
Xebia
AGILE NXT
Insights and Foresights for Your Next Step in Agile
agilenxt.com

AGILE NXT N°2/2019

Xebia was founded in 2001. We're a pioneering group of extremely ambitious craftspeople and a one stop shop for digital transformation. We're organized in specialized units of excellence around the world, with offices in Amsterdam, Utrecht, Hilversum,Paris, Gurgaon, Bangalore, Pune, Dubai, Atlanta and Boston. We employ over 1000+ people worldwide and have been working Agile in our own software development practices since 2004. In 2007, we were the first company in the Netherlands to start guiding other organizations in their Agile transformations.

Since then, we've initiated, guided and supervised more than 60 Agile transformations for companies among the top 250 in the Netherlands (Globally).

Welcome to the second edition of AGILE NXT—the magazine to inspiring and informing you throughout your professional Agile journey achieving agility. AGILE NXT delivers visionary as well as practical insights and guidance. Making agility work, is the only way to survive as a company and to stay relevant as a professional. What's your next step in eveloping agility? What would challenge you to go even further?

Agile Performance Management is the next step in developing agility. It's how an (Agile) organization quickly and efficiently aligns, executes, and re-configures its strategy—from management down to individual team members, and vice versa. It's how organizations will survive and thrive, today and tomorrow. By striking the right balance between value creation and organizational development:

- Alignment and Autonomy
- Stability and Dynamism
- Performance-focused culture and People-focused culture
- Performing and Learning

Enjoy reading and find many new and useful ideas, processes, and tools in this edition of AGILE NXT.

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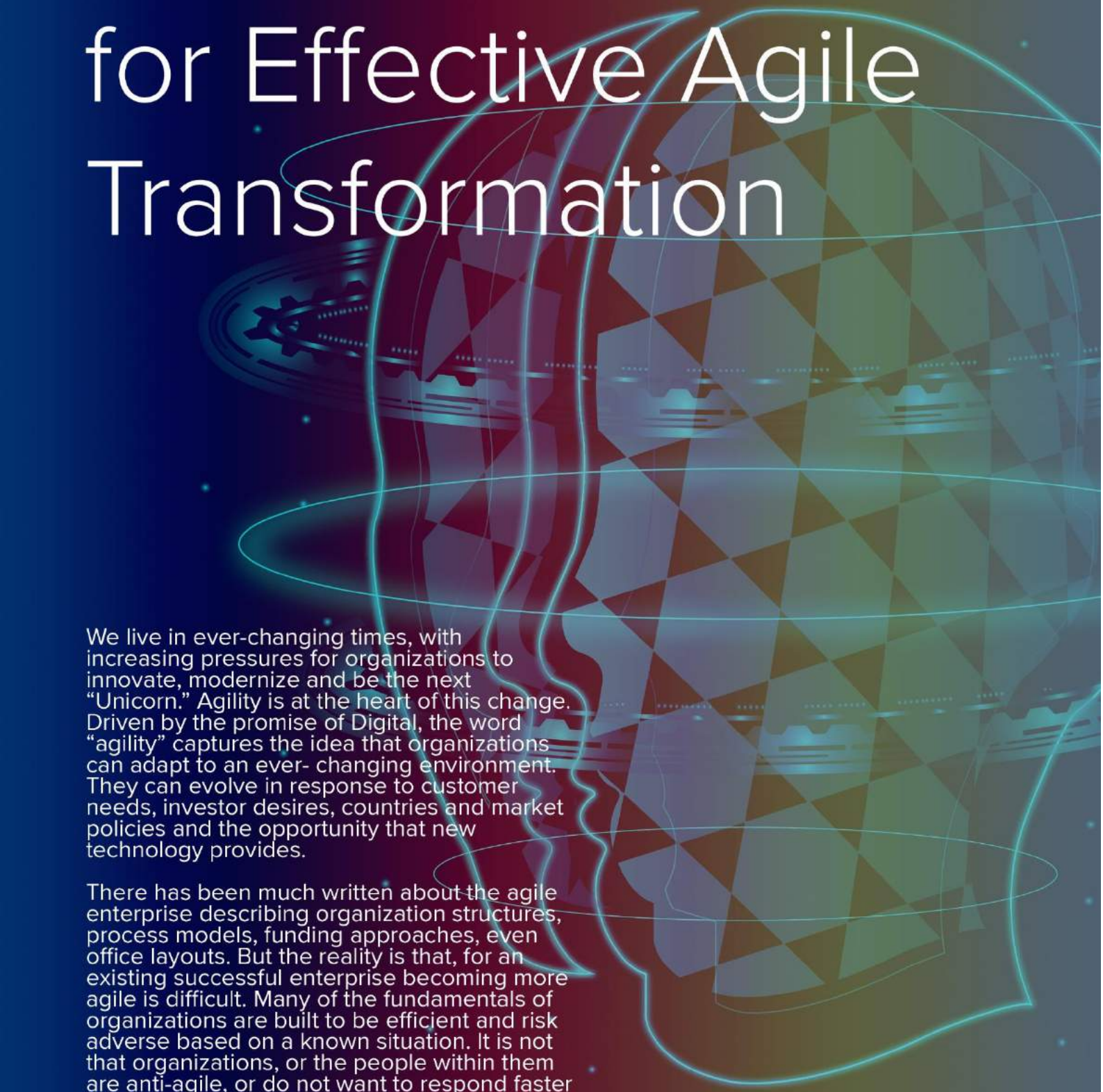
Key Focus Areas for Effective Agile Transformation



We live in ever-changing times, with increasing pressures for organizations to innovate, modernize and be the next "Unicorn." Agility is at the heart of this change. Driven by the promise of Digital, the word "agility" captures the idea that organizations can adapt to an ever- changing environment. They can evolve in response to customer needs, investor desires, countries and market policies and the opportunity that new technology provides.

There has been much written about the agile enterprise describing organization structures, process models, funding approaches, even office layouts. But the reality is that, for an existing successful enterprise becoming more agile is difficult. Many of the fundamentals of organizations are built to be efficient and risk adverse based on a known situation. It is not that organizations, or the people within them are anti-agile, or do not want to respond faster to the market, but everything seems to oppose the idea of agility. That "everything" is often described as "culture". Culture seems to be the word used to describe everything that happens inside a socio-economic system that we don't understand.

It is the thing we blame when things do not work saying 'the culture of this place will not let it happen'. And, we are right when we say culture has stopped the change, however that label does not provide a roadmap to change, instead a way of justifying our failure. Even John Kotter, the world-famous change expert in his latest book, XLR8 tells a tale of how innovation and traditional organizations rarely co-exist. He describes how, over time successful organizations care more about stability and inward focus which is the opposite of the agile enterprise.

"Great leaders understand that historical success tends to produce stable and inwardly focused organizations, and these outfits, in turn reinforce a feeling of contentment with the status quo."

- John Kotter.

So, is the desire for existing successful organizations to become more agile a fool's errand?

No, it is possible to become more agile, deliver more value to customers and create a culture where agility thrives. It is not, however, possible to buy a packaged solution for that change. The change, by its very nature is complex and we have learned from systems thinking that complex problems require a "probe-sense-respond" approach where the people within the organization try some "stuff", inspect it and adapt to what is learned. To be effective in this "agile" approach to agile transformation requires the following:

A Clear Definition of Success

This definition of success cannot be "more agile" but needs to describe what the measurable outcomes are that an agile enterprise delivers. For example, is agility in pursuit of increased delivery speed? Is it increased innovation vs. defect resolution? Is it an increased number of customers? Is the focus reduced employee attrition? Or something about the brand? Any metrics could be right or wrong for your organization, but should embody the strategy of the organization. Ideally, they should be outcome oriented and not concentrate on the internal metrics of the company such as efficiency, quality and predictability. When those internal metrics are perceived to the reason to move to agility, then it would be valuable to question why those metrics are so important when looking at the impact of those things to the business outcomes of the organization. Evidence-Based Management (EBM) is an emerging set of ideas that can provide some context or ask the right questions to building this dashboard.

An Iterative / Incremental Approach

Seems obvious but an incremental, iterative approach is fundamental to any change. That does not always mean start small but does mean break down the work into chunks and frequently inspect and adapt. This requires that the people driving the change have the ability to adapt. The plan can change and will frequently. And the plan is at many levels within the organization: at the macro level on which groups / teams to focus on and how complete value streams are affected; at the micro level - what working practices particular teams adopt, or how they engage with their stakeholders and customers.

For example, at the macro level, a change driven by time to market pressures might start with a focus on product development only to realize that actually the bottle neck is operations. A change where customer growth is key might start with implementing agility within the marketing, lead generation group only to discuss that actually the customer success and product development team need to change. At the micro level changes to how often a team involves a particular set of stakeholders or how the team is comprised.

A Change Team Inclusive of the Right People

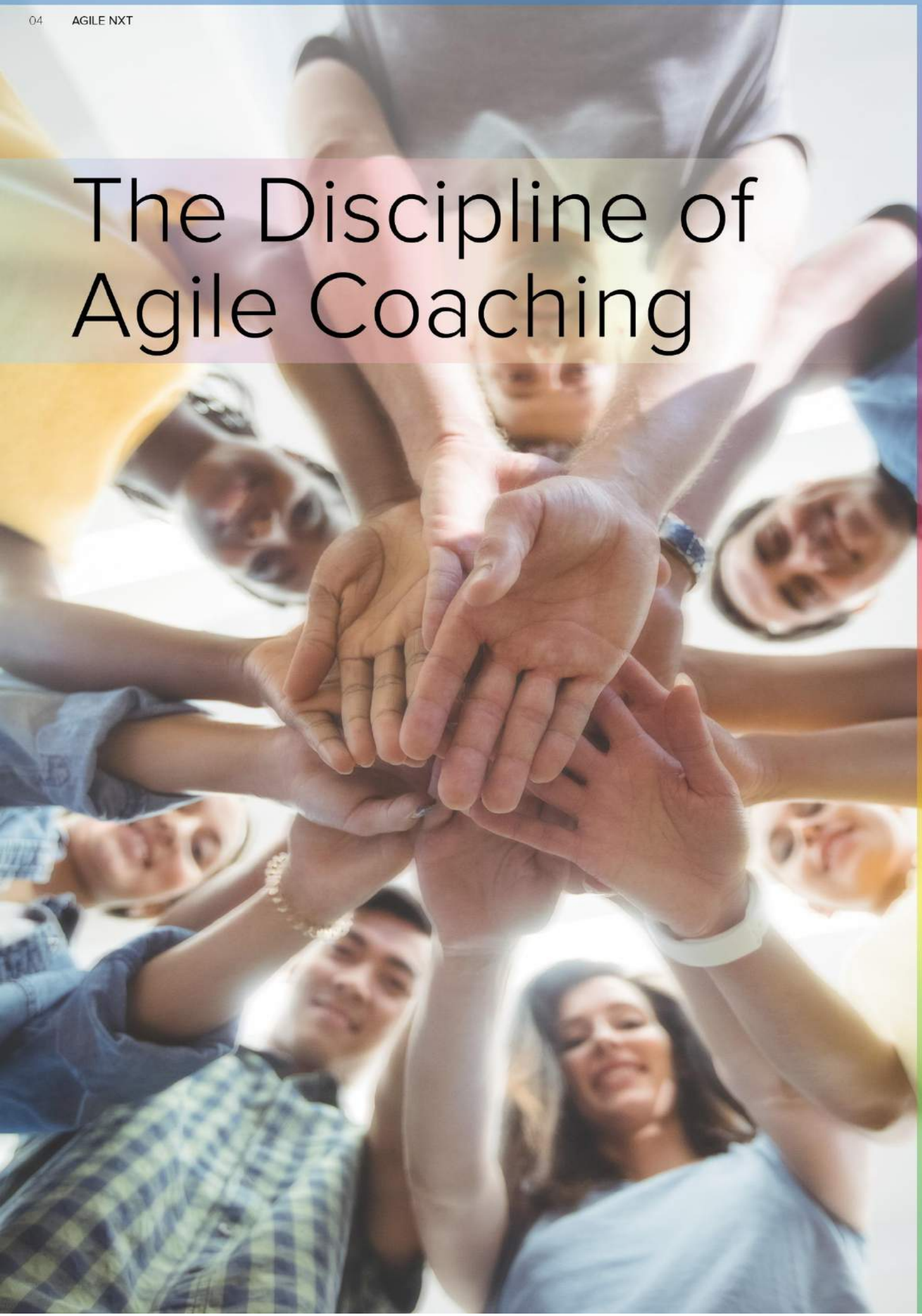
If the outcomes sought are broad and far reaching, then the boundary of that change needs to be drawn inclusive of all the people needed to drive that change. If the outcomes are narrower and more focused on thinking of product development as a service, then the team involved should include only those people. Mistakes often happen when a change is decided because of broad context such as customer attrition, or product time to market but the implementation focuses on one element of the organization such as product development. It would be a bit like a Formula 1 team changing only the engine to fix their finish problem. That problem would require changes to many components of both the car, the preparation, race operations and even the strategy employed.

Bottom Line Is: Use Agile To Do Agile

It seems too simple but being effective in your agile transformation requires you to approach the problem as an agile problem. That means an empirical approach, with frequent inspection and the ability to adapt. The scope of the change should be not defined by traditional organizational boundaries but instead by the outcomes that the organization seeks. If the environment does not allow that, then change the outcomes to focus on ones that are within your ability to change. For example, if the dream is to deliver new products to market faster, but the only people that can be involved are the product development team, then change the boundary from the customer to the internal organization. Define a clear boundary within your ability to change. By providing a clear boundary, direction and empowering the teams to deliver the change the likelihood of success will be much greater. And of course, that boundary and scope can change based on empirical evidence in an agile way!

