



**AGILE CHANGE**  
*management limited*

# **Agile Demystified – the sequel !**

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## Introduction

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This paper is the second in the series on getting to understand Agile. In the [first paper](#) I described the core concepts of Agile, the techniques, the terminology and the practical difficulties of adopting an Agile approach. In this paper I am going to explain the impact of Agile on other parts of your organisation, and how your ways of working will need to change to get the full value from an Agile approach.

Agile approaches to project delivery can have a powerful effect on an organisation. Projects assume a greater impact within the business because of the frequency of their output. When projects delivered all the requirements as a fully packaged single deliverable, the business often had limited engagement until this handover point. Now, projects are a production line, regularly churning out new features and functions which must be assimilated by the business into their own production line, which is dedicated to delivering "business as usual".

A simple analogy is that the project team are delivering pieces of flatpack furniture to their customer base, but these customers need to find the time and motivation to put the furniture together. This means that the business is directly and frequently impacted by projects, and at the same time, those in the project team need to work closely with the business to make sure they are delivering the most useful piece of furniture.

Managing initiatives using an Agile approach requires different values and behaviours than when we use a more linear approach. That feels like a bold statement, when all we are changing is how we organise our activities and deliver completed work, but it is true.

This is because Agile is only a change to the processes we follow on the surface. Beneath the surface it requires a paradigm shift in the trust and respect we show to others and our willingness to work collaboratively, valuing the input of others even when it conflicts with how we would get the job done.

In this paper, I have given examples for how our ways of working need to change to get the full value from an Agile approach, with specific reference to three areas:

- Impact on the team
- Impact on your customers
- Impact on senior management

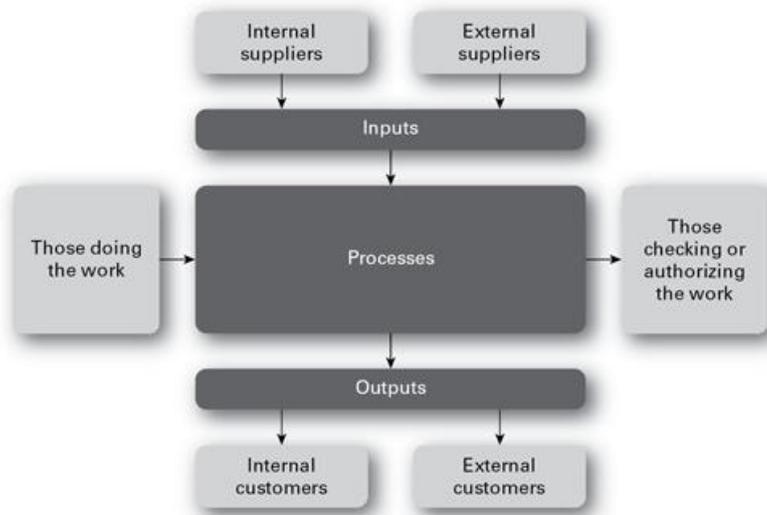
## Impact on the team

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The first thing to clarify in an Agile approach is who the "team" really is. Agile is a collaboration between those who have the technical skills to create the tangible project deliverables and those in the business who are going to implement and adopt these deliverables as part of their new ways of working.

Those with the technical skills can be further sub-divided into those with a formal role as a project team member and those who hold vital inputs to this work, but who are on the periphery, busy with their own areas of responsibility but who are called in to share their knowledge on an ad-hoc basis with the project team.

