



**AGILE CHANGE**  
*management limited*

# Why don't people use our work ?

## Author

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## Introduction

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This presentation was delivered at Agile Tour London presentation Friday October 19<sup>th</sup> 2018. The objective of the presentation was to understand why the improvements in project productivity through regular project deliverables available after every sprint has caused problems for our users.

The presentation explained aspects of how the brain works, and how users react to the changes in their ways of working triggered by these project deliverables. If we can understand why they are reacting in the way they are, then we can address these issues and provide better support for them.

After all, if users do not use what the project delivers, then benefits cannot be realised. Financial benefits, reputational benefits, efficiency benefits all rely on users changing how they work, to deliver the improvements promised by the project.

## Current challenges posed by Agile

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Working in an Agile way can feel great: emphasis on achievements gives people pride in their productivity; emphasis on empowered being an empowered team gives people a sense of community, and recognition of their knowledge and abilities.

Personally, I find the structure and techniques offered by Agile increase my productivity, because they increase my focus on getting things done, and tested so that I know they are really finished. I cannot remember how I used to organise my work before I used a Kanban Board.

I really enjoy helping my clients create Agile delivery plans, keeping things high level until we need to get into the detail, instead of building detailed Gantt charts of every activity from day one helps them clarify what it is that they want to achieve.

I am totally on-board with agile practices, but I am also aware that those in roles where they are responsible for creating new things i.e. features and functions have a different experience to their users.

Those in the business who are responsible for the day to day running of processes and delivering customer service are measured not on their ability to create new things, but to make sure that the existing processes work effectively.

I worry about the chasm between these two worlds, and the different objectives, perspectives and priorities that these two parts of the business have.

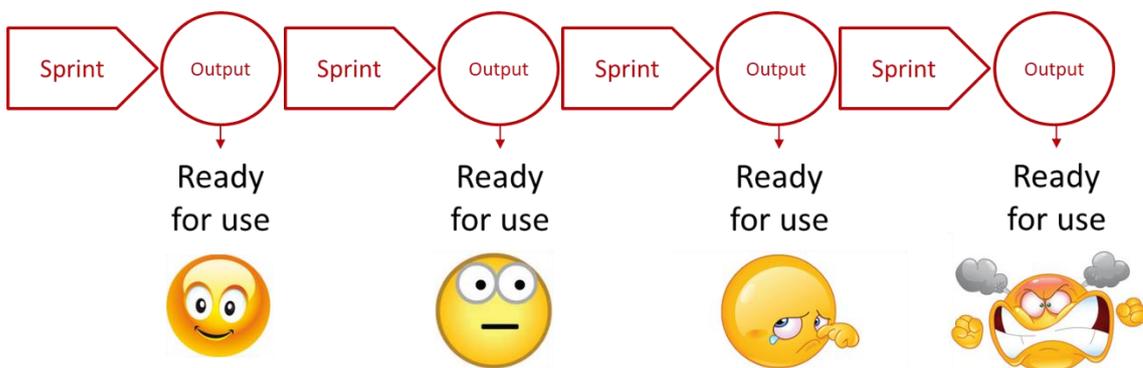


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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Technical excellence of the work</li><li>2. Unique features and functions</li><li>3. On-time delivery</li><li>4. Growing your expertise through retrospectives</li></ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting the needs of customers</li><li>• Usability of the features and functions</li><li>• Coping with the deadlines for 'business as usual'</li><li>• Meeting objectives and KPIs for changing processes</li></ul> |
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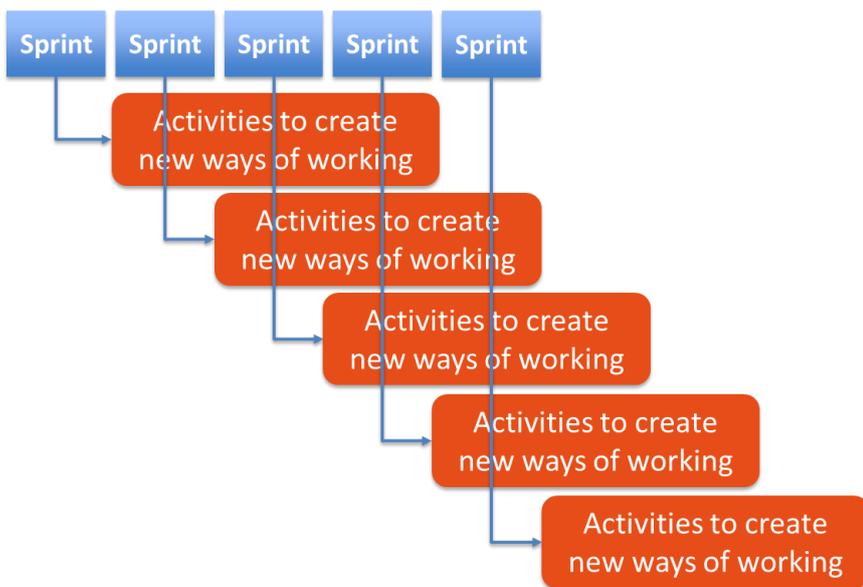
Agile development creates a pipeline of new features and functions which need to be fully exploited by our business customers, so they need to change their current ways of working to get the most use out of what we have delivered to them. At the start of a project, early deliverables are trigger the review of processes and the design of new ways of working. However, the speed and relentless of this delivery, sprint after sprint can rapidly become overwhelming.



