Afro Ant Conversation

MANAGING CHANGE IN AN AGILE WORLD

July 2017

INTRODUCTION

It is widely acknowledged that the adoption of new technologies and ways of working by the intended end users can be considered a significant marker of a successful implementation. A key goal of change management is to drive this adoption by supporting the transition of individuals from the current to future state[i].

In traditional large-scale implementations following a waterfall approach, where change management activities are aligned with project activities, problems can arise as the initial scoping and planning for change management is done long in advance of the actual go-live date.

According to the Greek Philosopher Heraclitus, "The only constant is change" – and this is often true in large organisations. By the time the expected benefits of a change are to be realised, the landscape in which the initial assessments and stakeholder analyses were conducted, may be unrecognisable.

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS CONVERSATION

This Ant Conversation was hosted over a dinner with 10 guests in attendance. The audience was split almost equally between Business Analysts (30%), Agile Experts (30%) and attendees coming from an Organisational Change background (40%).
The conversation was facilitated by Kate Lax from Afro Ant.

With this challenge in mind, there has been a move towards a more agile approach to change management. Agile implementations aim to reduce risk by being interactive and incremental in nature, with on-going user engagement and continued course correction. This means that the approach and key activities can change as the landscape and needs change.

This Afro Ant Conversation was initiated to discuss the topic *– how do Agile and Change Management fit together in this ever-changing world?* As the topic was a broad one covering Agile and Change, the conversation flowed through discussing the differences between Agile and Waterfall, to discussing what changes when an organisation goes Agile, through to how to "do" Change in an Agile environment and ending off with a discussion on how broader Change initiatives can be implemented in an Agile manner – making Agile more than "a way to implement an IT project".

This article includes some of the points raised and opinions discussed by the Ant Conversation attendees (any direct quotes are shown in inverted commas and italicised as follows: *"example"*).

DIFFERENCES IN AGILE AND WATERFALL

To set the context of this Ant Conversation, the first area of discussion was centred around the differences between Agile and Waterfall. Some of the key points raised by the group were as follows:

Methodology vs. Mentality

The participants of this conversation proposed that Agile be viewed "not as a methodology, but as a mentality." "It is best to think of Agile as a framework – without black-and-white pre-defined rules and roles."

A methodology has roles, responsibilities, processes, and artefacts and the Agile framework does not prescribe as rigidly to these criteria. A framework is a basic conceptual structure and can thus be superimposed in an organisation.

Although not rigid or prescriptive, broad guidelines do exist and "a good Agilist will be able to tell you what the team is busy with this week – and that it might look completely different in two or three weeks' time."

> *"The agile mentality is very simple to understand, yet very difficult to implement"*

Flexibility is key. *"An example of a previous project I was part of that worked very well is where they had a team of software architects (in an Agile environment) about a month ahead of everything else. They looked at what was coming, what systems would be affected, and they then defined it. When the teams came along, they worked the requirement and they implemented work in the framework that was defined for them. The quality was not affected, it was quick, and adaptable."*

> *Old-school motivation theories dictate that managers need to keep track of their staff or they won't deliver. This thinking is considered obsolete in the Agile world.*

Roles, Responsibilities and where Project Leaders fit in

In a pure Agile world, the function of each person in the team is to do what needs to be done at that point in time. Although individuals play a role within an agile team, the roles aren't permanent or fixed. Two key differing roles are those of the Project Manager and a Scrum Master. Traditionally, a Project Manager occurs in a Waterfall world and a Scrum Master in an Agile one, and

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although they are both often viewed as "lead" roles, the two roles are essentially different. There is typically a lack of line management responsibilities for a Scrum Master, whereas a Project Manager often adopts line responsibilities. It is also believed in Agile that the team does not need to be managed by the Scrum Master and their activities aren't predetermined or necessarily planned (especially not long in advance).

With the Agile way of thinking, recognition for *"people as people"* exists and it's believed that they want to do a good job. The role of the leader or the "manager" is to make this possible for them; to create the environment that enables them to do a good job.

