

AGILE BULLETIN 2025

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INTRODUCTION

Another year flew by. It seems like just a moment ago, we were packing up from Agile 2024. And now, here we are at Agile 2025 and Mile High Agile, back with a new issue of Agile Bulletin. It's our third year publishing, and we could not be more excited about the articles we have this year.

We're thrilled to share that over 90% of last year's contributors returned, and even more fresh voices joined in. The community is growing, and so is the value we can deliver together. We've seen more participation, more bold ideas, and more drive to make real change happen in how Agile is practiced and not just preached.

While last year brought anxiety around job cuts and market contraction, this year brings a different kind of tension: AI hysteria. But here's the silver lining. This moment is pushing organizations to finally rethink how they work. More teams are breaking down silos, embracing cross-functional or fusion models that bring business and tech together to co-create, innovate, and truly own the product journey from concept to cash.

It's not just Agile in theory. It's Agility in action.



We remain committed to offering sharp insights and real stories from the frontlines. The Agile Bulletin continues to feature contrarian views, spotlight hidden struggles, and celebrate unsung wins. All to spark honest conversations and fuel meaningful progress.

To all the leaders, who I had an honor to interview in the past eight months, thank you. Your insights will help this community grow.

To all our contributors, thank you. Without you, this would have never been possible.

To the community, thank you. Your downloads, shares, comments, and support mean the world. You're the reason we keep pushing forward.

Cheers to our team, where everyone stepped outside of their comfort zone to make this bulletin happen.

And if you're at Agile 2025 or Mile High Agile, stop by and say hi. Tell us what's working, what's not, and how Agile Bulletin can serve you better in the year ahead.

With deep gratitude,

Ivan Gekht
CEO, Gehtsoft USA



Gary Cohen is a product and organizational change consultant helping teams navigate complexity and drive meaningful change. He blends systems thinking, lean practices, and product discovery to guide organizations through continuous transformation in today's fast-moving, AI-influenced landscape. You can contact Gary at gary@practical-agility.com, check out his blog at practical-agility.com/blog, and subscribe to his free monthly newsletter on LinkedIn, "Are We There Yet?".



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THE MYTH OF THE FINISH LINE: LEADING IN AN AGE OF PERPETUAL CHANGE

[1] Mankins, M., Litre, P. (2024). Transformations That Work. Harvard Business Review.

<https://hbr.org/2024/05/transformations-that-work>



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Organizational change has traditionally been viewed as a transformative journey with clearly marked beginnings and endings: launching initiatives, rolling out new structures or systems, and celebrating completion once the dust settles. While these grand transformation efforts may occasionally be necessary, this approach has significant drawbacks.

Large-scale transformations are expensive, time-consuming, and frequently fail to achieve their intended outcomes [1]. Beyond the financial and strategic risks, such change is incredibly taxing on the individuals in the organization who must process, accept, and adapt to shifts thrust upon them (see numerous references on the Satir change curve).

Today's organizations face an even more daunting challenge due to the accelerating pace of external change in the VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous) world. How realistic is it to complete a 12- to 24-month discrete transformation effort when everything around the organization (customers, technology, regulation, society, and the economy) is evolving significantly during that period? Attempting to manage multiple simultaneous large-scale transformations is equally untenable.

Consequently, leaders and teams experience widespread "change fatigue," growing skeptical of grand promises and wary of the upheaval these efforts inevitably bring.

Is there a better way?

Leveraging Continuous, Purposeful, Organic Change

A more sustainable and adaptive alternative to the exhausting cycle of grand transformations involves nurturing continuous, purposeful, and organic change. Rather than waiting for circumstances to force major upheavals, organizations that thrive in volatile environments intentionally cultivate adaptability as a core aspect of their internal culture.

Continuous change does not mean constant disruption. Instead, organic change represents a flow of incremental, manageable adjustments that evolve naturally from how the organization is designed to operate. Leaders play a vital role, not by prescribing detailed solutions, but by clearly communicating objectives, setting strategic context, and empowering teams to experiment, iterate, and adapt autonomously.

This organic approach emerges from several key practices:

- **Planting Seeds of Change:** Leaders and internal influencers proactively encourage new ideas and behaviors within teams. Rather than imposing mandates, they model, celebrate, and reward behaviors they want replicated. They provide ongoing opportunities for learning and exposure to external ideas, creating natural

incentives for others to remain curious, experiment frequently, and adopt successful practices organically.

- **Cultivating Internal Change Agents:** Organizations must identify and empower informal leaders and thought influencers at all levels. These individuals organically spread ideas, generate enthusiasm, and serve as powerful advocates for new ways of working, accelerating the diffusion of beneficial changes throughout the organization.
- **Facilitating Idea Flow:** Structures, incentive, and practices that enable rapid communication, feedback, and experimentation across teams and organizational boundaries are essential. Frequent, small-scale experiments provide low-risk opportunities for innovation, allowing successful ideas to spread and unsuccessful ones to fail quickly without major consequences.
- **Encouraging People Recombination:** Intentionally mixing individuals from different areas of the organization promotes diverse thinking and innovation. Cross-functional collaboration, job rotations, and internal talent marketplaces expose employees to new perspectives, sparking creativity and novel problem-solving approaches.

By embracing these practices, organizations shift their perception of change from an externally imposed disruption to an internally cultivated, renewable source of strength and adaptability. Continuous, purposeful, organic change then becomes not just possible, but inevitable, ensuring organizations remain resilient amid relentless external shifts.

Creating the Conditions for Continuous Change: Containers, Differences, and Exchanges

The ideas of continuous, purposeful, organic change closely align with the complexity-informed insights offered by Olsen and Eoyang in their influential work, *Facilitating Organization Change*. According to Olsen and Eoyang, leaders don't need to directly control every change. Instead, their role is to intentionally shape the conditions that foster beneficial emergence throughout the organization. They introduce three powerful lenses for creating these conditions: **containers, significant differences, and transformational exchanges**.

- **Containers** are defined spaces, physical, virtual, social, or conceptual, where individuals or groups interact meaningfully. Leaders who design and nurture effective containers (such as cross-functional teams, informal gatherings, innovation forums, or communities of practice) create fertile ground where organic innovation can flourish naturally and repeatedly.
- **Significant Differences** involve intentionally highlighting and valuing diversity in perspectives, roles, experiences, and capabilities. These differences serve as catalysts for new insights, novel approaches, and creative tension necessary to drive innovation and adaptation. By consciously surfacing these differences, rather than smoothing them over, leaders foster the emergence of transformative ideas and solutions



- **Transformational Exchanges** describe interactions that profoundly shift people's thinking, behaviors, or relationships. These are not superficial transactions, but meaningful dialogues, collaborative explorations, and cross-boundary learning experiences that change perspectives, challenge assumptions, and provoke meaningful adjustments in how work gets done.

When leaders thoughtfully combine these three elements, they amplify the benefits of organic people recombination and idea flow. They create environments where interactions naturally lead to deeper engagement, continuous learning, and sustained adaptability. These are precisely the qualities needed in today's rapidly evolving organizational landscapes.

Conclusion: Measuring and Cultivating Continuous Adaptability

To fully embrace continuous, purposeful, organic change, organizations may need new ways to assess their adaptability. Traditional measures, such as milestone completions or strict adherence to project timelines, do little to reflect how well an organization absorbs new information, experiments, and adapts in real time. Therefore, to measure adaptability fitness, leaders should consider metrics such as:

- **Idea Flow Rate:** How quickly and broadly new ideas travel across teams and organizational boundaries
- **Recombination Index:** Frequency and quality of cross-functional interactions, collaborations, and rotations
- **Experimentation Velocity:** How rapidly small-scale tests are proposed, conducted, and learned from within the organization

By monitoring these indicators, leaders gain insight into how effectively their organization is learning, adapting, and maintaining alignment with the external environment.

Cultivating this generic adaptability "muscle" significantly reduces the need for frequent, disruptive transformations. When large-scale transformation initiatives do become necessary, organizations with strong internal adaptability experience less disruption and significantly greater likelihood of success. Continuous adaptability thus becomes not just a competitive advantage, but an essential strategic capability in navigating today's unpredictable world.



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AGILE METRICS FOR BUSINESS: THE DATA THAT SAVES YOUR JOB

Marina Alex is a leading expert in AI and modern management with 12 years of experience applying Agile in business. As founder of SWAY Academy, she empowers Agile coaches to succeed with SMBs. Her work drives communication, alignment, and revenue growth across 34 industries in 21 countries.

In 2022–2025, I watched dozens of brilliant Agile coaches get laid off. The worst part? Most didn't know why. They were doing stand-ups, running retros, coaching teams — but they weren't showing results in the language businesses care about: revenue, profit, and growth. This article is your wake-up call.

The Real Problem: You're Invisible to the Business

Let's not sugarcoat it. Agile coaches are being cut — not because they're bad at their jobs, but because no one *outside the team* knows what they actually do.

You helped reduce delivery time by 20%. Great. But did the CEO notice? You facilitated 17 retrospectives. Cool. But did it raise customer retention by even 1%?

No? Then welcome to the growing list of Agile coaches labeled “too expensive” and “not strategic.”

The truth? Most Agile professionals don't know how to *measure* their value in ways that matter to the people making budget decisions. They track team velocity. Meanwhile, the CFO tracks margins. Guess who wins?



Section 1: What Pain Feels Like (Hint: It's a Surprise Layoff)

Here's the playbook I've seen too many times:

- Company cuts budgets
- C-level asks, “What's this Agile coach doing?”
- Nobody can answer in dollars
- Coach is laid off faster than you can say “Kanban”

Agile coaches are often the first to be let go *because they never showed up* in boardroom conversations.

Worse, many genuinely *believe* their work is valuable — but they can't translate it into business outcomes. They speak “Agile.” The business speaks “cash flow.” There's no interpreter.

Section 2: The Only Agile Metrics That Matter in Business

Let me make it simple. If your work doesn't show up in these three areas, you're at risk:

1. Revenue Growth
2. Profit Margins
3. Strategic Decision-Making

Forget velocity charts for a second. What if instead, your monthly report said:

“In the last 30 days, our changes increased revenue by \$84,000 by cutting delivery time and aligning team output with high-demand features.”

Now we're talking.

Want a metaphor? Imagine you're a fitness coach. Your client wants to lose 10 pounds. But you keep talking about muscle mass, water retention, and reps. Meanwhile, the scale doesn't move. That's what you sound like to executives. They want bottom-line impact. Not ceremonies.

WHAT CAN YOU DO INSTEAD?

- Connect team output to customer retention
- Show how faster delivery led to faster revenue
- Demonstrate how backlog management cut waste
- Track cost per feature delivered
- Report monthly to leadership, using *business* terms

If the CFO can't read your report, it's not a business report.

Section 3: What Success Looks Like

Case Snapshot: Retail Chain (USA, 2022)

A mid-sized retail company was struggling with low store performance. We introduced a 5-day sprint cycle focused on local customer feedback and prioritized implementation of the top 3 suggestions per store.

Results in 60 days:

- 14% increase in local revenue
- 27% reduction in product return rates
- Monthly reporting aligned with revenue goals

When we showed these numbers to the CEO, she didn't just keep the Agile team — she expanded it.

Case Snapshot: Software Company (Europe, 2024)

Agile coaches were seen as a "cost." We shifted their role to own metrics like *time to revenue* and *feature ROI*. Within 3 months, leadership asked to "clone" the team to other departments.

The secret? We didn't change the work — we changed the way we measured and reported it.

Section 4: Where to Start

Don't wait for your next layoff scare. Here's how to make your value visible — now.

1. Track Impact, Not Just Activity

Replace "we had 10 retrospectives" with "we resolved 3 process blockers that reduced delay by 25%."

2. Start Talking in Money Terms

Ask the product owner or sales team how a faster feature release affects revenue. Use that in your updates.

3. Report Monthly to Leadership

Create a simple 1-page report: What did we improve? What was the result? How does it tie to revenue/profit?

4. Build Relationships with C-Level

You need one person in leadership who sees your value. Invite them to a demo. Ask their priorities. Align with them.

5. Learn to Translate

Every Agile artifact can be translated into business terms. Think in outcomes: cost saved, revenue earned, waste reduced, customer delight.

Conclusion: Want to Stay Employed? Speak Business.

I do believe that Agile isn't dying. But the *old way* of doing Agile — ceremonies without outcomes, jargon without clarity — is.

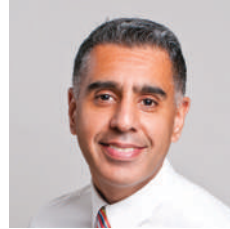
If you want to thrive in this new era, don't just coach. Don't just facilitate. **Deliver results — and prove it.**

Agile has always promised business agility. It's time we deliver on that promise. With metrics that make sense to the people signing your paycheck.

And if you're wondering where to start — start with this question:

"How does my work increase revenue or reduce cost?"

Answer that, and you'll never be laid off again.



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THE TWO-WEEK DREAM: A BEACON FOR A TRULY AGILE ORGANIZATION

Tarlochan Gill, or TC as he is often referred to, is an organization transformation co-lead and leadership mentor who works with and inspires leaders to create the organizational change they want with the people and resources they already have.

If you've spent any time in the world of Agile and Business Agility, you know it's about more than just frameworks and sticky notes. It's about building systems that adapt, learn, and thrive even in your absence. Sadly, for many leaders, those championing Agile transformations, or in the weeds with the work, the idea of stepping away for a two-week break still feels like a distant dream.

And if this is evident in your space, then I feel your organisation is far away from the outcomes that Agile and Business Agility promise. There is still a paradigm shift in the collective thinking and ways of working that needs to happen. In fact, let's take a step back. It doesn't matter which workplace philosophy you employ (or management methodology). In this modern VUCA world we live in, the outcomes the organisation desires and needs are all the same. The "how" may differ (e.g. Agile). But the ultimate results are the same.

In this article, I invite us to consider a higher dream for many business owners, or custodians of organisations, such as executives and general managers. I imagine and hope there are a few of you reading this. Even if you, like the past me, are not in a leadership role, but rather a developer, tester, or scrum master, I still believe this higher dream applies to us leaders who get things done. I feel it's a great beacon and test for a culture and way of working that serves everyone in the organisation, its customers, and the organisation system itself.



