Role of Leadership in Motivating Hybrid Teams During Agile Ceremonies

Research aim

To explore how leadership practices influence team members' motivation during Agile ceremonies that are conducted in hybrid work environments.

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Introduction

Background: Agile methodologies are a widely adopted approach to project management that promote iterative development, collaboration, and responsiveness to change (Anifa *et al.*, 2024, p. 86). They rely on self-organising teams, making motivation a critical enabler of successful implementation (Gaborov *et al.*, 2024, p. 8). Central to Agile are ceremonies, which co-ordinate work and facilitate team interaction and reflection (Anifa *et al.*, 2024, pp. 87-89).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposes that intrinsic motivation is supported when an individual's needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are met (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Prior research has identified that Agile ceremonies have the potential to meet these needs.

Problem: The shift to hybrid work environments has disrupted traditional Agile implementation. Research suggests hybrid settings can undermine engagement and motivation during ceremonies (Cucolaş and Russo, 2023, p. 7). Leadership has been identified as crucial in overcoming hybrid work challenges (Omo-Enabulele *et al.*, 2025), but there is limited empirical research examining how leadership practices enacted during Hybrid Agile Ceremonies (HAC) influence motivation.

Method

- Exploratory qualitative approach
- A phenomenological, cross-sectional, semi-structured interview design
- Followed DBS Ethical Guidelines and Belmont Report
- 10 participants in hybrid Agile teams, recruited using heterogenous purposive and snowball sampling

Procedure and Data Analysis: Semi-structured online interviews examined experiences of leadership and motivation during HAC. Data were recorded, transcribed, and anonymised. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) was used, with inductive theme development guided by SDT. Reflexive journalling supported the analytic process.

Results

Theme 1 HAC create structurally unequal conditions for participation

HAC privilege co-located participants through differences in technology and communication, interaction and connection, visibility and accountability. These lead to divide between remote and in-person participants.

> **"It's really easy in a hybrid setting for those who aren't in the room to almost be like second-class citizens."**

Theme 2 Motivation to engage in HAC is shaped by participants' experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness

Motivation is influenced by the extent to which participants' experience SDT's psychological needs of competence (ability to contribute meaningfully), relatedness (sense of belonging) and autonomy (patterns of engagement or disengagement).

> **"Sometimes I am not paying attention and that's enabled because it's remote."**

Theme 3 Leadership practices mediate how structural inequalities impact motivation in HAC

Leaders can mitigate hybrid structural inequalities by structuring ceremonies for equitable participation and the use of collaborative digital spaces (digital anchoring).

> **"We're anchored digitally so all conversation and decisions happen in a shared space."**

Theme 4 Leadership practices support or undermine motivation through the satisfaction or frustration of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Leadership practices directly influence motivation by satisfying or frustrating participants' autonomy, competence, and relatedness: autonomy is enabled by trust, ownership, and flexibility; competence by clarity, structure, and guidance; and relatedness by visibility, engagement, and recognition.

> **"A really good leader will make sure that everyone is celebrated."**

Impact

Motivation is actively constructed by the interaction between hybrid structural conditions, individuals' psychological needs and leadership practices. Leaders play a key role in making HAC motivating experiences.

> **"People are motivated … when leaders are genuinely engaged in the work that they're doing."**

Discussion

HAC create unequal participation conditions, favouring co-located participants. Motivation is reduced when individuals' psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are undermined by these conditions.

Leadership is a critical mediating mechanism, capable of mitigating or reinforcing these structural inequalities. This research advances SDT by demonstrating that leaders can influence motivation by intentionally enacting practices that fulfil team members' psychological needs.

References

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