The PM Dance Guide for Agile Project Management

What American Tribal Style Dance Teaches Us about Agility and Flexibility for Successful Project Delivery

by Tonica Griffin

How did dance inspire agility in project delivery for one organization focused on governance and compliance of US banking institutions? Large amounts of data are reviewed for various risk factors and analyzed for specific trends and patterns. The feat, to say the least, is challenging. To be effective at enforcing compliance and governance in the banking industry, this organization not only has to understand and interpret the data correctly but also must be able to manage cybersecurity risks in the most efficient manner to protect the privacy and integrity of that data.

A robust solution was needed to standardize how vulnerabilities were viewed and addressed across multiple organizational groups, including use cases unique to each area. With many stakeholders and differing business needs, building a solution would be challenging. Enter American Tribal Style (ATS) dance. In ATS, troupes perform as one but highlight individuality, allowing every member to showcase their unique interpretation of the dance to create an eloquent improvised choreography. It is a dance that surprisingly translates easily into project management, promoting an environment of ingenuity for favorable results in the midst of high risk and unknowns. ATS was critical to the successful delivery of a robust solution for a highly visible and critical problem, addressing business needs of multiple stakeholders within the organization.

The unconventional source of inspiration led to collaboration between cross-functional teams, high stakeholder engagement, and an inclusive team dynamic. It also promoted freedom to think outside the box, fail fast, and push creativity. The result was a premier systemwide solution involving big data technology, making organizational history and becoming a model for the effective use of Agile for systemwide initiatives.

1. Learning Objectives
    a. Understand how the principles of the improvisational dance known as American Tribal Style can be applied to successfully deliver projects with agility and flexibility.
    b. Understand how agility, flexibility and inclusion in project management can lead to improved team performance and better quality products.

PM category: Technical Project Management – Agility in Project Management