The True Measure of Leadership

So if the thought of your business running smoothly without you sends a spike of anxiety through your sprint planning, this one's for you.

I call it the Two-Week Dream. The ability to completely step away from leading a team or organization. It isn't just a test of your business systems; it's a test of the leadership in space. It's a signal that your teams are empowered, your culture is strong, and your organization is built to last. If you're ready to level up your leadership, it's time to consider what it really means to lead an Agile business.

The Moment That Sparked This Idea

Recently, I was deep in conversation with a client about an organizational transformation I'm working on. The goal? To shift the culture to be more self-organizing, adaptive, and capable of operating without constant oversight. In essence, to recreate the business owner's life, giving them the freedom to step away without the fear of chaos upon their return.

I asked them about their higher dream. That ideal state where they can take a two-week vacation, totally unplugged, and come back to a business that not only survived but thrived in their absence. To my surprise, they looked at me like I had just suggested running his business from the moon.

IF YOUR BUSINESS FALLS APART WHEN YOU TAKE TIME OFF, YOU DON'T OWN A BUSINESS - YOU OWN A JOB.

TC Gill

"You can't seriously think that's possible," they said, clearly picturing their enterprise as a delicate house of cards, held together by their constant presence.

I was genuinely shocked. Not because this fear is uncommon – quite the opposite. Many leaders have this limiting belief. They assume that without their hands on the controls, their organization would crumble. Yet, I've seen the opposite in action. I've watched businesses not only endure their leader's absence but evolve, adapt, and grow because of it. In fact, some leaders have learned this the hard way, often after a painful and catastrophic breakdown forced their teams to stand on their own two feet.

On the flip side, there is a brutal truth that I gently remind many business owners of.

“If your business falls apart when you take time off, you don’t own a business — you own a job.”

That hits home to many leaders hearing those words roll off my tongue.

It’s Not a Fantasy. I’ve Seen It. (And Lived It.)

So, reader... I’ve been a witness to it. Maybe you have as well. I’ve seen it play out multiple times. Across industries, team sizes, and leadership styles. And often, it’s preceded by some kind of breakdown—burnout, illness, divorce, existential crisis, you name it. The kind of cosmic slap that forces people to rethink the whole “I’ll rest when I retire” strategy.

BUT WHAT IF YOU DIDN’T NEED A BREAKDOWN TO MAKE A BREAK-THROUGH?

Seeing Your Business as a System

Here’s the thing: your business is a system. It’s not just a collection of departments or teams - it’s a living, breathing ecosystem. It can adapt, learn, and even thrive without you, but only if you’re willing to let it. The key is to build a self-organizing culture where leadership isn’t a bottleneck but a guiding force.

Think of it like raising a child (which, if you’re a parent, you know can be both deeply rewarding and

occasionally terrifying). At some point, you have to let them make their own decisions, learn from their mistakes, and find their own path. They can’t do that if you’re constantly micromanaging their every move. Similarly, a business needs space to learn and adapt without a parent figure hovering over every detail.

Reframing the Two-Week Dream

So, why not take this dream seriously? Why not see it as the ultimate test of your leadership? Can your business really not survive two weeks without you? If the answer is no, maybe it’s time to rethink your approach to leadership and Agile transformation.

Here are a few practical steps to get you started:

Practical Step 1: Get Your People Curious

Encourage your team to genuinely explore how Agile values and principles can come to life in their daily work... without needing you to be the centerpiece. It’s not about handing them the Agile Manifesto and expecting instant transformation. Instead, start conversations. Ask how they can evolve their ways of working and collaborating to reflect those values and principles.

Practical Step 2: Build Redundancy, Not Dependence

Think of your leadership role like an entry in a risk register. What would happen if you disappeared for a couple of weeks? Would the team be able to carry on, or would things grind to a halt? If there’s knowledge or responsibility that only exists in your head, it’s time to start sharing it. If you’re the only one who can handle a particular task or decision, that’s a risk. Mitigate it.

Practical Step 3: Test the System

Take a real break. Not the kind where you’re still checking emails every five minutes... but a proper step away. Let the team operate without you for a bit and observe what happens. Where are the cracks? Where does resilience shine through? Use those insights to improve the way your organisation is structured.

Practical Step 4: Empower the Whole System

Aim to build a truly self-organising environment... one where no single person is indispensable. Create teams that can flex, respond, and keep moving without needing constant steering.

Practical Step 5: Learn to Let Go

Trust your people. Not as a feel-good slogan; but as a core strategy for resilience. If you don’t believe your team can thrive without your direct involvement, chances are they won’t believe it either. Let go... and give them the space to grow into that trust.

The Reward for Letting Go

When you get this right, something beautiful happens. You get your life back. You get to switch off, recharge, and return with fresh ideas and renewed energy. Meanwhile, your organisation will have learned to stand on its own two feet, just like a well-raised, confident child finding their place in the world.

So, dare to take the Two-Week Dream seriously. Dare to build a business that can thrive without you. It’s healthier for you, your people, and your bottom line.

And who knows? You might even rediscover the passion that got you into this game in the first place.

I encourage you to start working toward making the Two-Week Dream a reality. It’s something I

wish for every leader... to reach a point where you’re not holding the reins, but instead letting the system run free.

IT’S SOMETHING I WISH FOR EVERY LEADER... TO REACH A POINT WHERE YOU’RE NOT HOLDING THE REINS, BUT INSTEAD LETTING THE SYSTEM RUN FREE.



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RISKY BUSINESS: WHY EVERY EXEC CONVERSATION SHOULD BE ABOUT RISK

I was recently helping a company sharpen its executive update. They had gorgeous charts, crisp bullets, shiny progress bars — everything you'd expect.

Except one thing: risk.

I finally found a “risk register,” buried so deep in the appendix that nobody ever saw it. According to meeting attendees, they never got past slide 10 before time ran out. It was almost as if by tucking it away, risks would simply vanish.

Truth bomb #1: When you're in a room full of execs, every question they fire at you is a probe for risk. They're listening for the unknowns, the “what-ifs,” the places where things could go sideways.

So why are we sweeping risks under the rug instead of putting them front and center? Because somewhere along the line, we decided that “risky” equals “scary.” We worry that admitting uncertainty makes us look weak. Some leaders — even execs — hear “risk” and translate it to “bad news.”

Truth bomb #2: Nothing you do is risk-free. Every project, every hire, every product launch has unknowns baked in. And if you want big rewards, you have to embrace risk.

The big question is: **How do we start weaving risk language into our decision-making routines, so it becomes second nature?**



A Quick Story: From Burying Risk to Leveraging It

One team I coached was terrified of sharing any downside. The team's first exec update glossed over challenges, and, unsurprisingly, the CTO grilled them: “Why didn't you mention the database scaling issues?” The answer was — they didn't want to look bad, and they didn't want to worry the execs. Their next meeting? They led with the database risk, quantified their mitigation plan, and presented trade-offs. The tone in the room shifted instantly. Instead of a grilling, they got questions about resource needs and offers to help from other departments. They turned a confidence-killer into a collaboration win.

Execs Are Already Thinking in Risk — Might as Well Join Them

Next time you're up there presenting, listen to the exec questions:

- “What's our buffer if this slips?”
- “How confident are you in that vendor?”
- “What happens if we hit a snag next quarter?”

It's all risk, all the time. If you hide it, you look like you don't see it. If you own it, you look like a leader who's on top of things.

Pro tip: Jot down every risk-related question you get. Use those exact phrases in your next slide deck. That alignment is powerful.



Jardena's Site

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Three Ways to Make Risk Your Ally

1. Risk as Information

Treat it like valuable intel, not a liability.

“We see a 60% chance the API rollout takes two extra weeks. We’ve built in a sprint buffer, and we’re checking progress every three days.”

2. Risk as a Strategy

Risk isn’t a flaw in your plan — it is the plan.

“We chose Vendor A even though it costs more, because it cuts our integration risk in half and accelerates our beta launch.”

3. Risk as a Conversation Starter

Invite everyone into the story.

“Here are our top three risks right now, our take on each, what we’ve learned since last time, and what we’re doing about them.”

Numbers Talk: Quantify Your Risks

Executives want to know what the trade-off decision is. Boil it down to a **comparison of risk and reward**. Replace vague labels with meat on the bone. The decision may be hard, but understanding the choice shouldn’t be. Give them numbers (or at least ranges):

- **Likelihood:** 20% chance? 80%?
- **Impact:** Two-week delay? \$50K overrun?
- **Confidence:** Are you 90% sure, or guessing at 60%?

“If the vendor slips two weeks (60% likelihood), we’ll push launch by one sprint, delaying revenue by \$100K. We’re 70% confident in this assessment.”

And always tie a **trade-off** to each risk:

“We can fast-track with the untested API—20% chance of a two-week slip — or stick with the legacy system and push launch by a month (5% chance of delay). Fast-track upsides include early market share; legacy system upsides include higher reliability.”

That’s the kind of choice execs live for: clear options with pros, cons, and numbers attached.

Make Risk a Habit

You don’t need a PhD in risk management. Just fold these mini-habits into your routine:

1. Slide One — Spotlight Your Risks

Start every deck with your top 3–5 risks, complete with likelihood, impact, plan, and trade-off. It signals you’re in control, not caught off guard.

2. Weekly Check-In — Surface Changes

In every status update, cover:

- **What’s new?** (emerging risks)
- **What’s changed?** (shifting likelihood or impact)
- **What’s gone away?** (retired risks)

Keep risk front and center, not buried in yesterday’s slides.

Jardena London is a consultant (the good kind), author, speaker, and CEO of Rosetta Agile. For more than 25 years, she’s been helping leaders ditch soul-crushing work and build organizations where people—and financials—can thrive.

She’s known for calling out the stuff nobody talks about: like how hiding risk makes leaders look weaker, not stronger. Her work lives at the intersection of bold truth-telling and practical transformation—helping execs get real about how decisions actually get made.

Jardena’s book, *Cultivating Transformations: A Leader’s Guide to Connecting the Soulful and Practical*, is a field guide for leading change without losing your soul in the process.

She also writes *The Soulful Lens at Work*, a newsletter for transformation-minded leaders who want sharp insights and zero fluff. Subscribe at <https://jardena-london.kit.com/newsletter-signup>.



Cultivating transformations

<http://cultivatingtransformations.com/>



Rosetta Agile

<http://rosettaagile.com/>



Jardena's Newsletter

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3. Learn & Pivot — Ask the Key Questions

At every meeting, pause and ask:

“What have we learned since last time? Does it change our plan or assumptions?”

This simple prompt turns risk discussions into real-time learning and adaptation, and prevents minor issues from snowballing.

4. Decision Frames — Tie Risks to Choices

Whenever you recommend a path, spell out the alternatives in risk/reward terms:

“Option A reduces schedule risk by 50% but increases cost by \$30K; Option B keeps costs flat but carries higher timeline risk.”

Over time, these habits normalize talking about uncertainty. They make risk part of the fabric of how you work, not a scary monster hidden in the closet.

Flip the Script on Risk

Great leaders don’t pretend to have all the answers — they’re fluent in risk. They name what could go wrong, quantify the stakes, and present clear trade-offs. Moving risk from the appendix to the opening slide, you turn uncertainty into opportunity, spark strategic conversations, and earn genuine buy-in.

Ready to see the difference? Drop that old habit of hiding risk. Lead with it, learn from it, and watch your team—and your results—thrive.

SIPS: BRINGING AGILITY TO SUSTAINABILITY

Exploring the Power of Collaborative Impact

As Agilists, we excel in fostering change, building alignment, and transforming cultures. So, what happens when we extend these principles to tackle global challenges? In this article, I delve into the inspiring journey of Sustainability Incubator Projects (SIPs), led by a diverse and passionate team, that aims to create meaningful impact beyond the corporate realm. From ambition to action, SIPs embody the spirit of experimentation, collaboration, and purpose-driven innovation, creating small steps that can lead to significant change.

The Call

You feel it; I do, too. That feeling that there has to be something more I can do, that feeling that you want to make a meaningful impact beyond work, and even on the world.

As Agilists, we certainly make an impact. We are a movement for positive change. We disrupted, converted, and helped



Joanne Stone

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She believes in the power of the collective and uses this to bring more hope to our complex world. She has been part of the Agile Community since 2012. Founder of Wick'd Agility, she helps with the adoption of Lean and Agile utilizing an in-depth knowledge of team dynamics, product management, organizational design, digital products, and how to motivate individuals and teams. She is in her third year of initiating a movement on Agilists in Sustainability where she founded the We Hope Magazine, Agilists4Planet Conference and has been a keynote on this subject. She created a mentorship group in 2017 to help over 500 new scrum masters and agile coaches and is very active globally with the Agile Community. She has over 30 years experience in IT. Loves dogs and nature. Joanne lives in Brooklin, Ontario, Canada.

A big dream. A big impact.

My dream is to use agility to impact sustainability in our backyards, our local communities. When I speak of sustainability I mean how can we make our communities sustainable now so they can thrive for future generations. From the UN perspective Sustainability includes Social, Environmental and Economic impact and the projects we have worked on have mainly been in the social and environmental areas.

SIPs stands for Sustainability Incubator Projects, a 32 hr design sprint where a group of international volunteers get together to help a leader with a cause from a local community. We pick a small part of a challenge or opportunity and design a prototype that they can use with a report which helps them move forward on their cause.

My dream is to have 10,000 of these worldwide with the outcome that gives forward moving energy to these leaders with a cause, to help employ many agilists, and perhaps to help break down these wicked sustainability problems we have in the world.

SIP sits in a broader program that is co-created with a beautiful diverse group of people: Kari McLeod, Arév Hakobyan, Pamela Castillo, and Jonathan Cortés. Each brings unique traits that have contributed to our current success. Our group has a varied background: social entrepreneurs and innovators, regenerative leaders, design thinking experts, a PhD, an Agile coach, an Executive Coach, a Team Coach, and me. Believe me, this diverse group can pack a punch.



