AGILESPHERE

Agile – what's in it for me?

An Agilesphere white paper

Version: 1.0
September 14, 2014
Author: Jeremy Renwick, jeremy.renwick@agilesphere.co.uk

Introduction

Agile has proved its worth in many organisations by improving the delivery and quality of software projects. This is particularly true of the use of agile to deliver new "digital" services that harness the power, cost efficiencies and reach of the web to disrupt existing business models or create new industries.

There is, however, a big difference between implementing agile in a greenfield or start-up business and transforming an existing organisation to meet the challenges and realise the opportunities of the digital age.

The complete transformation from traditional to agile delivery is now being actively considered by many organisations and a few have active programmes aiming to achieve this. This paper looks at the challenges posed by such initiatives and outlines Agilesphere's approach to digital and agile transformation.

The challenges

The core challenge to achieve a genuine Agile transformation is that, even if is triggered by technology, and has large technology delivery components, it is a business and organisational change programme first and foremost.

Business driven

Until now technologists have driven typical Agile adoption initiatives and these regularly get stuck or fail when they encounter indifference or active resistance from business leadership.

Business change programmes have to be driven (not just sponsored) by senior executives, i.e. the CEO or someone operating with their authority, if they are going to make any headway. This means an approach that has to be framed in terms of pragmatic, tangible business benefits and engages people using business language as far as possible.

What's in it for me (WIIFM)?

As with any business change programme, an agile transformation requires people to behave and/or operate differently when working as individuals and in teams.

This triggers a range of reactions including enthusiasm, rebellion and, possibly the most

difficult, two-faced passive resistance. This is particularly true of technology-initiated change.

While "top down" sponsorship and drive are critical, actually achieving results requires "bottom up" action. At the root of this challenge are the questions *"What's in it for me? Why should I change?"* as applied to each individual.

It's Agile but not as we know it

If we're changing a whole organisation, the approach has to be consistent. If we are making an agile transformation the approach has to be agile otherwise cynicism ("agile can't cope with real change") will kill the initiative at the start.

However some of that cynicism is justified in that agile techniques are usually presented from a software development point of view. Not only does this put non-technologists on the back foot, there are some important concepts in agile, e.g. continuous integration, that do not apply directly to non-technology deliverables.

In general, agile concepts and principles are as applicable to business change as they are to software. Our experience is that business change can be easier to deliver using agile than software. However, to deliver business change using agile needs some adaptation of both the techniques and language.

The 'language' dilemma

There is a caveat about language (words, phrases, body language, behaviours etc) that needs to be highlighted.

To get people engaged and help them with their understanding it is often best to present the change in language they understand. There will, however, be occasions where a new word or phrase has to be introduced as it describes a fundamental concept that is new; storypoint is an obvious example. There will also be times in the transformation where different language is an important symbol of change or will be needed to "unfreeze" a situation that is blocking progress.

In summary, adoption of appropriate and relevant language is one of the key things that needs to be embedded to achieve agile transformation, however mainstream agile language does not easily engage people new to agile. Managing this dilemma is key.

Keeping it together

Where many technology programmes have failed in the past is because the business change aspects (organisation, people and process) have not been handled well. Typically, business change is seen as a separate discipline to software delivery. This was always an artificial division and when implementing digital businesses models and services a very dangerous one.

While the rest of this paper focuses on business change, in practice we always recommend that the business change and technology aspects of a delivery be fully integrated.

The culture web

When looking at the organisational aspects of any transformation we use the Culture Web, developed by Johnson and Scholes, as a core diagnostic model. It provides a comprehensive diagnosis of the current state of the organisational design, values and cultural aspects that need to be reviewed, challenged and adapted to successfully achieve the desired change.

In summary these are:

• **organisation structure** – the structure of the organisation, formal and informal roles, responsibilities and relationships

• **controls** – the measurement and reward systems used to monitor what is important to the organisation and to reward those who do as required

• **power structures** – formal or informal power or influence by virtue of position, control of resources, who the person knows, or history

• **routines** – the 'way we do things around here'; these can be written for unwritten rules of the game within organisations

• **stories** – stories employees tell about one another and others about the organisation used to communicate traditions, standards and role models

• **symbols** – status symbols, language, terminology, logos and anything else that is a representation of what sits in the organisation's paradigm.