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The problem is that each output from an agile delivery model has to be understood, practiced and adopted as the new norm, and this process takes a lot more time than an average two-week sprint. I know we can argue that the size and scale of the changes we are asking the business to make are not that great, but psychologically the brain doesn't care that much about the size of change.

There is a time-lag between the project deliverable being available for use, and the time taken to create, practice and adopt new business processes that incorporate the project deliverable. This time lag worsens with every Sprint.



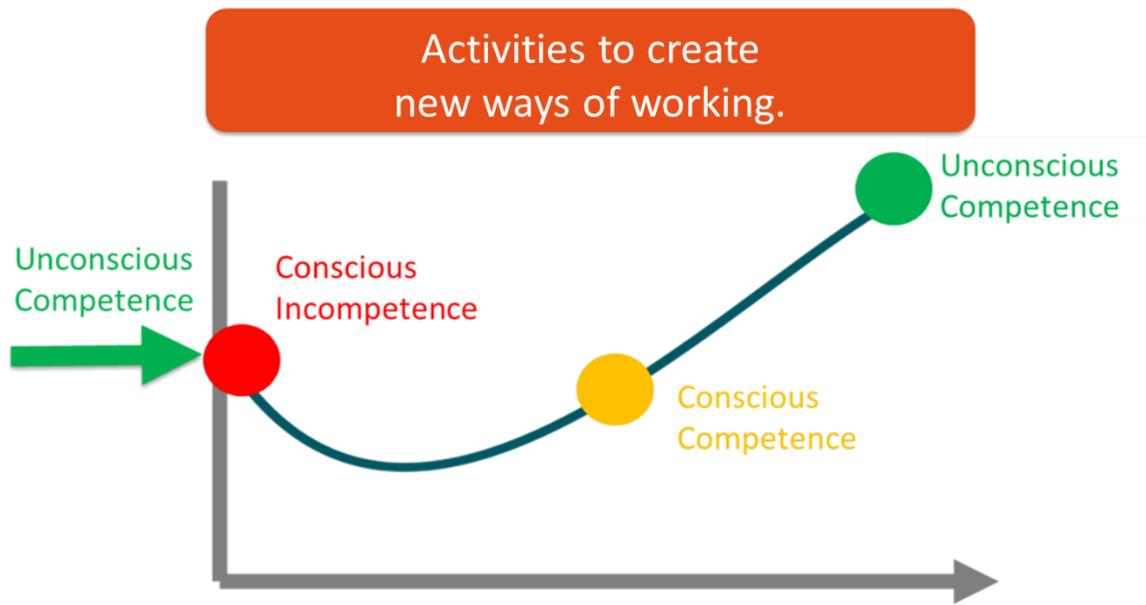
## How does change feel to those who have to work in new ways?

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When our projects introduce change to our users, we trigger a psychological impact. Up until the point that there is a new feature, users know how to do their job. They are experienced and have knowledge and skills in this way of working. We call this 'unconscious competence' which means they do things automatically, unconsciously, because they don't have to think it through, it is a habit.

Our outputs at the end of Sprints or Increments trigger a recognition that they need to do things differently, a recognition that their old habits are not going to work. They are not sure about how to do things in the new way, which we term 'conscious incompetence'. They are aware that they don't know how to do things, which feels stressful.