The SIPs

www.the-sip.world



We Hope Magazine and Agilists4Planet

www.agilists4planet.com/we-hope

Our journey

The SIPs began with a hard reality check from a beautiful soul and friend of mine, Caroline Sauve from Montreal, Canada. She is the brave, daring Agile and Integral Coach who took the step to leave her comfortable Agile Coaching Consulting gigs to pursue her passion for helping organizations make a positive impact on climate change. Caroline, who is aware of my work in the Agilists4Planet movement that raises awareness about Agility and Sustainability, said, “Joanne, the awareness of what agility and sustainability are, is ok, but what we really need now is to move into action.” So, I did just that; I got into action.

We started our first experiment in 2023, which turned out to be a total failure, to be frank. We gathered a group of volunteers for three months to identify what small problem we could tackle to make restaurants more sustainable. Sounds simple, right? Well, it wasn't. We spent weeks defining sustainability and finding the right area to work on for the right reasons. We spun around in circles.

Of course, we learned from our failure, we needed more structure so we didn't spin. So in the second iteration, Arév, an amazing Design Sprint Facilitator, said, "Let's try a design sprint." I was all in. And that's how the SIP started.

Our impact

We have collaborated with a Community Garden to recruit more volunteers, partnered with a Latin American Community to enhance their services, and united a group of Latin American Communities to support the larger community's cause. Currently, we are working with another farming initiative and we are in the prototyping phase.

From these SIPs, we have created multiple different prototypes, a mini website, a flyer, a newsletter, and we are currently developing an application. We also

held a SIP-A-Thon in person in Toronto, where we applied design thinking practices to address a challenge faced by the collective of Latin American Communities. The outcome: six new ideas to work from!

Each prototype had a significant impact, including attracting more volunteers for the garden, assisting the Latin American Community in navigating cultural challenges, and helping the Collection of Latin American Communities identify groups interested in building tools to support the overall community's growth.

The impacts I loved seeing were:

- The group of international volunteers enjoyed creating and working on meaningful work outside their day jobs. We empowered them to make a difference on an important issue. This involved more than just planting trees; it utilized a group of professionals' expertise and creative skills to effect change.
- The leaders with a cause were also very pleased as they tackled an opportunity or challenge they had no time to address and received a report with concrete data that helped them with their next steps. For them, it was a refreshing burst of energy to have a group of people who loved working on their cause for free.
- The SIPsters were paid in hugs and drinks and to me that was well worth it. Human Connection.

Next Steps on the Journey: Scaling

The next challenge we faced was how to scale. How can we expand this internationally? How can we monetize our efforts?

We started to scale and look at how to monetize our efforts. We have begun training other SIP facilitators, reaching out to universities and colleges, and I, well, I am collaborating with my local government and the

community and exploring the world of community grants. The scaling hill will require some effort, but for me, it's well worth the climb.

So, reader, where do you think you can begin? Or perhaps you already have? If you've engaged in work related to sustainability (social, economic, or environmental) with agility, please share your story with

me. I am always looking for other inspiring narratives and learning other ways that agility is making an impact.

If you want to stay updated on our efforts, join our newsletter for the latest, follow me on LinkedIn, or feel free to set up a meeting anytime for a chat.





Colleen Johnson

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YOUR PROCESS ISN'T READY FOR AI

Let's be honest, the traditional tools we lean on to control software delivery (meticulous planning, rigid timeboxes, and obsessively slicing work into the smallest imaginable chunks) aren't cutting it anymore. These practices, while once helpful in managing uncertainty, are increasingly out of sync with the speed and volume of changes AI is introducing into the development process.

AI is fundamentally changing the flow of work. It shortens feedback loops, increases parallelization, and enables developers to move faster than ever before. But increasing the volume of changes in your system without visibility is a recipe for disaster. Without the right conditions in place, AI doesn't just accelerate delivery — it accelerates dysfunction.

In a recent post titled "No More Coding Vibes in the Efficiency Era"*, James Boyer puts it bluntly: "AI can help. But if your systems are broken, it will help you break them even faster!" That clarity is non-negotiable if we want to harness speed without letting the system crumble under its own weight.

Boyer, J. J. (2025, June 19). No more coding vibes in the efficiency era. devinterrupted.

<https://devinterrupted.substack.com/p/no-more-coding-vibes-in-the-efficiency>

The Foundation: Visibility and Policy

The first step toward future-proofing your delivery process isn't plugging in more tools or generating more code. It's establishing visibility and clarity. A system that isn't well-defined will collapse under the weight of AI-accelerated output.

Teams need clear, shared workflow policies that define how work flows from idea to deployment. Explicit policies like entry and exit criteria for each stage, WIP limits, and service level expectations (SLEs) give you control without relying on the illusion of fixed plans. When everyone understands what "ready" looks like, you create the conditions for flow, not just movement.

In an AI-enabled team, this might mean:

- Ensuring code generated by AI tools is reviewed before entering test.
- Limiting work in progress to avoid overwhelming QA or deployment steps.
- Flagging AI-generated outputs with metadata to track downstream quality.

The Flow: Metrics Matter More Than Ever

When AI increases the volume and velocity of work, your only hope for managing it at scale is through metrics that reflect the health of the system. Flow metrics like Work in Progress, Throughput, Cycle Time, and Work Item Age are your operational safety signals.

These metrics show you how fast work is moving, where it's piling up, and how predictable your delivery has become. They replace outdated management levers like planning-by-sprint or over-reliance on estimation.

For example, a spike in Work Item Age can tell you that faster coding isn't translating to faster delivery or that something else downstream is breaking. AI won't tell you that, but your system should.

The Friction: Spot Constraints Sooner

Once you have accelerated one part of your system you are very likely to find that you've shifted your bottlenecks to another part of the flow. And if you're not watching, those constraints will quietly throttle your delivery capability.

AI might speed up development, but what happens when:

- Testing can't keep up?
- Code reviews become a bottleneck?
- Integration pipelines fail under the increased volume?

If you're still optimizing individual steps or celebrating faster commit rates, you're missing the point. The goal isn't to go faster in development, it's to go faster to *DONE*.

This is where systems thinking matters. You need to see the whole flow and understand how a change in one part affects the rest. When you elevate one step without preparing the next, you're not gaining speed, you're creating drag.

Optimize the Whole, Not the Parts

Theory of Constraints teaches us that local optimizations are often wasted effort. The system's throughput is defined by its constraint, not how fast each team or tool appears to be moving. AI makes this even more true.

Here's what it looks like when you optimize the whole:

- You focus improvement efforts on the actual constraint, not the loudest team.
- You measure throughput as value delivery, not task completion.
- You stop glorifying being busy and start enabling flow.
- You synchronize the system to reduce idle time, overload, and rework.



Scale Flow, Not Chaos

We're entering an era where delivery speed is no longer optional. AI is raising the bar whether we're ready or not. Chasing speed without visibility, flow, and alignment is how organizations scale chaos instead of capability.

Future-proofing your process isn't about getting faster at planning, sprinting, or slicing work into task-sized tickets. It's about reinforcing the system that turns ideas into outcomes. Make all of your work visible and expose simple metrics that give you signals to take action so you can address friction before it slows you down.

The pace of AI won't wait. Build the system that can keep up now.

Colleen is the CEO of ProKanban.org, an inclusive Kanban learning community. She is also co-founder of ScatterSpoke, an Atlassian Ventures Portfolio company driving actionable improvements through retrospective data. For over 25 years, she has presented, coached and taught agile to audiences around the world. She has worked across a range of industries with clients like Wells Fargo, eTrade, Home Depot, Southwest Airlines and more. Colleen helps organizations apply a systems thinking approach to aligning flow practices end-to-end. She has served as a board member for Agile Denver, the Agile Uprising, and chair of the Mile High Agile Conference. She is happiest in the woods, camping with her three kids and very patient husband.

FIVE DIMENSIONS OF COACHING CONVERSATIONS



Nimesh Soni

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Ever notice how a single conversation can change everything? Can a conversation have a lasting impact on a person?

Not the kind filled with advice or instructions — but one where someone listens, really listens. Where silence is welcome. Where a single question lands so deeply, it lingers long after the call ends.

That's the power of a coaching conversation.

It's not just talk. It's a space for reflection, growth, and possibility. A space where the client is heard into clarity.

And if we zoom in, we'll find that powerful coaching conversations aren't random — they have structure, intention, and depth. In fact, they often flow through five powerful dimensions.

Let's explore what they are — and how they shape the way we coach.



1. The Conversational Partnership

The foundation of any coaching conversation is the sense of partnership.

This isn't a one-way interaction. It's co-created. The coach doesn't lead with answers; the coach walks alongside, inviting the client to own their path and their pace.

This dimension is rooted in trust, presence, and mutual respect. The tone is collaborative, not directive.

Can silence speak?

Yes — it absolutely can. Silence invites thought. It honors the client's inner world. And often, in the stillness, insight arrives.

Try it: In your next conversation, leave room for silence. Let it linger a few seconds longer than usual. Notice what emerges.

2. The Growth Catalyst

Coaching conversations are not just reflective — they're catalytic.

This dimension is about holding space *and* gently stretching it. Asking questions that nudge clients to examine their assumptions, expand possibilities, and shift perspective. It's about pushing our clients just a little bit, pushing them to go out of their comfort zone, and making them a bit uncomfortable! This is where actual growth happens for the client.

Coaching is a catalyst for growth, not a comfort zone.

This dimension invites challenge — with compassion. We hold the mirror up. We gently stretch the client's thinking. We notice limiting beliefs, and we help shift the lens.

Questions like:

- “What's possible if you let go of that assumption?”
- “What's one small bold move you could try this week?”

This is where transformation happens. Not because we push. But because we believe in their potential — and they start to believe in it too.

3. The Thought Partnership

Great coaching conversations are never scripted. You are dancing in the moment with the client.

This is where the coach stays attuned and responsive, not reactive. Ideas bounce, shift, and build in the moment. The coach and client think together, not for each other.

In this space, we say things like:

- “That’s interesting — want to stay with that for a moment?”
- “I’m wondering what’s just beneath that thought.”
- “What’s the question you’re not asking yet?”

This dimension is about real-time exploration. Curiosity is the guide.

4. The Mirror Metaphor

Sometimes, the client doesn’t need answers — they need to see themselves clearly.

Here, the coach becomes a mirror, reflecting what’s said (and unsaid), what’s felt, and what’s observed.

- “You mentioned freedom three times. What does that word mean to you here?”
- “I noticed you smiled when you described that moment.”
- “You got really quiet after that statement — what happened there?”

It’s subtle, powerful, and not about judgment. It’s about clarity. And that clarity can shift everything.

5. The Future-Focused Lens

Every coaching conversation lives in the present — but it’s aimed at the future. It is focused on getting the client to You 2.0, a better version of themselves.

This dimension is where vision takes shape. Where abstract thoughts get grounded into next steps. Where the conversation turns into movement.

We ask:

- “What outcome would feel meaningful?”
- “What would success look like next week?”
- “What will you try before we speak again?”

This is not just about action — it’s about intention. It’s about creativity and challenging clients to see the future version of them. It’s about progress that’s chosen, not prescribed.

A Simple Practice

Grab a notebook or open your journal.

Think back to a recent conversation that happened in your personal or professional life.

- Was it an effective and impactful conversation?
- Which of the five dimensions were most alive in that conversation?
- Which ones felt underdeveloped or missing?
- How did silence show up? Was it comfortable? Useful?

Now, before your next conversation, choose one of the dimensions to lean into more consciously. Even a small shift in awareness can deepen the entire exchange.



Quality of Conversations: Measure of Coaching Effectiveness

Coaching is not defined by a title — it’s defined by the quality of the conversation.

A coaching conversation isn’t just supportive talk. It’s a structured, sacred space for inquiry, reflection, and forward movement. It lives at the intersection of presence and purpose.

Silence can be louder than spoken words.

When practiced with intention, it becomes the space where transformation breathes.

It is about listening deeply to the client, deeply and with intention — without planning your response, without interrupting, without rushing to fix ‘them’.

I invite you to...

Interested in improving your Coaching Conversations? Your Coaching skills? I invite you to join us at our YouTube channel @Agile-CoachingToolbox for insights and practical tips on Coaching.

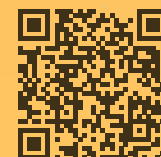
Nimesh is a Coach, Mentor, Trainer, Author, and an Enterprise Agile Transformation Consultant mentoring organizations in transition to value-driven approaches. He has been a key architect of transformation at various organizations including several of the Fortune 500 companies.

Taking a pragmatic approach towards transformation at organizations, he often mixes his agile expertise with a common sense approach while making it visual with illustrations and drawing so that it creates lasting impact.

Nimesh is an ICAgile authorized instructor as well as Certified Enterprise Coach (CEC/CSC) from Scrum Alliance and has helped various organizations as well as individuals on their transformation journey.

Nimesh teaches various certification workshops including ICAgile Fundamentals (ICP), ICAgile Team Facilitation (ICP-ATF), ICAgile Coaching Certification (ICP-ACC), ICAgile Business Agility Foundations (ICP-BAF), and Advanced Scrum Master (A-CSM) certification workshops.

Check out Nimesh in action on his YouTube channel, "Agile Coaching Toolbox".



