

# Agile Change Leadership

*What this is: a series about the impacts on leadership and management thinking as businesses adopt an Agile way of working and thinking in the context of change programmes.*

*What this isn't: a step-by-step guide to implementing Agile.*



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## Getting started using Agile methodology in Change programmes

There is a wealth of books on the benefits of Agile and re-writing them all here wouldn't be of much value – the question I am looking at here is more basic. Can all that good Agile stuff be used for change programmes, for programmes that are not technology deliveries? I think so. For me, Agile has worked equally well for technology and change programmes, with both benefitting from Agile speed and flexibility. For Agile change you only need to be willing to try applying Agile methodology, testing your deliveries and hypotheses as you go along and adapting as you learn more to ensure that your business change is delivered. This does not equate to abandoning change strategy and plans – the programme objective is stable but how it gets there is driven by outcomes. It takes very little time and very few edits to re-map the values and principles of Agile development to Agile change.

The 4 Core Agile Values	
Agile Development	Agile Change
1. <b>Individuals and interactions</b> over processes and tools	<b>Individuals and interactions drive</b> processes and tools Agile change focuses on how the behaviours and interactions of individuals and individual teams needs to adapt to achieve/ adopt the desired change. This will in turn drive changes in processes and tools
2. <b>Working fixes</b> over comprehensive documentation	<b>Working changes</b> over comprehensive documentation Agile change tests its proposals & collateral through iterative pilots before rolling out sustainable change. Documentation is as light possible while still communicating the change/training etc. needed
3. <b>Cross-team collaboration</b> over contract negotiation	<b>Cross-team collaboration</b> over contract negotiation The people impacted by/involved with the change work together across teams as needed. 'We want to...' not 'you must...'
4. <b>Responding to change</b> over following a plan	<b>Responding to change</b> over following a plan Change programmes do need plans, not least because of the numbers of players involved, but plans should be as high level as feasible and iterative, adapting to learning and feedback from its audiences to ensure the change is adopted as opposed to ensuring the change plan completes

## The 12 Core Agile Principles

### Agile Development

1. Our highest priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable development
2. Welcome changing requirements, even late in development. Agile processes harness change for the customer's competitive advantage
3. Deliver working developments frequently, from 30, 60 to 90 days, with a preference to the shorter timescale
4. Business people and development teams must work together daily throughout the project
5. Build projects around motivated individuals. Give them the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done
6. The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is direct conversation
7. Working development is the primary measure of progress
8. Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, improvers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely
9. Continuous attention to functional excellence and good design enhances agility
10. Simplicity — the art of maximizing the amount of work not done — is essential
11. The best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams
12. At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behaviour accordingly

