

The agile mindset or being *corafa*

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What kind of creature is a 'corafa'? It is a human being that needs a special habitat rarely found in traditional organizations: a corafa needs space for being creative. A corafa needs freedom for new thoughts. A corafa needs opportunities to develop, act, reflect, and learn. A corafa needs a group to work and have fun with.

Courageous, open-minded, resilient, appreciative, focused and action-oriented people are increasingly needed in organizations going agile.

And what exactly does a corafa do? Let's dive into a couple of sequences taken from the life of a corafa.



1. Courage

It takes a lot of courage to leave our comfort zone. But if we don't do it, we cannot lead by example.

Speaking Up

Non-corafa:

Eileen can't focus on her task. She still is angry at Maud, her boss: "I have enough. I feel so humiliated by her. But what can I do? She is a real control freak and always wants to have the final say."

Corafa:

Eileen takes all her courage and goes to her boss Maud: „Do you have a minute? I am really a bit bothered by a thing. Actually, you check all my emails to external stakeholders before I am allowed to send them. I somehow feel that you don't trust me. Can we talk about this?"

Knowing without acting

Non-corafa:

While observing Dave, his subordinate, who leads a military-like regiment in his team, John is thinking: "If Dave continues like this, more people will leave the company. And we already have a shortage of talent. But he is a real gifted engineer, that's most important."

Corafa:

Dave's team keeps on losing people. John takes a deep breath and sits down next to Dave in the canteen: "Do you know what your people are feeling? Do you know how the atmosphere in your team is? What about asking them for feedback?" He encourages Dave to enter into a dialogue with his team. AND: When he notices that nothing will have changed after a while, he has the guts of taking Dave out of a leadership role or even laying Dave off, depending on the context.

Feedback

Non-corafa:

Susan bumps into two colleagues who ask her: "Wouldn't you like to take over the D-Day-Project? Janine is really screwing it up." Susan: "Oh, well, what can you expect from her! I'm absolutely overloaded already, but I think that I'd better take it on. It's good that you asked me."

Corafa:

Instead of joining the gossip about Janine and feeling flattered by the offer, Susan says: „Have you told Janine about your concerns? If not, I will go to her now and share it with her. Otherwise, nothing will change.“ Dave off, depending on the context.

2. Open-Mindednes - Not possible

Non-corafa:

Manfred loses his temper in a brainstorming meeting: "Come on. If it was that easy, others would have tried it before."

Corafa:

Instead of blocking the new idea off, Manfred says: "Ok, I have never thought of doing it that way. Would be too good if it was that easy. But, I'll check it out and let you know tomorrow in our morning meeting." In the morning meeting, Manfred shares the result of his experiment. Amazingly, it had worked, with a bit of fine-tuning from his side.

3. Resilience - Surprise

Marc receives an email-invitation to meet the head of his Business Unit. He met that man just once before, ages ago. There was no agenda attached to the invitation.

Non-corafa:

Marc can't sleep well. He is haunted by thought carousels such as: "*What does the boss want from me? What if my main project was cancelled? Or even worse, what if I was laid-off?*"

Corafa:

Marc is surprised. The unit head sends him an email. How long has he waited for another opportunity to meet him in person. "I am really curious what he wants to talk about with me."

4. Appreciation - The extra mile

The team has put in three long nights to finish a software change that the customer requested extremely short term. Day four, the feature is finished and the team gathers in the kitchen.

Non-corafa:

Michael, the manager of the project, addresses his team: „*Well, this was hard work, but this is what we all get paid for. Let's hope that we do not get into time pressure again.*"

Corafa:

Michael buys pizza and beer for his team and thanks everybody for all the effort they had put in.

5. Focus - Endless task list

The company has been growing at an enormous pace for 24 months. Everybody is stretched and capacities are overbooked. A new customer is at the horizon with special requests for product features. In the weekly meeting, the team leader asks Martin to get in touch with this new potential customer.

Non-corafa:

Martin thinks: „It has to work somehow. I am not sure how, but it can't be helped. I am already sleeping badly, and my partner complains about me returning home when the children are already asleep.“

Corafa:

Martin explains: „Ok, when I take care of this new customer, I cannot compile the sales figures, and I can't finish the concept for our new creative space by end of this week. Is this ok with everybody? If not, what is most important?“

6. Action-Orientation - Meeting marathon

Jeanette feels a growing pain: Since she has become team leader, she is buried under thousands of emails, and requests for endless meetings are piling up. She is increasingly unhappy and feels stressed.

Non-corafa:

Jeanette opens her laptop in the middle of yet another unproductive meeting where Jean-Paul incessantly talks about his great achievement to reach their zero defect target. She really has other things to do, e.g. browsing through her emails. She texts her friend and cancels their jogging round for the evening.

Corafa:

Jeanette has had it. She cannot afford to spend her entire working day in unproductive meetings and make up for the lost time in the evenings. She informs her peers and seniors that she only will be available for meetings where her input is absolutely needed. She requests a meeting agenda with bullets to be prepared for quick decision taking.

Jeanette reflects on the result of her move: At the beginning, her colleagues took it personal. Some became even angry. After a while, though, they sent out agendas and only invited her for meetings she could contribute to. She saved between 1-2 hours each day. Others quickly followed her example.

Not your thing?

If not even your boss is corafa, why should you be? Think of distributed leadership: Agile organizations have many leaders, formal and informal ones. Agility is an attitude, a mindset. Leading by example is a way to translate this mindset into day to day action. The beauty of it: Everybody can do it. You don't have to wait for an expensive corporate initiative to take action.

Not born as a corafa?

Corafas have certain qualities; qualities, that can be developed. Certainly, some behaviors come more naturally for some people, depending on their personality. However, everybody can be corafa if he or she takes responsibility for self-leadership and develops into a corafa – step by step. The self-leadership book [The United States of You](#) provides an entire toolkit for each step.

Summary

Let's look at the essence of the Manifesto for [Agile Software Development](#), the root for the agile movement:

Human beings over processes – **People-centricity**

Working product over extensive documentation – **Pragmatism**

Close collaboration with customers instead of long contract negotiations – **Collaboration**

Go with change instead of sticking to a plan – **Adaptability**

To bring this essence to life, an organization must have **courageous**, **open-minded**, **resilient**, **appreciative**, **focused** and **action-oriented** beings, in short *corafa*.