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The Evidence-Based Management Guide

Measuring Value to Enable Improvement and Agility

September 2020

Purpose of the EBM Guide

Evidence-Based Management (EBM) is an empirical approach that helps organizations to continuously improve customer outcomes, organizational capabilities, and business results under conditions of uncertainty. It provides a framework for organizations to improve their ability to deliver value in an uncertain world, seeking a path toward strategic goals. Using intentional experimentation and evidence (measures), EBM enables organizations to systematically improve their performance over time and refine their goals based on better information.

By measuring current conditions, setting performance goals, forming small experiments for improvement that can be run quickly, measuring the effect of the experiment, and inspecting and adapting goals and next steps, EBM helps organizations to take into account the best available evidence to help them make decisions on ways to improve.

This Guide defines EBM, its concepts, and its application.

EBM Helps Organizations Seek toward Their Goals in a Complex World Using Empiricism

Complex problems defy easy solutions, but instead require organizations seek toward their goals in a series of small steps, inspecting the results of each step, and adapting their next actions based on feedback (see Figure 1).[1]

This model has several key elements:

A *Strategic Goal*, which is something important that the organization would like to achieve. This goal is so big and far away, with many uncertainties along the journey that the organization must use empiricism. Because the Strategic Goal is aspirational and the path to it is uncertain, the organization needs a series of practical targets, like

Intermediate Goals, achievements of which will indicate that the organization is on the path to its *Strategic Goal*. The path to the *Intermediate Goal* is often still somewhat uncertain, but not completely unknown.

Immediate Tactical Goals, critical near-term objectives toward which a team or group of teams will work help toward Intermediate Goals.

A *Starting State*, which is where the organization is relative to the Strategic Goal when it starts its journey.

A *Current State*, which is where the organization is relative to the Strategic Goal at the present time.

In order to progress toward the Strategic Goal, organizations run experiments which involve forming hypotheses that are intended to advance the organization toward their current Intermediate Goal. As they run these experiments and gather results, they use the evidence they obtain to evaluate their goals and determine their next steps to advance toward these goals.

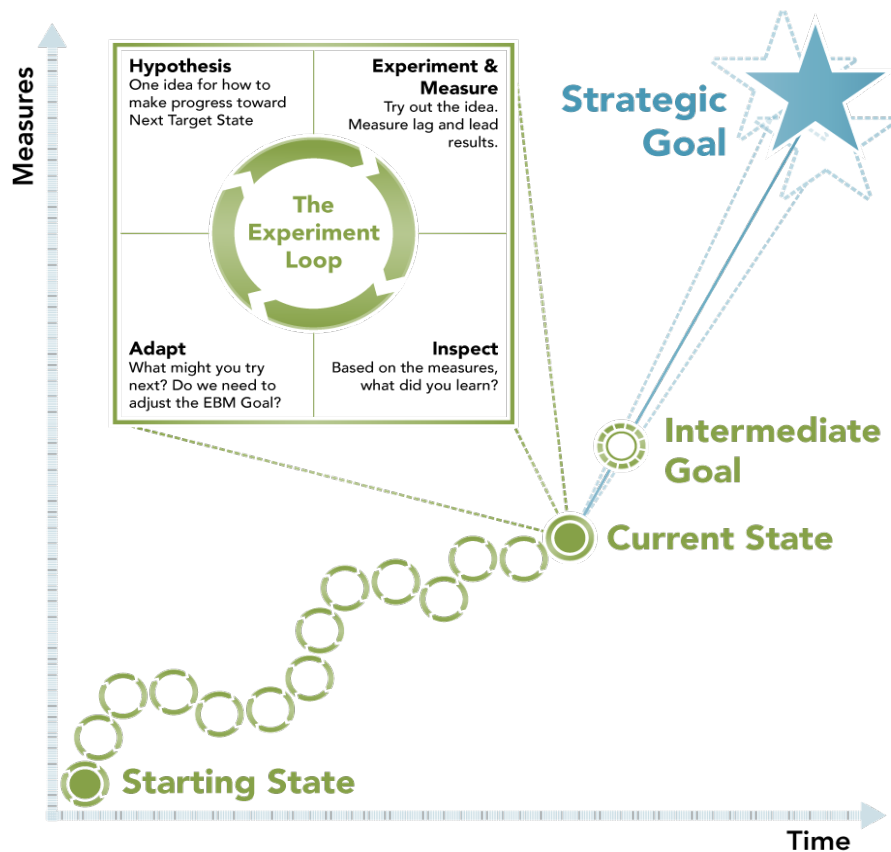[1] For more on complexity, see the Scrum Theory section of the Scrum Guide at https://www.scrumguides.org/scrum-guide.html

Figure 1: Reaching strategic goals requires experimenting, inspecting, and adapting[2]

Setting Goals

When setting goals, organizations must define specific measures that will indicate that the goal is achieved. Goals, measures, and experiments should be made transparent in order to encourage organizational alignment.

> *Consider the case of the response to an infectious disease:*
> - *The* Strategic Goal *is to eradicate the effects of the disease, as measured by the number of people who fall ill and suffer significant illness. Measurement is important; in this example, the goal is focused on the effects of the disease, and not on the means for achieving the desired impact. For example, the goal is not to vaccinate a certain percentage of the population against the disease; that may be an activity necessary to achieving the Strategic Goal, but it is not the Strategic Goal.*

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[2] Figure adapted from Mike Rother's Improvement Kata (http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mrother/The_Improvement_Kata.html)

- *An example of an* Intermediate Goal *is the successful completion of a trial of a vaccine against the disease. This is still ambitious and measurable, and achieving it may require the completion of many different activities, but it is seen as a necessary step on the path to achieving the Strategic Goal.*
- *Examples of* immediate tactical goals *may include activities like isolating symptoms, evaluating a therapy, sequencing the DNA of a virus or bacterium, and so forth.*

The Strategic Goal is usually focused on achieving a highly desirable but unrealized outcome for a specific group of people that results in improved happiness, safety, security, or well-being of the recipients of some product or service. In EBM, we refer to this as *Unrealized Value,* which is the satisfaction gap between a beneficiary's desired outcome and their current experience. *Unrealized Value* is described in greater detail below, in the *Key Value Areas* section.

Understanding What Is Valuable

Organizations measure many different kinds of things. Broadly speaking, measures fall into three categories:
- **Activities.** These are things that people in the organization do, such as perform work, go to meetings, have discussions, write code, create reports, attend conferences, and so forth.
- **Outputs.** These are things that the organization produces, such as product releases (including features), reports, defect reports, product reviews, and so on.
- **Outcomes.** These are desirable things that a customer or user of a product experiences. They represent some new or improved capability that the customer or user was not able to achieve before. Examples include being able to travel to a destination faster than before, or being able to earn or save more money than before. Outcomes can also be negative, as in the case where the value a customer or user experiences declines from previous experiences, for example when a service they previously relied upon is no longer available.

The problem most organizations face, which is often reflected in the things they measure, is that measuring activities and outputs is easy, while measuring outcomes is difficult. Organizations may gather a lot of data with insufficient information about their ability to deliver value. However, delivering valuable outcomes to customers is essential if organizations are to reach their goals. For example, working more hours (activities) and delivering more features (outputs) does not necessarily lead to improved customer experiences (outcomes).

EBM Focuses on Four Key Value Areas

In addition to using hypotheses and experiments to move toward goals, EBM provides a set of perspectives on value and the organization's ability to deliver value. These perspectives are called *Key Value Areas (KVAs)*. These areas examine the goals of the organization (Unrealized Value), the current state of the organization relative to those goals (Current Value), the

responsiveness of the organization in delivering value (Time-to-Market), and the effectiveness of the organization in delivering value (Ability-to-Innovate). Focusing on these four dimensions enables organizations to better understand where they are and where they need to go (see Figure 2).
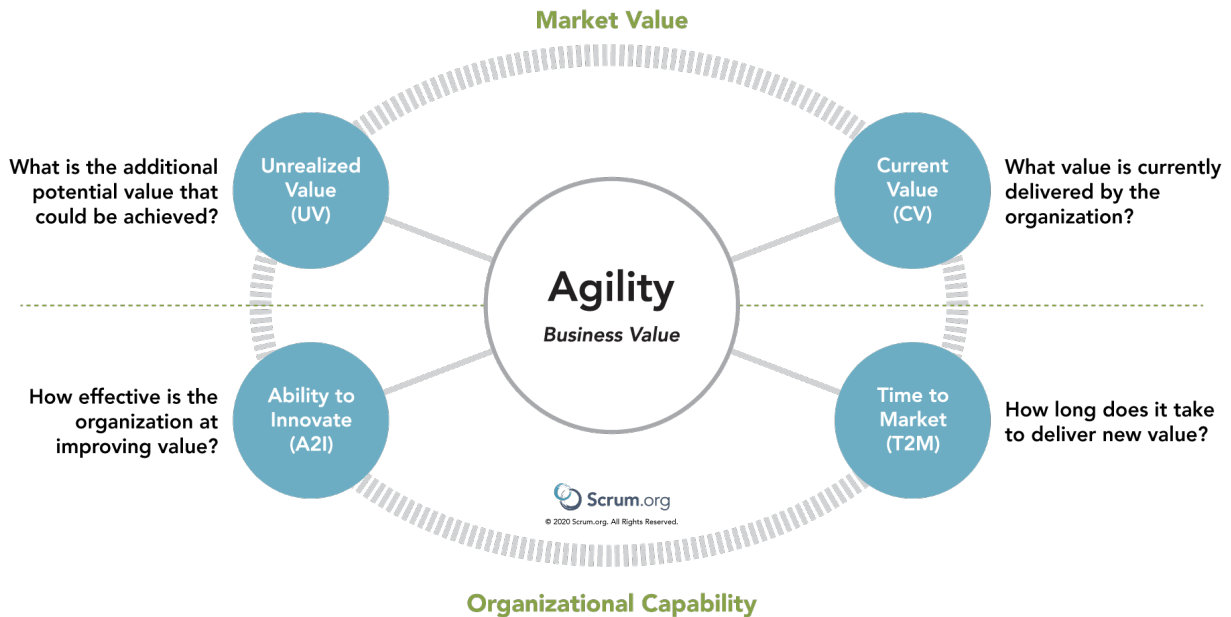

Figure 2: EBM focuses on four Key Value Areas (KVAs).

Each KVA focuses on a different aspect of either value, or the ability of the organization to deliver value. Delivering business value (*Current Value)* is important, but organizations must also show that they can respond to change (*Time-to-Market*) while being able to sustain innovation over time (*Ability-to-Innovate*). And they must be able to continually make progress toward their long-term goals (Unrealized Value) or they risk succumbing to stagnation and complacency.

Example Key Value Measures (KVMs) for each KVA are described in the Appendix.

Current Value (CV)

The value that the product delivers today

The *purpose* of looking at CV is to understand the value that an organization delivers to customers and stakeholders at the present time; it considers only what exists right now, not the value that might exist in the future. Questions that organizations need to continually re-evaluate for current value are:

1. How happy are users and customers today? Is their happiness improving or declining?

2. How happy are your employees today? Is their happiness improving or declining?
3. How happy are your investors and other stakeholders today? Is their happiness improving or declining?

Considering CV helps an organization understand the value that their customers or users experience *today*.

> ***Example:*** *While profit, one way to measure investor happiness, will tell you the economic impact of the value that you deliver, knowing whether customers are happy with their purchase will tell you more about where you may need to improve to keep those customers. If your customers have few alternatives to your product, you may have high profit even though customer satisfaction is low. Considering CV from several perspectives will give you a better understanding of your challenges and opportunities.*

> *Customer happiness and investor happiness also do not tell the whole story about your ability to deliver value. Considering employee attitudes recognizes that employees are ultimately the producers of value. Engaged employees that know how to maintain, sustain and enhance the product are one of the most significant assets of an organization, and happy employees are more engaged and productive.*

Unrealized Value (UV)

The potential future value that *could be* realized if the organization met the needs of all potential customers or users

Looking at Unrealized Value helps an organization to maximize the value that it realizes from a product or service over time. When customers, users, or clients experience a gap between their current experience and the experience that they would like to have, the difference between the two represents an opportunity; this opportunity is measured by *Unrealized Value*.

Questions that organizations need to continually re-evaluate for UV are:

1. Can any additional value be created by our organization in this market or other markets?
2. Is it worth the effort and risk to pursue these untapped opportunities?
3. Should further investments be made to capture additional Unrealized Value?

The consideration of both CV and UV provides organizations with a way to balance present and possible future benefits. Strategic Goals are formed from some satisfaction gap and an opportunity for an organization to decrease UV by increasing CV.

> ***Example:*** *A product may have low CV, because it is an early version being used to test the market, but very high UV, indicating that there is great market potential. Investing in the product to try to boost CV is probably warranted, given the potential returns, even though the product is not currently producing high CV.*

Conversely, a product with very high CV, large market share, no near competitors, and very satisfied customers may not warrant much new investment; this is the classic cash cow product that is very profitable but nearing the end of its product investment cycle with low UV.

Time-to-Market (T2M)

The organization's ability to quickly deliver new capabilities, services, or products

The *reason for looking* at T2M is to minimize the amount of time it takes for the organization to deliver value. Without actively managing T2M, the ability to sustainably deliver value in the future is unknown. Questions that organizations need to continually re-evaluate for T2M are:

1. How fast can the organization learn from new experiments and information?
2. How fast can you adapt based on the information?
3. How fast can you test new ideas with customers?

Improving T2M helps improve the frequency at which an organization can potentially change CV.

__Example:__ Reducing the number of features in a product release can dramatically improve T2M; the smallest release possible is one that delivers at least some incremental improvement in value to some subset of the customers/users of the product. Many organizations also focus on removing non value-added activities from the product development and delivery process to improve their T2M.

Ability to Innovate (A2I)

The effectiveness of an organization to deliver new capabilities that might better meet customer needs

The *goal* of looking at the A2I is to maximize the organization's ability to deliver new capabilities and innovative solutions. Organizations should continually re-evaluate their A2I by asking:

1. What prevents the organization from delivering new value?
2. What prevents customers or users from benefiting from that innovation?

Improving A2I helps an organization become more effective in ensuring that the work that it does improves the value that its products or services deliver to customers or users.

__Example:__ A variety of things can impede an organization from being able to deliver new capabilities and value: spending too much time remedying poor product quality, needing to maintain multiple variations of a product due to lack of operational excellence, lack of

decentralized decision-making, inability to hire and inspire talented, passionate team-members, and so on.

As low-value features and systemic impediments accumulate, more budget and time is consumed maintaining the product or overcoming impediments, reducing its available capacity to innovate. In addition, anything that prevents users or customers from benefiting from innovation, such as hard to assemble/install products or new versions of products, will also reduce A2I.

Progress toward Goals in A Series of Small Steps

The first step in the journey toward a Strategic Goal is understanding your Current State. If your focus is to achieve a Strategic Goal related to Unrealized Value (UV), as is typically the case, then measuring the Current Value (CV) your product or service delivers is where you should start (of course, if your product or service is new then its CV will be zero). To understand where you need to improve, you may also need to understand your effectiveness (A2I), and your responsiveness (T2M).

The Experiment Loop (shown in Figure 1) helps organizations move from their Current State toward their Next Target Goal, and ultimately their Strategic Goal, by taking small, measured steps, called experiments, using explicit hypotheses.[3] This loop consists of:

- **Forming a hypothesis for improvement.** Based on experience, form an idea of something you think will help you move toward your Next Target Goal, and decide how you will know whether this experiment succeeded based on measurement.
- **Running your experiments.** Make the change you think will help you to improve and gather data to support or refute your hypothesis.
- **Inspecting your results.** Did the change you made improve your results based on the measurements you have made? Not all changes do; some changes actually make things worse.
- **Adapting your goals or your approach based on what you learned.** Both your goals and your improvement experiments will likely evolve as you learn more about customers, competitors, and your organization's capabilities. Goals can change because of outside events, and your tactics to reach your goals may need to be reconsidered and revised. Was the *Intermediate Goal* the right goal? Is the Strategic *Goal* still relevant? If you achieved the *Intermediate Goal*, you will need to choose a new *Intermediate Goal.* If you did not achieve it, you will need to decide whether you need to persevere, stop, or pivot toward something new. If your Strategic *Goal* is no longer relevant, you will need to either adapt it, or replace it.

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[3] The Experiment Loop is a variation on the Shewhart Cycle, popularized by W. Edwards Deming, also sometimes called the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle; see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PDCA.

Hypotheses, Experiments, Features, and Requirements

Features are "distinguishing characteristics of a product"[4], while a *requirement* is, practically speaking, something that someone thinks would be desirable in a product. A *feature description* is one kind of requirement.

Organizations can spend a lot of money implementing features and other requirements in products, only to find that customers don't share the company's opinion on their value; beliefs in what is valuable are merely assumptions until they are validated by customers. This is where hypotheses and experiments are useful.

In simplified terms, a *hypothesis* is a proposed explanation for some observation that has not yet been proven (or disproven). In the context of requirements, it is a belief that *doing something will lead to something else*, such as *delivering feature X will lead to outcome Y*. An experiment is a test that is designed to prove or reject some hypothesis.

Every feature and every requirement really represent a hypothesis about value. One of the goals of an empirical approach is to make these hypotheses explicit and to consciously design experiments that explicitly test the value of the features and requirements. The entire feature or requirement need not actually be built to determine whether it is valuable; it may be sufficient for a team to simply build enough of it to validate critical assumptions that would prove or disprove its value.

Explicitly forming hypotheses, measuring results, and inspecting and adapting goals based on those results are implicit parts of an agile approach. Making this work explicit and transparent is what EBM adds to the organizational improvement process.

End Note

Evidence-Based Management is free and offered in this Guide. Although implementing only parts of EBM is possible, the result is not Evidence-Based Management.

Acknowledgements

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[4] Adapted from the IEEE 829 specification

Appendix: Example Key Value Measures

To encourage adaptability, EBM defines no specific Key Value Measures (KVMs). KVMs listed below are presented to show the kinds of measures that might help an organization to understand its current state, desired future state, and factors that influence its ability to improve.

Current Value (CV)

KVM	Measuring:
Revenue per Employee	The ratio (gross revenue / # of employees) is a key competitive indicator within an industry. This varies significantly by industry.
Product Cost Ratio	Total expenses and costs for the product(s)/system(s) being measured, including operational costs compared to revenue.
Employee Satisfaction	Some form of sentiment analysis to help gauge employee engagement, energy, and enthusiasm.
Customer Satisfaction	Some form of sentiment analysis to help gauge customer engagement and happiness with the product.
Customer Usage Index	Measurement of usage, by feature, to help infer the degree to which customers find the product useful and whether actual usage meets expectations on how long users should be taking with a feature.

Unrealized Value (UV)

KVM	Measuring:
Market Share	The relative percentage of the market not controlled by the product; the potential market share that the product might achieve if it better met customer needs.
Customer or User Satisfaction Gap	The difference between a customer or user's desired experience and their current experience.
Desired Customer Experience or satisfaction	A measure that indicates the experience that the customer would like to have

Time-to-Market (T2M)

KVM	Measuring:
Build and Integration Frequency	The number of integrated and tested builds per time period. For a team that is releasing frequently or continuously, this measure is superseded by actual release measures.
Release Frequency	The number of releases per time period, e.g. continuously, daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc. This helps reflect the time needed to satisfy the customer with new and competitive products.
Release Stabilization Period	The time spent correcting product problems between the point the developers say it is ready to release and the point where it is actually released to customers. This helps represent the impact of poor development practices and underlying design and code base.
Mean Time to Repair	The average amount of time it takes from when an error is detected and when it is fixed. This helps reveal the efficiency of an organization to fix an error.
Customer Cycle Time	The amount of time from when work starts on a release until the point where it is actually released. This measure helps reflect an organization's ability to reach its customer.
Lead Time	The amount of time from when an idea is proposed, or a hypothesis is formed until a customer can benefit from that idea. This measure may vary based on customer and product. It is a contributing factor for customer satisfaction.
Lead Time for Changes	The amount of time to go from code-committed to code successfully running in production. For more information, see the DORA 2019 report.
Deployment Frequency	The number of times that the organization deployed (released) a new version of the product to customers/users. For more information, see the DORA 2019 report.
Time to Restore Service	The amount of time between the start of a service outage and the restoration of full availability of the service. For more information, see the DORA 2019 report.
Time-to-Learn	The total time needed to sketch an idea or improvement, build it, deliver it to users, and learn from their usage.

Time to remove Impediment	The average amount of time from when an impediment is raised until when it is resolved. It is a contributing factor to lead time and employee satisfaction.
Time to Pivot	A measure of true business agility that presents the elapsed time between when an organization receives feedback or new information and when it responds to that feedback; for example, the time between when it finds out that a competitor has delivered a new market-winning feature to when the organization responds with matching or exceeding new capabilities that measurably improve customer experience.

Ability to Innovate (A2I)

KVM	Measuring:
Innovation Rate	The percentage of effort or cost spent on new product capabilities, divided by total product effort or cost. This provides insight into the capacity of the organization to deliver new product capabilities.
Defect Trends	Measurement of change in defects since last measurement. A defect is anything that reduces the value of the product to a customer, user, or to the organization itself. Defects are generally things that don't work as intended.
On-Product Index	The percentage of time teams spend working on product and value.
Installed Version Index	The number of versions of a product that are currently being supported. This reflects the effort the organization spends supporting and maintaining older versions of software.
Technical Debt	A concept in programming that reflects the extra development and testing work that arises when "quick and dirty" solutions result in later remediation. It creates an undesirable impact on the delivery of value and an avoidable increase in waste and risk.
Production Incident Count	The number of times in a given period that the Development Team was interrupted to fix a problem in an installed product. The number and frequency of Production Incidents can help indicate the stability of the product.

Active Product (Code) Branches	The number of different versions (or variants) of a product or service. Provides insight into the potential impact of change and the resulting complexity of work.
Time Spent Merging Code Between Branches	The amount of time spent applying changes across different versions of a product or service. Provides insight into the potential impact of change and the resulting complexity of work.
Time Spent Context-Switching	Examples include time lost to interruptions caused by meetings or calls, time spent switching between tasks, and time lost when team members are interrupted to help people outside the team can give simple insight into the magnitude of the problem.
Change Failure Rate	The percentage of released product changes that result in degraded service and require remediation (e.g. hotfix, rollback, patch). For more information, see the DORA 2019 report.

A Practical Approach to Improve the Performance of Your Agile Teams

Roland Flemm

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July 18, 2023

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Part 1, improving an A-level ecosystem with horizontal scaling.

The organizational archetypes ⬈ of the Org Topologies™ map can be used to plot organization designs that we refer to as **ecosystems**. This article describes an **A-type ecosystem** for (software) product development, the prevalent dynamics in it, and the solutions to improve performance using Org Topologies™ mapping.
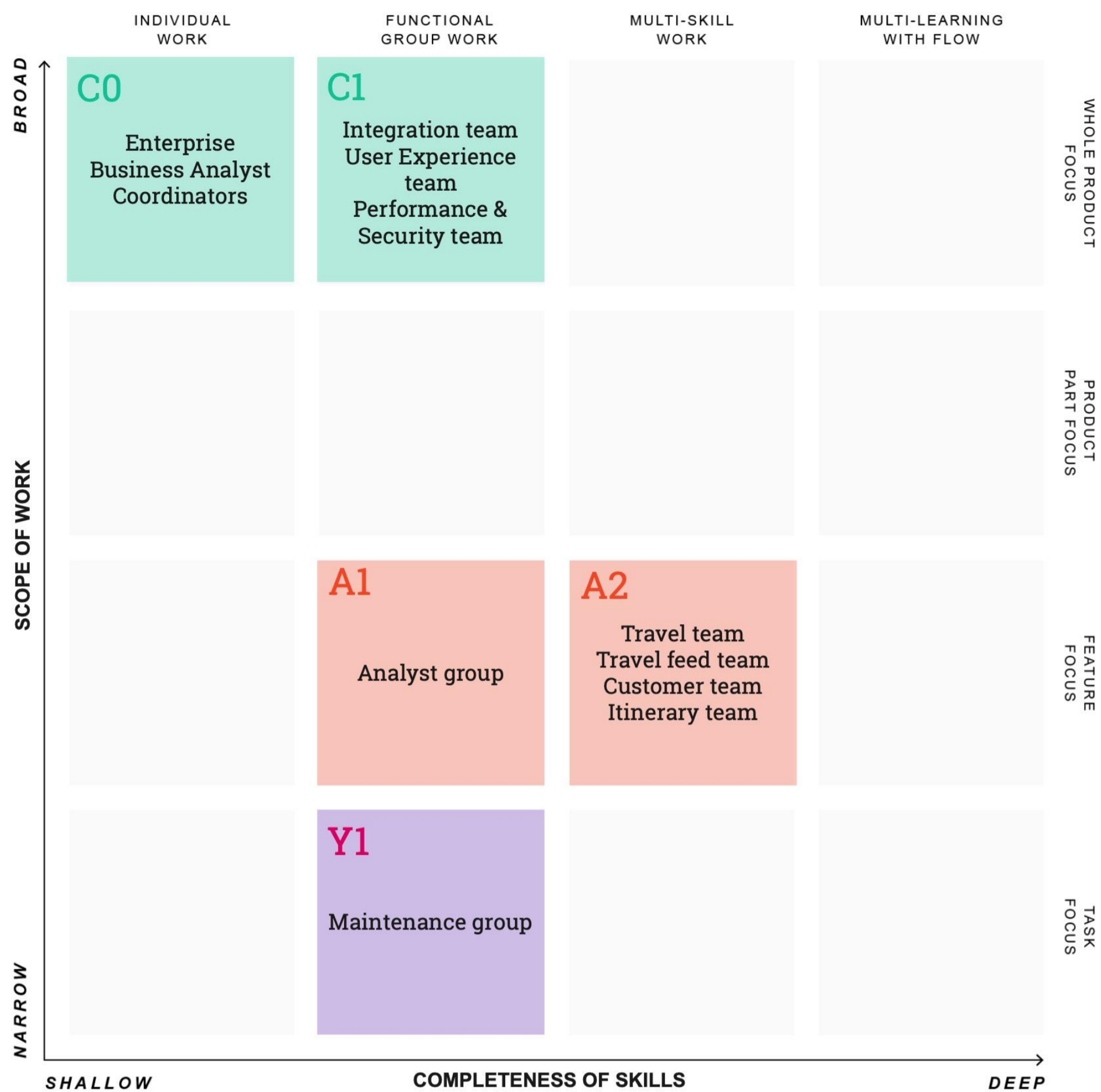
If you are unfamiliar with the Org Topologies™ approach, you can read this article to catch up and have a basic understanding of Org Topologies™ ⬈.

Example of an A-type Ecosystem

The A-level ecosystem is a combination of organizational archetypes where the A-level archetype is most prominent. At the A-level, as per the Org Topologies™ map, the work is done by the teams at the feature level. This means that their Product Backlog contains features, rather than tasks or business initiatives. However, customers do not think about application features, they have a "job to be done", a need to be met. For example, a user might need to find the best option to travel from A to B. We can help the user by offering a product that will allow them to select a mode of transport based on relevant selection criteria (time of itinerary, cost, scheduled departure or arrival times, etc). This product consists of a series of features: set selection criteria, search, show travel options, select travel options, see itinerary details, manage profile, price alerts, etc). In the A-level ecosystem, there will be one or more teams assigned to build and maintain (a set of) features. In our example, the A-level teams are of type A2, which means not all capabilities are available in the teams to deliver a Done product. They depend on other organizational elements for shipping value to the customer. In other words, to provide a fully operational solution to the customer, we need multiple organizational elements to collaborate. This is a common situation in software development groups.

In our example, this is an enterprise business analyst group (which can be mapped to archetype C0, an individual with a whole product focus). After decomposition, the feature-level work is further refined by the analyst group before the work is picked up by the A2-level teams. Each of the teams is responsible for building a certain feature(set). There is a travel team, travel feed-engine team, customer data team, and itineraries team. These teams work with Scrum. The analysts are not organized as a (Scrum) team. They are grouped into a department based on their expertise. (This is a Y1 archetype). After the features have been tested, we need an integration team to assemble the features into one working product, the user experience team will test the integrated product for consistency, and the performance and security team will need to verify the product before handing it off to the maintenance team for going live. These teams have a whole product focus but they have a single skill as they perform only a step of the complete product development process. Below is a visual representation (an Org Topologies™ mapping) of the ecosystem.

SCOPE OF WORK

BROAD

	INDIVIDUAL WORK	FUNCTIONAL GROUP WORK	MULTI-SKILL WORK	MULTI-LEARNING WITH FLOW	
	C0 Enterprise Business Analyst Coordinators	**C1** Integration team User Experience team Performance & Security team			WHOLE PRODUCT FOCUS
					PRODUCT PART FOCUS
		A1 Analyst group	**A2** Travel team Travel feed team Customer team Itinerary team		FEATURE FOCUS
		Y1 Maintenance group			TASK FOCUS

NARROW

SHALLOW   **COMPLETENESS OF SKILLS**   *DEEP*

Dynamics of this Ecosystem

Each A2 team has its own Product Owner and Product Backlog. The specifications of the customer needs are prepared by the analysts and spread across multiple Product Backlogs. The development of features will be performed asynchronously. This is because each Product Owner can individually decide on priorities. Also, there are variations in team speed. And asynchrony is inevitable because the amount of work for each team varies. The Customer team might have little work creating a login screen and a customer profile page, while the Travel Feed team might take much more time to disclose information from a large number of external sources.

Another interesting observation is that teams will not stay idle after delivering the required functionality for a certain customer journey. They will remain busy by adding functionality to their feature that their Product Owner deems valuable (face recognition maybe?). Also, the team might propose to upgrade their code to the latest frameworks and software patterns. Strictly speaking, this does not necessarily add value from the customer's perspective, nor might this be beneficial for the other teams. Doing work that is not adding value at the whole product level is also known as "local optimization".

