Adopting Agile? Be prepared for organizational transformation
We live in a world of swift transformation. What was gospel the last quarter may not remain the holy truth in the next. Even industries where change cycles have historically been slow - such as airlines, utilities, medical diagnostics - are facing unanticipated change. The advent of “Digital” and the focus on “User Experience” promises a customized user experience with very quick turn-around time. The high rate of business change necessitates a development philosophy that is focussed on delivering business value and within the rapidly evolving environment. Agile promises to deliver this and more.
Agile at scale

Agile is a time-boxed, iterative way of working that solves critical problems in development:

- Improving Time to Market with early and frequent delivery of features prioritized by business
- Better product quality driven by a focus on in-sprint testing and automation
- Visibility into progress ensuring issues can be identified early to reduce risk
- Building the right product instead of delivering a “successful project” designed several months ago and whose relevance may have changed

Naturally, organizations that have implemented Agile within small pockets are smitten by the results. Result: suddenly, the entire organization wants to go Agile.

76% of CIOs are expected to adopt Agile methods in 2016 [Gartner, The Gartner Scenario for IT Services Providers: IT Services in a Digital Future, Allie Young, Gianluca Tramacere, Ed Anderson, 26 April 2016]-which to us means one of the worst things an organization can do is ignore Agile.
The key challenges

However, when the entire organization embraces Agile, major challenges begin to arise.

While adopting Agile at a unit level is relatively easier, scaling is tough. This is because a small team may do well—but it will fail to generate value when all the other teams don’t work in a synergistic fashion for end-to-end efficiency.

If an organization is to be fully Agile, it needs to have teams several small and specialized teams working in a synchronous fashion to develop on cadence and be ready to release on demand. But it is no secret that achieving global optima is tough back-breaking business.

Overcoming the challenges

At Wipro, we use the term Enterprise Agility to describe a state where the various parts of the enterprise work cohesively across multiple areas to enable a cultural transformation and a shift in mind-set. Some of these core areas are:

People/ Culture: The key goal is to ensure collaboration. This is possible when traditional hierarchical, command-and-control structures are replaced by structures that encourage self-organisation and when roles and responsibilities (Scrum Master, Scrum of Scrum Master and Product Owner etc.) are created with a defined career framework, supported by role-based competency development programs.

Training/ Skilling: A major component of success is reskilling individuals, shifting them from being I (uniskilled) to Pi/ π (multiskilled). Success also depends on tweaking organizational policies to facilitate self-organization and reward performance based on collaboration.

Processes: In our experience, processes that allow value to flow form the foundation for successful Agile implementation. When processes are not in sync, value gets obstructed. For example, if the development team has software releases every six months and the marketing team wants it every six weeks, there is bound to be dissonance in the organization. An organization-wide cadence is important.

Budgeting: It is equally important to align business processes like portfolio planning and budgeting with Agile values. If planning and budgeting follow a rigid yearly cycle, business won’t be able to reprioritize critical activities. For example an Agile project may require incremental funding with an assumption that further funding will be provided based on business value delivered. This requires the budgeting process to change from a yearly cadence to one which is more short term.
Two things become clear from the nature of change required of organizations with ambitions of being driven by Agile.

First, in our experience, transformations have failed when there has been a lack of strong executive sponsorship. When an organization says, “I want to be the Google of [fill in your industry name]” the implications are vast. To realize that ambition, change will touch IT, Finance, Operations, HR, Procurement and other functions and require top executive commitment.

Second, enterprises have to start ‘being Agile’ instead of ‘doing Agile’. By implication, organizations must build and internalize the philosophy of Agile which includes Lean principles such as the ruthless elimination of waste and a pinpoint focus on delivering value. The entire organization must adopt Agile instead of IT alone bearing the mantle of Agile champions. When this metamorphosis happens, you can be sure that the organization will not just react faster to change but will thrive in it.

Partner Relationship Management: With quick and unexpected changes in project scope dictated by business, it is essential to re-examine how partner and vendor contracts are structured. These contracts can’t be rigid. They can’t be based on adherence to schedule, scope and methodology. Instead, contracts should demonstrate a willingness to embrace unpredictability. In other words, partner relationship management needs to look at how Agile contracting can be adopted along with appropriate success measures to enable collaborative risk management and agility.

Tools & Technology: Agile development assumes the adoption of strong engineering practices and automation. Adoption of Extreme Programming and DevOps practices brings in Engineering Agility and ensures left shift in Quality. Leveraging a rich tool landscape, cloud enablement of infrastructure and smart practices of distributed ways of working help virtual teams deliver a seamless and consistent experience to clients.
About the author

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With over 16 years of experience, Rituparna (Ritu) Ghosh, is a General Manager with Wipro. In her 15 years with Wipro, she has held multiple roles both internal and customer facing. She currently heads the Continuous Improvement initiatives in Wipro. As a part of this, she leads the Lean, Six Sigma and Agile transformation initiatives across the organization. Ritu has been responsible for the re-launch of Lean, Six Sigma and Agile. She designed and implemented a bottom-up strategy, based on continuous improvement to drive a cultural change within the organization and deliver measurable benefit to the projects. She and her team works closely with accounts to drive Agile transformation and works closely with various functions like CHRD, Training to drive the organizational change around Agile.

Ritu is an MBA in Marketing and Strategy with graduation in Economics. She is a certified Black Belt in DMAIC and trained in Lean, CMM™, CMMI™, ITIL™ and Agile. Ritu previously held a business role in Wipro and was responsible for driving the Process consulting business with a team of 550+ consultants. She has several white papers in her name which have been published in industry bodies like SEI and ANQ.

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