
Distributed Agile Team - Third Space Working

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Abstract: *The concept of the Third Space or Third place is becoming widely used in the current world and Information technology is no exception to catch hold of the positive factors that the third places offer. On the other hand the distributed scrum teams have their own set of hurdles in terms of communication with peers who are not co-located along with other the issues faced in the distribute team setup. The concept of bringing the distributed team together frequently to a third place and continue their work there would help team bonding and increased interaction, communication and trust between team members thus positively impacting and benefiting the IT projects and their successful delivery on the whole*

Keywords: *Distributed Agile Teams, Distributed Scrum teams, Third place, Building trust in teams, Third space*

1. INTRODUCTION

Third place or third space is a social surrounding that is separate from the two usual social environments: Home and Workplace. Ray Oldenberg in his book titles 'The great good place' emphasizes the importance of the third place and their role in civil society, democracy, civic engagement and in establishing feeling of a sense of the place in the occupants. Ones "First place" is the home and the "Second Place" is the workplace. Third places, then, are the "anchors" of community Life. They felicitate and foster broader, creative interactions amongst the occupants.

In a Distributed Agile team environment the team members do not work in close proximity or though they are in same location, they might be not collocated.. When working as a team; it would be difficult to effectively communicate and build trust among the teammembers without a face-to-face interaction.

This paper is to study the positive impact of having the distributed agile teams coming together at third places while getting accustomed to and reaping the benefits of Third place working.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THIRD PLACE

The characteristics of the Third place are as below

2.1. They Should be Placed on Neutral Ground

Occupants should not be tied down by any financial, political, legal or any other factors from accessing the third place.

2.2. Leveler

The Third Place should not put any importance on an individual's social status.

2.3. Happy Conversations

Playful and happy conversations should be prevailing in Third Places, although it is not required to be the only activity. The third place should provide a suitable environment.

2.4. Third Places Should be Accessible and Accommodative

They should be readily accessible to those who occupy them and be able to provide the wants of their inhabitants

2.5. The Regulars

Third Places would be visited by a number of regulars. They would help give the space its tone, and help set the mood and characteristics of the area over the time. Regulars also attract newcomers and help them to get accustomed to the place soon.

2.6. A Low Profile

Third Places are characteristically wholesome. The inside of a Third Place should be without any extravagance or grandiosity, and has a homely feel. Third Places should be accepting all types of individuals, from several different walks of life.

2.7. The Mood is Playful

The mood within in Third Places should have a tone of playful nature

2.8. Home Away from Home

Third place should provide such an environment that Occupants should have the same feelings of warmth, possession, and belongingness as they would in their own homes. An increasing percentage of American workers now telecommute, not from home, but from a third place.[2] Workers cite isolation when telecommuting from home and find working in public spaces a happy medium between the home office and the corporate office. Availability of public wifi has been a major enabler of this trend, and an increasing number of retail chains are catering to it.

3. BLENDING THE THIRD PLACE WORKING WITH DISTRIBUTED AGILE TEAMS

Coffee shops were among the first public places to serve wireless and environment for a popular third place to work. ^[4]The most prominent was Starbucks, a chain of coffee houses that started in Seattle and is now everywhere. Starbucks offer not only sofas but also desks with convenient electricity sockets. These days Starbucks makes bigger news when it switches Wi-Fi providers—it dropped T-Mobile for AT&T in February—than when it sells a new type of coffee bean. Bookshops such as Barnes & Noble are also offering such places for their customers to work while they shop. Third places should create a de-stressing destination and should provide a sense of ease and warmth for the occupants

Third places are the non-traditional workplaces which are now gaining popularity among the organization as they are recognized to be contributors to the overall business effectiveness and efficiency. Some companies also have in-house third spaces i.e. a casual coffee shop atmosphere for work within a corporate office.

The reasons for third places gaining popularity is the negative stigma attached to the concept of working from home. The contributing factors for their popularity in different countries are the living styles like the space availability, infrastructure availability like audio/video conference facilities, Joint family systems, power back up availability, network connectivity. The third place brings people, technology and space together in newer ways. Steelcase work cafe is one of the examples of an in house workspace. The Third places should have facilities for work, dining, infra capabilities, abundant video/audio conf capabilities.

