Mind model can be useful.

TEACHING AND MENTORING

The teaching and mentoring approach is about sharing experiences of Scrum and Agile in general and using one's own experience to suggest additional practices and methods. At the beginning of Agile transformation, ScrumMasters have to explain the Agile and Scrum approach over and over again, because mentioning it once may not be enough for teams to understand why it is being implemented and how it should work. When the team has matured, it's more about experiences and suggestions for new practices than teaching, but it's still an important part of the ScrumMaster's job.

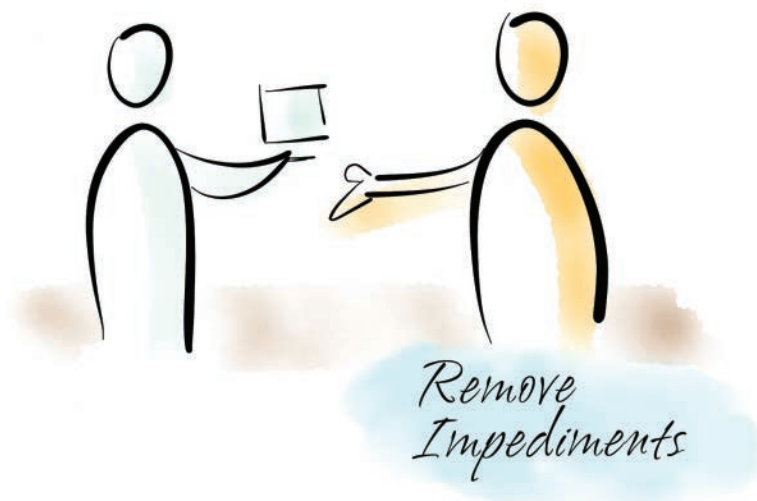Teaching, Mentoring, and Sharing experiences

REMOVING IMPEDIMENTS

A great ScrumMaster should start each day with a question: "What can I do to make it easier for my team to perform their work?" One way of helping them is to remove impediments so they can work efficiently.

However, ScrumMaster is not just any administrative position, and so the way to remove impediments is to delegate responsibility, activities, and ownership to the team so they can solve problems by themselves. Unless the ScrumMaster gives the team the opportunity to take over these tasks, she ends up as their "smother" who is so loving and caring that her "kids" are low-confidence grown-ups, dependent on her even in their thirties.

So, should the ScrumMaster remove impediments? Yes, but in a way that supports the team in finding a solution. The ScrumMaster can start by explaining what self-organization is and why it is such an important part of Scrum and continue with coaching and facilitation.
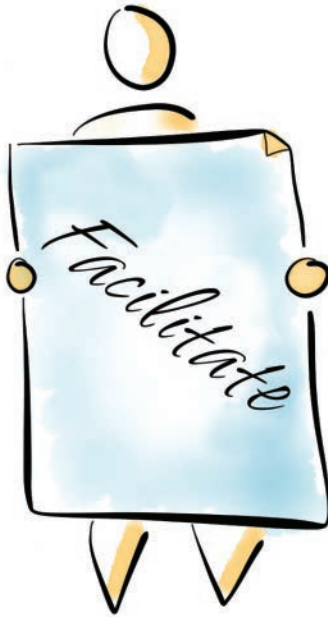

Remove Impediments

FACILITATION

Facilitation means making sure that team meetings run smoothly and that communication flows in an efficient way. Therefore, every meeting or conversation should have a clearly defined goal, deliverables, and an idea of what the expected result looks like. The facilitation rule says you should never interfere with the content of the discussion or the solution itself. You only drive the discussion flow.

Remember

- Facilitation makes communication more efficient.
- Define a goal, deliverables, and expected results.

COACHING

Coaching is probably one of the most important skills the great ScrumMaster must have. It requires a lot of practice and experience, but once you master it, it's incredibly powerful. In Scrum, coaching focuses not only on an individual's personal growth, but also on team self-organization, responsibility, and ownership.

Remember

- Coaching is more powerful than explaining, sharing experiences, or giving advice.
- The goal is not to be fast in the short term but to improve in the long term.

EXAMPLE: STARTING AGILE

The team is at the beginning of the transformation. They've just passed Scrum training, but they still don't understand what it is really about. They complain that Scrum is not the right method for them.

The right approach here is to explain all over again (and repeatedly) why you do Scrum, what you expect from such change, and how individual Scrum meetings and artifacts work together. In order to be successful, team members have to understand the dynamics and principles behind Scrum. If the ScrumMaster only facilitates, most likely this will not happen fast enough. If the ScrumMaster coaches, the team will be lost, as they haven't a clue how to improve their Standup, for example.

EXAMPLE: IMPEDIMENTS

The team is taking over responsibility, but they face loads of problems.

The easiest way is to take over and remove those impediments for them. But wait. How does that approach lead to the goal of the ScrumMaster building a self-organized team? It doesn't. So the ScrumMaster has to take the slower and more painful approach for the sake of the team and coach them to realize they can handle most of the impediments by themselves. If the ScrumMaster doesn't do this, she ends up as team secretary very quickly, and the team becomes a low-confidence group that always waits for someone else to fix things. Proper facilitation of meetings and discussion helps as well.

