Impact of Agile on Change Management

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Introduction

Agile approaches and techniques are having significant impact on the volume, frequency and type of change that is taking place in organisations. In this paper I want to explore how the techniques and responsibilities for managing change might change in response to the impact of Agile.

The adoption of Agile approaches continues to deepen across all organisations, in all sectors and industries. Change management continues to grow in recognition and adoption, as organisations recognise that their ability to transform to take advantage of new ideas is a competitive advantage and a survival mechanism.

The points I raise in this paper are designed to encourage collaboration between these two fast moving professional disciplines, as they are complementary to one another, with the existence of both critical to realising the benefits of new ideas.

Agile increases volume and frequency of change

Unlike waterfall projects which have a single 'go-live' date once all of the project deliverables have been created, Agile initiatives work on a rolling basis, delivering new features to the business, and triggering new ways of working via a series of Sprints and Increments. A Sprint can be as short as two weeks, during which the team develop elements of the project. At the end of the Sprint, all the work has been quality reviewed and if it works, it is authorised for use. Sometimes these elements are not standalone and so the team will work through several Sprints until an Increment (consisting of several Sprints, so 8-12 weeks in duration) of the project can be delivered to the business. In either scenario, change is delivered to the business more frequently, and incrementally to the business.
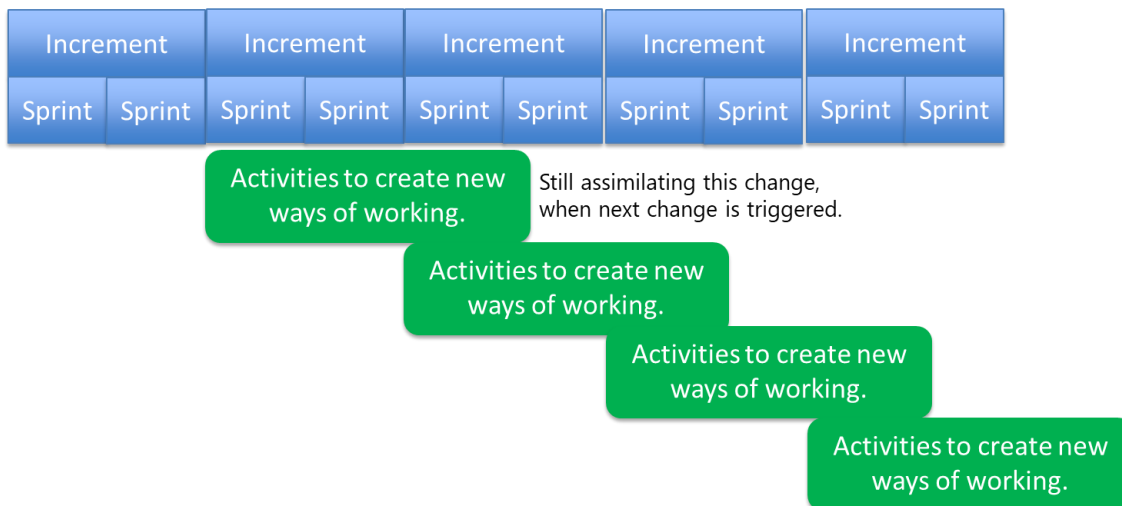
There are advantages and disadvantages to this approach. The business gets early access to deliverables, which if they offer improvements to their ways of working or enable the business to get ahead of the competition will be welcomed. By making individual features and functions available at the end of a Sprint or Increment, the scale of the change required by the business is often smaller than the 'big bang' triggered by Waterfall projects.
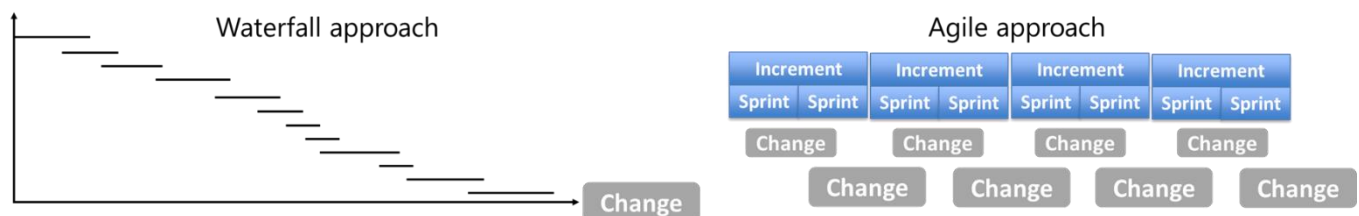
However, the frequency of the changes can be very disruptive to 'business as usual' as staff try to balance their time between designing and adopting new ways of working and managing their existing workload. In fact, one of the most frequent concerns I hear expressed by businesses who have

adopted Agile is the inability of the business to keep up with the relentless pace of the changes produced when teams are working in Sprints and Increments.

