

Introduction to Agile Change Management

Introduction

Agile change management is a description I came up with in response to the agile methodologies that dealt with IT development that ignored the need to create new ways of working alongside new features and functionality. I was frustrated that the ideas of incremental, iterative planning, prioritisation using business value were only being used to develop tangible change, not behavioural change. Since I set out my approach to applying agile to achieving change at work, it has become a best selling book and two very popular [global certifications](#).

Agile Means Different Things to Different People

Agile is a buzzword that everyone is talking about, but which is interpreted differently depending who you talk to. When I am in the boardroom, Agile is perceived as a mechanism for implementing change faster and getting ideas to market ahead of the competition. It is seen as a competitive advantage and strategically important. However, at a senior level the problem is that it is regarded as a mechanism, when it is a cultural change, because it is not a set of processes, it is a way of thinking and behaving.

For my clients in IT development and delivery, Agile is represented by a collection of methodologies including Scrum®, SAFe® and AgilePM®. However, whilst this group follow the principles and techniques of Agile, too often they don't have the clout to implement the cultural change needed to gain wide adoption of their approach.

For my clients in project and change management, Agile is too often a way to deliver change, but without the rigour offered by framing it as an initiative. Therefore, they are working with project teams who want to get on and deliver, and who have little patience for producing the business case, the strategies for managing people, quality and approach.

Why are Agile Methods so Popular?

The world is an uncertain place, which means that the certainty needed to plan any initiative in detail at the start and manage that plan over several years is no longer appropriate. It is better to begin with an idea of the capability you want to achieve but remain flexible as to how it becomes a reality. In this way, it is possible to respond to shifts and changes in markets, customer and supplier requirements, innovations in systems and the use of data.

I think the adoption of Agile approaches has grown exponentially as it is a logical answer to uncertainty. Start small, don't plan everything at once and expect changes. A natural response to uncertainty is not to commit all your resources to a solution that might not be the right answer. It is better to create part of the solution, try it out and get the feedback from those affected as to how effective it is before deciding what element of the overall solution to deliver next.

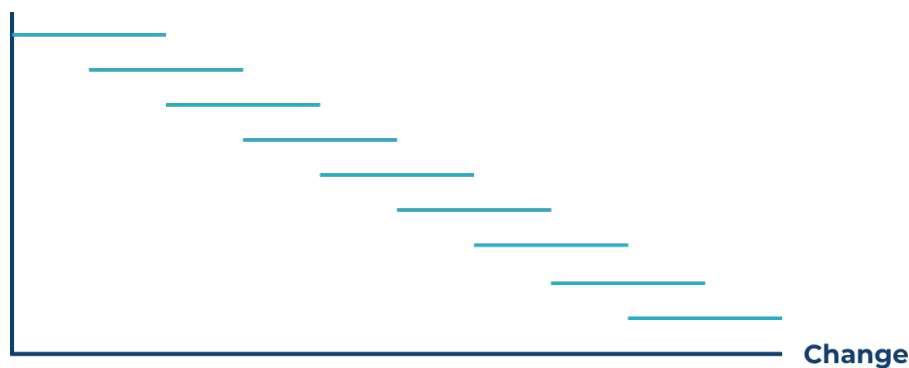


What is Agile Change Management?

Agile methods are concerned with iterative delivery, delivering early in the lifecycle to create return on investment as soon as possible. This early return on investment helps to fund more deliveries that take place frequently throughout the life of the change initiative.

This is a description of Agile development, most commonly used by IT, but also applies to agile marketing campaigns, training programmes and implementations of new products and services. Agile is different to more traditional methods (often referred to as a waterfall style) because they do not wait until every aspect of the initiative has been completed before the deliverables are handed over to users.

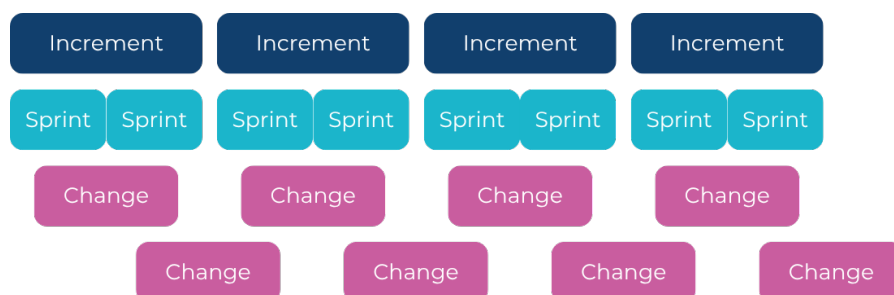
Waterfall Approach



In these traditional projects, as change comes at the end of a significant amount of work, and is packaged as one change, only one wave of change management activities is needed. However, the change might be significant and need a lot of explaining, with many amendments and innovations to business as usual.

