Is Your Agile Journey Evolving?

The Agile movement introduced some great ideas, but those ideas were not enterprise-ready. But business has changed. And Agile has evolved. Has your Agile adoption kept up?

Agile has indeed changed. In the words of Jeff Patton, the creator of user story mapping:

"When people say Agile today, they mean something different today than they did in 2001…it's come to mean something else."

To those who know how to make Agile ideas work, today's Agile is nothing like the Agile of twenty years ago. Early Agile was nascent and simplistic. It was largely a rejection of a range of dysfunctions; but early Agile's ideas for what to do about those dysfunctions were only partially formed.

The concepts about "Agile maturity" today are much broader and complex. They stem from the works of authors such as Nicole Forsgren (now VP of Research and Strategy at GitHub), Jez Humble (arguably the creator of continuous delivery), Gene Kim (perhaps the creator of DevOps), Klaus Leopold (Business Agility), and Mathew Skelton and Manuel Pais (Technology Teams). These works contain ideas very different from what one found in early Agile books about Scrum and eXtreme Programming.
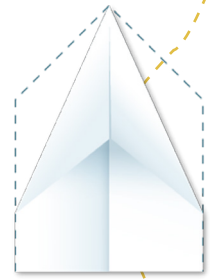
And of course, there is Agile 2, which was defined by fifteen highly experienced practitioners with expertise including Lean product design, Agile human resources (PeopleOps), systems and software engineering, Lean program management, business, learning theory, and DevOps. Agile 2 is further informed by the writings of great thinkers about human behavior and collaboration, including David Marquet (Leadership), Dr. Daniel Kahneman (Cognitive Science), Eric Ries (Lean), Daniel Pink (Motivation), and countless others. Importantly, there are also authors such as Susan Cain who dismantle the extrovert-favoring and non-neurodiverse extremes advocated by the legacy Agile community.

There is much more: Agile 2 has a strong focus on organization issues, including leadership and organization culture. That is why Agile 2 Academy has partnered with organization culture experts Human Synergistics. Agile 2 defines a rich leadership model but changing things like the predominant leadership patterns throughout an organization requires first understanding your organization's culture and also sustained action at many levels.

Leaders today need to look beyond the original Agile methodologies and patterns to achieve agility, because while the desired outcomes may be the same, the technologies, environments, and market demands are very different.

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In which direction are you leading your organization? Are you aspiring to the original Agile, or a more nuanced and evolved Agile? Here are some questions to help you to decide:

1. Is your team model based on self-organization, without considering or providing the kinds of leadership that each team will need?
2. Is experimentation encouraged, but without guidance and the freedom to conduct experiments early in the product life cycle?
3. Are dashboards used for status updates so that meetings can focus entirely on deep discussions and decision-making?
4. Are initiatives and teams set up from the beginning to flow from ideation to operation in a continuous manner without bottlenecks?
5. Are people able to engage and collaborate in ways that consider both team and individual preferences in working styles and communication?
6. Are DevOps practices a priority and being followed consistently at all levels (component, product, and your multi-product business platform)?
7. Is business data carefully curated and managed for product validation?
8. Do your business leaders understand the technology, and do your technical leaders understand the business?

Answering these questions can reveal behaviors that differentiate "old Agile" from the way that experienced and accomplished Agilists view Agile today; and these views are reflected by Agile 2, which is a mature Agile. For further insight, our upcoming whitepaper explains how organization culture—and most critically leadership culture—relates to the various aspects of Agile 2. If you would like to dig deeper, the book, Agile 2: The Next Iteration of Agile, explains the values and principles behind this new, "grown up" Agile.

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