Before a working product can be shipped, the work has to pass through the C1 groups and maintenance department. There is a lot of information going back and forth (round-robin) between the elements of the ecosystem that needs to be coordinated. The dynamics can be summarized as follows:

- Information scattered across many backlogs
- Asynchronous dependencies
- Local optimization
- High-frequency round-robin of work
- Need for coordination roles

Looking at the performance of this system, we see that there is low predictability on the delivery at the business initiative level (or customer need level). Also, we see that over time, there is a growing need for coordination due to the growing asynchronicity of the work. Transaction costs are increasing due to increasing lead times.

Resolving problems the fast way

The company's leaders want to have clarity on the possible delivery dates of new initiatives. This is difficult due to the high number of handoffs, round robins for rework, and isolated feature focus of the teams. Which such an organizational design, the likeliness of not meeting anticipated delivery dates is high. Once this happens, a common procedure is for the leadership to summon the coordinators to report on possible causes for

> *"Adding human resources to a late software project makes it later."*

This is Brooks' Law which learns us that adding teams will make the system perform worse. As a result, managers will push harder on the teams, team members will get frustrated, and leadership will be aggravated because the increased cost of additional teams does not give better results. These dynamics might be familiar to you.

Resolving problems in a systemic way with horizontal scaling

We should address this problem by looking at how the elements of the whole ecosystem interact. Managers should not waste energy trying to optimize the existing system. They can invest their time and energy more wisely in understanding the system, discovering the root causes, and considering options to redesign the system.

All ecosystems are sticky. Its elements will try to stay in equilibrium and maintain the status quo, even when it is under pressure. How does this work? First of all, people want painless and fast solutions, as opposed to finding and implementing a deeper solution which will take more time and effort. Secondly, the coordinators will be tasked by higher management to improve the system. But what if the coordinators are a part of the problem? They will most likely not see themselves as a cause for the poor performance, as this implies self-sacrifice.

In our example, we see a large amount of dependencies between teams. This problem was addressed by appointing coordinators to handle them. But was that the right solution? Did we address the root causes for having dependencies? No, we did not, because the fix did not make the dependencies disappear. Instead, we institutionalized them by appointing dependency managers, aka coordinators.

We need to think deeper and look for a solution that results in a system without dependencies, or at least reduces the most important ones. For this, we must study how information flows go back and forth when developing a product. We need to understand why these information flows are a problem. We should start by looking at the dependencies of the A2-level teams because they are at the core of delivering customer value.

The analysts, A2 teams, integration, security and performance, and maintenance groups are tightly coupled. The information between the groups round robins at high frequency: A development team hands off their work to the integration group, they raise bugs that need to be fixed by the developers, and so on. This kind of dependency occurs often and is also known as "Reciprocal dependency". We want to reduce them as much as we can. We don't care too much about dependencies that only pop up every so often. After all, we do not want to optimize the org design for exceptions.

We need to contain the reciprocal dependencies inside a single team or (product) group. Possible solutions to achieve this are:

- Existing team members learn the missing skill (obtain knowledge)

- We give the mandate to the team to perform the missing skill (obtain permissions)

- Automate and create a self-service solution (self-service, no-code/low-code solutions)

- We add someone with the missing skill/knowledge to the team

- We create new teams by mixing the existing single-skilled teams into teams that contain the reciprocal dependencies

The result:
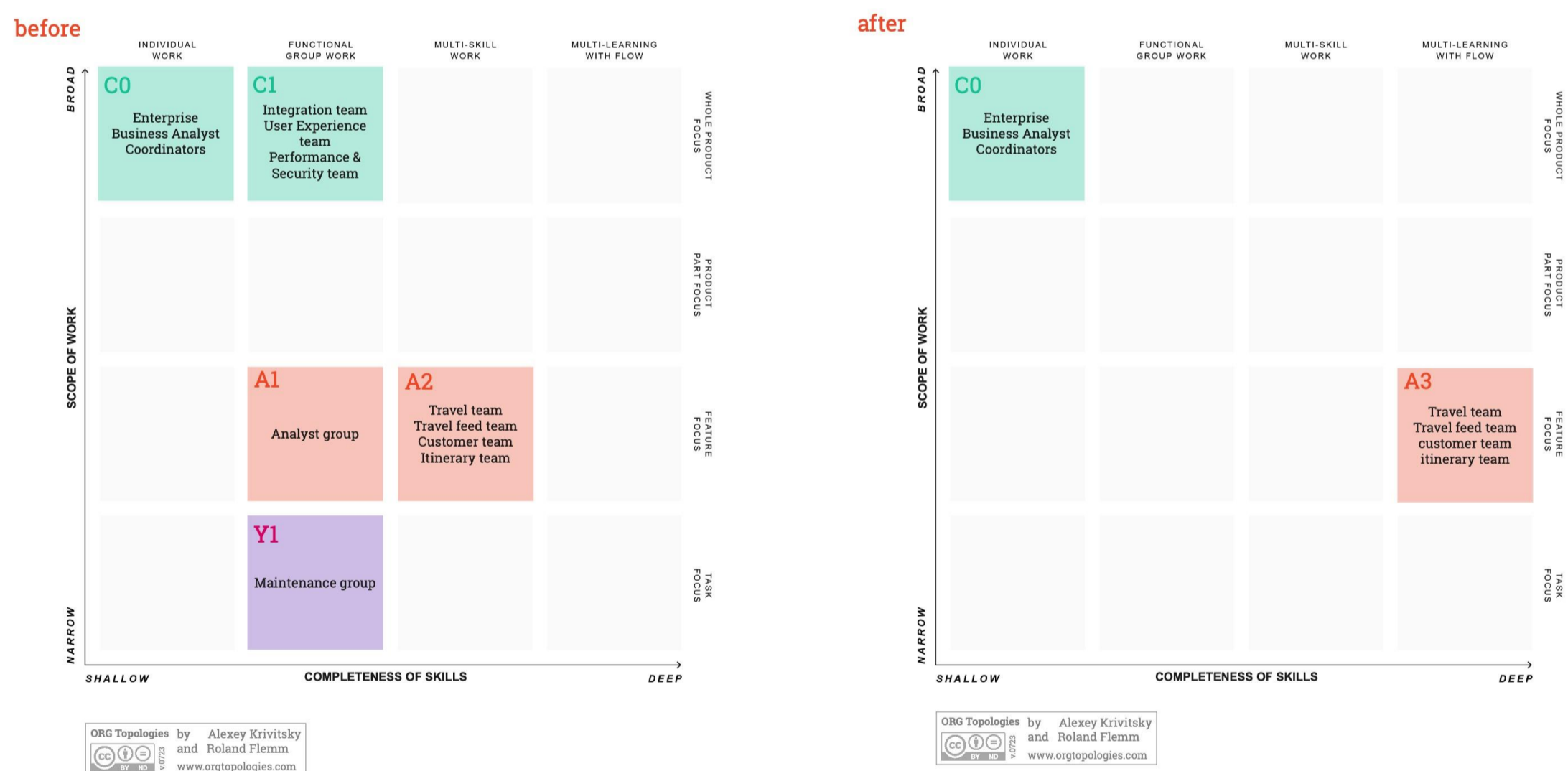
In the given example, we choose to change the organizational design by recreating teams that are better set up to deliver a Done increment every Sprint. This means that each A2 development team should be expanded with the missing skills to deliver a working product. . This will dissolve most of the other groups. By doing this, we will have contained a large number of unwanted dependencies in the teams. The teams will become A3-type teams (multi-learning with flow) and will lower the need for coordination drastically. After all, the teams do not work at the customer problem level.

Get Certified

In this article, we described a scenario for improving the org design using the Org Topologies™ map. If you want to learn more and build experience in understanding and designing agile ecosystems, consider signing up for our upcoming two-day Certified Org Topologies™ Practitioner (COTP level-1) classes.

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A Titanic Misfit: The Alpha Organization's Wasteful Endeavor in Red Markets

Martin Hinshelwood

July 13, 2023

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Under the ruthless canopy of the red market, I find myself staring at the bloated behemoth of an Alpha organisation, huffing and puffing in a vain attempt to keep up with the frenzied pace of the modern world. The Alpha model, once a paragon of order and efficiency in the leisurely blue market era, has now morphed into a lumbering dinosaur, with its hierarchical structures and rigid command and control systems looking out of place in the high-speed, unpredictable red markets.

From Alpha to Beta: The Urgent Call for Agile Organisational Transformation

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https://nkdagility.com/blog/

> *Alpha Organizations: Born in the Industrial Age, they are hierarchical and less adaptable.*

> *Blue Markets: Blue markets refer to the historically stable and slow-paced markets rooted in the Industrial Age.*

From where I stand, I see an excessive trail of waste trailing behind these giants – a by-product of their misguided foray into the red markets. Each wasted opportunity, each missed trend, each delayed product launch, heaps more on the pile of squandered resources. Their attempts to rein in the chaotic, whirlwind pace of red markets with their outmoded command and control policies is like trying to tame a wild river with a teaspoon.

The bulk of the waste I observe can be traced back to the speed, or rather lack thereof, at which these Alpha organisations operate. Red markets are volatile; they shift and morph at a breathtaking pace. Yet, Alpha organisations move with the grace of a steam train, heavy and cumbersome. The time they waste in bureaucratic decision-making, pushing papers from one department to another, and getting approval from higher-ups who are far removed from the realities of the market is a luxurious indulgence they cannot afford.

> *Beta Organizations: Agile and decentralised, they excel in fast-paced markets.*

> *Red Markets: Red markets are modern, fast-moving, and complex, driven by constant innovation and fluctuating consumer demands.*

Not to mention the innovation wasteland they create, full of ideas and ambitions, bright minds find themselves shackled by the Alpha's obsession with command and control. Creativity is stifled; innovation is snuffed out. The organisation considers their ideas too extreme, uncertain, and untested. And so, they are left untapped and unexplored, wasted.

Then there is the waste of human potential. In an Alpha organisation, most power rests with the top tier. The middle and lower rungs are left to follow orders, their insights and expertise largely overlooked. This has created a vast reservoir of untapped potential that has yet to be utilised. So many workers, so much talent, left on the sidelines, their abilities wasted.

Finally, there's the customer disconnect, perhaps the most egregious form of waste. Alpha organisations, ensconced in their ivory towers, struggle to keep their finger on the market's pulse. They are often slow to respond to changing customer needs, and their offerings often miss the mark, wasting effort, resources, and lost customers.

Watching the Alpha organisation struggle in red markets feels akin to watching a fish attempt to climb a tree. It is a spectacle of monumental waste – a waste of time, resources, talent, and opportunities. However, all is not lost. I see a ray of hope in the form of Beta organisations, nimble and responsive, perfectly suited to thrive in the complex red markets. They are the future; they are the answer. The sooner we realise this, the better we'll be in reducing the colossal waste we are currently witnessing.

NKDAgility can help!

These are the kinds of issues that lean-agile practitioners love and most folks hate, and if you need to move from alpha to beta-type practices, my team at NKDAgility can help you or help you find a consultant, coach, or trainer who can.

If you have issues that are undermining the effectiveness of your value delivery, it's especially important to find help as soon as you can and not wait!

Which you can do right now. You can request a [free consultation](#) ↗ with my team or sign up for one of our [upcoming professional Scrum classes](#) ↗. Because you don't just need agility, you need Naked Agility.

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Answer These 3 Questions to Determine If You're Getting Value from Scrum

Stephanie Ockerman

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

April 1, 2023

★ 4.8 from 6 ratings

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As the most popular agile framework, organizations use Scrum for doing complex work in sectors ranging from software and hardware development to marketing and recruitment. With this widespread adoption, some variation in how teams practice Scrum has inevitably evolved. At the same time, some organizations that have turned to Scrum wonder if they are getting its full benefits. So, how do you know if Scrum is working? In this article, I outline three questions that can help determine if you're getting value from Scrum. Your answers might point to adjustments you can make to your practice to improve outcomes.

Scrum is a path to business agility

Organizations adopt Scrum to achieve business agility so they can manage uncertainty and risk in complex environments to achieve their goals. Scrum helps deliver high-value creative solutions in increments of value over short periods (no longer than a month), called Sprints.

The framework depends on having a clear vision and an understanding of what you want to achieve. It requires embracing an agile mindset, which involves collaboration, flexibility, team empowerment and a willingness to experiment in the face of possible failure to navigate uncertainty and enable continuous improvement.

Adopting Scrum practices while maintaining old organizational structures and processes is a common misstep when embarking on an agile journey. Without truly embracing the principles of agility in your approach, Scrum won't deliver the benefits it's known for.

So, how do you know if you're getting the value you deserve from Scrum? Let's turn to the three questions that can help you determine that.

#1 Are you getting a return on investment soon enough?

Whatever product or initiative your organization undertakes requires a discussion about the expected return on investment (ROI). Business owners and organizational leaders must decide where best to invest their staff and resources.

Delivering features and functionality your customers want and find valuable sooner significantly benefits your bottom line. Rather than tying up large amounts of budget for a long time without getting any return, using Scrum as intended by its creators allows you to deliver value incrementally and get some returns along the way.

Even if your product is not sold to customers but instead used internally, it can still have ROI. For example, you can measure value in terms of time saved, new customer services, or improved job satisfaction.

Scrum reality check: If your Scrum Team isn't delivering product value much more frequently than before you implemented Scrum, this is often an indicator that you may not be taking an empirical and collaborative approach to how you work with customers to understand, deliver, and measure value ⧉.

#2 Do you have enough transparency, flexibility and control over investment decisions?

Scrum gives the organization transparency, flexibility and control over investment decisions because it focuses on delivering a small slice of usable value every Sprint. This limits the investment risk to a shorter time frame.

Having a usable Increment every Sprint also enables frequent feedback and assessment of changes in your environment, allowing you to validate that you are moving in the right direction and honing in on the desired outcomes. If not, you can pivot. Sometimes the best decision is to stop investing in an initiative. The sooner you stop, the better because there won't be as much waste. You haven't tied up people and resources for months or years before discovering that what you created missed the mark or is no longer needed.

Scrum reality check: If your Scrum Team takes several Sprints to produce a Done increment, it often indicates you are applying the old paradigm to your work (i.e. using a traditional waterfall approach and trying to fit Sprints around it). This can happen when there are handoffs between Scrum Teams (i.e. lack of cross-functionality or collaboration). Not getting to Done ⧉ can also often result from a Product Backlog that looks more like a traditional project plan of tasks or a technical requirements specification rather than a transparent ordered list of value to be created.

#3 How easily can you change direction to take advantage of opportunities and respond to risks?

Another way to word this question is, "How much waste will you have if the organization needs to stop investing in initiative A and pivot to initiative B?" There will likely be some waste, but you can work in a way that reduces that waste. And that also helps us avoid getting stuck in the sunk cost fallacy.

When you are not bound to projects and initiatives with long time horizons before realizing any value, it's much easier to change course. By delivering value in shorter cycles, you've realized whatever ROI you could, putting the organization in a better position to shift resources to take advantage of new opportunities that arise or respond to risks.

Innumerable circumstances require organizations to change how they invest their people and resources. Emerging markets, changing customer behaviors, new revenue streams, technological breakthroughs, and adapting business operations to meet new needs or world circumstances are just a few examples. Being able to respond to these conditions quickly is the ultimate competitive advantage.

Scrum reality check: If your team is working on several parallel initiatives without tangible progress toward customer outcomes Sprint after Sprint, it could indicate that you need to make more intentional choices about how to invest in the product in a focused value-driven way. I have seen this show up when a Product Owner is not genuinely empowered, resulting in a Product Backlog containing a random smattering of items to "show progress" each Sprint on every stakeholder's favorite initiative. Working on everything at once to "show progress" results in everything taking longer to get done. And when lots of initiatives are "in progress," there will be more waste when you want to shift direction.

How did you do?

Scrum is notoriously easy to understand and difficult to use well. Organizations and teams seeking greater business agility succeed by committing to continuously improving their practice. It's easy to become disillusioned and abandon Scrum because it's "not working." Or to accept mediocre results because it "feels like" there is more visibility than before. Often, the reality is that organizations need to strengthen and develop the agile skills and mindset necessary to realize Scrum's benefits.

You might not have been able to answer the questions I've proposed here with a "yes" or "no" answer, and that's ok. You might see satisfactory success in some areas but not others—success is a spectrum. Also, you might resolve that you're successful enough today but realize six months from now that you aren't. Regularly revisiting these questions can offer the reality check you need to realign and continue to improve. No team or organization ever achieves "perfect agility" - whatever that means. It's about being intentional on your journey.

Take your Scrum practice further

Join me for a [Professional Scrum Training](#) class to delve more deeply into how to get closer to "yes" on the questions in this post.

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Are you Familiar with Agile Organization Design?

**Cesario Ramos**
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

February 28, 2023

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What is **Agile Organization Design**?

It's a powerful approach to designing organizations that allows for adaptability to customer demands. According to organizational design expert Jay Galbraith, there are five key components that make up an effective organizational design: strategy, structures, processes, reward systems, and people practices.
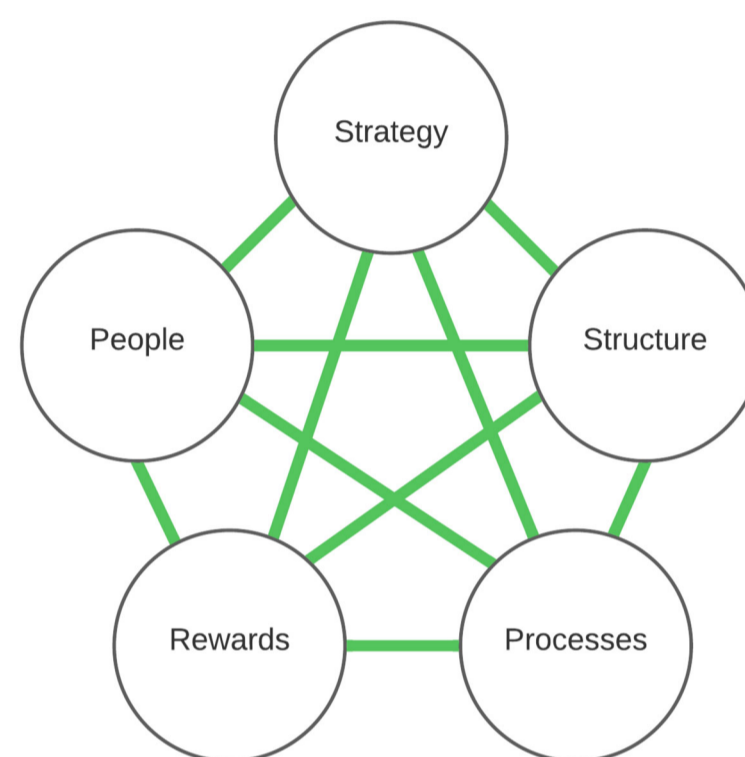
When these components are aligned and support each other, the organization is most effective, as people get a consistent message about the appropriate behavior.

But why should you care about organization design?

Simply put, to achieve your business strategy, your organization must have the capabilities to support it. This includes the skills, competencies, and alignment of your employees. If your organization's capabilities and strategy are incompatible, it becomes less effective. Imagine needing to respond quickly to customer requests to be successful, but your existing department structure and processes make even a small change to a product take months of decision-making and development. Your current capabilities would not support your new strategy.

So, what capabilities are required to be adaptable?

There are three essential capabilities required for adaptability.

- **First**, the capability to switch between different types of work fast and at a low cost.
- **Second**, the capability to learn fast about the Value Stream, including user needs, product features, and market trends.
- **And third**, the capability to learn fast about the Product Organization, including short feedback loops on processes, organization design, technologies, and team capabilities.

Unfortunately, you can't simply buy these capabilities. Instead, when an organization concludes that its current capabilities are no longer sufficient for success, the employees need to redesign the organization into one that allows it to build the necessary capabilities over time. An Agile organization design can help you achieve this goal by creating a flexible structure that supports your employees' ability to learn to adapt to customer demands.

Looking to build an adaptable organization?

The key lies in understanding your strategic focus and the required capabilities to achieve it. Let's break it down.

First, consider your strategic focus. Is your organization **product-centric**, **operations-centric**, or **customer-centric**? Each focus requires a different set of capabilities and organizational design. For instance, a product-centric organization prioritizes innovation and new product development, while an operations-centric organization focuses on low cost, reliability, and efficiency. If you have a customer-centric focus, you need the capabilities of delivering high customer satisfaction and nurturing long-term relationships with customers.

Of course, larger companies often have a mix of foci, so it's crucial to identify the capabilities required for each focus and design your organization accordingly. This is where Agile organizational design comes in - by combining your strategic focus with Agile principles, you can effectively deliver value.
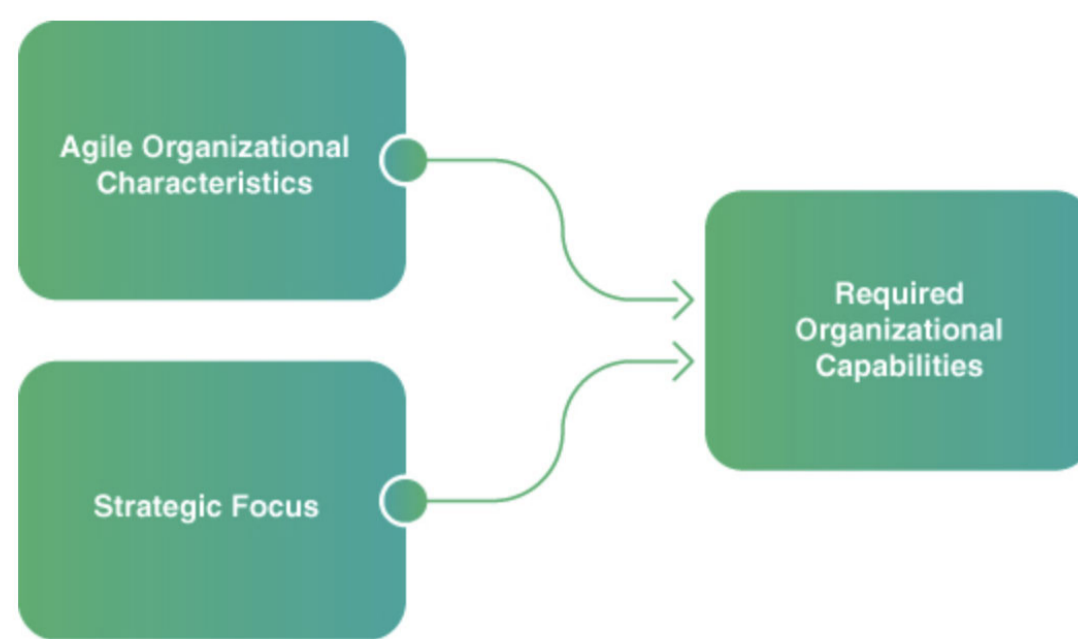
So, how do you redesign your organization for adaptability?

It starts with understanding your business strategy and clarifying the reasons for change. From there, you can determine the required organizational capabilities, assess your current organization, and create a design that facilitates the development of those capabilities.

But here's the thing: most design decisions are speculative until you start working in the new organizational design. That's why it's crucial to have a culture of reflection and continuous improvement, regularly revisiting your design decisions, process, structure, and required capabilities.

To help guide you through the design process, the Creating Agile Organizations book offers 12 organizational design guidelines that cover typical challenges encountered in building an Agile organization. Ready to build an adaptable organization that can thrive in today's rapidly changing business landscape? Let's get started.

Looking for an Overview of the guidelines?

You can download the organization design cards here ⬈.

Summarizing

To summarize, a proper organizational design is critical to achieving your business strategy, and you need to redesign your organization when your capabilities and strategy are incompatible. Redesigning your organization involves rethinking its structure, processes, and people to ensure that they align with your strategy and capabilities.

Want to learn more about this topic?

Please visit creatingagileorganizations.com ⬈

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Breaking Chains, Racing Forward: Sara's Quest for Organizational Agility

Cesario Ramos

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October 25, 2023

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Determined to find a way to meet her goals, Sara knows that her organization needs to step up and embrace new capabilities. With the way things are currently set up, there are too many dependencies between teams, conflicting goals, and coordination issues that are holding them back. It's like trying to run a race with one foot tied to a rock – they're not getting very far.

Despite working hard, her teams seem to always get bogged down in low-value tasks, unable to focus on what really matters. It's frustrating, and Sara is not happy with the current situation at all. It's time for a change – a new approach that will get everyone working together towards a common goal.

So, she had a meeting with her management team to discuss how to improve the current situation. The result is a list of capabilities they believe will enable her group to deliver on the ambitious goals.

Agile for Customer-Centric Development: Sara's Plan for Success

Sara strongly believes that her organization requires three critical capabilities to succeed. The first is the ability to deliver new functionality rapidly and efficiently. The second, equally important capability is to understand and quickly adapt to their customers' needs. She acknowledges that they are currently gathering feedback from their customers, but the feedback loop is too lengthy and needs improvement.

Sara also recognizes the importance of the capability to allocate her teams to work on the most important product functionality, rather than simply having the teams focus on their areas of expertise. Therefore, she seeks the capability of broadly specialized teams..

With these capabilities in mind, Sara is eager to take action and explore different avenues to achieve them. She's even considering implementing some of the latest scaling frameworks to help her organization..

So, she calls in her **agile coach Kim** to help her on this matter.

Kim, the Agile Coach

After explaining her problems and required capabilities, Kim starts explaining the impact it will have on her organization and management style.

Resource Efficiency vs. Flow Efficiency: Striking the Right Balance

Kim starts with the topic of efficiency: Which efficiency do you mean? There are two types of efficiencies that are important for us to consider. Resource and Flow efficiency and it is very hard to score high on both. Therefore, it is important to prioritize which one to focus on.

Let me explain: Resource Efficiency is about making the best use of your team's time and expertise. For example, if your team has five days available to work and they work full-time for five days, they are considered 100% utilized. Conversely, if your team only works 2.5 days, their utilization rate drops to 50%. Resource Efficiency also involves using your team's expertise most efficiently. A UX specialist who works solely within their area of expertise is considered more efficiently used from their perspective than when working outside their area of expertise. Optimizing your resources is key to improving Resource Efficiency.
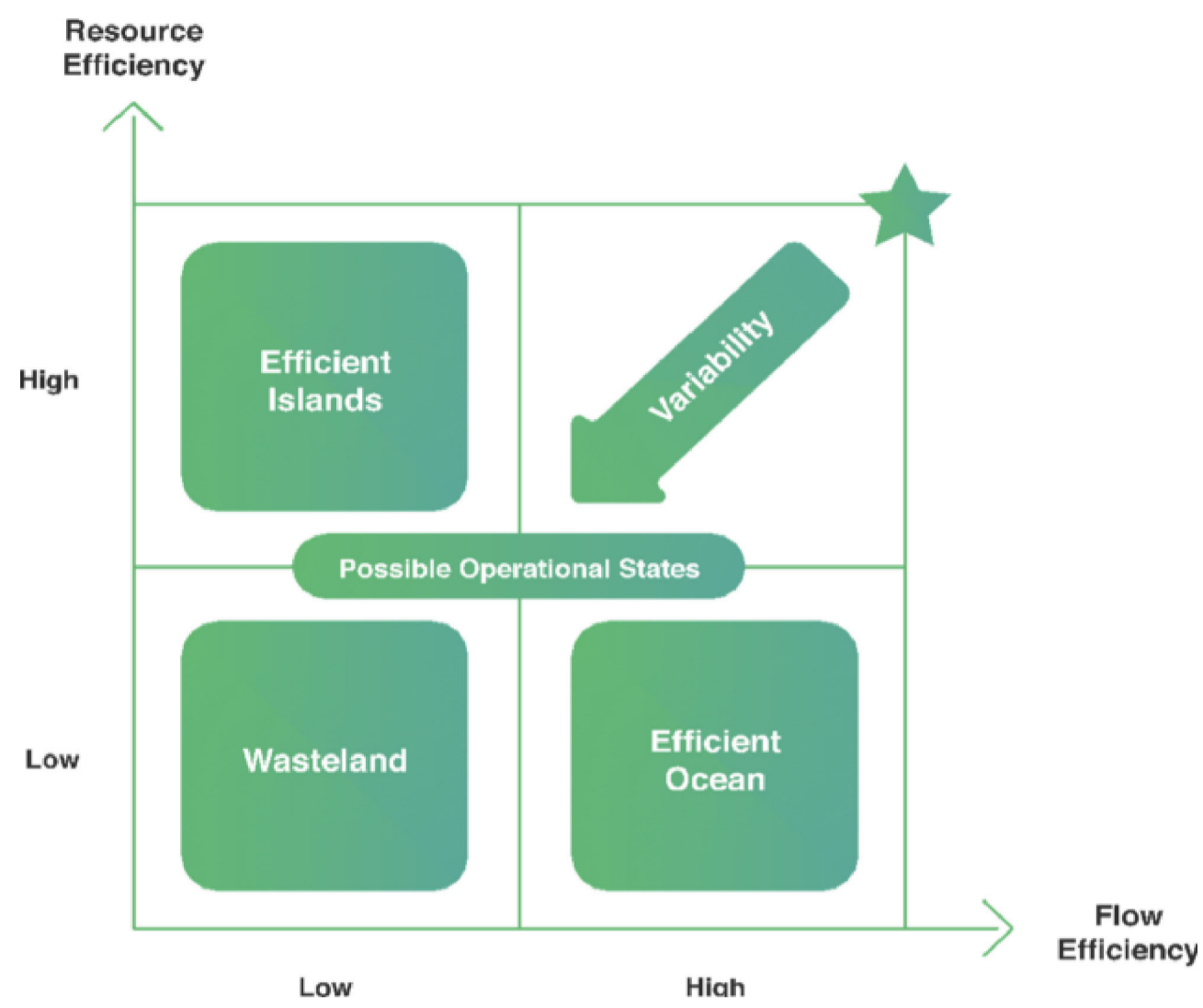
On the other hand, Flow Efficiency focuses on how efficiently your team can take an idea and turn it into a solution that's ready for your customer. For instance, if a feature could be developed in five days without any delays, but it takes ten days due to delays, coordination issues and conflicting goals, the flow efficiency rate drops to 50%. To achieve high Flow Efficiency, teams need to be ready to work on the feature at any given moment, without any delays or pauses. This means e.g. that they cannot be busy with other tasks as that would create delays. Flow Efficiency helps achieve faster results and shorter feedback loops from customers, enabling you to learn more about them.