YouTube channel
<https://youtube.com/@agileCoachingToolbox>



Alexander Frumkin

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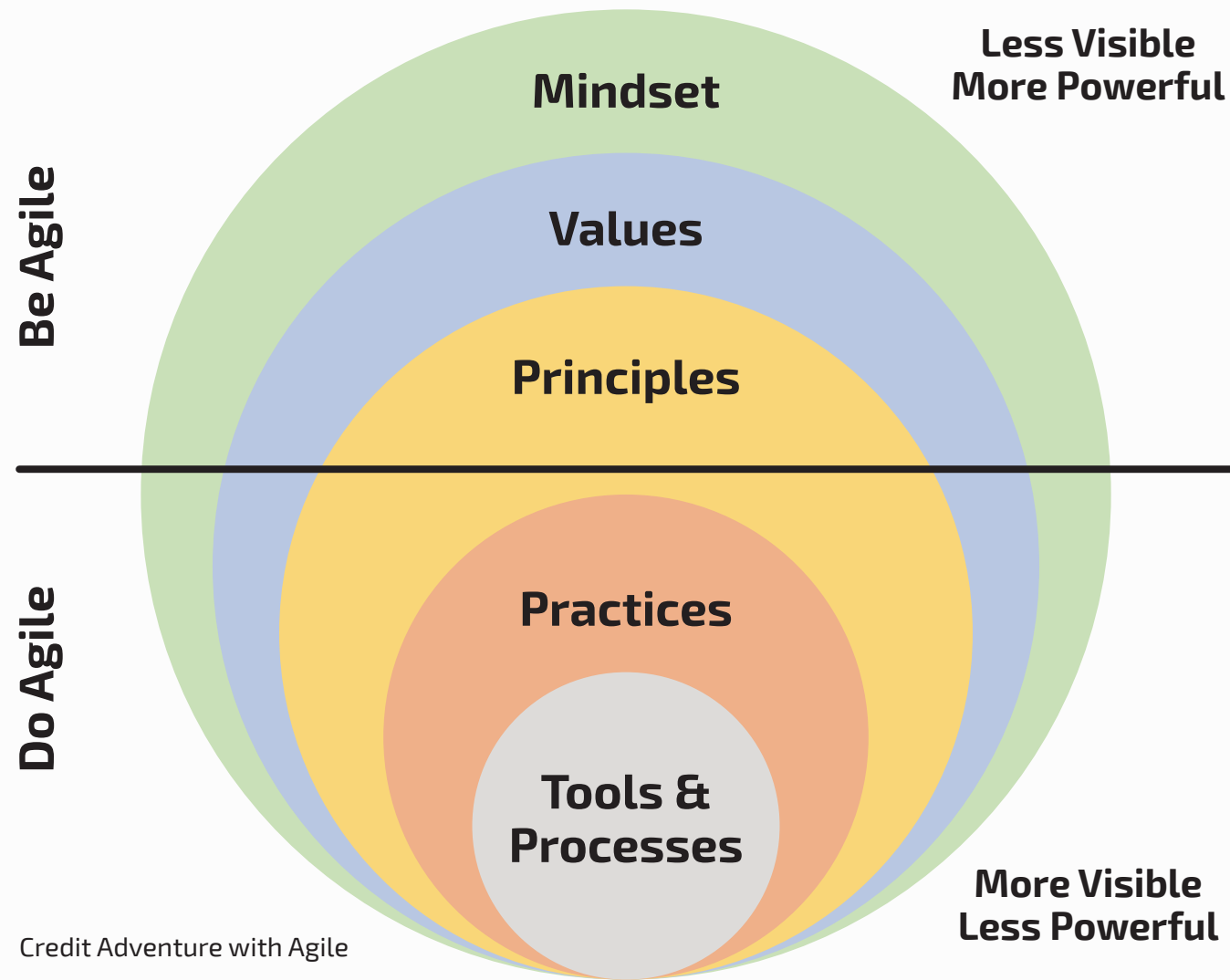


THE REPORTS OF AGILE'S DEATH ARE GREATLY EXAGGERATED

Agile is broken beyond repair." I increasingly hear that sentiment from friends and colleagues in the Agile community. And sadly, I understand where it comes from. The last few years have done a lot of damage.

For over two decades, *Agile*, or I prefer to use the noun *Agility*, has been a buzzword since 2001, when the **Manifesto for Agile Software Development** was published as a response to the skyrocketing complexity and uncertainty in software development. Although initially designed for the software industry, *Agility* quickly evolved into the go-to approach for tackling any challenge marked by complexity and unpredictability.

The Manifesto inspired many well-meaning individuals to rethink how to navigate the world of complexity and uncertainty and use this new approach to generate value for complex problems. But it also attracted the wrong crowd — people who, intentionally or not, treated agility as a crystal ball, a universal solution to all organizational woes. Rather than embracing the human and collaborative spirit of the Manifesto, they latched onto tools, prescriptive practices, and rigid frameworks. This approach was incredibly appealing to those who felt uncomfortable navigating complexity and uncertainty. It provided a false sense of control.



However, we, the Agile practitioners, must also take responsibility. We failed to communicate why agility matters and what it truly means. I recently had a conversation with several competent professionals at a client organization. Their take? *Agile equals JIRA*. Nothing more, nothing less. When I introduced the concept of the **Agile Onion** — peeling back the layers from tools and practices to principles, values, and mindset — it triggered an aha moment. That simple visualization helped them understand that agility is far more than a toolset — it’s a way of thinking, collaborating, and adapting in the face of complexity.

This shallow interpretation fueled the rise of “agile” frameworks as lucrative, mass-produced solutions — plug-and-play systems marketed as silver bullets. That mindset enabled the rise of “agile” frameworks as money-making machines — scalable, packaged, and one-size-fits-all. And it worked... for a while. But eventually, reality caught up. More and more organizations saw these cookie-cutter approaches failing. Disillusionment spread. Confidence eroded. In my view, the apogee of this trend was when, in January 2023, Capital One eliminated approximately 1,100 positions within its technology segment, specifically targeting roles associated with its “Agile” job family.



If not Agile, what else?

Fortunately, the community of modern product and technology practitioners continues to evolve. Several recent publications offer fresh ideas and a renewed focus on principles over process, helping guide the next generation of ways of working.

Andrew McAfee, author of *The Geek Way* [1] and a New York Times bestseller, examined the 100 most valuable companies by market cap in 2022, including Microsoft, Netflix, and Amazon. These companies — leaders of the modern economy — have embraced agility by embodying four core principles:

1. **Science:** Making decisions based on data, experimentation, and evidence.
2. **Speed of Learning:** Rapid adaptation and iteration to stay ahead.
3. **Accountability:** Empowering teams while holding them responsible for results.
4. **Openness:** Fostering transparency, trust, and collaboration.

As McAfee highlights, these principles drive the success of companies that account for over 47% of the stock market value. Interestingly, they align closely with the **values and principles of the Agile Manifesto**, the very mindset that Agile coaches like me champion.

Marty Cagan in his best seller *Transformed* [2] introduces the term of a **product organization** as a company or business unit structured around delivering customer and business value through digital or physical products. Instead of organizing by function (like marketing, engineering, or sales), a product organization builds **cross-functional teams** — typically made up of product managers, designers, and engineers — jointly accountable for outcomes tied to

[1] McAfee, A. (2023). *The Geek Way: The Radical Mindset that Drives Extraordinary Results*. Little, Brown and Company.

[2] Cagan, M., Hickman, L., Idioldi, C., Jones, C., & Moore, J. (2024). *Transformed: Moving to the Product Operating Model*. Wiley.

specific products or user problems. These teams work iteratively, prioritize customer feedback, and are often empowered to decide how to solve problems within a given product area best. At its best, a product organization aligns around **outcomes over outputs**, focusing less on delivering features and more on delivering measurable value. It emphasizes that true transformation isn't about adopting agile frameworks or digital tools. However, a **product organization** aligns with Agile values and principles by focusing on empowered, cross-functional teams that deliver customer value iteratively, adapt quickly to change, and own outcomes, not just outputs.

While none of these publications explicitly label their approaches as Agile, their visions remain closely aligned with the values and principles of the Agile Manifesto. They can be seen as an evolution of agility. Like it or not, the spirit of agility is alive, driving teams and organizations to thrive amid today's complexity and uncertainty.



What should we do?

The Agile community cannot keep doing the same things — framework-first rollouts, jargon-heavy training, tool worship — and expect a different result.

I believe it's time to “rebrand” the definition of Agility to make it more compelling for business leaders:

“Agility is your organization's ability to adapt and deliver value faster than your competitors”.

To make this definition resonate at the executive level, we need to shift the conversation in three key ways:

Alexander (Sasha) Frumkin is a passionate Enterprise Agile Coach, Trainer, and Author in San Francisco, CA. With over 25 years of hands-on experience in software development, Sasha has embraced agility since 2007. Over the years, he has guided numerous teams and organizations through successful Agile transformations, empowering teams to deliver innovative products to market rapidly. He is currently supporting VSCO's growth in his role as an Agile Program Manager.

1. Shift from frameworks to outcomes

Instead of selling agility as a set of rituals or frameworks, we must focus on business impact: faster delivery of customer value, improved innovation throughput, reduced waste, better talent empowerment and retention, and customer satisfaction. Tie everything back to outcomes.

2. Speak the language of business, not Agile

Terms like “Scrum,” “velocity,” or even “mindset” often alienate executives. Instead, speak of strategic responsiveness, value delivery, cycle time reduction, and de-risked investment. Use metrics that matter to them.

3. Teach adaptability, not compliance

Stop pushing rigid playbooks. Teach leaders how to build conditions for adaptability — clear purpose, empowered teams, fast feedback loops, and alignment on customer outcomes. Help them create systems, not just adopt practices.

WHAT SKILLS AI WILL REPLACE, AND WHAT SKILLS WILL BE MORE IN DEMAND BECAUSE OF AI

THIS TIME, LIKE ALL TIMES, IS A VERY GOOD ONE, IF WE BUT KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH IT.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Executive summary

There have been many transformations over the last 5+ decades I've been involved with software, product development, and business improvements. The transformations typically take the form that some new technology creates amazing opportunities while eliminating others. AI is driving this again. We are witnessing this phenomenon again, this time driven by AI.

There are two skills AI can replace or supplement: programming and translating frameworks into action. Programmers and coaches who don't grow beyond these are likely to see their skills become less in demand.

But there are two skills that AI cannot fill because they require empathy, which machines lack.

The first skill is a team coach who integrates domain knowledge with Kata coaching while understanding how people listen, learn, react, and resist. This skill enables more effective coaching, as the coach can tailor their approach to the individuals involved.

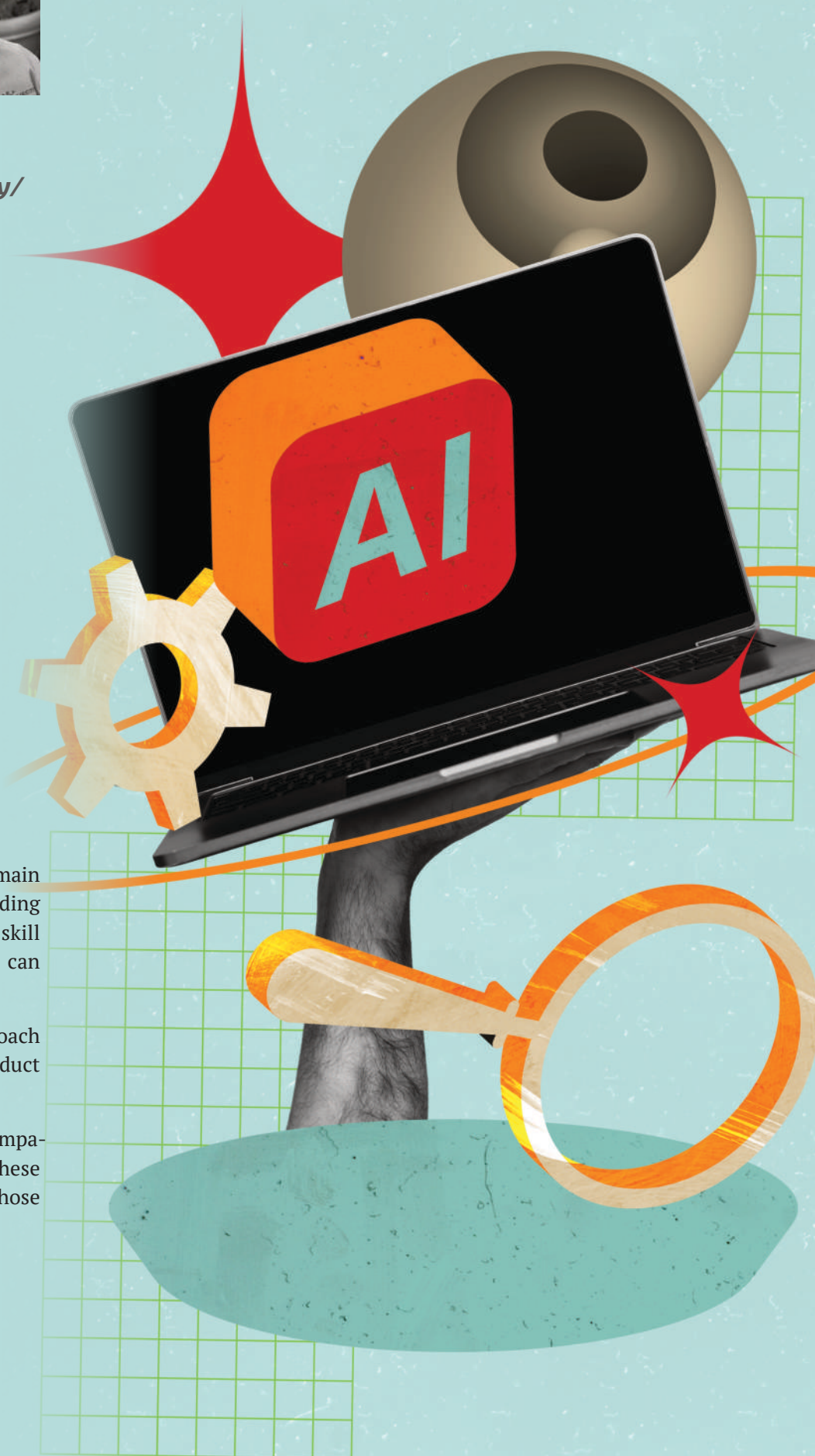
The second skill is taking a jobs-to-be-done approach to see what's needed. This will be useful to product owners, business analysts, or developers.

AI will not excel in these skills because it lacks empathy. As AI raises the baseline for effectiveness, these skills will become increasingly in demand from those who want to go beyond the new norm.



AI Shalloway

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AI Shalloway is the founder and CEO of Success Engineering's Value by Design approach featuring Amplio. Amplio takes a jobs-to-be-done approach by first seeing what you need to do and then seeing how best to implement it. His Amplio University is an ongoing learning journey which is more effective while being less expensive than typical training. He is available for in-house training and consulting.

Full Article

There is little doubt AI will, at least partially, replace team coaches who are primarily using frameworks to tell people what to do, as well as developers who are primarily coders.

These are areas where AI excels.

However, if we examine what is lacking in these two roles, we discover something that AI is unlikely to excel at in the near future (within the next five years).

