

Agile Coaching Learning Outcomes

Version 5.1



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SPECIAL THANKS

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HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This document outlines the Learning Outcomes that must be addressed by accredited training organizations intending to offer ICAgile's Agile Coaching certification.

Each LO follows a particular pattern, described below.

0.0.0. Learning Outcome Name

Additional Context, describing why this Learning Outcome is important or what it is intended to impart.

The Learning Outcome purpose, further describing what is expected to be imparted on the learner (e.g. a key point, framework, model, approach, technique, or skill).

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. DEVELOPMENT IN THE AGILE COACHING DISCIPLINE

1.1. THE AGILE COACHING MINDSET

1.1.1. Definition of Agile Coaching

Professionals operating at the Agile Coaching step make conscious choices about their actions in the service of teams.

Provide guidance on how to choose and/or combine the four basic skills in each moment (coaching, facilitating, mentoring and teaching) that will best serve the situation. Practical advice on which to choose and how, along with skills to cultivate the needed self-awareness and self-management, are taught in this LO.

1.1.2. Coach as Agile Role Model

Effective Agile Coaches are the “first Agilist.”

Make the case that personally embodying the Agile values and principles is a key component of being an Agile Coach, and is gained through real-world experience with agile delivery.

1.1.3. Achieving Essential Mindset Shifts

Effective Agile coaches successfully make some key mindset shifts and serve as a living example of how one can thrive within these new mindsets.

Introduce key mindset shifts and help learners see ways to live these shifts in their own lives. Key mindset shifts may include: focus on team improvement over specific results; focus on business value-driven delivery over achieving scope, schedule or budget targets; focus on the leverage in the present moment over the past or future; focus on staying curious and seeing the best in people over judging or manipulating; focus on assisting the team in achieving their commitment and learning when they do not achieve it rather than stepping in and doing it for them; employing a “servant as leader” style rather than “telling” style (see Robert Greenleaf).

1.1.4. Achieving Self-Awareness/Self-Management in the Coach

Self-management is a critical Agile Coaching skill that can be learned and increased.

Introduce one or more models of self-awareness that impact one's ability to be an effective Agile Coach. Further, this LO is concerned with giving the learner techniques for managing themselves, their biases, assumptions and emotions within a coaching context. To be effective, the Agile Coach must be both self-aware (e.g., know when she is biased about a given topic) and use self-management (e.g., not let her bias affect how she facilitates the meeting). There are many models of self-awareness (e.g., emotional intelligence, Myers-Briggs, various personality inventories, various self-awareness mindfulness techniques)

that can guide the coach. Most important is to choose at least one model and apply it.

1.1.5. Agile Coaching Stance

An Agile Coaching stance gives a coach something to hold onto – a center, an anchor – in their professional storms.

Guide the learner into understanding an Agile Coaching stance -- a blend of their skills and attitudes they will need to hold-to in the work of Agile Coaching: a mindful “how to be.” An Agile Coach blends their core skills of facilitation, teaching, professional coaching and mentoring, along with other relevant skills and attitudes -- perhaps related to conflict navigation, interpersonal communication, individual change or technical craft (as examples). The intent is that the coach-at-work should consciously consider and choose from their stance, as they partner with teams and individuals for their success. As a matter of instruction, a model Agile Coaching stance could be provided, or the learner may be guided into designing their own.

1.1.6. Ethical Considerations of Agile Team Coaching

Understanding our own ethical boundaries as a coach helps us know what and where our limits are.

Define what ethical considerations should be addressed when coaching individuals and teams. Explore this topic from the perspective of a leader, agile coach, professional coach, and their own personal boundaries. Introduce the learner to the Agile Alliance Code of Ethics initiative.

2. COACH AS PROFESSIONAL COACH

2.1. FOUNDATIONAL PROFESSIONAL COACHING SKILLS

2.1.1. Basics of Using Emotional Intelligence as Underpinning

Developing one’s emotional intelligence (EQ) is necessary for using professional coaching skills in service of others.

