

# USING THE AGILE COACHING CANVAS TO DRIVE VISIONING FOR AGILE CHANGE.

## Agile Coaching Canvas

Are you an Agile coach, ScrumMaster or team's servant leader?

Agile Coaching Canvas is there for you to help clarify your current challenges, focus on what's really important and then envision the path of guiding your teams and companies there.

It is not limited to software product development teams and groups and can be customised to pretty much any team/company coaching. Still it has its roots down in the Agile values.

The Canvas can be downloaded from the [Focused Agile Coaching](#) website, along with other supporting materials.

There are three main use-cases for the Canvas:

1. **Individual or self-coaching tool:** the Canvas can help you (e.g. a consulting agile coach) build a sticky vision of where to guide your clients (e.g. scrum teams).
2. **Peer coaching tool:** it can be a great helper during your peer Agile coach / ScrumMaster dialogs to help each other get clearer pictures of coaching strategy and tactics.
3. **Team coaching tool:** during team 'futurospectives' (see an article on this<sup>1</sup>) the Canvas to help a team co-create a shared vision of their future along with some insights on how to get there.

Below is an example of a coaching dialog ("peer coaching tool" use-case) between a coach and a coachee (client) that is guided by the Agile Coaching Canvas. None of them has to be a professional coach, but of course possession of the core coaching skills is hard to overestimate.

So here is how a peer coaching session can go when the [Agile Coaching Canvas](#) is being used as a guide.

## **Building rapport for the coaching session**

Coach: Hi, Mel. How are you today?

Client: Hi! Thanks, I'm doing fine. Since our last talk I've been able to make some progress with one of my teams. But of course it is still a long way to go...

Coach: Good to hear. Small steps, inspect and adapt and eventually you're reaching the goal, right?.

Client: Yes... The goal... The thing is that at times I feel like I have too many goals. Some are coming from my one-on-ones with my direct manager, the others I set for myself, and there is also a constant flow of things the Scrum teams demand. I feel I don't have any clear picture of where I'm actually taking them... I used to have one when we bootstrapped Scrum. Back then it all was pretty clear...

Coach: Oh, it sounds like you're little upset. It also sounds like you need to set some time aside to get a bigger picture. Is that about right?

Client: Exactly. I'd like to have a long-term - and maybe even not reachable - image of what kind of future I'd like to take my teams and the organization to. I actually think that our ScrumMaster community would benefit from having a shared bigger picture as well. As we are now mainly fighting with daily impediments... But on the other hand: isn't it what ScrumMasters are supposed to be doing, in the end?

Coach: Yes and no, Mel. Let's see. Between the trees it is hard to see the forest, they say. So how do you feel if we go today for a journey to explore that bigger picture. Do I have your permission to work with you on this during our today's session?

Client: Absolutely! I'm intrigued and anxious now. Can't wait.

Coach: Good then.

## **Navigating: start with what is there**

Coach: Mel, before we use my secret time machine and see how the bright future looks like, I'd like you to dedicate little time studying the situation at hand. OK?

[The coach sketches the four focusing areas of the Agile Coaching Canvas]

Coach: Mel, I'd like you to look at this. Almost all, if not all, of our agile coaching activities can be grouped into the following four areas.

### **Teamwork and Team Health**

Coach: [Continues] We work with our teams [points to "Teamwork and Team Health"] to help them jell and start taking responsibility of improving the process. That's usually where we spend most of our time when the teams are new to Agile, we are new to the teams, or both. When you mentioned the Scrum kick-off stage - that's probably where your main focused was.

Client: Yes, I spend a lot of time in the area. Especially with one of my new teams who were very new to Scrum and the company.

### **Business and Customer Engagement**

Coach: Exactly, they need you there. But of course, our teams are not working in isolation - they are producing value for the stakeholders, customers and hopefully also - for the end users. [Smiles and points to "Business and Customer Engagement"]. We know we are doing good when the vision is clear and shared, the teams are motivated by the purpose, the flow of value constantly flows, and the teams have a wide communication channel, so to speak, to the subject-matter experts and end-users. Am I clear enough?

