Agile Development: Creating a Learning Environment

By ROB LAMBERT

This post is part of our series on the agile development process that we follow at NewVoiceMedia.

A core focus of Agile (and self organising teams) is that you should strive to create a learning environment. An environment where you are always learning, improving and reducing waste.

This is fundamental to what we do here at NewVoiceMedia. It's a guiding principle for us all. "What can we learn here?" is often a phrase I hear said when we troubleshoot issues or we have a breakdown in process.

When we talk about learning at NewVoiceMedia we aren't just referring to our ability to learn from the mistakes or progress we make, but also from other sources outside of our daily work.

We've worked hard to create a learning culture, and have to keep working hard to keep it working. It's tough, but it's worth it.

I thought I'd share with you some of the things we do here. This list is by no means complete, but these are some of the things we've started doing to encourage and grow our learning environment:

A book library. We've had this for some time now and add to it very regularly. It's a well visited part of the office is the library. I'd suggest getting a diverse set of books in it (agile, lean, business, tech, coding, testing, learning books).

Weekly lunchtime learning sessions where someone does a short presentation, or coding Kata or Testing Dojo.

Regular weekly training for those things directly relevant to your work, like security awareness.

In-house training from external providers. It often works out a lot cheaper if you can get external suppliers to train you in your own office.

Attend free meetups, gatherings, user groups, conferences or open days in your surrounding areas. Our guys often attend Microsoft events in Reading, Skills Matters events in London and local meetups around Basingstoke, Hampshire.

If you can, attend the bigger tech/dev/test conferences. The buzz you get after a good conference is enough to power you through the next few months on good ideas and insights alone. Don't forget to report back to the team though.

Create an internal comms channel for sharing links, book review, ideas, tech insights, problems etc. We use Salesforce Chatter for this.

Create an internal Wiki for storing information, solutions etc.

If you can, stick "Information Radiators" around your office to provide meaningful information, insights and other reporting. (More information on these in a future post!)

Attend business domain conferences. For us this would be Contact Centre events. The insights you get are incredibly valuable.
But the point of this post is that it wasn't always like this at NewVoiceMedia. Just like other companies we have to work hard to build a learning culture. Above are some ideas but there are countless other ways to help to build a culture of learning and growth within your business.

And the interesting thing is that the above is not restricted to agile at all. In fact, it's not restricted to development or testing either. It's actually possible to have this as a core fundamental for any business.

How do you encourage learning in your own organisation? Do you feel that your team are learning enough?

We hope this post has been useful. If so, please subscribe to the blog and share with your network.

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