Introduce one or more models for emotional intelligence and make the connection that EQ is the underpinning for professional coaching skills because it enables self-awareness and self-management.

2.1.2. Presence

Being fully present as a coach is key to successful coaching. Methods for presence include building rapport, awareness of the environment, self-management and consciously preparing for coaching.

Teach the importance of presence and provide the learner with techniques and methods for achieving it.

2.1.3. Listening

Listening is more than hearing; and, it is a skill that is often taken for granted. To be of service, coaches must develop their listening skill.

Teach the importance of listening and provide the learner with at least one model or technique for developing their listening skill.

2.1.4. Powerful Questioning

Powerful questions are open ended, thought-provoking questions that trigger curiosity and stimulate creativity / new insights. For example, rather than asking "Did that work?" regarding an action the client took, the coach may ask "What did you learn?"

Familiarize the learner with the concept, examples and application of powerful questions.

2.1.5. Giving and Receiving Feedback

Being able to openly receive and provide effective feedback that builds people up instead of tearing them down is essential to helping individuals achieve their potential.

Provide the learner with techniques for giving effective feedback to coachees and being open to receiving feedback from coachees and other coaches.

2.2. THE COACHING CONVERSATION – COACHING FOR ACTION

2.2.1. Topic Identification

Coaches must be able to help the coachee identify the topic they would like to work on; often, it is deeper than what the coachee initially presents.

Introduce techniques for coaching others as they identify the topic they want coaching on. This may involve sorting, prioritization, uncovering underlying issues, etc.

2.2.2. Topic Exploration

The majority of the coaching conversation is spent in exploration.

Introduce various techniques that can be used to explore the topic. Techniques might include reflecting non-verbal communications, perspective shifting, asking open-ended questions, metaphors, values clarification, etc.

2.2.3. Action Commitment

The coaching conversation successfully completes when the coachee moves into action of their own choosing.

Introduce techniques that can be used to move into effective action after the coachee has identified and explored the relevant topic, thereby helping them take responsibility for their actions and their results.

2.2.4. Conducting the Coaching Conversation

It is important to experience using the concept of a coaching conversation in a realistic Agile setting.

Practice having a coaching conversation from beginning to end using Foundational Professional Coaching Skills, to identify the topic for coaching. Explore the topic and help the coachee come to an action commitment.

3. COACH AS MENTOR

3.1. KEY MENTORING SKILLS

3.1.1. Give Options While Maintaining Presence

The act of giving options is a cornerstone for mentorship. The best mentors give options in the service of their mentee, figuratively or literally by their side.

Introduce at least one technique on how to provide options while maintaining full presence in service of furthering the mentee's agenda.

3.1.2. Articulate Expertise

You can't mentor someone in something you don't know more about than them.

Clarify the connection between one's expertise and their ability to mentor, emphasizing that mentoring skills cannot be applied in areas where one's expertise is less than the mentee.

3.1.3. Mentee at Free Choice

Actions freely chosen by the mentee are more likely to happen.

Explore the inherent tension between wanting to give direction and helping the mentee explore options for themselves. Introduce at least one method to honor the mentee's free choice. Mentors should use their power wisely to help mentees make choices that are right for them, rather than pushing their own agenda.

3.2. MENTORING AGILE ROLE TRANSITIONS

3.2.1. Contrasting Mentoring with Coaching

Knowing when to coach and when to mentor is a critical skill for coaches when working with individuals in transition.

Contrast coaching and mentoring, exploring situations in which one might be preferable over the other.

3.2.2. Understanding the Individual Change Cycle

Whether they are just beginning in Agile environments, or as they develop into skilled practitioners, individuals on Agile teams are confronted with the need to learn new skills, develop new mindsets and engage in new relationships with their colleagues. In short, they are required to change.

Introduce one or more models for how individuals change, grow and learn. Such models should distinguish between self-chosen change and organizationally imposed change. It should also emphasize the need to "meet a person where they are" in their change process, rather than the coach imposing her/his beliefs or needs.