Client: Sure, that's sounds like this second area is about implementing the second agile value of "customer collaboration over contract negotiation".

Coach: Exactly. And if the first area was about "individuals and interactions" this one is exactly about the collaboration with the customers in the widest understanding of a "customer". Let's explore the other two areas.

### **Engineering and Release Process**

Coach: If you remember the key principles of the Toyota Production System, then you'll know the Toyota (or also Lean) Managers do spend a lot of time in what they call the "Gemba walks". In software product development that would be literally looking into the code [He circles the "Engineering and Release Process"]. If a coach has enough technical skills she can help make a huge difference there. That's the third area of our focus. That's about understanding how the team engineers the product and builds quality in. That will of course touch the way product increments got shipped and released.

Client: I see...

### **Organizational Evolution and Maturity**

Coach: If these three areas we've just looked at are about value production, delivery and consumption. The next area [He highlights the "Organizational Evolution and Maturity"] is about the environment the teams are in. The key questions here are how supportive and understanding the management is; how effectively they solve the organizational impediments; how deep the company understands and implements the Lean and Agile principles; what do the managers do to increase the capacity of the organization to learn and improve; how the inter-team and product dependencies are being minimized. That's the systemic part of agile coaching.

Client: Oh. In our case that is in the hands of the enterprise coaches...

Coach: Well, that will depend on the company... But I believe ScrumMasters like us need to work with the managers to get the organizational impediments solved. I don't think any enterprise-level coach would be able to do this due to the lack of the time spent at Gemba... But when he does that - what differentiates him from a ScrumMaster - a daily rate?

[Both laugh]

Coach: Well, OK. That was a quick tour around the four focusing areas of agile coaching. I'd like you now to imagine yourself in the office during a normal day. See your teams and your company in details...

Client: ... Aha.

### **Finding the focus**

Coach: Got it? So if there would be one of these four areas that is demanding your attention and focus - which one would that be?

Client: Yes, I suppose the area that is dragging my attention is related to how my teams interact with other teams. There are many cross-team dependencies which cause delays and frustration. I think that's the "Organizational Evolution and Maturity" area on your chart. This area is...

### **Looking for real examples**

Coach: Let me pause you for a second quickly. We're looking for specific examples of issue, challenges, problems, impediments, if you will, related to what you've just spoken about. So can I ask you please to remember any recent situation related to team dependencies.

Client: Yes, let me see... Yes, I know. There was this situation recently when my mobile team got blocked by the Web team not delivering their new registration API on time. In fact it was done, but when we started to use it, it became obvious that the other team were not taking the task of testing very seriously...

Coach: Aha. That sounds like you are still emotional about it. How did it make you feel when this happened?

Client: Yeah! I felt and still feel ... em... helpless. There was very little I could do that moment. It was already too late to act so I was in a reactive mode... Unblocking the team was difficult, so I mainly focused on making sure they learn from this and don't get too demotivated. Yes, that was emotional.

Coach: Thank you for sharing, Mel. I think I know how this may feel. What's interesting is that usually the challenges in one of the areas transcend and influence what's happening in the other areas. Which other areas this situation could influence?

Client: Definitely the team work and team mood were impacted. Also the customer collaboration was - well, we had nothing to ship for quite a while. So the product people were ... how can I say?...

Coach: Pissed off?

Client: Yes!

[Both laugh and use this time to release the emotional steam]

## **Dreaming future success**

### **Putting the current situation aside**

Coach: OK. I see. We will come back to this a bit later. Now, Mel, I'd like to ask you to put this all aside. [Puts the sheet where they drew the four focusing area away]. I promise we'll come back to them.

Client: Sure. I'll try.

### **Imagining the company in far future**

Coach: I'd like to invite you now to join me for a journey in time. Feel free to close your eyes, if you feel like it. We're moving in far future. About a year from now. Does it make you feel dizzy?

Client: A little.