But there is a catch, to achieve your goals of fast delivery, you need to accept lower Resource Efficiency and adjust your actions accordingly.

However,…

Kim elaborates further on the concept of flow efficiency, emphasizing that it is necessary but not sufficient for allocating teams to work on the most critical functionality. If teams have high flow efficiency but work on a narrow domain, they may be fast but not adaptable at the overall product level. To illustrate this point, imagine multiple teams, each responsible for a specific domain. While each team can efficiently solve problems within its domain, they cannot help with work outside of it. When the most important work happens to be in a domain that is overloaded, the other teams cannot assist, resulting in the group being unable to work on the most important tasks.

Let me draw it for you, that makes it easier to understand.
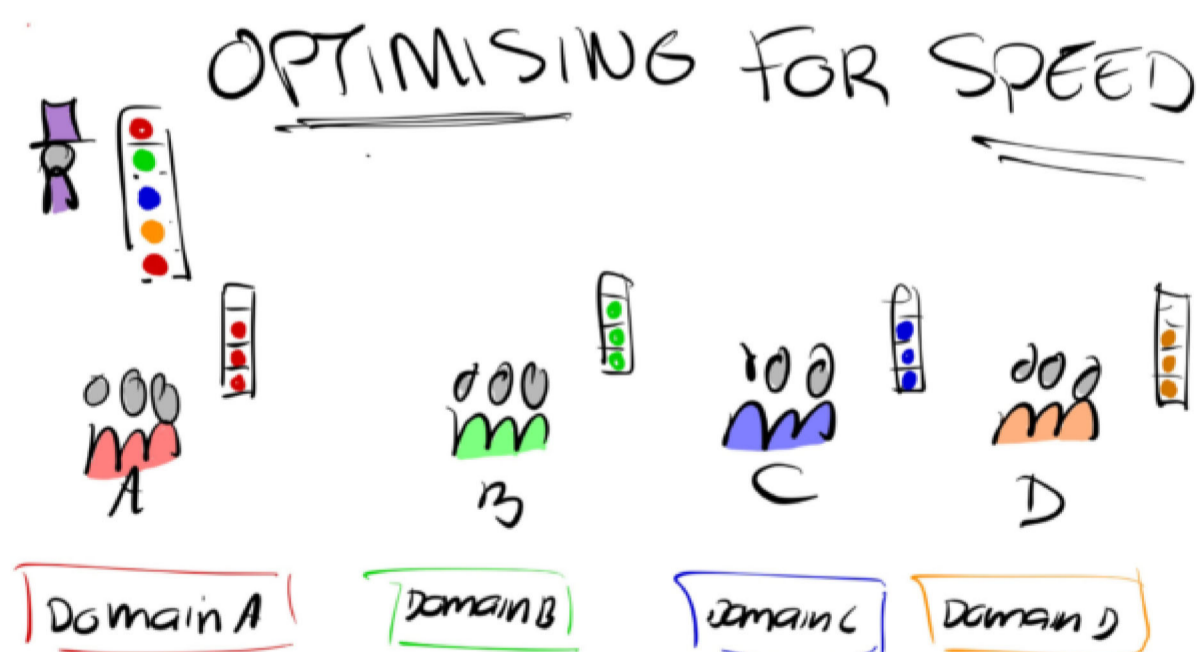
Each of these domain teams is cross-functional and super fast, you give them a problem and they can solve it end-to-end. But, each can only work on its domain. Look what happened when e.g. the most important work is in the red domain.
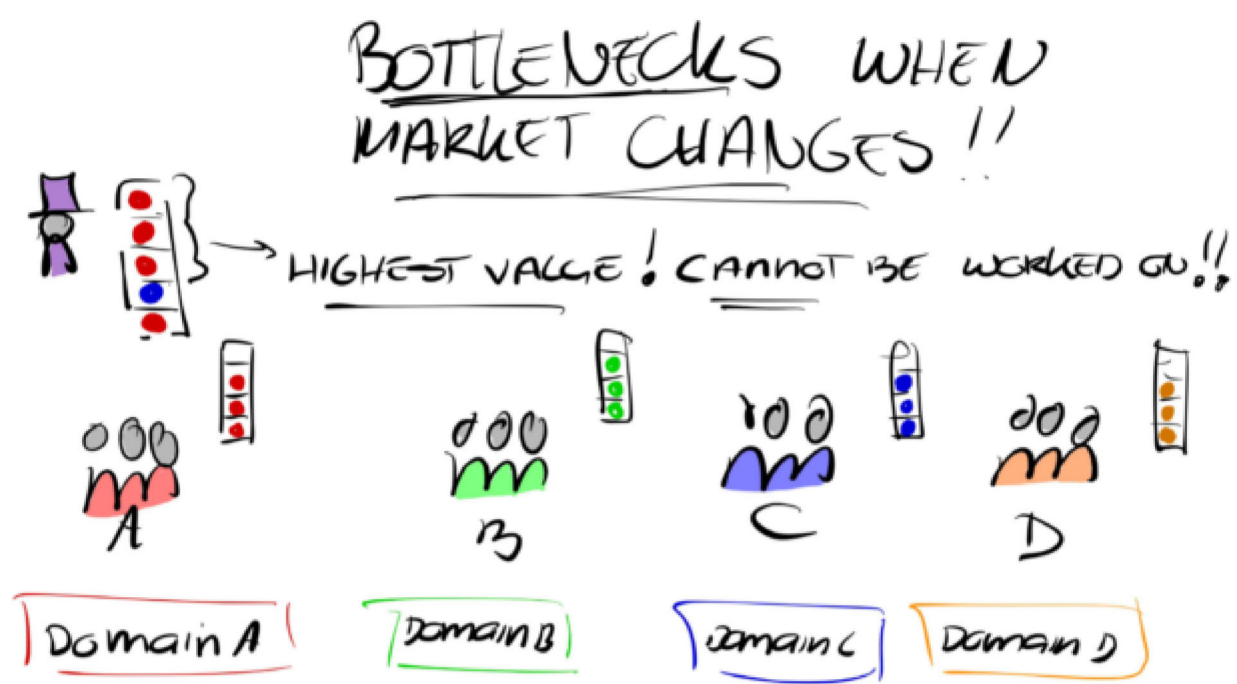
The red team A becomes overloaded, but the other teams cannot help because they only know about their specific domain. So, teams B, C and D still work on something, but it is not the most important work. The result is that the group has low adaptability and cannot focus on the highest-value work.

... one more thing

To effectively change direction, it's crucial that the cost of making such a change is minimal. For instance, if a feature took six months in budgeting, planning, analyses, and design, but then deemed unnecessary in the first weeks of development, the costs associated with dropping it would be high. This would create hesitation among stakeholders and teams because of sunk costs. Therefore, it's necessary to have a low-cost adaptation strategy in place to ensure that you can prioritize high-value work. This can be achieved by limiting the work in progress, working in short iterations, minimizing the learning costs associated with stopping existing work and starting new work, as well as reducing the expenses associated with repeating tasks and overhead activities like coordination, deployment, and testing through automation.

So, I hope this explanation clarifies the impact required for the group to achieve the desired capabilities.

Read the full episode at Creating Agile Organizations ⬈.

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Develop Enterprise Agility With Product Groups
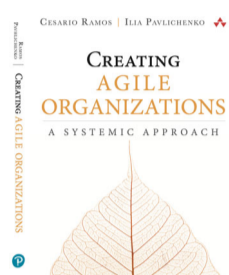
Ilia Pavlichenko

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February 23, 2023

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This article is part of a blog series dedicated to the book: Creating Agile Organizations - A Systemic Approach ↗, by Cesario Ramos & Ilia Pavlichenko.

Cross-functional team is the basic structural block in Scrum. It is a self-managed unit that optimizes *speed of learning* and *flexibility*. When multiple cross-functional teams are working on the same product we call it a scaled Scrum and there are different implementations of it, for instance, Nexus and LeSS. But in a context of an enterprise new questions pop up:

- How to take into account the whole value creation system? For instance, for a typical banking product like a *mortgage,* besides creating new features, the organization needs to perform lots of activities like supporting existing clients, marketing, value propositions, selling the product, comply with regulatory requirements etc.

- What is the place for organizational functions that are rarely the primary focus of an Agile Transformation: *legal*, *procurement, HR*?
- What is the overall organizational design for an Agile company?

In this article we'll briefly cover the above questions.

Agile Organization Design

The prototype of an Agile Organization would have a few shared functions along with the strategic management. The rest of the organization is mainly organized around semi-independent Product Groups that likely have separate leadership, finances, resources, and people, which may be augmented with shared services such as purchasing, sales, human operations, and finance.

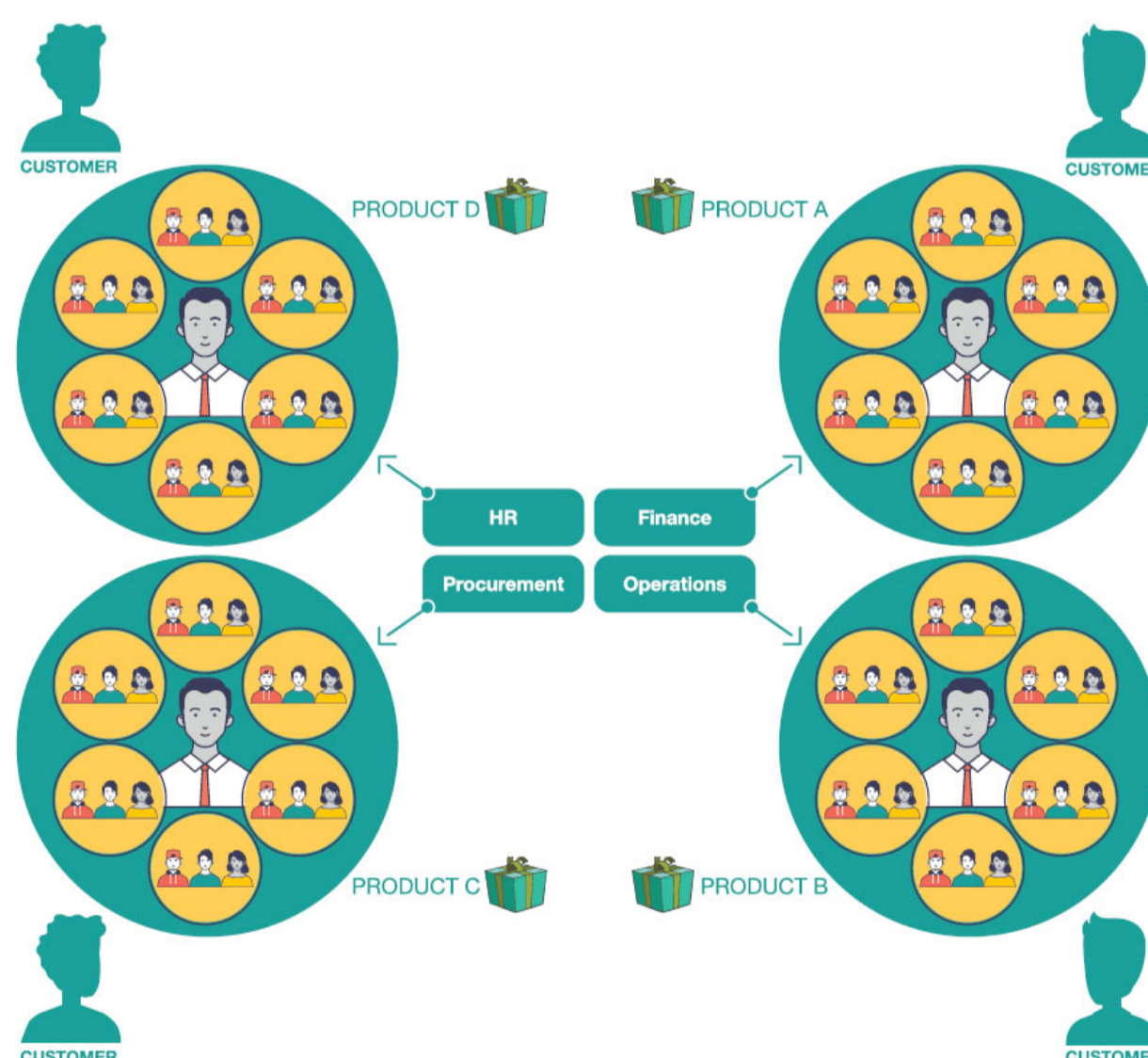**Figure 1.1**: Prototype of an Agile Organization

This approach gets the benefits of a decentralized approach (speed, flexibility) combined with economies of scale that emerge from shared services.

Think of a Product Group as an enterprise level cross-functional unit that extends cross-functional team concept.

Let's have a look at how a Product Group is structured.

Product Group Structure

Product Group has a few critical characteristics:

- It has a definitive purpose or mission.
- Consists of elements to achieve its mission: *cross-functional teams*, *functions*, *systems*, *roles and responsibilities*.

- Has a market focus and a profit and loss (P&L) responsibility.
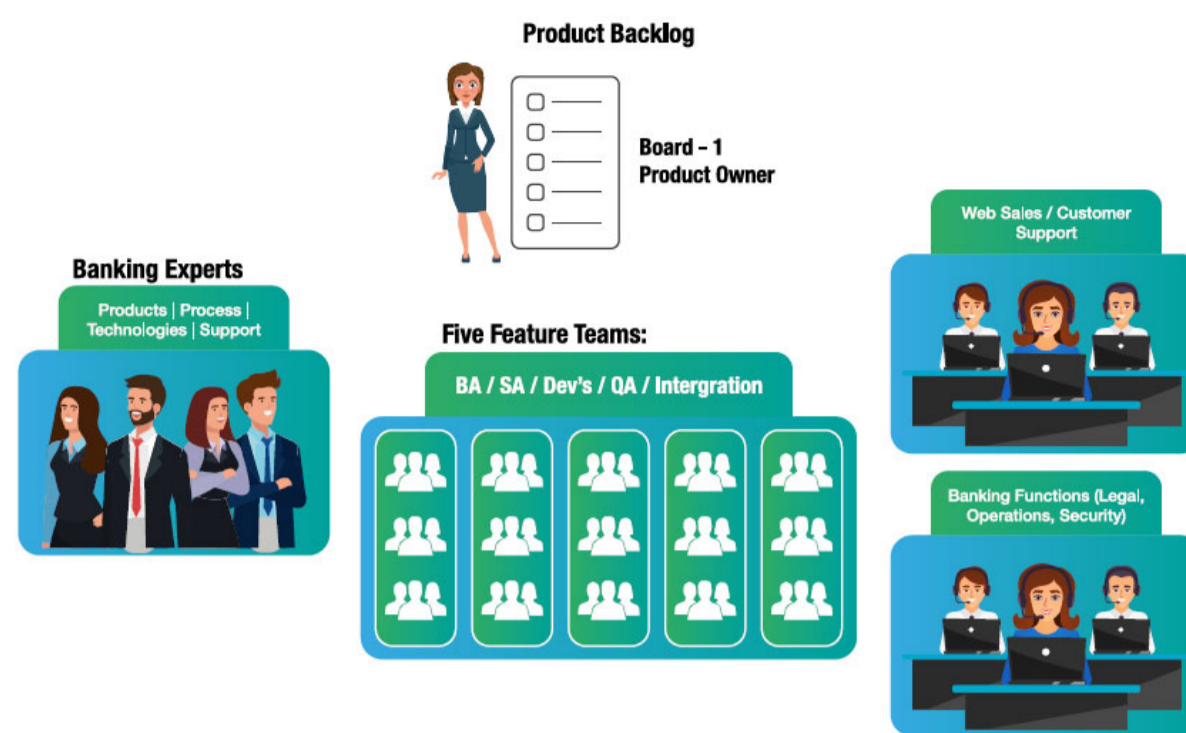- Has decision-making autonomy.

Figure 1.2: Product Group example

In Figure 1.2 you can see a concrete implementation of a Product Group concept. In this particular case the product is an ecosystem for small and medium entrepreneurs. Five cross-functional teams create the core digital value proposition and share a single Product Backlog. That's the scaled Scrum part, but it's not enough for Agility. The Product Group also includes additional organizational functions to execute a business model:

- Sales
- Customer support
- Legal
- Operations
- Security
- Marketing.
- A group of banking experts that help the Product Owner product management activities

Do the latter mentioned functions work in Scrum? Maybe, but not necessarily. What is more important is that the Product Group includes all the necessary resources to cover the value stream and generate revenue. Why? People that belong to the same product unit coordinate effectively because they report to the same manager, adopt the same goals and priorities, and share the same resources, therefore coordination costs go down. The flow of work also increases because by grouping interdependent roles in the product units and in the teams, the teams waste less time on alignment and coordination activities. Over time, members of the Product Group are likely to develop a shared culture, further facilitating collaboration.

This was a really brief introduction into the prototype of an Agile Organization and concept of a Product Group. It raises additional questions:

- How to design a Product Group?
- Which functions should be included in the cross-functional teams and which should stay separate?
- What functions should be centered as shared services among Product Groups?

In the following articles we'll try to cover those. Hope that was helpful.

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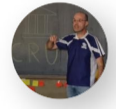
Alexandre Mac Fadden

July 31, 2023

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The post-COVID business landscape is pushing companies to strategically position themselves and seek new opportunities. Now, they must discover innovative ways to deliver enhanced value to customers while differentiating themselves from competitors. That means taking calculated risks that can lead to either success or failure.

Meeting the Moment

While companies may have been in similar situations in the past, what sets the present apart? The key difference lies in the scarcity of resources such as money, talent, and feedback from end-users combined with the pressure from customers and competitors ↗ to continuously innovate.

Merely adjusting your operations to be cost-effective leaves you vulnerable to being outpaced by competitors. Similarly, making incorrect choices can deplete your resources without yielding the desired results.

Embracing Experimentation

Given the circumstances, you must explore new avenues to optimize your return on investment (ROI) and expand revenue streams. How can you find opportunities to propel your company forward while also effectively utilizing your resources?

In my view, it boils down to embracing a mindset of relentless experimentation. Failure is expected and accounted for in this model until you find something that effectively meets your business goals.

The faster you iterate ↗ between field-tested hypotheses and feedback, the sooner you'll uncover valuable insights. Agility enables you to refine and cycle through this process repeatedly, eliminating flawed assumptions and optimizing those with a greater chance of producing favorable outcomes.

Identifying (and Eliminating) Silos

Many companies are actively pursuing innovation but often fall short in how they approach it. What I've observed is a lack of alignment and collaboration among existing "silos" within organizations. These siloed structures are designed to hinder collaboration.

Take a moment to assess the environment at your company. Observe how departments, teams, decision flows, KPIs, and other elements are structured. Reflect on the potential for collaboration and alignment and what prevents your organization from realizing that potential.

Leadership and Scrum

True agility for companies goes beyond fancy methodologies and rituals. It begins with clear leadership, providing a definitive direction for the business. Based on this vision, teams can collaborate to explore potential avenues and collectively prioritize their focus.

These teams can then choose what to work on in the upcoming days or weeks, enabling them to swiftly validate their hypotheses against market feedback. If the anticipated return is promising, they can proceed to optimize and refine their approach. However, if the results are unsatisfactory, they have the flexibility to step back and select another option.

Does this sound familiar? Indeed, many methodologies employ similar principles, whether fully or partially, to expedite testing and improvement of strategies.

Personally, I favor Scrum as our primary framework, as it provides a solid foundation for exploring various pathways, integrating teams, fostering transparency, and achieving alignment. We can also leverage Kanban, PMBOK, and other supporting methodologies to enhance these fundamental elements.

In my view, Scrum extends beyond being a mere tool for programming teams. Instead, it becomes a larger entity—an essential component of a feedback cycle. With Scrum, teams becomes a value-creating unit ↗, comprising cross-functional members who contribute diverse and cohesive perspectives.

Think of these teams as "micro" companies within the larger organization. Each one collaborates and adapts to produce the necessary outcomes aligned with the presented goals, vision, and direction.

In terms of management, many companies continue to operate based on outdated practices, relying on metrics that were created without considering the current business realities. These metrics can create a false sense of control and foster unhealthy comparisons. It can also result in what's known as the Cobra Effect, where limited transparency results in slow adaptation and poor results.

Worse yet, leadership in these organizations is often fragmented between teams or departments as each one looks to protect itself. This approach makes optimal outcomes next to unreachable, as teams give in to internal conflict instead of staying focused on company-wide goals.

The good news is that a well-established vision and a self-managed, cross-functional team supported by the organization can eliminate fragmentation. Collaboration becomes the norm, and everyone aligns themselves towards a shared direction.

Even if they perceive the chosen direction as less than ideal, they adapt and self-correct, continuously seeking new ways to progress thanks to the inherent feedback cycle. Moreover, the team can continuously enhance their process by introducing elements that support enhanced decision-making, such as quality standards, governance procedures, and communication standards.

When combined, self-managed teams, a clear vision, and a rapid feedback loop maximize value and allow you to experiment effectively during a period of increased competition and tighter budgets⧉. Everyone within the organization is focused on working towards initiatives that bring the most value, allowing for a powerful and cohesive alignment of efforts.

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Embracing Uncertainty: Rethinking Project Timelines in Agile Environments

John Gillespie

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October 2, 2023

★ 5 from 1 rating

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How is predicting the future working out for you?

Unlocking Agile's Potential by Successfully Navigating Uncertainty in Project Timelines

For many of us, unexpected events stress us out. The idea of project management predictability is compelling. It often lures us into the trap of deterministic estimates. However, with Agile practices, where adaptability and responsiveness reign supreme, sticking to rigid timelines can be a recipe for disappointment.

For those of us who like working with nicely laid out timelines and being proactively prepared, we may struggle with this inevitable news. Let's investigate why deterministic estimates set us up for failure and explore pragmatic alternatives that empower decision-making while embracing uncertainty.

What Are the Pitfalls of Deterministic Estimates?

While fixed deadlines may seem like a weapon that allows us to stay in control, they frequently underestimate the dynamic nature of complex environments and create obstacles that can damage the project's performance.

Creating an Illusion of Control in Fixed Deadlines

Complex projects (software development) inherently involve variables that can change rapidly, like requirements, priorities, and even unexpected obstacles. Relying on fixed deadlines assumes that these variables will remain constant. This thought process often leads to a misalignment between expectations and reality.

Neglecting the Agile Spirit

Agile practices thrive on their core principles of adaptability and responsiveness. When a project adheres to a deterministic deadline, the essence of Agile can be compromised. Agile encourages teams to be flexible, iterate, and adjust course based on continuous feedback. Fixed deadlines can push teams to ignore valuable insights that could improve the final product.

Imagine a software development team that encounters evolving requirements mid-project. With a fixed deadline looming, the team might be compelled to make rushed decisions to meet the predetermined timeline. In Scrum, we welcome changing requirements but acknowledge that changing requirements will likely impact any deterministic estimates previously provided.

These decisions to stick to original estimates and ignore learning can lead to underwhelming solutions, increased technical debt, and compromised quality. The pressure to adhere to the timeline can result in a lack of thorough testing and validation, ultimately diminishing the value of the end product.

Causing Disheartened Teams and Subpar Outcomes

When fixed deadlines drive teams, morale can suffer. Have you ever heard of the term "Death March"? My focus on Agile practices was driven by the fact that I participated in one too many death marches in my career. Agile values collaboration, empowerment, and ownership. Teams constrained by rigid timelines might feel frustrated as they are forced to ignore their expertise and insights in favor of meeting an arbitrary finish line.

Moreover, compromising quality and cutting corners to meet the deadline can lead to a subpar user experience, disappointing users and stakeholders.

In the end, pursuing fixed deadlines can lead to an end product that doesn't fully address the evolving needs of users, a team disheartened by compromised quality, and stakeholders disappointed by missed expectations. Recognizing these pitfalls paves the way for a more enlightened approach to project timelines in the Agile realm.

Embracing Agile Uncertainty

Agile practices thrive on their ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Instead of attempting to predict the unpredictable, Agile embraces uncertainty as a catalyst for improvement.

For example, a Scrum team may iterate and refine its product incrementally based on user feedback. This approach acknowledges constant change, and plans must be agile enough to accommodate it.

Shifting from Certainty to Forecasting

As teams move away from deterministic estimates, forecasting takes center stage. Scrum Masters may work with their teams to establish a range of potential outcomes rather than a fixed date. This approach paints a more realistic picture of when deliverables might be ready, allowing for more informed decision-making without stifling creativity.

Metrics that Matter

With Agile, metrics should be insightful rather than restrictive. Metrics that track team cycle time and service level expectation provide valuable insights into project forecasts without forcing arbitrary deadlines.

Collaborative Decision-Making

Agile flourishes when decisions are made collectively. When agile teams, stakeholders, and management collaborate to make informed choices, it fosters a sense of ownership and amplifies the collective wisdom. This approach generates better decisions.

Agile Estimation Techniques for Realistic Planning

Effective Agile estimation relies on techniques that acknowledge the fluid nature of projects. Consider right sizing, an approach to planning the number of work items that is gaining popularity. The Kanban Pocket Guide states," The right size will be the range of possible outcomes as dictated by the percentile confidence you have chosen for your SLE. For example, if you use an 85th percentile as your SLE, and in your process, the 85th percentile is 12 days or less, then the right size for items to flow into your system is 12 days or less. "

This technique encourages a probabilistic understanding of workloads, helping teams avoid the pitfalls of overcommitting or underestimating tasks. Agile teams can align expectations with reality by focusing on the effort required rather than arbitrary deadlines.

Creating Teams That Embrace Uncertainty

Even as teams better understand Agile, it's essential to remember the transition from deterministic estimates to embracing uncertainty doesn't happen overnight. It's a process that involves cultural shifts, open communication, and continuous learning.

During this transition, fostering a culture of psychological safety is paramount. Teams should feel comfortable admitting uncertainty, sharing their insights, and voicing concerns. Agile practices encourage open dialogue, paving the way for collaborative problem-solving and improved decision-making.

Consider conducting workshops and training sessions emphasizing Agile principles and effective estimation techniques to facilitate this shift. By equipping your teams with the tools to navigate uncertainty, you help them make informed decisions and confidently drive projects forward.

Manage Agile Efforts with Confidence

The illusion of deterministic estimates gives way to the power of adaptability with Agile. Teams can confidently perform by embracing uncertainty, shifting from certainty to forecasting, and fostering collaborative decision-making. As leaders and executives, the journey involves giving up the urge for rigid control and embracing innovation and unpredictability.

So, say goodbye to deterministic estimates and welcome empowered decision-making that thrives amid uncertainty. The path ahead is exciting and transformative, where Agile principles guide the way and successful outcomes emerge through a blend of expertise, adaptiveness, and shared vision.

Upskill Your Teams with Confidence

If unsure which workshops or approach suits your organization, contact @Agile_ity⬀ to schedule a short conversation or look at the current public workshops.⬀ If these dates do not work for you, let us know, and we can schedule a private workshop or possibly another public session.

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The 10 Commitments Of An Agile Leader

Jay Rahman

July 17, 2023

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Agile has become more than just a buzzword in our complex world. Agility is a mindset, a skillset, a culture, and a driving force behind successful, flexible, and responsive organisations.

Central to this Agile environment is the role of an Agile Leader, an individual whose understanding, commitment, and practice of Agile principles can significantly impact the outcome of any Agile transformation.

The Agile Leader's commitment goes beyond mere lip service to the Agile Manifesto. It's about creating a conducive environment for teams to innovate, collaborate, learn, and grow. It's about leading by example and embodying the principles and values that Agile upholds. But what exactly are these commitments an Agile Leader should make?

Fractal Systems is an Agile consultancy with a difference; we've worked with hundreds of managers, leaders and teams, helping them successfully implement Agility in their organisations. More than this, we are the firm that organisations call when their Agile implementations go wrong. When things are challenging, you see the effects of tremendous and terrible leadership up close. So, we've seen the common behaviours and commitments that drive Agile success.

Here, we delve into the '10 Commitments of an Agile Leader.' These commitments are the essential pillars that provide the foundation for an effective Agile environment, guiding leaders in their pursuit of agility and empowering teams to thrive in the ever-changing competitive business landscape.

Outstanding leadership is the cornerstone of any thriving Agile environment. Leaders and managers are like the foundation of a building; they give the organization stability and direction. They set the tone, define the culture, and embody the values the rest of the organization should follow.

Ray Dalio, the successful investor and author of "Principles", emphasises the significant role managers and leaders play as the underpinnings of an organization. In the Agile world, this couldn't be truer. Agile leaders create an environment where teams feel safe to experiment and learn from failure, encourage collaboration, and innovation is the norm. They instil a sense of shared responsibility and facilitate open, honest communication. These actions build trust, promote autonomy, and foster high adaptability—integral elements for Agile to thrive.

In essence, effective Agile leadership is the bedrock upon which the principles of Agile can flourish. The leader's ability to commit and model these behaviours sets the stage for the organisation to follow suit and ensures meaningful and productive change.

So, whether you're embarking on an Agile transformation journey or refining your existing Agile practices, these ten commitments offer a roadmap to effective Agile leadership.