They can get back to unconscious competence through practice of new ways of working. But as we can see from this diagram, there is a 'productivity dip' because when we do something for the first time, we go more slowly and we make more mistakes compared to when we are experienced in what we are doing. This causes its own stress, as how many of us how the time to take things more slowly. We are all under so much pressure to get things done, we have run out of hours in the day. The idea that we are about to experience a slower work rate, and we will make mistakes that will take time and effort to put right as well feels overwhelming.



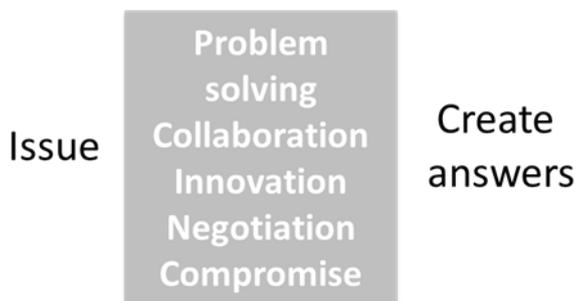
**Change makes the brain unhappy!**

Another problem with this lack of competence is that it triggers uncertainty. The brain hates uncertainty. Essentially, the brain loves habit, it loves unconscious competence because it uses less processing power. Our brains are approximately 3% of our body weight, but use about 11% of our processing power i.e. our oxygen. So like any power hungry machine (tv, laptop etc) it likes to go on 'standby mode' which is the equivalent of unconscious competence.

Every time we introduce change, we create uncertainty. This means the brain feels 'shocked'. The brain likes to know what is coming round the corner, and when this doesn't happen, it loses confidence. Too many changes produces 'shock mode'.

***In control***

***In shock mode***



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When the brain is 'in control' it can process problems. It assimilates data, it sources new information, and identifies new ideas to be able to solve the problem. This creative space is something we don't think about, but it is there to help us navigate new situations and come up with ways to cope. The problem is, when we are in 'shock mode' this creative space in the brain shuts down.

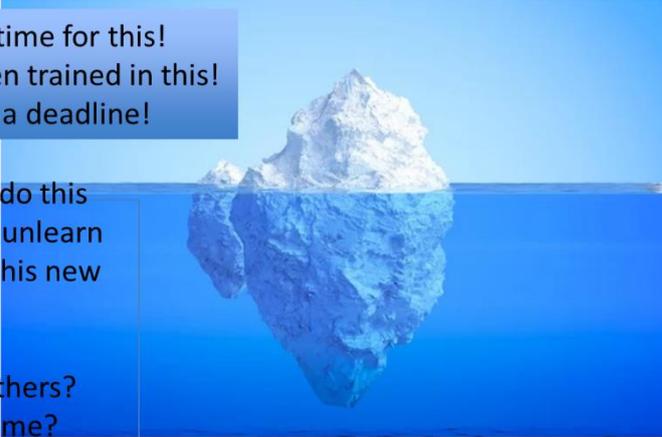
Instead, the brain demands instructions. It cannot process any new information to create new answers, so it demands answers. This is a real problem when we are asking our users to be at their most creative and to come up with new ways of working.

### Change triggers learning anxiety

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The brain is triggering learning anxiety, which is a powerful form of resistance. This can manifest as totally reasonable push-back: we haven't got time for this now, we have other deadlines, we are really busy with our customers, we haven't been trained in this.

These rational examples of resistance are all the things at the top of the iceberg, things we can easily see. The problem is, all too often we try to address these rational complaints about change, with rational answers about why the change is beneficial, and how easy it will be to work in new ways.

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- We don't have time for this!
  - We haven't been trained in this!
  - I am up against a deadline!

- I am scared of not knowing how to do this
- I am going to have to remember to unlearn how I used to do things, and learn this new way of doing things.
- What if I make mistakes?
- What if I don't learn as quickly as others?
- What if my team no longer respect me?
- What if I lose my reputation for reliability?

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But what the brain is really saying is (the rest of the iceberg – much bigger and much more powerful but not articulated):

- I am scared of not knowing how to do this

- I am going to have to remember to unlearn how I used to do things, and learn this new way of doing things.
- What if I make mistakes?
- What if I don't learn as quickly as others?

Learning anxiety is a perfectly reasonable fear of looking stupid, but people don't want to admit to this baser instinct, so they wrap it up in logical reasons why the change cannot be adopted now – the top of the iceberg.

