STEP 4: PEOPLE
ESTABLISHING A NEW APPROACH TO PEOPLE MANAGEMENT THAT SUITS AND SUPPORTS AGILE WORK AND A FLEXIBLE ORGANIZATIONAL SETUP

People management certainly is one of the main challenges of the agile transformation. Usually, considering the implications of these HR-related aspects team comes to mind too late. Instead, you should think about how to enable your team to work in a more agile setup through adapted people management tools right from the start of your transformation. STEP 4 will discuss three main areas that should be taken into consideration.

"HR is in my opinion the main preventer of agility!", revealed one chief communication officer – an impression that was implicitly shared by many people we talked to in the course of our research project. The rigid guidelines and restrictions of human resources departments and work committees were often named as the main hurdle when it comes to innovative approaches toward an agile employee management. However, we also found many examples where communications and HR worked hand in hand to allow for adaptive and flexible solutions.

Communication departments that pursue an agile transformation have to refocus their people management in three main areas:

► Job rotation and role switch

► Competence management and training

► Careers and incentives

Three essential dimensions of people management in agile communication departments

Job Rotation & Role Switch

PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

Career & Incentives

Competency Management & Trainings

Job rotation and role switch

To address the interconnected and interdependent nature of content production and distribution in communication, as well as to allow for people to work most effectively and efficiently, employees in agile structures often take on different roles **(role switch)** and tasks **(job rotation)** at the same time: in one project they are product owner, in the next Scrum master, and in a third content or channel expert. This usually happens simultaneously since many employees are constantly involved in three to six projects – unless they take on a leadership position in a major project that occupies all of their time.

This can quickly lead to **leadership and role conflicts.** Colleagues will meet as equal team members in one project, while one of them is authorized to give instructions to others and in the next project it is vice versa. This can be problematic, especially when prior to the transformation one was subordinate to the other.

Furthermore, the attempts to create more agile structures and processes can create complex matrix structures with **unclear hierarchies and reporting lines**. Staff members that work in different projects automatically have different people to report to. As stated above, hierarchies have a stabilizing effect on organizations. If hierarchical orders are now fluctuating and sometimes even turned upside down, spheres of insecurity are created and might even lead to a leadership vacuum. People have to be prepared to deal with this. This preparation best happens in the form of a newly designed competence management and training program.

Flexibilizing roles and functions principally stands in contrast to the specialization that has long been propagated in the industry. In the meantime, many communication departments have started to look for **generalists** who can be deployed more flexibly. This can have a positive effect on the aspect of lateral career development as people develop a diverse skill set that can also be of use outside the communication department. However, being flexible can also turn out to be counterproductive. A constant change of personnel on certain jobs, roles and functions can lead to **information gaps** and the breakup of long-term relationships with stakeholders. Particularly in situations where a basis of trust has been established over years with certain stakeholders, such as journalists or board members, a rotation is inappropriate. This is why many agile companies have not given up on all areas of expertise. Some people remain outside the general 'pool' (see STEP 2: structure). While this makes sense, it can lead to negative feelings among colleagues such as envy and disfavor. Therefore, it is advisable that these people, too, integrate themselves into the overall team, for instance, by sharing their expertise and exclusive insights with colleagues.

Another problem with these dynamic structures is that the disciplinary manager **lacks an overview** of the employee's performance in the various projects and positions. This is where more transparency and new approaches to performance management (see STEP 5: Evaluation) are needed. To meet these challenges, it is important to set a framework in which role profiles and task descriptions are clearly defined.

Competencies management and training

Communication departments that embrace a more agile way of working have to equip their employees with the respective competencies and skills to tackle that task. Oftentimes, this challenge is underestimated or simply not seen. But in an increasingly dynamic and flexible work environment, **lifelong learning** opportunities are necessary in order to tackle the challenges of job rotation and role switch.

