As rapidly changing market conditions and customer expectations require companies to accelerate product/service speed-to-market, many have turned to Agile development, a philosophy that shifts focus from prescriptive project management to proactive product management. However, truly implementing and scaling Agile development remains a challenge for many organizations for a variety of reasons, including lack of appropriate planning, overcomplicated implementation, a short-sighted approach to the process, and/or – perhaps surprisingly – overzealous adoption. Through research and experience, we have identified some best practices to engage, and pitfalls to avoid, on the road to Agile adoption.

A Little Agile Is Not Agile

When transitioning from traditional prescriptive management methodologies, such as Waterfall, to Agile frameworks, enterprises often try to follow what they think is the safe path of fitting some Agile methodologies within the overall framework of the traditional system, or implementing Agile in a piecemeal manner.

Rather than improving efficiency and effectiveness, this approach often results instead in turbulence and chaos:

- *Inconsistent Agile adoption*: Agile adoption is fragmented, omitting structural and organizational changes that are vital to the success of Agile.
- *Inefficient team structure and function*: Employee teams trained for Agile are disbanded and sent to non-Agile projects, squandering the benefit (and expense) of their training and experience, while new resources are retrained for new Agile projects.
- *Customer involvement*: Customer engagement is vital to successful Agile development; piecemeal Agile does not enable the efficient capture of customer input, delaying feedback and reducing its relevance.
- *Change adaptability*: Adaptability, too, is an essential component of Agile development, but traditional methodologies generally adhere to rigid processes that limit flexibility and business outcomes.

Waterfall model	Piecemeal Agile	Mature Agile
Low agility	Agile in Waterfall	Enterprise-wide scale Agile
Rigid team structure	Hindered organizational agility	Framework-driven delivery
Process dependencies	Limited collaboration	Cross-functional teams
Limited customer involvement	Stagnated process evolution	High customer collaboration

A Better Way to Test the Waters: the Pod Approach

Early Agile adoption is best handled through a pod approach, with gradual adoption across the enterprise. This "pocketed Agile" approach adopts the Agile frameworks and principals, in their entirety, in specific small teams within the enterprise. It involves frequent customer collaboration and self-organized, cross-functional, empowered teams working to deliver the minimum viable product at the end of each iteration. Unlike the piecemeal approach, with fragments of Agile scattered through the delivery lifecycle, this approach uses Agile throughout the lifecycle, but in limited teams and projects.

When You're Ready to Go All In

While adopting small, mutually exclusive Agile development teams is a good way to get started, it is not an effective long-term approach. But scaling Agile across an enterprise, like marriage, is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly. It requires an ordered and calculated approach, with constant and careful monitoring, and continuous evolution. The key to success is a gradual but concerted change within the enterprise.

Agile adoption is not embracing a new technology; it is, instead, a full-fledged change management program that requires enterprise-level acceptance and consensus. As we noted above, the journey starts with a few small pods. From there, the journey follows several steps.

- *Connect the Agile dots*: As the original Agile development pods begin to demonstrate meaningful success, additional pods are added. Organizations must beware not to bloat team sizes to unmanageable levels in an effort to "scale" Agile; the smaller Agile teams should be the example for other teams. Enterprises need to orchestrate the different yet uniform pockets of Agile, without which neither standardization nor scale would be possible.
- *Change operational design to suit Agile*: To scale Agile, the business has to drive adoption; an entire operational redesign may be required, with systems and processes restructured to incentivize cross-functional teams. This phase may require assistance from external experts. As structured knowledge sharing is institutionalized, the resulting collaborative organization is better able to scale Agile.

- *Follow a framework-driven approach*: As Agile scales within an organization, it becomes increasingly necessary to leverage frameworks to share learning from experienced teams to newer adopters. Training, while necessary, is insufficient on its own, and specific frameworks are needed to share vital information. Commonly used frameworks include Scrum and Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe).

Pitfalls to Avoid

Under-committing | Scaling Agile requires a complete culture shift, and so fully embracing change is a necessary first step. To fully absorb Agile requires

- Management commitment
- Customer involvement
- A product mindset
- Team structures and roles

Once the Agile culture becomes part of the enterprise DNA, it evolves from adoption to enterprise-wide scalability.

Overcomplicating Agile transformation | On the other end of the scale, another common challenge in Agile implementation is overcomplicating Agile adoption, by either falling back to a piecemeal approach or by blowing implementation out of proportion. It is not uncommon for enterprises to begin to equate enterprise-wide Agile with "everything Agile," wasting resources implementing Agile in processes that operate effectively without it or that will not otherwise benefit from the approach.

Believing you can "achieve" Agile | Agile is considered a journey for good reason: scaling Agile is a never-ending process that requires continuous evolution and improvement. The organization must monitor, and analyze its process, course-correcting as necessary, and remain always dynamic.

The Agile journey is complex and vexing, and can stress an organization, but its resulting rewards are well worth the effort.

For complete coverage of this topic please see the full report, *The Agile Journey: Following Agile to Being Agile*.

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