The first three of these are obvious aspects that are likely to need some redesign, but it's the last three that hold the key to long lasting sustainable change given they tend to paint a picture of the less tangible values and beliefs that drive behaviour within the organisation.
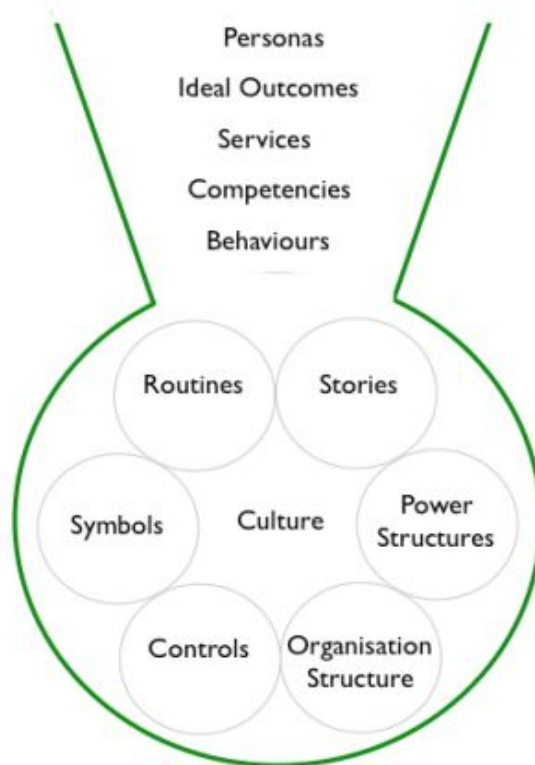
It is particularly applicable when dealing with the significant paradigm shift that is needed in an agile Transformation. By paradigm Johnson and Scholes mean the taken for granted and

shared assumptions and beliefs about the organisation.

While the model is very powerful, we have found the need to add to it to make it more focused and practical when implementing agile / digital transformation.

Digital Transformation Model

When looking at an agile / digital transformation we start with WIIFM and keep it central to our thinking. We then structure and gather the high level user stories (requirements) by comparing current situation and ideal future situation through the following iterative process.

Personas
Ideal Outcomes
Services
Competencies
Behaviours

Routines   Stories

Symbols   Culture   Power Structures

Controls   Organisation Structure

• **Personas:** In a large organisation / user population it is impossible to manage the detailed drivers of every person. We research patterns of perspectives to develop personas, fictional descriptions of people who are a "typical" representative of group of people who are part of the change and share similar situations and drivers.

The fictional nature of personas is also important to de-personalise some of the more

sensitive aspects of change when it comes to delivery. We develop a manageable set of personas, typically between five and 30, and regularly iterate them to keep them representative, as they will change as the transformation is implemented.

• **Ideal outcomes:** Keeping in mind both WIIFM and the overall aims of the change initiative we describe the ideal outcomes for the personas. Initially these are likely to be high level and obvious e.g. "I can work flexibility to accommodate my family responsibilities" or "The right money in my account on time every month" but will evolve, often rapidly, as the transformation progresses.

• **Services:** These are both the technology and non-technology services that provide the platform for the new paradigm and need to be directly linked to the ideal outcomes identified.

Even if the technology part of the overall service is comprehensive, there will always be people aspects to those services e.g. who develops the code? writes the content? manages digital inclusion? who decides the direction of the service and how?

• **Competencies:** full delivery of the transformation will need people with the right capabilities and competencies have we got those competencies? can we develop those competencies?

• **Behaviours:** for the transformation to be embedded for the long term, we will need people with the right behaviours and attitudes. How do we develop/incentivise and maintain these attitudes and behaviours?

People's behaviours are driven by their values and how they are supported and shared by the culture of the organisation. If we need to change the behaviours to support the new digital service then we need to look at all aspects of the culture web.

It is likely that user stories will be generated from all of the headings in the Digital Transformation Model. These are then planned and managed using typical agile techniques.

Changing change

There is another important point to make about agile transformation, the switch from traditional "waterfall" methods to agile methods as it is a special case of business change.

Agile transformation is a significant change programme in its own right but it should never happen in isolation. Just changing your change delivery methodology creates little business value; it is the application of agile to "real" business change programmes that improves delivery of strategic objectives.

In our experience agile transformation only really starts when it is linked to a "real" business change programme as this is what generates true executive sponsorship and the right level of focus.

So, in practice, an organisation ends up with at least two critical programmes running at the same time. It is important to recognise them as separate programmes to ensure sufficient resource is made available and that pragmatic delivery decisions around the business programme do not compromise the broader agile transformation.

At the heart of a successful agile transformation programme lies a successful organisational design and culture change programme i.e. the organisational and people aspects of change rather than technology. We appreciate the irony of this and hope you do too.

Acknowledgements