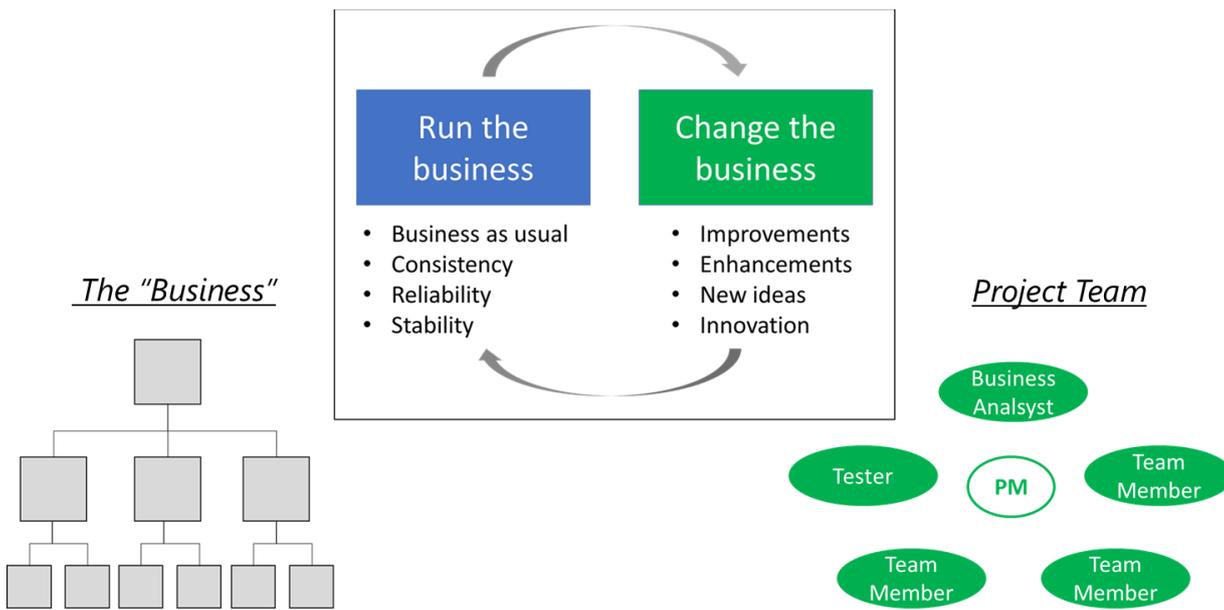
This Community Map can be helpful in identifying who is involved directly in the team and who will be involved on an “as needed” basis.



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Understanding who to involve is one thing but recognising that those not directly in the project team will have a different motivation to those in the team is critically important. Project team members are assessed on their ability to create project outputs in every sprint. Their priorities are design, development and test of new features and functionality that can be used by the business to deliver services to customers. Their pre-occupation is with the Delivery Plan, hitting the deadlines, ensuring that what is created passes its tests.

Those who represent the voice of the business have an interest in making sure these project deliverables reflect the needs of the business, but the project is not their only priority. They are judged on their success in meeting the Key Performance Indicators associated with “business as usual”. Therefore, they are constantly splitting their time between giving guidance to the project team and spending time on their own objectives.



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Be up front about these different priorities. Ask those from the business what pressure they are under and when these pressure points tend to occur so that there is at least an acknowledgement that they have two masters to serve and cannot always drop everything to come to project meetings, demonstrations or sign off what has been created immediately it is available for review.

Make it easy on those representing the business, by clarifying who does what in terms of team responsibilities. Work is divided amongst the team based on experience and specialist expertise which is obvious to those involved, but which is opaque to those outside the team. This can act as a barrier, because if the team appears as one unit, it is hard to work out the most relevant entry point to ask for information and to share information.

	I am the main contact for..	I can provide help with ..
Team member 1		
Team member 2		
Team member 3		

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To enable those that you need to work with to understand who best to contact, create a “who knows/does what” chart. This way you move the team from a homogeneous unit to individuals each with their own areas of expertise. It makes it clear who to contact in the event of questions, which increases understanding and trust. Also, it speeds up decision making. Encourage those you work with in the business to create a similar chart, so that if your key contact is not available when you need an urgent answer, you know who else you can refer to.

