DISCUSSION PAPER

People and Structures in Transformation

Contents

Introduction

Agility is difficult to describe because it is much more than a method: agility is a state of mind. In 2019, the "Work, Training and Education" working group of the Plattform Industrie 4.0 (WG 5) set itself the goal of whetting people's appetites for agile working by making it tangible – because agility provides key answers to a rapidly changing and increasingly complex working environment.

Following the underlying agile principles, agile working puts people at the centre of organisational design and thus does more justice to the individual needs of employees; at the same time, it increases the adaptability and delivery capability of organisations.

Many companies nowadays apply agile frameworks and methods (cf. among others the input paper Agile Working of WG 5 of September 2019) and thereby gather their very individual experiences in the spirit of Franz Kafka, who once said: "Paths are created by walking them."

Why agile working?
Change in the working environment!

Technological change alters processes and leads to organisational change. Mass products "off the peg" are increasingly being replaced by customised solutions that meet individual customer requirements. Digitised industry is characterised by the following developments, among others:

- In new and digital business models, data-based and customer-oriented/individualised products and services are an integral component.

- Los size 1 is – also at reasonable cost – possible.

- Advances in robotics and artificial intelligence are shaping future business models.

The uncertainty of employees in the face of increasing complexity should be countered by structure-giving elements and decentralised assumption of responsibility. Increased complexity consequently requires new forms of working that enable quick decisions. In the process, workers are invited to actively participate in shaping structures and environments. The past two years have once again made it clear that it is necessary to introduce new forms of working and to rethink structures that have been established for many years.

And now?

Not just since the pandemic, buzzwords like agile working and the associated frameworks and methods (e.g. scrum and design thinking) have been on everyone's lips. As part of its work, the Agile Working sub-working group engaged with different companies to learn more about their experiences to date in introducing and practising agile ways of working. For this purpose, interviews were conducted with more than 20 people from seven companies and the perspectives of HR, the works council and the employees in transition were obtained in each case. The companies are organisations from various sectors with turnovers of around EUR 1bn to EUR 109bn and within a range of around 2,800 to over 303,000 employees.

Sincere thanks go to all interview partners at Daimler AG, Festo Didactic SE, HDI Global SE, Merck KGaA, SAP SE, Siemens AG and Trumpf SE + Co. KG.

In the field reports from the companies, agile transformation was often associated with the creation of self-organised teams. Self-organisation of teams and the accompanying assumption of responsibility for their own actions can significantly increase the performance of teams and thus contribute to an improved company result. The key to success has been whether management supports the project and is willing to invest in training, among other things. In the composition of self-organised teams it is important to create team constellations in a diverse and interdisciplinary way, so that different people with different characteristics come together, for example openness and joy in experimenting should meet continuity and perseverance.

At the same time, the interviews clearly showed that mere reorganisation of teams and the introduction of agile ways of working in the companies considered are not sufficient on their own, but that much more is involved. Agility is a mindset based on principles that can and must be reflected very individually in companies. It is the result of a change in co-operation based on agile principles. These principles can be summed up as follows:[1]

- A corresponding mindset forms the basis for every framework and method. Agile working puts people at the centre, relies on self-organised, interdisciplinary teams, iterative processes, transparency, focus and continuous improvement, and a feedback culture based on openness and respect.

- Based on direct customer requirements, products and services are developed and provided in an iterative process. Constant early consideration of feedback from customers and users as well as clear prioritisation of requirements are essential prerequisites for success in order to be able to react to changing requirements.

- Agile working offers a (proactive) creative response to the changing framework conditions that characterise Industrie 4.0 today.
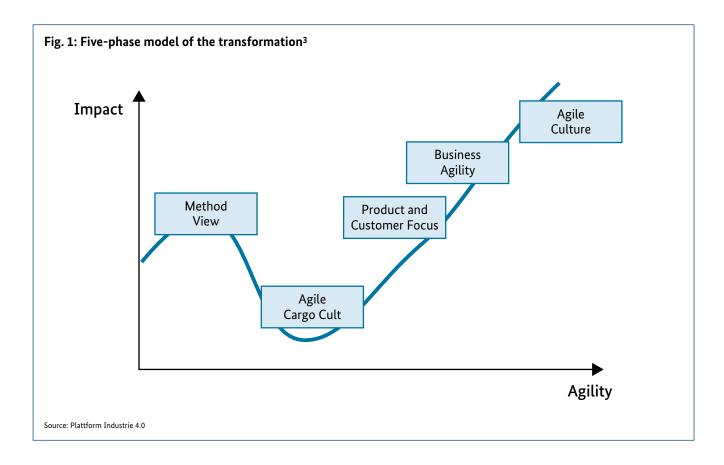
Regardless of the experiences that a large number of companies have already had, more organisations are introducing agile frameworks and methods into their everyday work in order to drive culture change. They also hope to achieve improved results following the example of supposedly agile companies. Even these companies, after the initial euphoria that a changed way of working may initially bring, will reach a point where there is hardly any noticeable effect in terms of organisation. This phase is called "agile cargo cult"[2] (cf. Fig. 1). It marks the point in time when, despite an increasing degree of maturity in terms of agility, the visible impact seems to diminish temporarily. It is probably also the phase that many German companies that have already embarked on the agile journey are currently in.