1. Commit to Ownership:

We have all seen them, the leaders and managers who quickly assign blame when challenges arise; shifting and sharing responsibility so that nothing sticks to them. The fact is, this kind of irresponsible behaviour causes untold levels of damage. Leaders who adopt a shifty leadership style demonstrate a weak and uninspiring stance. Teams won't want to step out of their comfort zone or try new approaches to better working methods if they fear undeserved consequences.

Committing to Ownership is a fundamental aspect of being an effective Agile leader. Ownership implies taking responsibility for successes, setbacks, and challenges during the Agile journey. It means standing by the decisions made and being accountable for the outcomes. Agile leaders take charge of the transformation process and drive it forward, ensuring it aligns with the organization's strategic goals. They also actively work to remove any obstacles hindering their team's progress. By demonstrating such a strong sense of ownership, Agile leaders foster an environment where team members take responsibility for their tasks, encouraging a culture of shared accountability. This commitment to ownership provides the necessary stability and direction, making it an indispensable quality for leaders navigating Agile transformation's complex and often uncertain path.

2. Commit to Invest Time, Resources, and Budget:

Change doesn't necessarily happen on a shoestring. Good leaders understand that wise investment is required to upskill themselves, their management and their teams. Dedicate the necessary resources – time, money, and tools – to ensure Agile success.

As leaders change their approach to management, they need to find different ways of using their time. Both to learn better, adaptive management and leadership approaches as well as to monitor and support the teams doing the work.

We said that leaders and managers are the bedrock of an Agile firm, so invest there first. This includes training, tooling, and allocating time for learning and adaptation.

3. Commit to the Agile Mindset and build the Agile Skill Set:

Committing to the Agile Mindset and Building an Agile Skillset are two interconnected responsibilities of an Agile leader.

Committing to the Agile Mindset goes beyond merely understanding Agile principles and practices. It involves internalizing and living these principles out in every action and decision. An Agile mindset is adaptive, flexible, and customer-focused. It values individuals and interactions

improvement, learning, and adaptation become the norm. Leaders embody this mindset and inspire their teams to do the same, fostering an Agile culture.

Building an Agile Skillset is the next step to committing to the Agile Mindset. Agile leaders not only need to understand the principles of Agile, but they also need to acquire the skills necessary to implement those principles effectively. These skills might include facilitating effective communication, managing and responding to change, resolving conflicts, and empowering team members. An Agile skillset also includes effectively understanding and using Agile tools and methodologies, such as Scrum or Kanban. By building an Agile skillset, leaders equip themselves to navigate the challenges of the Agile transformation journey and guide their teams towards success.

Committing to the Agile Mindset and Building an Agile Skillset form the core of Agile leadership. These commitments enable leaders to drive Agile transformations effectively and foster a genuinely Agile culture within their teams.

4. Commit to Leading by Example:

The Agile approach is built on the premise of iterative development and continuous enhancement, and this applies not just to products or services but also to individuals, teams, and the entire organization.

Agile leaders understand that to navigate the rapid pace of change in today's business environment, they must embrace a mindset of lifelong learning. They invest in their personal growth and actively seek out opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills. They also encourage and facilitate learning within their teams, providing resources for professional development and creating knowledge-sharing opportunities.

Moreover, Agile leaders are committed to continual improvement. They see every project, every interaction, every success, and every failure as an opportunity to learn and improve. They embrace feedback, regularly reflect on their performance, and adjust their actions accordingly. They also encourage their teams to do the same, fostering a culture where reflection and improvement are part of the daily routine.

This commitment to continual learning and improvement allows Agile leaders and their teams to stay relevant, competitive, and effective in a fast-paced, ever-evolving business landscape.

5. Commit to Cultivating a Learning Environment:

You cannot think your way through complex problems. Instead, you must take calculated risks, try good ideas and test their efficacy. These ideas won't always work; that's ok, learn and adapt. Don't stick to rigid plans and try to force them. Agile is about continuous improvement, which requires a culture of ongoing learning. Pay attention to key outcomes to figure out what's working or not. Remain open to learning personally and promote and foster this environment across the organisation.

Agile leaders understand that plans and strategies might need to be adjusted based on new insights, customer feedback, or changing market conditions. Rather than viewing these changes as setbacks, Agile leaders see them as opportunities to learn, improve, and deliver better value. This commitment to promoting adaptability involves fostering a culture comfortable with uncertainty and always ready to pivot when necessary.

By demonstrating this commitment, Agile leaders empower their teams to embrace change rather than resist it. They ensure that change is seen as a natural part of the journey, not as a deviation or a failure. This enhances the team's resilience, encourages continuous learning, and ultimately drives the delivery of products or services more aligned with customer needs and expectations.

6. Commit to Empower and Trust Your Teams:

Empowerment in Agile leadership is all about decentralizing decision-making, enabling teams to take control of their work and innovate without unnecessary constraints. However, empowerment should always be preceded by building capable, skilled teams. This involves investing time, resources, and effort in nurturing talent, offering training, and fostering an environment where individuals can grow their skills and knowledge.

Once the team is well-equipped, Agile leaders must display trust in their abilities, allowing them to make decisions, solve problems, and learn from their experiences. Trusting your team encourages a sense of ownership, boosts morale, and fosters mutual respect and collaboration. It communicates the belief that your team is competent and capable, promoting confidence and encouraging greater innovation and productivity.

7. Commit to Collaboration:

Committing to Collaboration is an indispensable attribute of Agile leadership. Agile is a team-oriented approach that thrives on diverse perspectives and collective problem-solving. Agile leaders recognize this and work tirelessly to foster a collaborative culture within their teams and the entire organization.

Committing to collaboration involves breaking down silos that limit communication and sharing ideas. It means fostering an open environment where individuals feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, ideas, and concerns. Agile leaders also need to facilitate cross-functional collaboration, ensuring everyone understands the shared vision and goals and that all voices are heard and valued.

Collaboration in the Agile context extends beyond the confines of the team. Agile leaders must also work towards fostering collaboration with stakeholders, clients, and other teams in the organization. This commitment to collaboration maximizes the collective knowledge and skills of the group, fuels innovation, and aligns the team towards a common purpose, ultimately leading to better solutions and outcomes.

8. Commit to Action:

Agile leaders are proactive, preferring thoughtful action over endless deliberation. This doesn't mean rushing into decisions without due consideration but rather fostering a culture where calculated risks are encouraged, decisions are made with the best available information, and course corrections are part of the process. Agile leaders place a greater emphasis on tangible results and progress over excessive planning and theorizing. This commitment drives momentum, fosters a sense of urgency, and helps maintain the team's focus on delivering value rapidly and consistently.

9. Commit to Value People and Interactions:

Committing to Value People and Interactions forms the very essence of Agile leadership. This commitment is grounded in one of the core values of the Agile Manifesto, which states that we should value "individuals and interactions over processes and tools". Agile leaders understand that the people create value and make the organization successful, not merely the processes they follow or the tools they use.

Valuing people involves recognizing each team member's unique skills, talents, and perspectives and appreciating their contributions to the

Valuing interactions means prioritizing open, honest, and effective communication within the team and with other stakeholders. It involves promoting collaboration, encouraging the exchange of ideas, and facilitating constructive feedback. Agile leaders foster an environment where interactions are not just transactional but are opportunities for learning, innovation, and building relationships.

This commitment to value people and interactions underpins a human-centred approach to work, leading to higher team morale, greater productivity, and more innovative solutions.

10. Commit to Cultivating a Safe-to-Fail Environment:

Recognise that mistakes and setbacks are part of the learning process and can be powerful catalysts for growth and innovation.

Agile leaders understand this and foster an environment where team members feel safe to take calculated risks, try new things, and learn from their mistakes. This commitment involves creating a blame-free culture where failures are viewed as opportunities for learning and improvement rather than personal shortcomings.

By fostering a safe-to-fail environment, Agile leaders encourage creativity, experimentation, and continuous learning within their teams. This commitment reinforces the Agile principle of inspecting and adapting, allowing teams to innovate, evolve, and deliver value more effectively. This safe-to-fail culture ultimately leads to more resilient, adaptable teams that are better equipped to navigate the complexities and uncertainties of the Agile journey.

The Agile journey isn't just about adopting new methodologies or practices—it's about a significant cultural shift that requires steadfast, skilled leadership. The '10 Commitments of an Agile Leader' outlined in this blog serve as guiding principles to navigate this transformational journey.

Embodying these commitments—from ownership and the Agile mindset to fostering a safe-to-fail environment—ensures that as an Agile leader, you pave the way for a successful, sustainable Agile transformation. The journey might be challenging and filled with uncertainties, but with these commitments at the heart of your leadership, you'll be well-equipped to navigate the complexities and unlock the full potential of Agile.

Remember, Agile isn't a destination—it's a continuous learning, adapting, and improving journey. And as a leader, your commitment to these principles will set the tone for your entire organization's Agile journey. Keep leading, keep learning, and keep evolving. Your Agile transformation is a journey of growth, and each step forward, no matter how small, is a step towards greater agility, productivity, and success.

Learn with Fractal Systems

Looking to upskill and boost your career prospects in Agile? Look no further than Fractal Systems' Agile Training! **Our team of real-world practitioners are active in the industry**. This means you can trust that the techniques you learn are tried and tested in real-life situations.

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How To Lead Scrum Masters With Liberating Structures?

Barry Overeem
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

March 16, 2023

⭐ 5 from 1 rating

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Some time ago, I had an interesting conversation with an Agile Coach from a large car manufacturer in Germany. As an Agile Coach, he's responsible for about 50 Scrum Masters. Not in a hierarchical way, but more as a servant leader. For about one hour we talked about how to be a servant leader for such a group of Scrum Masters. What are ways to lead, inspire, and guide them?

After our conversation, the topic kept spinning in my mind because somehow it intrigued me. Eventually, it's actually quite simple. Regardless if you're an Agile Coach or Scrum Master, servant leadership is the desired mindset, behavior, and attitude. As a servant leader, you teach, facilitate, coach, mentor, remove impediments, and spark change.

In this article, I'll share my view on servant leadership, explain how it connects to Liberating Structures, and offer examples of how the combination creates an environment for Scrum Masters to find support, offer help, and draw inspiration.

Servant Leadership

Here's how I describe servant leadership in the paper "[The 6 Stances of a Scrum Master](#) ↗". Rather than drawing attention to yourself, you help others be as effective as possible. You don't manage or lead the team by telling them what to do or how to do it. The only area where you should take a strong position is when decisions are made that adversely impact the empirical process or the degree to which team members feel safe to take interpersonal risks.

A Scrum Master can show servant leadership by...

- Restraining from solving and instead asking questions encourages the team members to figure out their own solutions;
- Showing vulnerability by being open about problems, personal issues or anxiety lowers the barrier for others to be open as well;
- Creating a safe environment, where constructive disagreement is encouraged and team conflict is considered an opportunity for growth and improvement. But also to intervene in order to protect the Scrum process and the health of the team.

The Scrum Master leads by example, by respect, and by the ability to influence the organization of the Scrum team and its effectiveness. The Scrum Master should lead with values, courage, commitment, and stubbornness. Stubborn by having strong beliefs and the intention to change the organization.

Servant leadership proves to be the backbone of the Scrum Master role. Its philosophy and practices increase teamwork and create an environment in which individual growth can flourish and endure. As a servant-leader, the Scrum Master can help the team act upon the Scrum values of courage, openness, respect, focus, and commitment and realize their full potential.

The philosophy and practices of servant leadership increase teamwork and create an environment in which individual growth can flourish and endure.

Liberating Structures

Liberating Structures ⧉ are a collection of 30+ interaction patterns that unflatten, enrich, and deepen interactions in groups. With strong roots in complexity science, and collected by Keith McCandless ⧉ and Henri Lipmanowicz ⧉, all Liberating Structures implement five design elements ⧉ and ten principles ⧉. Liberating Structures are simple and easy to learn, making it easy to pick them up and spread them throughout your organization. Their purpose is to *involve and unleash everyone*, which is essential in environments where everyone's voice is necessary to navigate complexity.

If you've never heard before of Liberating Structures, this description probably feels vague, abstract, and maybe even meaningless. Liberating Structures mostly make sense when you experience them. The longer you talk about the structures, the more confusing it probably gets. So let's make things more specific.

Liberating Structures & Servant Leadership

Now that I've explained the basics of servant leadership and Liberating Structures, how do both connect? How can the combination create an environment for Scrum Masters to find support, offer help, and draw inspiration? How to grow a self-sustaining community of Scrum Masters? Here are some specific examples. It's not a complete list and structures can definitely be switched. My intention is mostly to show how servant leadership and Liberating Structures are connected.

As a servant leader, you spark change with…

- **Purpose-to-Practice** ⧉ **(P2P).** A great way to start or reboot a community of Scrum Masters is by defining a clear starting point. The first step of P2P is to define the purpose together. What is the purpose of our Scrum Master community? What do we hope it makes possible? From there, P2P covers other essential elements — principles, participants, structure, and practices — that are designed to help achieve that purpose. What rules must we follow in pursuit of our purpose? Who must be included to achieve our purpose? How will we organize ourselves? What are we going to do? Revisit the outcome of your P2P session frequently to include new insights.
- **15% Solutions** ⧉. Trigger big change by starting small. A 15% Solution is any first step or solution that you can do without approval or resources from others and that is entirely within your discretion to act. Simply put, it is something that you can start right now if you want to. So, it's a great catalyst for change. Whenever you meet with your Scrum Master community, make it a habit to finish by defining a 15% Solution. Even better, create small groups of Scrum Masters that support each other in making it happen. This also grows the coaching muscles of Scrum Masters.
- **Social Network Webbing** ⧉. Organizations are social systems ⧉ made up of people who are organized into networks. One of the great things about these networks is you can use them to drive change in, across, and beyond organizations. Social Network Webbing ⧉ "quickly illuminates for a whole group what resources are hidden within their existing network of relationships and what steps to take for tapping those resources". Use this structure to support Scrum Masters in making their network visible so they can use it to spark change in the organization.
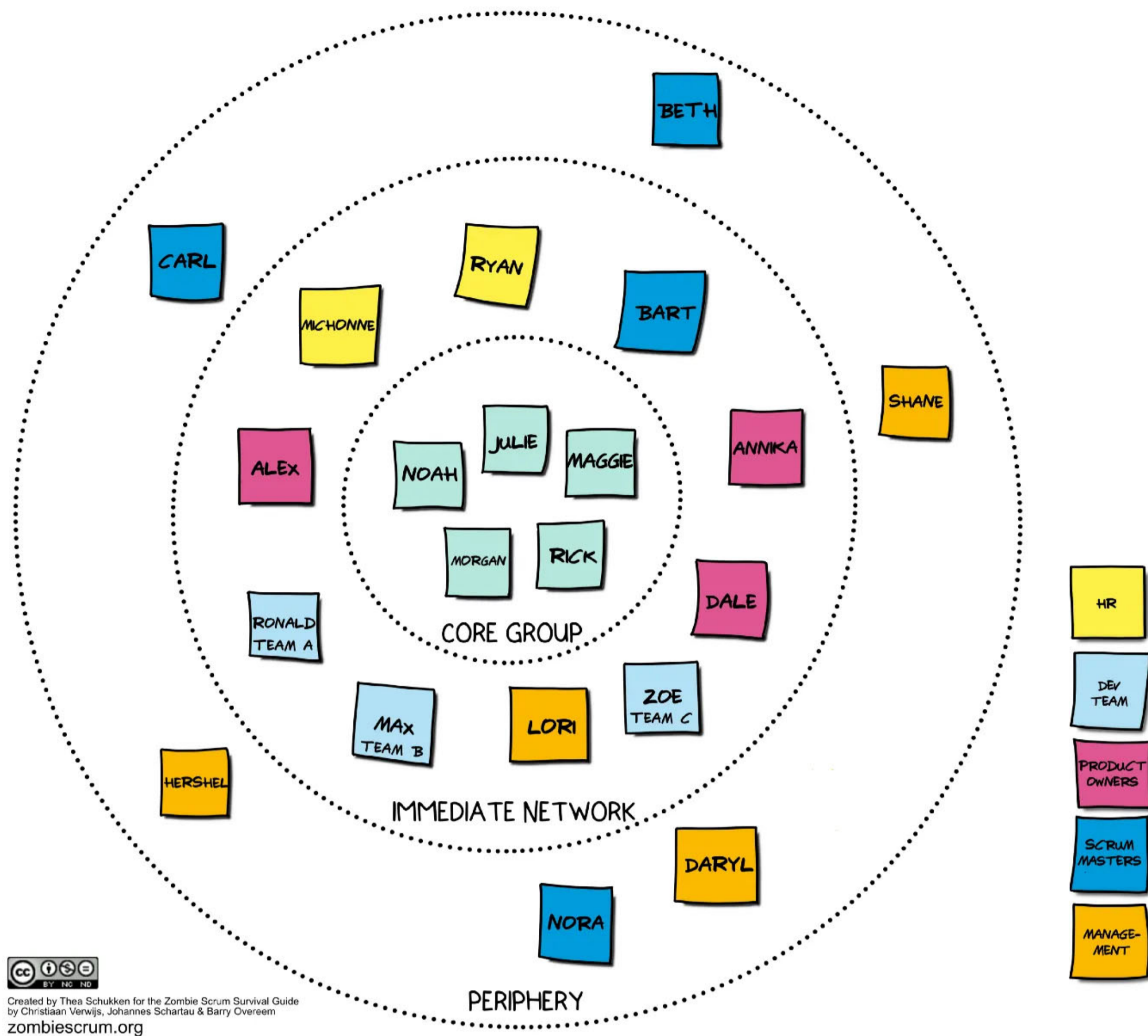
Encourage Scrum Masters to use Social Network Webbing to make their network visible so they can use it to spark change in the organization.

As a servant leader, you teach and enable teaching with…

- **Shift & Share** ↗. Organize a session in which some Scrum Masters teach parts of the Scrum Guide to each other. Even topics they might not fully understand yet. For example, what are Sprint Goals? What is meant by the Scrum values? How are transparency, inspection, and adaptation part of the Scrum framework? By teaching it to others, you quickly discover what parts you don't fully grasp yet. Or, what topics trigger the most questions in the group? Shift & Share is a great structure to enable these teaching moments.
- **Simple Ethnography** ↗. Get in contact with organizations from whom you've heard good stories about working with Scrum. Organize an opportunity to visit this organization and observe its Scrum events. Try to collect as much data as possible. gain insights about how they collaborate, and validate any assumptions you have. What makes Scrum successful in this organization? How are they dealing with the challenges at hand? Afterward, share ideas & insights and discuss what you can improve as a Scrum Master.
- **What, So What, Now What** ↗. Being a Scrum Master is challenging. You'll stumble upon tough impediments, face resistance when trying to initiate changes, and sometimes need to navigate conflict. This is where "What, So What, Now What" can be very useful. It helps by asking us to step back and consider what is going on. It structures our thinking by breaking our experience down into three steps: "What do we notice?", "So, what does this mean?", and "Now, where do go from here?". By doing this with others, we are encouraged to discover the gaps in our understanding by learning from their perspectives. Spent time with your Scrum Masters to teach them this structure, and frequently practice it together.

Ladder of Inference

I take **actions** based on beliefs — **Now What?**

I adopt **beliefs** about the world

I draw **conclusions** from assumptions

I make **assumptions** based on meaning — **So what?**

I add cultural & personal **meaning**

I select **data** from observations — **What?**
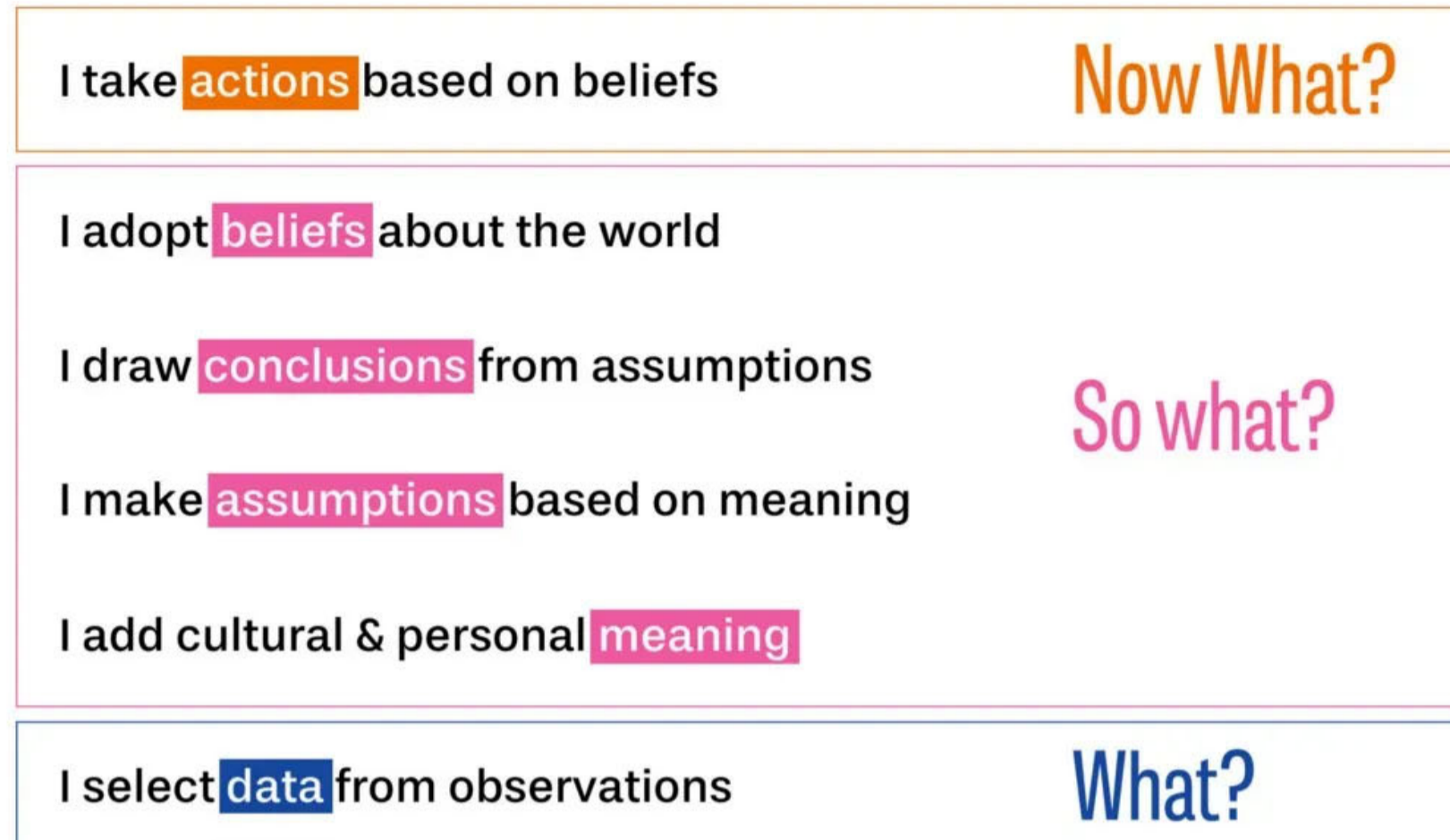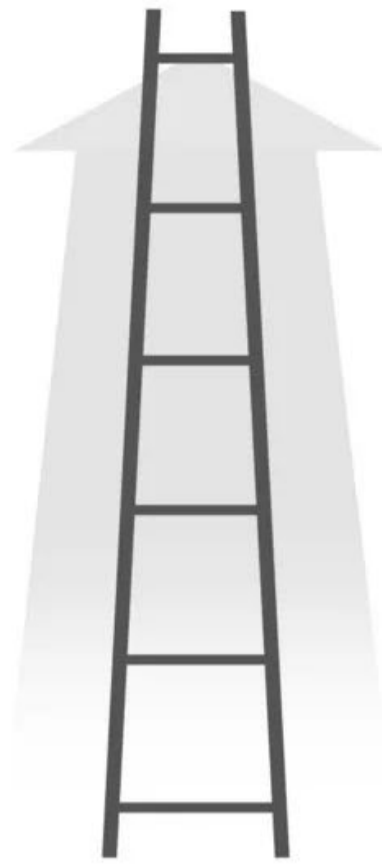
The Liberators — Developed by Keith McCandless & Henri Lipmanowicz. Based on work by Chris Argyris.

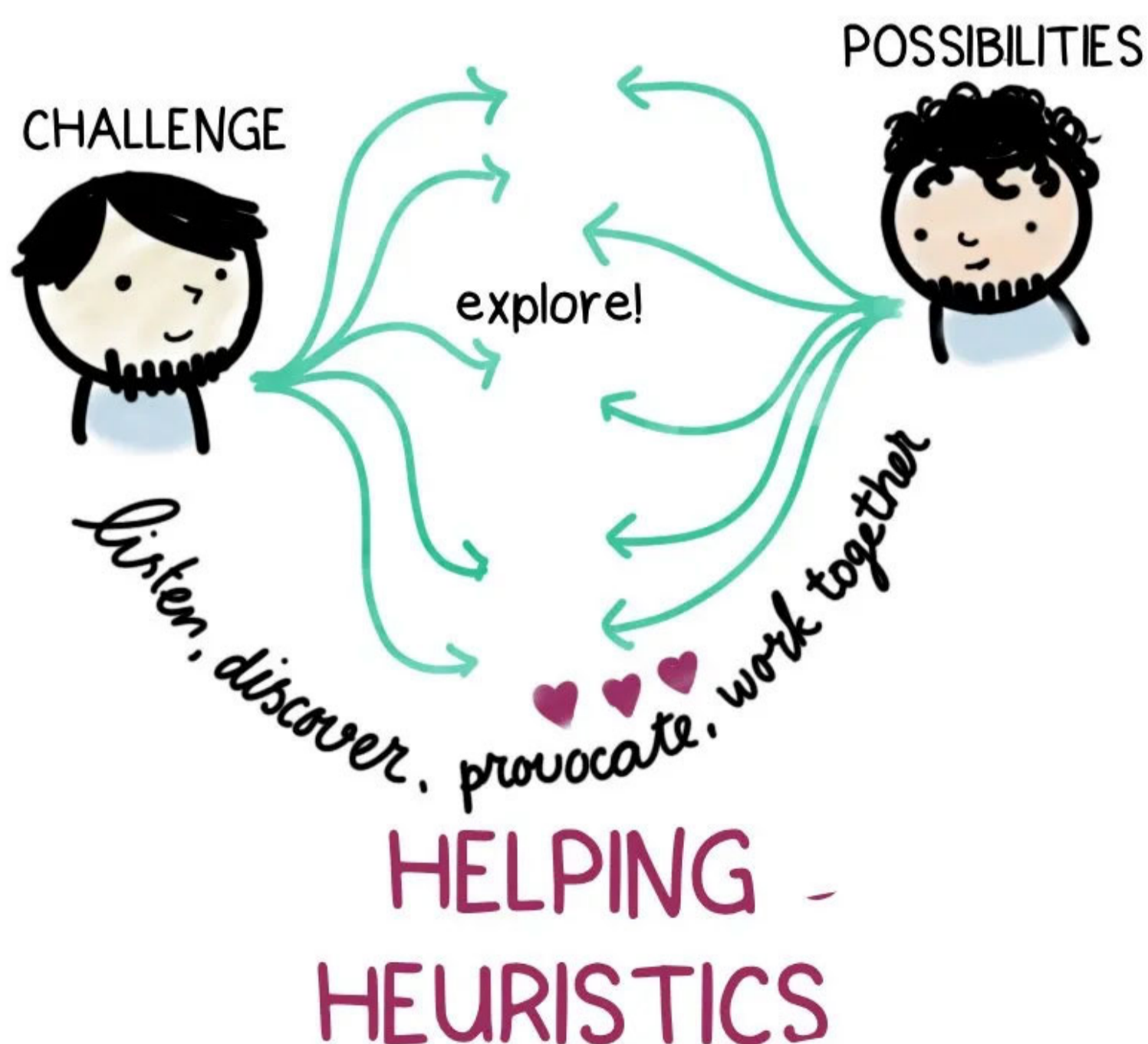## As a servant leader, you coach and enable coaching with…

- **Troika Consulting** ⧉ & **Wise Crowds** ⧉. Organize a monthly session focused on giving & getting help. Scrum Masters can bring impediments they faced with their team, and ask other Scrum Masters for advice. It's also possible they raise personal struggles they experience in their role. Where Troika Consulting offers all participants the opportunity to bring a challenge, Wise Crowds is focused on a specific problem. Small satellite groups work together to give advice on specific impediments. Wise Crowds is not just about the actual problem being solved, but also about developing the behavioral repertoire to do this with a large group. So, as a group of Scrum Masters, you also strengthen your coaching skills.
- **Heard, Seen, Respected** ⧉. As I've mentioned earlier, the Scrum Master role is challenging. There's probably a (wide) gap between the desired state of the team and organization and the current state. In your pursuit of bridging this gap, you'll probably face situations where you aren't fully heard, seen, or respected. Instead of keeping these experiences for yourself, the Liberating Structure "Heard, Seen, Respected" offers you an opportunity to share them. Sharing tough experiences in itself can already have a healing effect. Especially because this structure encourages the listener to listen with full attention. No questions are asked. In turn, you simply listen with full empathy and compassion, to the story the other person has to share.
- **Helping Heuristics** ⧉. Helping Heuristics allows Scrum Masters to practice with progressive methods of giving and getting help, and discovering what is made possible by that — both for the Scrum Master asking for help and for the Scrum Masters offering it. In short rounds, Scrum Masters rotate between three roles: coach, observer, and client. During each round, the client first shares a personal challenge, after which the coach applies four progressive methods for giving help. In the meantime, the observer notices patterns in the interaction as well as what is made possible by the four methods. As such, it's another great exercise to hone the Scrum Master's coaching skills.