Dave West
CEO & Product Owner
Scrum.org

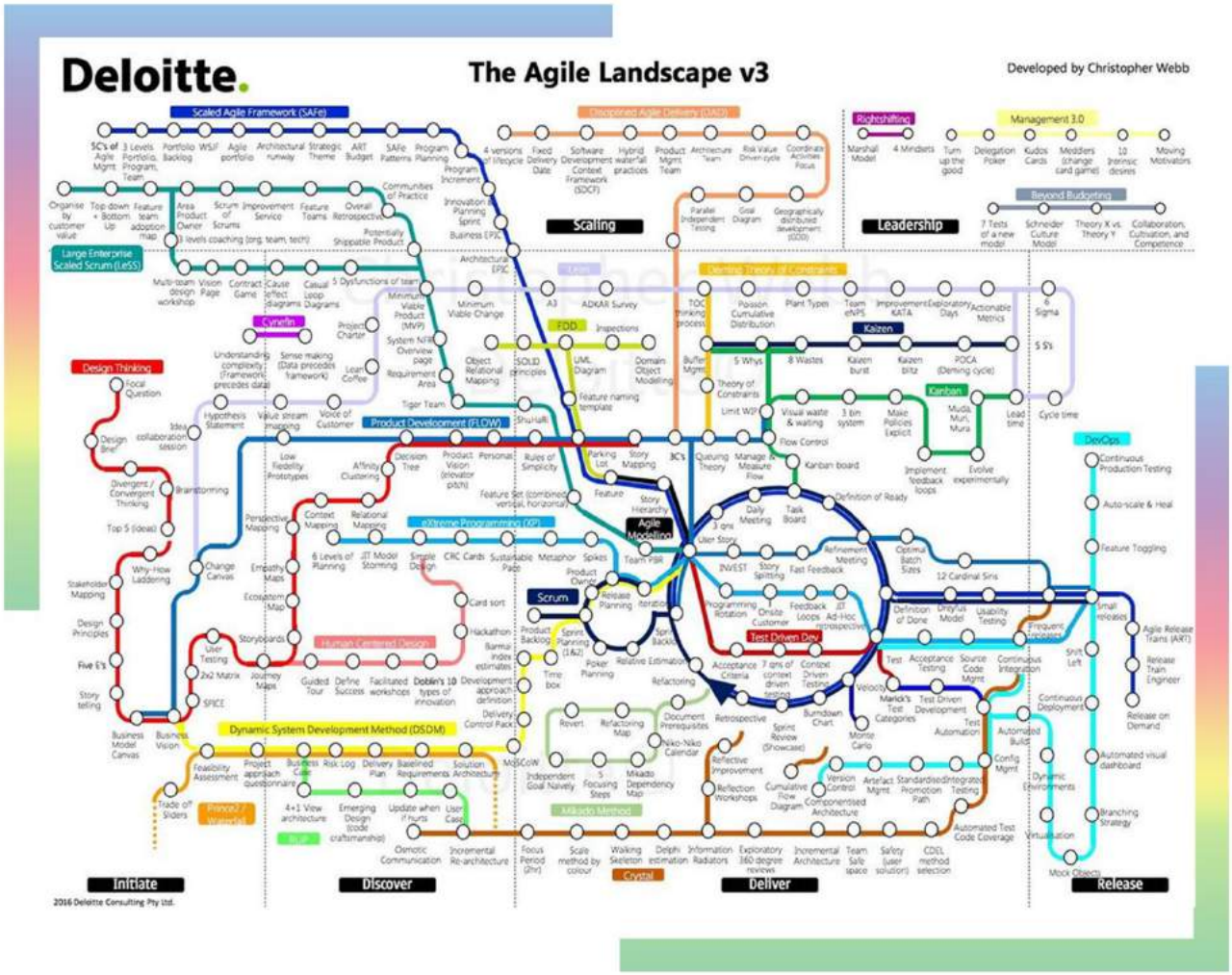
The Discipline of Agile Coaching



Why Agile Coaching

Agile software development has become the predominant approach to building software-intensive products today. According to the 2019 State of Agile survey, 96% of organisations are now using agile approaches to build their software. The success of agile approaches is moving outside of software development and into the wider business realms.

Adopting radically different ways of working is not easy and teams at every level need help and guidance as they embark on the new journey. The agile landscape is complex and can be confusing for new players (and sometimes for experienced players as well).



Deloitte published this subway map showing their interpretation of the agile landscape -
please don't try to read it!

Go Back to the Basics

Given such a complex environment, a common question is where do we start?

The best starting place is the original source - the Agile Manifesto which was published in 2001. The manifesto is a simple statement of four values and 12 principles that should underlie every agile method and approach.

Manifesto for Agile Software Development

We are uncovering better ways of developing
software by doing it and helping others do it.
Through this work we have come to value:

Individuals and interactions over processes and tools
Working software over comprehensive documentation
Customer collaboration over contract negotiation
Responding to change over following a plan

That is, while there is value in the items on
the right, we value the items on the left more.

Kent Beck
Mike Beedle
Arie van Bennekum
Alistair Cockburn
Ward Cunningham
Martin Fowler
James Grenning
Jim Highsmith
Andrew Hunt
Ron Jeffries
Jon Kern
Brian Marick
Robert C. Martin
Steve Mellor
Ken Schwaber
Jeff Sutherland
Dave Thomas

The challenge for organisations is how to retain the simplicity inherent in the manifesto in the face of the complexity of practices and approaches that have evolved over the 18 years since the manifesto was written.

Enter the agile coach - an agile coach is an experienced practitioner who has worked with multiple organisations and/or teams to help them adopt and adapt their practices as they embrace the mindset of agility. Deeply grounded in the values and principles of the Agile Manifesto, the coach is able to help make sense in the face of complexity, draws on their knowledge of agile practices and frameworks and supports individuals, teams and the whole organisation in their journey to new ways of thinking and working.

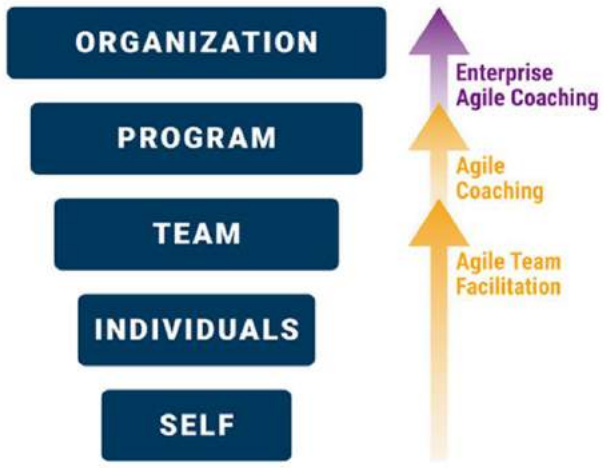
An agile coach is akin to a sports coach - they understand the rules of the game, the nuances of the practices and what it takes to achieve success for the team. They provide guidance, challenge thinking, point out possible alternatives and facilitate learning in the teams they work with.

It's certainly possible to achieve agility without having a coach, but bringing in a coach can smooth the transition, help avoid some common mistakes and accelerate the time to value from the organisation's investment in new ways of working.

What Agile Coaching Is and What it Isn't

Agile coaches work at different levels in the organisation - enterprise agile coaches work with leadership teams and help them create an environment in which agility can flourish.

Team coaches work with individuals and teams to help imbed the agile mindset, guide the adoption of practices and encourage changes in the on-the-ground ways of working.



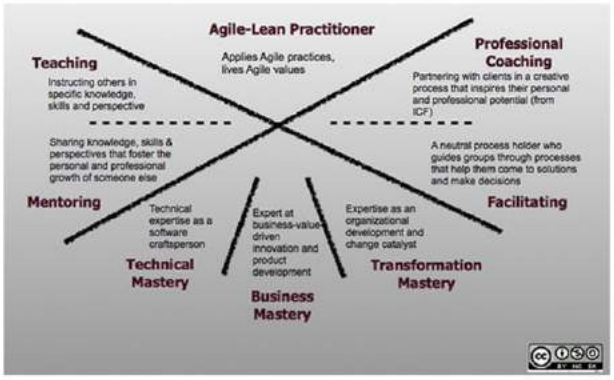
Agile coaching spans multiple disciplines and requires both breadth and depth of knowledge and experience.

According to the International Coaching Federation, coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.

The discipline of coaching has some key characteristics which include:

- Ethical guidelines & professional standards - coaches hold themselves to high ethical
- Establish trust
- Coaching presence
- Effective communication
- Facilitate learning & results
- Accountability

Agile coaching draws on the discipline of professional coaching and expands into other areas. The Agile Coaching Institute has published this framework for agile coaching:



The disciplines an agile coach needs to be proficient in are:

- Agile-Lean practitioner - to coach others, you need to have a deep understanding not just of the agile practices but of the intent behind every one of the practices and frameworks in use and how they link to the values and principles of the Agile Manifesto

- Teaching - they must be able to teach their teams new techniques and practices when needed

- Facilitation - they will frequently be called upon to facilitate collaborative sessions where the team is wrestling with a challenge or planning some activities

- Mentoring - they need to be generous in their sharing of knowledge, while respecting the individual's ownership of their own decision making

- Professional coaching - coaching competencies enable individuals and teams to solve their own problems effectively using powerful questioning and creating a safe space for experimentation and learning

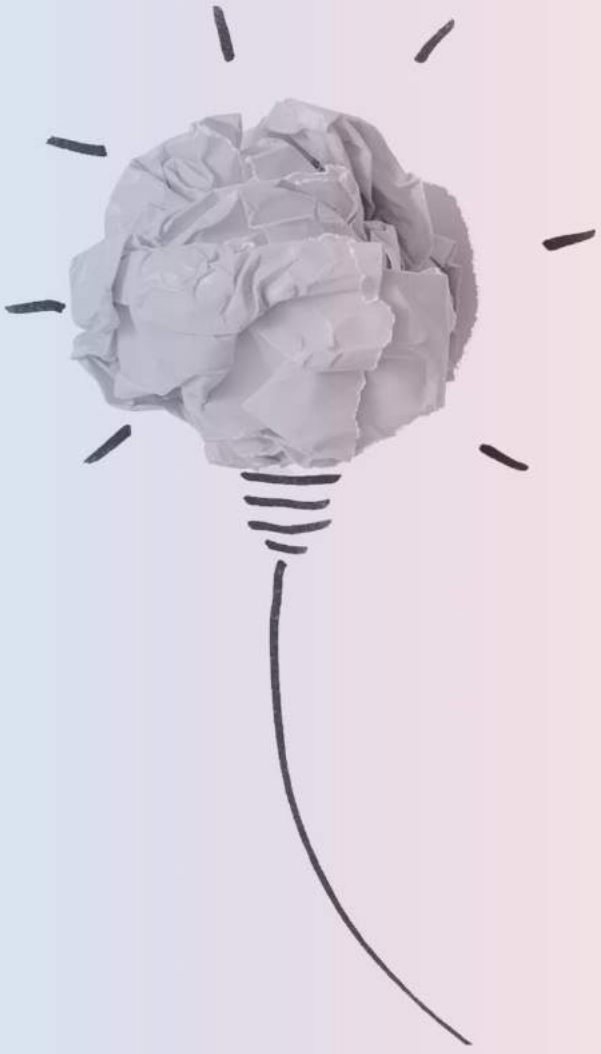
- Practice Mastery - an agile coach needs to have deep mastery in **at least one** of the practice areas (it is rare for one person to have mastery in all three aspects)

o Technical mastery - deep knowledge of the technical practices of the domain. They need to be able to show why the strong technical practices (for example pair programming in XP) are valuable and be able to apply the practices in the team's context, showing them through example how to build the product right

o Business mastery - deep product management and customer interaction skills are needed if you want to coach teams in dealing with the hard value-based trade-offs which are crucial to building the right product

o Transformation mastery - if you're working at the leadership level, advocating changes to organisation structures and policies you need a deep understanding of organisational design, how people and organisations adopt change, how to engender an environment of psychological safety

These are the foundational skills. In addition, agile coaches need to understand what drives and motivates people, how change happens for individuals and teams; they must have deep empathy with the teams they work with and care about others' success more than their own. Agile coaching is servant leadership personified.



The Journey to Become an Agile Coach

This track has two knowledge-based certifications leading to the competency based designation, ICAgile Certified Expert in Agile Coaching (ICE-AC).

Knowledge-based certifications.
The silver flags indicate knowledge-based certifications which require some evidence of knowledge acquisition in the classroom. These certifications are intended to be motivational and can be achieved through active participation in the learning experience, they are not hard to achieve but certification is not guaranteed - active participation is required. The reason for this level of certification is to acknowledge that people are on a learning pathway and to give them recognition for taking the steps. These certifications are named "ICAgile Certified Professional" with the certification name (e.g., ICP-ATF is ICAgile Certified Professional in Agile Team Facilitation and ICP-ACC is ICAgile Certified Professional in Agile Coaching). Completing the knowledge-based certifications does not mean that the person is a competent agile coach - just that they have begun a journey towards mastery.

Competency-based certification.
The ICE-AC certification, which is at the top of the agile coaching track is competency-based and it is hard to achieve. To earn ICAgile Expert status you have to not only show knowledge in the area, but you must also demonstrate competency to a panel of existing experts in a live session where you actively coach someone who has a real challenge they need help with. The story of my personal journey to ICE-AC (ICagile Expert in Agile Coaching) can be found here. The bar for ICE is high, and 60% of people who take the assessment fail on their first attempt. The assessor panels provide open and honest feedback to the candidates which gives them clarity on where they need to build their competencies and knowledge.

One Pathway to Mastery

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Shu
beginner

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Ha
experienced practitioner

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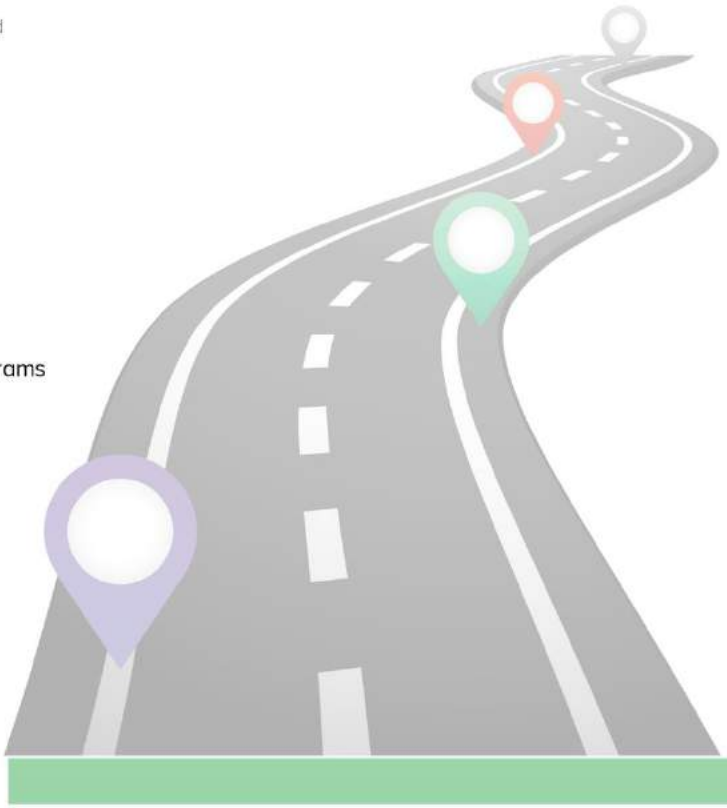
Ri
master practitioner

Certifications are steps on a journey, and mastery in coaching is a journey which requires significant ongoing personal investment. Achieving the knowledge-based certifications are a good start, followed by deliberate practice (ideally under the guide of a trusted mentor). A professional coach needs to be constantly looking for new tools to add to their toolbelt, learning new practices and coaching techniques in order to expand their usefulness to the teams they coach and guide. Deepening skills in the coaching discipline through additional study and widening the skills they have in the technical areas.