From an organisational point of view, the essence of Scrum is often considered by leaders as something that their teams must adopt, but for a successful switch to Agile, leaders need to run with the Agile mind-set before their teams take it on.

Artefacts and Documentation

"Waterfall implementations tend to be documentation heavy but what Agile is about is people and process; it's not about churning out artefacts."

Documentation is an output and not an outcome – and even if it's well-documented, many project documents go unread and can be perceived as a "tick box exercise". It was argued that one of the most important factors is to keep the stakeholder who will be receiving the product/document/support in mind. Documenting something doesn't guarantee delivering something.

One of the Business Analysts in attendance mentioned that in practice, they do still produce a lot of documentation but it is primarily used as a starting point for a sprint. In this example, *"the documentation is powerful because the developers and the testers use this as a hook, and delivery happens without hold-ups. It's useful to have the detail/documentation ready so that it can be referred to, but when/if we realise we have a gap during the sprint, we won't necessarily go back and fix the documentation".*

It was noted that there is a concern around not having standards documented or consistency throughout. *"I am working on a system now where if you want to authorise a transaction you have to click a button that sits in the top left-hand screen. On*

> *"The biggest danger to Agile is Agile done badly. Having stickies on a board doesn't make you Agile." – Ant Conversation Participant, July 2017*

another transaction, the button to authorise sits at the bottom of the screen and it's called "acceptance". It's like two different companies that are worlds apart have designed these.

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From a user point of view, you want things to work, to be predictable. So how do you gain accuracy in an Agile world without standards?"

Difference of power and ownership

"Waterfall from a management perspective is driven top-down. There is a Steering Committee / Board and a Project Manager who is a "slave driver". The Business Analyst, Systems Analysts, Developers and Testers have little power to influence – only execute. With Agile it's the other way around. The teams have the power – these are the development team, test team and even the BA and SA's if you're really Agile."

WHAT CHANGES WHEN WE GO AGILE?

Mutual Exclusivity vs. Hybrid models

Pure Agilists argued that if the methodologies are mixed, Agile will not work and that Waterfall and Agile should be mutually exclusive. In practice, many organisations are adopting hybrid models including using Agile in certain parts of their implementations or in different stages of the SDLC. In these adaptive environments where hybrids are being made, it's debatable whether this is right or wrong – depending on the output and desired outcome.

Culture Change

"To move across to Agile, everyone must change and regardless of your role, everybody has to adopt a different mind-set."

To successfully implement Agile in an organisation, a full-scale culture change is needed, at all organisational levels.

To successfully implement Agile across-the-board in an organisation, a full-scale culture change is needed, at all organisational levels.

Within a Waterfall world, you would typically have Sponsors, Project Managers, and Business Analysts doing most of the guiding and direction work, with Developers and Testers at the bottom of the pyramid. If you switch things to proper Agile, there is a change in onus of control – with the role of Developers and Testers changing hugely.

If you are operating in an organisation where hierarchy and reporting lines are very important, the movement towards and Agile and collaborative culture can be painful for some. Often, to get the middle management team to adapt to this way of working can be very difficult.

An example of this dynamic in action, is where a developer says she needs 3 days to do something, no one can tell her she can only have 2 days. The people who must do the work

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do the estimates. This gives those who must do the work authority which, it was argued, creates commitment. The team members decide the development phases and they can communicate status and progress.

"We don't engage unless we get at least business, IT and the leadership involved. Otherwise you are setting yourself up to fail."

Different ways to introduce Agile and change the culture

It was agreed that there are several ways to bring about this culture change. For example, you could *"hang it on the big flag "we're going Agile" which brings about mandated change (although mandated change is viewed as less likely to work)"* or you could prove success: *"It's empowering if people in an organisation have doubts to say to them, "Go down to the third floor. There is a team that there that has been doing agile for 7 years, and on the first floor there is a team that has been going agile for 5 years".*

The argument for the second option of incremental change stated that *"if you optimise a part of the value stream over time, that you will sub-optimise the whole value stream. There is the possibility of that happening, but this is still all just speaking about process. The very first thing of an Agile Manifesto is visuals and interactions above process and tools."*

A key question posed was: *"How do you get an engaged workforce versus a compliant workforce? Good project managers usually have an engaged project team. Bad project managers usually have a compliant project team."*

"Everything is a journey! You're not Agile one day and Waterfall the next."