[Waits a little for Mel to start dreaming. And starts speaking in slower lower voice]

Coach: Last year has been intense, fun and also very productive. You guys were able to do more than you had hoped for. Now all those last year's challenges look small and are almost forgotten. Well done! You should be very glad. Are you following?

Client: Yes...

Coach: And now, Mel, you're entering the office. [Pauses for some more time until she starts nodding] Tell me what you see?

Client: Well. My teams are quite independent. I see them in sprint planning now. People are very active. Good vibes. There is no one owning the stage. I see people working in small groups in parallel. Oh, and you know what? There are people from other teams there as well.

Coach: Aha. What else?

Client: Well. There are several ScrumMasters helping out. Feels a little chaotic. Like a... like in a wasp nest! You know? Everyone is contributing the way he or she can. But you can feel a strong common goal. Alignment. And a buzz.

Coach: Aha. And what are *you* doing there?

Client: Hm... Well, I am not doing much. I'm mainly observing from the side. It feels my job has been done before the meeting. Everyone knows what to do. So now the stage is theirs to work things out.

Coach: Aha. How does it make you feel?

Client: Good... Actually very good! I'm no longer the most responsible person. It is a relief. And is also challenging!

Coach: What makes it so?

Client: Well, I have the time now to work on other, bigger things. And more challenging impediments.

Coach: What could that be?

Client: Well. I guess since the teams are well functioning and producing the needed outcomes I now have the time to focus on organizational-level things. One of them is making sure whatever the teams are producing is actually having some kind of impact on our business. Measured impact. We talked about that long ago, but I never had enough time to work closer with our product people to make this thinking happen.

**Identifying key milestones as signs of success: what has been changing?**

Coach: Aha. Now I'd like you to stay there for a bit more. You know, that journey your teams did - it hasn't just happened overnight. There were some visible milestones that you've passed together. Now looking back on the journey - if someone like me would be observing the organization from outside what would be the things, changes he would be noticing?

Client: Well... We started to have overall retrospectives where we were discussing cross-team impediments. That made the issues visible and understood.

Coach: Aha, what else was happening?

Client: Since management was also taking part in those retrospectives, we started to have a dialog with them. By 'we' I mean ScrumMasters from different teams. This dialog helped to make the need of the organizational changes understood and acknowledged. I guess we had to re-organize some of the teams so that they didn't have these many dependencies on each other. I think some teams got partially merged or something like this had happened. They got extended responsibilities.

Coach: Aha. And how about your mobile team?

Client: Yes. They got some back-end engineers as well. Otherwise how had they solved their dependency on the API?...

Coach: Interesting. Let me repeat what I've just heard: there were multiple phases of changes happening. In the beginning you were focusing more on making sure everyone has the same shared understanding on the systemic impediments. Those

overall retrospectives helped. Then you worked closer with the management to come up with necessary solutions. And one of the solutions was the re-org of the teams. Am I missing anything?

Client: No, that's it. I'd like to add that probably not all teams were affected by the changes. We probably did some selection and improved what hurt the most. Or maybe we focused on one part of our product. Not sure...

Coach: I see. Anything else?

Client: Mmm. No, not really.

### **Expanding horizon of benefit: whose lives have changed?**

Coach: It sounds like these changes had quite a positive effect on the delivery and team spirit. Who else did benefit from these changes?

Client: ScrumMasters. Myself.

Coach: How?

Client: Well, as I explained I'm not responsible any more for making sure all dependencies are identified, managed and solved before the work can be planned. This has become a responsibility of the teams to do coordination and solve those issues.

Coach: Who else did benefit?

Client: Also - the product managers and stakeholders. I guess the things became also more transparent for them. And the teams simply can deliver more now. So yes - the stakeholders benefited.

### **Detailing: what is needed to make the leap?**

Coach: Mel, thank you for this journey. Do you want to stay there for some more. Or you're OK to come back?

Client: He-he, I'd love to stay there. But yes, time to go back.

Coach: Yep. So first of all how did you like that image?

Client: A lot. And I don't work much there! [Laughs.]