If you have a deep passion for enabling the success of others and genuinely care about improving outcomes for individuals, teams and organisations, then becoming an agile coach could be just what you need to help achieve personal fulfilment in your own career. A good starting point could be talking to the people at Xebia about their certification classes in agile coaching.

Shane Hastie
Director of Agile Learning Programs
ICAGILE



Crafting Quality Code

Why does crafting quality code becomes imperative in SW industry/ all the fields we are in today? An initial check on the internet will easily throw you an indicator, **close to 75% of an engineer's time is spent in understanding the code.** This also reflects the complexities we create in the code. In Philips with our Software Center of Excellence we are addressing some of these issues and helping in crafting quality code as a culture in the organization.

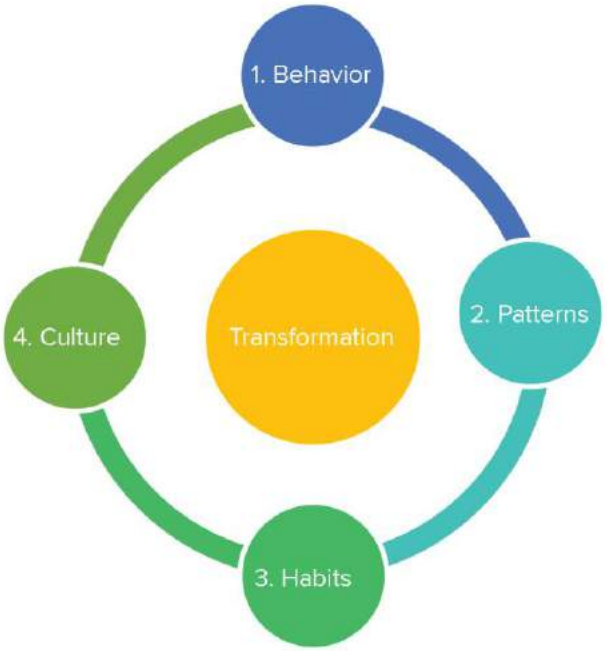
Our behaviors reflect our culture. For any new initiatives to be successful, we need to understand the culture of the team/work place/environment.

As you see from the picture here, **Behaviors** drive patterns in an organization. Clean code practices need strong support both from teams and leaders. It begins like the basic **"boys scout rule-"** keeping the place more cleaner than we found it. When leaders and managers take a step towards talking the developer language and are seen being closer to code, newer and healthy, **Patterns** starts spreading across. This quickly becomes a **Habit** over a period of time and we see individuals/leaders/managers get rewarded (or become successful) by demonstrating these habits. Harvesting such Habits continually ushers in the (clean code quality) **Culture** of the organization.

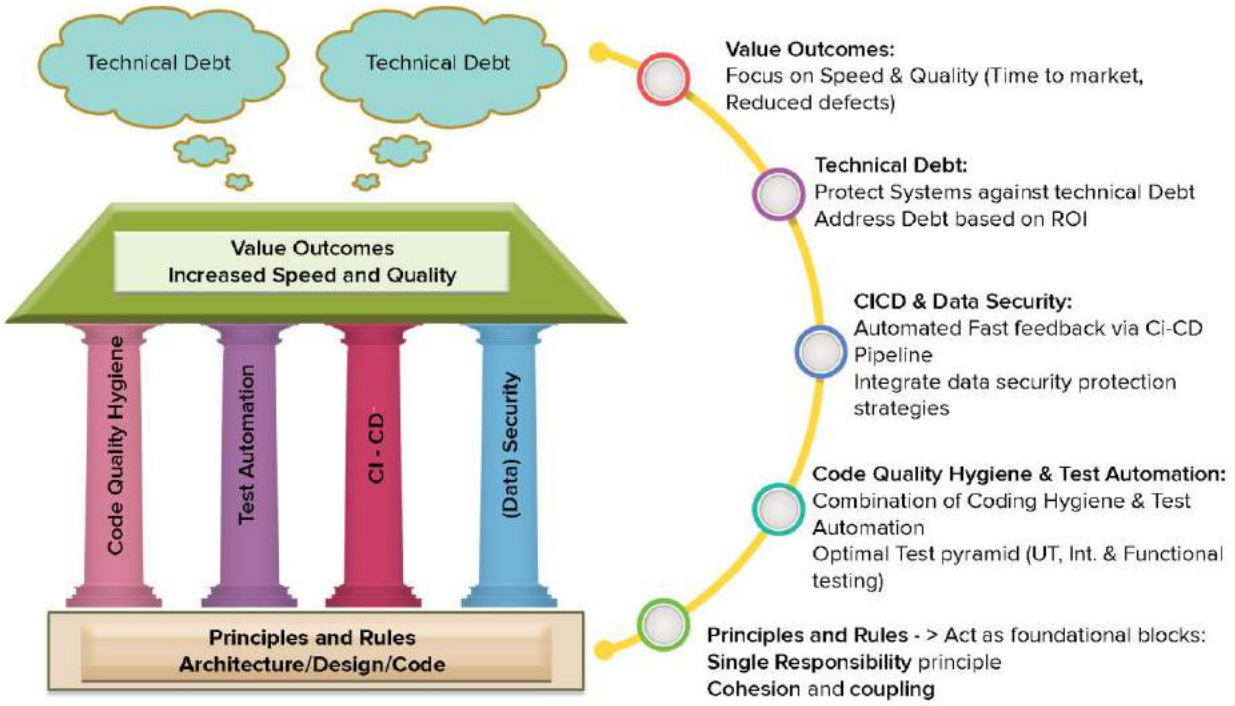
Now our task is to support inculcating some of these clean code behaviors within the teams at all levels, enabling value delivery **transformation.** These new behaviors become patterns, leading to habits and resulting in a **culture** of 'speed and quality'.

With our tagline **Better, Faster and Forever,** we have defined and deployed the below simple and effective framework to spread the clean code practices in Philips organization. Please refer to the below diagram 'Crafting Quality Code'. Short descriptions are enclosed for the blocks represented.

The depiction reflects the focus towards realizing value outcomes in terms of speed and quality by adhering to a set of robust practices with 'Principles and rules as foundation and the house supported by multitude of pillars like Code quality, Test automation, CICD pipeline and Data Security aspects. Technical debt is reflected as weather cloud, so that the house is always guarded against creating (new) Technical debt which slows down development and results in decreased productivity.



Note: The depiction of the various elements is not a complete list. Choose the parameters that will result in the maximum value outcomes for your organization



Principles and Rules: Architecture/Design/Code

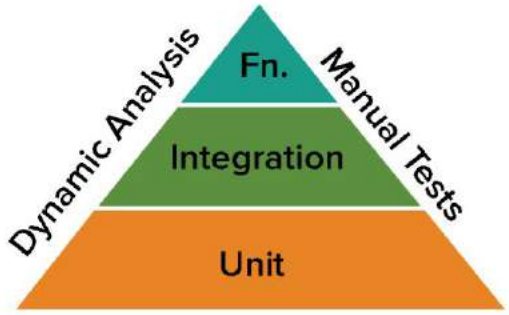
They act as the guiding principles and the applicable standards (e.g.: Coding guidelines) on which our work of art needs to 'pivot and adapt'. It is recommended that the rules and architecture elements are baselined and the reference map is integrated in the CI-CD pipe and advanced tools are used to throw violations and alert developers (including build breaks when rules are violated). E.g. Create functionally independent modules which performs single task or function resulting in high cohesion and low/minimal dependency.

Code Quality Hygiene:

The elements covered here are compiler warnings, Static analysis warning checks (e.g. Sonar Qube), Dead and Duplicate code elimination and zero tolerance towards them. A policy of "all warnings to be treated as errors" is a good tolerance indicator. Code Review is another important aspect, which is a great way of transferring knowledge amongst the teams and detects issues at the source of creation. Duplicate and dead code when left undetected bloats the code base and creates maintenance havoc over a period of time. CPD tool (Copy/Paste detector) comes in handy to detect and eliminate duplicates.

- **Test Automation:**

For Illustration a simple Test pyramid is given:



- **Unit Tests:** Forms the base of the pyramid. They are the easiest and cheapest way of detecting and fixing bugs near the source of creation

- **Integration tests:** Merging/Combining group of components and modules and performing tests. A caution: As the dependency increases, the focus on Unit testing (UT) is lost as we move to large component and integration tests, losing the much needed focus on UT's

- **Functional/system tests:** Testing the system against its intended use or the user requirements.

- **Dynamic analysis:** Tests performed to check and measure behavior of applications in run-time. Analyzing and measuring performance in a variety of services (e.g.: JMeter as load testing tool)

A high level of automation is recommended and should be integrated in the CI-CD (continuous integration –continuous deployment) pipeline. Manual tests are the ones, which require user intervention.

- **Beware:** Map your tests against the various levels of the pyramid (including the percentage of automation) and check, how your test pyramid looks like. If your pyramid looks like an inverted cone its time of serious introspection!!!

CI-CD Pipeline:

All the code quality and test automation aspects are to be integrated in the CI-CD pipeline. The key intent is to have faster feedback to developers. Build times are to be made faster and build issues are to be addressed and resolved as early as possible.

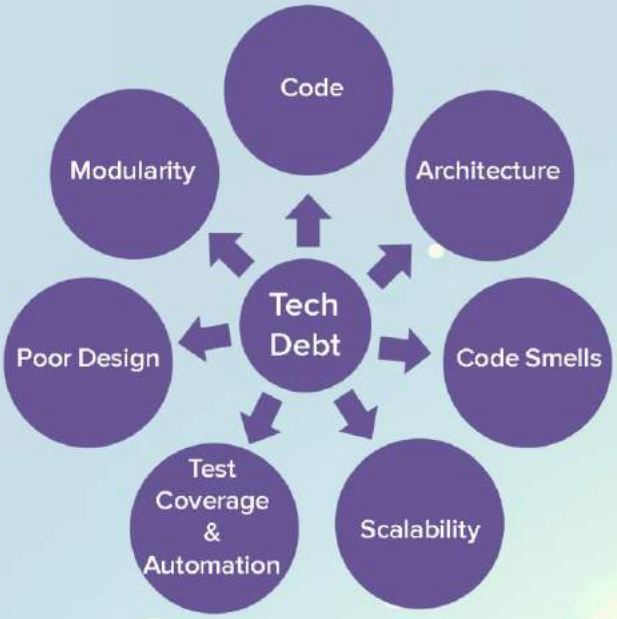
(Data) Security:

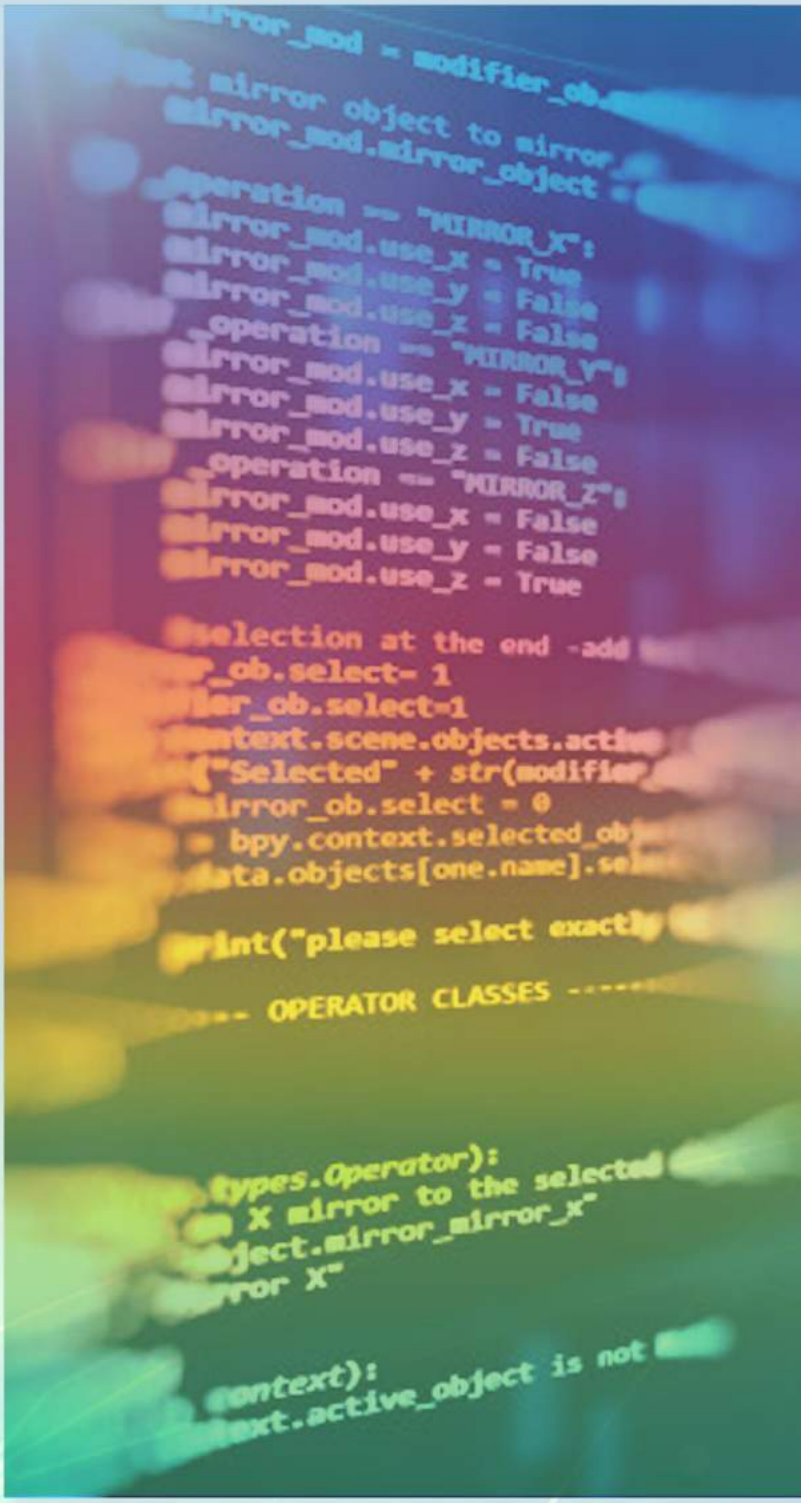
In the medical industry protecting patient data information against piracy and theft ranks very high. With the multitude of laws governing rights of individuals, the onus is very high on the product and legal manufactures to ensure data security aspects are well protected. (e.g.: HP Fortify tool acts as both for static analysis checks and security vulnerability scanning)

Technical debt:

Many SW companies are working towards reduction of technical debt. Technical debt in the picture is depicted as a 'weather cloud', which we need to guard ourselves against, at all times.