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The importance of demystifying Agile

For your everyday business stakeholders, it is important to demystify the Agile jargon. For people to be able to understand, implement and adopt this move across to agile time needs to be taken to explain not only the process, but the new terms too. *"We need to speak to our customers (internal and external) in a language they will understand."*

"This is exactly why we as Agile coaches go and educate ourselves in change management. Even a scrum master is a change agent. Agile coaches also need to be transformation coaches. This is essentially our job – transitioning people from one state of being or working to another"

The stumbling blocks to changing to culture of Agile

In trying to change the culture or organisational structure to accommodate a move towards Agile, there are many challenges that could be encountered. This discussion raised a few of these challenges:

- **The way we've always done things**. If you are working with a group of people who have historically been told what to do, with little to no autonomy and accountability, it can be difficult to introduce and support this new way of thinking.
- **The loss of perceived power**. For some levels or groups of people, "power" will be shifted away.
- **The possible loss of jobs**. Although not a guarantee, there is a possibility that there may be structural changes to the way the organisation is managed – for example, rendering a level of management redundant.

The end goal won't always be defined up front

"We have to define what the "end" looks like by asking stakeholders, "when you feel that you had gotten enough value, that's when we will stop. It's a totally different mind-set from projects where you have an objective and you deliver it. Agile is a lot like programmes in that agreement on "enough" value is determined during engagement sessions with stakeholders."

Although it was argued by a participant that there is always a due date – *"I haven't ever worked on an Agile project where there wasn't a date. There are a whole lot of things that hang off the date. We can't just say that we are going to stop when we feel like it, or when the money runs out."*

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Team Dynamics and changing roles of an Agile Team

"In a team, everyone should be doing something, teaching something, and learning something. This change can be a noticeable one for teams moving into Agile as the need for team cohesion and interdependencies deepens."

When discussing the Change Management role in an Agile world, it was suggested that a good change manager will do what they must do to get the job done and the question was asked whether the Business Analyst (BA) could become the Change Manager as this person understands the business well. While it was agreed that

It is easier for some than for others to move across to agile. I think that the millennials were born for Agile."

this is true, it was also agreed that although the role of the BA changes (to varying degrees, dependent on organisation and individual) most notably in that they no longer own the requirements, the BA does maintain a key role of analysis and design – and thus Change Management should be left to Change Managers.

A change in ownership

"What I'm taking out of it is that Agile isn't saying that there is this hierarchy of the waterfall. It's like we're all in this together, we're in the same boat."

In witnessing a move across to an agile way of doing things, one of the participants noted that *"The thing I actually enjoy in being part of a BA/agile team is the realisation from the business "person" that he/she is deciding. It's fascinating and fantastic. When this person attends the first meeting and asks, "so we have to do XYZ first?" and we respond by saying – it's totally up to you. The decision completely lies with this person and if they want to change their mind, then they can go for it. This is a fabulous feeling. It takes some of the responsibility off BAs as well."*

"Essentially, the ownership and focus become a business discussion and generally people know what they want – it's their "want" and they instinctively know whether the course the project is on is going to achieve that."

It was noted that this is reliant on having the right people in the right positions with the right temperament which opens up the space for some people who may have the knowledge but haven't had the opportunity to voice this before.

A practical example provided by a participant was in an organisation where there were multiple demands being made on a single delivery team. When the decision makers from each of the areas making demands was put in the same room and asked to prioritise their demands on the agile team, they felt that it wasn't possible to do. This highlighted for them what the

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delivery team were facing daily – having to juggle conflicting demands and still being expected to deliver. This put the ownership for prioritisation back where it belonged – with the business.