In an Agile approach, change is frequent, therefore, it is assumed that each of the changes create only a small amount of change to business as usual. However, there is need to be able to manage multiple waves of change.

Agile Approach



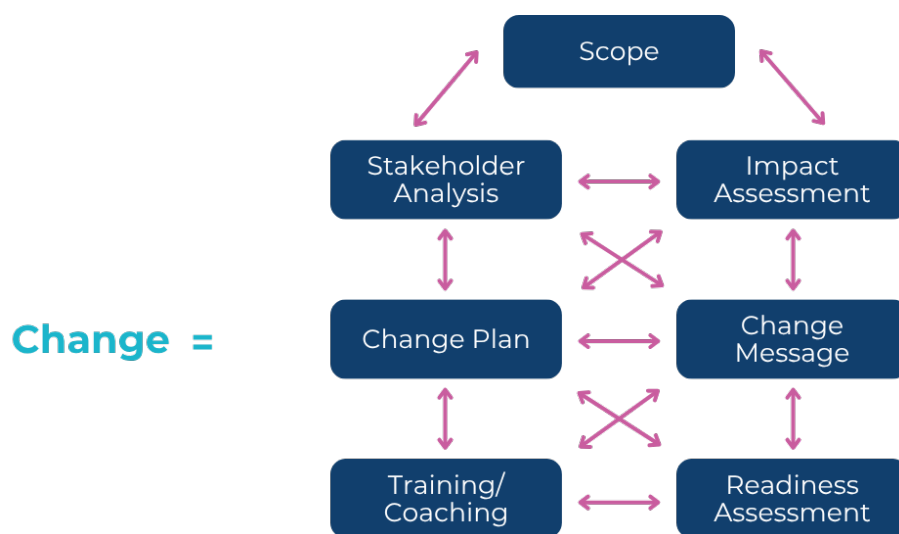
Agile change management is a natural extension of Agile development methodologies including Scrum®, SAFe® and AgilePM® which set out how best to create a 'production line' that frequently delivers tangible change in the form of new features and functionality.

Agile change management partners the change management activities with the incremental delivery from each of the sprints and/or increments of Agile development.

How to Achieve Agile Change Management

The frequency of change generated by Agile approaches means that the traditional change management activities have to speed up. Essentially, we are creating mini waves of change to take place alongside delivery of change to the business. These mini waves of change can only be achieved if the organisation has a well-developed approach to leading its staff through change.

Each of these mini-waves of change comprise key elements of the change process that are needed to support people through change. As shown in this diagram, they are inter-related, with each contributing to the successful adoption of new ways of working.



Scope – clarifying what will and will not change as a result of the project deliverables. What needs to change will affect who needs to be involved and what changes they will have to make, so it is important that in Agile change management there is a lot of sharing of information between those responsible for project delivery and those responsible for creating new ways of working.

Stakeholder Analysis and **Impact Assessment** – identify who must change their ways of working in response to the tangible changes being delivered and carry out a tactical impact assessment that examines what processes, standards, metrics and data must change as a result.

Change Message – ask basic questions about how much customers or suppliers need to know about this change and decide on the key messages about the change that staff must be given.

Change Plan - identify all the change activities that enable those impacted to participate in the change and capture these in the Change plan.

Provide the necessary **training and coaching** as people transition to new ways of working, and partner this with **Readiness Assessments** to check that all preparations have been completed.

Simplify Change Management Activities

In an Agile environment it is helpful to 'automate' these activities. Make them as simple to understand and easy to carry out as possible, so that they can be undertaken quickly (because the time between changes is short) and frequently (because the volume and regularity of change is high).

As part of the completion of every Sprint, run through a checklist of points to ascertain the scope of the changes to business as usual that need to take place. For example:

- Are we changing the inputs to any of our processes? This includes the data we make available to systems, the format of this data, the time when it is available etc
- Do we need to change our operational processes? This includes removing steps from the process because we have automated the work or adding in new quality reviews or sign offs.
- Do we need to change our maintenance processes? This includes contracts for support, timetabling updates etc
- Do we need to change our security processes? This includes who can access systems and information and what information can be changed or shared.

Use the scope of the change to identify the stakeholders using a pre-prepared list of those likely to be impacted. Have a set of standard questions available to ascertain what needs to change. For example:

- Roles, responsibilities, reporting lines and levels of authority
- Activities in a process
- Documentation used to carry out a process
- Frequency and/or time when set tasks are carried out
- Equipment needed to complete tasks

Use this information to identify the actions needed to make change happen. To appeal to your Agile colleagues, write them up as User Stories.

User Stories

A User Story is a way of expressing an objective or requirement so that it is directly attributable to the individual or group that needs it:

As a.....STAKEHOLDER

I need.....REQUIREMENT

So that.....BENEFIT

For example:

As a Customer Services Manager

I need developers to show me the changes to the data input screens

So that I can identify what steps to remove from the existing process

As a Call Centre operative

I need to know what the new information we need from customers

So that I can change what I say on the phone to customers

By having these User Stories ready for inclusion in any Product Backlog, the implementation activities can be prioritised alongside the creation work from the start of the initiative.