3.2.3. Key Agile Role Transitions

Everyone goes through some kind of transition in their role when they encounter Agile methods and an Agile Coach clearly articulates that transition.

Provide an overview of the typical transitions faced by the people in various roles and/or responsibilities when Agile is brought in, such as analysts who move out of the customer/team intermediary role, testers who become part of the up-front action, product owners who focus on the “what” and “why” of the product and Agile managers who become creators of Agile environments. This LO presents key transitions so that Agile Coaches can easily articulate them. (Which roles and their transitions to be covered will be dependent on the Course Designer's beliefs about Agile roles and their business context.)

3.2.4. Identifying and Handling Resistance from Individuals

Agile Coaches use resistance rather than resisting resistance.

Help the learner decipher how to work with resistance from individuals as they take up their Agile roles, rather than seeing resistance as an indication of failure or something to be solved. In this LO, the learner is exposed to at least one model for working positively with resistance.

3.2.5. Conducting the Mentoring Conversation

It's important to integrate the skills of mentoring in a mentoring conversation about a real-world Agile situation.

Practice mentoring skills (which may also include coaching skills) in a realistic Agile setting. This includes establishing and maintaining presence with a mentee, articulating expertise and sharing experience, and keeping the mentee at free choice.

4. COACH AS TEACHER

4.1. KEY TEACHING SKILLS

4.1.1. Use Multiple Content Delivery Mechanisms

Individuals have a personal learning style. It is essential for the teacher to consider and use multiple styles to ensure broadest impact.

Orient the learner to the personal nature of human learning and provide an overview of techniques (e.g., visual, auditory, tactile, experiential, lecture) that should be considered when designing learning experiences.

4.1.2. Chunk Content into Digestible Pieces

You should not try to eat an elephant in one bite.

Expose the learner to strategies for breaking up learning experiences into pieces that are most likely to take root and help the learners to maintain focus. It is likely that this LO will draw parallels or direct connections to facilitative techniques described elsewhere in the course.

4.1.3. Check for Understanding

Silence is not agreement or understanding. New ideas do not always land well, or at all.

Introduce techniques to help learners assess the impact and understanding of a new idea within a student or group. It is critical for coaches not to simply ask students “Do you understand?” and accept nodding heads as a positive indicator of understanding. Coaches may use many different techniques for “checking-in”, including: repeating back (asking the student to repeat the new idea), discussing the new idea and its implications, teaching back (asking the student to teach the new idea) and reporting out (ask the students to report in with new experiences based on the new idea).

4.1.4. Create an Environment for Stickiness

Casting a new idea is the start -- not the end -- of the teacher's role.

Arm the learner with at least one strategy, model or technique that promotes lesson stickiness (e.g., 10m/24h/7d).

4.2. AGILE MINDSET SHIFTS AND FRAMEWORKS

4.2.1. Helping Team Members Experience the Agile Mindset Shifts

Foundational Agile beliefs must be experienced, not just taught.

Convey the importance of helping team members experience mindset shifts such as value-driven priority, self-organization or empirical process improvement through experiential learning.

4.2.2. PRACTICE: Distinguishing and Articulating at Least One Agile Framework

Agile Coaches know one or more Agile frameworks 'stone-cold' and can fully articulate at least one clearly, simply and quickly.

Help the learner develop the capability to articulate and teach at least one Agile framework, including its associated roles, common practices, values and principles.

5. COACH AS TEAM COACH

5.1. FOUNDATIONAL TEAM COACHING

5.1.1. Systems View

Team coaching includes looking beyond individual voices and seeing the system itself.

Introduce concepts around shifting the coach's focus from individuals to a whole-system perspective. This involves looking at the system of all humans involved, and the connections between them in order to see it truly as an outsider. Everything that happens in a system is data about how the system operates.

5.1.2. Observation

An Agile Coach must develop muscles of observation apart from interpretation and evaluation.

Help the learner see with neutral eyes to differentiate between the facts of observation (as a video camera would capture it) and analysis, interpretation, judgment or evaluation.

5.1.3. Articulate What's Happening

Being able to name what you see, in a non-judgemental way, creates awareness for the system.