It was also agreed that one of the most difficult changes in ownership is a shift in the relationship between IT and business. It was posed that in Waterfall, the relationship between business and IT is a supplier-client relationship. Some of the participants felt that IT often "lost", because *"typically, they consist of techies while business are negotiators."* For Agile to be successful, this supplier relationship must change into a partnership, where the business owner becomes part of the team. Previously, IT would scope and go away to work on their project and come back to deliver. With Agile, it's a much more hands-on process – every two weeks, backlogging, prioritising etc. must be done.

The business must dedicate more time to the implementation team as they own the solution. *"The best-case scenario is when you're in a situation where business has come on board and they start to drive the introduction of agile. We like to see situations where business is so hands-on, they are driving IT a little crazy."*

HOW DOES CHANGE FIT INTO THE AGILE WORLD?

The role of Change

In Waterfall, one of the biggest challenges has been to influence project managers and sponsors in creating the understanding that change management does not only come in at implementation. Change needs to come into the project at the very first meeting. Change Managers play a bit of a Scrum Master role in ensuring that all the leaders are aligned and in creating a general understanding among them.

"The question is: where is that pull for the change manager to come in during an Agile implementation? Is it that change doesn't sit with the change manager, but with the people who are actually affected by the change?"

Change Management non-negotiables

When the question was posed: What non-negotiables does a change manager still need to deliver to make it a success?
The consensus was that there were main areas of focus:

Agree	→	Measure	→	Adapt

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"Think of an Agile team as cross-functional. As a Change Manager, you can think of yourself as the person in the team that is one of the most adept and adaptable, that has the most knowledge but that doesn't mean that you are the only one who is going to do change. If this system is going to go to a group of 100 000 people, then there will be change management required and you as the change manager become one of the stakeholders. You can think of yourself as an Agile team member with a change focus." The change manager often acts as the glue between IT and the business that the system is going to flow out to. Very often you'll find that a user who is part of the team will go out and "seed".

Training in an Agile World

Agile by nature means constant change, refinement, iterations and continuous improvement, and this view needs to encompass training. In a Waterfall implementation, training staggers on from other project activities, but in an Agile world, the training approach needs to be more Agile too.

One way to do this is to review milestones where you know, by a certain date that you'll have a certain amount done and you can assess whether it will be viable for people to see or use completely.

As soon as the product is in a state that your stakeholder is happy enough to show it to someone else, you can start training, but by this point it would be too late to start planning for training so planning should start upfront.

Within the first few sprints, you should be able to predict how long it will take to get to a state of being "trainable". At every sprint you can communicate "accuracy percentages" and alter them as sprints come and go. If you keep adjusting, you should get to point where you are certain enough to know when you can start to roll out training.

The people planning and doing training are part of the team and if they are part of sprints they will be able to start material development and put in placeholders for areas awaiting confirmation. If you are developing your training material in conjunction with sprints, theoretically it should be ready by the time that the demo is ready. Your training material can then actually be "demoed" at the same time as the actual demo.

"You have to be there when the team prioritises because there is a part of the application that is visible and usable by business and actual users. If you are part of the group that decides what becomes priority, then you are going to push for training to get done."

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CAN AGILE BE MORE THAN A WAY TO IMPLEMENT NEW TECHNOLOGY?

Agile has its roots in systems development but over time there has been a definite move into more non-IT related areas. As one Agile expert explained:

"I don't work with software teams anymore. I work with people that are in consulting, leadership, change teams. The principles we apply are the same as those we apply in software development. If you give us money for the next 2 weeks, how can you spend it in a way that is of the most benefit to you? Of course, we do things upfront and we have a vision. Unlike waterfall – where we thought that if we just think hard enough that we would be able to define things crystal clear – we embraced the fact that things change all the time. A huge predictor of company success is how much it can cope with change. How change resilient are you? So instead of fixing what was said was going to be built, we must go back and ask, what's the next after the next?"