Long-term employability is one aspect in a volatile field like communication, being equipped with adequate skills and competencies is another. However, this is a shared responsibility: Companies must provide a **work environment that facilitates learning** and actively supports individual learning processes for their employees in order to promote self-efficacy and lifelong employability. There are no one-size-fits-all solutions for this – all employees should be provided with solutions tailored to their specific needs. They should be able to engage in more targeted on-the-job and on-demand learning and have access to new, increasingly digital learning solutions. Likewise, employees will need to do their bit by learning more autonomously and self-reliantly. Taking care of your own career will become more important in times when career paths become more obscure and insecure.

In agile structures, not only long-standing managers but also younger employees sometimes take on a **managerial role** by acting as product or project owners, for example, without having been prepared for this through long-term training programs. The ability to manage yourself and others will become a core competence for all employees in the future. **Self-management**, for instance, in the sense that employees are able to assess the time they spend on certain tasks and projects, will be more relevant. Thus, the opportunity to acquire this expertise must not be reserved for a select group of current and future managers but has to be available to all employees. This does not only apply to self-management skills but also to general management and leadership skills.

In addition to (self-) leadership competencies, a high degree of diversity in terms of **channel and topic expertise** is also

» It is advisable to accompany reorganizational changes also on a personal experience level, for instance, by reflecting experiences plus offering coaching on processes and agile expertise. The relevance of these things only becomes apparent when you are working in these new structures. Still, I wish we had addressed the question of competencies with regard to lateral management and working in agile organizations earlier on. «

Corinne Metz, Senior Communication Expert, Deutsche Telekom

required of all employees. As discussed above, employees should be able to take on different roles and tasks in different projects, contexts, and subject areas. In agile, cross-functional projects, broad knowledge is necessary to be able to work together in an interdisciplinary way across departments.

Today, transferring knowledge and skills is organized in the form of **peer-to-peer learning formats** and many companies are rethinking their internal training programs. In particular, technical skills, for example video creation, which used to be purchased or learned from experts, can also be passed on within the team. The basic prerequisite here, however, is that employees are willing to share their knowledge. In many organizations, knowledge is still seen as an instrument of power and is not shared. Therefore, it is crucial that **knowledge sharing** becomes part of the job description, and employees can help by reserving a certain proportion of their working time for this responsibility (see STEP 5: EVALUATION). The internal knowledge transfer can also be supported by a company-wide, constantly updated database in which the competencies of the employees are recorded.

To identify suitable employees for the respective projects quickly and efficiently, a **resource management and a skills and competencies database** makes sense. Here, various job profiles such as copywriter, project manager, event manager, AV editor, or photo editor are uploaded. Each profile consists of various skills, such as leadership, project management, editorial writing, interviewing or storytelling. This can provide a better overview of the existing and required skills as well as any qualification requirements. In case such a database exists, employees can link themselves with one or more job profile and skill. They can, for instance, also state their levels of expertise and state jobs they are currently doing or want to do in the future.

The corporate communications department of Deutsche Telekom successfully introduced such a skill database three years ago: *"For three years now we have had a skill database named 'Competence.' It's linked to our resource management database.*

Therefore, we can assess simultaneously who has free resources at which time, who owns which skills, and who requires further training. We went this way in agreement with the works committee. The database definitely helps us to staff our projects," says Elfriede Schmitt-Jones, who is in charge of communication services at the company.

Such a database coupled with human resources management allows for a more goal-oriented further training program and more efficient project staffing. Updating the database should be an integral part of the performance assessment between the disciplinary superior and the individual employee and should be used as a basis for further development and advancement measures.

Career & Incentives

Agile reorganization often goes hand in hand with **removing hierarchical levels** and democratization of decision-making processes. This poses not only a challenge for leadership and guidance as missing hierarchies lead to unclear chains of command and a possible politicization of internal processes. It is also challenging to provide alternative career paths and incentives for motivated employees.

What can these alternatives look like?

▶ **Establish expert career paths:** Traditionally, leadership positions are linked to the number of people in your team who report to you. This system is outdated. In the future, career development will be more lateral rather than horizontal, linked to a certain kind of expertise and areas of interest.

▶ **Lateral development:** Giving the staff the opportunity to try out different areas and media channels, learn from peers, prove themselves in prominent projects, etc. is meant to compensate for the lack of promotion prospects. Additionally, incentives such as international work rotation programs or sabbaticals can also become an alternative to the classic corporate career.