Some have described Agile as a production line for tangible changes, but without the equivalent production line for behavioural changes. Behavioural changes take longer to assimilate as they are the result of our emotional evaluation of how we are affected. The length of time is difficult to predict because it is driven by how each individual has previously experienced change and how they feel about this specific change.

Increment	Increment	Increment	Increment	Increment
Sprint	Sprint	Sprint	Sprint	Sprint	Sprint	Sprint	Sprint	Sprint	Sprint

Activities to create new ways of working.

Still assimilating this change, when next change is triggered.

Activities to create new ways of working.

Activities to create new ways of working.

Activities to create new ways of working.

Moving from current to new ways of working involves 3 overlapping processes:
1. Before deciding to change, we seek out reassurance that the change is positive and will not harm our existing status, competence and confidence.
2. Once we have satisfied ourselves that the change is 'safe' we begin a cycle where we identify the changes we need to make, practice and learn these changes, identify further changes and practice these. This is not always a smooth journey, because problems will emerge that need to be fixed.
3. Eventually we get to a point where the changes feel like routine, and we no longer view them as a change but as a normal part of our work.

These three steps take time and a great deal of mental effort. For some people the time and effort is less, because they enjoy unpredictability and believe that new equates to improvement. For others, any threat to the consistency and stability causes them stress, and they take much longer to adopt the new ways of working.

Copes easily with change

Productivity

Time
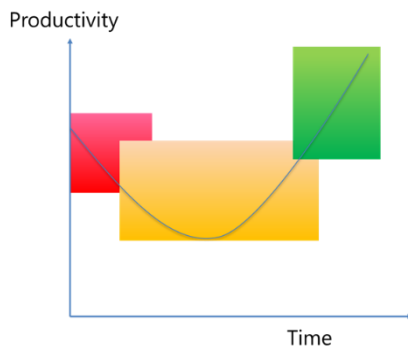
Struggles to adjust to change

Productivity

Time
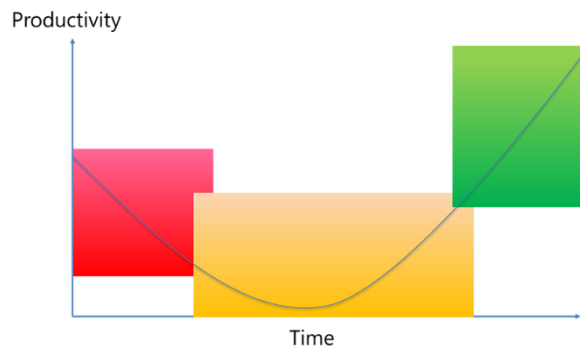
- Accept the change
- Practice the change
- Change is no longer a change

Whilst staff are struggling internally with change, customers often want stability and consistency in their dealings with an organisation, so constant, evolutionary change is not necessarily a force for good. Staff must become swans, who are paddling furiously under the water to keep pace with internal change, whilst maintaining a serene glide through the water in front of their customers.

To cope with this increase in volume and frequency of change, I am suggesting three changes to how Agile and Change Management professionals work:
- Building capability for increasing amounts of change
- Treating change as a continuous and normal part of the business landscape
- Sharing responsibility for managing the change between those who create change and those who are impacted by it.

Building capability not methodology

Change Management is a complex specialist discipline that involves psychology, emotional intelligence, neuro-science and behavioural economics. As a profession we need to use our understanding of these sciences to develop methods and techniques for encouraging people to change their ways of working.

I think a lot of good work is being done in organisations to improve how change is managed, creating the methods and frameworks to ensure change is undertaken professionally. It is now common for organisations to have a central Change Management Team of some kind. Often this team develops the approach for managing change and lends people out from this central pool to help those in the business manage change. However, I think the advent of high volumes and a rapidly increasing frequency of change means that these Change experts need to enhance their role. If managing change

continues to be the preserve of specialist change management experts, no organisation will be able to keep pace. There will not be enough change specialists to manage all of the changes taking place.