Help the learners voice their observations, in service of the system becoming more self-aware. The ability to present a neutral observation is one of the agile coach's most basic interventions. A system that can see itself may self-repair when unhealthy dynamics are present.

5.2. DESCRIBING TEAM DEVELOPMENT

5.2.1. Describing a Model of Team Development and Using it in Service of a Team's Development

Agile Coaches understand and use one or more models to illustrate how teams develop; they are able to use them to articulate where a team is and to help them take measured steps forward.

Introduce one or more models for how teams develop over time, and be able to use the model to inform their intervention with a team. This includes a group's conscious decision to become a team and a team's continued journey to high-performance. As examples, the coach may detect the team's current developmental level and use that information to inform the design of a team start-up, reset or recovery, or coaching "in the moment," with an intention of empowering the team to chart their own path.

5.2.2. Helping a Team Detect their Own Stage of Development

Agile Coaches develop a team's capability to detect their own stage of development and devise strategies to improve.

Convey the importance of raising the team's capacity for self-awareness, and ability to self-heal and self-improve. The coach can do this by sharing one or more models for team development and giving the team language and practice at naming what they see, identifying what's missing and what's needed next.

5.2.3. PRACTICE: Creating a Team Kickoff / Startup Agenda

Starting a team off on the right foot is crucial to the journey towards high performance.

Provide the learner with an opportunity to design a startup or re-set of a team using a real-world scenario. This would include elements such as helping the team get to know one another, create a culture, align on a vision, setting up their work environment [5] and establishing team agreements and/or ground rules.

5.3. COACHING THE JOURNEY TOWARD HIGH PERFORMANCE

5.3.1. Defining and Identifying High Performance

Teams will move in and out of different levels of team functioning on their journey to being a high performing team. Many teams will strive for high performance and never reach it, others will experience it for a moment in time and it will be gone.

Help the learner identify characteristics of a high-performing team and to help the team assess their performance and identify areas for improvement. The high performing team model needs to support agile team performance characteristics (e.g., empowerment, shared leadership, vulnerability, resolving conflict, trust and continuous improvement).

5.3.2. Team Development is a Journey, not a Destination

Teams will move in and out of different levels of team functioning on their journey to being a high performing team.

Provide the learner with a context for understanding that teams go through cycles--moving from highly collaborative and productive to less productive and less collaborative--in addition to their developmental stages. This is a natural process and needs to be reflected back to the team, not seen as a failure.

5.3.3. Assessing the Team as a Healthy System

Teams will develop patterns of behavior and dynamics. Assessing a team in a moment, getting a snapshot of its behavior and norms, gives the Agile Coach information to understand its health or non-health.

Introduce one or more models for assessing healthy team functioning, especially the ability to identify clearly dysfunctional aspects. Provide suggestions for awareness of environmental elements typically outside the team's control (e.g., geographic distribution, teams that are really working groups, cultural misunderstanding).

5.3.4. Adapt Your Style Based on Team Maturity

Enhance the team's self-sufficiency by consciously choosing your leadership range (i.e., leading from the front or leading from the back).

Convey the importance of becoming intentional about one's leadership approach based on the team maturity and Agile maturity, and letting the level of direct involvement decrease as they mature and take on more themselves.

5.4. HANDLING CONFLICT AND DYSFUNCTION WITHIN THE TEAM

5.4.1. Surfacing and Working with Conflict

Conflict is a natural part of a team's development and learning process and is essential to their creativity and quality of work. Fear of interpersonal conflict can be an impediment to building a high performing team.

Highlight the importance of conflict in a team and provide the learner with the ability to surface conflict in a positive manner to improve the team's conflict competency. When conflict competency exists, team members feel more

confident in their abilities to address conflict and hold one another accountable for their behavior and performance.

5.4.2. Building Self-Awareness/Self-Management Capacity in the Team

The same issues of self-awareness and self-management apply to the team as well as to the Agile coach.

Give the learner tools to use for both themselves and with their teams to increase the team's capacity for both self-awareness and self-management.