▶ **Individual motivation:** Every person is motivated differently. Principally, there is the possibility of monetary versus non-monetary incentives. In the past decade, the general trend was to reduce monetary incentives in favor of non-monetary ones such as praise or recognition, suggestions schemes or job enrichment.

▶ **Spot-Boni:** Even in agile work environments many employees prefer monetary incentives. Thus, it is important that any monetary incentive schemes are designed to support the overall value creation process and go hand in hand with agile principles of work. This means incentives should be more flexible and should support the collaborative character of work. Some companies have jettisoned individual bonus payments at the end of the year and established Spot-Boni ('spot bonus') programs for individuals or teams for excellent short-term performance instead. Some companies are even experimenting with the approach to pay such bonuses exclusively at a team level. On the one hand, the bonus is granted not by the executive but by the team colleagues, and second the Boni is linked to the team and not individual performance.

ⓘ CAVEAT

While the abolition of hierarchies and the democratization of organizations are usually heralded as employee liberation with a focus on their positive aspects such as more freedom, self-determination, less compulsory attendance or 'free coffee,' we also found some problems with these alternative approaches toward career development and incentives.

- The interviews and informal talks with junior and middle-management staff revealed that most of them were frustrated with the **lack of career opportunities** in agile structures. Abandoning leadership positions means abandoning stepping-stones for younger team members. Although a corporate career has always been a risky and competitive affair, lately it has become even more difficult.

- In those organizations that had already undergone an agile transformation, we oftentimes found a **non-homogeneous salary structure** due to the still-valid collective wage agreements. Thus, albeit on paper former departmental structures and hierarchies have been abandoned, employees that did hold a team lead or department lead position in the past still earn more than their colleagues.

- Junior employees for whom the question of promotional prospects is still very important were sometimes frustrated by the **lack of provable career advancement.** Although in principle they endorsed the perspective of lateral development within a department or company, they consider it problematic that in case of a job change, there is no chance to produce some proof of vertical development, either in the form of titles or leadership responsibilities in order to find a more advanced job in another company.

Thus, career and further development opportunities have to be reconsidered in agile work environments. Otherwise you lose exactly the kind of people you hope to keep on board: motivated, dedicated employees who do not hesitate to 'walk the extra mile' for the firm.

PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT IN AGILE ORGANIZATIONS

Siemens AG is a German multinational conglomerate company headquartered in Munich and the largest industrial manufacturing company in Europe. The principal divisions of the company are Industry, Energy, Healthcare (Siemens Healthineers), and Infrastructure & Cities, which represent the main activities of the company. Siemens and its subsidiaries employ around 385,000 people worldwide and reported a global revenue of around EUR 87 billion in 2019.

The Siemens communications team embarked on a transformation journey focused on collaboration and co-creation. To enable this, new training formats and a different competency management were required within the teams.

Siemens' transformation journey

A couple of years ago, the Siemens Communications team embarked on a transformation journey focused on collaboration and co-creation. Clarissa Haller, Head of Siemens Corporate Communications, has defined four strategic pillars: collaboration, digitalization, people development and culture change. In recent years, the communications community, comprising approximately 500 people in Germany and 500 in international subsidiaries, has increasingly used agile working methods, such as working in squads. To enable the communications community to embrace the transformation, new training formats and a different competency management were required within the teams.

Interview with Nicole Weckwerth, Siemens AG

Dr. Lisa Dühring visited Siemens Headquarters in Munich in July 2019 and talked to Nicole Weckwerth, at the time Director Set-up and Resources, about their current initiatives and platforms for people and career development.

Nicole, you are responsible for people development and talent management within the Siemens communications team. Over recent years, the communications department has undergone a massive reorganization. How important are people management and career development for this new structure?