As well as developing and being the guardian of the change management approach within their organisation, the Change experts must create the capacity and capability for change at every level within the organisation.

Let's democratise change so that it becomes a part of everyone's role. The objective of expert Change Practitioners must be to transfer their knowledge of how to manage change, not to take the lead in managing individual change initiatives. Achieving this is a 3 step process:
- Explain how change happens
- Allocate change responsibilities to everyone
- Create a simple approach

Explain how change happens

An element in building the capability for change is making everyone aware how behavioural change occurs. When I look at the successful transformation programmes I have led, I can see how training staff and managers in how humans react to change has been a key element in empowering them to lead themselves and others through change. A few hours of insight ratifies what people already know, and gives them the confidence to recognise why they and their colleagues react to the challenge of adopting new ways of working the way that they do. It gives them insight in how to motivate themselves and others and how to overcome the natural resistance to doing things differently.
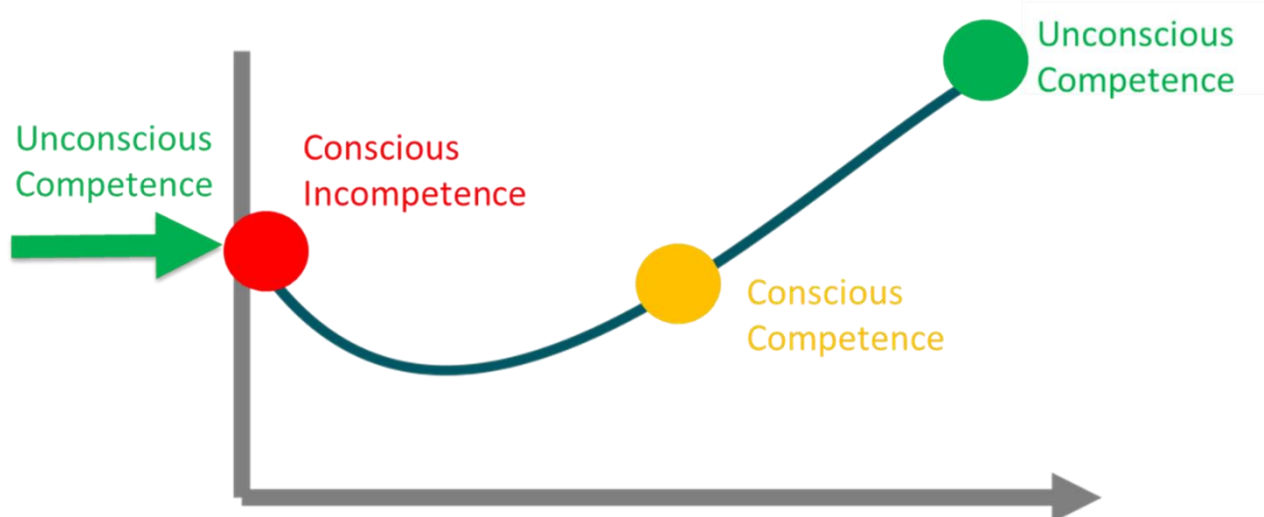
I use this and other visuals to explain how hard humans find change, as it requires to accept that our current ways of working are no longer required, so we must forget them, and we must accept the pain of learning new ways of working. Change makes us temporarily incompetent as we leave our skills in the old ways of working behind and build new skills and capabilities.

Allocate change responsibilities to everyone

Use their knowledge to describe the responsibilities and activities needed to manage change so that job descriptions can be rewritten, competency frameworks can be updated to reflect change management skills and KPIs relevant to the creation of new ways of working can be defined.

If we want to involve everyone in change we have to recognise this contribution in the way that performance is evaluated. If we ask people to take responsibility for creating new ways of working but only measure their contribution to the operation of existing ways of working, then they have no motivation to make change something they own.