Other companies that are aiming for a transformation in the future or have recently started one could benefit from their experiences. This discussion paper therefore summarises the numerous questions and challenges that have arisen in this context.

1   Principles behind the Agile Manifesto. (n. d.). Retrieved on 7 November 2022, from https://agilemanifesto.org/iso/en/principles.html

2   The term "cargo cult" is a metaphor created by the spillover of Western goods and technologies to the Melanesian islands in the South Pacific. Thus, this term originally comes from the observation of inhabitants of the Melanesian islands who were almost "buried" in air-dropped cargo (English cargo) such as clothing, tinned food, and other coveted Western goods during World War II. When no more "cargo" was dropped after the end of the war, the islanders imitated the practice they had seen the airmen use: for example, they built aeroplane models and created runways, hoping that in this way the planes would come back with their cargoes. Only that the imitations were made of the materials that were accessible to the inhabitants: bamboo, straw, wood. "Cargo cult" thus stands for imitating behaviours without understanding the underlying meaning.

In order to leave the agile cargo cult as quickly as possible and achieve real product and customer focus, it is helpful to better understand what is going on in this "doldrums" situation during the transformation.

In this edition of the discussion paper we therefore focus on the first two phases of the transformation. While the first edition of the paper mainly presented current principles and methodologies, such as Scrum, Design Thinking and LEGO® Serious Play®, the main aim now is to give a practical insight into agile transformations.

Fig. 1: Five-phase model of the transformation[3]

Source: Plattform Industrie 4.0

3   Maximini, Dominik (2022), Wieviel Agilität darf es sein? Zwischen starren Strukturen und agilen Kulturen. Das Scheitern agiler Transformation, in: Pilster, J., Bauer, K., Brosig, C., (ed.) (2022). in_between 2021: Conference Report. BoD – Books on Demand.

Introduction of personas

Personas are descriptions of fictitious people who, with their respective needs, desires, characteristics, goals and life circumstances, help to describe concrete target groups. The persona method is used in the agile context to integrate the perspective of possible target groups or users into the development process.

The "Agile Working" sub-working group has made use of this method to make its work more target group-oriented and to portray the perspective of people who play a major role in shaping the culture in change processes. For this purpose, three personas were developed, corresponding to the roles of manager, organisational development officer and employee representative in companies and each having their own perspectives on the introduction of agile working methods.

Using as examples dialogues between these three personas, situations are presented that were experienced by members of the "Agile Working" sub-working group or described during the interviews. This clearly illustrates possible experiences, questions, conflicts and resolution strategies of people in changing organisations.

In the following, three personas are introduced individually. Then – corresponding to the phases of the transformation – the respective challenges are illustrated in the form of various dialogues.

Persona Angi, manager

Angi, 45 years old, is a committed woman who has been working successfully in agile teams for several years and finds this working method to be extremely effective and expedient. Over this long period Angi has been able to build up a large network in her company. Angi has an open and accessible personality – she is always receptive to new subject areas and people and always open to change. Angi's ambitious nature and strong career awareness have led to her having management responsibilities for quite some time. She is very experienced with regard to working methods and staff management in uncertain and volatile times – this helps her a great deal in dealing with everyday challenges while remaining solution-oriented

and pragmatic. However, Angi also remembers the "time before". Even though she is very convinced of the value of her work in her agile team, with the help of her hands-on mentality she tries to show that she lives agility herself and does not just delegate it. With her empathetic and understanding manner, Angi tries to keep all her staff on board, because she knows that if she really wants to be agile and successful with her team in the long term, everyone has to pull in the same direction.

Angi's open and determined personality and positive thinking is a great asset for her daily work in an agile environment. She encourages teamwork and regular exchanges between the members of her team, but also always gets involved on an equal footing with other team members. An open work and error culture, clear, honest feedback and a healthy hands-on mentality are particularly important to Angi in her daily work. She lives these values every day and practises them openly.

Angi's working days normally begin early and are well structured. She usually works on a hybrid basis, which means some days from home, some days in the office. On days when she goes to the office, her husband takes care of their children in the morning. This gives her enough time to have breakfast and sometimes to do some sport before she leaves for the office at around eight o'clock. On days when she works from home, Angi often does many things at the same time, but this does not fluster her. She is good at doing many tasks at the same time and not losing track. In the evenings she regularly takes a few hours off, meets up with friends or reads specialist literature. At weekends, switching off and spending quality time with her family is very important to her. Outside of her work and private life, Angi is also involved in local social clubs.

In general, Angi tries to meet the demands of her work as well as those of her family, which she sometimes finds difficult to do. On the one hand, she wants to achieve something for herself, pursue her career, implement plans, be a contact person and help to make important decisions. At the same time, Angi feels she cannot adequately fulfil her role as a mother and other family responsibilities. This dilemma often wears her down and she feels torn. On the one hand, she is concerned that losing her span of control of the employees reporting to her could damage her career

and be detrimental to her reputation as an experienced middle manager. On the other hand, she sees agile working as an opportunity for more freedom as well as a good balance in her professional and private life. Despite her openness, Angi sometimes harbours doubts about whether agile working could nevertheless put a strain on her future career path. She also wonders if she is really up to the task of being an agile leader. Can she confidently answer employees' questions about content and methodology? Will her leadership role continue to develop positively? Will she always be able to acquire the necessary knowledge, despite the demands of day-to-day business?