This is in addressing the human aspect of coaching and product development.

The irony is that frameworks purporting to be "Agile", which was about "people over process," have mostly ignored the people aspect of product development. Instead, they presume that coaches merely need to explain to people how to follow them and that developers can convert requirement statements into code.

However, the primary objectives are to enhance people's effectiveness and create value.

This article discusses opportunities for several roles to be enhanced through greater emotional intelligence.

Making coaches more effective with emotional intelligence

Simply instructing people on what they should do, without explaining the reasoning for this and providing a supporting theory, has historically proven ineffective. Saying to “follow to understand” leads to slow learning at best and resistance at worst.

However, a one-size-fits-all approach doesn’t work. While some require an understanding of the reasons behind these actions, others prefer being told what to do. The coach must know how to interact appropriately.

Frameworks have long aimed to create quick starts while promoting widespread adoption. As the chasm has been crossed, the personalities of those adopting Agile methods have evolved. Additionally, the types and sizes of the organizations involved have changed as well.

Quick starts are now less effective because the variety of people adopting Agile methods has increased. They often become counterproductive as they do not address the different needs of individuals.

Expanding the business analyst role and/or making developers more effective in creating value.

Programming is a small part of creating value. Deciding what needs to be done and how stakeholders will use the product is more critical. Determining what needs to be done has primarily involved understanding the “wants” and “needs” of stakeholders.

But people are notoriously bad at stating what would be truly useful. Most development teams focus on solving the problems people face instead of what would create better opportunities.

The shift from outcomes to outputs emphasizes a focus on benefits rather than functions. However, it

still fails to explore alternative methods for creating better benefits.

A Jobs to Be Done (JTBD) approach, which focuses on understanding the underlying “job” a person is trying to accomplish in a given context, fosters greater innovation. This perspective reveals the progress that people seek and highlights what truly drives their choices. JTBD uncovers the functional, emotional, and social dimensions of the task at hand. By framing innovation around these real-world jobs, teams can design solutions that align more closely with what people are trying to achieve, making this approach more predictive and actionable than traditional need-based analysis.

This requires understanding people, not just the mechanics of their work.

Agile, however, has made a JTBD approach more challenging by positioning product owners between customers and development teams. Many POs in the Agile world are marketing and sales professionals who are overwhelmed with wants and needs, leading them to concentrate on these demands.

In addition to software being not particularly innovative, it is notoriously difficult to use. The reasons are similar – a lack of empathy with users. It requires examining how people interact with an application rather than focusing on how an application is constructed.

This limitation has long been noticed and addressed with the role of the UX Person. This is because, let’s face it, most software developers don’t empathize with their users. This is evidenced by the fact that when their software is misused, they don’t examine the software’s design; instead, they blame the user’s ignorance or stupidity.

BAs and devs can enhance their importance and opportunities by coming from the stakeholders’ perspective. I fear that few will do this, however.

In summary

While AI will replace many people, its lack of empathy will create new opportunities for people who enhance their own. Coaches and developers who can take the other person’s perspective will stand out from those who don’t.

There will be demand for people who can see what would truly enhance the work of people, as well as those who can explain things to their teams in terms they understand.





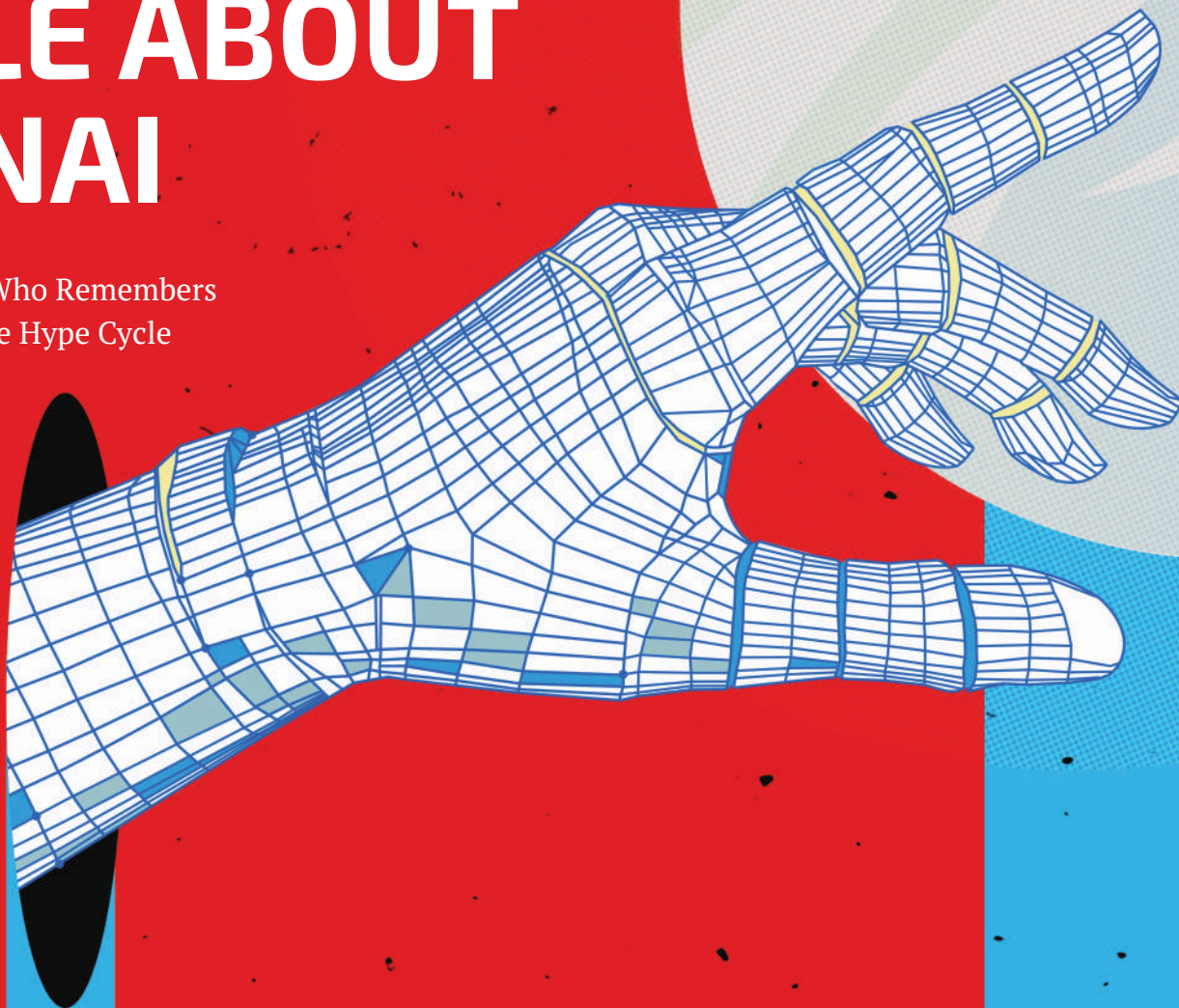
Nikolay Gekht

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OF LOOMS AND LLMS: A CAUTIONARY TALE ABOUT GENAI

by Someone Who Remembers
Life Before the Hype Cycle



Nikolay Gekht has been quietly cleaning up project messes since 1992, mostly ones he didn't cause. A stubborn proponent of engineering thinking and the scientific method, he prefers real outcomes over rituals, and logic over loud voices. Once upon a time, he founded Gehtsoft USA. He now teaches more than he probably should and still believes legacy code deserves a second chance. When not reviving old systems or reworking a course, he enjoys ironic observations and long arguments with himself or friends, depending on who answers first.

Let us begin with the obvious: everyone, everywhere, is talking about AI. Loudly. In all directions. Some believe it will save us; others think it will destroy us, and a few suspect it might merely rearrange our calendars with passive-aggressive flair.

As for me, well, I have no intention of joining either camp. I'm far too old, cynical, and frankly too busy sipping lukewarm tea to march behind yet another flag. So instead, let's consider both sides: the good in the bad and the bad in the good.

The Jacquard Loom of Our Time

A good example of a historical cousin to GenAI is, arguably, the Jacquard loom. A fine tool from the early Industrial Revolution that enabled the mass production of intricate textiles. Beautiful results, at a fraction of the time, with the added benefit of employing less-skilled workers for less money (progress, as ever, knows how to count pennies.)

This is, in essence, what GenAI is doing today. It boosts productivity, opens once-guarded professional silos to the masses, and lets the apprentice do what once required a master.

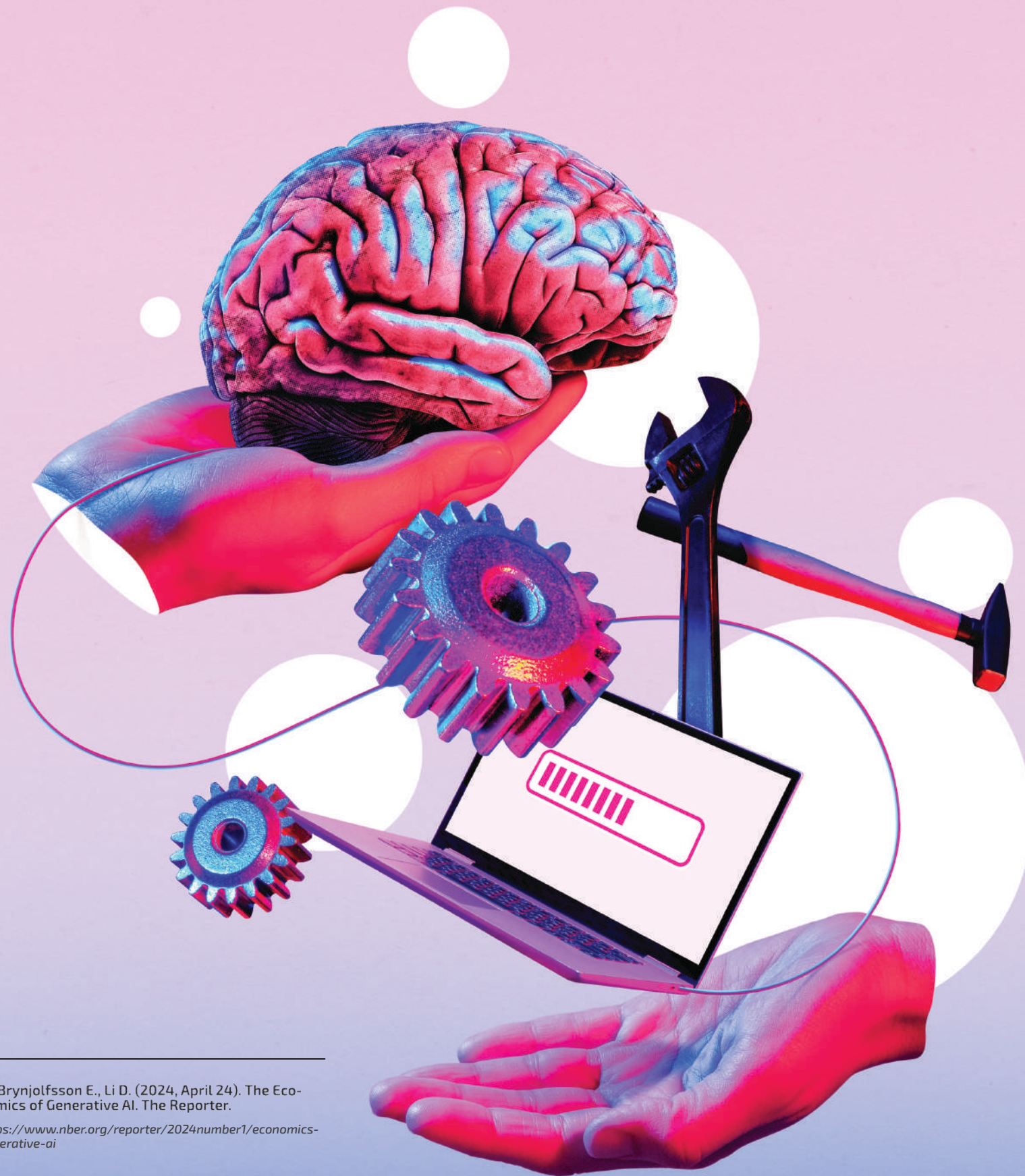
The data, naturally, is already piling up like unread Jira tickets:

- Brynjolfsson & Li (April 2024): +14% productivity boost in task resolution; +35% for novices in customer support roles [1].
- Dillon et al. (May 2025): GenAI power users spend 31% less time on emails and wrap up documents faster [2].
- Deloitte (2024): 74% of firms said GenAI met or exceeded ROI expectations [3].
- Microsoft (April 2024): Every \$1 spent on GenAI returned an average of \$3.70 [4].

When even finance departments start calling something a good investment, you know it's no longer just a passing trend. By late 2024, nearly 28% of U.S. workers used GenAI in their daily routine (CFO Dive) [5]. That's not "early adoption" anymore. That's Tuesday morning.

So yes, it's here. Like the loom before it, GenAI is rapidly becoming a fixture of modern business. Ignore it, and you risk waking up in the discount bin of your industry.

But... There's always a "but"...



[1] Brynjolfsson E., Li D. (2024, April 24). The Economics of Generative AI. The Reporter.
<https://www.nber.org/reporter/2024number1/economics-generative-ai>

[2] Dillon, E. W., Jaffe, S., Immorlica, N., Stanton, C. T. (2025, May). Shifting Work Patterns with Generative AI. National Bureau of Economic Research.
<https://www.nber.org/papers/w33795>

The Return of the Loom's Revenge

Just as the Jacquard loom transformed the industry, it also transformed craftsmanship into something else entirely. Artisanry faded. Mastery was replaced with button-pushing. Today, you can still find a master weaver, but they're mainly on Instagram and possibly French (my oldest daughter is one of them, by the way).

And this is the uncomfortable parallel we need to talk about.

A recent MIT study (Nataliya Kosmyna et al., Your Brain on ChatGPT: Accumulation of Cognitive Debt when Using an AI [6]) hooked writers to EEGs and compared those using AI tools to those who weren't. The result? The ChatGPT crowd consistently showed lower brain engagement across the board. Linguistically, behaviourally, and neurologically they underperformed.

