



AGILE CHANGE
management limited

Benefits of an Evolving Solution

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Introduction

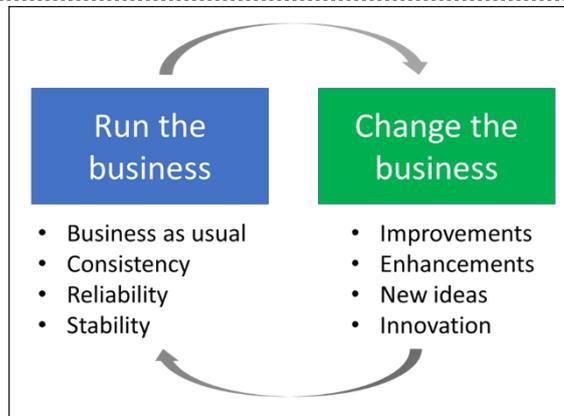
This paper summarises a presentation I gave to Agnostic on 4th March 2020. As the Chief Examiner for the Agile Change Agent qualification, and an experienced Transformation Director leading cultural change within global organisations, I am at the sharp end of resistance to change. One of the most common causes of resistance to adopting an Agile approach is a lack of understanding of the business benefits of Agile approaches.

Those of us working in Agile are excited by the advantages it gives us. Listed in many surveys on the adoption of Agile are:

- Faster to market
- Increased response to changing circumstances
- Greater visibility of achievements
- Greater team performance

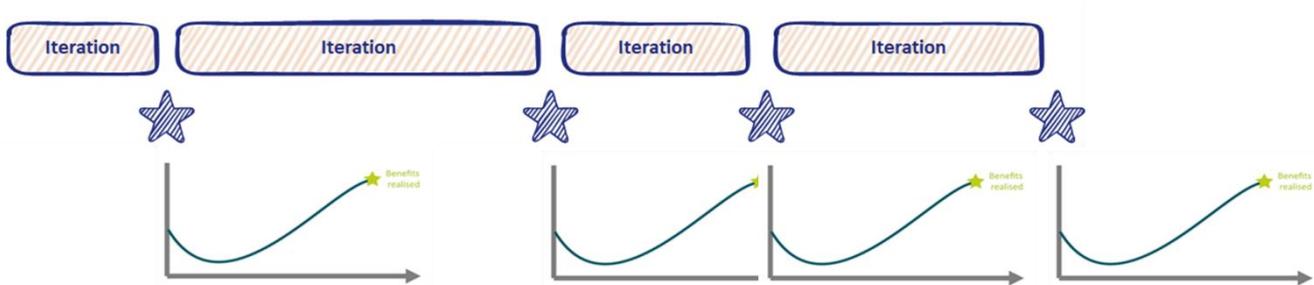
However, the perception of our colleagues in the “business” servicing internal and external customers and working with suppliers and regulators is of disruption and uncertainty. This is an issue for all of us, because successful adoption of Agile requires all parts of the organisation to participate. Agile is based on the principle of collaboration, so it is time to sharpen our articulation of the benefits of this approach and bring others into our world.

Different worlds



Let's start with an appreciation of the different pressures we are under. Many of my “Agile” colleagues are in roles which are dedicated to delivering and implementing change. We are a disparate group, with many job titles including Developer, Analyst, Change Manager, Project Manager, Programme Manager and Business Analyst. It is our responsibility to bring new ways of working to our colleagues in the “business”. We are incentivised to remove old ways of working, introduce improvements and enhancements and increase the current capabilities of the organisation through the introduction of new products and services.

Our colleagues in the “business” are performance managed on their delivery of “business as usual” i.e. the delivery of existing products and services to customers. They offer reliability, consistency and stability to customers and anything new disrupts this pattern of familiarity. It is their work that is the core of the organisation, earning the revenue that pays of the innovation and continuous change that Agile creates.



Their resistance to adopting an Agile approach is that our colleagues in the “business” will experience frequent disruptions to their established patterns of work, forcing them through the productivity dip associated with having to learn new ways of working. We have to help them discover why this disruption is a price worth paying.

Selling the benefits

As a passionate convert to Agile after many years in using more traditional (waterfall) approaches, I believe that how we work now is the most common-sense response to our VUCA world – Volatility; Uncertainty; Complexity; Ambiguity.