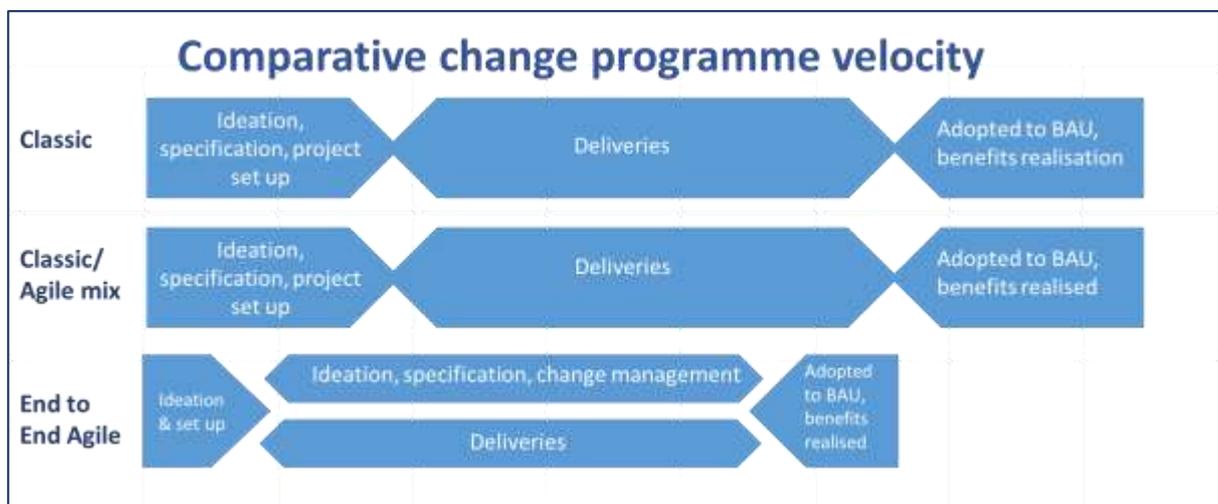
### Agile Change

- Our highest priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable **change**
- Welcome and act on feedback, even late in delivery.** Agile processes harness change for the customer's competitive advantage
- Deliver working **changes** frequently, from 30, 60 to 90 days, with a preference to the shorter timescale
- Business people and **change** teams must work together daily throughout the project
- Build projects around motivated individuals. Give them the environment and support they need, and trust them to get the job done
- The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a **change project** is direct conversation
- Embedded change** is the primary measure of progress
- Agile processes promote sustainable **change**. The sponsors, improvers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely
- Continuous attention to functional excellence and good design enhances agility
- Simplicity — the art of maximizing the amount of work not done — is essential
- The best **change projects**, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams
- At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behaviour accordingly

As you can see, Agile Values and Principles support change programmes as well as they support technology delivery, and the same can be said of Agile delivery methodology. Scrums, Kanban boards, Stand-Ups & Retrospectives, parallel design, test & delivery sprints and Agile ceremonies are all extremely effective in delivering viable, embedded change at pace. Just because you can do something doesn't always mean you should but in this case I found the evidence to be strong – my Agile change programmes led to a major reduction in the backlog of delivered technology that no one was using.

It is very common to see Agile methodologies being used for the delivery phase of technology programmes while the business change elements, both in identifying the required changes and in the following business readiness and benefits realization, use the business's traditional processes. This creates an uneven change delivery flow: **SLOW** - Ideation & Change Identification/ Specification, **FAST** - Change technology delivery, **SLOW** – business readiness planning, adoption to Business As Usual and benefits realization. This means that the time lapse between Idea and Adoption by the business between Waterfall and Agile is fairly equal. The Agile value-add is that the return on investment is delivered incrementally throughout the programme instead of a (hopefully) big bang at the end and that the developments are tested, functional and fit for purpose with limited wastage.

This gives companies the opportunity for a huge win, if they can achieve it, through applying the proven value of Agile working end to end across Business Change. The business tempo changes radically: **FAST** - Ideation and Change Identification/Specification, **FAST** - Change technology delivery, **FAST** – business readiness planning, adoption to Business As Usual and benefits realization. The company gets all of the benefits of Agile development plus the benefit of a significant reduction in the time between Idea and Adoption by the business.



Of course, some things are a lot easier to say than to do so where to start?

The first requirement for Agile change is to introduce the Agile culture, mind sets and management behaviours end to end across the organisation, even to those teams who will not themselves be delivering anything using Agile. Without this you are doomed to spend your days bouncing off solid brick walls, climbing mountains of resistance and floundering in lakes of apathy. You need to have a solid communication and influencing strategy to get this culture change underway and the active support from the senior leadership. You won't get 100% enthusiasm and commitment from every person you speak to from day one but think of it as a game of Jenga... every person you win around to Agile is one more block removed from the tower of resistance and eventually the tower collapses...

The cultural mind shift needed to implement Agile change effectively is moving away from top down Command & Control with its detailed programme specifications, fixed milestones and a (time-consuming) approval process for both deliveries and in-programme changes. Command & Control gives the reassurance that expenditure will be mapped to specific

deliverables into the business with an easy to track ROI but comes at the cost of fixing the programme at the original specification. Over the life of the programme it becomes progressively out of date and potentially less aligned to the current business need.