CHALLENGE — explore! — POSSIBILITIES

listen, discover, provocate, work together

HELPING - HEURISTICS

As a servant leader, you mentor and enable mentoring with

- **UX Fishbowl** ⧉. As a mentor, the Scrum Master helps the team to grow through mentorship or to find suitable mentors for them. A mentor actively draws from his/her professional experience and knowledge and helps others learn from that. The UX Fishbowl offers a great setting to share these experiences. Options for 'fish' to share their knowledge & experiences are Scrum Masters from other teams or organizations, or anyone else that you feel has valuable things to share.
- **Celebrity Interview** ⧉. This structure offers a different type of opportunity to share knowledge and experience. It allows someone to share their experiences and insights with a group in a profoundly more engaging and interactive way than regular presentations. Instead of having to wait with questions until the end of a presentation — if there's even time left — Celebrity Interview uses the burning questions on everyone's mind to structure the conversation. So, invite someone you think the Scrum Masters can learn from, and run a Celebrity Interview.
- **Conversation Cafe** ⧉. A third option to enable mentoring within your Scrum Master community is Conversation Cafe. Ideally, build a rhythm for a monthly Conversation Cafe. It's an opportunity for Scrum Masters to make sense of the profound challenges they face. Sitting in an (online) circle with a simple set of agreements and a talking object, small groups engage in consecutive rounds of dialogue. Conversation Cafe invites people to listen to one another's thoughts and reflect together on a shared challenge. When you have multiple small groups, they can all use the same topic and share patterns afterward, or each group picks a topic they consider most relevant.

Conversation Cafe during a Scrum Master workshop with Swisscom and KPN iTV in Switzerland.

As a servant leader, you facilitate and enable facilitation with…

- **1–2–4–ALL** ⧉. Facilitation is a skill everyone in the Scrum team should master. So instead of considering the Scrum Master as someone who 'facilitates', I rather see Scrum Masters as enablers of facilitation in the team. So, when your role is to support Scrum Masters, make them aware of the foundational Liberating Structure like 1–2–4–ALL. You can obviously expand it with other structures, but this would be my starting point. It's such a simple yet powerful structure to engage everyone simultaneously in generating questions, ideas, and suggestions. And it works everywhere and anytime.
- **Impromptu Networking** ⧉. Another example of a foundational Liberating Structure is Impromptu Networking. This probably doesn't cover a full session, but can be used to make some first connections, and share stories, challenges, or experiences with each other. Not only is it a good way to 'break the ice', but it also doubles as a clever way to use the collective brainpower of the group to rapidly identify patterns. Frequently try this structure together, so each Scrum Master becomes confident enough to try it themselves.
- **Design storyboards** ⧉. This structure exists to purposefully think about how a group wants to spend time together to achieve their purpose most effectively. If you work with Scrum Masters, and you have frequent gatherings, you can use design storyboards to prepare these gatherings together. Optionally, you can ask a small team to prepare for the next session. As such, everyone experiences designing meetings, workshops, and gatherings. Within the, hopefully, safe space of fellow Scrum Masters, you can also give feedback on the session itself on a meta-level. This builds the confidence of Scrum Masters to also design sessions for completely other occasions.

As a servant leader, you enable the removal of impediments with…

- **Discovery & Action Dialogue** ⧉. This structure exists to help groups invent local solutions to the problems they face. Rather than giving up or immediately reaching for "best practices" that worked elsewhere, it helps groups carefully analyze the problem, potential solution, and how everyone can contribute to both. Work together with your community of Scrum Masters to build problem-solving skills in groups by providing them with a useful structure to think about challenges.
- **Ecocycle Planning** ⧉ **& Panarchy** ⧉. Both structures help you make unproductive behavior, activities, and relationships visible. While Ecocycle Planning creates transparency on a specific level, Panarchy allows you to analyze the entire system to find opportunities for change. Use it with other Scrum Masters for individual reflection & impediment removal (plot the activities of a Scrum Masters on an Ecocycle), for team reflection & impediment removal (plot the activities of the Scrum teams on an Ecocycle), or for organizational reflection & impediment removal (plot the activities of the organization on an Ecocycle). Whenever it's beyond the individual level, it's recommended to involve the people it concerns as well. Instead of talking *about* other teams, managers, and departments, consider talking *with* them and making impediment removal a joint effort.

While Ecocycle Planning creates transparency on a specific level, Panarchy allows you to analyze the entire system to find opportunities for change.

- **Wicked Questions** ⬀. This structure creates transparency about seemingly paradoxical realities that exist side-by-side. By accepting both realities, you can engage in deeper strategic thinking and explore new possibilities. As Scrum Masters, you continuously face Wicked Questions. The real question is: are you aware of them? Common questions are *"How can we encourage autonomous Scrum teams while also keep moving in the same direction, simultaneously?"* or *"How can we give Scrum teams time to innovate while also keeping a focus on getting work done?"* So, organize a session and work together to make the Wicked Questions transparent. Maybe each Scrum Master faces a unique Wicked Question, but it's quite likely to discover some patterns. Use these patterns to identify options to productively navigate the Wicked Question.

Closing

In this article, I shared my view on servant leadership, explained how it connects to Liberating Structures, and offered examples of how the combination creates an environment for Scrum Masters to find support, offer help, and draw inspiration. The trigger for this article was a conversation I had with someone who supported a group of 50 Scrum Masters. Obviously, all given examples can also be used at a Scrum team level. In the end, Liberating Structures are powerful enablers of servant leadership, and everyone has the freedom to become a servant leader. Luckily, it's not connected to a specific role.

I hope this article offered you some inspiration to run some experiments within your organization. If you've got other ideas, feel free to share them. Let's learn and grow, together!

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Imitation is not Flattering: B2B Startups Must Forge Their Own Organizational Structures

Matthew Dominici

October 19, 2023

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Scrum hasn't much to say about organizational design. And rightfully so – if there is *any* area that has no universally applicable template, org design is it.

B2B startups – that is, companies whose customers are other businesses – have an especially hard time with organizational design. Their customers are hundreds or even thousands of times larger than they are. And so, many B2B start-ups design their organizations to match that of their much larger customers. The logic appears sound: aligning internal structures with those of your large clients seems like a good way to understand and meet their needs more effectively.

But the reality is that your customers are buying from you *because* you are small and nimble. You are able to solve their problem sooner more effectively than they could internally, and that is extremely valuable to them.

Furthermore, attempting to match the scale and complexity of larger clients' organizational structures can strain the resources of a nascent startup. There is a real risk of burning out employees, who now need to expend energy on untangling needless bureaucratic knots. This type of organizational design throws a giant wet blanket on the entrepreneurial spirit of what should be your most enthusiastic, resourceful employees.

I once worked with a small company whose main customers were large North American cable and telco companies.

They had:

- PMO Department (1 person)
- BA Department (1 person)
- UX Department (2 people)
- QA Department (2 people).
- Engineering Department (5 people)

Each department sat in their own separate area of the office. You could almost physically see the waterfall of projects travelling from one area of the office to the next.

They created BRDs that were very similar in form to what their customers were producing for their own internal Projects. The bulk of communication between each "department" was done through a series of templated documents, and whenever something went wrong, the blame would be placed on a 'missed requirement'.

By mirroring their major customer's org chart, they were severely limiting the effectiveness of their own internal collaboration. They would work for months on a project, only for the client to reject the latest release because it wasn't what they thought they were asking for. Projects that *were* accepted were often late and required extensive rework after the initial release.

As they began to break down their internal silos, and move to something resembling an agile organization (with a cross functional team, go figure), they started bringing people from their customers' organizations to the Sprint Reviews.

They were getting real time feedback on what they were building, while they were building it.

Developers would speak directly with people from the client's organization, instead of playing broken telephone with the Account Executive.

Quality improved.

Releases became more frequent.

The client loved it.

The client even began applying some of these principles in their own internal projects.

Resist the urge to mirror your clients' organizational structures. Embrace a structure that encourages agility throughout your organization, and provide that value to your larger customers – because they can't do it themselves.

💻 **Matt's upcoming Public Class schedule can be found 👉 here** ⧉

📋 **Find out about Private Agile and Scrum training for your team or organization 👉 here** ⧉

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Minimum Viable Library (3) — Agile Leadership Edition

Stefan Wolpers
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

October 2, 2023
⭐ 5 from 1 rating

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TL; DR: The Minimum Viable Library for Agile Leaders

A new edition of the Minimum Viable Library on Agile Leadership is available! Explore a series of carefully curated collections of essential books, newsletters, podcasts, and tools to elevate your agile expertise.

Read on and learn how the recommendations for agile leaders cover a wide range of topics, from the importance of self-managing teams and trust-based environments to the crucial roles of accountability and resilience. While "servant leadership" as a term may be fading, its principles of empowerment and collaboration endure. Stories of transformation in traditional settings underscore the value of decentralized leadership and quick communication.
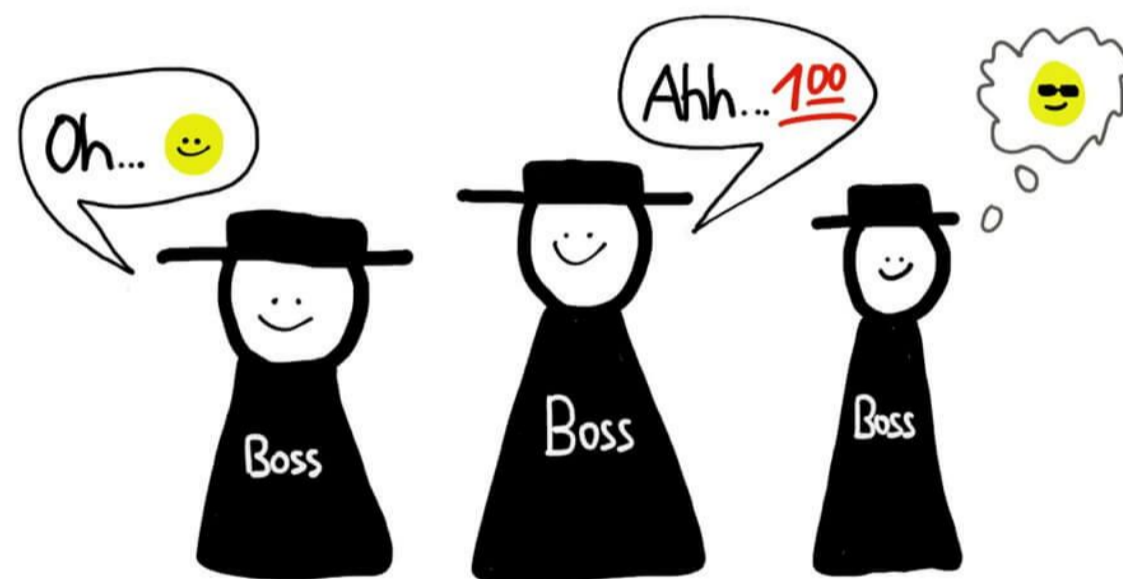
📖 Get notified when the Scrum Anti-Patterns Guide book is available ⧉!

☞ *Shall I notify you about articles like this one? Awesome! You can* sign up here for the 'Food for Agile Thought' newsletter and join 49,000-plus subscribers ⧉.

⧉
👉 Join 400-plus peers and help create the next edition of the Scrum Master Salary Report ⧉!

Minimum Viable Library (3) — Agile Leadership Edition

These are the six books I consider the bare minimum for any agile practitioner who takes agile leadership seriously:

1. **L. David Marquet**: "Turn The Ship Around! A True Story of Turning Followers Into Leaders:" In 'Turn the Ship Around!' former submarine captain David Marquet flips the traditional leadership model, fostering a culture where everyone is a leader. Marquet successfully transformed a poorly performing submarine crew into a top-tier team. The lessons learned from the book reflect Scrum's concept of self-managing teams well.

2. **Simon Sinek**: "Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't:" Simon Sinek's book offers a vision of workplaces where

where leaders — like Scrum Masters — prioritize their team's wellbeing, stimulating collaboration, autonomy, respect, and, ultimately, performance.

3. **Jocko Willink, Leif Babin**: "Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win:" In 'Extreme Ownership,' ex-Navy SEALs Jocko Willink and Leif Babin explore leadership lessons learned in combat, emphasizing accountability, resilience, and a relentless focus on mission success. With regard to Scrum, there is one noteworthy takeaway: there are no bad teams, just bad leadership, dear Scrum Masters.

4. **Robert K. Greenleaf**: "Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness:" Robert Greenleaf revolutionizes traditional leadership approaches with a holistic, ethical model. While the Scrum Guide no longer refers to Scrum Masters as servant leaders, the book, fortunately, promotes empowerment, collaboration, to foster wiser and more autonomous (Scrum) teams.

5. **General Stanley McChrystal, David Silverman, Tantum Collins, Chris Fussell**: "Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World:" Gen. Stanley McChrystal's 'Team of Teams' recounts the revolutionary shift from traditional tactics to a highly agile, transparent 'team of teams' strategy in the Iraq War. Focusing on decentralization and rapid communication, this model has since proven effective in diverse environments, offering transformational insights for leaders of any organization.Think: if the US Military can overcome its traditional ways of leadership, why shouldn't that work with your organization?

6. **Bill Walsh, Steve Jamison, Craig Walsh**: "The Score Takes Care of Itself: My Philosophy of Leadership:" Bill Walsh's transformational leadership took the San Francisco 49ers from bottom to dynasty, changing how football is played. The book offers valuable insights applicable to any leadership role across industries, agile organizations included.

⬏ Conclusion

Creating a minimum viable library of carefully curated collections empowers agile practitioners to access essential resources that elevate their expertise. It condenses valuable knowledge into accessible formats, enabling individuals to stay informed, adapt to challenges, and drive successful agile transformations. Join the effort!

Which books, newsletters, podcasts, and tools do you consider essential for agile practitioners interested in agile leadership? Please share your suggestions in the comments.

Related Articles

The Minimum Viable Library — Product Owner Edition ⬈.

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If you like to join all you have to do now is provide your credentials via this Google form ⬈, and I will sign you up. By the way, **it's free.**

The article Minimum Viable Library (3) — Agile Leadership Edition ⬈ was first published on Age-of-Product.com.

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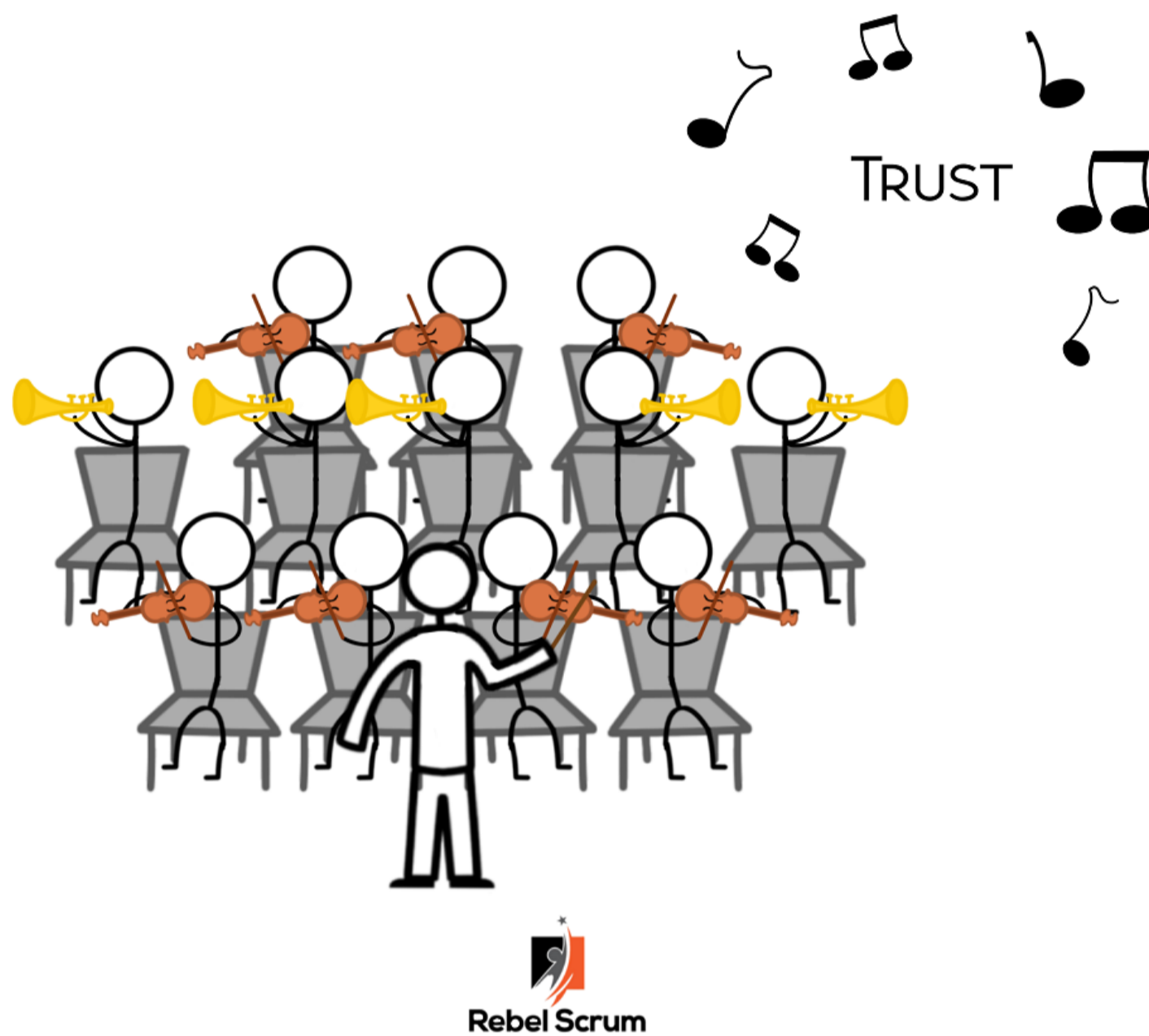# Non-Technical Leaders in Scrum

Mary Iqbal

September 20, 2023

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The adoption of Scrum, an Agile framework known for its flexibility and adaptability, has extended beyond the realm of software development. Today, Scrum is utilized in various industries, and as a result, leaders from diverse backgrounds are tasked with guiding Scrum teams. While technical expertise can be an asset, it's not always a prerequisite for effective leadership in an Agile environment.

The Changing Landscape of Leadership

In traditional hierarchical structures, leadership often relied heavily on technical proficiency and top-down decision-making. However, Scrum challenges this paradigm by promoting self-organizing teams and shared accountability. This shift in leadership dynamics opens the door for non-technical leaders to excel. Leaders of Agile teams shift their responsibilities from task management to Agile leadership, which means ensuring team members have the tools, resources, and information they need to succeed in delivering value to the customer and meeting company goals.

Emphasizing Communication

Clear and Transparent Communication: Effective communication is the cornerstone of leadership in Scrum. Non-technical leaders should prioritize clear, concise, and transparent communication with their teams. This includes setting expectations, sharing goals, and fostering an environment where team members feel comfortable expressing their ideas and concerns.

Active Listening: Actively listening to team members is crucial. People leaders should encourage open discussions and actively seek input from team members, valuing their insights and experiences.

Ask Questions that Help the Team Focus on a Benefit Mindset: Leaders can foster a benefit mindset within their Scrum teams by asking questions that encourage a focus on delivering value to the customer. Questions such as "What are we trying to accomplish", or "What value does this bring to our stakeholders?" can guide the team's thinking towards outcomes rather than just completing tasks.

Ensure that the Product Owner Has the Information They Need: Effective communication includes ensuring that the Product Owner, who is responsible for Product strategy - including the content and ordering of the Product Backlog - has the information they need to make informed decisions. Leaders should promote a strong connection between the development team, the Product Owner, and key stakeholders, ensuring that requirements, expectations, and feedback flow smoothly, ultimately leading to a better product.

Building Trust

Lead by Example: Leaders can build trust by demonstrating a commitment to Agile principles and values. This includes promoting Agile principles such as helping the team to deliver value frequently and building teams around motivated individuals, supporting self-organization, and championing Agile practices.

Acknowledge and Address Knowledge Gaps: It's okay for non-technical leaders to admit when they don't have all the answers. Transparency about knowledge gaps and a willingness to learn alongside the team can foster trust and collaboration.

Fostering Collaboration

Facilitate Collaboration: Leaders play a crucial role in facilitating collaboration within Scrum teams. This involves removing obstacles, promoting cross-functional cooperation, and ensuring that team members have the resources they need.

Celebrate Achievements: Acknowledge and celebrate team achievements and milestones. Recognizing individual and collective contributions fosters a sense of accomplishment and teamwork.

Continuous Improvement: Encourage a culture of continuous improvement by supporting Retrospectives and where necessary, helping the team to implement actions identified during the team's Retrospective.

Conclusion

Non-technical leaders can excel in Scrum environments by embracing the principles of Agile leadership, emphasizing communication, and fostering trust and collaboration. While technical knowledge can be very valuable, it is not the sole determinant of success in guiding Scrum Teams. Effective leadership in Scrum is about creating an environment where teams can self-organize, continuously improve, and deliver value to stakeholders. By prioritizing open communication, trust, and collaboration, non-technical leaders can guide their Scrum teams to success and contribute to the growth of Agile practices in their organizations. True leadership in Scrum means enabling and empowering teams to achieve their goals by providing the necessary support and guidance.

To learn more about people leadership in an Agile environment, signup for [Rebel Scrum's]⤢ upcoming [Professional Agile Leadership]⤢ class. [Professional Agile Leadership Essentials]⤢ (PAL-E) is an opportunity for leaders to learn the 'why' behind the Scrum framework.

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global annual report

2023

STATE OF AGILITY

IN PROCUREMENT & SUPPLY

with the focus topic

ADAPTIVE PARTNER ECOSYSTEM

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As Ugur Sahin, CEO of BioNtech, said recently: "When the need is urgent, like when the world needs a new vaccine, there's no time for contracts." The alliance between BioNtech, Pfizer and Fosun Pharma is based on 'trust-based cooperation' - a strong focus on shared leadership and open, honest communication. One of the most advanced example at present is Haier. They have moved to an 'adaptive partner ecosystem' as a company (80,000 entrepreneurs), including all their partners. As a result, Haier has increased its revenues and profits by 20% over the last 10 years! - In general, Adaptive Partner Ecosystems are much more flexible and resilient than current supply chains. As the report shows, its principles are increasingly being applied not only to co-creation/innovation, but to the entire joint delivery of value to the customer. As such, Haier and these Adaptive Partner Ecosystems provide an inspiration for future ways of working beyond the supply chain, as well as how to improve smaller current challenges in in how we form and manage our trading relationships.

> When the need is urgent, there's no time for contracts. The alliance between BioNtech, Pfizer and Fosun Pharma to develop the COVID19 Vaccine was founded on 'trust-based collaboration'.
>
> **Ugur Sahin**
> CEO BioNtech
>
> **#AdaptivePartnerEcosystem**

This 2023 report provides insight to the state of agile in procurement and supply and is an update on our previous study, released in 2022.

INSIDE THE NUMBERS

Results have high levels of interdependency between groups or networks of organizations to solve todays complex problems. 83% are recognizing the need to rethink how relationships are formed and managed involving more than 1 partner. Most are still struggling with an appropriate contracting strategy for multiple partners. In addition, most respondents report that they are not establishing trading relationships quickly enough. Success stories in commercial functions have demonstrated the potential for huge business impact, with improvements in lead times of between 200 and 800%. No wonder 88% of executives agree that 'agility' is of strategic importance to their business.

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

88% of respondents in executive managment agreed that adopting agile is of strategic importance to their business

AGILE TRANSFORMATION

For a growing number (82% of respondents) this is at company level, but still only a few include their customers or vendors.
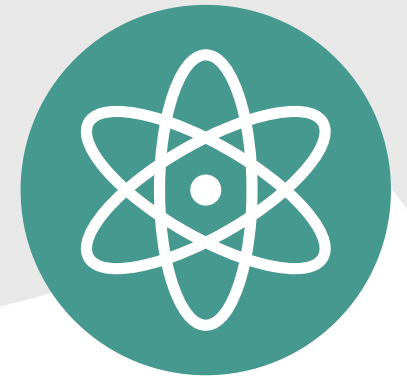
ADAPTIVE PARTNER ECOSYSTEM

83% of respondents need to include more than 1 partner for solving complex problems, while most of them don't have an appropriate contracting strategy and can't establish the partnerships fast enough

Since the last report, there has been a 19% increase in the number of respondents who have started an agile transformation in their function or even at an enterprise level. However, the approach taken to transformation remains similar, indicating that the majority of respondents are not receiving sufficient executive support to become agile in a structured way, nor are they engaging their external partners in the journey. This lack of executive engagement to driving change is a risk to its speed and effectiveness. Furthermore, the failure to involve key partners in the transformation will limit the benefits that can be achieved from implementing agile across the value ecosystem.

FOREWORD BY SCRUM.ORG

Eric Naiburg

Chief Operating Officer
Scrum.org

This 2023 survey and report on the State of Agility in Procurement and Supply Chain shines a light on the need and desire for organizations to improve their business agility. The continued market uncertainty increases the need for organizations to be able to quickly adapt to changes and speed up delivery. By bringing agile ways of thinking to the procurement process and contracts, people and teams doing the work can deliver greater value in a timely manner.

While seeing a significant increase in teams being empowered to make decisions, they still suffer from receiving insufficient executive support to become agile in a structured way and the inability to engage their external trading partners in the journey. If teams are working in more agile ways, yet their contracts restrict their ability to truly deliver with greater agility, their hands are tied and will likely fall back into older ways of working. This is why the entire organization must support the decision to become more agile and make changes to how they act and think in order to drive agility across the organization.

Tim Cummins (founder of World Commerce & Contracting formerly IACCM) & **Mirko Kleiner** (President Lean-Agile Procurement Alliance) have designed and published this study.

COOPERATION PARTNERS

This survey would not have been possible without the support of our global cooperation partners. We're proud to see the collaboration even between competitive alliances to achieve something bigger than us.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Participants responded from all around the world, from corporates to SME's, from multiple industries and roles. This has enabled us to present results from both the buyer's and supplier's point of view covering both public and private sector. Compared to the 2022 results, we were able to diversify the location and industry of respondents, while the size of organizations remained similar.