Persona Hans, employee representative

Hans, 55, experienced in company politics as a long-time employee representative, starts his day with his daily ritual and walks his dog. He uses the time to reflect on the previous night's union event. He thinks about what might be newsworthy for his party, in which he is very active. His many years of experience as an active employee representative are also reflected in the fact that he and his colleagues increasingly have to be prepared to go the extra mile.

Despite a heavy workload, he takes every opportunity to engage in conversation with colleagues. He conducts these conversations with a high level of empathy and collegiality. Hans greatly appreciates hearing the experiences of the employees. The meetings that have to be held demand a certain degree of flexibility from him and he often has to set priorities for them at short notice.

Hans is aware that he has to use a lot of initiative to keep himself regularly informed and trained in order to remain on an equal footing with his negotiating partners and to protect the employees.

Hans is rather critical of the new topic of agility, which is to be expanded in his company. At the moment, one change follows the next. Is there even enough time for change? Are his colleagues ready for it? Hans wonders what a works agreement must look like; strictly speaking,

agile working cannot be a reality without it. He does not want to be left behind by the company, but wants to be involved in finding solutions.

For Hans, it is important that his colleagues be protected in the process of agile working and that their work does not get out of hand and become overwhelming. What Hans finds positive about agile working is that employees are involved and decisions are made as a team – that is motivating! However, co-determination must not be lost sight of in the process. As an employee representative, Hans wants to help ensure that a corresponding works agreement on agile working is concluded. It is important to him that agile working continues to be healthy working in the long term. Only in this way, Hans is sure, will agile working become a success – for both the company and its employees.

Persona Steffi, organisational developer (HR)

Steffi, 38, works in organisational development at her company and has already experienced and helped shape many change processes. Through her studies in organisational development and numerous further training courses of relevance, she is also very familiar with theory in addition to practice.

She knows that the extensive development towards agile working methods in today's working environment is indispensable and that the future of her company depends to a large extent on the openness of employees to new processes.

However, this often proves to be a difficult undertaking in Steffi's organisation. Especially in structures that have grown historically, which is the case in her organisation, change must be approached cautiously. Steffi knows that processes of this type in particular can never take place without the active consent and co-operation of those involved. She has often seen frustrated employees leave the company during change processes.

For the successful introduction of agile methods, Steffi and her team do their best to provide all possible

resources, to generously create space and time for change, and to try out different types of concepts, knowing full well that agility can only ever succeed on a voluntary basis and in an appreciative atmosphere.

Steffi tries to ensure this atmosphere exists through her empathetic nature and her active approach to people. She uses her network and her communicative nature above all to ensure the greatest possible transparency in the team – which is not always easy for all team members. But Steffi notices the impact her open and empathetic demeanour has on employees. Also, in many difficult and tough situations, her resilience helps her, especially when she meets resistance in her teams.

In addition to all the care and indulgence in the team, it is ultimately important to Steffi that the processes are effective and that her work and dedication pay off. For this, Steffi is willing to go the extra mile for the sake of the cause and to commit herself to the cause beyond her formal duties.

Steffi is a very active person and takes care to lead a balanced lifestyle. She does a lot of sport and eats a healthy diet, and in the evenings she likes to end her working day with yoga. In addition to her actual work, she is active as a coach and trainer, gives specialist lectures and often takes the opportunity to further her education. In addition, a deep connection to her social environment is very important to her, which is why she maintains close contact with her family and friends.

Insights into the first two phases of an agile transformation

The personas experience a variety of situations in the individual phases of the transformation and are confronted with very different challenges – each characteristic of the respective phase. In the following, the first two phases of the transformation (cf. Fig. 1), i.e. method view and agile cargo cult, are explained in more detail. Furthermore, the typical experiences are illustrated with impulse questions as well as dialogues between the personas. The dialogues were developed based on the interview results as well as the experiences of the members of the "Agile Working" sub-working group.

Phase 1: Method view

In his poem "Stufen" ("Steps"), Hermann Hesse emphasised the magic of the beginning, which is always accompanied by the fear of change and letting go of the familiar. Hesse knew about the necessity of accepting this cycle and wrote: "Only those who are ready for departure and journey may escape paralysing habituation."

In the "method view" phase, the organisation confronts agile working methods and decides on a methodology that fits its projects and culture. As soon as the framework is in place and employees have been trained in new values, attitudes, roles and processes, teams have been set up, departmental structures have been changed, and the big "why" and the transformation goals have had their communication launch, the agile journey starts, in most cases with a kick-off event.

Once the lever has been pulled and the transformation process started, the effect gradually becomes visible. To start with the perceived impact is particularly noticeable because, especially at the beginning, working methods usually change fundamentally. Just as the "Agile Working"

sub-working group experienced it in a self-experiment when they applied the agile methods from the 2019 "Agile Working" impulse paper, the first successes are also quickly noticeable in the corporate context after the introduction of agile methods. Spurred on by visible, positive changes, the management in most organisations tends to scale the agile way of working in the next step in order to transfer the tangible successes to the entire organisation.