5.4.3. Creating Awareness that Teams are Human Systems

Teams are human systems that have their own values, perspectives, consciousness and truth.

Expose learners to the idea that a team is more than a collection of individuals, that it is a human system with its own characteristics, needs and growth potential. Further, show that moments of conflict or collaboration difficulty can be seen as human systems dynamics, rather than solely personal to the individuals involved. The learner will be able to begin seeing the team as a human system by bringing their awareness to this level, at least some of the time.

5.5. HANDLE ORGANIZATIONAL IMPEDIMENTS

5.5.1. Identifying and Capturing Impediments

The decision to adopt Agile at a team or organizational level will introduce varying types of change into the organization.

Introduce common organizational impediments and help the learner be able to help teams recognize and capture the impediments affecting them. Agile practices do not necessarily create new problems but they have a way of surfacing dysfunctions that already exist within an organization. Organization impediments that impact the team may be such things as organizational structure, physical office layout, hiring practices, career paths, training and development, compensation, rewards and recognition, leadership, etc. At this level, the purpose is not to solve these organizational challenges, but to mitigate their impact on a specific team.

5.5.2. Leadership Engagement

Organizational impediments limit team productivity and quality. Some impediments can be resolved by the team, others may need to be solved at higher levels in the organization.

Provide the learner with the ability to know when and how to engage leadership in solving organizational impediments.

6. SET BOUNDARIES FOR AGILE COACHING

6.1. COACHING ALLIANCES AND CONTRACTS

6.1.1. Defining the Agile Coaching "Contract"

When they begin work with a team and its business unit, effective Agile coaches make agreements with key stakeholders (e.g., management, the team) on how the coaching work will proceed. This involves those directly affected (e.g., the team) as well as those “paying for” or authorizing the coach’s services (e.g., management or sponsor).

Convey the importance of a coaching contract, that it is not a “legal” contract but rather an agreement between the parties. How to negotiate such an agreement, why it’s important to coaching success, how it helps bound what the coach agrees to do (e.g., start-up and run a new Agile team for three months) and what the coach will not do (e.g., give performance management evaluations for team members), as well as what the “client” will do (e.g., provide training for the team, make a candidate Agile Team Facilitator available from within the team) are all components of this LO. Effective Agile Coaches, whether they are internal employees or external consultants, see their work similarly to that of a collaborative consultant (see for instance Peter Block, *Flawless Consulting*), which is why the coaching contract is an appropriate learning topic for all Agile Coaches.

6.1.2. Designing a Coaching Alliance

A coaching alliance is the other side of the coaching contract. Where the contract provides the conditions for the work (e.g., boundaries, time, roles), the coaching alliance empowers the Agile Coaching relationship.

Introduce key elements of designing a coaching alliance including creating rapport, key questions to ask, tone of the discussion and hoped-for outcomes. This is a two-way conversation wherein the parties assert what they need to create a powerful relationship, and negotiate for alignment. It answers questions such as how do the individuals or the team as a whole want to be coached? How would they like to receive feedback? How will the coach know when she has challenged the team “too far” or “not enough”? Will they help the coach get better at coaching them in the unique way they need to be coached?

6.1.3. Internal vs. External Coaches: Special Considerations for Contracting and Designing Alliances

Internal coaches and external coaches work under different constraints. Understanding the power and limitations of their situation helps the coach create stronger coaching contracts and alliances.

Discuss the key differences between internal and external coaches, identify the unique challenges faced by internal coaches (e.g., maintaining neutrality and confidentiality, holding people accountable, challenging the status quo) and that these are important topics to bring into coaching/alliance conversations. Familiarize the learner with the unique challenges of being an internal coach, and that it does not prevent them from maintaining the coaching stance (e.g., maintaining neutrality, not colluding, supporting the client’s agenda). Familiarize the learner with the unique challenges of being an external coach, such as the need for effective systems entry, treating the client system with respect for the choices it has made, balancing challenge with respecting the pace of change that can be assimilated, etc..