For this ownership to be possible those at the most senior levels within the organisation must reframe what constitutes success, by acknowledging the need for balance between Business as Usual and Change. This balance will be different for different roles but some element of the balance is core to every role.
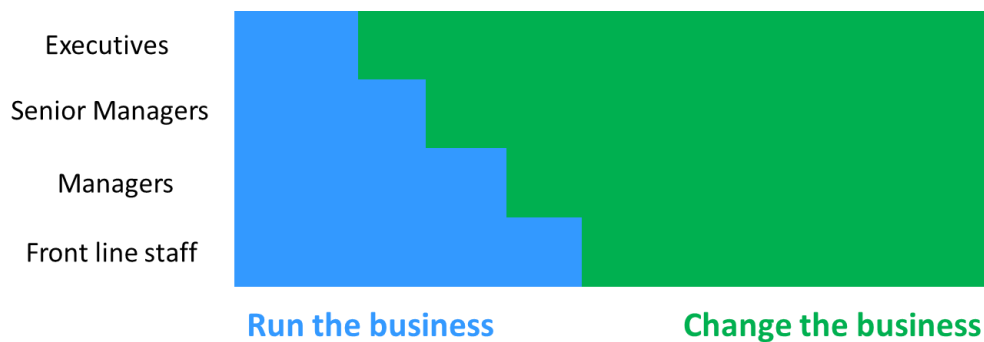

Create a simple approach

Change experts should use their knowledge and skills of how to make effective change work by creating simple toolkits that non-specialists can follow. Business as usual obligations mean that staff do not have the time to learn how to manage change. They don't want to become change management experts, they want out of the box solutions that enable them to improve and innovate current ways of working whilst still being able to meet all their existing obligations for service delivery to their colleagues and their customers.

This is a knowledge transfer responsibility, where experienced and qualified change practitioners use their extensive specialist knowledge to create intuitive and easy to apply checklists, guidance notes and tools to help those without this specialist knowledge successfully manage change.

I use this simple 5 step model to create checklists for my teams about what should be in place to make change happen. This is a summation of many years of leading change initiatives, but my clients don't

need to know (nor do they have the time to care in many cases) that this approach is based on the work of Professors Kotter, Bridges and Ledgerwood etc).
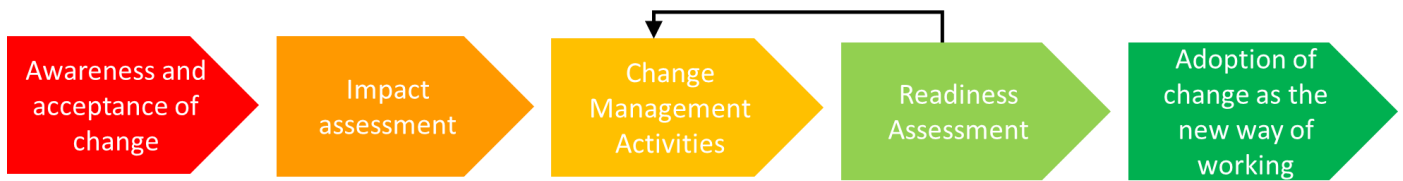
Integrated not individual change initiatives

Let's not scale up for individual change programmes, let's build a capability that treats all change as part of a continuum, where we move incrementally to achieve what we need to achieve. This continuum is more commonly described as a portfolio, where all the initiatives needed to deliver the strategic objectives of the organisation are captured. This index of initiatives is a continuous flow, as changes are completed, and new ideas are added.
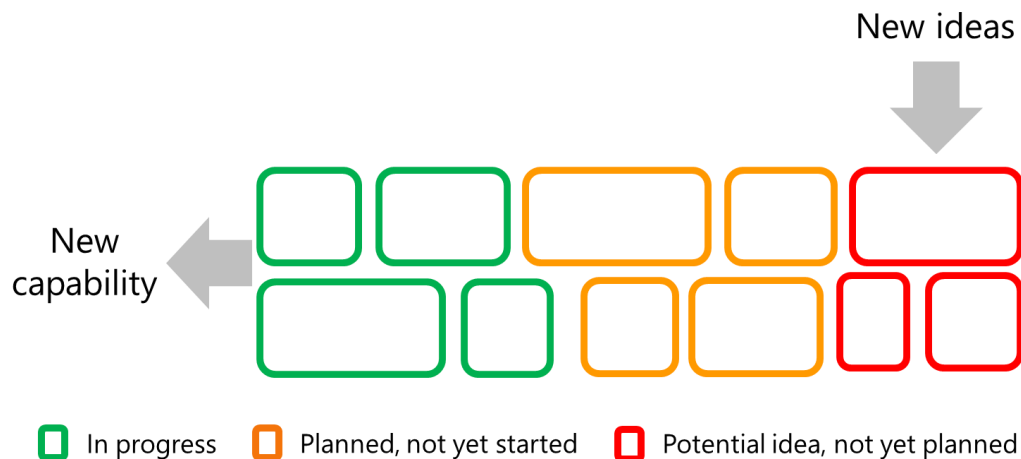
High volumes and increasing frequency of change means that treating any change initiative as a one off, after which things will return to 'normal' is no longer appropriate. I cannot scope and plan a change in ignorance of other changes that are underway or that are already being planned, as to be beneficial for the whole organisation I need to make sure my scope aligns and contributes to everything else. Working in isolation risks duplicating other changes or delivering something that runs counter to other initiatives. I think this leads us to a number of changes in how we scope, plan and report change:

