

Agile Manager Behaviors: What to Look For and Develop

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Imagine being asked to write a job announcement for one of the management/lead positions on your agile team. You understand that this person needs to have familiarity with the specific technology and with the preferred agile methodology but are struggling with getting the “right” person. How should this person act? The accompanying *Executive Report* defines the eight preferred behaviors of an agile manager and helps you, your organization, and your team use those behaviors to search for and develop people for that role.

THE PROCESS

During this research, I used the behavioral definitions and normative, analytical techniques provided by the Management Research Group (MRG) out of Portland, Maine, USA. The first step included a comparison between MRG’s 22 leadership behaviors and the principles offered by:

- Principles from leading agile thought leaders
- The concepts offered by the agile Declaration of Interdependence (DOI)
- The competencies found in the IAF’s Certified Professional Facilitator (CPF) program

This comparison was done solely based on my understanding of MRG’s behavior definitions and what I knew about each of the thought leaders’ intent. In other words, this portion of the analysis depends on my bias, beliefs, and understanding.

To lessen that personal influence, I asked MRG to conduct a Leadership Effectiveness Analysis (LEA) Role Expectations survey in which 12 “experts” could join me in sharing their opinion through a structured and controlled test environment. The MRG questionnaire is a three-way, statistically normative test, honed over 40 years. The answers are compared against a database, which contains more than 200,000 other cases.

The final list of preferred agile manager behaviors was created by giving weight to those that were identified in both the DOI and the Role Expectations survey because these sources represented “expert agreement.” Secondly, weight was given to those behaviors that were common across all three agile resources (that is, thought leaders, DOI, and LEA survey). The results indicate that agile managers should have the following behavioral characteristics:

- 1. Innovative** — feeling comfortable in fast-changing environments; being willing to take risks and to consider new and untested approaches
- 2. Strategic** — taking a long-range, broad approach to problem solving and decision making through objective analysis, thinking ahead, and planning
- 3. Excitement** — operating with a good deal of energy, intensity, and emotional expression; having a capacity for keeping others enthusiastic and involved

4. **Tactical** — emphasizing the production of immediate results by focusing on short-range, hands-on, practical strategies
5. **Communication** — stating clearly what you want and expect from others; clearly expressing your thoughts and ideas; maintaining a precise and constant flow of information
6. **Delegation** — enlisting the talents of others to help meet objectives by giving them important activities and sufficient autonomy to exercise their own judgment
7. **Production** — adopting a strong orientation toward achievement; holding high expectations for yourself and others; pushing yourself and others to achieve at high levels
8. **Consensual** — valuing the ideas and opinions of others and collecting their input as part of your decision-making process

AGILE MANAGER JOB ANNOUNCEMENT

When writing a job description for an agile manager, you may be tempted to include multiple technical expectations (for example, ScrumMaster, DSDM certification). While those may be important to the organizational environment and may be a baseline upon which you need to judge applicants, my coaching experience says the manager's ability to behave appropriately will be what makes or breaks your agile experience. Thus, you might want to use the following in your next agile manager job search:

- Manages a [name your preferred agile methodology] initiative and keeps current on new trends in other agile practices and technology solutions.
- Creates and takes new ideas easily to delivery/deployment [**innovative/productive**].
- Ensures cross-organizational and multiple stakeholder consensus [**consensual**].

- Communicates with multiple learning styles [**communication**].
- Achieves results when others seem incapable of doing so [**excitement**].
- Applies an integrated process of planning and development strategies to ensure incremental results are delivered [**strategic**].
- Develops appropriate working agreements to ensure tough decisions, issue escalation, and change/enhancement requests are managed well [**tactical**].
- Facilitates meetings and workshops efficiently and effectively [**delegation**].

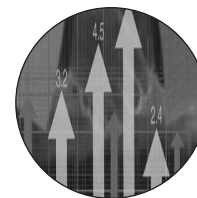
DEVELOPING INTERNAL CANDIDATES

Developing an internal candidate requires interest and initiative on the parts of both the employee and the organization. My experience shows that future agile managers need to be aware of and act upon feedback from their boss, peers, and direct reports (which can be accomplished in what I call a Leadership 360 approach). Given the eight behavior definitions here, individuals, their teams, and their executive sponsors can set up such a feedback mechanism. The key is to be as specific as possible: use goal statements that others can measure against; have several actionable objectives that the candidate can actually accomplish; and have a process to gain feedback from other observers to ensure work is being completed and/or to adjust behaviors.

SUMMARY

The purpose of the report is to discover behavioral traits that define the roles of agile managers. One might argue whether the eight behaviors identified in this research are truly definitive (in other words, might there be alternative behaviors driving the most successful agile managers?). Therefore, the second phase of this inquiry process will test this report's assumptions by getting at least 60-80 excellent agile managers/leaders to complete an

LEA 360 questionnaire online. If you know someone who fits that picture and would like to participate, please send them my way.



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