Technical debt is a measure of cost-of-change and risk-of-defects. Like a financial debt, the technical debt incurs interest payments which comes in the form of extra effort that we have to do in future development https://martinfowler.com/bliki/TechnicalDebt.html
Look for aspects of technical practices that slows down/increases risk of defects. Prioritization of technical debt is key (safe-guarding current delivery)





Value Outcomes:

The key value outcomes by focusing on the parameters discussed above will be

a) Time to market (speed of our delivery)
b) Quality (Reduced defects and cost of non-quality)

A by-product of Speed and Quality would be Productivity improvements as we reduce the waste in the system

With the implementation of the above, the initial results have started to flow down in our development and this is definitely a path well-travelled. Let us all come together in crafting quality code, and share our learnings in this improvement journey.

Sundaresan Jagadeesh
Director, Philips India Limited

Art of Innovation & Role of Leadership in Innovation

In today's competitive world, with disruptive market, shorter timeline and reduced budget, the conventional leadership style of command and control, planning and running behind fixed plans do not really work. It is imperative that leaders adopt a different model of working— a model that embraces the three elements of intrinsic motivation: autonomy, mastery and purpose as theorized by Daniel Pink in his book Drive.

Devdutt Pattnaik, the way he connects the Indian mythology with Management, explains the new role of leaders in a lucid and logical manner. He says that there are two aspects of the world:

1) Prakruthi (nature)
2) Samskruthi (culture)

Prakruthi refers to the forest, the land where the rule of "The Might is right" exists. This is like the market place where organizations innovate and build businesses.

The leaders of the today's enterprises need to think of a new model as explained by Devdutt Pattanaik beautifully in Lord Krishna's "Raasa Leela". In an episode of "Raasa Leela", all the Gopikas go to the forest at night. Although the forest is dangerous, these women willingly go to Prakruthi and perform a dance. The dance takes place in a circle, equidistant from the Lord. Despite being aware of the dangers, the Golpkas voluntarily move and perform the dance with Bhakthi and devotion.

Prakruthi
The might is right. Animal culture.

Samaskruthi
Rules and Policies govern. All are equal.

Samskruthi means the land of culture where the rules are made to treat everyone equally.
This is likened to organizations where everyone must be treated equally. Although we need to live in constructs, true innovation happens only in the forest. However, the forest is scary and full of wild animals, which is equivalent to competing in the market space. While Prakruthi is uncertainty, Samskruthi is certainty. Humans like to live in certainty knowing that living in uncertainty is simply not possible.

In a similar way, today's leaders must empower their organizations to take risks and move from comfort to vulnerable zone. Like Gopikas, the team members must voluntarily move to the Nature and enjoy their work like the way gopikas do with their dance. While Gopikas dance with Bhakthi, the teams solve problems with "Passion". Like Lord Krishna, leaders must manifest themselves in different forms to deal with various facets of enterprise agility and allow the teams to perform and enjoy the journey.

As a leader, when employees approach you with an idea, do not ridicule it and look for reasons why it would not work. Rather, help the employee identify the possible barriers and encourage him or her to think of possible solutions. Leaders should also foster an environment where innovation can take place by giving employees a few hours to work on projects besides their jobs.

Promote autonomy by giving employees the motivation and freedom to do things their own way. As humans, we thrive for sunlight and certainty, without realizing that millions of galaxies can be found only at night. Enabling teams to deal with innovation without the fear of failure is the next big leap in modern organization leadership.

Anand Murthy Raj
Founder,
Director Agile Spirit Pvt Ltd.

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Problem

problem (noun)

a matter or situation regarded as unwelcome or harmful and needing to be dealt with and overcome.

People usually refer to agility as the speed with which an individual, a team, or an organization can respond to a change. In my opinion, this does a great disservice to what agility truly means. The key to agility is not just responding to any change or perceived risk, but taking a moment to understand: Is this really a problem, and is it worth my time?

Problems make us uncomfortable. Problems are a reminder that all is not well in this world. It could be as simple as running out of coffee in the morning or a report not sent on time to the boss, sometimes it could be a machinery breakdown or a neighboring country plotting the third world war or perhaps dealing with the spouse's frown and raised eyebrows. The point here, is, whether it is about an individual or a corporation, the environment is fluid and ever changing, presenting new challenges on a day to day basis. Old models of engagement are no longer efficient or effective.

Embracing problems, then, is not a choice to be evaded, but to be met head on. We encounter, on a daily basis, what appear to be problems that need solving. It is practically embedded into our job description: "Problem solver", "Manages risk well" et cetera. So, in this continuously changing milieu, what does one do?

This is our first instinct when we encounter a problem:
1. **Denial** – It is not my problem, ergo, someone else's problem.
2. **Anger** – What the heck did <insert least favorite colleague here> do this time?
3. **Bargaining** – I will do anything to avoid this.
4. **Depression** – This never happened to the other fella. (Sad face)
5. **Acceptance** – (Rolls up sleeves, wipes eyebrow, bares claws) Bring It On!

By this time, you are in full Wolverine mode and you are ready to slice your way through a million henchmen, except that... there are no henchmen within a mile of where you are standing. Your colleagues are staring at you, while you have gone all wild-eyed, nostrils flared, mouth frothing... you get the picture. Which is why, the moment we hear a problem, we immediately start thinking of solutions. Our natural instinct is to rustle up a solution the moment we get a whiff of a problem. Ironically, that is where the problem lies (no pun intended). This is when we run into the wall known as the 'curse of knowledge'. A wall, more commonly known as **Bias.**

Biases are a colored lens to view and process the problem

Biases are mental shortcuts (also known as **heuristic**) that result in the human brain trying to simplify information processing. Biases help us make sense of the world and take decisions speedily, especially during dangerous circumstances. The world is infinitely more complex than when early man walked the earth, and the amount of information we are bombarded with on a continuous basis is too much for the human brain to logically process. Such mental shortcuts help us navigate the complexity and take decisions more quickly, effectively and decisively.

Biases affect creativity & innovation

Biases can help us process the information faster. But they are also guilty of **reinforced behavior** since they rely on our past experiences, logical reasoning, preferences and beliefs. This leads to errors in our thinking. The more successful our previous decisions have been, the harder it becomes to consider the alternatives.
The inability to identify and assess the alternatives lead us down a preset path, causing mistakes repetitively. We use our 'instincts' to take decisions, and rationalize any failures on external factors, not realizing the inherent bias guiding the decision making process. The result is a negative impact on our creative and innovative thinking. People then end up trying to solve the wrong problem while ignoring critical flaws, repeating the patterns time and again.

Tackling the real problem

Interestingly, a solution was presented over a century ago by Mahatma Gandhi—one of the greatest thinkers of the 20th century, he saw people grappling with information becoming industrialized in the age of telegraph, train, and steamships. Scraps of information began bombarding people, making the pace more frenetic. The parallels with today's fragmented, frantic data snippets begging, nay demanding, immediate consumption cannot be ignored. Gandhi, sharing his thoughts through his newspaper in South Africa, urged his readers to **slow down** their pace of reading. He gave his readers extensive instructions on how best to read, urging attentive and careful reading and re-reading. Gandhi asked his readers to modify the act of reading into a **discipline**, to digest the ideas before rushing into conclusions.

Not every problem requires an immediate solution. When a problem manifests, the aim is to **not** charge forward, but to take a step back. Stop, take a deep breath, and look at it as a curiosity, not as an issue. A good night's sleep would not hurt either. Return to, and reconsider, ideas that may have been initially struck down as impractical or inconclusive. We do not spend enough time experimenting, as we do with minimizing risks and avoiding failures. When we do something and it works as expected, it could be called successful, but we do not learn much. Learning only happens when we explore something unexpected and a breakthrough happens. Breakthroughs are unexpected outcomes. They have the potential to fundamentally change what we do and how we quantify success. The trick is to try out small, incremental experiments that minimize big failures. Analyze the outcome to understand why and how it came about.
A problem is nothing more than an unexplored opportunity. Learn to love the problem first, so that you can love the solution later on.

"It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer."
- Albert Einstein

Abhay Aggarwal
Enterprise Agile Coach, Xebia

Yesterday's Competitive Advantage is Today's Industry Standard

To meet the digital demand of the 21st century, an increasing number of companies have chosen the Agile business model. Cloud-native systems, embracing social media, mobile platforms, continuous feedback, the predictive capabilities of (big) data, and other technologies all are extensions of this organizational transformation.

Agile is a mindset that guides every aspect of collaboration and is not limited to any one part of an organization. In its broadest sense, Agile is a business model, an operational structure that offers organizations the tools and capabilities they need to react swiftly and efficiently to the fluctuations, and disruptive or relevant trends of the market.

The speed of digitalization today requires a higher degree of agility, adaptability, and flexibility at every level - from the organizational structure and culture, down to its IT architecture. For this reason, an organization's Agile business model must be comprehensive, with learning and adapting built in as essential to its survival.

Teams must be able to function "ad hoc" wherever and whenever necessary, without dated hierarchical or monolithic structures getting in their way. Operational response time can't be hindered by legacy-systems or inferior digital tools. These are no longer optional improvements.

Yesterday's competitive advantage is today's industry standard.

It's not enough to merely shape, organize, guide, or lead your organization in a particular direction. Agile has become the new standard.

Rapid Development

Since the turn of the century, the world has changed tremendously, requiring significant adaptations in how we manage and transform our organizations for future success. Sometimes, its good to pause and appreciate these changes, particularly how quickly the movement towards more flexibility and maneuverability has progressed.

Now, in 2018, as organizations embrace the next phase of their Agile maturity, new questions are arising, such as:

- What's the difference in effectiveness and ROI within the organization when a certain framework is chosen?
- Is it advisable to choose a variety of Agile business models for the diversity of value streams and types of activities within the organization?
- Which metrics need to be set up to enable continuous recalibration and adjustment?
- What's being overlooked if the promised added value hasn't manifested from the organization and teams after a number of years of working Agile?
- What should the target operating model look like in order to be fit for purpose in 2020, or 2025?

We're now at the point where there has been sufficient experimentation in all business functions to fully complete a high performance version of the Agile organization puzzle. In 2019, we anticipate seeing the first consistently Agile company throughout the entire organization, including all the necessary metrics and feedback loops.

The following timeline illustrates the speed of Agile's development in less than two decades:

2001 - A group of thought leaders from the software development world who felt things needed to be done differently penned "The Agile Manifesto." They didn't agree on much else, except for the intrinsic value of being "agile."

2007 - In response to the growing alignment they saw between business and IT, a group of business and IT professionals from Xebia launched the earliest versions of Agile consulting and training.

2011 - The first organizational Agile transformations began to occur in the Netherlands, establishing end-to-end teams that were responsible from ideation through a product or service's life cycle. Applying customer/user feedback became central to this process.

2014 - People outside IT product development began experimenting with Agile, applying its principles and methodologies in their own domains. Wait times were significantly improved, and handovers were reduced through this new method of collaboration. Campaigns that had previously taken four to six months to develop were suddenly completed and delivered within a few weeks.

2015 - From this year and on, staff departments such as HR, finance, risk and compliance, and procurement began working in an Agile way. After that, organizations gradually started embracing Agile in their entire omnichannel strategy - from call centers that provide customer service to physical locations offering information, advice, and sales.

2018 - Agile's next wave begins.

Optimize

The next step in optimizing the Agile business model is an old challenge. Organizations must find ways to achieve genuine collaboration with business partners. The "war for talent" and value creation must move beyond the egocentric, win or lose battle.

As the world is increasingly confronted with diminishing resources and raw materials, it's time to look for ecosystems in which humanity's survival comes before maximizing profit. This necessitates a network of high-performance cells fitting seamlessly with other high-performance cells, which together, constitute the whole.

Over the past few years, a few important prerequisites to realizing the Agile promise have become apparent:

1. A clear vision and objective must be implemented and supported throughout the entire organization.
2. Continuous learning and improvement based on feedback and interaction with customers, users, own employees and systems.
3. An organization (and its architecture) must be easy to navigate and (dis) connect; a network of end-to-end responsible, autonomous teams and self-contained services.
4. Processes and structure must be able to continuously adapt to changing circumstances.
5. Aspire to an engineering culture for all; with a "can-do" mindset characterized by enthusiasm and inspiration.
6. Challenge professionals to continually develop; provide the space for them to experiment and innovate to stay fit for purpose.
7. Automate repetitive operations to prevent errors wherever possible.
8. Measures all activities for effectiveness and make continuous adjustments possible.
9. Reduce complexity across the organization and in its products and services; create strength through simplicity.

Realizing perfect, holistic collaboration is paramount. Principles, people, technology, leadership, strategy, structure, and cooperation work in synchronized harmony. Keep the old adage in mind, "*Agile is about working smarter, rather than harder. It's not about doing more work in less time: it's about generating more value with less work.*"

Edwin Oldenbeuving,
Principal Consultant,
High-Performance Agile
Organizations

How to Choose a Good Scrum Master for Your Scrum Team?

Think about the industry practices that have been nurtured over the years by self-titled Agilists and sponsors of the transformation game—from traditional project management to Agile way of doing the job. Have we achieved any success? Does it justify spending millions of dollars? How do organizations measure ROI in their balance sheets? No one has definite answers to these questions. It is tough to measure the changes in terms of ROI. The consulting organizations make money through these transformation assignments without adding any real value.

Come to think of it, one of the reasons of failure could be attributed to the failure of the Scrum Master (Agile says "Fail Fast," but not at the cost of losing millions). This fundamentally highlights how we appoint the Scrum Master in the first place.

- How is the scrum master selected?
- Who selects him or her?
- Who should get involved in selecting the Scrum Master?
- What characteristics and traits should one look for when selecting a Scrum Master?

Let us explore, how it is practiced in our industry today as opposed to how it should actually happen.

Often, it is the management who appoints a person, whom they feel qualified for the job. The irony is, the management either knows little or they are completely ignorant of what the role entails. My experience says that instead of finding a role, we should look for the right person compatible for it. At times, the process of appointing the Scrum Master depends on the person who is on bench, we try to find a project to make him or her billable.