Perspective of the personas in the dialogue

Even in the first phase of the transformation, however, despite an initial mood of optimism and initial successes the change in working methods gives rise to unspoken questions and concerns among those involved, which in turn can lead to misunderstandings. This must be resolved urgently.

In the following, we use fictitious personas to illustrate possible challenges in introducing agile ways of working. After all, in order to make a transformation successful, the

representatives of the HR department, of the works council and of the management embodied in particular by the personas must work together intensively. The following dialogues have been developed to create a deep understanding of the different perspectives and the resulting issues. The impulse questions that follow allow you to examine your own situation. In addition, at the end of the section, questions have been gathered that the personas ask themselves and to which answers should be found as part of the transformation.

Dialogue 1: Employees among themselves

It is a Wednesday in June in the year 2022. In April of this year, Example AG, a mechanical engineering company with around 500 employees, embarked on its agile journey with a major kick-off event. Numerous information events and workshops were held beforehand to familiarise employees with the agile methods and their new roles. Now, some eight weeks later, Kira and Tobias, who used to work together in the same department, meet by chance by the coffee machine. Kira has been working as a product owner since the change in team constellations, while Tobias is a scrum master in another team.

Kira: "Tobias, how nice to see you again, how are you?"

Tobias: "Things are going OK, I'd say. And you?"

Kira: "Oh, not too bad. I don't know what to make of all this agile work. How are you getting on with it?"

Tobias: "Well, let's put it this way – I can see all the things I still have to learn."

Kira: "What do you mean?"

Tobias: "Before, I had to reach milestones and co-ordinate interests. As a scrum master, I am much more. And I notice that I lack a 'method toolbox' as facilitator of the team. That totally stresses me out."

Kira: "I feel the same way. As a product owner, I have a lot of responsibility. For example, I have to decide how we prioritise the backlog entries. In other words, which topics the development team works on as a matter of priority. That sometimes keeps me awake at night. I really wanted to have responsibility, now I have it and I'm constantly afraid that I'm steering the team in the wrong direction. But what happens if I prioritise incorrectly? It kind of overwhelms me."

Tobias: "I understand. We can't be left alone like this. Here, a new task, get on with it."

Kira: "That's right. I'm glad it's not just me. What can we do?"

Tobias: "Have you spoken to Angi yet?"

Kira: "No. I'm worried that if I don't get this done, I'll lose my role as product owner. Besides that, Angi has been annoyed so much lately."

Tobias: "I don't want to talk to my manager either. We've only known each other since the changeover and I don't want to approach her with problems right away. What do you think of talking to the employee representative first?"

Kira: "Yes, that's a good idea, let's approach Hans. He knows his stuff and always seems pretty constructive to me."

Dialogue 2: Employees and employee representative

A few days later, Kira and Tobias have a lunch date. In the canteen they meet Hans, the employee representative. They approach him and arrange to meet in the coffee bar the next afternoon.

After a bit of small talk about Example AG and the modernisation of the company headquarters, Hans gets straight to the point.

Hans: "You do have a specific concern. Kira, in the canteen yesterday you briefly hinted that it was to do with the agile transformation. What exactly is bothering you both?"

Kira: "Well, first of all: We are both on board with the agile transformation idea. We think this change is a good thing. As part of the change, we were both given new roles. Tobias is a scrum master, I am a product owner. We both had project management roles before. And now, just over two months after the start of the transition to agile working, we simply realise that we still have lots of problem areas. We're uncertain in some areas and have so much responsibility at the same time."

Tobias: "I'm also sure that it's not just Kira and me."

Hans: "I think so too. But what exactly do you mean by problem areas and what do you mean when you say that you feel unsure?"

Tobias: "In my role as scrum master, I've noticed that I'm unsure about when I should stand back and let the team discussion continue and when I should intervene. I think I tend to intervene too much, I'm used to that from my previous job as a project manager. But that doesn't feel right. It's now part of my job to lead the team into self-organisation. In the first sprint we didn't complete some tasks and we had to take them to the next sprint. It shouldn't really be like that. I feel like I'm hanging in mid-air."

Hans: "If I understand you correctly, you're concerned about finding a balance between leading and supporting your team into self-organisation without over-leading at the same time."

Tobias: "Yes, exactly."

Kira: "I must confess that I've sometimes even had sleepless nights since I became a product owner. It's my responsibility to prioritise the backlog. At the same time, so many managers have an opinion about it. But in the end, it's me who decides which backlog items are at the top of the processing list: and it's my responsibility to properly filter all the objections and demands of everyone who has a say."

Hans: "It sounds to me like you want support in this jungle of opinions so you can defend your decisions with more confidence."

Kira: "Yes, exactly that would be nice, if it would make me feel more secure."

Hans: "So what are your managers saying about your concerns? Have you talked to them yet?"

Kira: "No, we preferred to talk to you. It's one thing to say 'I want this role'. But then to be complaining about having worries after just two months, that's something else."

Tobias: "Especially since I have a new manager who I've only known for eight weeks."

