

Agile Transformation

What should “good” look like?
(And what to be wary of)

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Barbara Roberts - Agile Transformation Coach

- Specialises in agile in the complex corporate world & well known for her common-sense and pragmatic approach to agile
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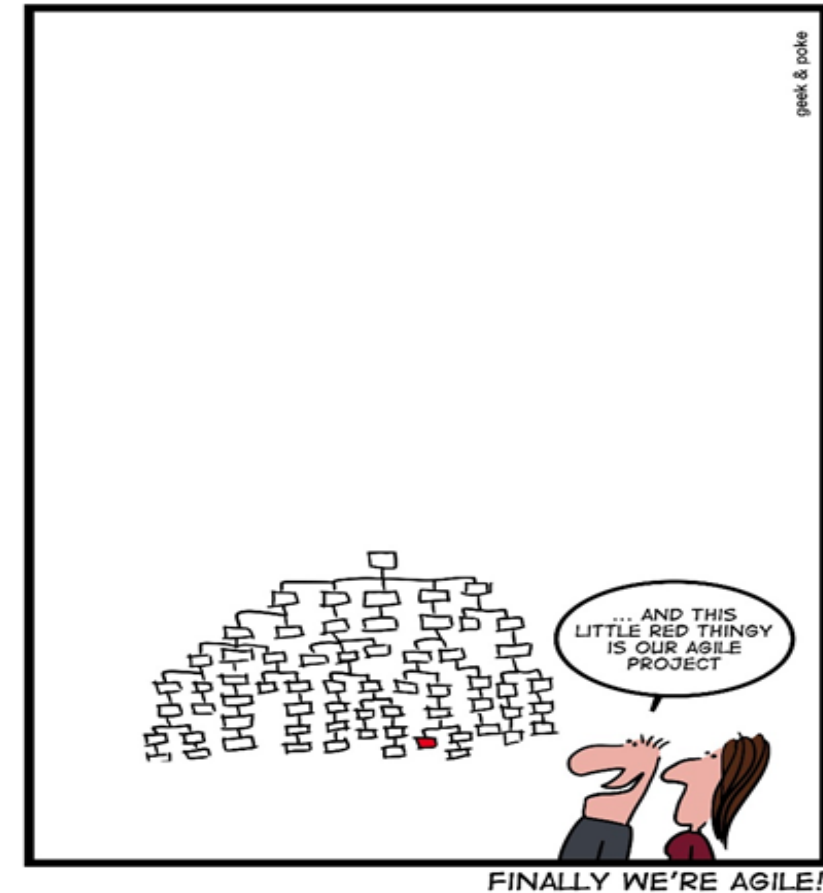
- Agile Transformation – a silver bullet?
- My typical steps for successful transformations

Please note – the views expressed here are based on my own experiences of delivering (and rescuing) agile transformations, and seeing what works and what doesn't



Take “Agile Bragging” with a pinch of salt

- There is a lot of bragging about agile
 - Corporate announcements that “we are now agile”
- And all too often the reality.....??
 - Pockets of agile at the lowest level
- This is not “Agile Transformation”
- “Agile” without change at higher levels results in ...



Transformation - not a “quick fix”

- Transforming an organisation to be fully agile is not an instant binary cut-over
- There is also a perception for many is that agile transformation is an “IT thing” 😞
 - It is definitely not as simple as “introducing Scrum and using JIRA”
- Agile transformation is a major change programme
 - Done properly it always involves significant behavioural change
 - It is a business change and will impact many areas
- Getting the early steps right is key to later success

- ✓ Agile Transformation – Not a silver bullet
- Step 1 – Make the right choices



1. Understand, never assume

- Every transformation is different, depending on areas such as
 - Organisation maturity
 - Start-up? Long-standing with significant legacy?
 - The reason(s) driving the need for change
 - Who “owns” the change
 - Specific constraints
 - E.g. Formally regulated? Workforce skill levels?
- Agile will never be a “one-size-fits-all”
- I start by asking questions
 - I need to understand **this** organisation and its current issues
 - This means talking to people at different levels in the organisation
 - How does the management view compare to the team or staff view?
 - Both views are important



<Example>

1. Understand, never assume

- Caveat for customers

*“Beware the organisation or consultant who arrives with a pre-prepared presentation of
“YOUR AGILE SOLUTION”*

- How can they possibly know this is the right solution for you?

< The worst example I ever saw (anonymised to protect the guilty!) >

- Caveat for consultants

“Beware the customer who tells you exactly what you need to be doing”

- How do you know this is the right solution for this customer?

- I cannot push through an agile approach that is unlikely to fit this customer

- E.g. “We want you to implement Scrum” is often based on a very limited understanding of the agile options and a quick check on Wikipedia! (personal experience of this !!)

1a. Ask “Why?” – What are the drivers?