So, the question is—who should become the Scrum Master for your new team? Is it your current Project Manager, Tech Lead or the Functional Manager? I have my reservation against the current industry practices. I will pick none of the aforementioned roles.

Although, understandably, the management usually wants a standard answer for who they should select as the Scrum Master in this new work approach called "Agile," but it is not a one-size-fits-all answer. And the reason is, it depends on the person, the team and the environment. There are multiple factors that influence the selection of the person for the role. It cannot be a cookie-cutter approach, which is pretty much standardized. Even in the same organization across two teams, the selections could vary.

We commonly see Project Managers being given the role of a Scrum Master. However, a great Project Manager does not mean that he will fit well in that role. Often, the management wants Project Managers who can "get things done." They drive performance and push the team. They may even micro-manage for results and visibility by tracking every task, status, risk, change and deviation from the plan. Management loves this (or, truthfully, love the results). On the other hand, I have also seen Project Managers who provide the management with what they want (helping get more productivity and more visibility to progress, issues and options) by serving, empowering and trusting the team.

Some managers, due to their company's culture and expectations, carry the responsibility of getting results from their people (for the projects their people are involved with). For these managers, even if they wanted to embrace the trans-formative qualities of the Scrum Master, the company culture will push back, and most often win. For managers in these tough positions, one would rather see them find someone else to be the Scrum Master. The manager can then focus more time and energy toward a bigger need—being a heat shield, organizational impediment remover and management mindset and organizational culture change agent.

The problem is much larger than we can imagine or think of; many questions are unanswered and the answers that are correct or at least deemed right, the industry does not want to embrace them.

- What are the traits that we expect from a Scrum Master?
- Who decides the Scrum Master?
- How do we select a Scrum Master?
- What skills do we want in a Scrum Master?

Here are certain qualities to look for while selecting a Scrum Master:

- The person understands and practices servant leadership and facilitation.
- The person is in pursuit of continuous improvement.
- The person can build trust and confidence with his team members and stakeholders.
- The person is humble, thoughtful, collaborative in nature, knowledgeable in Scrum and other Agile practices.

I would suggest you to take such crucial decision to the team to see what they think. Certainly, prudence is needed here, but we should empower and trust the team to make an informed decision at the very beginning of adopting Scrum.

According to Scrum Cofounder, Dr. Jeff Sutherland, great Scrum Masters can come from virtually any background or discipline (engineering, design, testing, product management, journalism, academia, social work, etc.), and their role is relatively simple:

- Remove impediments
- Guide the team in Scrum practices
- Protect against outside interference

Getting all traits in a single person could be an impossible task. In such scenario, based on your critical success factors, choose the type of MVP (Minimum Viable Personality) for the Scrum Master role in your organization.

Ajay Kabra
Sr. Director, Xebia

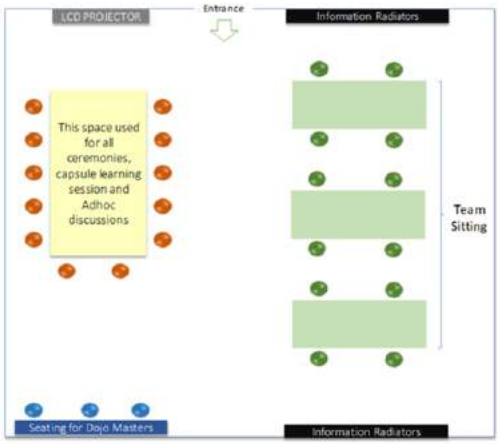
Creating effective and performant teams with DOJO

Agile software development philosophy and DevOps way of working has been ringing software development industry bells for while now. Organizations have invested money, time and effort in transforming to this new way of working. The conventional starting point for this journey has been to train individuals and teams on Agile frameworks, Devops tools & practices. Training by itself educates and creates awareness amongst the audience but has not proven to be an effective way of instilling belief of the benefits of what an individual learns.

Two years back an organization was creating a strategy to move the complete enterprise to Agile DevOps way of working. But the question was the same – what's the most prudent way to achieve the goal. One obvious low-cost option was to train everyone, but the consensus was this will be ineffective. Getting external consultants in large numbers was a high cost and high-risk option. The think tank after lot of exploration formulated an approach of 6 weeks to transform teams working on existing projects to the Agile DevOps culture. This approach was coined as DOJO.

What is DOJO? It's a dedicated space where teams come for six weeks of intensive skill building towards learning Agile-DevOps. They learn to do things in a different way, more effectively but not necessarily faster. Think of it as an incubator on steroids – the ultimate testing ground for teams learning Agile-Devops in the most hand-on possible way. It's a six-week course in which teams hyper-sprint (3-day Sprints). The idea is to provide teams with muscle memories so that when they transition back to the work environment and its time do sprint planning, daily scrum they know what it means. It's a paradigm shift of moving the focus of organizations from project based to product-based culture. In an organization against 10 products there were 100 projects going at a point in time. To increase the ability to prioritize, and focus on the highest value items, having a product inclination is important.

For me it all started when this organization approach Xebia to pilot this program. For this they needed DOJO Masters – the coaches who could enable the team to learn Agile-Devops practices and culture. Xebia formed a team of 3 DOJO Masters who had a combined expertise in Scrum, Software craftsmanship, QA automation and DevOps.
A start date was agreed with the customer. About 2-3 weeks before the program start date, DOJO masters did a chartering exercise designed to both explain the teams what the DOJO is and make sure that the team is a good match for it. A dedicated space was setup to accommodate the complete the team and the DOJO Masters. The layout was designed to cater to the collaborative working.



For a convenient read and better understanding for the readers, I shall detail the what happened in 6 weeks in a chronological order:

WEEK 1

On Day 1, after the initial introduction sessions team discussed and finalized the learning goals. The learning goals were -How to write effective unit tests, React.js, Continuous integration through Jenkins, Story Writing, how to deliver in short sprints, Efficient Planning and Functional test automation. The Sprint schedule and cadence plan for a 3-day Sprint (shown below) was decided in consultation with all the stakeholders. Topics for 1-hour Dojo sessions were also agreed with the team. Calendars were blocked for each ceremony till Sprint 9.

Day 2 started with the first Sprint planning meeting in which only one story was refined. This happened due to unavailability of the PO and the inability of any other person in answering to team's clarification. Daily stand up on Day 3 was a first time one and the DOJO master gave a detailed walkthrough on how a model stand up should happen. The team was educated on relative estimation through story points during Backlog refinement for Sprint 2. Out of the 8 stories discussed, 2 stories were sized in story points. Dojo master worked with the team to create a technical SPIKE. On the last day of the sprint 1 (Day 4), none of the stories was completed 7 action items were decided during the retrospective. Sprint 2 started on Day 5 and 13 stories were planned. DOJO Master highlighted that the amount of work was too much for the team to complete but the team was confident in delivering all.

	DAY 1		DAY 2		DAY 3	
	1st Half	2nd Half	1st Half	2nd Half	1st Half	2nd Half
Sprint Planning	10:30 to 11:30					
Daily Scrum			10:30 to 10:45		10:30 to 10:45	
Sprint Review						5:00 to 5:30
Sprint Retrospective						5:30 to 6:00
Refinement				4:00 to 5:00		
Dojo session				5:00 to 6:00		

WEEK 2

The stand-up in Sprint 2 had 70% of attendance and team understood why it was crucial to have the complete team. Some of the dependent tasks could not be discussed and the risk of not delivering the commitment was highlighted by the DOJO masters. Team decided to move away from the Visual task board and have the JIRA board projected for the next stand-up. JIRA compliance was very low since the team was not updating tasks and not updating the remaining work for each story in progress. On Day 3 of Sprint 2, the stand-up had complete attendance, and this was the first sign of improvement. Since the stand-up was conducted through JIRA, some team members updated JIRA before the stand-up. Code Review practice was established during the Sprint and the DOJO master demoed the pull request concept. Few developers were coached on how to write effective unit tests by Technical DOJO master. 2 stories were completed & demoed out of the 7 committed stories. Agile DOJO master took 30 min additional at this moment to explain the relevance of clearly written acceptance criteria. Also, the team was educated with the concept of Definition of Done. During the Sprint Retrospective, 3 action items emerged. Sprint Planning for Sprint 3 was well conducted by the Scrum Master. Definition of Done was finalized with team agreeing on Unit testing and Code Review as part of DoD. DOJO master conducted a 1-hour JIRA session and made the team understand what the essential inputs are required by them to be updated in the tool. Jenkins session was also conducted to explain the setup and configuration of Jenkins. The intent was to operationalize it from Sprint 4. 2/9 stories were completed at the end of Sprint 3 and the team by now very well understood the main reasons for not meeting commitment. Firstly, there were a lot of integration and merge issues and this was due to working Silos and the incorrect ways adopted by the team to write unit test cases. Secondly, the team did not ask relevant questions during the planning to further refine the story and this resulted in ambiguity in the acceptance. DOJO masters stressed the importance of refactoring the code.

WEEK 3

QA Dojo master educated the team and worked with them setup the automation framework, train the team to write test cases in JavaScript and ensure the ready test cases get executed upon successful deployment to the QA environment. Agile Dojo master worked with Product owner during Sprint 4 (called as Refactoring Sprint) and refined stories for next 2 sprints. He introduced some story splitting techniques and educated the PO how to prioritize the stories. He also guided the PO to create a Vision and roadmap for the product. This exercise was done to bring clarity to the thought process of the PO. Technical Dojo master worked with the team in refactoring the existing code. Jenkins was integrated with the build tool and Dashboards were created for Jenkins and JIRA. The team was able to close all retrospective action items of Sprint 3 as an outcome of Sprint 4.

WEEK 4

To keep up the momentum, Agile Dojo master introduced a 10 min huddle concept at 4:30 PM in the evening. This was to keep the focus and remind everyone on the daily goals that are required to meet the Sprint goal. A buzzer bell was run 3 times every day to remind the team to update JIRA. During Sprint 5 review, 4 out of the 5 stories were developed but 2 out of them failed the code review process. DOJO masters enforced this discipline and only 2 stories were demoed and were approve by the Product owner. The last important practice introduced was pair programming. Till now team had been hesitant in adopting this but by now the natural trust in the evolving process encouraged them to try this as well. Sprint 6 commitment was to develop and deliver 7 stories and improve on 5 retrospective action items. By now the planning session had become quite smooth with the Scrum Master taking control of the process from the Dojo masters.

WEEK 5

5/7 stories were delivered by Sprint 6 end and 4/5 retrospective action items were closed. Pair programming did wonders for the team's productivity. It helped the team to break the silos of working individually on one functionality and shortened the code review process due to better collaboration while coding and writing unit tests. Sprint 6 was the first time when there was tacit sense of satisfaction amongst everyone involved in the DOJO program. The concept of quick sprints in a focused environment now seemed a success to all.

WEEK 6

The last week focused on sustaining the momentum. Sprint 7 helped in deriving a stable velocity since 4/5 stories got delivered. With 10 to 12 stories points delivered in both Sprint 6 and 7, PO felt comfortable in forecasting. The last sprint review had all 5 stories demoed but only 4 stories were approved by the PO. There was retrospective of 1 hour conducted on the last day and the feedback was overwhelming. The Happiness Index of the team was 4.8 out of 5. 6 out 7 learning objectives was completely achieved with one of them (learning React JS) being partially achieved. With celebrations ending the DOJO program, it had been an overwhelming experience for all direct and indirect participants.

The experience was amazing and satisfying for me as an individual too. There was a sense of accomplishment that we could make a difference to individuals, build strong team dynamics and embed a culture of self-learning amongst the individuals who were part of the 6-week intensive learning program. This methodology is recommended for enterprises who would like to scale the practices and spread the culture across globally distributed teams. The best is to introduce this program progressively so that organizations get to learn from each DOJO program and can fine tune the next ones in the spirit of being agile.

Pranav Barar
Principal Consultant, Xebia

Using Brain Science to Boost Your Scrum Events

As an Agile coach with a passion for Scrum (and mother of three!), I'm always on the lookout for innovative ways to boost and develop personal and professional mastery. I recently attended a powerful training, "Training From the Back of the Room Back of the Room," devised by Sharon L. Bowman. It teaches you how the human brain works in a learning setting like a training or workshop. I discovered some interesting differences between traditional and brain-based learning that also apply in the workplace. This article describes some of the concepts I learned and how you can apply "brain science" to make your Scrum events more effective.

The Brain

The human brain has three parts which all have their own functions. The "reptile brain" is the primary brain which holds all primary life functions (breathing, heart rate, balance).

The "mammal brain" is the part of the brain where senses, hearing and motor areas for the body reside. The human brain or "neocortex" is the part where the cognitive functions work. Cognitive functions are perception, language, action, attention, memory, consciousness, imagination, emotion and orientation.

Cognitive Functions

The cognitive functions of the neocortex are the focus of this article. These are the functions of the brain that allow us to absorb information and knowledge. To process information, you need memory, as well as language, orientation, attention, and problem-solving abilities. Reasoning, calculating, writing and reading are all cognitive functions.

Brain Science

Brain science or neuroscience is the methodical study of how brain cells work and how the brain executes all its functions. Although the brain has been subject to extensive research, we still don't exactly know what some parts of it do. In the training and her books, Sharon Bowman describes the "six trumps" of learning based on cognitive neuroscience that create a better learning experience for learners. What makes or breaks attention? What do you need to do to stimulate information processing? How can you optimize learning? These six trumps enhance learning based on the science of the brain.

Six Trumps

Through extensive research on brain science, Sharon developed the "six trumps" of learning. Each trump indicates the superior state that surpasses the other for optimizing learning:

1. Movement trumps sitting.
2. Talking trumps listening.
3. Images trump words.
4. Writing trumps reading.
5. Shorter trumps longer.
6. Different trumps same.

Movement Trumps Sitting

Physical movement increases cognitive function by increasing blood circulation. The brain receives more oxygen, which enhances our ability to think and learn. Moving every 10 to 20 minutes increases a participants ability to process information. Sitting for long periods makes thinking and learning more difficult because your body's oxygen level decreases.

Moving around keeps people awake, it enhances cognition and boosts memory.