- Scoping
- Planning
- Reporting

Scoping

The scope of any change or transformation has to align to the strategic objectives of the organisation. We need to use these strategic objectives to create a compelling, exciting description of how the organisation will operate in the future. We need an organisation wide destination that describes the capabilities, products, services and priorities of the organisation at a point in the future. This 'destination' becomes the fulcrum around which all change initiatives can be based. This enables an organisation wide change to be interpreted at divisional and functional levels of the organisation, creating a local view of the change, whilst preserving the 'golden thread' back to the overall change that is required.

Align these visions to deliver integrated change.

Use achievement of each vision to update Destination.

Use Destination to create the vision for each change initiative.

Destination

Destination
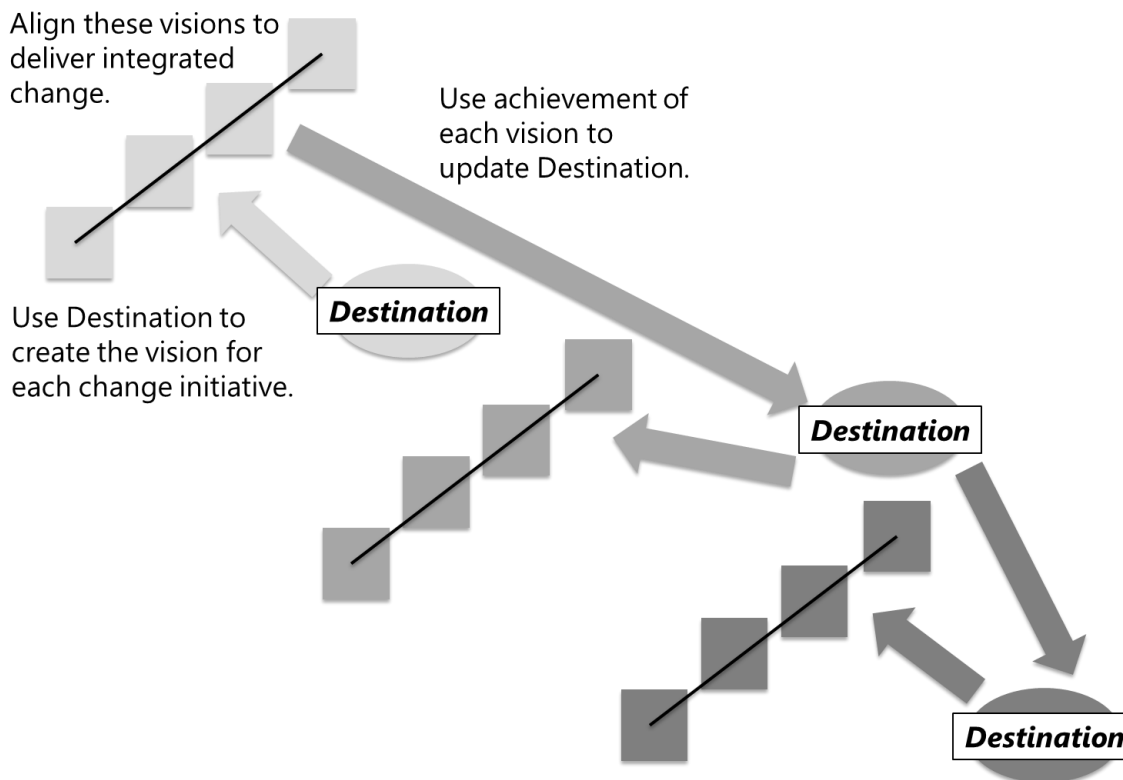
Destination

Of course, this destination is itself subject to change. It needs to be regularly redeveloped and enhanced as change is achieved and the organisation gains capability from different functions (e.g. supply chain, product development, operational improvements).