> *In times of rapid change, experience could be your worst enemy ~ J. Paul Getty*

Agile for non-IT change

Agile coaches start with the problem we're trying to solve. If the organisation identifies three different problems to solve we must look at everything that could possibly go wrong. You'll probably spend a month or two to plan this. If you take a Lean approach to this (Agile is actually a software implementation and lean is the overall thinking). If you look at these possible problems, you need to start looking at the possible experiments you can do; determine which experiment will have the most impact. This is the experiment I would spend my time planning, actioning and measuring.

Unpacking experimentation

From a Change Manager's point of view: *"When you're dealing with people, then the word experimenting might raise a few eyebrows. Irrespective of what you're trying to achieve, if the impact is structural with people, then you can't go "experimenting". Where I'm thinking about it is when it comes down to things like redundancy – you don't really have the option to go and do a trial/experiment."*

"Change very often is experimental in approach. But what I'm hearing over and over is that Change Managers do it quite organically. It's about bringing the rest of the organisation along and the cultural shift, so that we can start to use a word like 'experimenting' safely."

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WHEN CHANGE MANAGEMENT ITSELF BECOMES AGILE

A lot of the discussion around Agile and Change Management was focused around how we manage the people side of change in an Agile implementation. Another aspect was introduced to the discussion around using Agile principles to effect Change.

"We have all worked with complex adaptive systems (humans are complex adaptive systems). Any one small thing that you change, changes everything. The change can be big, or the change can be small.

So, just as we look at product backlogs every two weeks because the product can be changing, or the team's ideas could be changing, it works the same with human change. To try and envisage the outcome of a change at the beginning through a change roll-out plan etc. is deciding about the change at the time when you know the least about it. The basic principle is that everything is an experiment.

For most professionals, this is quite a difficult concept to accept – we don't have enough information to envisage the impact etc. of something at the beginning."

An Approach to Changing Agile-ly

Identify the things that need to be changed in the organisation and then view the process of changing them as a bit more organic and iterative. List the changes desired and their impacts, so that they can be prioritised. To achieve our change goals, we can try several "experiments".
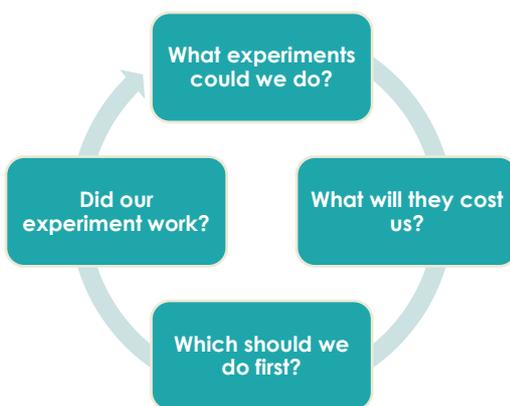
As we are only working in 2-week sprints, we can quickly identify that the change isn't working or needs to be refined. Some questions to ask yourself, when outlining this:

1. What does the experiment look like?
2. What is the experiment going to cost?
3. How are we going to measure it?

"If you have created this view and you pick the things you can do in a 2-week period for example. The idea is that you fail early and fail fast, so the focus needs to be on conducting experiments that are not going to be expensive or hugely impactful – especially because we don't know that it's going to work.

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If you're doing this from the beginning then you're building your knowledge and you're building your expertise in this space, so that by the end, your failure is so minimal because now you know how. You've learnt and grown in this process to the point where there was a proper change transformation. This allows for early risk (which is where the risk needs to be)."

SUMMARY

With its roots in the world of IT, there are many significant and successful initiatives that have been implemented using an Agile approach but there is a definite move towards using the principles and ways of working in other areas of organisations. Although this conversation followed a few different tracks, there were consistent themes that emerged. Ultimately is was agreed that for Agile to work well in an organisation a cultural shift to an iterative, collaborative way of working needs to take place. A continual course correction approach needs to exist so that what is being delivered meets the organisation's current and future needs – regardless of whether it is an IT or Change initiative as the essence remains the same.

To improve is to change and to be perfect is to change often ~ Winston Churchill

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[i] https://enterprise-knowledge.com/change-management-for-agile-projects/

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