LOCATION OF ORGANIZATION

Respondents where from:

NORTH AMERICA 19%

EUROPE 38%

ASIA 11%

AFRICA & MIDDLE EAST 9%

SOUTH AMERICA 10%

AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND 14%
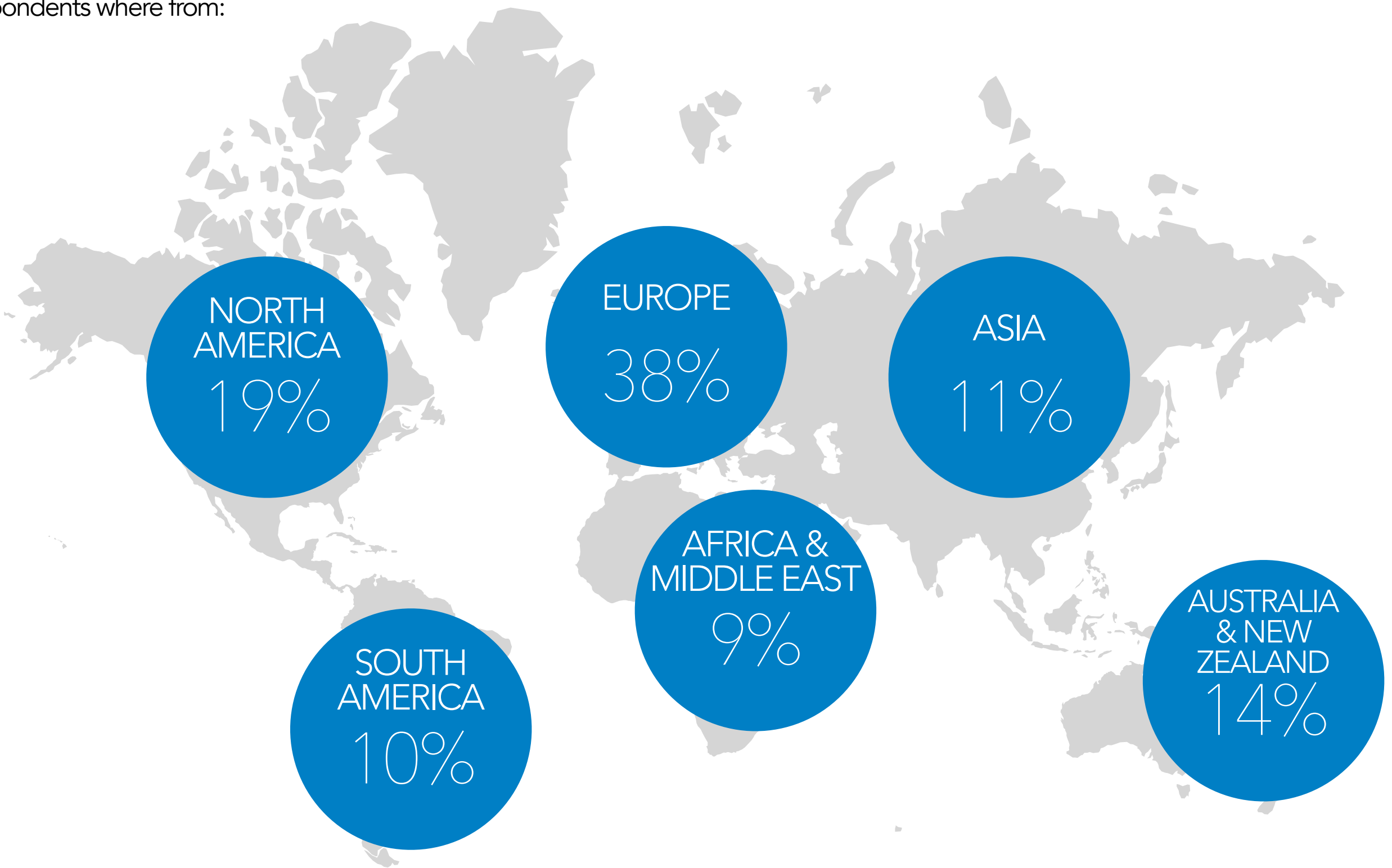
SIZE OF ORGANIZATION

Respondents organization have an annual revenue in USD)

< $ 1 BILLION — 49%

$ 1-5 B. — 18%

$ 6-10 B. — 7%

> $ 10 BILLION — 26%
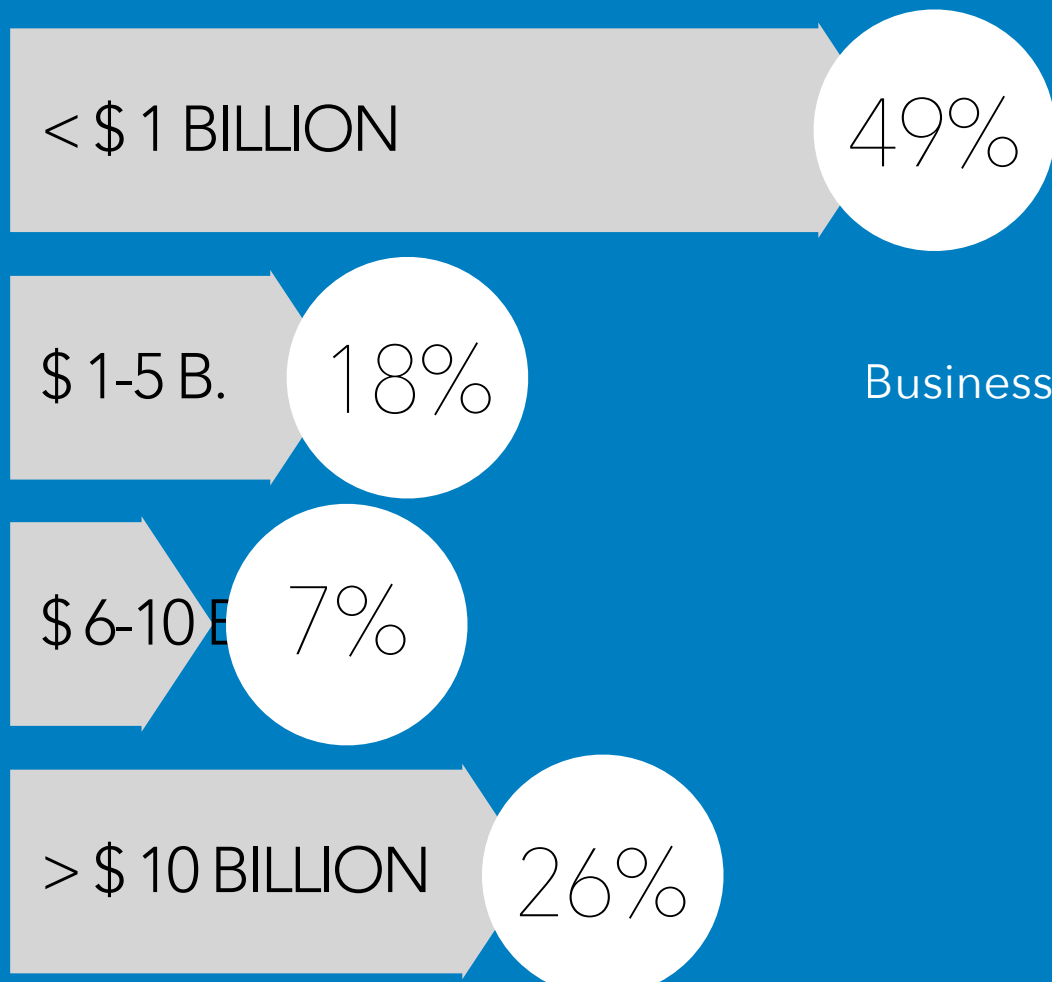
INDUSTRY

Respondents organization belong to those sectors

Manufacturing
Health Care
Aerospace / Defence
Construction
Logistics
Food
Legal
non-profit
Automotive
Education
Other
Banking / Insurance
Technology
Public Sector & GOV
Telecom.
Business Service & Consulting
Oil & Gas
Power Generation
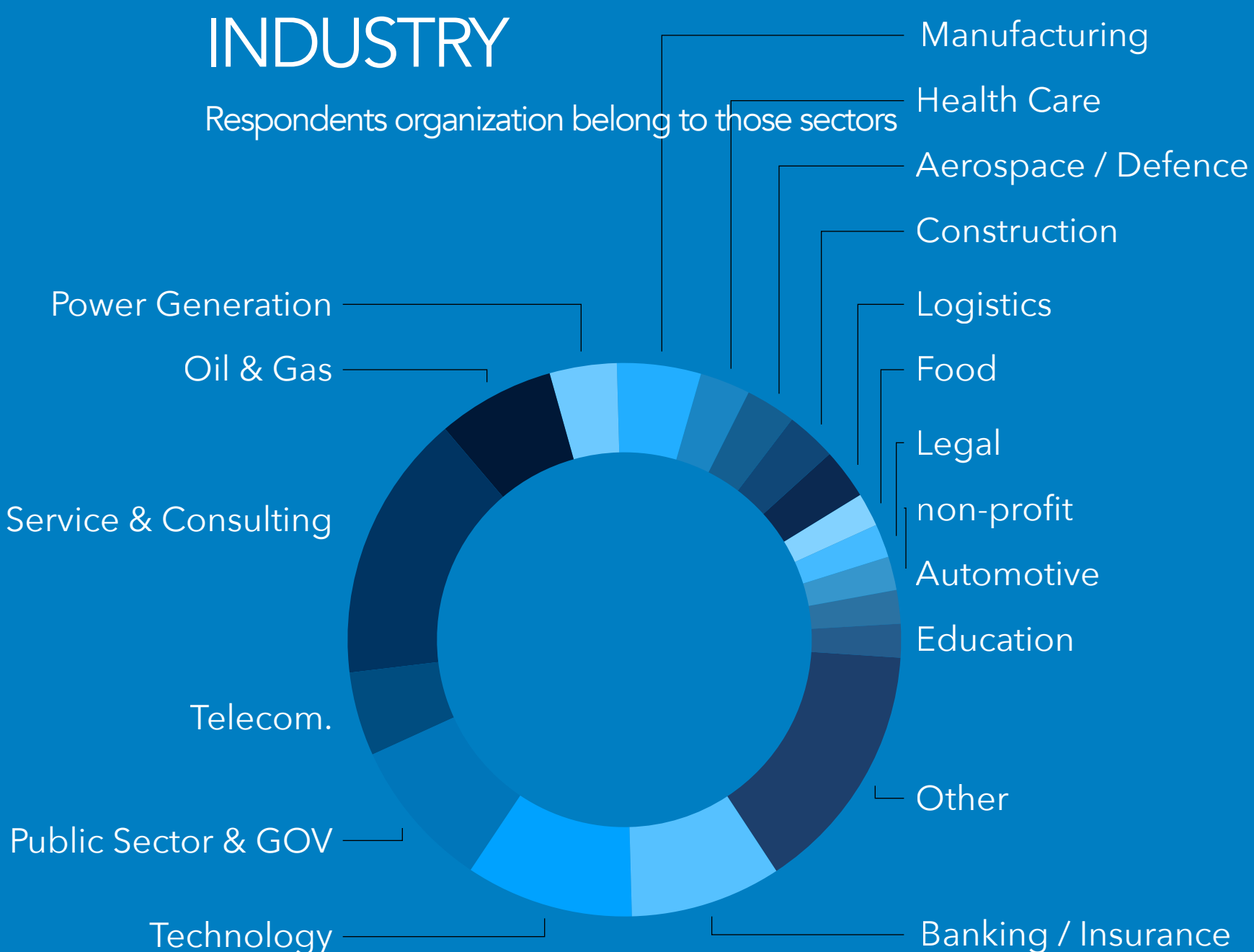
RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

The respondents are very balanced from the buyer- and supplier side. Respondents cover most of the commercial functions.

BUYER & SUPPLIER ROLE

The respondents came from the supplier- as well from the buyer side

SUPPLIER 32%

BOTH 34%

BUYER 34%

79%
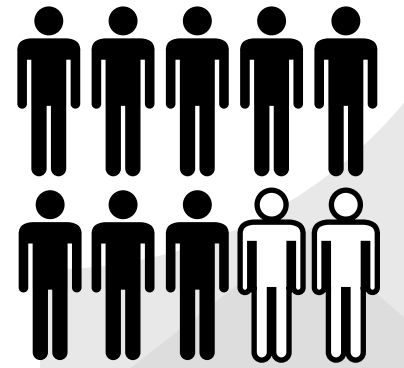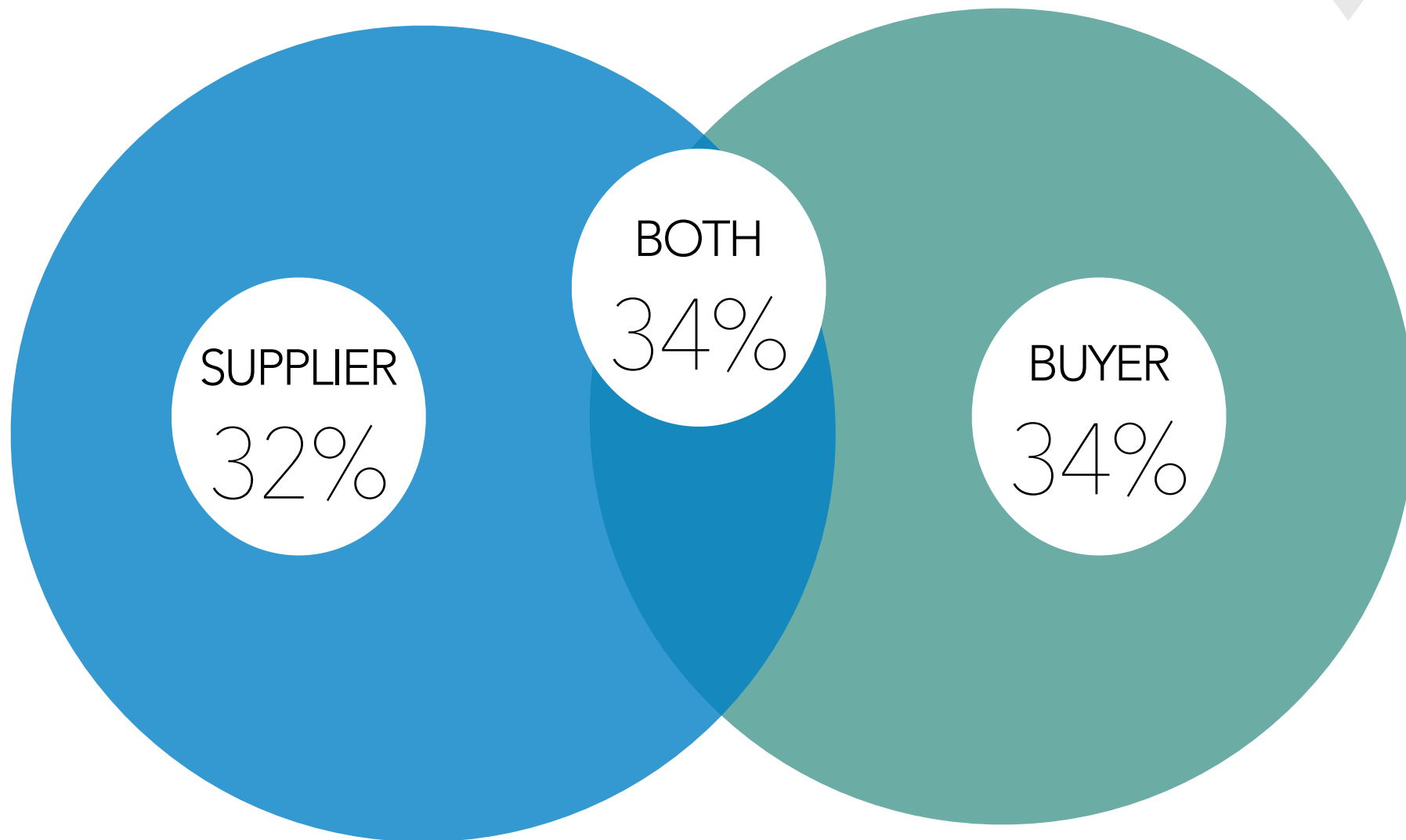
79% of respondents do most of their business in private sector, which leaves 21% doing their business with public sector / government

FUNCTION

The respondents came from the following roles & functions

Contract / Commercial Management

Procurement / Supply Management

Legal

Other

Leadership / Management

Project Management

IT

Business Unit Management

REASONS FOR ADOPTING AGILE
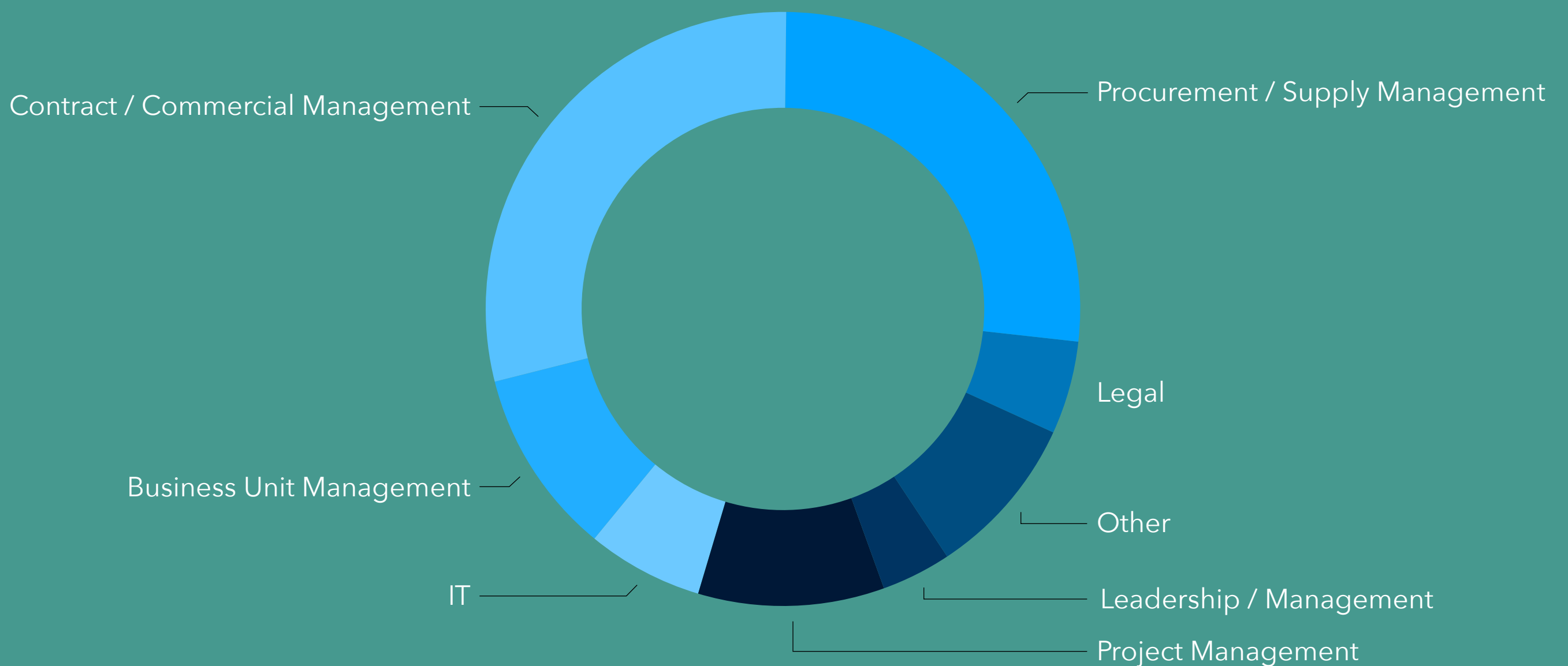
Both procurement and supply-side respondents agree that adopting Agile is a top priority for executives as they deal with increased market uncertainty. There is a heightened sense of urgency driven by the pressing need to protect growth and margins through more adaptive capabilities. For both buyers and suppliers, this drives a need for greater focus on outcomes and value - both of which may alter during the life of their relationship. This also means a reduced focus on the traditional aspects of procurement, such as cost, and an increased focus on value.

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF BUSINESS AGILITY

51% VERY IMPORTANT

37% SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT

12% NOT IMPORTANT

88%

88% of respondents agree that adopting agile is of strategic importance to their business to deal with greater market uncertainty
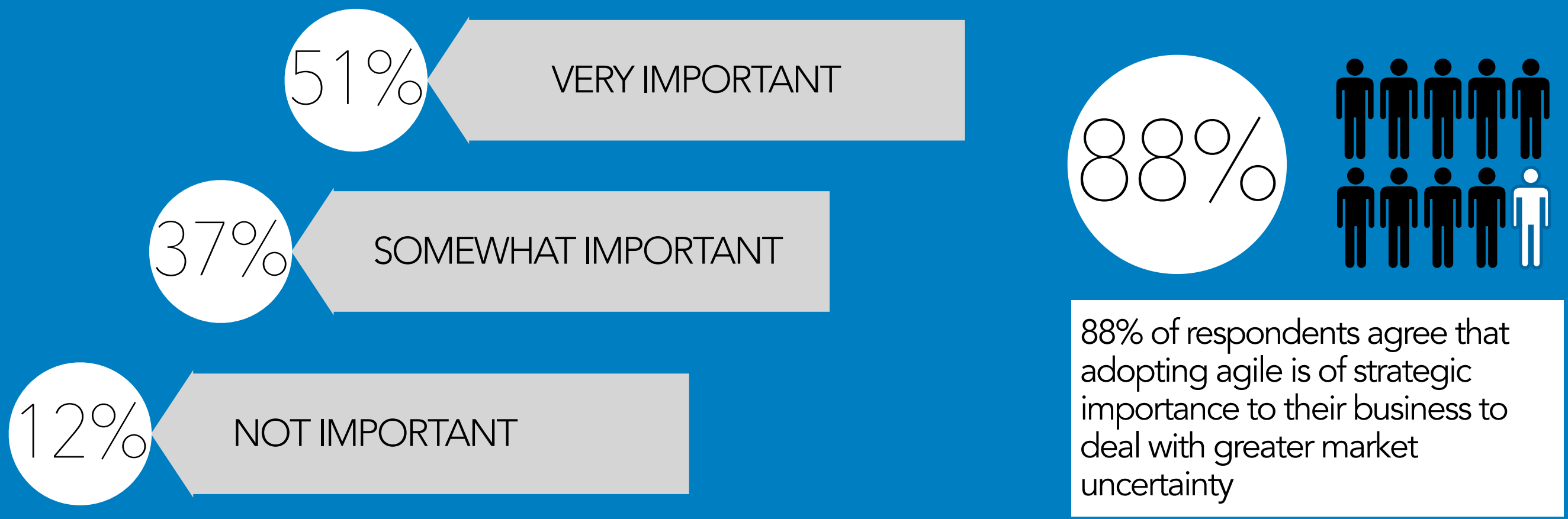
REASONS FOR ADOPTING AGILE

The top 3 reasons for adopting agile are to enhance ability to manage changing priorities or the need to rapidly adjust to altered market conditions, to reduce time to market and to overcome complexity haven't changed since last report. Interestingly, respondents report a greater need to improve their alignment with the business and stakeholders.

enhance ability to manage changing priorities
reduce time to market
overcome complexity
foster innovation
improve business alignment
improve stakeholder management
reduce risks
reduce costs
improve team morale
other

the report STATE OF AGILITY IN PROCUREMENT & SUPPLY by LAP Alliance & World Commerce & Contracting is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Global annual report 2023. It was inspired by the annual 'State of Agile' report by VersionOne.

6

PROGRESS IN ADOPTING AGILE

Since the last report, there has been a 19% increase in the number of respondents who have started an agile transformation in their function or even at an enterprise level. However, the approach taken to transformation remains similar, indicating that the majority of respondents are not receiving sufficient executive support to become agile in a structured way, nor are they engaging their external trading partners in the journey. This lack of executive commitment to driving change is a risk to its speed and effectiveness. Furthermore, the failure to involve key partners in the transformation will limit the benefits that can be achieved from implementing agile across the value chain.

MATURITY LEVEL OF YOUR TRANSFORMATION

82% of respondents are at some stage of an agile transformation within their overall organization, a growing minority has coordination at a company level, but just 9% include their external trading partners.

82%

22%	10%	19%	21%	9%	18%
STAGE 1	**STAGE 2**	**STAGE 3**	**STAGE 4**	**STAGE 4**	**OTHER**
First experiences with agile practices	Successful pilot projects	Agile trans-formation of function initiated	Agile trans-formation coordinated on company level	Agile trans-formation includes partners	We haven't started our Agile Journey / new ways of working yet

82%
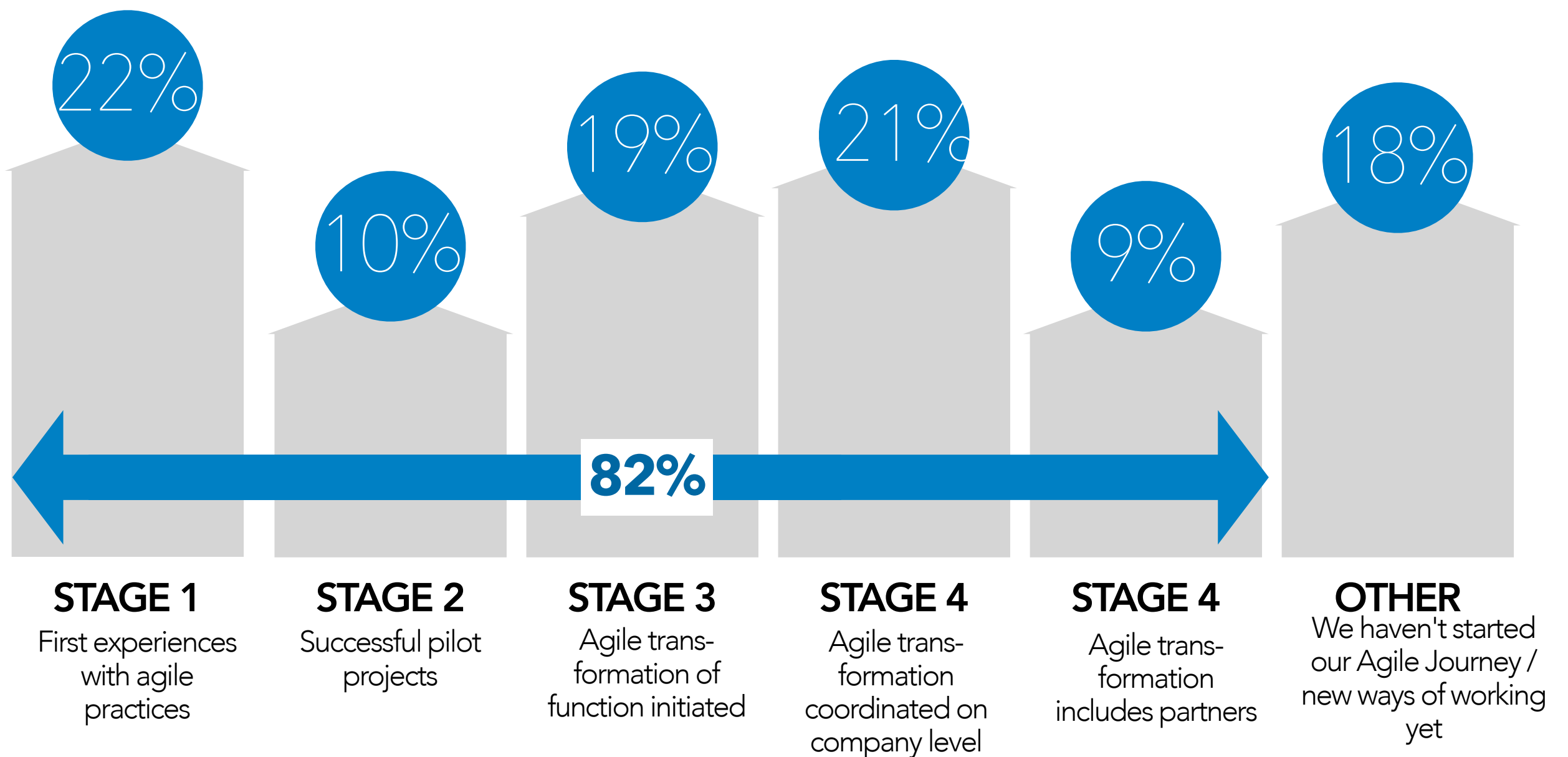
TRANSFORMATION APPROACH

In spite of the strategic importance of becoming agile, just 14% have established an executive action team to lead the transformation top down. Over half are operating a 'do it yourself' approach.

46%	20%	16%	14%	4%
Do it yourself or guidance by internal agile coaches	Cross-functional transformation team	Guidance by external agile coaches	Executive Action Team	Other or no approach

AGILE MATURITY

57% of those who have not yet begun an agile adoption have plans to get started. In comparison to 2022 less agile techniques have been reported to be applied.

ADOPTION PLANS OF THOSE WHO HAVEN'T STARTED YET

58% or respondents are starting or plan to start adoption within next 12 months

42%
Not yet & no immediate plans

23%
About to start adoption

20%
Plan to start adoption within next 6 months

14%
Plan to start adoption within next 12 months
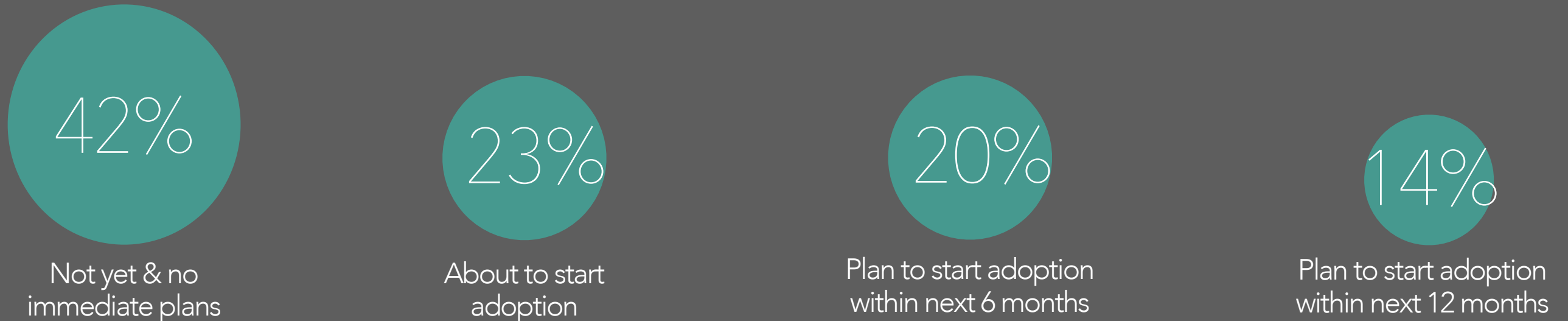
AGILE TECHNIQUES

The top 3 agile techniques are short iterations, the daily stand-up and empowered cross-functional team.

- Short iterations
- Daily stand-up
- Empowered cross-functional team
- Kanban board
- Retrospectives
- Dedicated product owner
- User Story Map
- Agile Portfolio Board
- Lean Procurement Canvas

AGILE MATURITY
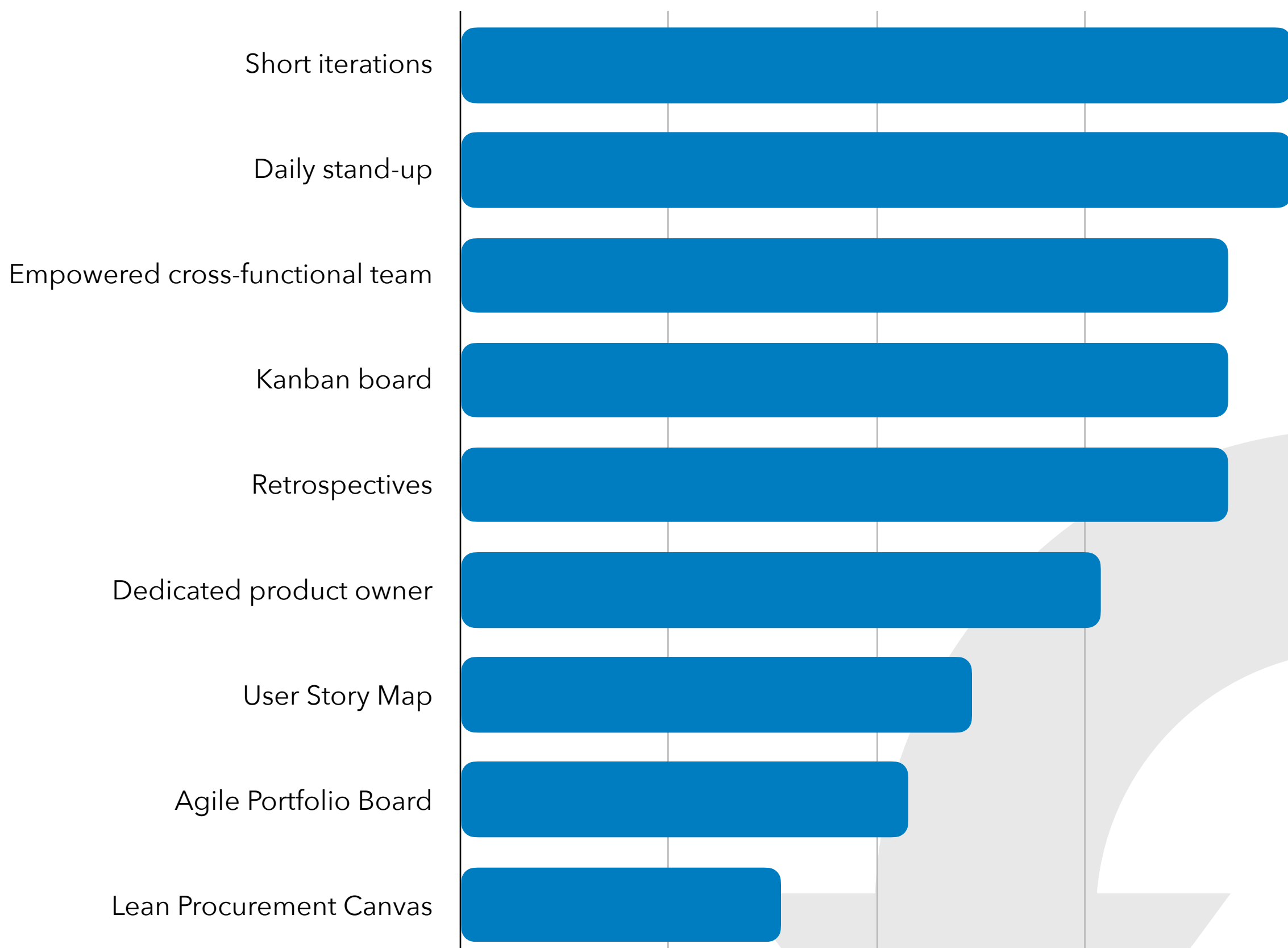
In general, this year's results show that most agile initiatives continue to use long-established methods such as Scrum and Kanban. Relatively few are drawing on function-specific methodologies, such as Lean-Agile Procurement. Some have begun to experiment with design thinking. Many - particularly in procurement - have limited familiarity with Agile contracts, which are a key enabler for more agile collaboration and dealing with uncertainty. In fact, 53% have less than 1 year's experience of agile contracts and the frequency of use is relatively low.