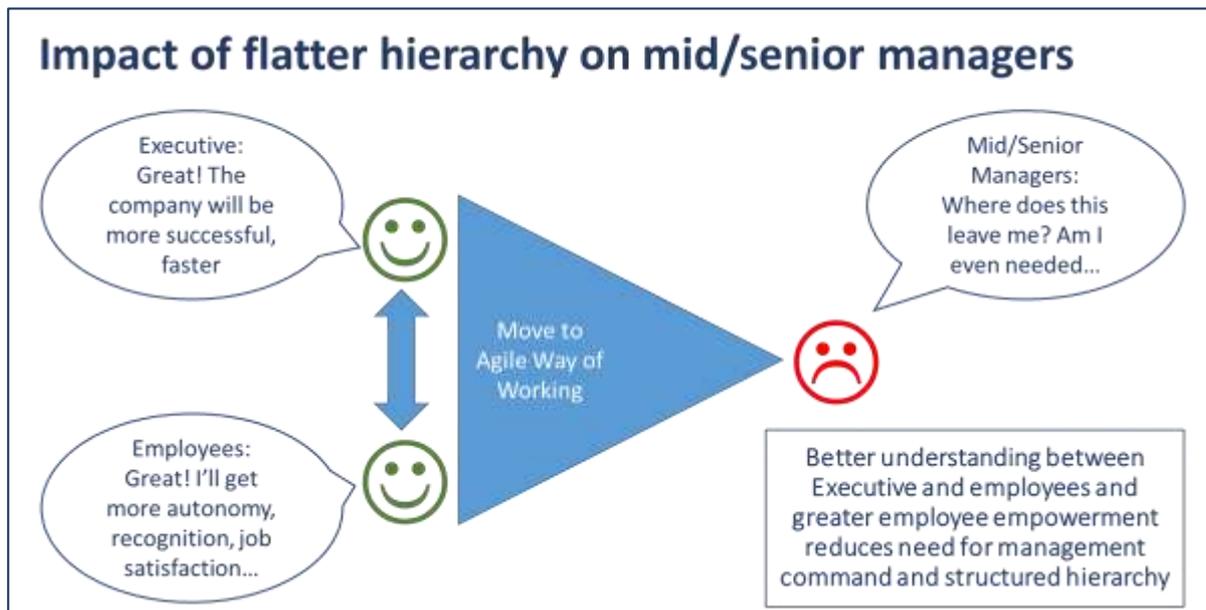
Moving to the Agile mind set means that the end game (the outcomes the company needs to meet its strategic objectives) is set. The timing (but not the content) of milestone reviews to assess the progress made towards achieving strategic objectives is set. The budget (the price the company is prepared to pay to achieve the strategic objectives) is set. The priority this programme has in the hierarchy of corporate programmes is set. That's it – everything else can flex. Which makes complete sense given that the owners of the business change are extremely unlikely to be able to write code, design solutions, design process flows, create communication collateral or carry out any of the other detailed activities needed to achieve the strategic objectives. What they are absolutely able to do is to set strategic direction, prioritise, evaluate business impacts, inspire and lead the company etc. – and adopting Agile methodology allows them to focus on exactly that.

The Agile mind shift needs to ripple down the hierarchy, all the way to the most junior person in the company. In my experience, there is huge enthusiasm from the bottom up. The management gives clear direction on the outcomes they want to see, authorizes you to work as effectively as you can with whoever you need to irrespective of where they sit in the company, the autonomy to determine the best route to success, removes the bureaucracy processes that slow you down, values your ideas and recognises the value of your contribution. What's not to like? Usually there is reasonable enthusiasm at the top – not 100% as some people really like Command & Control (usually their role includes doing the commanding and controlling) – but a strong enough majority to make it viable.

The block to adopting Agile mind-sets tends to appear at the mid/senior level of management. They are used to seeing their value to the company being their ability to come up with the ideas, to define and drive activity and to take the key decisions on behalf of their programmes. They have strong opinions – that's how they got there in the first place – and have taken years to build themselves into a position where they can implement their ideas and create status for themselves in their industry. Now they are being told that it isn't about them and their achievements, but about the teams and their achievements. They find themselves in a culture where control is not valued, indeed where senior management see controlling the team and insisting on detailed plans as a management failure. The Executive expectation that the managers will achieve Executive objectives doesn't change – but they now expect these to be delivered as a natural consequence of employee goodwill, a commitment to corporate objectives and a sense of ownership that the middle manager will have engendered collaboratively.