In short: more output, less thinking.

This observation won't surprise anyone who's ever taught a teenager with access to Google Docs and a deadline. But it should concern those of us responsible for developing actual talents.

Because if we're not careful, we may find ourselves with teams who can churn out impressive results, but don't know why they work or what to do when they don't.

[3] Rowan, J., Ammanath, B., Perricos, C., Sniderman, B., Jarvis, D. (2025, January). The State of Generative AI in the Enterprise: 2024 year-end Generative AI report. Deloitte.
<https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/what-we-do/capabilities/applied-artificial-intelligence/content/state-of-generative-ai-in-enterprise.html>

[4] Taylor, A., (2025, April 22). How real-world businesses are transforming with AI — with 261 new stories. Official Microsoft Blog.
<https://blogs.microsoft.com/blog/2025/04/22/https-blogs-microsoft-com-blog-2024-11-12-how-real-world-businesses-are-transforming-with-ai/>



Lessons from 36,000 Feet

To find a solution, I propose we look upward, literally. Commercial aviation offers a chilling case study of overreliance on automation.

Modern pilots spend less than 0.5% of their time actually *flying* the aircraft [7]. That’s not a typo. The result? When things go wrong, many can’t cope. Several high-profile incidents in the past two decades were caused (or worsened) by pilots who simply hadn’t had enough “manual time” to build instinctive, confident reactions.

A 2010 study [8] from Cranfield University showed that regular practice and real hands-on, eyes-on-the-horizon flying directly correlates with better emergency handling.

Airlines that care about safety ensure pilots practice flying, even when they don’t have to. We, too, should consider this when building, managing, and mentoring teams in an AI-augmented world.

[5] Tyson, J. (2024, October 3). Generative AI hits 28% usage rate, spreads throughout US workplace: NBER. CFO Dive.

<https://www.cfodive.com/news/generativeai-hits-spreads-usworkplace-nber/728884/>

[6] Chow, A. R. (2025, June 23). ChatGPT May Be Eroding Critical Thinking Skills, According to a New MIT Study. Time.

<https://time.com/7295195/ai-chatgpt-google-learning-school/>

[7] Pilot Handling Skills. Skybrary.

<https://skybrary.aero/articles/pilot-handling-skills>

[8] Ebbatson, M., Harris, D., Huddleston, J., Sears, R. (2010, February). The relationship between manual handling performance and recent flying experience in air transport pilots. National Library of Medicine.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20099179/>



What Now?

As my grandfather used to say, “If you can’t avoid it – lead it.”

So here’s what I’d suggest:

- *Adopt with intent. Use AI where it makes sense, not where it looks shiny.*
- *Set clear goals. Ensure GenAI solves problems you actually have, not ones your vendor told you about.*
- *Design for people. Let AI boost your people, not replace them. The goal is augmented intelligence, not abandoned intellect.*
- *Manage the risk. Security, ethics, vendor lock-in: these aren’t side quests, they’re the price of admission.*
- *Keep skills sharp. Bake “manual mode” into your teams’ operating rhythm. Challenge thinking. Review raw code. Write from scratch, sometimes just because.*

Above all, build feedback loops. The second way of DevOps isn’t just a buzzword, it’s how you keep people and systems honest, connected, and improving.

In Closing: A Modest Plea

GenAI is neither saviour nor saboteur. It’s a tool. A powerful, slightly overeager, occasionally hallucinating tool.

Use it wisely and you can scale great heights. Lean on it blindly, and you may find your feet have left the ground entirely until they reconnect, suddenly and painfully, with the floor.

Let’s not burn the looms. But let’s not forget how to weave.

A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME



Antoinette Coetzee

[linkedin.com/in/antoinettecoetzee/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/antoinettecoetzee/)



Over the past two years, the Agile Coaching industry has found itself under siege. Many organisations have eliminated the roles of Agile Coach or Scrum Master, or have diluted them by folding them into delivery-focused responsibilities. What was once a clear commitment to guiding Agile transformation is now being absorbed into general execution. Agile change programs are on the decline [1].

This moment should serve as a wake-up call for an industry barely three decades old. The Scrum Master role emerged in 1995, and the Agile Coach role only came into formal recognition in 2009. Was it all just a temporary phase — something needed only to get us to a tipping point where Agile would become standard practice?

[1] Powers, S. (2025, January 17). The decline of agile change programs. The Deeper Change Academy. <https://www.deeperchange.academy/articles/the-decline-of-agile-change-programs>

Apparently not. According to the latest State of Agile Annual report, satisfaction with Agile has actually declined, from 71% in 2022 to just 59% in 2024. So if Agile is now “the norm,” it isn’t exactly thriving [2].

In other words, we’re not evolving — we’re in an existential crisis.

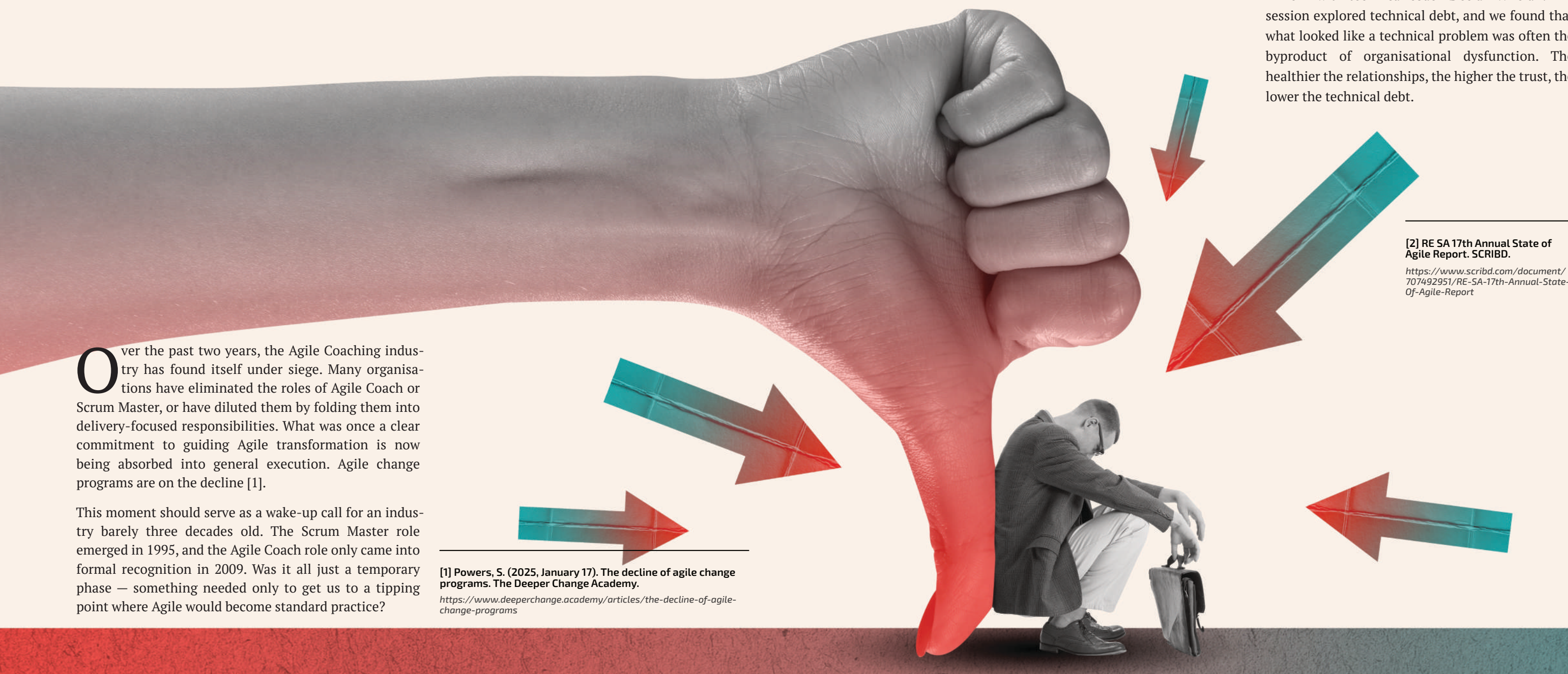
It would be easy to continue debating Agile’s future, but as someone who coaches Agile Coaches and Scrum Masters, my greater concern is for the people doing the work. I get to witness firsthand what’s in their hearts — what they long to bring into the world — and it moves me deeply.

To be fair, not everyone is equally affected. Independent, well-established coaches seem largely immune to the disruption. And there’s a noticeable pattern among those who are weathering this storm: they’ve been investing in capabilities far beyond Agile frameworks and certifications. Why? Because the technical problems Agile seeks to solve are dwarfed by the deeper, human challenges that truly block progress.

Whether success is defined as faster delivery, higher quality, more relevant features, or agility in changing direction, it’s never just about the mechanics. I recall co-facilitating an Audacious Salon in 2017 with technical coach Declan Whelan. The session explored technical debt, and we found that what looked like a technical problem was often the byproduct of organisational dysfunction. The healthier the relationships, the higher the trust, the lower the technical debt.

[2] RE SA 17th Annual State of Agile Report. SCRIBD.

<https://www.scribd.com/document/707492951/RE-SA-17th-Annual-State-Of-Agile-Report>



That's the deeper pattern — what happens at the micro level reflects what occurs systemically.

Once a coach or Scrum Master moves past the surface-level issues — frameworks, practices, tools — they begin to encounter the truly interesting and challenging work. This has led many into adjacent fields: professional team coaching, executive coaching, leadership development, and organisational change. And when dedicated Agile roles started vanishing in 2023, those who had already expanded their skillset found themselves prepared — not falling back, but leaning forward.

The critical takeaway isn't just what these coaches chose to do, but why. They viewed their purpose as helping organisations resolve real issues — regardless of whether Agile was the method. Their

commitment wasn't to Agile as a brand, but to the well-being and performance of the organisations they supported. They assumed full responsibility for the impact of their presence and leadership.

In doing so, they relinquished their personal agendas and aligned themselves with the organisation's agenda. Their role, whether titled Scrum Master, Agile Coach, or otherwise, became a vehicle to support the organisation's deeper purpose.

And now, perhaps, it's time for another shift.

One of the most common laments I hear from coaches is: "Leaders just don't get it." But what if the universe has brought us these very leaders, not by accident, but by design?

Antoinette partners with leaders ready to grow—helping them see what's getting in their way and take bold, meaningful steps forward. Known for her warmth and grounded presence, she creates space for deep insight and real change.

With a background in organisational leadership, she specialises in vertical development, conflict resolution, and building aligned, purpose-driven teams. Her work combines compassion and challenge, guiding leaders to lead with clarity, courage, and connection.



Coaches often don't see themselves as part of the systems they work in. Coach training emphasises neutrality — and rightly so, as it's one of our most powerful tools. Yet, coaches also lead. We lead without authority, through reflection, partnership, and development.

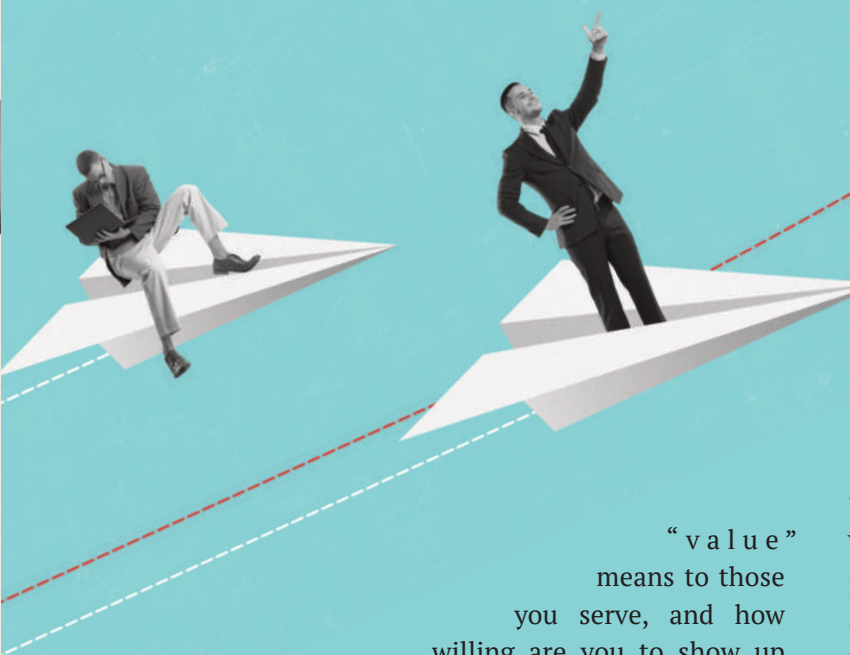
What if the vision you hold for your organisation requires you to step into a more active leadership role? What if becoming the leader you wish others would be is part of your calling? Could you let go of the title you hoped to hold, and instead step into a larger role — living out the same values, using the same skills, and transforming what leadership looks like from the inside?

How agile are you in redefining your role in the world?
How clearly can you see what

“Before one studies Zen, mountains are mountains and waters are waters;

after a first glimpse into the truth of Zen, mountains are no longer mountains and waters are no longer waters;

after enlightenment, mountains are once again mountains and waters once again waters.”



“value” means to those you serve, and how willing are you to show up and deliver that value? What inner architecture do you need to build to offer your clients what they truly need? And how resilient are you in the face of change?

I'm reminded of a quote from Dōgen:

Agile, at its core, shifts how we see work, people, and collaboration. Once we've internalised “individuals and interactions over processes and tools,” we can carry that perspective with us wherever we go. The principles remain, even if the roles fade.

What if this was the plan all along? What if the disappearance of Agile roles is not the end, but the end of an internship? A necessary passage in the development of a new kind of leadership?

May your mountains become mountains again. And your waters, waters.

The world needs you.

It needs your leadership.

HOLISTIC TESTING: WHAT IT MEANS FOR AGILE TEAMS

Janet Gregory and I have been using the term “agile testing” since the signing of the original Agile Manifesto. Agile development focuses on quality, agile practices emphasize testing. The agile values, principles and practices apply to testing as well as coding and other development activities.

