

Huddle – a claim for more efficient group discussions among Agile Coaches/ScrumMasters

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During the last years I attended several ScrumMaster/Agile Coaches teams and we experimented with various formats for efficient syncing in our group (among the ScrumMasters).

I can highly recommend syncing regularly as it shows common topics to discuss and allows an overview and input on organizational level.

In this post I summarize a format – our Huddle – that works highly efficient.

I think as Agile Coaches we should lead by example and use the tools we teach ... as I learned we still have the tendency to not moderate our own sessions – for whatever reason?!

Structure

We get together weekly for 1,5 hours to huddle as the Agile coach team. Topics to discuss are collected in advance, using the following scheme:

| TOPIC | WHO | TIME | VOTES |
|--|-----------|------|---------|
| Decision Process <i>Why: For solid decision in our group</i> | Sebastian | 15' | 3 ** |
| ... | ... | ... | ... |

Topic: What shall we discuss and why is it important to be discussed?

Who: Who asked for discussing it and will explain the background?

Time: How long do we approximately need to discuss it?

Votes: How many team members support this topic – the more votes, the more likely it will be discussed.

*: How often was this topic postponed (4 * = let's remove it from the list of topics)?

We start from top voting down and try to discuss as much topics as possible within the given time frame.

Topics longer than 20' will just get shortly announced and a support and preparation by a smaller group will be set up.

Moderation

In the round of experts for moderation interestingly it needs an even more tough moderation 😊

We timebox every item to the proposed time initially. We can extend the topic if the group indicates the need. We extend by half the time proposed and every extend will half the time again. (e.g. 10' + 5' + 2')

To make decisions we check for consensus (by hand signals). It really helps to ensure the support by every team member and avoid not necessary discussion if the group already can reach an agreement.

All results are protocolled immediately. Action items are assigned during protocoling.

We use Confluence, including the voting plugin and edit the page during the session. This way everyone can follow and we share a common understanding.

Items that we discussed during the last 4 session are shortly announced and get removed from the list (in case it was of high importance the person connected with the topic need to pitch it once again and explain it better why it should be discussed in the group).

The team building aspect

During huddles we exercise heavily how to behave in our group. We try to listen to everyone, show by hand signals that we would like to speak next.

The term – “Have you”/”Hab Dich” – signals that another team member takes care on the order of speakers.

The mentioned check for consensus sometimes is a tough goal but it moves the group further, as really every voice is heard. If we sometimes cannot come to an agreement – it’s worth the discussion and waiting time as it shows that maybe the idea is not prepared far enough.

During our discussions we joke, can be rude (somehow), can learn more about another. And it’s a time we – as Agile Coach team – can spend together.

Leaving a productive session makes us proud and shows everyone that we can achieve something. Non productive session – happen sometimes – provide great input for our retrospectives.

The case discussion method – to provide advices for team members with deeper questions

To answer deeper questions and provide advices we use the great tool “Kollegiale Fallberatung“/case discussion method.

Roughly described this method works this way: A team member who needs an advice will explain the case to a group of advisors (we have usually 3 team members building the advisor group) within 5-10 minutes.

Followed by a question session by the advisor group to understand the case and get a detailed picture about it.

The team member to advice leaves the room and the advisor group will discuss the case and prepare solution proposals within 10-15’.

All get together and the advisor group provide their advices/solution proposals.

An awesome format to enlarge the solution space and help team members to take next steps.

How do you sync in your ScrumMaster/Agile coaches group? Can you propose working formats or will you use the described methods too?

Further readings

- Huddle up – It’s meeting time by @PetraCoach
- Efficient group decisions