- Me : Why agile? What is driving this for you?
 - Typically it will be to address a specific business issue
 - E.g. respond faster to market change
 - E.g. deliver better quality solutions
 - E.g. be a more flexible organisation
- This helps me understand what the change needs to deliver
- It also helps me know what is working well and therefore needs to be protected
- From this I can start to see the boundaries
 - Most transformations require compromise on both sides
 - Where can I compromise? Where can my customer compromise?
- In other words, an agile transformation needs to be flexible
 - Be agile about being agile !
 - Evolution, rather than revolution



1b. Ask “Why?” - Process

- Beware “This is the way we do it”
- Don’t be afraid to (politely) challenge the process / ways of working
 - “Why do you do <x> this way?”
- It is important to understand the logic behind the process
 - All too often processes have been built around historical work-arounds and continue long after the problem went away



NB Understanding the logic behind the process is also important for successful use of agile!

- I actively discourage just “following the agile book”
- I always also provide the “Why...this is important”, “What...this achieves”

- ✓ Agile Transformation – a silver bullet?
- ✓ Step 1 – Make the right choices
- Step 2 – Agree the strategy and start communicating



2. Agree the strategy and start communicating

1. **Assess** (based on the feedback)

- Which agile approach or combination of agile approaches would work here
- I present recommendations to the senior leadership team

2. **Position** with senior stakeholders

- Focus is on the potential benefits and “What’s in this for you” messages
- But I am always honest (I do not promise the impossible)

... assuming they give approval

3. **Communicate** (short informal agile sessions)

- These may be general, open to all, or have a specific focus
 - a group e.g. senior leadership team, a specific role, an area of the business, a single topic

• My objectives?

- to build a base of accurate agile information
- to ensure I am seen as approachable, on the side of the organisation and individuals

2. Bring people on side as early as possible

Typically people affected by an agile transformation fall into 3 categories



Those who are initially anti-agile or extremely cynical

- “Oh no! Yet another fad that promises to solve everything”
- Those who believe agile is anti quality, anti governance and only supports “quick and dirty”



The wildly enthusiastic

- Those who believe (hope) agile is anti quality, anti governance and supports “quick and dirty”



The “let’s see how this pans out before I make any commitment”

Interestingly groups 1 and 2 both need careful handling

2. Address fears and misconceptions

Getting misconceptions and fears out into the open is important

- Some typical examples



“Agile will be the only solution here in future”

Associated with “My experience will no longer have value”



“There is no role for a PM in agile. I’ll be expected to retrain as a Scrum Master”



“Agile is great, you can do whatever you want” !! (e.g. no documentation!)



“Agile can defy the laws of physics”

(“We need this (failing) 12 month project delivered in 3 months, please”)



“Agile is only relevant for young tecchie people”



- ✓ Agile Transformation – Not a silver bullet
- ✓ Step 1 – Make the right choices
- ✓ Step 2 – Agree the strategy and start communicating
- Step 3 – Identify a suitable pilot and get prepared



3. Choose a suitable agile pilot

- I always take an agile approach to transformation
 - Evolution from status quo
 - “Don’t throw the baby out with the bath water”
 - Protect what is working well, focus on what needs to change
- I strongly recommend starting with an agile pilot
 - Limits the risk to the customer
 - Gives the customer the opportunity to see for themselves
 - Far better than a “Trust me, I’m a consultant” approach
- This also demonstrates empirical & “iterative and incremental” approach i.e. agile in action
 - Pilot provides early learnings
 - Enables tailoring the agile process and the “fit” within the organisation

3. Choose a suitable agile pilot

- Pilot needs to be a challenge, but not Mission Impossible!



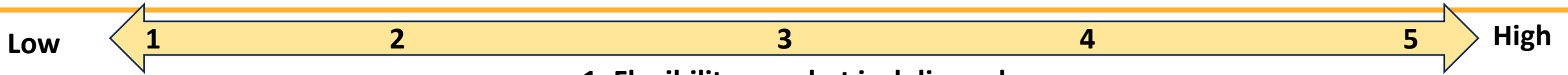
“Please deliver the impossible”
A personal experience

3. Assessing a potential pilot

- I look for business commitment (an actively engaged sponsor)
 - A good sponsor makes the difference between success and failure
- I assess potential pilots for the benefits agile can provide
 - Especially something that would prove a challenge for a traditional (linear) approach
- A simple “agile-o-meter” is a good easy starting check
 - Assessing 6 key areas which support successful agile
(detail on next slides)



3. Simple “Agile-o-meter” : Slider Definitions (1 of 2)



1. Flexibility on what is delivered

Level 5 : Stakeholders are very comfortable with the fact that change is inevitable and needs to happen, to converge on an accurate solution. They are also very comfortable with the role they need to play in prioritising the work, and they understand the scope of the work is being flexed in order to protect the quality and the deadline of what is being delivered.



2. Level of collaboration

Level 5 : There is a very high level of collaboration amongst all parties involved. This is typified by a one-team culture and excellent working relationships, both internally and externally. High levels of trust exist and a desire to be helpful is prevalent.