AGILE PRACTICES IN PROCUREMENT OR SALES

The respondents used or plan to use the following agile methodologies to improve their sourcing or sales.

Hackathon

Big group events to co-create proposals

Incremental sourcing

Lean Startup

Lean

Scrum **#1**

other

Lean-Agile Procurement **#4**

Kanban **#2**

Design Thinking **#3**
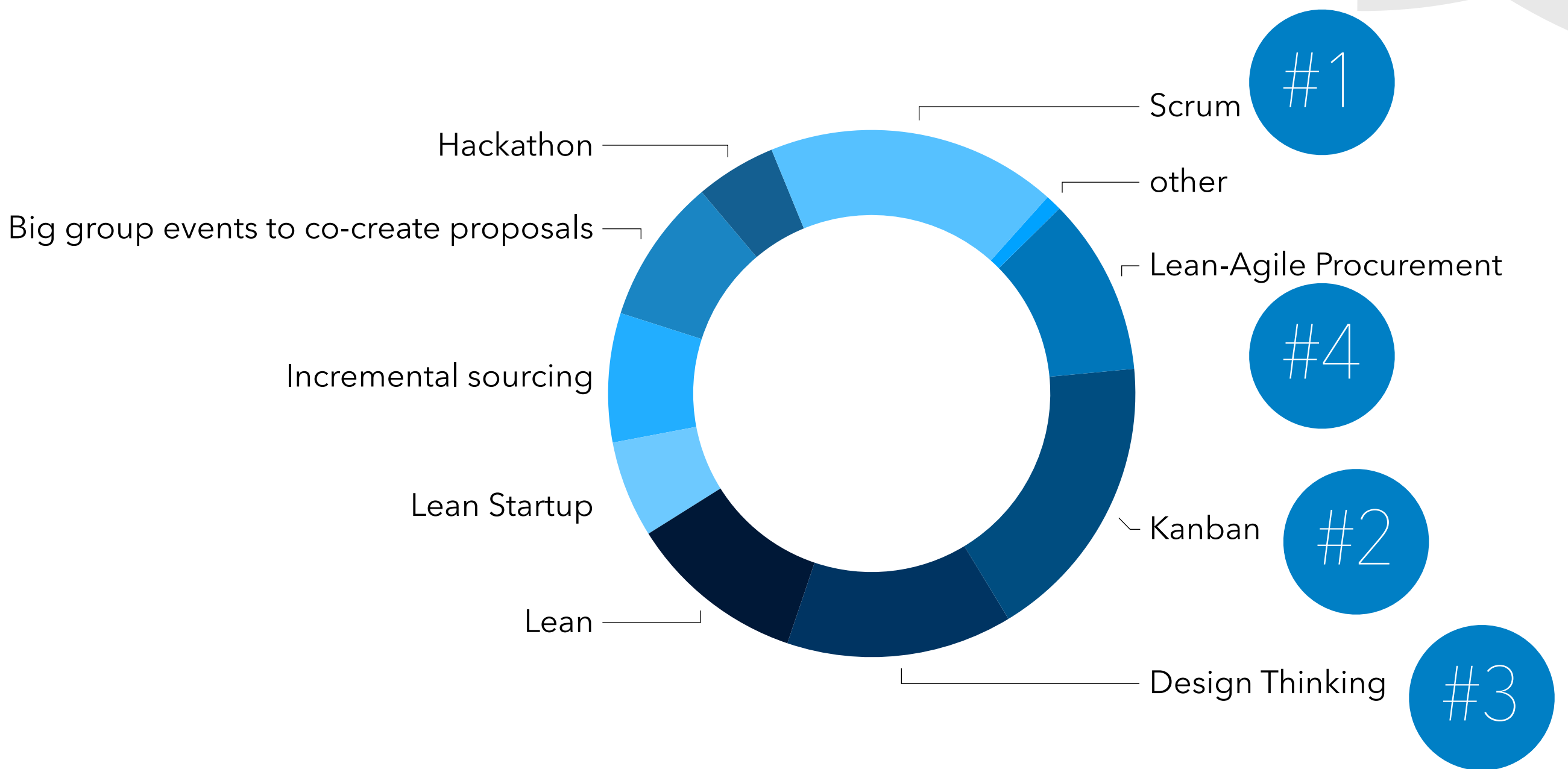
EXPERIENCE IN AGILE CONTRACTS

53% of respondents have less than 1 year's experience of agile contracts and just 10% call themselves 'experienced'.

47% New to agile contracts

6% Less than 1 year of experience

53%

17% 1-3 years of experience

19% 3-5 years of experience

8% 5-10 years of experience

2% More than 10 years of experience

ADAPTIVE PARTNER ECOSYSTEM
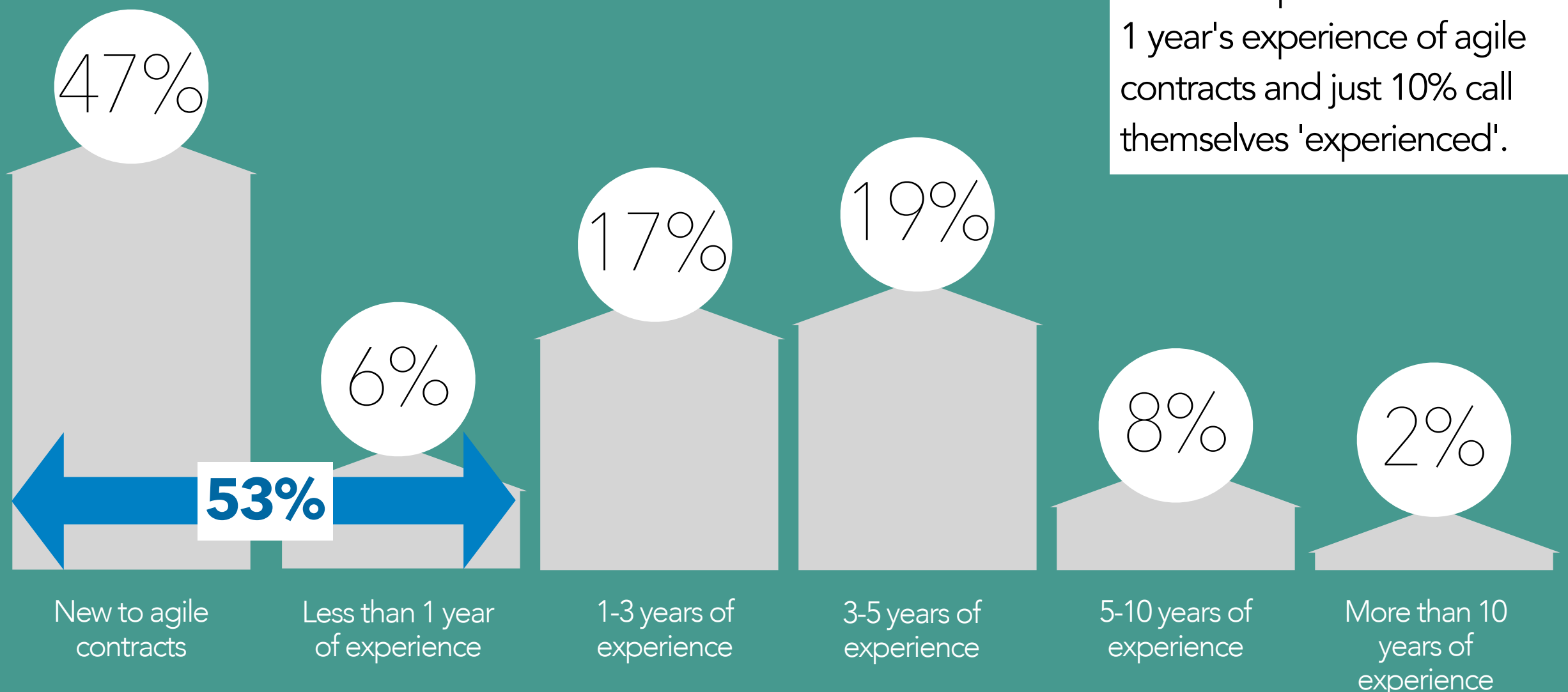
As Ugur Sahin, CEO BioNtech recently said: "When the need is urgent like when the world needs a new vaccine, there's no time for contracts." The alliance between BioNtech, Pfizer and Fosun Pharma was founded on 'trust-based collaboration' – a strong focus on shared governance and open, honest communication. In an environment of extreme uncertainty, establishing a formal contract may either take too long or even be impossible to achieve. Therefore, establishing an adaptive governance framework that draws on agile principles is an intelligent way to ensure control, 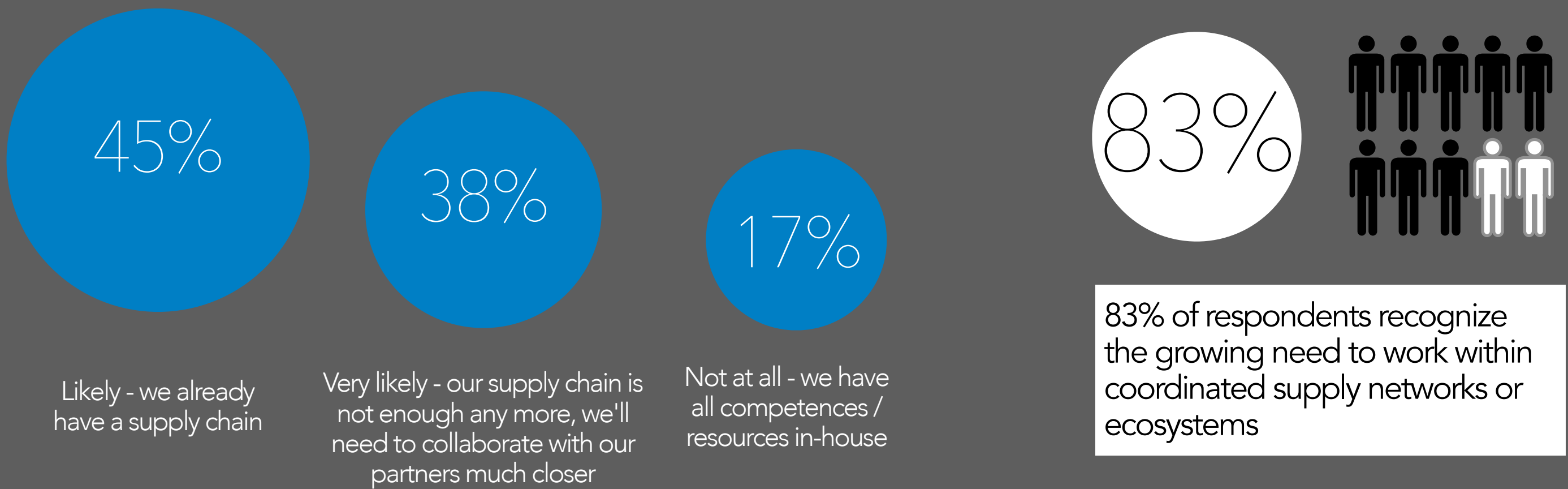manage risk and create certainty. These 'trust-based collaborations', or 'Adaptive Partner Ecosystems' are much more flexible and resilient as current supply chains and are being increasingly applied along the entire value strean.

NEED OF INCLUDING MULTIPLE PARTNERS

Respondents recognize the need for more adaptive relationships to fill competency gaps

45%
Likely - we already have a supply chain

38%
Very likely - our supply chain is not enough any more, we'll need to collaborate with our partners much closer

17%
Not at all - we have all competences / resources in-house

83%

83% of respondents recognize the growing need to work within coordinated supply networks or ecosystems

SCENARIO'S FOR COLLABORATION WITH MULTIPLE PARTNERS

The top 3 scenarios where the respondents reported they have to collaborate with multiple partners to solve their problems are in innovation, production and go to market. In general, there are scenarios along the entire product lifecycle.

Other · Innovation · Production · Market research · Go to Market · Sales & Marketing · R & D

ADAPTIVE PARTNER ECOSYSTEM
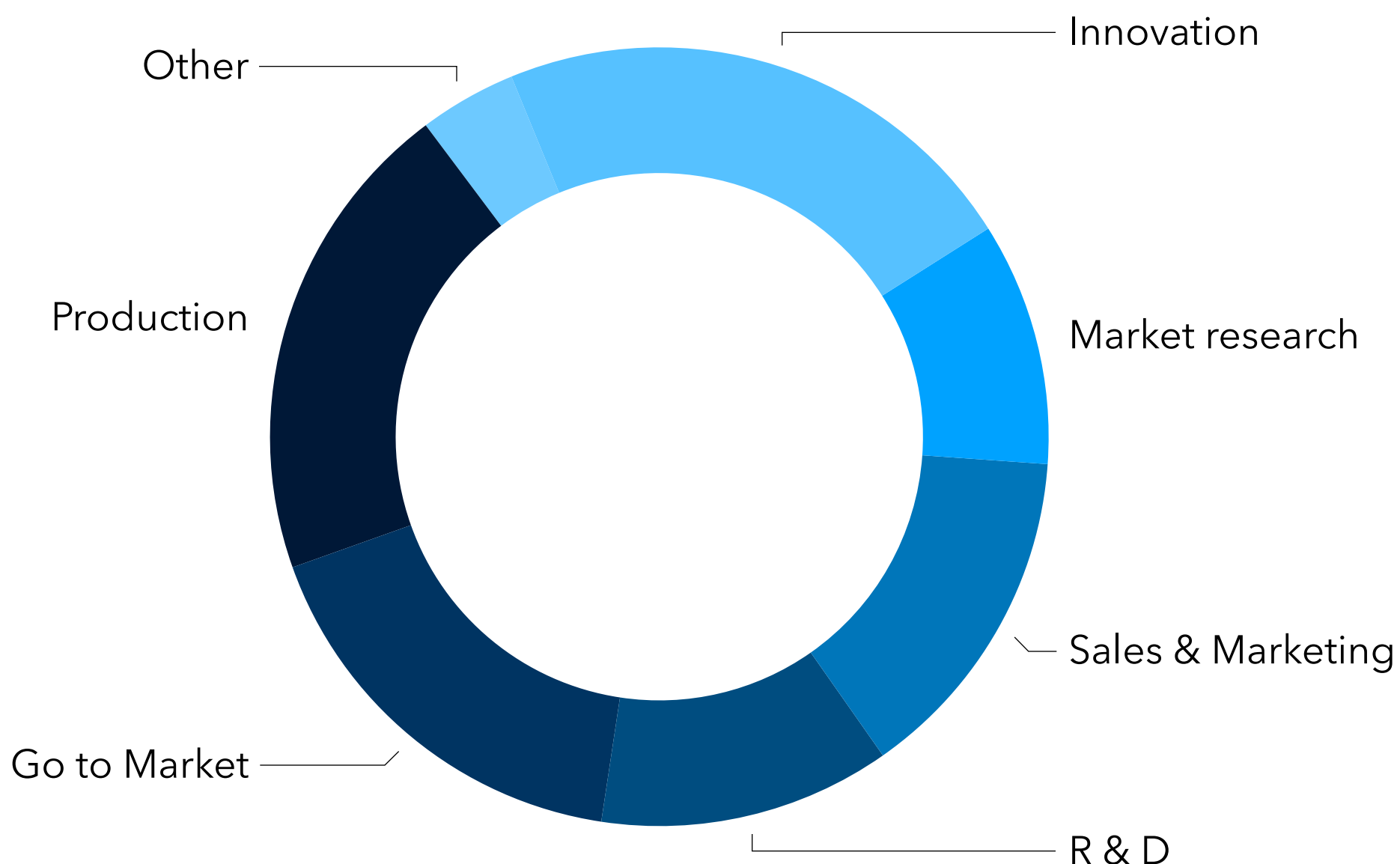
In spite of a clear need for adaptive partner networks or ecosystems, the approach to contracting has not undergone any major change. However, almost a third are utilizing more adaptive techniques.

CONTRACT STRATEGY

The most common multi-partner contracting strategy is still 1 contract per partner. A clear minority of respondents said they had a collective contract with multiple partners (17%) and one in eight are operating some relationships either without any formal agreement (2%) or through a governance framework only (11%).

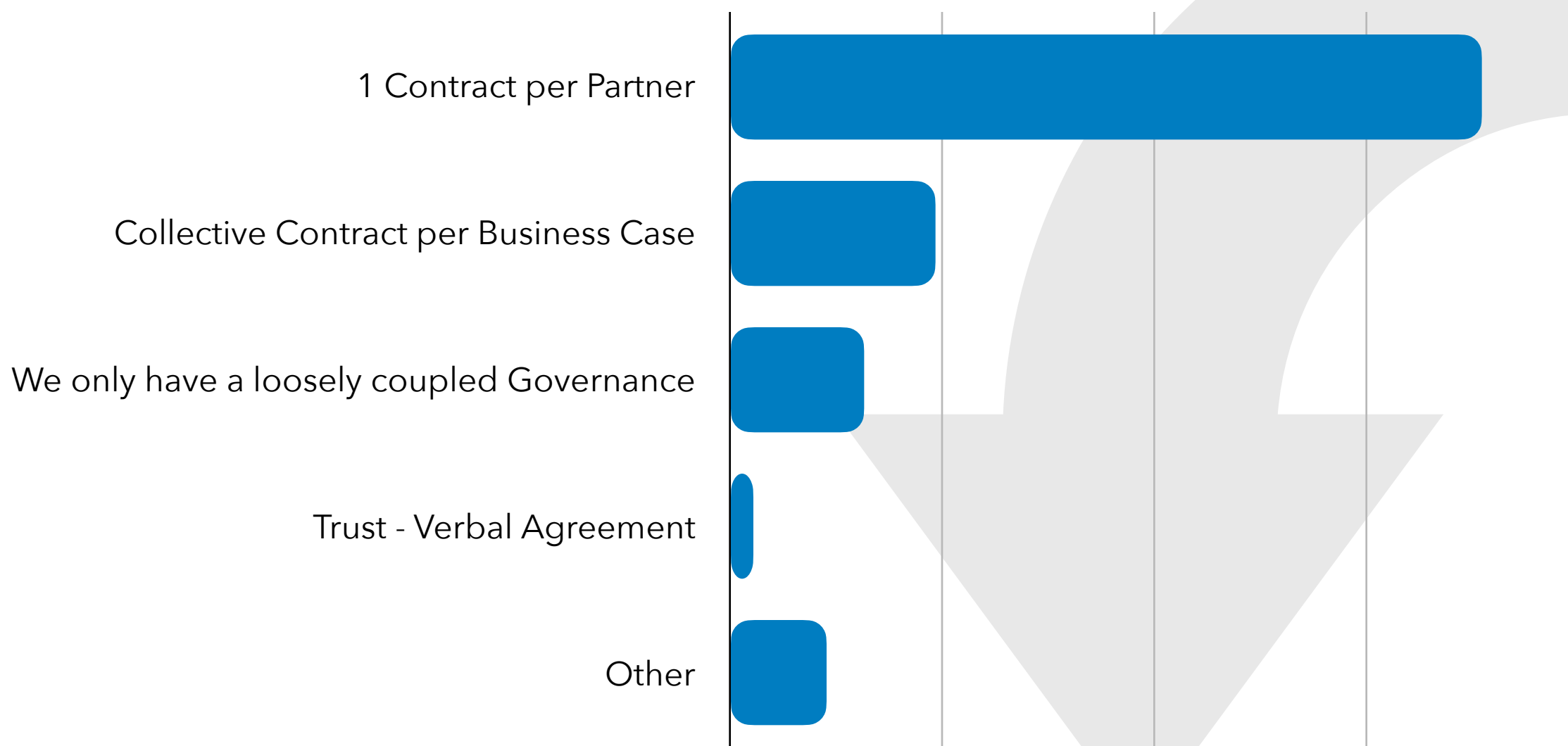| Contract Strategy	
1 Contract per Partner	████████████████
Collective Contract per Business Case	████
We only have a loosely coupled Governance	███
Trust - Verbal Agreement	█
Other	███

CADENCE OF CONTRACT UPDATES

Very few companies (7%) have the agility to update their contracts that are required in an adaptive multi-partner ecosystem.

69% — No Update - Just the initial Contract
23% — Every 6 Months
6% — Every Month
1% — Every Week

92%

92% of respondents update their contracts never or just every 6 months

ADAPTIVE PARTNER ECOSYSTEM

Although the majority of respondents indicated that they would be quite slow to mobilise a new multi-partner ecosystem, there appear to be faster examples already in place. It's likely that, similar to the co-development of the COVID-19 vaccine, this is driven by a sense of urgency supported by top management. This needs to be explored in the future.

MOBILIZATION OF A NEW PARTNER ECOSYSTEM
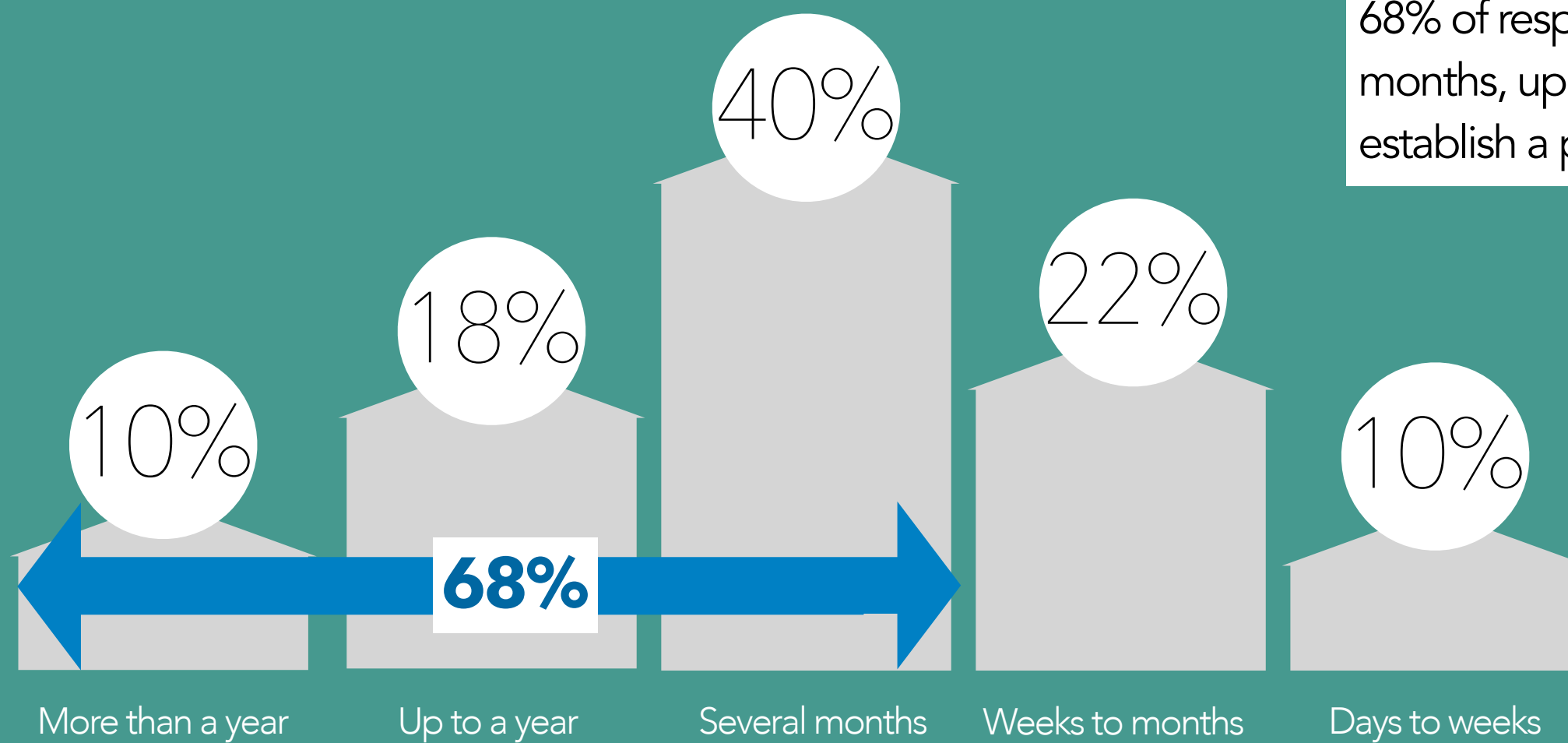
68% of respondents need several months, up to a year and more to establish a partner ecosystem.

10%	18%	40%	22%	10%
More than a year	Up to a year	Several months	Weeks to months	Days to weeks

68%

CHALLENGES TO ESTABLISH A NEW PARTNER ECOSYSTEM

In addition to internal compliance, the biggest challenges to building a new multi-partner ecosystem are reported to be more on the soft side, such as trust and cultural and social fit between the people involved in the partnership.

Internal Compliance
Trust
Cultural & social Fit
Sharing internal Data
Time-to-Market
Finding the right Person per Company
Intellectual Property
NDA
Profit Sharing
Other

BENEFITS FROM ADOPTING AGILE
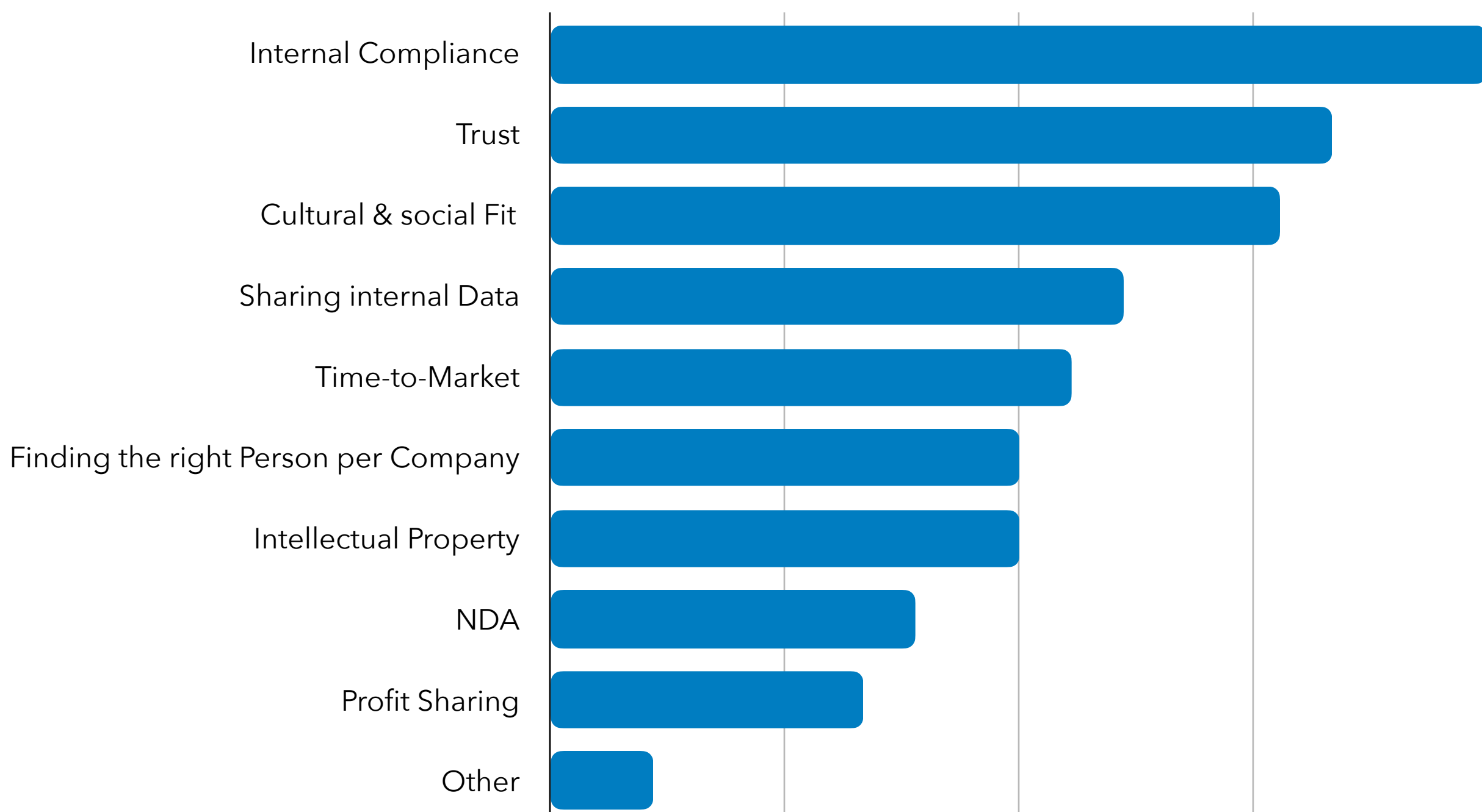
Respondents confirm that the adoption of agile has a significant positive impact on all "players" along the entire value chain. Compared to the previous report, "improving total cost of ownership" made it into the top 3 benefits of adopting agile. Apart from a lack of knowledge of agile, the main barriers to adoption are the usual suspects that affect change programs and point to the need for executive support and a structured approach to transformation.