Hans: "Yes, I can well understand that. First of all, I can put your minds at ease. We have not yet conclusively sorted out with HR which tasks are changing and what impact this will have on employees. This also applies to managers. What does this mean for your freedom of choice and responsibility? What impact does it have on

your grouping? What training needs to be offered to you and much more. We are currently drawing up a works agreement for this. Nobody is insisting that the processes in the new structures should run smoothly from the start. We will continue to expand the training programme and keep reminding you of the most important contacts for you and your teams. The contacts should then keep in touch, and work with us, i.e. the works council, and with HR, to further develop the training offerings."

Kira: "That sounds good. We already know that there are places somewhere where we can get an overview of support services, on the intranet for example. But the search for them always gets pushed to the bottom of the list of priorities. Otherwise we wouldn't be sitting here. The knowledge is not available to such a degree that we know who to ask ad hoc."

Tobias: "Exactly, you constantly feel like there's not enough time. Is it our job to free up the time necessary to find support services? At the same time, we still have to motivate our teams to continue working and making decisions within the new structures. There's a lot of uncertainty all around."

Hans: "No, it's not your job to go out and find support services. It is the responsibility of HR and the works council to provide the necessary support and to communicate it transparently. Only if we manage to convince the vast majority of our employees that agile working is an important part of the future way of working will we succeed in making the shift. For that, we need every single person here. We also need space for discussions, such as for your questions. And time. Time to talk to each other and time to try out new things. The employee representative needs to be at the coalface a lot, and we have to allow more time for that, too."

Kira: "Yes, that sounds good. I feel like I've been left alone until now as far as that's concerned."

Tobias: "Do you think the changeover can work?"

Hans: "Well, that's up to everyone involved. In the works council, we have prepared for the launch. The management must be prepared to provide sufficient human resources. And then I'm also hoping that our colleagues will be committed. If they are interested and involved, then it will work and it will be a real competitive advantage. This could not only make our jobs safer, but also improve our working conditions. In the end, we all benefit."

Kira: "I doubt if the employees see it that way."

Hans: "Yes, I can understand that, too. But in my experience, colleagues are more motivated when they are involved from the outset. When they understand how the outcome came about and that they influenced it. They'll be much happier, even if it's not 100% what they expected."

Kira: "But we can hardly influence that."

Tobias: "That's your job, too, isn't it, and HR's job?"

Hans: "Partly: In your new roles, you also have a sort of leadership responsibility and visibility. If you set a good example – and in this case I mean above all with a positive basic attitude – then your teammates will follow you more easily.

I said earlier that we haven't finalised that with HR yet. It should rather be said, we have not yet agreed on which step we will start the next project with. The agile working environment will change constantly. Where things are constantly changing, we also have to co-ordinate continuously. And new beginnings become a habit. If we always continue to communicate and you and your colleagues actively participate, agile working will be a win-win for everyone. And today we have taken the first important step towards achieving this: we are talking to each other right now. I'm glad you both reached out to me."

Kira: "Thank you so much Hans for taking the time to talk to us."
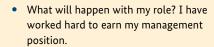
Impulse questions

- How much time has your organisation given employees to familiarise themselves with the changes brought about by the transformation?

- Is there a continuous opportunity to address questions and concerns? To whom? Are employees aware of this possibility?

- How are the changes communicated? How do managers deal with the (expected) uncertainties?

Questions that the personas ask themselves

Persona employee representative (Hans)

- How do I get a comprehensive picture of the agile framework as quickly as possible so that I can get an overview of possible framework agreements we need? Phew – I can see I've got a mountain to overcome …

- What does my employer even mean by agility?

- Should we support the launch or instead prevent it?

- For which groups of employees should the method be applied?

- How is the new working method received by employees?

- Where do we need to set up guardrails?

- How can we escalate when necessary?

- Who can provide technical support (trade unions/networks/consultants)?

- What do we do with the people we can't convince?

- Is our pay structure changing?

- Does this actually achieve the company's goals?

- Don't we need a different understanding of leadership?

- How can we provide the necessary resources (qualifications) in the board?

- How intensively should we support the topic?

- What budget do we need for inventory/rooms, etc.?

- Can we not first of all support the new method on an experimental basis and gain initial experience?

Persona manager (Angi)

- What will happen with my role? I have worked hard to earn my management position.

- I see mistakes coming and I'm not allowed to slow my team down because of self-organisation – where's the added value there?

- What tasks will I face in the future and how should I prepare for them?

- What qualifications do I need?

- Is management behind the rollout?

- What do my employees think of the new way of working?

- How can I create the necessary freedom for my employees in day-to-day business?

- What do customers think about the new approach? Are they willing to co-operate?

- I've been stripped of my management duties and am now supposed to apply for new tasks, like everyone else. Do I want that?

Persona HR executive (Steffi)

- Would it make sense – especially for the start – to set up some kind of "point of contact" to which all participants can turn if they have questions about their role, even anonymously?

- What continuing training programmes do I need for managers?

- What continuing training programmes do I need for all employees, regardless of their roles and responsibilities?

- What role-specific continuing training programmes do I need to offer?

- What continuing training is best for myself?

- How do I communicate their role shift to managers and how do I find out if they are still the right people for the changing requirements?

- How do I handle it if I answer "no" to the above question?