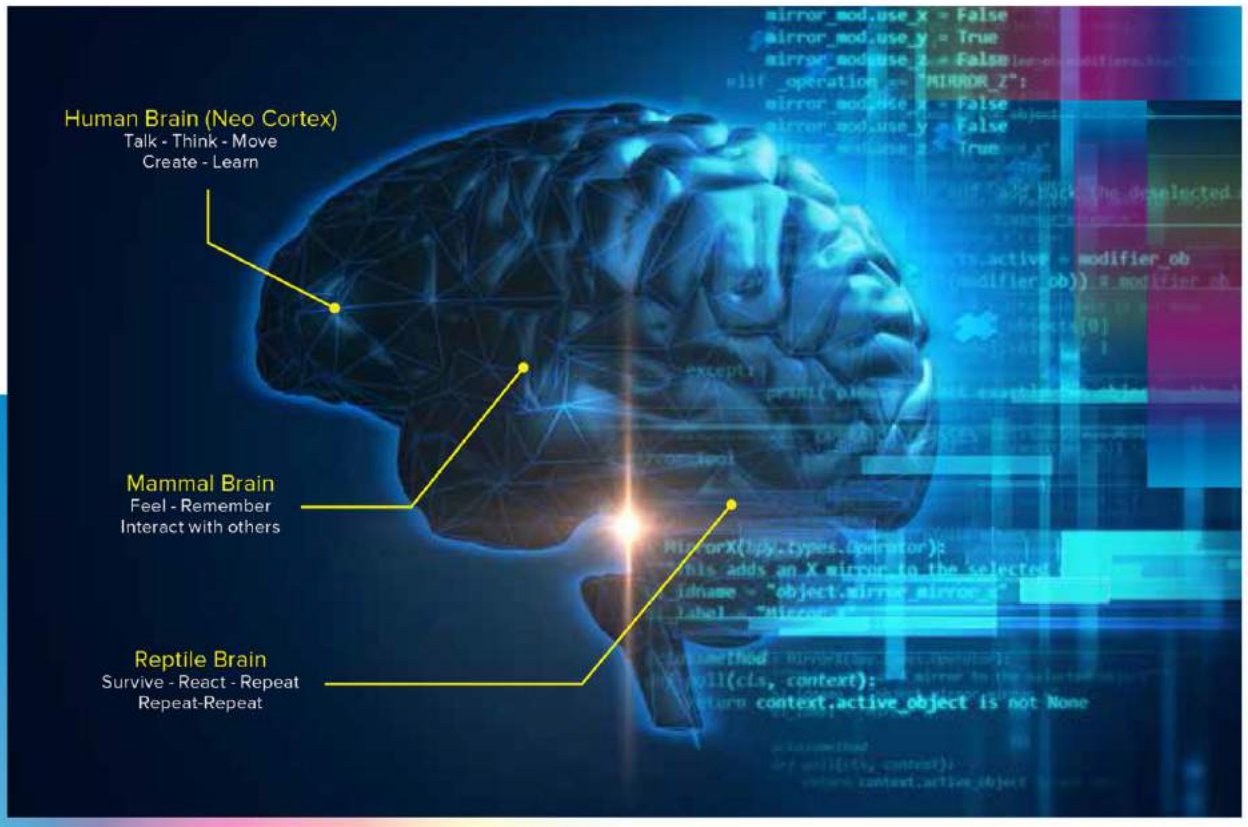
Movement ideas:
Get people moving with simple stretching exercises, or by asking them to walk in place or around the room. Stand up to discuss in pairs, or ask people to write thoughts on sticky notes and post them on the wall to motivate moving. Even turning to discuss topics with other people is better than sitting still. Bottom line, take short body breaks to get the oxygen flowing.

Talking Trumps Listening

Verbally processing information leads to a better understanding of it than only hearing it. Talking builds relationships, elicits feedback and enhances involvement. When you are in a conversation, you are processing information three ways:

1. You listen to what is being said.
2. You think about it.
3. You reply with an answer or thought in your own words.

Talking helps you retain the information in your brain. By discussing it rather than just listening, the new information connects to what you already know. However, a person has to feel safe and comfortable to speak.



Talking ideas:
Create a container where people feel safe to share. Get people talking by asking them to turn and talk to their peers, or use a talking stick. Stand up and discuss, in pairs or small groups. Hold discussions, small group presentations, role-playing or collaborative games.

Images Trump Words

Vision trumps all other senses. Our brain stores images and sounds longer than it does words alone. We call an image anything that creates a mental picture. An image can be a photo, video, or a mental one formed in the imagination through story, metaphor, or analogy. Cases studies and visuals created by participants also form images in the mind.

An image helps to activate the brain, it evokes emotions, it triggers long-term memory and creates shortcuts in the brain.

Image ideas:
Help people create mental metaphors and memory maps through doodling, stories, and graphical facilitation.

Writing Trumps Reading

If you add writing to the physical senses of seeing and hearing the brain stores that information longer. When writing, you use multiple senses, it requires physical movement and adds the sense of touch. Your body and mind are engaged. Writing enhances the involvement because it helps you to review content, which reinforces it. Writing stimulates memory, is kinesthetic and it grabs and holds the attention. Writing helps to focus; you have to think about what you write when you are writing. You process information three times when you are taking notes in a learning environment: you hear it, you think about it, and you translate it to paper. When you write, you are already thinking about what you should write, thus evaluating and ordering the information that you receive. The process of thinking before you write helps to fix ideas more firmly in your mind. Writing leads to higher and easier recall and better retention of the information presented to you.

Writing ideas:
Ask people to practice outlining, mind mapping, doodling, drawing icons and filling in blanks.

"The process of thinking before you write helps to fix ideas more firmly in your mind."

Shorter Trumps Longer
Our cultural conditioning and the natural way our brain works makes it "check out" after ten minutes or so unless something happens that grabs our attention again. The attention grabber could be a change in our environment, the way content is presented, people moving or the way a meeting or training is facilitated. Disrupting attention helps the brain "chunk" content or information into smaller parts. People remain alert and stay engaged when you work with smaller pieces. When people pay more attention to what they are hearing, they understand it better and remember it longer.

Shortening ideas:
Break up content by giving small tasks and short assignments. Keep meetings brief. Change up the learning environment and your facilitation style.

Different Trumps Same
You (and your brain) don't pay attention to boring things. Your brain will eventually ignore everything that is continuously the same. Use a variety of teaching and learning techniques to activate and engage people. Anything new, unexpected, unusual or extra-ordinary will capture the brain's attention. So change things up regularly, mix and vary!

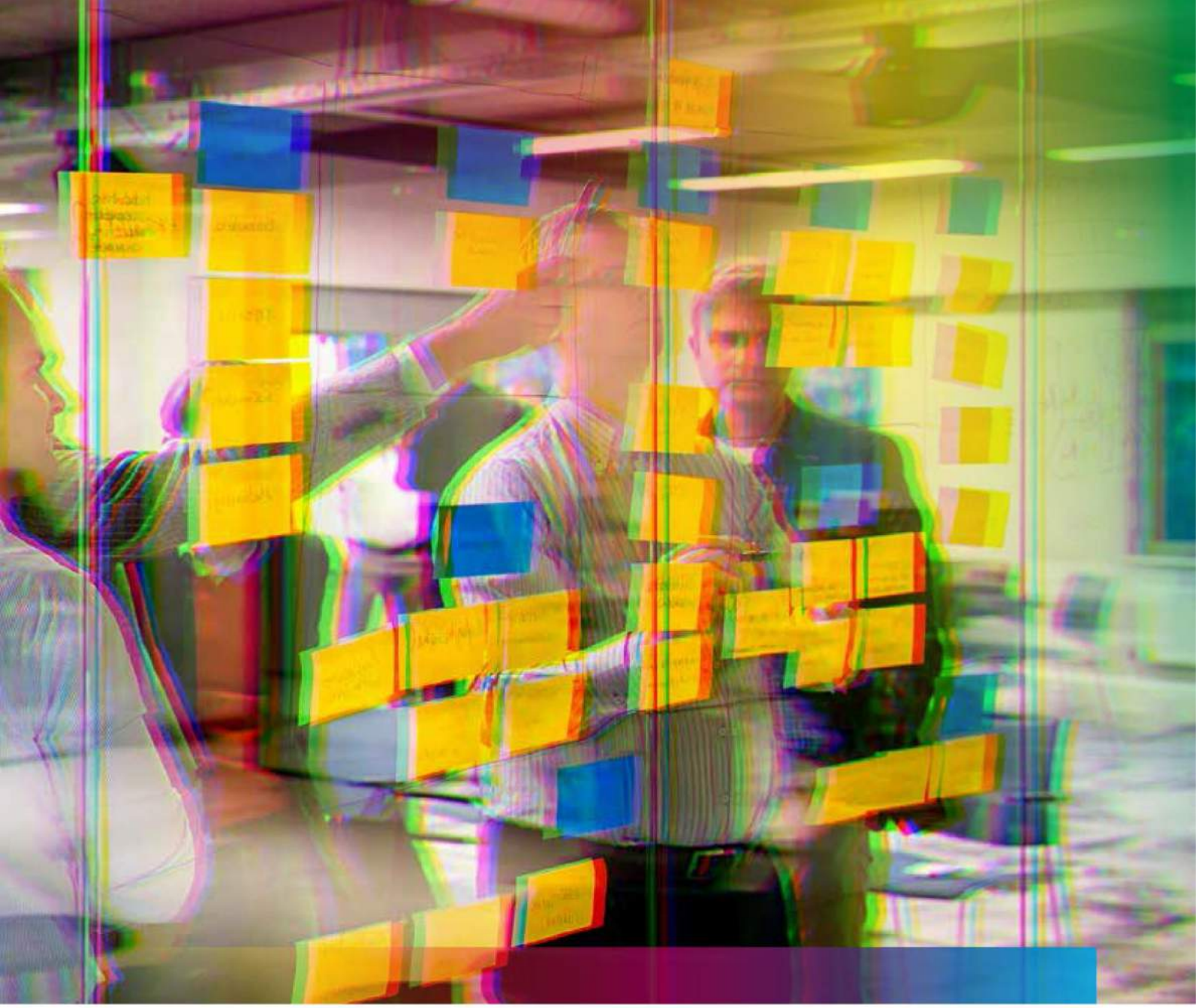
Differentiating ideas:
Develop surprising ways to engage your audience. Introduce dot voting (voting with dots on subjects), or a data hunt (go around a room to gather information).

Applying Brain Science to Scrum Events
Employing any of these six trumps during your Scrum events can help the attendees focus and pay more attention. Brain science can improve their problem solving and innovation abilities as well. Engaged, involved and activated attendees will learn more from the experience. By stimulating openness and commitment, you also avoid negative thoughts and create happier people. Even introverted attendees will benefit from brain science when you create the space for them to speak up (for example, in smaller groups) and foster respect and trust.

In the Scrum framework, there are five Scrum events, and every event has its own purpose. These events are timeboxed to keep the meetings focused. Here are some ideas of how you can apply brain science in each:

1. **Daily Scrum** - synchronize on the progress made toward reaching the Sprint goal
   - Maintain attention by rotating the order of the team members' contributions.
   - Short check-in round at the start.
   - Stand up.

2. **Sprint Planning** - create a forecast for the next Sprint
   - Move around (get up to the board).
   - Write down the items on sticky notes.
   - Visualize the business value.



3. **Sprint Review** - exchange feedback on delivered increment and look forward to the product backlog
   - Let stakeholders handle the mouse.
   - Let every attendee write down one improvement for the shown functionality.
   - Let stakeholders write or draw their feedback.
   - Use different ways to involve stakeholders (e.g., Sailboat game).

4. **Sprint Retrospective** - inspect how the last Sprint went regarding process and people
   - Dot voting.
   - Engage everybody and stimulate discussion.
   - Try different formats to spark creativity.

5. **Sprint** - container event for all other events
   - Move frequently.
   - Talk to each other.
   - Make important stuff visual (Definition of Done on the wall, the Sprint Backlog visible for everybody).

I learned a lot from Sharon Bowman's "Training From the Back of the Room," and her six trumps of learning based on cognitive neuroscience. Knowing how the human brain works and how its cognitive functions allow us to absorb information and knowledge isn't just interesting, it's useful for business. When we keep movement, vision, writing, images, brevity, and variety in mind, especially in our Scrum events, we process information better and faster, which can help us work more effectively.

Evelien Roos,
Scrum Professional,
"Committed to innovating the mastery of Scrum."

Surgical Approach to Agile in Outsourcing Environment

There are two variants of Agile adopted across the industry—the way product companies embrace it and the outsourcing service providers do it. Generally, product companies are presumed to be a good fit when it comes to adopting agile as it is easier to align with the bigger picture—the Product Vision. However, in outsourcing, a lot of times, the visibility is restricted to the scope of work, which is governed by contractual terms.

There are different kinds of agile implementation methods that organizations use besides adopting similar methodologies like Scrum, Kanban, Nexus, Scrum@Scale and SAFe models. What are the factors that influence the implementation of such prescribed methodologies in different ways?Essentially, it is the environment that decides. One key factor, which supersedesthe entire agile implementation is the contractual environment. Now the question is—Do we have any better approach to agile that can help an organization meet the contractual agreement and needs of the customer?

In my experience, every agile implementation in an outsourcing environment is a different variant of Agile, led by different contractual needs and depends on the following key factors:

- Customer collaboration and awareness of Agile
- Effectiveness of estimation model or technique
- Processes or Practices adopted
- Knowledge Management
- Metrics to govern the team or program toward common interest or vision

Customer Collaboration and Awareness of Agile

Customer perspectivedrives how agile is implemented in the outsourcing industry. It is imperative that the customer gets into the agile mindset before adopting it as a methodology to achieve business value. Agile has become the go to strategyto address the ever-changing business requirements. Although agile recommends working software over comprehensive documentation,in the outsourcing environment, SLAs, KPIs and documentation are needed to help the customer feel secure and informed about how risk is going to be mitigated and performance is going to be measured.
However, the question is—does it compromise on the agile principles or values? Is hybrid agile model a better fit for an outsourcing environment?
Agile focuses on developing feature-rich products and delivering value rather than concentrating on the effort or schedule variance. Since, the customer is always bound by timelines, priorities often shift toward the latter, giving rise to SLAs and KPIs that would help reduce the risk of project failure.From an investor's point of view, this is absolutely right to think: how does the personget value for money and whetheragile can be the best solution in such situations?

Collaboration to enroll in agile philosophy: It is a cultural shift from the perspective of **'Customer is always right' to 'Together we are rightly aligned'** to delivera common vision. The focus is not on reporting customer specific issues and leaving it there. Rather,it is inworking towarda solution and taking a jump from being a service provider to becoming a valued partner. Agile core values FORCC **(Focus, Openness, Respect, Commitment, Courage)** form a strong foundation if adopted collaboratively among customer and service providers.