I think our best response to explaining the advantages of Agile is to concentrate on the core of what we deliver, which is an evolving solution. Starting small, not planning everything at the start but building on what we learn from each iteration delivers early return on investment and enables us to react rapidly to changes in circumstances.

To those responsible for “business as usual”, an evolving solution has more negative connotations. We need to address these concerns, we need to explain in business terms what we are delivering, and critically, the many controls that exist within Agile to make sure we do what we said we would do.

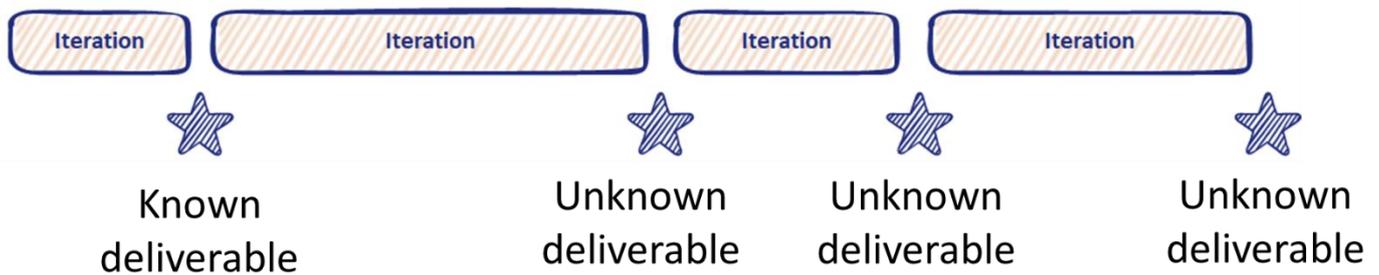
The most common negativity about an “evolving solution” is:

- Evolving means not fixed and defined but has the potential to grow and develop, which means that what will be created is not certain at the start.
- Working in short sprints of delivery means frequent surprises which is hard to cope with internally, but which can cause real anger with external customers.

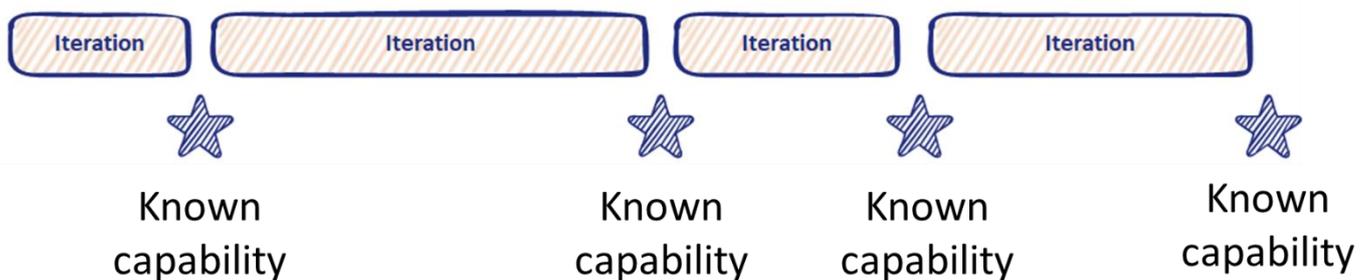
What am I going to get for my money?

If something evolves, it means developing, emerging and growing. It is the opposite of more traditional methods where the requirements are identified, and the full scope of the solution designed before anything is created. This traditional approach creates a perception of certainty about what is going to be delivered, accompanied by a full list of activities to “prove” how the project deliverables will be created, with a detailed breakdown of what is going to happen, how much it is going to cost, and when it is going to be available.

Agile cannot explain item for item where the money is going to go up front, because we let the detail emerge as we respond to the results of our early deliveries with added functionality as we move through the lifecycle of our initiative.



We need to address the problem caused by this uncertainty by working with our business colleagues to describe in as much detail as possible the new business capability that results from our initiative. This does not run contra to the principles of Agile, because we are not defining all of the work up front, but we are setting a clear destination, describing what the organisation will be able to do that it could not do before.



For clarity, we can also include things that will stop, or be removed as part of the adoption of this new capability. By stating what will be achieved, we are not preventing iterative development, as we are not defining each of the elements that will be created or how they will be created. We are looking ahead, and stating the end goal, the compelling set of benefits that the organisation will realise as a result of our work.

This is easier said than done, because it requires us to jump ahead and imagine a world where our project has been successful, and we can picture the new ways of working and the reaction of customers, suppliers, colleagues and regulators to these new capabilities.