This means the inter-dependencies between ideas becomes a critical success factor of any scoping work. Those involved in creating the vision for a change are responsible for investigating the scope of other initiatives, identifying overlaps and gaps and confirming that the vision of one initiative aligns to the visions of other changes planned and underway.

Planning

Planning can no longer be a single activity at the start of an initiative. If we recognise that the scope of our change is continually impacted by the achievements of other changes in the organisation, then our change will be easier to accomplish if we break it into small pieces and re-plan after the achievement of each small piece. Planning then relies on frequent assessment of the current landscape, asking the question: "knowing what we know now, where should we go next?" This incremental approach is core to Agile approaches, but more importantly reflects the nature of our world today. Planning up front in a VUCA world where we are subject to volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity just doesn't make sense. If we go too far ahead in our planning, there is a good chance that circumstances will have changed, making some of our work obsolete and creating gaps that are not being filled by our original plan.

Reporting

In an environment of continuous, integrated change, the information that is reported also needs to change. As there is so much change, there is significant risk to 'business as usual' from two forces:

- Risk that the totality of impact on ways of working destabilises core processes
- Risk that so much effort and energy is concentrated on change there are insufficient resources to deliver an acceptable level of business as usual.

Reporting on the activities and achievements of change is not sufficient in this environment. Instead, we need reporting on the likely totality of impact. Using heat maps and other techniques, we need to show how many business processes and how many customer services are subject to change from each initiative in each time period. This reporting needs to be structured so that the information from all current change initiatives can be added together to give the whole picture. We know that only when this is done can the risk of overload be prevented.

	Dept 1	Dept 2	Dept 3	
New processes designed	🟩	🟩	🟩	
New roles designed	🟩	🟩	🟨	
New templates created	🟩	🟨	🟨	
Attendance at training	🟩	🟨	🟨	
Customers notified	🟩	🟨	🟥	
Suppliers notified	🟨	🟥	🟥	

Similarly, there is a need to track the amount of time and the number of people required to take part in change management activities. These include demonstrations, workshops, training courses etc that

reduce the time available for meeting the demands of business as usual. For example, an individual might be needed in a half day workshop for one change initiative but is also booked on a one day training course for another, and needs to attend several meetings to help scope yet another change. All these activities add up to something significant, so we need to think about the questions to ask to identify the total disruption across the organisation.

It isn't easy to report at this level, because those providing the information are caught up in the demands of the change they are involved in, when we are asking them to report on their initiative as part of a wider network.

Collaboration between projects and change activities

It also means that all change management activities shouldn't be the responsibility of specific change experts. Agile teams create project deliverables that trigger change at least every increment and sometimes every sprint. If they do this without providing the support for users to implement these deliverables, then very quickly a back-log of new functionality and new processes build up, which the users do not have time to assimilate as they are caught up with business as usual.
For this reason, I strongly recommend that Agile teams are encouraged to identify support activities as additional requirements that are included in the Sprint.

This creates a collaboration between the business and the project team, because the project team are defining the support they will provide to the business to help ensure that the project deliverables are adopted. I am not saying that the project team should take responsibility for creating new ways of working, as they are not part of the business and don't have that level of specialist knowledge. However, they do have expertise about the features and functionality that they are creating, and are a vital input to new ways of working. For example, new ways of working are designed as a result of understanding what is and isn't possible using the project deliverables. The project team can provide that information to the business via:

- Demonstrations at team meetings and to customers and suppliers
- Question and answer sessions at process re-design workshops
- Sand box versions of new systems so business users can experience how things work
- Guidance notes to support business users starting to use the project deliverables
- Training materials, creating scenarios and examples that form the basis of training courses in how to use the project deliverables

I have had a lot of success with my Agile teams when I get them to create User Stories describing the needs of their business users in transitioning to new ways of working. They come up with a wide variety of ways they can help, and because they are written as User Stories they can be prioritised and planned for in the Sprints, so they are delivered alongside the new project deliverables.