We published our first book, *Agile Testing: A Practical Guide for Testers and Agile Teams*, in 2008 [1]. Since then we have published three more books: *More Agile Testing: Learning Journeys for the Whole Team* [2], *Agile Testing Condensed: A Brief Introduction* [3], and *Holistic Testing: Weave Quality into Your Product* [4].

Wait a minute, that last title — what happened to “agile testing”? Several things. The term “agile” means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. “Holistic testing” better reflects that the whole team takes responsibility for quality and testing, and that testing activities occur all the way around the continuous loop of software development.

[1]: Crispin, L., Gregory, J. (2008). *Agile Testing: A Practical Guide for Testers and Agile Teams*. Addison-Wesley Professional.

[2]: Crispin, L., Gregory, J. (2014). *More Agile Testing: Learning Journeys for the Whole Team*. Addison-Wesley Professional.

[3]: Crispin, L., Gregory, J. (2019). *Agile Testing Condensed: A Brief Introduction*. Library and Archives Canada.

[4]: Crispin, L., Gregory, J. (2024). *Holistic Testing: Weave Quality into Your Product*. KDP.



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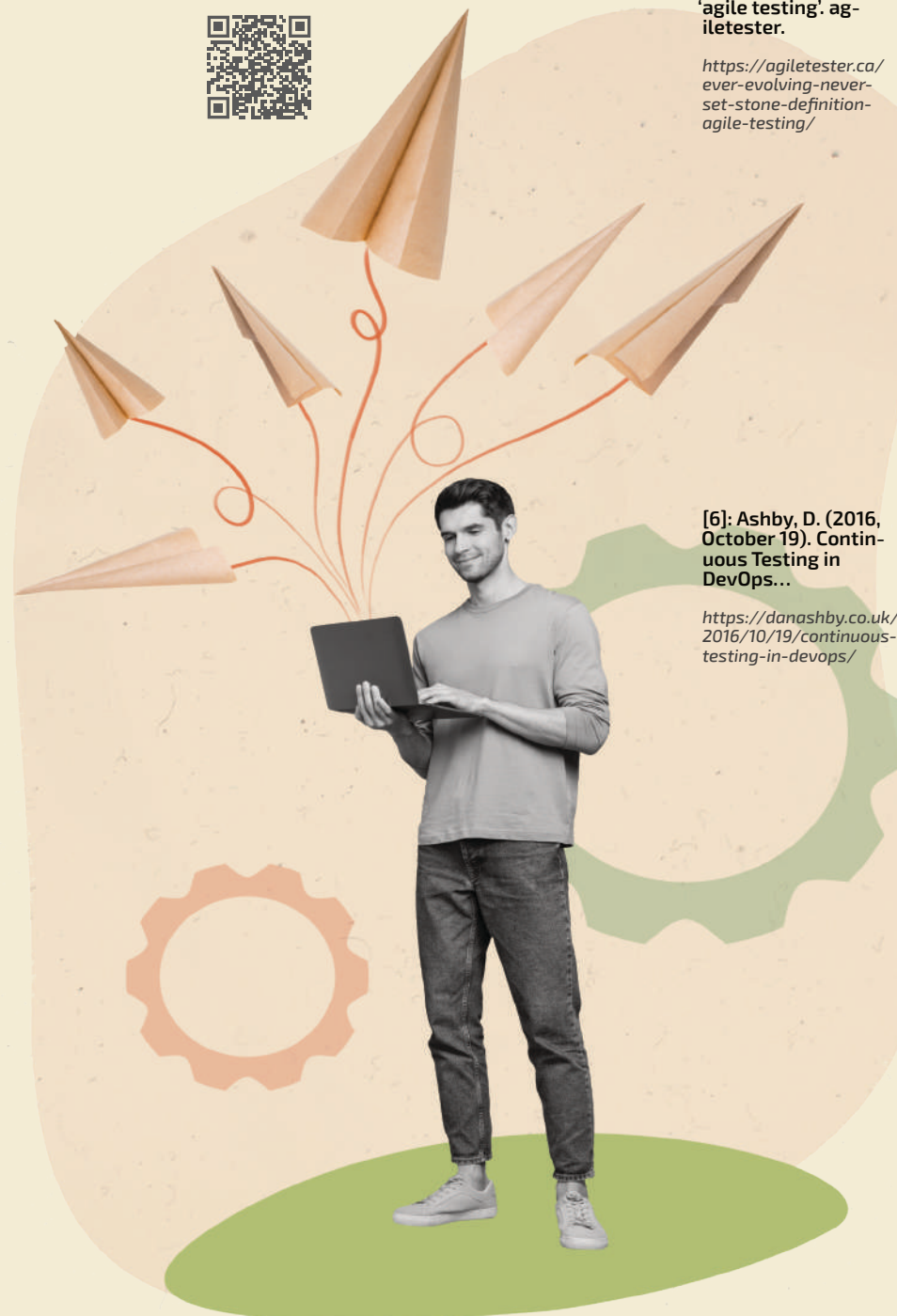


[5]: Gregory, J., Crispin, L. (2017, July 7). Our ever-evolving, never set-in-stone definition of ‘agile testing’. *agiletester*.

<https://agiletester.ca/ever-evolving-never-set-in-stone-definition-agile-testing/>

[6]: Ashby, D. (2016, October 19). *Continuous Testing in DevOps...*

<https://danashby.co.uk/2016/10/19/continuous-testing-in-devops/>



Agile testing, evolved

Let's start by defining what we meant by “agile testing”. With a lot of community input, we posted our definition [5] of agile testing some years ago:

Collaborative testing practices that occur continuously, from inception to delivery and beyond, supporting frequent delivery of value for our customers. Testing activities focus on building quality into the product, using fast feedback loops to validate our understanding. The practices strengthen and support the idea of whole team responsibility for quality.

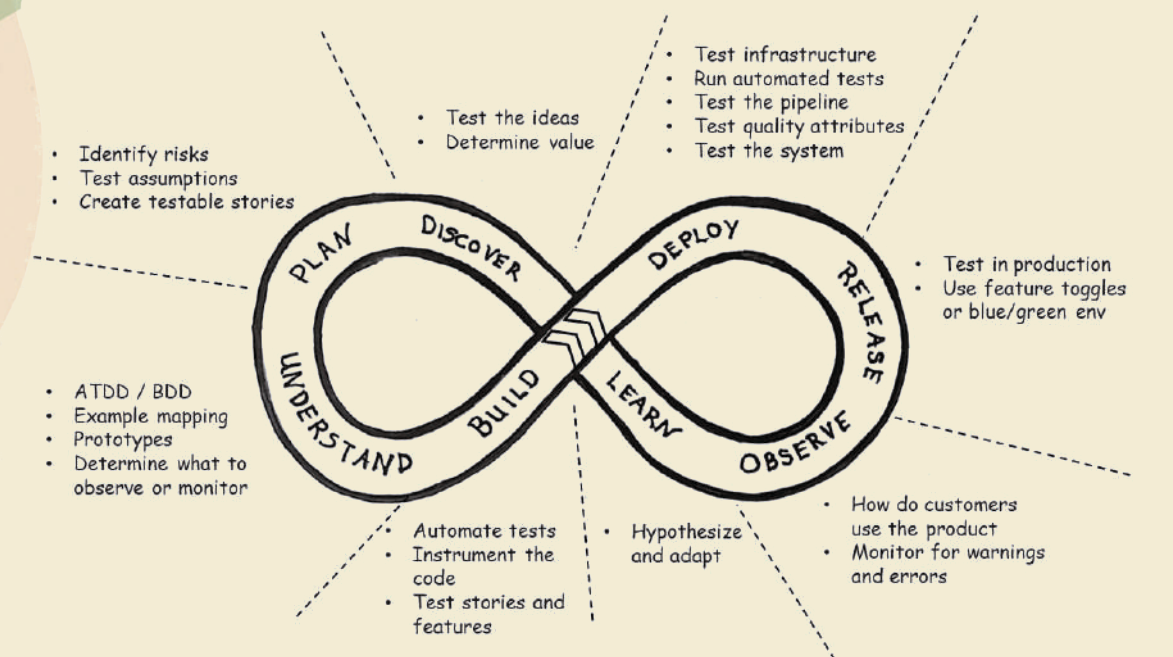
Though not new, continuous delivery and DevOps culture became much more visible over the past ten years. More teams, including ones we have worked on and with, invested in testing activities on both sides of the “DevOps loop”. Dan Ashby captured this so well in his “Continuous Testing in DevOps” post [6]. We have had interesting discussions with Dan as well as other leading practitioners about the many testing activities throughout the infinite loop of software development. This inspired Janet (with some help from me) to create the Holistic Testing Model. Here's the model,

including example testing activities for each stage:

The left side of the loop is about building quality into our products. The delivery team collaborates with all stakeholders to learn what customers value most, identify risks, and break each new feature into small, testable stories. Team members help product folks articulate business-facing examples of desired behavior. Those examples are turned into tests, which can be automated as the production code is built.

The right side of the loop involves testing to see that the team “got it right”. A robust deployment pipeline allows testing in production-like environments. This testing includes quality attributes like security, accessibility and performance. As the team uses release strategies to turn new changes on for customers, they can see if those changes work as expected. They get information so they can adapt as needed.

The examples used in this diagram are just that – examples. There are literally hundreds of testing activities that can take place throughout this development cycle. Teams can use this model to create an effective testing strategy that gives them confidence for frequent releases.



Holistic Testing Model with examples
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Holistic Testing, Explained

Here's how we define Holistic Testing, from the introduction to our Holistic Testing book:

“Holistic testing” is a comprehensive term to encompass testing activities throughout the development cycle. Software teams perform testing activities from the start of an idea, through to customer interaction with a delivered feature. All members of a delivery team think about testing and quality throughout the entire software development cycle. They instrument their code so they can learn how recent changes behave in production, using monitoring and observability. That learning helps the organization plan the next changes to the product.

“Holistic testing” is a more comprehensive term to encompass the feedback loops that let us deliver small batches of changes frequently and confidently. The “whole team” today can include UX designers, programmers, testers, and operations specialists such as site reliability engineers.

All members of a delivery team are thinking about testing from the beginning of the cycle, including how we should instrument our code to provide information about how it's really behaving once it's in production. Many teams are watching dashboards, alerts, digging into huge amounts of data to identify and

Lisa Crispin is a consultant, author and speaker based in Vermont, USA. She and Janet Gregory have co-authored four books, most recently *Holistic Testing: Weave Quality Into Your Product*. See the book website for more information. They have also developed two courses taught by training providers around the world, see <https://AgileTestingFellow.com> for more. Learn more via LinkedIn and <https://lisacrispin.com>.

only concerned with the “average” customer experience. We want to ensure that **all** customers are having a good experience.

Using the Holistic Testing Model, the team can focus on bug prevention. In the planning stages, the conversation starts with what level of quality do we need. As we dig in to make sure everyone understands what to build, we identify all the kinds of testing we need to have to support that level of quality.

We continue to adapt the model, but for now it encompasses testing activities as we see it. We'd love to hear how you test differently, and how this model might help you visualize the types of testing you do in your product. Every product team has a slightly different context, so choosing what types of testing you do, or how much you do, will be very specific for your team.

Since we introduced our holistic testing model, we've had several practitioners tell us, “This describes what we do so well! Thank you for explaining this – I can use this model to explain to others!” This holistic approach resonates with people on teams who have learned ways to deliver small chunks of value to their customers frequently, at a sustainable pace -- in other words, people embracing agile principles and values.



WHO NEEDS SCRUM MASTERS?



Tobias Mayer

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Firstly, what exactly is a 'scrum master'? Those who attend an Agile conference will surely know, some may be scrum masters themselves, or perhaps work with one. But beyond this relatively small group of people there are a great many more people — mostly executive directors, hiring managers and human resources personnel — who believe they know what a scrum master is, but only because they have successfully manipulated the term to mean what they want it to mean, so it fits neatly into a corporate category and does not interrupt the status quo.

Indeed, so long has this manipulation been going on that the majority of those identifying as scrum masters these days believe a scrum master to be some sort of junior project manager or delivery manager, one who keeps developers in compliance with organisational rules, measures their productivity and reports upwards. Just look at any recent job description for a scrum master, and you'll get the picture. In terms of an organisation actually being agile, the role has diminished to an unnecessary overhead, a cost without a benefit.



Unnecessary overhead

Let's consider that for a moment. Who actually needs scrum masters? Software development teams don't need scrum masters, except in the very short term to begin to implement this way of working. Some developers certainly need to learn better methods and techniques to hone their craft, techniques such as clean coding, test-driven development, continuous integration, pair or mob programming, integration testing, and so on, but that is a different job, a job for a technical coach or mentor. And no, vibe coding does not replace good craftsmanship.

Product owners and product managers don't need scrum masters, except again in the very short term, to learn how a product backlog differs from a product requirements document, what a sprint goal is, and how they now have to start talking with the developers rather than handing off requirements. Simple stuff: new ways of working that may take a few weeks of practice to become habit, little more. Supporting a small group of developers and a product owner to become self-managing and create a process for themselves based on the scrum framework is a job that should take less than three months, preferably 6-8 weeks. Eventually, and sooner rather than later, scrum teams need to become truly self-sufficient. The core relationship in scrum is between the product owner and the developers, and both parties need to nurture that relationship themselves, reflect on it, and improve it over time. Too often scrum masters, by trying to 'do scrum properly' and be helpful, actually get in the way of true self-organisation.

You may think at this point that this article is focused on the removal of the scrum master role. The opposite is true: the corporate world needs such a role, but it requires a reframe. To be of value a scrum master must become one who holds up a mirror to the organisation, so it can see itself for what it is, and essentially make its own decisions about change and improvement. Mirroring a system to itself is no easy task, and scrum masters will need to put in a lot of work to reach this level of engagement, and to achieve the trust required for such work. It may be valuable to look at this development in stages.

The three stages of a scrum master

Stage 1: Understand and live out the philosophy, theory, and structure of scrum, whilst creating rhythm and harmony within the team environment. The beginning scrum master is inspired to teach scrum to developers and producers, and to socialise this way of working to management. This stage should last no more than a few weeks, maybe as long as three months.