Effectiveness of Estimation Model or Technique

To meet customer expectations in a contractual environment—accurate estimations, team's efficiency and product quality, they all seem likeanti-agile patterns. However, it is crucial for any business to understand how the investment is being translated into business value.

Therefore, we cannot ignore these factors in the name of Agile implementation. The Base functional unit size (Story points or Function points) should be identified in a way, which will help to remove subjectivity and relativity from the estimation technique. At the same time, it is scalable at the program level. The typical issues faced in such environment are:

- **Standard definition of functional unit:** This can be achieved in story points, although it is difficult to define and sustain. The way agile environments are designed to follow inspect and adapt, it is going to drive revision in the functional unit definition in due course of time as the team matures. The Function point has a standard definition of functional size, which is based on known functionality or assumed functionality.

- **Scaling of estimation method to assess the program level performance:** The Function point estimation model can be adopted to arrive at the functional size, as it works on predefined counting rules. Variation among the scrum teams would also be less and provides a scalable measurement framework to assess the performance at the team, program, or portfolio level.

Measurement framework for improvement: Strong measurement system has been a key element in making any contract or outsourcing engagement. In such environment, there is always a pressure to meet the customer's expectations in terms of performance, which at times becomes difficult to sustain in an agile environment. Considering such Catch-22 situation, we have to identify a mechanism to assess the program, team, product health, besides focusing exclusively on the output. Few of the suggested metrics to suit the need of the contractor outsourcing environment are as follows:

- Productivity, i.e. Hours or Function Point
- Defect Density, i.e. Defects or Function Point
- Defect Removal efficiency, i.e. number of defects closed in the sprint ornumber of defects introduced in current sprint and residual defects
- Defect Productivity (severity wise), i.e. hours per defect

Processes or Practices Adopted

Agile and Processes are considered to beeach other's rival inthe outsourcing industry. Many outsourcing organizations havean obligation to sustain accreditation like CMMi and adopt an Agile way of working. In such cases, does it lead to conflict between Agile principles and CMMi? Well, not really. A deep consideration is needed to align agile practices with process expectations. However, our assumptions related to the constraintsstop us from doing so. There are two areas as part of agile product development that needs strong process governance:

- Focus on technical excellence i.e. inherent product quality: While we deep dive into understanding the Definition of Done, it mandates you to be process- centric to sustain the inherent product quality i.e. code quality, technical debt, unit test coverage or functional testing coverage. All these define the quality standards for any agile team to comply with, how does an agile team deliver to definition of done? By agreeing on processes or practices that are to be followed to meet the quality standards set as part of the definition of done. Most of the agile development engagements are functional-driven. However, there should be a continuous attention to technical excellence as part of the process. It is enabled only by allocating a fixed capacity for technical stories as part of the iteration or sprint or at the release level. All these factors clearly demand a need for a process-centric approach.

- Lean approach toward documentation:Documentation is the only way to reduce risk in outsourcing,especially in scenarios where development teams work from remote locations thereby, reducing day-to-day visibility.Three levels of documentation are to be defined in an agile environment, i.e. Governance,Scrum work productsandEngineering, which are controlled by tools and automation. Governance helps in meeting the expectation of standards like CMMi, ISO by havinga program-level plan with required information, focusing on agile process flow adopted by teams, tools used and roles as per the engagement. Estimations and schedule should be integrated with the product backlog. To reduce the documentation efforts of the scrum teams, it is recommended to have more tools to address the engineering process needs like code review, unit testing and automation testing framework. Status reporting documents can be merged with sprint ceremonies where customer representatives also participate and get regular visibility. The sprint exit report can be introduced to publish the status of deliverables to all stakeholders and this replaces the need for a weekly status report. The metrics dashboard should be populated at the end of every sprint and published at released or stage level to all the stakeholders.

Knowledge Management:

In a dynamic agile environment, where resource movement is imperative, a quick ramp up or induction plan or KAKT plan is a must to ensure the smooth influx of trained and equipped resources. A three-level induction plan is recommended, which should be ideally compiled in fifteen to twenty days at the most. Stage 1 is for domain or product training. Stage 2 belongs to Agile process session focusing on customer-driven processes for agile and Stage 3 is about On-the-job training, at least for the sprint duration, to get more hands-on applied processes. All the induction presentations, documents, product manuals should be kept in the knowledge repository and made accessible to all the team members as well as the new members so that there is less dependency on a single person to give the induction sessions. The customer usually prefers to stick with critical resources due to application knowledge dependency. This dependency can only be removed by having a strong knowledge management framework.

As we understand, every surgery need is different in the context of the placement of internal components within a system. Hence, one standard way of solving issues may not work. In the same context, all contractual or outsourcing agile environments exhibit similar symptoms. Yet, one standard framework would not fit well. The hybrid approach of picking what solves your problem is a recommended way to move ahead in your agile journey. Diagnose the root cause, not the symptoms to recommend the right medicine.

Meetu Singh
Director, Xebia

Nurturing Behavioral Agility

Agile has been quite a buzzword for corporates and organizations for the past decade and a half. There are two schools of thought about it. One believes in the contribution of Agile toward creating business value and the other refuses to see its benefits. Agile as a concept has had a diverse set of responses from various levels across organizations and people have had different opinions around agility. This has created a void that needs to be considered, for agility is an integral part of our world today. Let us lay out the points to be considered from a behavioral point of view.

Agility – A Behavioral Perspective

We must understand that agility is not something that can be implemented like technology. It is more of a mindset, a way of life and has a behavioral aspect to it. Of more than a million behavioral permutations that we understand and experience in our lives, the most basic, vital and yet conveniently ignored facet is *'Nurturing'. 'To nurture'* is one of the fundamental laws of mother nature, yet we tend to ignore this aspect, especially in the corporate world. Agility is no exception to it. Nurturing agility—in the corporate context is important, as it is based on a set of guiding principles and values, which are ultimately governed by human interpretation and behavior.

Nurturing Agility

In the recent years, organizations have been investing to create an Agile culture. In most cases, this has been taken up as an initiative. The fact that initiatives become necessary to cultivate an Agile culture implies that the concentration is on efforts that are are outcome-centric and artificially imbibed in the system. On the other hand, if agility comes naturally to the human capital and it is visible in the daily business of an organization, the impact is faster, more efficient and experienced in a real sense.

This has been referred to as *'shift in paradigm'* and *'shift in mindset'* of people. This *'shift in mindset',* in turn, forms the basis for maximizing business value in an organization resulting in the most beautiful by-product of overall growth of the organization. An important observation here—a shift in paradigm and mindset are not the results of implementing agility. Rather, they are an outcome of nurturing it. Nurturing something needs time. This could mean months and years before it begins to show its impact.

The Big Question is: How to Nurture Agility?

In the context of the corporate world, the most effective way to ensure agility is through living and abiding by the core values. These core values may be specific to an organization or the ones pointed out by the Agile Manifesto.

At present, in most organizations, the senior leadership is the only layer that upholds the core values in their daily conduct. The moment we start drilling down the hierarchy, such values remain mere words. It is a rare state when all team members or employees are aware of their organizational core values. This is because the team members are only driven when they are under the pressure to deliver. If we push on delivering at the

cost of compromising on the values, the culture of the organization is affected, which in the long run is detrimental to the overall growth of the organization.

So, how do you introduce and nurture agility?

You will find the answer among the five values mentioned in the Scrum Guide, created by the founders of Scrum—**Jeff Sutherland and Ken Schwaber.**
The specified agile process frameworks would have been enough if the objective of maximizing the business value were achieved by implementing the frameworks alone to any ecosystem. There is a reason why there are 4 guidelines, 12 principles and 5 values associated with these frameworks. This is the part that addresses 'nurturing of behavior' to achieve a shift in paradigm and mindset.

Organizations invest in agile initiatives through training sessions, certifications, role organization, establishing an Agile Center of Excellence, hiring Agile Coaches, the whole nine yards. Yet, the ROI runs negligibly low. There is an impact on the entire ecosystem of the organization while bringing in the changes. We channelize all our energy toward stabilizing it instead of embracing it at this point. Often, after spending extended periods of time, effort and huge amounts of cost, organizations conclude that agile is not working for them. Based on their experience and looking at their numbers, we may agree to this.

A shift in the paradigm or mindset starts only when people start believing in the values and in putting the principles of agility to use.

Adopting Behavioral Factors to Nurture Agility

For an organization to be agile, the resources (time, effort and cost) must be focused on upholding the values. This can be achieved only when people across all levels start practicing and embodying the values in their daily lives. Once we institutionalize and ingrain them in our behavior, we will intuitively become transparent and gradually inspect and adapt ourselves to contribute to a common objective for the overall growth of the organization. However, this is an incremental way of evolving.

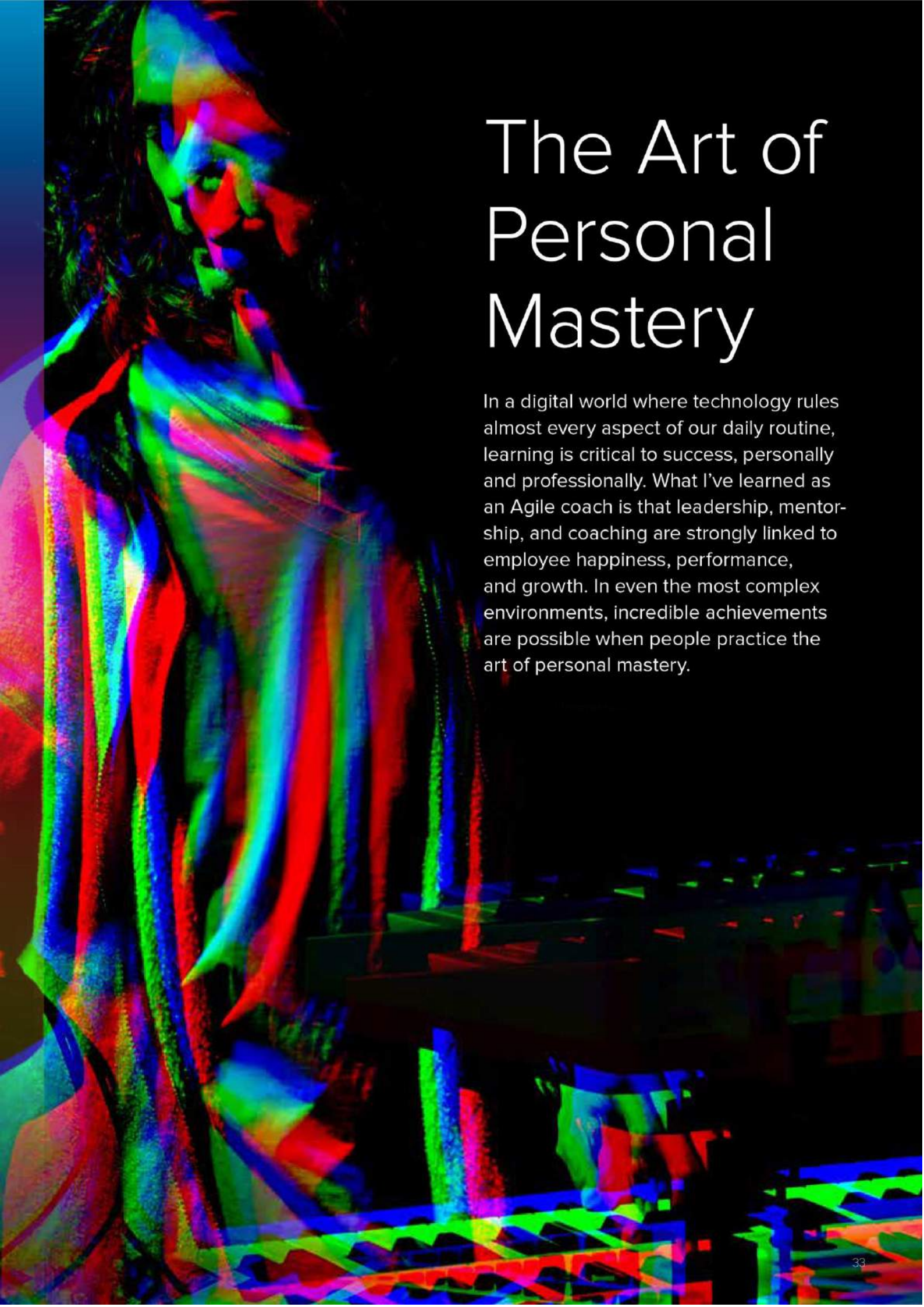
The most beautiful things created by nature are also the simplest of all. Taking guidance from this principle, we can start with the values that we can incorporate in our daily conduct such as:

1. **Active listening**
2. **Empathy (using techniques like mirroring and matching)**
3. **Awareness and Healing**
4. **Conceptualizing and Stewardship**
5. **Foresight and Building community**

Unless we understand the meaning of these words and apply them in our lives, these words carry no significance. The above mentioned values form the core of 'Servant Leadership'. The true essence of this concept can only be experienced through application of the meaning of each of these in our conduct while continually balancing them on the three pillars of agile: Transparency, Inspection and Adaptation.

Agility is not a change whose impact will be drastically visible overnight. Agility will reflect on the culture of the organization. It is worth trying, as the intangible value created by agility ends up creating an incomparable ROI for any organization and its culture over a period of time.

Aashish Nagar
Enterprise Agile Coach, Xebia



The Art of Personal Mastery

In a digital world where technology rules almost every aspect of our daily routine, learning is critical to success, personally and professionally. What I've learned as an Agile coach is that leadership, mentorship, and coaching are strongly linked to employee happiness, performance, and growth. In even the most complex environments, incredible achievements are possible when people practice the art of personal mastery.

In Peter M. Senge's book, "The Fifth Discipline," personal mastery is defined as "a set of specific principles and practices that enable a person to learn, create a personal vision, and view the world objectively." In the context of this article, I look at personal mastery through the eyes of a change agent who guides, coaches, mentors, or influences people to achieve their goals.

Because we now live in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world, it's become increasingly difficult to prioritize problems and identify their solutions. Personal mastery is vital under these unpredictable conditions because it unleashes the limitless potential of knowledge workers and creatives to solve problems.

Personal mastery consists of mindful listening, paraphrasing, asking questions, and providing feedback on feelings and, eventually, thoughts. It requires you to postpone your judgment. It activates learning by challenging current visions, pushing group members out of their comfort zone, enhancing thinking, and influencing perspectives. It removes the symptoms of ego from our communication that often render it inefficient and contaminate our interactions - judging, opinionating, and listening with the utter intention to speak. Instead, personal mastery shifts the focus to learning and improving, ourselves and others. By first sharing, then exploring, and finally combining information, personal mastery creates knowledge and accelerates understanding.