### Impact on your customers

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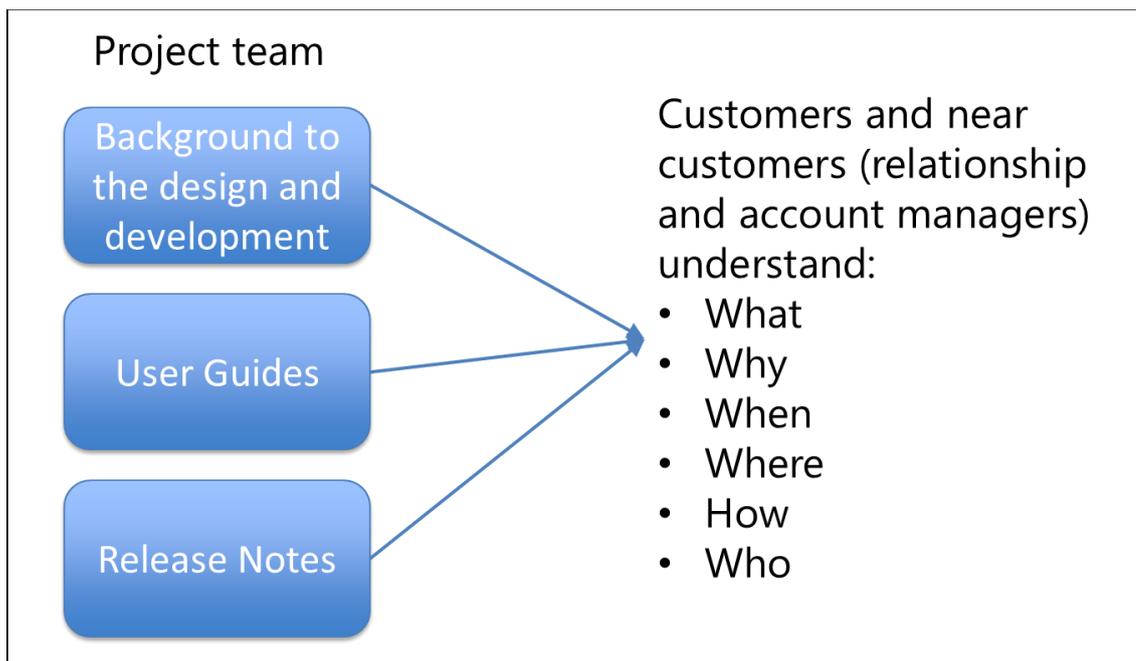
The immediate “customers” for many projects are internal colleagues who are going to have to work in new ways to accommodate the project deliverables. A larger group but whose voice is not always heard are the external customers on behalf of whom, ultimately, the project is delivered.

It is important to realise that whilst the project deliverables are being created to provide more features and functionality for customers, hopefully improving their experience, this also changes what they are used to. Agile is a constant cycle of new outputs that can lead to changes in how the customer experiences what your organisation has to offer. In other words, customers can experience Agile projects as disruption in the short term.

I don't think we can overcome this, but it highlights how important it is for the project team to communicate what is coming next and what the likely impact that will be on the existing experience. The project team might not be responsible for communicating this to the ultimate customers, but they do have a responsibility for ensuring that those in relationship or account management roles are fully briefed so they can give detailed and credible answers to customers. This is an aspect of Agile working that is so often over-looked but can have a significant negative impact on customer service and the reputation of the organisation.

Create mechanisms to enable this transfer of knowledge by including in the work of each sprint the creation of information that will help the recipients of the work fully understand what it is they are getting. Using our flatpack furniture analogy, failing to include a picture of how all the pieces fit together would make the task so much more difficult!

Some team members see this transfer of knowledge as an “extra” to be delivered on a best-efforts basis. I hope I am making the point that it is integral to effective adoption of the project deliverables so is a core activity, as important as creation and testing.



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## Impact on senior management

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In my experience, Senior Management have three key issues with an Agile approach which need to be addressed up front or they will not give the Agile team the support required:

1. Not knowing what is going to be delivered and when
2. Not getting progress reports about the activity within the team
3. Empowering/trusting the team to do its work but being responsive in answering questions

## Not knowing what is going to be delivered and when

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We know that one of the greatest advantages of an Agile approach is not wasting time on detailed planning up front, for things that cannot be determined at the start of the project lifecycle as information emerges later on. However, if you are the person signing off the budget, this can feel extremely risky. It is a disadvantage, not an advantage. This is because a more traditional project plan sets out what is going to happen and when from start to finish, so senior managers can more easily judge what they are paying for. In reality, plans created in detail up front are subject to a great deal of change, but at the outset their level of detail can look impressive and be reassuring.

Help senior managers feel more in control of the spend they are authorising by explaining your sprint plan or delivery plan. You might not be able to give them exact details of what is going to be created but you can explain the concept of frequent delivery, and how this is tested through early customer feedback. You can also reassure them that your planning is based on the concept of early return on investment, not waiting for payback after the project has closed.

Supplement your Delivery Plan with all the control points that take place during a Sprint, so that Senior managers can see that whilst the project deliverables evolve over time, this is done in a structured and planned way. For example, make it clear that there are daily stand ups, retrospectives and planned dates for demonstrations, walk-throughs and question and answers sessions with the business to keep everyone informed of progress and to seek their feedback.