It isn't surprising that senior managers can feel uncertain as to how they are supposed to lead without commanding. In some regiments of the British Army, officers are divided by their soldiers into two groups: the 'Come On's (good) and the 'Go On's (bad). In Agile, Command & Control style managers have to move into the 'Come On' group. To make it worse, only some of the individuals on the teams whose performance is now their new goal actually work for them, so they have to share the credit for success. This is compounded by it not being entirely clear how adopting Agile impacts career development at middle and senior levels. The flatter hierarchies that Agile methodology encourages can leave this group worried that adopting this new way of working will remove many or not most opportunities

for career progression. On the other hand, they know that if the Executive have decided on this course, not adopting this new way of working because of their concerns will have a short term and entirely negative impact on their career opportunities within their company.



Does it matter?

Yes. This is the group that will make or break any attempts a company makes to adopt Agile structure and are usually behind partial or failed Agile implementations. They can try to look Agile by changing the terminology so phases become 'product increments', development teams 'scrums', project managers 'release train engineers' while keeping as much control as before but this isn't Agile. It's simply waterfall without the benefit of a commitment to deliver the business outcomes. Agile needs real delegation to the lowest most appropriate level, real authority to self-determine work and output, for functionality and design to really change as the programme learns more. Mid/Senior managers have to focus on the high level strategic goals and employee engagement, trusting their teams to deliver. They have to make the mental and emotional shift from giver of orders and driver of performance to facilitator and leader of collaborative, self-determining teams. Finally, they need to know that their line management agrees that their success is measured by team results.

The other cultural element that has to be addressed is the wider organisation... while Agile technology delivery supported by Agile change management is better than no Agile at all, the benefit will be reduced, or even negated, if the surrounding organisation isn't willing to embrace Agile. If it takes the business – strategists, marketers, financial approvers and business managers - months to agree on the business outcomes that they want delivered, and then operations, infrastructure, sales and end users take many more months to actually use the output, then companies will not realise their goals any faster.

Ideas on how to bring non-Agile parts of the company to work smoothly with Agile teams will be looked at in a later chapter, but a solid start point is to help these teams to

understand that Agile does not replace having corporate goals, targets and a focused strategy. Agile is simply a methodology, a capability, a philosophy that makes it possible for corporate goals, targets and strategies to be delivered more quickly, more robustly and – most of all – less wastefully. In fact, it is key to any Agile programme that it knows the goals and business outcomes that it is working towards. However much the way in which it achieves those outcomes changes in the light of learning and experience, the end goals do not change and are always their focus.

So this then is the first step on an Agile change journey: prepare the ground by bringing in Agile thinking and Agile culture first, as widely as you can. You may not be able to mandate it outside of your own project or programme but you can influence the surrounding environment and you can agree a way of working that allows you full Agility in a way that other teams feel comfortable with. In the real world, this first step is often taken at the same time as beginning work on the programme as business imperatives don't always allow the luxury of a long preparation period but that doesn't mean that it can be overlooked in the rush to get the programme underway.

Part of programme set up, and a permanent component of your change plan, is the design and delivery of a plan to start the shift to an Agile mind-set in as much of the organisation as you can reach. There isn't a one size fits all solution for this as every company has its own culture, its own political environment and its own openness or otherwise to change and an understanding of these is the foundation of any plan. Another variable is the benefit to the business of moving to Agile change which will be a factor of the competitiveness and fluidity of the commercial environment, the volume of change needed and the current change processes. While this rarely means no Agile at all, it may well mean needing to run a bi-modal Waterfall/Agile set up for a potentially long transition period.

Addressing the challenges and means of changing corporate mind-sets in full will be in a future chapter so for those of you who cannot wait, I've given a small selection of recommended reading in this area below.

### Recommended reading

Simon Hayward – The Agile Leader:

[https://www.amazon.co.uk/Agile-Leader-Create-Business-Digital/dp/0749482737/ref=tmm\\_pap\\_swatch\\_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1556016942&sr=8-23](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Agile-Leader-Create-Business-Digital/dp/0749482737/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=1556016942&sr=8-23)

Forbes - How to make the whole organisation Agile:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevedenning/2015/07/22/how-to-make-the-whole-organization-agile/#3ee9f8105841>

McKinsey – How to create an Agile organisation:

<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/how-to-create-an-agile-organization>

CGI: Why Agile isn't always Agile:

<https://www.cgi.com/sites/default/files/white-papers/agile-culture-white-paper.pdf>

CXO Transform – multiple very useful resources. Free subscription: <https://cxotransform.com/>