### **Change creates other disadvantages for users**

#### **Loss of status**

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For the existing way of working, the staff member is completely clued up, so they can make decisions about how they work, when they get stuff done, which corners to cut.

When we handover a new feature, and change how they do things, they lose this autonomy, and we make them dependent on someone else telling them how they need to work. This loss of autonomy triggers a loss of status because you are clearly not the top of the pack. Someone else is giving you instructions which means if they are the one telling others what to do, they must be the more senior in the relationship. Humans are pack animals, and we need to know where we are in the pecking order of the team.

This loss of status pushes us down the pecking order, which triggers stress. People feel less confident, less in control and less valued. None of this feels good, so the brain prefers to stay working in the old way, which maintains their status.

#### **Loss of belonging**

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When we know how to do our work, we are a fully contributing member of a team. Up until the change, users knew their place in the pecking order of their team, but now they feel isolated as their position of respect and being known for their reliability in doing a certain thing has been lost.

Loss of belonging has significant impact on the stress levels of those affected. They lost their confidence and they feel isolated.

We trust more, we collaborate more with those that we feel we have something in common with, someone who is part of our tribe. So when this is lost, we lose that team collaboration, which is a feature of high performing teams. Change can trigger a loss of performance.

### Help users address change

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There is a lot we can do to help our users cope with our new project deliverables. First, we need to treat resistance to change as the risk that it is. PMI® have undertaken research into early warning signs for complex projects, which concluded that formal project review processes will be ineffective until we learn to pick up on subtle dynamics such as group think, political pressure and inconsistent decision making. These are all created by the emotional impact of change on our users.

Research by the Management Innovation Centre in Amsterdam examined 2,000 projects in 43 countries before concluding that the best opportunity for improving project success rates lies in learning to understand and influence social dynamics (why people behave as they do).

Project Aristotle was the name of the research undertaken at Google, who after studying 180 teams discovered that out of all the factors that their most effective teams exhibited, psychological safety was the top one, that outperformed all of the other factors:

1. Psychological Safety – is it safe to take risks and be vulnerable in front of each other?
2. Dependability – can we count on each other to do high quality work on time?
3. Structure and Clarity – are our goals, roles and execution plans clear?
4. Meaning of the work – are we working on something that is personally important?
5. Impact of work – do we fundamentally believe that the work we are doing matters?

We need to add readiness assessments and readiness activities into each Sprint so that we are considering the impact of what needs to change in the business processes before we deliver the output from the Sprint. This is our best hope of preventing the backlog of deliverables that are not going into use because users cannot adapt at the pace that the project can create.

We need to be empathetic, let's walk in the shoes of our users and recognise that they have deadlines, metrics and objectives that they must meet that are different to yours.

One of the most impactful things we can do is help the creation of new ways of working by transferring our knowledge. Project team members have an amazing amount of knowledge about how the deliverables work, why they work the way they do and any compromises that have been made during development and as a result of testing. We need to provide this help, including briefing the users, sitting with them at their desks and showing them how things work, providing demonstrations, giving them opportunities to have a go and try things out whilst we sit alongside them.

To get the most impact from this support, we need to advertise that this support is available as early as possible in the project lifecycle. As soon as our users realise that they are not on their own, the sooner

their stress levels will reduce, and therefore, their resistance will reduce. Then we should make this support available in a way that enables users to choose what works for them, so they feel empowered in the process.

### Conclusion

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Behavioural change takes a lot of time and effort. It requires practice and a willingness to make mistakes and have a go. It is hard for users to put this time and effort into change if they feel that the changes are being imposed upon them. I think we are entering a new era where project teams, developers, testers and business analysts are working together with their users. It is no longer them and us, it is a mixed economy and unless we work together, our projects will fail because the benefits will not be realised.

### About the author

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I have been responsible for the successful delivery of effective change and for creating environments that support transformational change for over twenty years. I have an impressive track record of successful consulting assignments and I am an acknowledged thought leader in Change Management.

I am the Co-Chair of the Change Management Institute UK and a respected author of text books and articles on change, project and programme management. I am a talented communicator with a reputation for delivering complex information with humour and passion. I draw on my wealth of practical experience to illustrate concepts and to engage my audience in lively debates on advantages and disadvantages of each approach that I outline.

To access more resources about change management, connect with Melanie on LinkedIn  
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