BENEFITS FROM ADOPTING AGILE

Respondents reported significant improvements that have resulted from their adoption of agile working practices in procurement/sales.

22%	21%	18%	14%	13%	9%
Improved customer satisfaction	Improved time to market	Improved total cost of ownership	Other or yet to see any visible benefits	Improved status & reputation of team / function	Improved supplier satisfaction

CHALLENGES ADOPTING AGILE

The top 3 barriers to agile adoption are lack of knowledge, organizational resistance to change and the challenge of changing mindsets.

- Organizational restistance to change
- Organizational culture at odds with agile values
- Lack of skills / experience with agile methods
- Unable to adapt current processes / governance / policies
- Insufficient training & education
- Inadequate management support
- Lack of business / customer availability to support change
- Minimal collaboration & knowledge sharing
- Other

Priorities are identical in Procurement and Supply, with 'digitalization' taking top place for both. It is clear that most groups are still on the journey to improve underlying capabilities and establish the systems and behaviors needed for more agile or adaptive operations. Interestingly focus of current priorities is set mainly to internal activities so that more outcome-based priorities such as ESG / Sustainability still play a minor role in most of the businesses.

TOP 8 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES IN PROCUREMENT

The respondents ranked the following in terms of their priority in their commercial processes

#1 Digitalization of procurement

#2 Training employees to be ready for the next challenges

#3 Agile transformation of procurement function

#4 Finding highly skilled employees / vendors

#5 Improving operational procurement

#6 Improving strategic procurement

#7 Adjusting post pandemic

#8 ESG / Sustainability

#9 Development of a more resilient partner ecosystem / supply chain

#10 Other

TOP 8 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES IN SUPPLY

#1 Digitalization of sales

#2 Training employees to be ready for the next challenges

#3 Agile transformation of sales function

#4 Finding highly skilled employees / customers

#5 Improving operational sales

#6 Improving strategic sales

#7 Adjusting post pandemic

#8 ESG / Sustainability

#9 Development of a more resilient partner ecosystem / supply chain

#10 Other

CONCLUSION

The annual reports show that the gap between the required executive support and agile adoption by commercial functions is narrowing. However, it remains the case that only a minority of organizations are driving agile adoption at the board level. Current grassroots initiatives tend to draw on standard agile practices such as Scrum and Kanban, rather than investing in a more functionally-oriented approach. While this progress should be welcomed, it is a relatively slow process that risks missed opportunities.

Leading examples such as Haier show that a commercial function working based on agile values & principles is not the end of the possible evolution. Commercial functions and roles will continue to evolve from a function to a capability that is widely distributed across business units. The basis for this will be the necessary data transparency and self-service via platforms. On a positive note, more respondents say they are involving their partners/suppliers in their agile adoption. However, at 9%, this is still a very small minority and definitely not enough. It is essential that business agility does not stop at the front door!-This empirical evidence is also what we see in our agile coaching engagements. There is still a long way to go. Commercial functions are responsible or active in supporting 100% of revenue and up to 80% of spend - this shows the extent of their potential economic impact. According to the World Trade Organization, the public sector is one of the largest investors, investing an average of 10-15% of GDP each year.

Global success stories such as Haier, but also global success stories using Lean-Agile Procurement have shown that it's possible to improve time to market by 200-800%, value for money by 80%, risk reduction by 80% and increase customer and partner/supplier satisfaction up to a recommendation rate of 9 out of 10. In this sense, gile has the potential to deliver billions in financial returns, as well as enabling other critical aspects of value delivery!

Post-pandemic, we've heard in our day-to-day work that organizations are seeking new ways of working beyond single source, supply chain, etc. This has been driven by the recent experiences and challenges of supply chain disruption, price volatility, geopolitical uncertainty, etc. But now this need for innovation is not simply reactive to the market: it is increasingly forward looking, as business adjusts to environmental and social values, which are now also being embedded into regulation. In the past 20 years the Agile community has come up with principles cross-functional, empowerment, etc: We strongly believe that the new cross-functional will become cross-company! This has led to the focus of this year's global survey on the 'Adaptive Partner Ecosystem'. We're eagerly awaiting the results from our global respondents. The first big surprise was fact that the need for companies to work with multiple partners isn't just in innovation, but in all aspects of the product lifecycle. Less surprising were the current contracting strategies and the long lead times to mobilize an adaptive multi-partner ecosystem. Leading examples such as Haier and their collective contracts for a partner ecosystem and an update cadence of weeks to 1 month are still more inspiration than reality in most organizations.

To address today's economic, social and environmental challenges, we strongly believe that the more agile mindset shown by BioNtech must become an entrenched capability. The Adaptive Partner Ecosystem is an essential element for a business to survive

More

To find out more about the creators of this annual report visit the websites:

World Commerce & Contracting
www.worldcc.com

Alliance lean-agile procurement
www.lean-agile-procurement.com

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Scrum's Role in Leadership Decisions: A Clarification

Martin Hinshelwood

October 5, 2023

★ 0 from 0 ratings

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Navigating the world of Scrum, I've often encountered a recurring question: How does Scrum assist leadership teams in selecting the most valuable work? The answer might surprise some: it doesn't.

Scrum, in its essence, is a framework. It doesn't possess the magic wand to point out which tasks or projects are of utmost value. That responsibility, my friends, rests with the leadership. It's their duty to understand the business landscape, gauge customer needs, and set a clear strategic direction.

Enjoy this video? Like and subscribe to our channel:
https://youtu.be/bpBhREVX85o?si=GNodX3428erIYyvn ⧉

Now, where does Scrum fit into this picture? Scrum steps in to facilitate the execution of these decisions. It aids in moulding teams of professionals who can rally around the leadership's choices and bring them to fruition. It's not about dictating the 'what' but about streamlining the 'how'.

But here's a wee nugget of wisdom: leadership decisions should focus on outcomes, not just solutions. It's not merely about implementing a feature or launching a product. It's about the broader impact, the ripple effect it creates in the market, and the value it brings to the customers.

In wrapping up, while Scrum is a powerful ally in the execution phase, the compass that guides the ship - the decisions on direction and value - lies in the hands of the leadership. It's a partnership where both play their part, ensuring that the journey is not just efficient but also meaningful.

NKDAgility can help you.

These are the kinds of issues that lean-agile practitioners love and most folks hate, and if you struggle with finding the value, my team at NKDAgility can help you or help you find a consultant, coach, or trainer who can.

If you have issues that are undermining the effectiveness of your value delivery, it's especially important to find help as soon as you can and not wait!

Which you can do right now. You can request a free consultation ⧉ with my team or sign up for one of our upcoming professional Scrum classes ⧉. Because you don't just need agility, you need Naked Agility.

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The Future of Agile Roles != The Future of Agility

Yuval Yeret
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

January 26, 2023
★ 5 from 1 rating

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The story of Capital One laying off hundreds of people in Agile roles⤤ is making the rounds. I have no direct connection to Capital One, so I can't comment about what's going on there.

What I can share is that for years now, I've been coaching companies and leaders to see the Scrum Master and similar roles like the SAFe RTE as accountabilities relevant leaders take on (it can be formal managers/leaders or natural leaders from within teams that are passionate about agility and gravitate to this). See the Scrum Guide for Leaders.

One example is the VP of Engineering in a growing startup, who decided to take on the SAFe RTE role (Chief Scrum Master for the Agile Release Train) since they felt it was up to them to provide this sort of leadership.

Remember – Scrum Accountabilities != Scrum Roles

This way of thinking is supported by the 2020 Scrum Guide update that changes the language from Scrum Roles to Scrum Accountabilities. SAFe also sees itself as a dual operating system in parallel to the organizational structure, which means the Scrum Master and other roles should be seen as accountabilities.

If/When leaders take these new ways of leading and showing up to heart, it creates healthy and sustainable agility. Getting there requires support and coaching of course.

Sometimes you do need someone dedicated to agility

In addition, there are situations where no one is passionate about organizational performance, health, agility, and development. In these contexts, the right move IS to have a person dedicated to these accountabilities. Most of the time, these people are brought in to become part of the leadership team of a larger group.

So what do the layoffs of Agile roles mean?

Is "laying off all agile roles" a sign that a company achieved agile nirvana? Probably not.

My take on what we're seeing right now in the market is more often one of these scenarios:

- Companies wake up to the reality that they are DOING Agile (rather than BEING Agile) and see the Agile roles as part of the problem.
- Companies that believe in their Agile way of working and have achieved a reasonable level of agility. They want to continue to improve, but when they are looking to extend their runway in the current macroeconomic environment, they make the tough but necessary decision to spend less on the "future of work" and more around "doing current work".
- Change in leadership and the loss of a formal or informal Agile Champion leads to a shift in perspective about agility.
- Companies where people in agile roles are making an impact but either don't care or struggle to provide transparency to this impact in a way that will resonate to business people (think CFO). In the current context, this isn't a very sustainable strategy…

Now what?

If you're in an Agile role (Scrum Master, RTE, etc.) I recommend you focus on continuously improving the effectiveness and results of your team (or ART), in a way that is impactful to the business, ideally in a quantifiable way. Look at Evidence-based Management for ideas regarding what to focus on and what conversations to have with your team and stakeholders.

It might be frightening, but you should also consider asking your team, stakeholders, and leadership a question used in Netflix – **How hard would you fight to keep me here?** The answer and conversation might be hard to hear – but it will provide the transparency you need to inspect and adapt your focus.

If you're in a big organization with a formal or informal agile role community of practice I recommend you make this a topic you work on.

The optimistic in me hopes that, as a community, we will use 2023 as a wake-up call that will positively impact what we focus on and the value we bring to organizations.

And finally, one of the hard truths about our role is that our ultimate success is when we're not needed anymore. Moving between teams, contexts, and sometimes companies is part of this profession we took on…

(This article was originally published on YuvalYeret.com⤤)

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The Leader's Guide to Fostering Decision-Making Abilities

Mark Wavle
□ □ □ □

September 26, 2023

⭐ 0 from 0 ratings

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Leaders sometimes hesitate to grant more autonomy because they worry that their team members aren't capable of making those decisions. Certainly, it would be foolish and unkind to expect them to be able to do something they're not able to. I've even heard some leaders use this as a reason they can't delegate a decision.

Rather than viewing this as a barrier to autonomy, we can see it the role of leaders to foster the growth of their team members' knowledge and abilities, enabling them to make effective decisions down the road.

Good news: there's a process you can use to grow this decision-making capability in others!

How to Start – Transparency

Start by identifying a decision that you're currently making for the team. Consider what inputs you use, the risks you take into account, and your decision-making process. Next time you make the decision, describe these elements to the team so they understand why you made the decision and give them an open invitation to ask questions so they can understand your approach. You are starting to train them how to think about the decision.

Mentoring to Grow

Shifting into a mentorship stance, you can invite input from the team as you make the decision the next time. This is an opportunity for them to see you working through the decision in real-time - externalize the thoughts that are running through your head so they can hear them.

Creating an open atmosphere is key to learning so team members can ask questions about your how you're investigating and deciding. Be sure to thank people who speak up and ask questions, even when you're struggling with the challenge or how they posed the question. As they're asking questions, you can gauge how they're digesting the decision and discover focus areas where they need more help.

As you see the team growing, shift to making the decision together with the team, inviting them from the sidelines into the decision-making with you. This phase is the "fulcrum" of the process, where you gain confidence in their decision-making capabilities as you all collaborate.

The Shift to Delegation

By this point, the team has been through the decision process with you several times and you're ready to ask them to make the decision. But you're staying nearby – the team needs your input before they make the decision. Give them an opportunity to ask you questions and get your input, and then you can inquire about their inputs, the risks they considered, and their decision-making process.

You're setting a pattern for future decisions, creating clear guidelines and a transparent system for the team to seek your input, support, and feedback.

Summary

Growing autonomy is a leader's job, and there's a process to do it. Remember that teaching others how to make effective decisions in specific situations is an ongoing process. Patience and persistence will be your allies in nurturing autonomy over time.

In the future, let's explore an important aspect of delegation: when it's appropriate to delegate, and how much to delegate.

For more, subscribe to our newsletter ⧉ or check out our upcoming classes! ⧉ Also, subscribe to our YouTube channel ⧉, follow us on Twitter ⧉, or connect with us on LinkedIn ⧉!

Want to chat? Reach out to info@unstuckagile.com ⧉ so we can help you get Unstuck!

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The Struggle Of Organizational Overweight

Barry Overeem
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

June 4, 2023

★ 5 from 2 ratings

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Lose weight and increase agility. That would be a good New Year's resolution for many organizations. In the past year(s), I've been in touch with lots of teams and organizations. And although some of them are in good shape, many still suffer from organizational overweight. ⚖️

Interestingly, most of them already pledged to lose "weight" years ago. That was the primary purpose of their Agile transformation. But instead of losing weight, they gained weight. And instead of increasing agility, they only become more rigid, slow, and sluggish.

So what happened? 🤔

I don't know the details of all the teams and organizations, but I do see some patterns…

1️⃣ Going on a diet requires discipline, resilience 💪, and patience. Not every organization is able/willing to show this. If the first results don't show up quickly, they give up and move back to the old way of working, or they try a new diet.

2️⃣ Changing habits is difficult, especially if it impacts you personally, and not someone else. If you can't put the blame on other teams or departments, you'll quickly learn if you really wanted to change.

3️⃣ Organizations don't know HOW to improve. They understand weight must be decreased, they even know how much weight they must lose, but how? ✊

4️⃣ Organizations don't know how to set SMALL improvements. Even if organizations know what to improve, they get stuck in way too big of improvements. So nobody knows how to get started. What would be the first step? 🤔

5️⃣ Organizations set unrealistic goals. An ambitious goal can boost morale 💯, yet a totally unrealistic goal can also be highly demotivating. Especially if nobody — except management — was included in setting the goal.

6️⃣ Removing existing parts is more difficult than adding something new. Instead of making tough decisions and removing roles, processes, or practices, it's easier to add something new hoping it will magically 🪄 improve the situation.

7️⃣ Organizations are addicted to fast food consultancy 🍔. This is the type of consultancy that feels good in the short term but is actually unhealthy in the long term. Don't fall into the trap of the sugar rush, you'll regret it and will only gain weight.

Luckily, I have also noticed that many organizations have learned that their existing "Agile transformation" only made them more unhealthy. Maybe this needed to happen first before they are really open to some creative destruction. 🤲

10 Ideas to Lose Weight And Increase Agility

So what can you do to support your organization lose weight and increase agility? I'll share 10 ideas to help you get started. All of them are based on Liberating Structures. Because using these structures shouldn't be a goal in itself, I'll emphasize their purpose and possibilities. Check the related blog posts for a step-by-step explanation.

Having a shared, clear, and inspiring purpose will drastically increase your chances of success. Purpose-To-Practice ⬀ (P2P) helps you shape resilient initiatives and is ideally suited to kickstart the ambition to lose organizational weight. The first step is to define this purpose together. From there, P2P covers other essential elements — principles, participants, structure, and practices — that are designed to help achieve that purpose. Because everyone is involved in defining these essential elements, you ensure shared understanding and encourage self-organization.
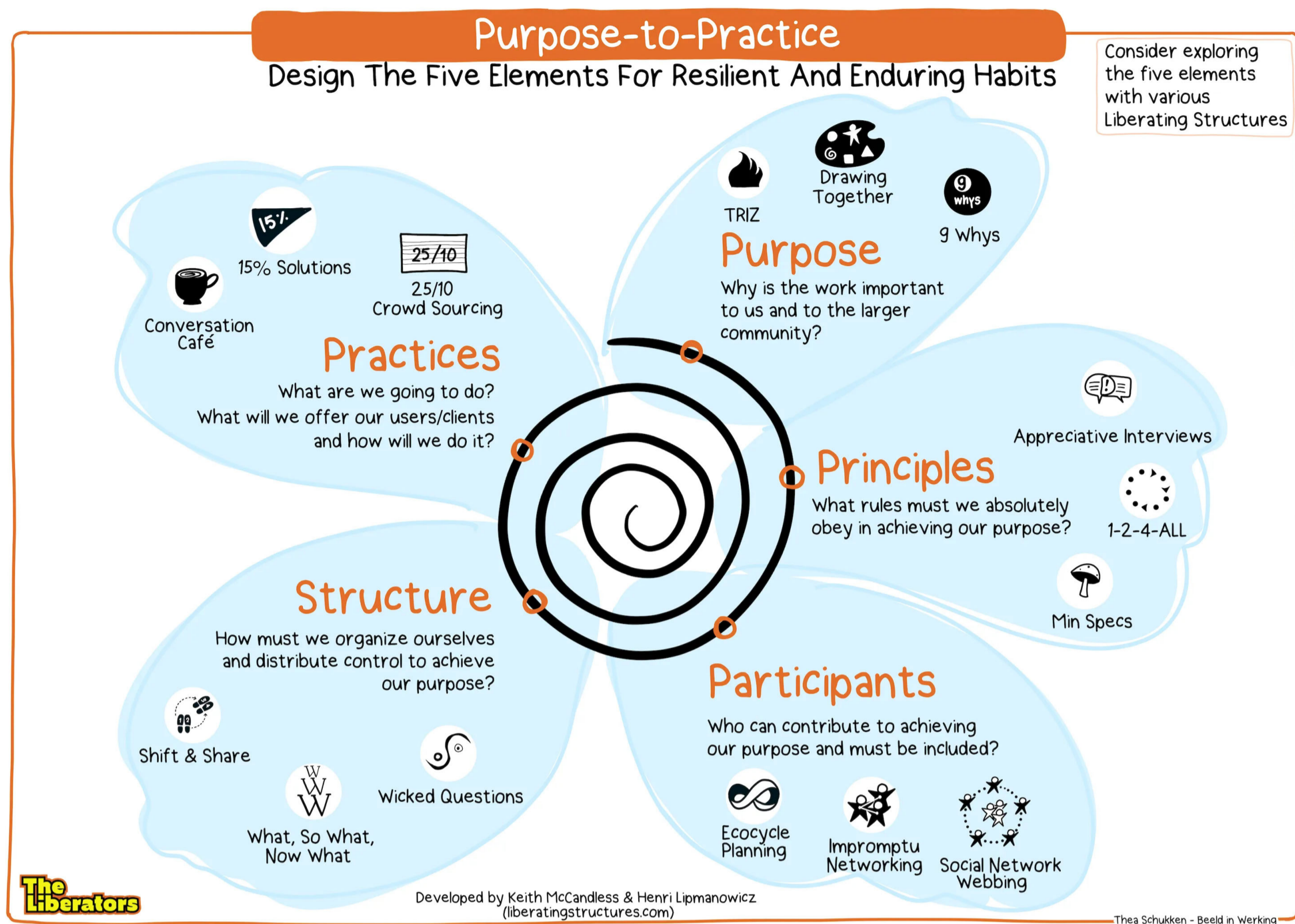

You can download a high-resolution version of this illustration here ⬀.

2. Trigger creative destruction

The purpose of Ecocycle Planning ⬀ is to analyze the full portfolio of activities and relationships to identify obstacles and opportunities for progress. Ecocycle Planning is about exploring what it is that you're keeping in the air (but shouldn't), and what it is that you aren't (but should). Try this exercise within your organization, and plot all the activities, roles, projects, processes, and relationships on the Ecocycle. Analyze where things are stuck in the traps, and determine how to set things in motion. If it's too much for one Ecocycle, you can also decide to focus on a specific area.

3. Make changes in the organizational system

Organizations are complex systems. They are made up of many layers, components, and elements that interact in unexpected and unpredictable ways. This interplay guides and shapes our behavior and what is possible. Systems Thinking offers a perspective on how we can influence complex systems. It invites us to look for patterns in the entire system and identify potential leverage points. Once we find the proper leverage points, even a small push can trigger a big change. Use the Liberating Structure "Panarchy ⬀" to find these leverage points, and remove bottlenecks & dependencies that prevent organizations from losing weight.

Developed by Keith McCandless & Henri Lipmanowicz.
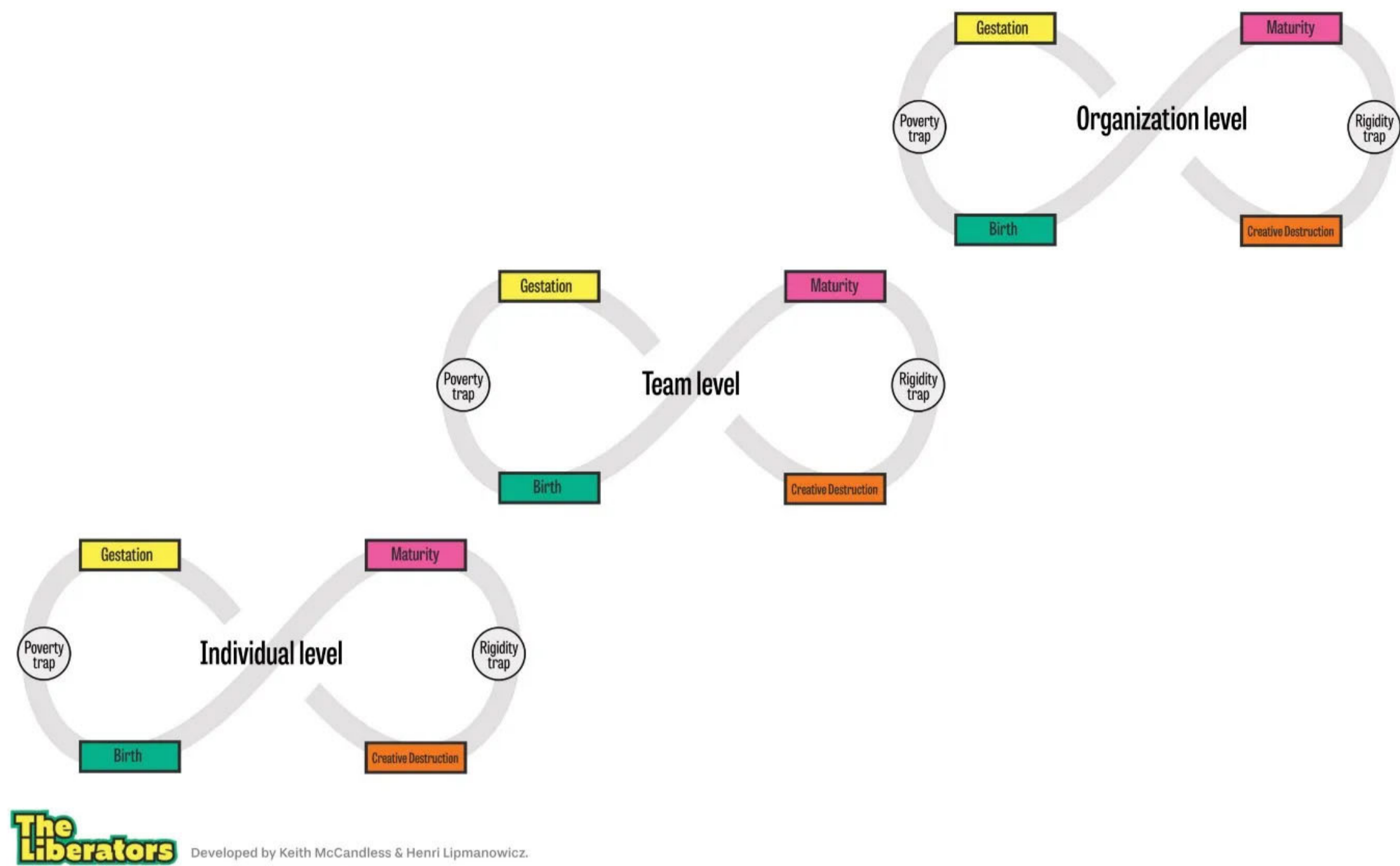
In Panarchy, the analysis shifts from one level to many different levels. This is just one example — you can add many more or add entirely different levels (e.g. culture, products).

4. Stop unhealthy and counterproductive behavior

TRIZ ⬀ is one of the most confronting, painful, and yet also powerful Liberating Structures. It invites the creative destruction of activities and behaviors that limit innovation and productivity. In the first round, you ask everyone to list all the activities they can do, and the behavior they can show, to become the most heavyweight organization ever! In the second round, everyone marks the things they are actually already doing. This quickly illuminates all the existing unhealthy and counterproductive behaviors. In the third round, everyone works together to determine how they'll stop this behavior from showing up again.

5. Discover essential needs and activities

Gaining weight as an organization is a slow process that takes years. For a long time, it can even go unnoticed. Over time, organizations slowly gain weight by adding roles, activities, processes, rules, governance, departments, etc. However, it won't go unnoticed forever. Even if the company is still in denial, the harsh reality of being too slow, too rigid, and too sluggish will show up. Customers that wait too long for answers, products that won't ship, and problems that don't get fixed.

This is where "Min Specs ⬀" can show its value. It offers a balance between first exploring the entire field of do's and must not do's, and then aggressively narrowing down to what is absolutely essential. Given all the things we do as an organization, what is truly the absolute essential? And what are things we can actually do without?

6. Refine your improvements

As mentioned above, many organizations don't know how to set small improvements. Even if organizations know what to improve, they get stuck in way too big of improvements. In the article "How To Refinement Your Improvements Into Actionable Quick Tips ⬀", I address this problem and explain how 15% Solutions can help. They're not the ultimate solutions to all your problems, but they will encourage the team to continuously make small improvements. Small steps in the right direction. They'll allow the team to learn what is needed, identify the next steps, and simply boost team morale by showing change is possible! In short, lose organizational weight one pound at a time.

Trigger BIG change by starting small with '[15% Solutions](#)⧉'.

7. Face paradoxical challenges

Good intentions and ambitions often get stuck because of paradoxical challenges. Despite good intentions, things just don't seem to work out. Whenever this happens, there's probably a [Wicked Question](#)⧉ at play. A Wicked Question creates transparency about seemingly paradoxical realities that exist side-by-side. By accepting both realities, you can engage in deeper strategic thinking and explore new possibilities.

In their aim to lose weight and increase agility, organizations can end up facing dozens of Wicked Questions. For example, "How is it that we want to deliver the best support and quality to our clients, and use minimal processes, governance, and quality checks simultaneously?". Work together to make the paradoxical challenges visible that your organization faces in its ambition to lose weight, and use "[Integrated~Autonomy](#)⧉" to learn how to effectively navigate the challenges.

8. Share success stories

Losing organizational weight and increasing agility isn't easy. You'll probably face many challenges that are difficult to resolve. Lack of improvement can start a negative spiral of blaming & complaining, which demotivates everyone. The Liberating Structure "[Appreciate Interviews](#)⧉" is a great remedy to prevent or resolve this spiral of negativism. Starting from what goes well — instead of what doesn't — it liberates spontaneous momentum and insights for positive change as "hidden" success stories are uncovered. Give it a try, share successful moments of organizational weight loss from the past, and work together to determine how you can make it happen in the present as well.

"[Appreciate Interviews](#)⧉" is a great remedy to prevent or resolve a spiral of negativism by focusing on successful moments from the past, and bringing them back to the future.

9. Learn from other organizations

Whenever you hear "This is just the way things work in our organization" alarm bells should start ringing. Especially when it's a widespread belief within the organization. If hardly anyone believes the organization will lose weight, it's good to bring some fresh insights. Not from a trainer, coach, or consultant with a nice story — which can be helpful, but if it's only theoretical, also frustrating —, but from other organizations that have managed to lose weight. Ideally organizations from the same size and/or industries. The Liberating Structure "UX Fishbowl ↗" is a great way to have people from different organizations share their experiences, and to offer everyone the opportunity to ask their burning questions.

10. Express essential needs clearly

One reason that organizational change often doesn't happen is because of unclear requests and expectations. Clearly expressing what we need from others to succeed isn't something we're very good at. It's easy to get stuck in vague requests like "We need to communicate openly" or "I need your support". It's no wonder that the response to these needs is often equally vague, like "I will do my best" or "We'll see". Unclear requests for help are often met with equally unclear commitments. The Liberating Structure "What I Need From You ↗" is designed as an antidote to the diffusion of accountability that is often prevalent in organizations and makes it hard to be successful. Give this exercise a try, and make super clear support requests to other teams, departments, and managers, necessary to lose organizational weight.

One reason that organizational change often doesn't happen is because of unclear requests and expectations. WINFY can help you resolve this problem.

Closing

In this blog post, I shared 10 ideas to help your organization get started with losing weight and increasing agility. Ideas to rethink existing roles, activities, processes, rules, governance, etc. What can you change in order to become faster, less rigid, and more agile? In my experience, Liberating Structure can help you make the current situation (painfully) visible, spark meaningful change, and help you define the next small steps.

❓ What causes for organizational overweight do you recognize?
❓ What other reasons have you experienced?
❓ What is an organizational change you'd like to see happen, and what would be your recommendation to start improving?

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