

Top 10 - Team Practices

1. **Empower them** – By giving control for local decision making and work sequencing to the team we gain the advantages of additional insights, better motivated teams, and more practical plans with less waiting.
2. **Listen to them** – The team is closer to the technical details of the project and also best placed to determine the most successful solutions to project challenges and problems. Encouraging the team to solve the project problems has two main benefits. It demonstrates they are valued for their insight as well as their output, which makes people feel more involved and appreciated. Also, solutions suggested by the team are more likely to be embraced and executed with enthusiasm. It is better to have a 70% optimal solution executed with 80% enthusiasm than a 100% optimal solution executed with 40% enthusiasm.
3. **Trust them to get the job done and solve problems** – micro management undermines trust and stifles the feelings of creativity, empowerment, and task ownership that we are trying to promote. Instead check up on status more passively from the daily stand up meetings, project velocity, and retrospectives.
4. **Judge when to step in / away** – empowering a team does not mean abdicating involvement. Instead it means closely monitoring and deciding when to step in and when to step back. Many variations in team velocity and project disputes can be classed as “common cause variation” and are best solved by the team. However, externally sourced issues or major upsets (“special cause variation”) are prompts for immediate intervention.
5. **Create a productive workspace for them** – Agile teams need open plan areas for easy communications, wall space for charts and cards, and tools like digital cameras, collaboration software, projectors for demos, etc. Make sure they have them.
6. **Provide support for them** – An important part of removing impediments is to make sure people have what they need to be productive and successful. This not only covers the computers, software and external group facilitation they ask for, but also training and mentoring that they may not directly ask for. Where areas for development are identified, discuss them with the team member involved and if acknowledged as areas for improvement, then provide mentoring and training to grow them. The project needs productivity and often the best way to get this is to grow the production capability of the team members. It helps to make people feel valued and improves staff retention too.
7. **Encourage reflection and adaptation** – No process is created optimally the first time and no plan survives contact with the enemy. Accelerate project improvements by encouraging reviews, look-backs and adaptation. Code reviews and retrospectives are great ways to find areas for improvement. Make sure you implement the suggestions and check back to ensure they are actually delivering the anticipated benefits. Also, ask open ended questions to the team like “Where are we vulnerable?”, “Where do we most need to improve?” then shut-up and wait for suggestions.
8. **Reward and recognize them** – Teams need regular rewards and recognition to maintain enthusiasm and fuel “problem busting” behaviour. Waiting for the project to be delivered before celebrating is too little, too late and may never happen if the team gets demotivated or members quit due to lack of recognition. Find frequent (but real) victories to celebrate as a team and recognize individual achievements with a sincere “Thank You”, or gift as appropriate. The outward ripple of appreciation and improved mood pay dividends.
9. **Communications** – Share project news, both good and bad freely with the team. Demonstrating this desired behaviour shows it is OK and valuable to share information. Communicate the project vision and sub-component visions to ensure people have a common understanding of the end goals that we are all aiming towards.
10. **Align objectives and promote people** – Find out what people want to work on and then wherever practical, find ways to integrate this work in the project. Aligning their personal goals with the project objectives is a great way to boost commitment and productivity. Finally, help people progress in their careers and promote the deserving ones above and beyond your control – you will lose a good resource, but who knows where they will be working when you need your next job.