EXAMPLE: STUCK

The team has been working in a Scrum environment for a long time. They may not be a good "Scrum team," but they are fine with how they are.

The optimal approach here would be coaching. Coaching techniques reveal opportunities for improvement to the team and also let the team members see their problems first. If the ScrumMaster starts with teaching and explaining, the team will most likely not accept it and reply that, as a self-organized team, they will decide how they work. The ScrumMaster is not there to tell them what to do. In some cases they refuse to accept such a ScrumMaster, and she has to leave eventually.

EXAMPLE: RESPONSIBILITY

The team is quite good; they mostly self-organize. The ScrumMaster remembers that her facilitation skills were a necessary aspect of their success. That's how the ScrumMaster improved their cooperation. That's how she made them efficient.

Nonetheless, it's the right time to move on and change the approach. All ScrumMasters should do is step back and let the team run the meeting. Don't stay in the middle, don't start it, and don't indicate who's next. Just be there, ready for facilitation with a lighter touch. Give them space and trust them. They will make it. If the discussion goes in the wrong direction, coach them so they identify the problem and adjust accordingly. Note that you are not disappearing at this time; you are still present, carefully listening, aware of what's going on, and ready to help if needed.

EXERCISE: STATE OF MIND—NOW

Go through all the approaches of the ScrumMaster State of Mind model and think about situations where taking this approach could be useful and also where it would be inappropriate.

Teaching, mentoring:
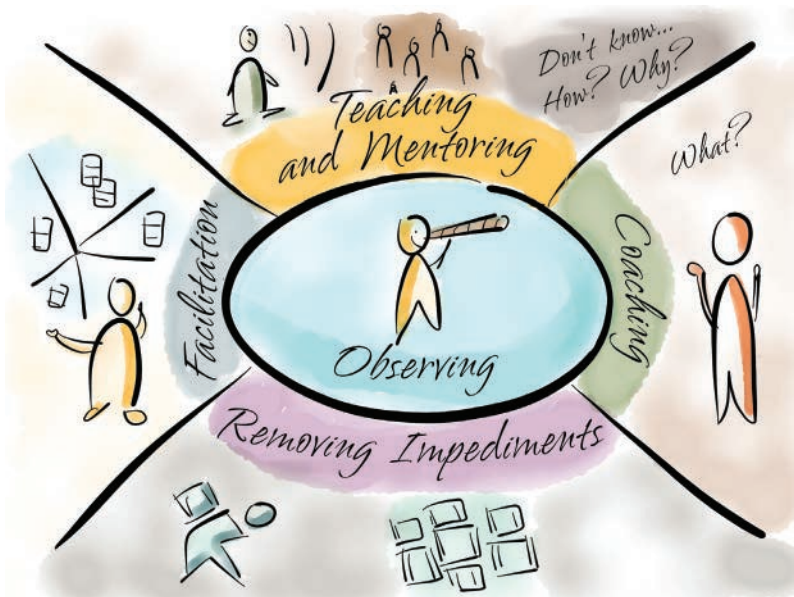
Removing impediments:

Facilitation:

Coaching:

Which approach is the most comfortable for you as a ScrumMaster and why?

- ☐ Teaching, mentoring, sharing experience, giving advice
- ☐ Removing impediments
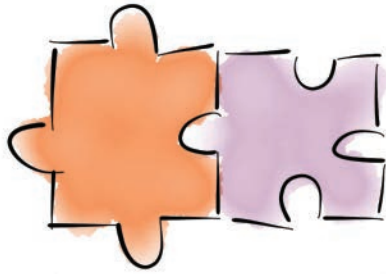- ☐ Facilitation
- ☐ Coaching

THE MISSING PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

Although all the approaches of the ScrumMaster State of Mind model are important during your journey to becoming a great ScrumMaster, one very important item is still missing—*observation*. If you take the opportunity to be quiet and let the team take over an activity, you can continue to observe them for another minute before you teach them or explain how they should do something, facilitate their conversation, coach them to decide themselves, or try to fix the problem yourself by removing impediments. If you resist the urge to solve every issue as quickly as possible so the team can get back to work again, you will be much closer to the goal of having a self-organized team.

Therefore, the ScrumMaster State of Mind model is very important, because it forces you to step back to the role of observer and decide which approach you are going to take and why. There is truth to the adage that listening is one of the most important aspects of communication and decision making.

When you imagine how listening could have improved the outcome while you were teaching, facilitating, coaching, and removing impediments, you will find some situations where you would have decided things differently if you had practiced this model.

Remember

- Observing, listening, and not interfering are the most important aspects of a great ScrumMaster's job.
- Any action, such as coaching, facilitation, teaching, or removing impediments, can wait until it's clear which approach is the best choice.

EXERCISE: STATE OF MIND—THE FUTURE

Is there any approach you would like to use more often? Why?

- ☐ Teaching, mentoring, sharing experiences, giving advice
- ☐ Removing impediments
- ☐ Facilitation
- ☐ Coaching
- ☐ Observation

Why?

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