3. Ease of communication

Level 5 : Communication is very easy amongst all parties involved. The environment is “communication rich” with a lot of face-to-face interaction (physical or virtual) and visual information is readily available in forms such as prototypes and models. Retrieval of information is also easy in order to reference knowledge, information or data (historical or current)

3. Simple “Agile-o-meter” : Slider Definitions (2 of 2)

Low ← 1 2 3 4 5 → High

4. Ability to work iteratively and deliver incrementally

Level 5 : It is very easy to deliver benefit to the business or customer by regular deliveries of the overall solution. It is also very easy to work iteratively in the sense that solutions and understanding can be refined interactively by the frequent delivery of formal and informal deliveries. There is a desire to learn and experiment (and fail fast!) as well as an overarching feeling of “think big, start small”

Low ← 1 2 3 4 5 → High

5. Advantageous environmental conditions

Level 5 : The overall working environment is very supportive to working in an agile way. Personnel are assigned full time to their work, they are skilled-up, they have efficient platforms to work from (e.g. tooling, software, communications). Contractual frameworks and compliance considerations are not seen as restrictive.

Low ← 1 2 3 4 5 → High

6. Acceptance of agile

Level 5 : All stakeholders closely involved are fully aware of the behaviours and practices of working in an agile way. They have been trained and have experience. Not only are they happy to work this way, but they prefer it and understand the advantages it brings. Peripheral stakeholders are also aware of the need to carry out their roles in an “agile friendly” way.

3. Assess – blockers or manageable risks?

- Don't expect 100% positive response
 - Agile-o-meter provides an impartial and realistic assessment of the risks to agile success
 - It may also highlight where further information or training is required
 - These contra-indicators are managed using standard risk process
 - Too many “Low” responses may highlight a “Mission Impossible”
 - I am also suspicious if all responses set to 5!!
- Certain areas often cause internal friction
 - E.g. Quality - How formally is this assessed?
 - By non-negotiable tick-lists or as a discussion possible around outcomes?
 - Agile has proved successful within formal quality standards (CMMI level 5, ISO etc)
 - E.g. Is there formal gating?
 - Agile has natural gating points but these may differ from traditional gates
 - Early discussion can resolve this before mismatch problems surface



3. Prepare the way forward

- Organise training for the pilot team and the stakeholders
 - This helps everyone understand what to expect (and what is expected of them)
 - It reassures people that agile is not unstructured chaos
- Organise the appropriate level of on-going support
 - How, when and where
 - Typically I run workshops and byte-size sessions on specific topics
 - I also set up 1-2-1 coaching schedules for key roles
- Additional things to consider e.g.
 - Locations / timezones
 - Level of maturity and experience within the team



- ✓ Agile Transformation – not a silver bullet
- ✓ Step 1 – Make the right choices
- ✓ Step 2 – Agree the strategy and start communicating
- ✓ Step 3 – Identify a suitable pilot and get prepared
- **Step 4 – Run the pilot**



4. Run the pilot

- The team and stakeholders now have all the early information they need



- I always ensure I am available and accessible as much as is needed
 - at key events e.g. at “gate” points
 - day-to-day as new practices are taken on
- Support needs to be provided both formally (organised) and informally (ad hoc)
- Hold regular retrospectives to “inspect and adapt”
- Expect the unexpected - Things will never go exactly to plan
 - Be prepared for adaptation and compromises
 - In other words... be agile





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- Step 5 - Retrospect and repeat – build out the change

5. Build out the change – a few examples

There are numerous options for rolling out the change to agile - As always “It depends..”

- A 2nd project with the same team
 - Benefit – team is already performing so know what to do and what to expect
 - Disadvantage – limits the spread of experience.
- Divide the team, creating 2 teams with a mix of experienced + new to agile team members
 - Benefit – spreading the experience wider
 - Disadvantage – disrupting a “performing” team
- Pilot in a new area of the business
 - Repeat the previous “pilot” approach, to build on lessons learned
 - Provides opportunity to test approach and learnings with a fresh group
- As experience and knowledge deepens, start to tackle the difficult areas (and people!)
 - But remember that not everyone will (or will want to) transfer to agile thinking
 - Typically there will always be options for agile and more traditional approaches
 - But in reality over time the “traditional” pool will diminish significantly








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- **And finally....**

Agile – the end goal

- Agile is a mindset, based around common sense
- Agile gets results through teamwork and collaboration
 - Successful agile is driven by people
- Agile delivers quality working solutions
- Successful agile is all about “Being agile” and not just “Doing agile”
 - “Being agile” means agile thinking sits at the heart of everything you do



-  Ensure the “customer – supplier” relationship suits both sides
 - Successful transformation is always a collaborative joint effort
-  Ensure the agile transformation will be delivered using agile thinking (!)
 - This sounds obvious, but is so often ignored / forgotten
-  Ensure the comms starts early and delivers honest and consistent messages (at all levels)
-  Remember this will be an evolution, not a revolution
 - Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater! (Protect the good stuff)
-  Compromise is normal, it is not a sign of failure

Your questions



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- AgilePgM[®]
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- Scrum Product Owner
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