Provided these facilities in third place, we anticipated that they work very well if it is blended with the working style of the distributed agile teams. ^[5]The hurdles in effective communication and building trust in distributed agile teams and ways were suggested to overcome the hurdles have already been discussed across various forums and in our previous papers [6] and Third space working by the distributed agile team is one other way to overcome those hurdles

Inspired by the way the third places work, we have chosen Four team members who are part of the distributed scrum team located in Bangalore. These team members commute over 90 minutes one way to reach their work place and though they work in same project, they are not collocated. A Third place

is identified which is closer to all the four team members and our experiment is to get the team working in the third place for four consecutive Fridays and provide the team a set of questionnaire to assess the effectiveness of working at third place and positive and negative factors that the team encountered with such an arrangement.

4. RESULTS OF THIS BLENDING

The overall results of such arrangement proved that the distributed scrum team that we chose to experiment on to work in third spaces is happier in terms of

1) Lessened commutation hurdles :

2) The team felt the third place working reduced the commutation of 90 minutes one way to a mere 15 minutes one way. This is a net time saving of 2 hours approximately a day. This saving of time would cater to lot of energy, effort saving, less consumption of fuel on travel, more time for personal work, less stressful days and resulting in more work life balance

3) More effectiveness at work:

The effectiveness at work is on the positive side as the team seats at a collocated third place and in a more cheerful environment.

4) Less stressful days:

The lesser travel and face to face interactions leads to less stressful days of work for the professionals.

5) Work Life balance:

The remaining time of around 2 hours is used by the team to spend with their family members and for their personal work, thus striking a balance between work life and personal life

6) Socializing with project team and third place workers:

The team started socializing with other inmates of the Third place and by third week, they were in a position to exchange pleasantries with other inmates and know them by name.

7) Increases trust between team members:

The team members answered that they know the team better now and their capabilities and interests. This definitely led to increase in trust within the team on other team members.

8) Increase in the communication between team members with less apprehensions about others The communication is quite often than before and the team now does not hesitate to call and seek clarification from other team members. They started using phones frequently for things that can be managed over calls and choose to use mails only when it is required for a group to be notified about messages. This decreased the wait time to get clarifications and thus positively impacting the delivery and its timelines.

9) More comfort ability with the team:

The team is more comfortable with the others than before and the same has been expressed by all team members post this arrangement of working in third place for four consecutive Fridays.

10) Work routines being more manageable an regular work days:

The positive impact of the team meeting is seen on the remaining four working days of the week. The team were relaxed and they know that they meet the other team member on the last day of

week and they reserved any informal queries which can be simpler and needs attention for Friday and sought information when they meet.

- 11) Preference to visit third places often: The team also liked the concept and expressed their willingness and interest to visit third places often as they seem to be positively impacting the teams productivity.
- 12) Environment and ambience at the third place: Almost all the team members expressed their satisfaction with the arrangements in third place with some exceptions

On the flip side team has observed that

- 1) The infrastructure facilities like having printers,
- 2) Availability of conference rooms should have been better,
- 3) Environment should have been more sound proof and menu on the food items should have been more elaborate in third place that we have chose to experiment on.

5. CONCLUSION

On the whole the team is positive to carry out their regular work schedule in third places frequently and find it much effective, time saving, happier environment, lessened apprehensions, increased trust and communication between team and having a work life balance.

Further, there is a lot of lively environment at the third place and we thought to propose a ‘silent zone’ in the third place to cater to the needs of the situations where inmates need to work with extra care and needs privacy of their own. We often feel that working in an environment with no external disturbances would solve critical issues more quickly. So this proposal of the ‘Silent zone’. The implementation of this is yet to be taken in any of the third places.

As a general observation, the team were impressed with this culture and agreed that the visits to the third places twice a month would help the team to socialize and break the hurdles of working remotely and would boost up the morale of the teams

Also the ^[6]UI programming in distributed scrum teams which would be required in crucial phases of the project can be handled very well in the third places rather than the team member seating in isolated locations.

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