Coach: Well, you did a lot with your teams to get there. So you deserve a lot of appreciation. And especially - from yourself.

Client: Yes. But this will be a long road...

Coach: Well, and it depends. If you could imagine that future so easily, then it is just a matter of focus and perseverance to get there. The most difficult part is done - you have the vision. Everything else is just tactics.

Client: I hope it is like you're saying. But I feel it ain't be easy.

### **Which skills to develop and deepen?**

Coach: It doesn't have to be very easy or otherwise you get bored. [Laughs.]  
Speaking about easiness: which of your current skills do you think you will need to exercise a lot on the journey?

Client: Hmm... I guess - positivity. I know things won't go always as planned, so keeping the atmosphere positive should help avoid unnecessary stress and demotivation.

Coach: What else?

Client: Well, my vision... I mean I will have to share it with everyone involved: teams, other ScrumMasters, managers. So I guess being able to explain, engage and encourage would be needed.

Coach: Aha. Which skills would you need to stretch a little in order to achieve the goals?

Client: Stretch? You mean develop? Hm... I guess I'll need to be able to start seeing a bigger picture behind concrete issues of specific teams. Be more systematic, I'd say.

Coach: Yes, system thinking is vital for driving organizational changes. We can talk during our next session if you wish: on how to deepen this key skill of an agile coach.

### **Whose support will be needed?**

Coach: Now, provided you have all the necessary skills and personal resources, I wonder whose support would you need?

Client: Well. My boss needs to be involved so that he can be supportive. And my fellow ScrumMasters.

Coach: Aha. If there is someone who you'd be kind of hesitant, reluctant, maybe even not confident to talk with... Who might it be?

Client: That would be the Team leads of the teams being changed. They would try to protect their territory, I believe. I'm really not sure how to approach this with them.

Coach: What if you knew?

Client: Well, I don't know. Of course, I could convince the most approachable people first, like ScrumMasters, my boss, the boss of the boss maybe. And then when we have an alliance of supporters, I guess it will be our shared responsibility to onboard the Team leads and get their support.

Coach: Good. If we would have a bit more time, we could have spent a bit more on looking into this. We can also of course dedicate one of our next sessions for exploring these details. It is up to you.

Client: Sure

### **How will you apply the coaching stances?**

Coach: Now I'd like you to look into what we call the four coaching stances: coaching, teaching, facilitating and mentoring.

Client: Ah yes. I know them. There are explained in details in the book by Lyssa Adkins on agile coaching. I also attended one of her workshops when she and Michael Spayd explained this.

Coach: Aha! So it is not new to you. Great, then. I wonder if you would be interested in working this out on your own and share with me later?

Client: Absolutely. So what do I need to do?

Coach: See. We've spoken about many important things. You know your focus. You have your bold vision. You know why it is important to get there. And we also talked about what kind of skills and support you would likely need.

Client: Yep.

Coach: Well, now it would be the right time to go into the tactics and shed some light on *how* - how exactly you would guide your team and organization. Who will you be teaching and what? Who will you be coaching, provided they have the needed knowledge? Which processes will you be facilitating? Who will need you as a mentor to pair up with and learn by doing? These sort of things.

Client: I see. Yes. I already have some ideas. I can share next week when we meet.

Coach: Great! So, we have few more minutes of our 45 minute talk. What was the most insightful for you?

Client: I guess, I can't say 'everything', right?

[Both laugh]

Client: The most important for me was that picture of the future that I now have. It is memorizable and... sticky. Yes, it is sticky. I can restore it any time and get some motivation and inspiration. That's very helpful. Thank you so much!

Coach: Well, thank *you*. For the chance to be there on your journey. It was a great experience for me to observe such a great leader like you. The way you were describing your vision. I was really impressed how clear it was. I really think having a vision is 80% of the success. So see you next week?

Client: Thanks!

Coach: Ciao! And have a great day.

Client: You too, bye!

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1. <http://www.infoq.com/articles/new-year-resolution-retrospective>