Organizations need all of their employees to practice personal mastery. How? Start by empowering and enabling your employees to:

- Share what they sense, feel, and think.
- Communicate their vision.
- Intervene when they believe it is necessary.

By removing obstacles that could discourage employees from feeling comfortable and sharing valuable information, your organization can develop a culture of learning and innovation, with personal mastery in its DNA.

An Example of Lacking Personal Mastery

Martin is a leader in an organization that's going through an Agile transformation. He'd like to choose the right behavior for the situation, but the habitual behavior chooses Martin instead. He's a passionate guy, committed to making things work. But passion also has its downside. In conversations and discussions, Martin unknowingly and unintentionally replies with the same catchphrase, over and over again: "But the question is..."

He then follows the catchphrase with his own opinion, which contradicts whatever the other speaker just said.

After hearing from others that they find Martin's pattern quite disappointing, an Agile coach decides to immediately call attention to it when it happens during a group retrospective. Martin feels awkward and disappointed. He wonders why none of his colleagues spoke up before. He thought they'd all agreed to be "radically transparent." Addressing this blind spot would have helped him.

However, Martin's feelings surprise the others in the group. They emphasize that, in these recurring situations, they are the victims, not him.

I call this a "hostage situation of perceptions." The group feels victimized by a communication pattern, that they perceive is intentional, that disqualifies their input. Martin unintentionally reinforces the group's belief when his old habits unconsciously and repetitively kick in.

Personal mastery, on the other hand, would have made all the difference in this situation. It would help Martin and the group become more conscious, honest and outspoken. A person with personal mastery would provide Martin with feedback on his catchphrase immediately. Personal mastery would also help Martin become more conscious of the ineffective patterns in his communication style. He would intentionally and regularly ask for honest feedback and deliberately change his speech patterns.

Paul Immerzeel,
Business Agility
Consultant and
Leadership Coach

Doing DevOps the DASA Way

After embracing Agile processes and continuous delivery for application development, many IT departments are now adopting DevOps as a service delivery approach. DevOps is imperative for creating and operating a productive information platform that's essential for digital business. As the name suggests, IT operations are part of these initiatives.

Author **Thomas Kruitbosch**

DevOps started as an open grassroots movement, embracing the principles of the Agile manifesto, continuous delivery, and other practices. There's a strong focus on sharing lessons learned among practitioners, and it has attracted increasing commercial attention, which has resulted in DevOps-branded software and services. This attention may shift the focus towards implementing IT software tools and processes while ignoring fundamental concepts and principles of DevOps. The result? Limited productivity outcomes.

As Xebia consultants, we regularly assess Agile, continuous delivery and DevOps initiatives within organizations. Frequently, we notice that the initiatives are mainly limited to adopting Agile process tools to organize work. Likewise, we have seen IT automation initiatives driven by continuous delivery that didn't work. These focused on local optimizations bound to the existing organization structure, architecture, and software release processes. Even when these initiatives were started with the right principles and key business outcomes in mind, somewhere down the line, they were dropped.

Among other root causes, we've found that a lack of knowledge and skills frequently contributed to the derailment of these initiatives. This included poor understanding of DevOps concepts and implications, no common vocabulary and a lack of competencies to break through existing way-of-working patterns. The DevOps Agile Skills Association (DASA) was founded to address these knowledge and skill gaps. Xebia is one of the founding members of DASA.

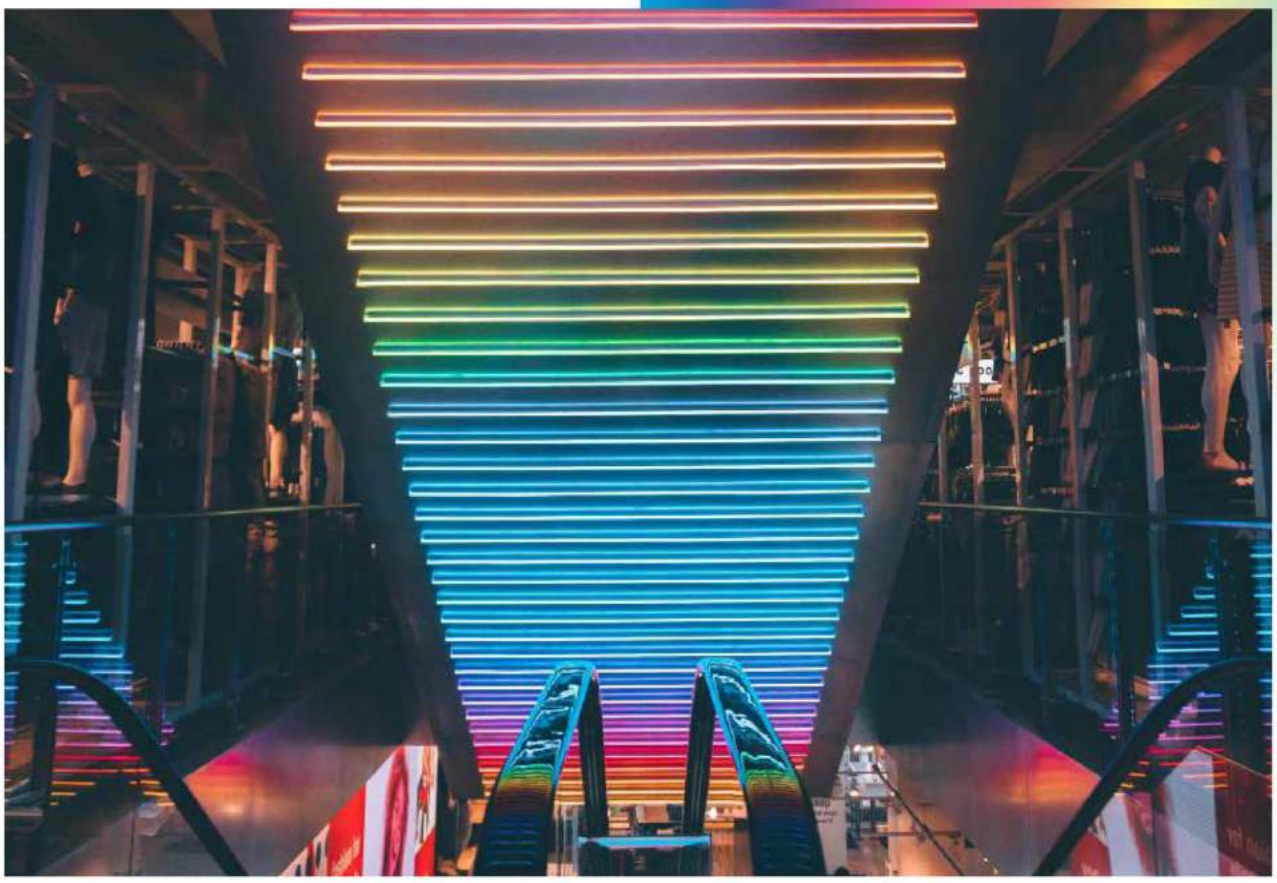
DASA is an independent, and open, members-driven association supporting the development of DevOps training and certification in the global market. This includes the development and evangelization of a vendor-neutral DevOps qualification program for professionals. According to DASA, DevOps is about cultivating experiences, ideas, and culture to create high-performing IT organizations. DASA has defined six DevOps principles.

The Six DASA DevOps Principles

- Customer-centric action: courage to act, innovate.
- Create with the end in mind: product and service thinking, engineering mindset, collaborate.
- End-to-end responsibility: live your accountability, concept to grave, performance support.
- Cross-functional autonomous teams: T-shaped profiles, complementary skills.
- Continuous improvement: if it hurts, do it more often, fail fast.
- Automate everything you can: enhance quality, maximize flow.

Effectively applying these six DASA DevOps principles implies adopting the principles of the Agile Manifesto as well. It means that "being DevOps" (according to DASA) includes "being Agile" (according to the Agile Manifesto).

Adopting the six DASA DevOps principles requires a holistic approach, which cannot be limited to the implementation of processes, controls and software tools. For many organizations, adopting the six DASA DevOps principles can only be done when they are willing to tear down the existing silos of the organization.



Throughout the DASA qualification program, concepts, techniques, and examples are covered to demonstrate the far-reaching implications envisioned by the (founding) members. As such, they highlight concrete challenges and guidance to tackle these challenges. For example, challenges with the architecture of IT systems and the structure of the organization are covered. The qualification program acknowledges that implementing DevOps the DASA way is hard for many organizations, something not done overnight or with a plan-driven transformation program.

"Why do skills and knowledge matter for DevOps?"

Thomas Kruitbosch,
Principal DevOps
Consultant

The training paths of the DASA qualification scheme cover knowledge, skill and behavior competencies for engineers, product owners and leadership relevant in DevOps. For example, the Create and Deliver training path of the DASA qualification scheme will not train participants to be a skilled Scrum master, neither will it train participants to become skilled in a particular programming language. Rather, it will provide these participants with a common vocabulary and the knowledge, skills, and behaviors required to operate successfully within an organizational environment inspired by DevOps principles. Likewise, the Enable and Scale training path focuses on the knowledge and skills required to create and manage such a DevOps inspired environment. When combined with Agile training paths, the DASA qualification scheme can build a solid foundation for Agile and DevOps initiatives.

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Business Value/ROI, Prioritization, Backlog Management, Story Mapping, Cost of Delay, WIP Limits

DEVELOPMENT TEAM
Clean Coding, Pair Programming, Technical Debt management, Refactoring, Estimations, Agile Ceremonies, CICD, Automation frameworks

STAKEHOLDERS
Role in Backlog Management, Classes of Service, WIP Limits, Prioritization, Involvement in Agile Ceremonies

TOOL TRAININGS

PRODUCT MANGEMENT
JIRA, TFS, ASANA, RALLY

VERSION CONTROL
GIT, BITBUCKET

DEVOPS
JENKINS, BAMBOO, TEAMCITY

INSTRUCTOR LED

E-LEARNING

FRAMEWORK RELATED TRAININGS

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Certified Scrum Master (CSM)
Certified Scrum PO (CSPO)
Certified Scrum Developer (CSD)
PSM (I and II), PSPO I

KANBAN
Team Kanban Practitioner (TKP)
Kanban Management Professional 1 (KMP)
Kanban Management Professional 2 (KMP)

SAFe
Leading SAFe (SA)
SAFe Scrum Master (SSM)
SAFe Advanced Scrum Master (SASM)
Implementing SAFe (SPC)

DASA
Clean Coding, Pair Programming, Technical Debt management, Refactoring, Estimations, Agile Ceremonies, CICD, Automation frameworks

STAKEHOLDERS
Role in Backlog Management, Classes of Service, WIP Limits, Prioritization, Involvement in Agile Ceremonies

Xebia

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Conference Theme

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Track Themes

Life beyond Scrum	Software development done right	Transparency, inspection and adaption	Agile & Organizational behaviour

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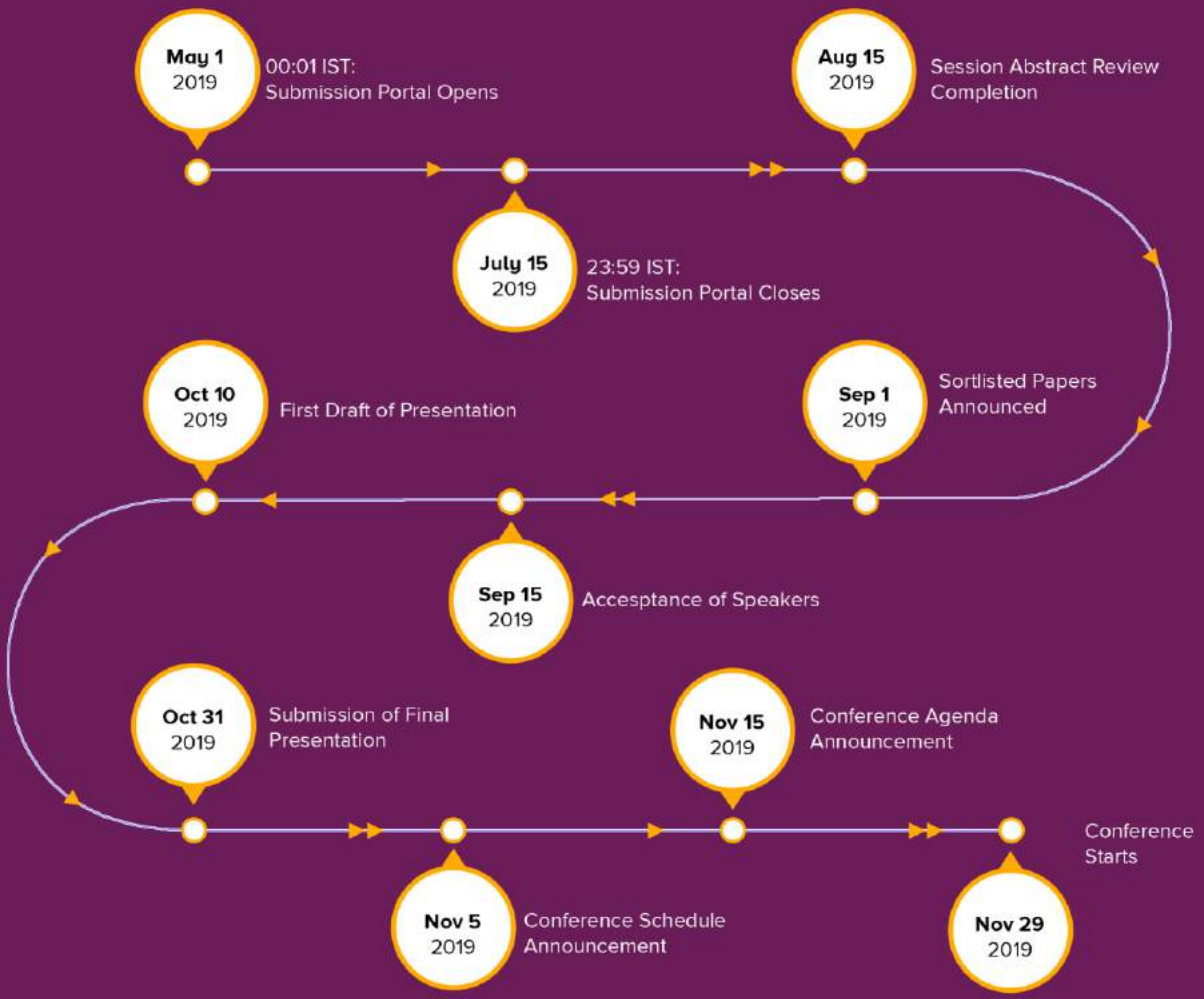


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