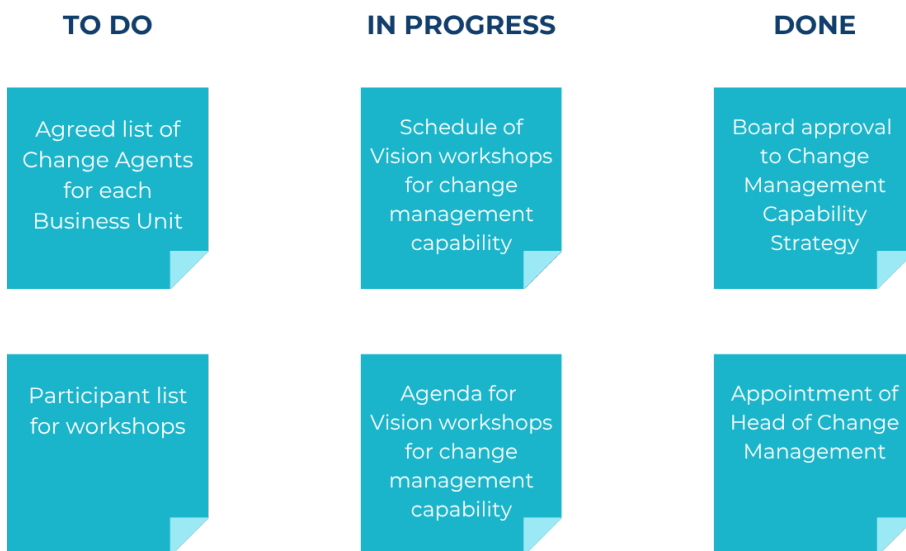
Daily Stand Ups

Daily Stand-Ups are also known as daily scrums, where all those working on the change come together to give a brief update on what they have done since the last stand-up and what they are working on between now and the next stand-up.

By including change management activities as User Stories, they get picked up as part of the work of a Sprint, so are discussed at the Daily Stand Ups. The meeting provides up to date information, ensuring that everyone knows what everyone else is working on so that it is easier to collaborate, to identify and resolve dependencies, risks and issues. The meeting helps the team get things done and minimise the need to escalate to senior managers.

Kanban Boards

I want the teams running each of the Sprints to use a Kanban Board to demonstrate their progress. Kanban is a simple technique for visualising the work involved in making change happen. There are 3 columns: To Do; In Progress; Done. Each task is written on a sticky note, and these notes are moved from column to column as the work progresses.



Each of their User Stories can be shown on a Kanban Board, so that progress can be visible to all by sharing the latest picture of the Kanban Board as part of a weekly blog. Pictures of each of these Kanban Boards can be sent in from each of the teams to form an overall Kanban Board that summarises the progress across the globe.

Cautionary Note

I think that we need to re-think how we support the implementation of change created by Agile approaches, and the ideas described above can help to regularise change management as a well-defined, and easy to apply business service.

However, I think it is important to clarify the risks that Agile approaches expose businesses to:

1. Whenever we are implementing change, we are asking humans to learn new habits and unlearn old ones. This is a complex psychological and emotional process which is hard to rush. Essentially change management involves creating new habits, and we all know how much repetition is needed before something becomes the new norm. How much can we really speed up the emotional acceptance of change and the amount of time needed to practice something until it becomes the new 'unconscious competence'?

2. Because of agile methods, the volume of change is much higher. We are not asking people to prepare themselves for one change, we are asking them to adapt to a world of constant and unrelenting change. So I think whatever we do, we have to support our actions with a narrative that sets this new reality of constant change, and that nothing is ever completed. There is another version coming soon, so people are being asked to work in an environment of non-permanence. That suits those who believe change is good and standing still is risky. But for those who prize consistency and stability, the shocks keep coming and it is harder for them to adjust.

Conclusion

Agile continues to drive new approaches in project management and change management. I think we are only at the beginning of the journey to helping staff cope with (and perhaps even thrive) in a world of constant, unrelenting change. This paper scratches the surface of ideas to manage high volumes of change, and I would love to hear your ideas, as we need to keep learning from each other.

About the Author

I am an acknowledged thought-leader in approaches for change and transformation. I work for many globally recognised brands across different industries as well as advising governments and public sector bodies on their approach to behaviour change. My passion is helping people cope and thrive with change at work, a role that becomes more challenging as the volume of change continues to increase. I am the author of 10 books, including the Agile Change Management Handbook and Neuroscience for Change at Work. I am the founder of the global [Change Capability Community](#), and the [Capability for Change survey](#).

I regularly run events including free online coaching sessions to transfer my knowledge and to share the latest approaches and ideas about change. View my website for more information or to register.

www.capabilityforchange.com