Both are essential. When Clarissa Haller assumed the role of Head of Siemens Corporate Communications in 2016, one of her main goals was to stress the importance of lifelong learning and employability. Working in a fast-changing and dynamic environment, as well as facing the challenges of the digital transformation, every team member needs to continually hone their skills and ensure that their competencies remain relevant. There has been a general change in how we approach talent and career development. For us, 'Own your career' is not just a slogan. Our employees are supported by an ecosystem of Own Your Career tools and methods. Mentoring, job shadowing, and also our online program Strength Finder are tools that enable you to determine and drive your own development. With Strength Finder you can identify your strengths and continue to build on them. Based on these findings, Siemens offers each employee a broad range of training and courses to match their individual needs.

What kind of training do you offer to the employees of the communication department?

We have fundamentally changed our approach to training in recent years. Whereas in the past we have conducted many face-to-face training sessions with external trainers, today we offer most of our programs virtually and in-house. Much is done by colleagues for colleagues. Recently we initiated a training series consisting of short impulse sessions for management followed by Lunch & Learn sessions for employees and a follow-up for both parties in the Jour Fixes.

In order to think outside the box, we invite experts to provide insights into their work or research. For example, we invited a social media

Nicole Weckwerth, former Director Set-up and Resources at Siemens

consultant who was involved in the presidential election campaign of Barack Obama, as well as network specialists and mindfulness experts.

Furthermore, we have found that people in interdisciplinary teams – our squads – learn many new skills from their colleagues. We have greatly emphasized the on-the-job learning approach as we are increasingly working in interdisciplinary project teams with rotating employees. Thus, we want to ensure that the skills and competencies in our team are shared across the entire department.

Apart from these peer-to-peer learning approaches, are there any special skills or competencies you realized your colleagues need in order to work in a more flexible and dynamic environment?

Yes, definitely. We understand that in order to be able to work collaboratively and agilely, one needs an enhanced set of competencies and skills. Over the past months, my team and I have concentrated on establishing a virtual platform, the Communications Learning World. This is an online channel for the communication community. In the Learning World, one can find the necessary competencies and skills needed to tackle the current and future challenges communicators will face.

For each role within our team and for all defined competencies, we have compiled general information, articles, blog entries, videos – for instance from our Speaker's Series – presentations, webinars, etc. We also refer to the overall Siemens Learning World managed by our HR team and the learning programs offered by them. For some roles, we have over 300 entries.

Organizing and managing the content of this learning platform probably requires a lot of resources. How do you manage that with your team?

We have established a community of curators that sources and manages information from the different teams in our department. A curator is responsible for a certain topic or field of interest such as social media or analytics. It can either be technical skills or expertise or content/topic-related knowledge. We ask them to provide knowledge and insights from their squads like interesting news, such as a video – whatever could be potentially beneficial for their colleagues. Thus, the Learning World has become kind of a knowledge-sharing platform. Also, our trainees created an introductory video series providing basic insights such as "How to do a video" or "How to use Instagram."

How have you achieved the buy-in of the curators who have to put in extra time and extra effort to build-up the Learning World?

It is not easy to motivate our team members to assume the role of curator since it comes on top of their daily work. In the beginning, incentives were required. Sharing knowledge and providing peer-to-peer learning had to become part of their general job description and performance review. Slowly we are getting there – more and more team members are using the Learning World and discovering a universe of different development formats.

People Development @ SIEMENS

• **Mentoring**
• **Reverse Mentoring**
• **Virtual Orientation**

Previous speakers included...
"Move To Think", A. Quaintance; "Personal Branding", T. Onaran; "Campaigning for Change", J. Laar Henning Beck

Develop Yourself @Communications channel: the place for Learning and Development for Siemens communications

Initiatives

Speaker Series

Talents

Learning World

Awards

#CultureCons

SIEMENS
Ingenuity for life

SPEAC: high potential development program for aspiring talents
Volontariat: 2-year guided Communications Trainee Program within Siemens for graduates in Germany

Promote and encourage Comms colleagues to try for awards such as:
• European Publishing Awards
• Gartner Communications Awards
• PR Report Awards
• Werner-von-Siemens Awards

#CultureCons is a series of conversations and concepts that enhance and refine our understanding of the changes required of each of us as we adapt to rapid digital and cultural transformations.