What Happened to The First Value?

The Relationship Between Organisational Culture and Becoming Agile

David Bales UTS HDR Student & Agile Coach

Ways of Working?

Since when has Agile only been about "Ways of Working"[1]? The term is now synonymous with large-scale Agile adoptions and transition initiatives in Australia.

The focus of these initiatives is a practice-based Agile. Rolling out a mix of OKRs (Doerr and Page, 2018), the Spotify model (Kniberg and Ivarsson, 2012), Scrum (Schwaber and Sutherland, 2011) and a sprinkling of SAFe practices (Leffingwell, 2016), establishing several processes to follow and packaging it up as a new *way of working*. Teams are under the pump cranking out more and more features that no one cares about and beginning to believe that this is what Agile is.

What about *Ways of Thinking* or *Ways of Being*? We seem to have violated the first Agile Manifesto value (Beck et al., 2001; J. Highsmith and Cockburn, 2001) and missed the point that the signatories were trying to make, that people and their interactions were more important (Cockburn and Highsmith, 2001; J. A. Highsmith, 2002). To develop a "critical consciousness" in the teams and build their capability and confidence to creatively define their own path (Freire, 2018).

A recent review of 172 papers between 2017 and 2020 that were concerned with Agile transition indicated that over 53.4% cited that organisational culture had a significant influence on the success or failure of an Agile transition, but only 10.5% investigated any further than just a superficial footnote with little consensus.

So we have a developing situation of large-scale Agile implementations creating a generation of teams beginning to believe that Agile is only about practices, and that organisational culture, the values, beliefs, behaviours, language, symbology and habits of an organisation has something to do with it but we don't know why (Geertz and Darnton, 1973).

The Research

This research investigates the relationship with organisational culture and Agile to understand how this relationship both influences our interpretation and gives rise to the manifestations of them.

Teams, organisations and culture are contextual and unique lived experiences (van Manen, 2014). A resonance of the people, the environment and the work. What can they tell us about our understanding and implementation of Agile?

This is an ethnographic study (Sharp et al., 2016). A form of qualitative research that collects information about how teams do their work and their perspectives on organisational culture and Agile. Findings from the study will be written as an ethnographic account of the people and their culture bringing meaning to what we witness and experience.

Interpreting Your Teams' Culture

To understand an organisational culture, we need to interact with your teams. The people doing the work. At the coal face and in the trenches (Kniberg, 2007). To give a voice to their *true* perspectives, beliefs and values that they associate with your organisation and Agile.

Participating in the study brings several benefits:

- **Free agile training & coaching** from one of the most experienced Agile coaches in Australia for your teams in return for participating in the study
- **Summary findings for your organisation** including the state and nature of the team and organisational culture and its relationship to your implementation of Agile
- **Optimum decision making** grounded in the summary findings from your teams and their perspectives on organisational culture and Agile

Participating in the study involves:

- **Observation** - allowing a researcher to observe teams in action as they do their work
- **Interviews** - participating in interviews to explore individual and team perspectives of organisational culture and Agile
- **Workshops** - participating in workshop activities to explore teams' understanding of organisational culture and Agile

---

Getting Involved

If you would like to participate in the study and contribute to our understanding of this phenomenon, please get in contact at david.l.bales@student.uts.edu.au or visit dlbales.com for more information.

All information collected is confidential and de-identified, and the study is conducted subject to the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee's continued oversight and approval.

You have a unique lived experience. It cannot be replicated. But we can understand it and give it a voice.

References

Beck, K., Beedle, M., van Bennekum, A., Cock- burn, A., Cunningham, W., Fowler, M., Grenning, J., Highsmith, J. A., Hunt, A., Jeffries, R., Kern, J., Marick, B., Martin, R. C., Mellor, S., Schwaber, K., Sutherland, J., & Thomas, D. (2001). Manifesto for Agile Software Development. Retrieved November 12, 2020, from http://agilemanifesto.org/

Calnan, M., & Rozen, A. (2019). ING's Ag- ile Transformation—Teaching an Ele- phant to Race [Publisher: SAGE Pub- lications India]. Journal of Creating Value, 5 (2), 190–209. https://doi.org/ 10.1177/2394964319875601

CBA. (2022). Building the workforce of the fu- ture. Retrieved January 3, 2022, from https://www.commbank.com.au/ articles / business / foresight / building - business-es-of-the-future.html