Phase 2: Agile cargo cult

The term "cargo cult", as described earlier, means the imitation of behaviour in the expectation of improvement, but without understanding of the actual reasons. Transferred to the agile world, the cargo cult shows itself in the fact that external features such as flat hierarchies or meeting structures (e.g. daily) are introduced without understanding the deeper meaning behind the agile methods, behaviours and structures. So it is a "copy & paste" of external features without seeing and touching the underlying iceberg in the hope that success will come naturally.

Some signs that an organisation is in the agile cargo cult include:

- Management demands agile ways of working, but itself continues to behave as in a traditional organisation.

- A project manager is now called a product owner, but must still have decisions approved by a steering committee.

- There is a lack of courage to release MVPs (Minimum Viable Products) that can knowingly not yet be "perfect".

A real transformation into an agile company does not take place where agile methodologies are copied, because a deep understanding of the meaning of the methodologies and of the company's own attitude and mindset required for it is missing. As a result, there is a lack of real delegation of responsibility, despite this being important for decentralised decision-making. In addition, trust is particularly important as a cornerstone, trust in one's own ability to change and act, in the self-organisation of the teams, and trust in acting in a protected space within which courage is desirable and mistakes are allowed.

At this point, first of all some good news: you are not alone. The reason the phenomenon of the agile cargo cult has been given a name is because almost every transforming organisation falls into this doldrums phase. The reasons for this are essentially to be found in the corporate structures, most of which have evolved historically, and whose change is massive and complex. Every change takes time. Transforming an organisation that has operated for decades or longer as a line organisation with a hierarchical structure requires patience more than anything. And even more time. And the constant drip that wears away the stone.

The change into an agile organisation must be approached holistically and understood as a process that is never really finished. Customer needs, people, team constellations and tools are in a constant state of flux.

It is crucial that people are understood as the linchpin of transformation in the agile working environment. Because if you look at organisational hurdles, you find that behind every major obstacle, behind every resistance that arises, there are people. People whose needs, questions and fears play an important role. People who bring different histories, both personal and professional. People who, building on this, enter into change processes, self-organisation, the assumption of responsibility, and dialogues with colleagues, customers, and managers with different attitudes. Any kind of resistance can be traced back to unspoken fears, insecurities and unanswered questions.

Here's more encouragement: "Resistance in change situations is as certain as night follows day." (Michel 2020). If resistance is not strong enough, this should even raise scepticism about whether the change is far-reaching enough, whether it is credible, or whether it has even been understood. As described earlier, resistance is the result of unanswered questions or unexpressed fears. So, resistance is a good sign: the change information has arrived. It is recognised in its dimension. And now resistance opens up the space for dialogues.

Change processes can rarely be fully thought through in their complexity. Thus, another important element of resistance is that issues become visible that have not been considered and for which solutions must be found.

Appreciative dialogue about the underlying motivation of resistance creates credibility. Critical debate and friction are the basis for a common denominator, not the exclusive presentation of the new way of working and thinking by management. Only through direct debate and dialogue can cultures be transformed.

Within respectful dialogue, it is important to keep in mind that each individual has a different view of themselves and circumstances. Each individual sees his or her own view as "the truth". Here, too, dialogue and debate help to create a shared picture.

It is the interaction of transparent communication, continuous support for all those involved (agile coaching) and constant questioning of the processes and structures created around agile collaboration that determines success or failure. However, there is no patent remedy for this; every company goes through its own evolution and finds its own interaction.

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Impulse questions

- When was the last time you listened to your counterpart without interrupting him/her? Try the following "game":
  - Let your counterpart finish, without ifs and buts.
  - If your counterpart pauses, wait at least ten seconds (in most cases, sentences will follow).
  - At the end, wait another ten seconds.
  - Then repeat in your own words what you heard: "I understood that (...), is that right?"
  - You can look forward to many new insights.
- When did you last query the transparency and effectiveness of your communication measures, related to agile transformation?
- How often do managers and agile roles receive training and in what form does it take place?
- Is there the possibility of offering coaching for individuals?

Dialogue 1: Organisational development meets middle management executivess

It is Thursday morning. Kira and Angi meet for a one-to-one talk. After the two have exchanged ideas about general topics, Kira begins to ask the questions she brought with her. Their questions revolve around prioritising the backlog items and evaluating and "editing" individual user stories. She tells of business owners whose opinions about the product and the product vision are at odds with each other. She feels pressured and torn, not knowing where to start.

In the course of the conversation, Angi becomes uncertain. What should she say in response to these specific questions? Should she know? Only – who can she refer to now? Is it beneficial to her further career if she can't answer all the detailed questions? How can she best help Kira in this situation? And in such a way that Kira also comes to her as the first point of contact the next time, even though she is not an expert in matters of detail? Should she be? Does she need to change in her role to continue her career? Angi doesn't know the answer to that. In addition, her thoughts revolve around the doctor's appointment, where her husband currently is with their young daughter. Actually, she would have liked to accompany her daughter there herself. At the same time, however, she must show presence and be accessible to her employees at all times, especially in these change-intensive times.

Angi tries to address Kira's questions. "Kira, there's some stuff that's been bothering you. I can well understand how you feel. Let's pause for a moment, sort through our thoughts, and consider: What is your most important priority for today? What needs to get done today, can't wait, and would make you feel good if you got it done today?"