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## Not getting progress reports

When senior managers are frantically busy, a report that tells them all the things a team has been up to is an advantage because it helps them appreciate what is happening. Agile communications rely on senior managers keeping themselves informed, which can be perceived as an additional burden. Have an upfront conversation with your Sponsor about how you will be visually tracking progress and work out practical ways for sharing this with senior stakeholders.

For example, does your Sponsor understand how Kanban works, if not maybe take a few minutes to explain so that they appreciate how you are tracking progress? The same can be said for burn down charts and for how you are sharing meetings in Daily Stand Ups – don't assume they know this is happening if Agile is new to them.

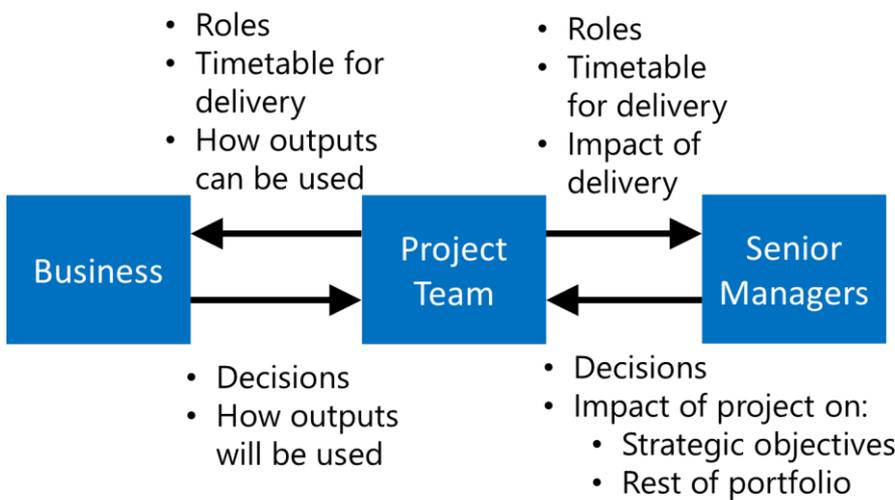
Take the time to explain how these visual techniques for tracking achievements are available for stakeholders to find out at any time what is happening and to get the reassurance that they need that progress is real. Ask questions to find out what information your Sponsor or the Business need to feel that they are well informed. Recognise that these needs are likely to be different to the needs of the team doing the work, but that this additional information provision can be helpful to the team, giving them a new perspective on their work. For example, if the team doesn't usually track its work against the Business Case, which is a vital document for the Sponsor, look at what can be learned by the team if they have to review what has been delivered in each Sprint through the lens of the benefits that it might create.

## Empowering/trusting the team

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Moving away from formal escalation of issues to a more ad-hoc approach can be a bit of a surprise for senior managers who may be looked after by a gatekeeper PA and are not used to immediate requests for decisions. Again, just like the reporting, this is something that you need to explain and work out how this can be achieved based on the schedule and amount of travelling that your Sponsor might be doing as part of their day job.

Use “contracting conversations” to develop an appreciation for how information and decisions will flow between the project team, the business/customers and senior managers. This technique is so important to establishing an effective working relationship that it is important to plan time for these, and identify the key contacts with whom you need to establish an agreed approach to how you work.



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In this example, the project team have identified the information that they need from the Business and from their Sponsor to be successful and are asking questions about what those stakeholders need from the team. Too often we drift into assumptions about the information needs of others. By taking this structured approach to discovery at the start of the initiative, there is a greater chance that trust will develop between the parties, which will smooth the path for all decisions and information sharing.

## Conclusion

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Agile is a simple concept that is complex to implement. This complexity is in part driven by the number of those affected by this change in how work is carried out. Understanding how others can be drawn into the benefits of Agile working, and how success is reliant on this collaborative approach is vital to any successful adoption of Agile.

## About the author

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My job is to help organisations develop the capability to manage change and transformation. This involves a wide range of activities as no two organisations are the same. For example, I might devise the framework and methods to be used to become more Agile, more digital or more innovative. Other times I am leading the creation of an internal network of change management champions who lead themselves and their colleagues through transformation to achieve new ways of working. I am often in the board room supporting senior leaders to become effective sponsors and I go on to provide executive coaching throughout the life of significant change initiatives.

I love my job so much that I write lots of articles and text books to help transfer my knowledge and experience to the next generation of change managers. I am passionate about my profession and help to lead the growth of the Change Management Institute in the UK as well as promoting our professional globally.

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