Cockburn, A., & Highsmith, J. (2001). Agile software develop- ment: The people fac- tor. Computer, 34 (11), 131–133. https: //doi.org/10.1109/2.963450

Coopers, P. W. (2022). The secrets of agile's success. Retrieved January 2, 2022, from https://www.pwc.com.au/ digital-pulse / secrets - of - agile - success . html

Deloitte. (2022). The time is now – our 2018 predictions in be- coming an Agile Aus- tralia - Agile Blog | Deloitte Aus- tralia. Retrieved January 2, 2022, from https: //www2.deloitte.com/au/en/blog/ adaptability - blog / 2019 / time - is - now - our-2018-predictions-becoming-agile-australia.html

Doerr, J., & Page, L. (2018). Measure What Matters: How Goo- gle, Bono, and the Gates Foundation Rock the World with OKRs (Illustrated edition). Portfolio.

Freire, P. (2018). Pedagogy of the oppressed (50th anniversary edition.). Blooms- bury Academic.

Geertz, C., & Darnton, R. (1973). The Inter- pretation of Cul- tures. Basic Books.

Highsmith, J., & Cockburn, A. (2001). Agile software develop- ment: The business of innovation. Computer, 34 (9), 120–122. https://doi.org/10.1109/2.947100

Highsmith, J. A. (2002). Agile software devel- opment ecosys- tems. Addison-Wesley.

iTnews. (2022). ANZ reveals the good and bad of its Agile transformation. Retrieved January 3, 2022, from https : / / www . itnews.com.au/news/anz-reveals- the-good-and-bad-of-its-agile- transformation-523277

Jacobs, P., Schlatmann, B., & Mahadevan, D. (2017). ING's agile transformation [Place: New York, United States Pub- lisher: McKinsey & Company, Inc. Sec- tion: Insights on Financial Services]. The McKinsey Quarterly. Retrieved September 23, 2022, from http://www. proquest . com / docview / 2371882288 / abstract/DA53B39604664D-F6PQ/1

Kerr, W. R., Gabrieli, F., & Moloney, E. (2018). Transformation at ING (A): Agile. Harvard Business Review, 19.

Kniberg, H. (2007). Scrum and XP from the Trenches (2nd). InfoQ. https://www. infoq.com/minibooks/scrum-xp-from- the-trenches-2/

Kniberg, H., & Ivarsson, A. (2012). Scaling Agile @ Spotify. https://blog.crisp. se / wp - content / uploads / 2012 / 11 / SpotifyScaling.pdf

Leffingwell, D. (2016). SAFe 4.0 Distilled: Ap- plying the Scaled Agile Framework for Lean Software and Systems Engi- neering. SAFe® 4.0 Reference Guide: Scaled Agile Framework® for Lean Software and Systems Engineer- ing.

McKinsey&Company. (2022). Implementing agile government approaches to im- prove citizen experience | McK- insey. Retrieved January 3, 2022, from https : / / www . mckinsey . com / industries / public-and-social-sector/ our-insights/ implementing - agile - ways - of - working - in-it-to-improve-citizen-experience

RMIT. (2022). Agile Ways of Working. Re- trieved January 2, 2022, from https : //www.rmit.edu.au/study-with-us/ levels - of - study / short - courses / agile - ways-of-working

Schwaber, K., & Sutherland, J. (2011). Scrum Guide. Scrum Guide.

Sharp, H., Dittrich, Y., & de Souza, C. R. B. (2016). The Role of Ethnographic Studies in Empirical Software En- gineer- ing [Conference Name: IEEE Transactions on Software Engineering]. IEEE Transactions on Software Engi- neering, 42 (8), 786–804. https : / / doi . org/10.1109/ TSE.2016.2519887

Telstra. (2020). Five ways Agile ways of work- ing can improve your personal life. Re- trieved January 2, 2022, from https : //exchange.telstra.com.au/five-ways- agile-can-improve-your-personal-life/

van Manen, M. (2014). Phenomenology of Prac- tice: Mean- ing-Giving Methods in Phe- nomenological Research and Writing (Vol. 13.). Routledge. https://doi.org/ 10.4324/9781315422657

Victoria, I. (2022). Agile Ways of Working, pre- sented by Bos- ton Consulting Group. Retrieved January 2, 2022, from https://www.vic.ipaa.org.au/calendar/ 2020/12/9/agile-ways-of-working