What it going to happen in the future?

Another issue for our business colleagues, is that incremental delivery doesn't give enough notice about what will be delivered in future sprints. Iterative development works very well for the creation of new ideas, but colleagues often need a long lead time to communicate what will be happening to customers and suppliers.

A few weeks' notice is not enough time to explain changes to customers or to plan ahead for marketing campaigns, give wholesalers advance warning of new products and services coming on stream or to make changes to the supply change to reflect different needs.

I think this is where MoSCoW (Must Have; Should Have; Could Have; Won't Have This Time) can be of most help. We can describe future deliverables, identifying the minimum functionality they will have. We are not getting caught in a promise to deliver every possible feature, because that conflicts with the flexibility needed to respond to lessons learned from previous Sprints. However, it does enable us to have a conversation with business colleagues about what it will be possible to do, and what they can promise to customers. This sets an expectation of new functionality, so that we are preparing customers to take action, whilst recognising that the exact detail will not be known immediately.

Another key action therefore is to involve customers as early as possible in trials and tests, not making them wait until everything is perfected. Their early involvement gives them ideas about what they will need to change in their own business, increasing their ability to prepare.

Tailor our argument to the needs of different stakeholders

We should recognise that our stakeholders have different responsibilities and therefore need to hear different benefits related to an Agile, evolving solution if they are to give us their support.

SPONSORS
Achieve strategic objective

FINANCE DIRECTOR
Ensure value for money

DEPARTMENT MANAGER
Achieve business objectives.

TEAM MEMBER
Achieve KPIs and business targets.

Sponsor

The Sponsor role (also referred to as Senior Responsible Owner or Executive) has a responsibility to contribute to the achievement of the strategic objectives of the organisation. They need to know that the solution they are funding will make a positive contribution measures that the organisation has identified as representing success.

Let's explain that be enabling the solution to evolve, we can use the MoSCoW prioritisation method to ensure that everything we add to the solution has been tested against the success criteria (expected business benefits) to ensure we don't waste time adding anything to our solution that is not needed.

As we evolve the solution, we can be responsive to changes in the business environment, reacting to the results of horizon scanning so that whatever we create, we know if has relevance to our current situation.

We evolve the solution by prioritising our work based on its contribution to business value, so we do not waste time "gold plating" our solutions with extra features that cost money but which do not deliver "return on investment".

Whilst the exact details of the solution evolve over time, we do have certainty of when functionality will come on stream, so we can prepare all parts of the business to market and sell from that date, maximising the financial return.

These specific delivery dates also provide dates at which the value delivered against the costs spent can be measured and if the benefits are not greater than the costs, the project can be terminated, having delivered some of the scope but not rolling on indefinitely.

Finance Director

The Finance Director is always in the background and is a key stakeholder for ensuring the approval of our development budget. Finance Directors work to a strict annual timetable governed by the financial quarters, half years, year ends and rules of the tax system. This means that certainty is important for when funds are needed and when benefits will come on stream: revenue generation and cost savings.

As with the Sponsor, we need to explain that each element of our evolving solution is evaluated against the business benefit it provides and only those elements with the strongest return on investment will be included.

We also have to point out the use of Sprints means there is early and frequent return on investment.

Another benefit is that whilst the contents of the solution are flexible (they evolve), the timetable to which we operate is fixed, so they can rely on this return on investment occurring at specific dates throughout the life of the initiative.

Team members

As we read earlier, our colleagues in the business are performance managed on their ability to service customers, manage issues, create customer satisfaction and increase staff engagement. The benefits of the evolving solution to Department Managers and their staff must be explained in terms of how each delivery enhances their ability to do their job.

I think the most powerful argument for this group is that the solution evolves based on their feedback and that the "voice of the customer" i.e. their voice, is what helps us understand what features and functionality we should add next. This means they are more likely to get things that satisfy their needs and that are relevant to their work.

They can also shape the timetable of the evolving solution to ensure it reflects the peaks and troughs of customer demand. They can guard against a sprint ending and having to implement new functionality at a time when customer demand is at its highest. They can also shape the acceptance criteria for the evolving solution to ensure that the speed, security and accessibility helps them with their work.

About the author

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 Chief Examiner of the Agile Change Agent qualification from the accreditation body, APMG-International. I am also the UK Country Lead Change Management Institute and a respected author of text books and articles on change, project and programme management.

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