Kira reflects.

"Hmm, if you ask me like that – then quite honestly another topic altogether. More of a personal one. I have the impression that two colleagues from my team have a problem with me. They don't talk to me openly and I know they are talking behind my back. When I asked them about it, they replied it was 'nothing'."

Angi: "And what would you have to do today to feel better?"

Kira: "I was thinking of asking our scrum master to organise a joint meeting between them and me. I would like to talk to them about it in the presence of our scrum master. They have a good relationship with him, so I would hope that they would open up then."

Angi: "That sounds good, do that. Please let me know how your conversation went."

Kira: "Thank you, Angi. Our one-to-one really helped me sort myself out."

Angi: "I'm very pleased about that. And let's talk more about the questions you asked at the beginning. Will you set up a 30-minute appointment for us?"

After Kira leaves the room, Angi feels relieved because she has been able to help Kira sort herself out. At the same time, she is glad she did not have to answer any harder questions about Kira's job as a product owner. Or, she doesn't have to? Maybe her role as a manager is exactly what she just discussed with Kira? Because these questions give her no peace, Angi decides to talk to her contact person in HR.

Dialogue 2: Middle management executive, organisational developer, employee representative

A few days later, in a meeting room: Steffi and Hans are already there, Angi enters the room and greets them.

Steffi: "Hi Angi! As you can see, I'm not alone, I brought Hans with me in his function as employee representative, because the works council is also very keen right now to get an idea of the mood in the organisation."

Hans: "Yes, thank you very much for that Steffi. Angie, I hope you're okay with that. It's a very sensitive time right now, and so I'm grateful for any opportunity that leads to me being right on the pulse of our organisation and learning what's on your minds."

Angi: "Yes, for sure. Glad to have you with us."

Steffi: "Angi, you asked for this exchange of ideas and wrote in your meeting invitation that it was about your role as a manager in the context of agile transformation. Why don't you tell us exactly what it's about?"

Angi reports on her difficulties answering detailed questions about working in an agile context. Of her uncertainty about her position vis-à-vis her employees. Of her confusion about what skills she now needs to bring to the table when it comes to her future career, which she is eager to advance. She also reports on the conversation with Kira (without mentioning her name) and her reflection on whether the demands on her as a manager have now changed in the context of agile transformation.

Steffi and Hans patiently let her speak and take notes.

Steffi: "Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts and concerns so openly. I can also reassure you that you are not alone with these worries. That is why we are also developing comprehensive empowerment for managers. It starts in six weeks. It will be about empowering you all in your changing role."

Hans: "It is a constant learning process that began with the introduction of the agile transformation. We need to get used to change and operating in uncertain contexts becoming the norm. This means that we will also constantly offer training courses and exchange formats that will evolve just as we do within the organisation. It is important that each individual understands that each person is an important part of this change. We, Steffi in her role within HR and myself as employee representative are there to identify your needs, create the framework for action and equip you with the tools you need."

Steffi: "Angi, I wanted to tell you about the possibility of individual coaching, in case you haven't heard about it yet. We have agile coaches in the organisation for each area, and these can be consulted if there are any questions.

In your area, Pooja and Frederico do that. Both have many years of experience with the challenges that agile transformation brings. Go ahead and approach them. After all, we're still over six weeks away from our leadership empowerment launch."

Angi: "That's a good suggestion, thank you very much, I'll definitely take a look at that!"

Hans: "I would also like to add that I am very grateful, Angi, that you approached us, or rather Steffi, because precisely that is a very essential part of the process. Everyone needs to point out where help is needed so we can find solutions together. That's exactly what you did and I thank you for that, that's exemplary."

The two sample dialogues show that in the agile cargo cult phase, uncertainties come to light that are associated with change in working methods and can lead to disputes. To address this situation, open dialogues about questions and ambiguities are particularly important. Attitude is also crucial: because conflicts that arise are not a problem, but offer great potential for improvement and further development – as long as a team "gets its act together" and does not get stuck in a crisis. However, this is not so easy, as emotions are usually involved and personal concerns overshadow factual issues. Communication should therefore be supported and monitored by people in organisational development roles, e.g. by the HR department or by the scrum master in teams. This allows the organisation to maintain focus and continue working on the next level of maturity in the agile transformation journey, the product and customer view.

Questions that the personas ask themselves

Persona employee representative (Hans)

- Do employees have enough time to implement the transformation to agile working?

- Are employees and managers adequately trained?

- Are job descriptions changing for employees and managers?

- Do employees and managers feel secure enough to actually voice their questions?

Persona manager (Angi)

- Am I adequately trained?

- What additional responsibilities do I have?

- What does the change mean for my career planning?

- What does the change mean for my pay (and bonus)?

- Who will support me with questions about continuing training and health cover?

- Do I receive sufficient time and financial resources?

- Am I personally capable of managing an agile team? Do I trust my colleagues?

- How can I obtain employee feedback in a legally safe manner? Does the company have a data protection process or tool in place for this?

- How can I measure success?

Persona HR executive (Steffi)

- Are my continuing training programmes still the right ones?

- Should we initiate another communication campaign to communicate to employees why we need agile transformation and what their future role will be?