User stories are requirements written in the format of:

As A ......name of role

I want.....what support is needed to implement the change

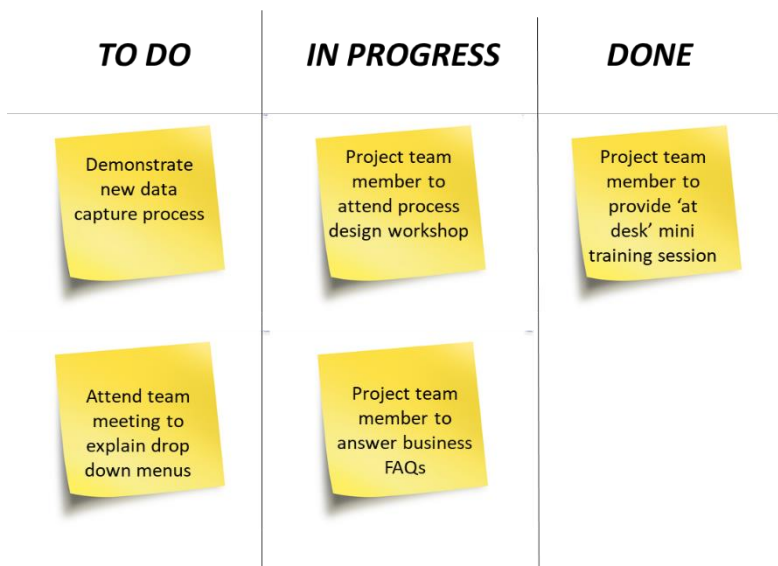**So that**.....assistance, advantage or benefit that this work will create

The 'As A...' aligns the requirement to a specific stakeholder or stakeholder group so it clarifies who the activity is going to support. It is important for the project team to make sure that they have User Stories that address the needs of all the business functions that are impacted by what they are creating.

The 'I want' articulates what is needed at a low level of detail. This helps to break the support activity into small steps that fits well with the concept of Sprints and in using Kanban. The project team need to make sure that what they are promising to do can be fitted into the duration of their Sprint.

The 'So that....' is a way of ensuring that the support activity that the project team are undertaking will assist the users in adopting the change, and ensuring the project deliverables become an integral part of 'Business as Usual'.

I have seen how this helps create an environment where people feel they are truly working together, instead of the change being 'done to them', with project deliverables being handed over, ready for use but without the help to make this use possible.

As Agile teams often track their progress using Kanban Boards, it is easy to create an integrated picture of all of the work needed to create and implement the deliverables. Kanban is Japanese for 'visual signal' and it is an easy way to understand how much work is in progress. 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.

TO DO	IN PROGRESS	DONE
Demonstrate new data capture process	Project team member to attend process design workshop	Project team member to provide 'at desk' mini training session
Attend team meeting to explain drop down menus	Project team member to answer business FAQs	

Another benefit of implementation tasks being undertaken by the project team has been how this 'rounds out' the work of the team. These User Stories enable those undertaking technical work to keep in the forefront of their minds how their work might be used in practice, which has a balancing effect on what they create. It is always possible to add in features and functionality because they are technically possible, even if they aren't practically useful. However, if you are responsible for supporting the implementation as well as creating the tangible changes, then I have seen how this urge to add in extra features is curbed by reality.

Conclusion

Change management has to change, because the pressures from Agile working continue to increase the volume and frequency of changes experienced by internal business users, customers and suppliers.

I am very aware that I am writing this paper at a point in time, and if I were to write it 6 months from now, there would be more examples to share as organisations are at the forefront of adopting to the impact of Agile. Only today, I heard from one of my clients, a global organisation, that they have put in place a portfolio management process that is designed to enable staff to see the integrated nature of the many changes that they are making.

I hope this paper has triggered some ideas of your own, and please get in contact if you would like me to share your examples in future work.

About the author

I have been responsible for the successful delivery of effective change and for creating environments that support transformational change for over twenty years. I have an impressive track record of successful consulting assignments and I am an acknowledged thought leader in Change Management.

I am the Co-Chair of the Change Management Institute UK and a respected author of text books and articles on change, project and programme management. I am a talented communicator with a reputation for delivering complex information with humour and passion. I draw on my wealth of practical experience to illustrate concepts and to engage my audience in lively debates on advantages and disadvantages of each approach that I outline.

To access more resources about change management, connect with Melanie on LinkedIn
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