- Would measures that strengthen the sense of togetherness in the team be beneficial to ensure that a change in co-operation is supported by a strong sense of "we"?

- Would initiating a buddy approach (experienced plus inexperienced) with departments that have already gone through agile processes be helpful? Or a tandem model (same level of knowledge)?

- Furthermore, what is my role as an organisational developer? Do I need to explain this role? How can I provide advice, be a sparring partner, support learning processes and create the right stimuli?

Summary and outlook

The "Agile Working" sub-working group has established one thing above all in the course of its examination of the use of agile frameworks and methods: it is good to know that you are not alone. Most companies face the same challenges. It is both beneficial and helpful to share experiences, to talk about formats, about successes and failures, about tips and tricks. For this reason, the sub-working group recommends not only that the impulse questions be taken up in private, but that an exchange of views take place with colleagues from one's own organisation, as well as with representatives from other companies. This means that the level of maturity in terms of agility is constantly being raised.

Therefore, our last impulse question is also the most important one for you: **who do you exchange ideas with, within the company – both in your area and in others? And who do you exchange ideas with outside your organisation?** Make space for this dialogue in your diary; impulses are beneficial, refreshing and profitable.

The interviews provided interesting insights into this: companies that want to start a transformation should pay attention to the following aspects in addition to the introduction of agile frameworks and methods:

- Management must be a role model and exemplify agile thinking and action right from the start.

- Constant accompanying communication is necessary to explain goals and individual steps.

- Fears and worries must be given space so that they can be dispelled.

- Interdisciplinary teams are the key to increasing your own innovative strength.

Perhaps in this way the "agile cargo cult" can be toned down a little. Those who see themselves included in it need an individual way out, which results in genuine product and customer orientation. This includes neither scheduling a time limit nor prescribing a fixed procedure: trying out, failing, changing, and all accompanied by discussions, because space for dialogue is essential. A community of drivers and enablers to drive agile transformation and to have "feelers" in the organisation whose impressions are repeatedly evaluated and processed into dialogue formats can help to avoid getting stuck in the doldrums.

Most agile frameworks include the retrospective format for this purpose, in order to detect potential for improvement and to optimise collaboration. Well-trained, empathetic organisational developers, for example in the roles of agile coaches or scrum masters, though also managers, are important for successful implementation. A good feedback culture should be repeatedly activated and reinforced by these people through various formats.

The next phases of the transformation progression that follow the "agile cargo cult" with increasing maturity in agility are "product and customer focus", "business agility" and "agile culture".

With the Austrian composer Anton Bruckner in mind: "If you want to build high towers, you have to spend a lot of time on the foundation." We wish you the space, time and stimuli to get the best out of the resistance you encounter and to transform these insights into constructs that bring solutions.

Glossary

Agile coaching is used to support organisations or teams in adopting agile working methods, especially with regard to the basic principles, attitude, tools and roles.

Daily or "daily scrum" meeting is a firmly structured and short daily meeting in the scrum team. The aim is consultation and keeping each other informed.

Design thinking is an approach intended to lead to solving problems and developing new ideas. The goal here is to find solutions that are convincing from the user's point of view (user perspective). Design thinking is based on the assumption that problems can be solved better when people from different disciplines ("team") work together in an environment that promotes creativity ("space"), jointly formulate a question, consider people's needs and motivations, and then develop concepts that are tested multiple times ("process").

LEGO® Serious Play® (LSP) is a fun problem-solving, communication and creative method. Concrete topics and problems are dealt with in a moderated process. This is done in a fun context ("play"), though the method ensures in-depth communication and goal-oriented topic processing ("serious").

MVP is an abbreviation for Minimal Viable Product. Feedback from users of the product should be obtained as early as possible in order to avoid undesirable developments and to optimise the development process with a view to customer benefits.

Resilience refers to a person's psychological resilience or adaptability. In the context of companies, we speak of organisational resilience.

The **retrospective** or sprint retrospective is used for continuous improvement in the scrum process (cf. Scrum).

Scrum is an agile framework that helps people, teams, and organisations generate value through adaptive solutions to complex problems. Scrum is primarily used in the development of products and is now also gaining acceptance in other corporate areas. In dealing with ambiguity and complexity, scrum serves to advance a project "on sight" and to deliver results on a short-cycle basis, thus constantly creating value for the customer. Continuous feedback loops are used to improve the product (see Scrum Guide by Ken Schwaber & Jeff Sutherland, November 2020).

The **scrum framework** is characterised by three different responsibilities: **product owner**, **scrum master** and **developer**, each of which is associated with specific tasks: a product owner collects technical requirements from stakeholders and arranges them, a scrum master improves the process and removes obstacles, and the development team develops the product together in an iterative procedure ("sprints").

The term **"user stories"** is a tool of agile teams. User stories describe the requirements and needs of the customer or end user with regard to the product or result to be developed by the agile team.

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AUTHORS

Andreas Becker, Merck KGaA | Markus Bell, SAP SE | Jens Gärtner, Airbus Operations GmbH | Dietmar Kuttner, Siemens AG | Sarah Lay, HDI Global SE | Juliane Pilster, HDI Global SE | Nora Treiber-Lobenstein, SAP SE