Stage 2: An effective scrum master must have the trust of others and the courage of herself to speak truth to power, as a medieval court jester was wont to do, often to the dismay of other advisors. Speaking truth will not make you popular. Scrum transitions will commonly go through difficult phases. When times get tough, old habits kick back in, sprint boundaries are not respected, ceremonies are dropped, long working hours to fix "critical issues" become commonplace and the voice of management says "we can't do scrum right now, we'll come back to it". At such times the scrum master needs to channel the Old Testament prophets, reminding people of 'the law', which in this case will be their own agreements predicated on the scrum framework. The prophet warns of the inevitable outcome of the straying behaviour, and strives to bring them back to the true path — in the case of scrum the 'true path' is their own agreed method of working, determined through retrospectives. This is work with management and leadership as much as, if not more than, it is with workers.

Stage 3: Eventually the scrum master needs to become as an organic gardener, lovingly preparing the organisational soil, letting change emerge, nurturing it, guiding the growth patiently, gently and naturally — and removing weeds without introducing toxins. Through this action the system will start to see itself, and individuals within the system will recognise areas of improvement. In other words, we will all start to wake up, and to care.



Tobias Mayer is a long-term citizen of the Agile space, a writer, mentor, teacher and speaker. He is committed to the liberation of the corporate workplace, and to that end frequently thinks, talks, writes and offers workshops to inspire grass-roots initiative.

Tobias has a varied and ragged past, including many years as a software developer and tester. He has been a student of theology for the past twenty years, and is currently training to become a Human Givens psychotherapist.

"Tobias Mayer's signature move is to pick up a stone and throw it through our glass house, smashing our old paradigms and causing us, after some pain and turmoil, to say, 'OK, my comfortable way doesn't work anymore. Now what?'"

— Lyssa Adkins, author of *Coaching Agile Teams*

In summary

It is not workers who need scrum masters (any more than they need micro-managers). It is those in management and senior leadership who need scrum masters. Positional Power needs scrum masters because without them there is no one courageous enough to speak up, to speak truth. The SM's real job is organisational transformation, not team hand-holding. Few people understand that. Even fewer implement it. There is a world of difference between the platonic ideal of a scrum master, and its real world implementation as described here. But just because it is that way, doesn't mean it must stay that way. The ones who have the power to change this system are the scrum masters themselves. To be useful, scrum masters must be facilitators of change, agents of transformation. If they are not doing that, they are failing the profession, and they need to either step up, or step away and rebrand themselves according to corporate mores. There are no half-measures.



Ricardo Peters

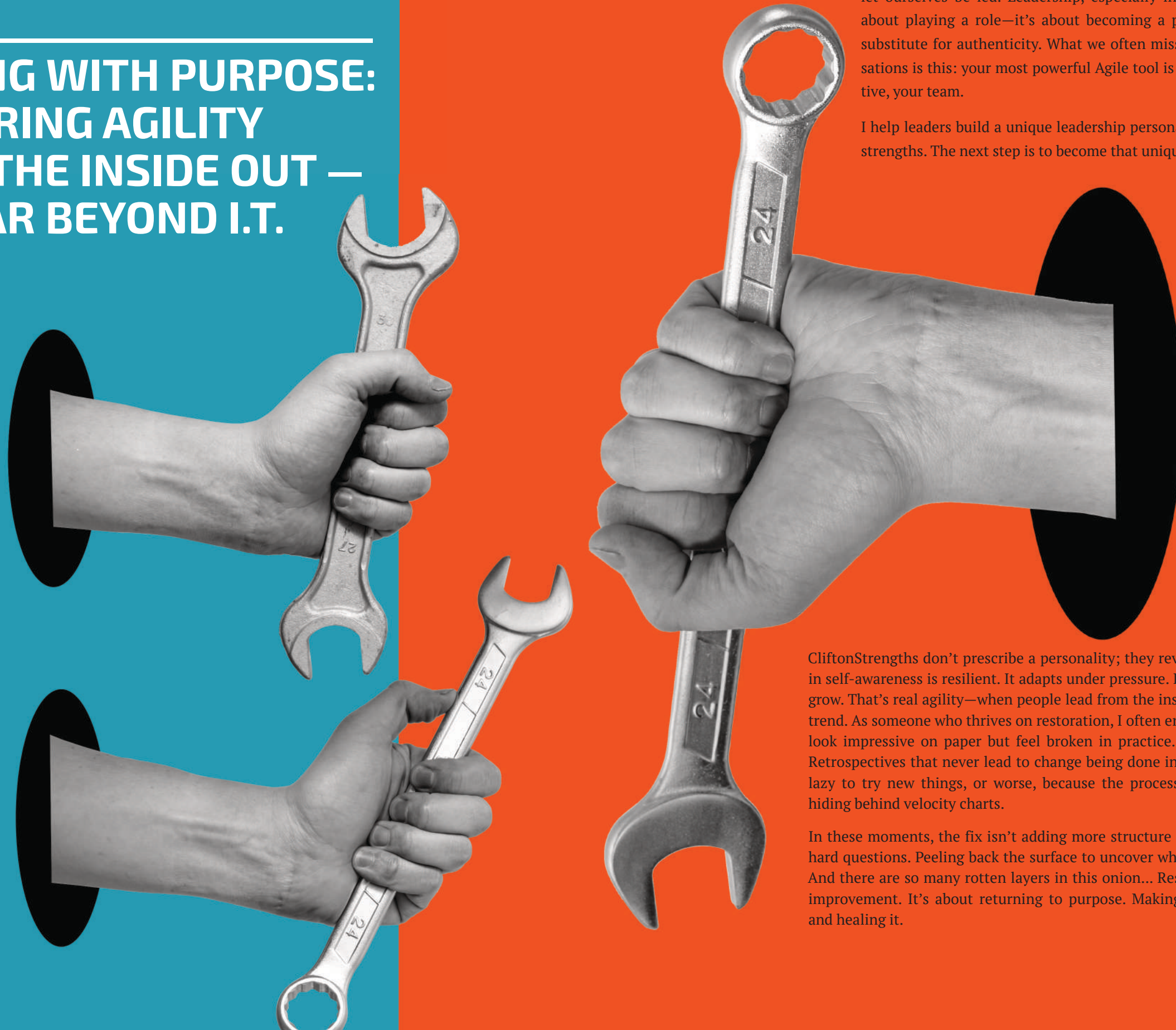
[linkedin.com/in/petersricardo/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/petersricardo/)



LEADING WITH PURPOSE: RESTORING AGILITY FROM THE INSIDE OUT — AND FAR BEYOND I.T.

Not long ago, I was working in an "Agile" Project. We had sprints, scrum events, velocity, the works... but somehow we were as far from truly being Agile as possible. We were just doing. Agile was never supposed to be a checklist or a cage. And yet, somewhere along the way, we started confusing agility with tools, ceremonies, and buzzwords. In too many organizations, Agile has become mechanical — well-documented but lifeless. Teams go through the motions while outcomes stagnate. Leaders recite values they don't embody. The human spark is missing.

The truth is: Agility doesn't need another framework. It needs restoration. A return to intention. A return to people. And it starts with leadership.



The emphasis on what each role should be doing was useful while we were learning the ropes. After some time, however, it was less about how we were performing our role responsibilities, and more about how we led and let ourselves be led. Leadership, especially in Agile environments, isn't about playing a role—it's about becoming a presence. No playbook can substitute for authenticity. What we often miss in transformation conversations is this: your most powerful Agile tool is you and in a wider perspective, your team.

I help leaders build a unique leadership persona grounded in their natural strengths. The next step is to become that unique persona. Tools like

CliftonStrengths don't prescribe a personality; they reveal one. Leadership rooted in self-awareness is resilient. It adapts under pressure. It makes space for others to grow. That's real agility—when people lead from the inside out, not from the latest trend. As someone who thrives on restoration, I often encounter Agile systems that look impressive on paper but feel broken in practice. Cargo cults of Jira boards. Retrospectives that never lead to change being done in Azure, because we are too lazy to try new things, or worse, because the process said so. Burnt-out teams hiding behind velocity charts.

In these moments, the fix isn't adding more structure — it's listening. Asking the hard questions. Peeling back the surface to uncover where the system lost its soul. And there are so many rotten layers in this onion... Restoration means more than improvement. It's about returning to purpose. Making the invisible pain visible, and healing it.

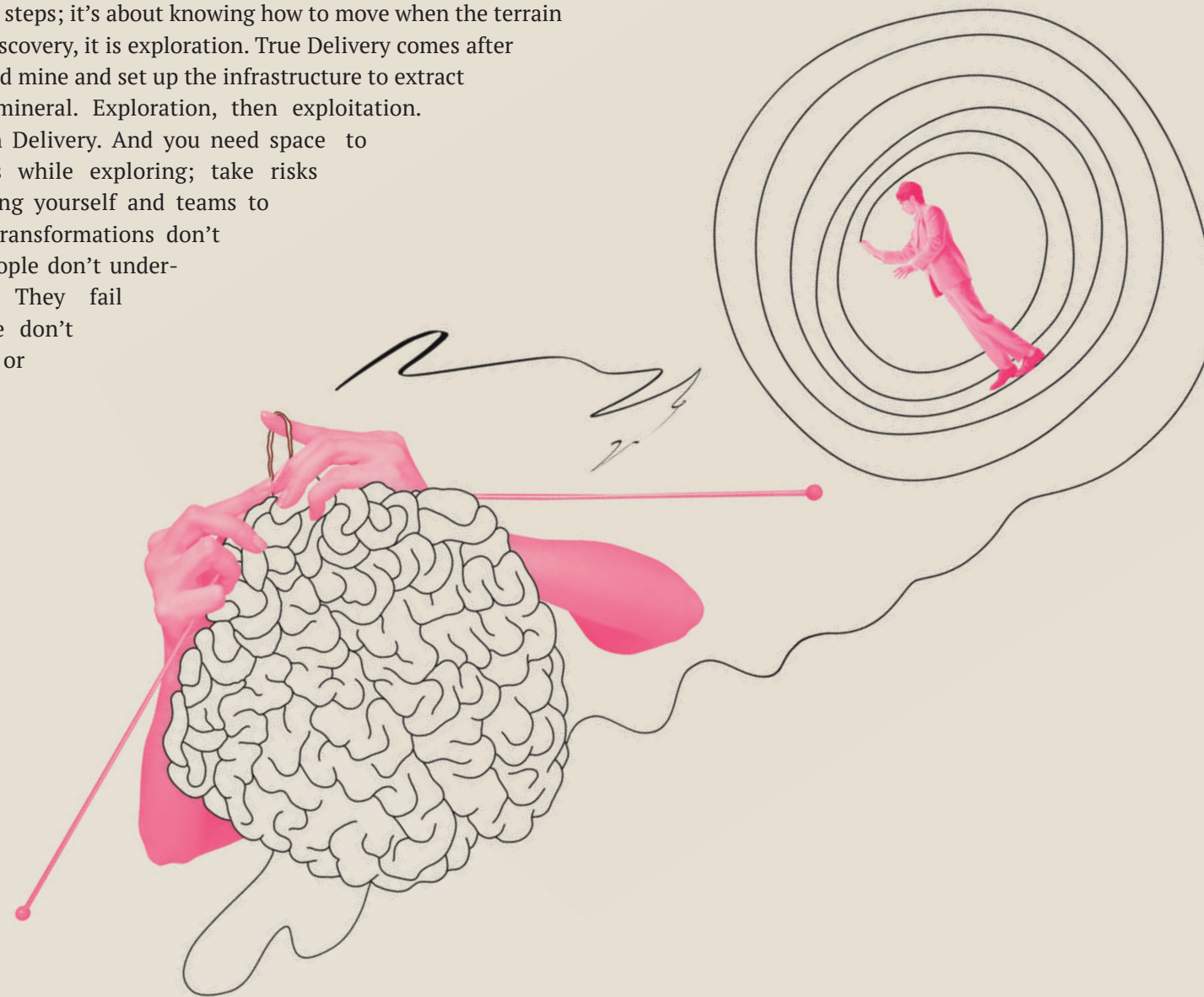
One team I worked with was doing everything "right" but still missing deadlines and morale was sinking. Retros rarely bring out any problems... So strange... Turns out, their problem wasn't process—it was silence. No psychological safety. No real feedback loops. Once we created space for truth, the Agile practices started working again—not because we changed the playbook, but because we changed the context. And boy, were there problems to be solved!

You don't need a sprint to be agile. You need a way of thinking. Agility is about responsiveness, not routines.

When I coach teams, I focus less on whether they're doing all the rituals and more on how they're thinking. Are they testing assumptions? Are they learning fast? Are they having the right conversations? This shift—from output to outcome, from behavior to mindset—is where true transformation lives.

Imagine agility like being in the jungle looking for the gold mine. It's not about following steps; it's about knowing how to move when the terrain changes. It is discovery, it is exploration. True Delivery comes after you find the gold mine and set up the infrastructure to extract this precious mineral. Exploration, then exploitation.

Discovery, then Delivery. And you need space to make mistakes while exploring; take risks without exposing yourself and teams to danger. Agile transformations don't fail because people don't understand Scrum. They fail because people don't feel safe, heard, or seen.



That's where emotional intelligence enters. Traits like empathy, prudence, and harmony aren't soft—they're strategic. They're the difference between teams that survive and teams that thrive.

In an Agile organization, what will truly turn the tide isn't a new Agile maturity model — it is courageous leaders who start listening more than speaking. Who practice vulnerability. Who create space for dissent without fear. That will change everything. Emotional intelligence is what carries agility across the messy human side of change. But the potential hidden in this human side is extraordinary!

Some of the most exciting Agile work I've done has nothing to do with IT. Agile belongs in marketing teams validating campaigns. In HR teams redesigning onboarding. In leadership offsites exploring adaptive strategy. In nonprofits working through uncertainty. Agility is not a technology movement. It's a cultural one.

When we detach agility from software, we reconnect it to its essence: navigating complexity, delivering value, and continuously learning. That's a conversation every team, in every function, should be having.

Agility is courage. The courage to challenge the status quo (and not being punished for doing so). To challenge what's broken. To lead with what matters. To be real and a better professional. We don't restore agility with checklists—we restore it with people who dare to lead from the inside out. If you're one of them, welcome. The future of Agile needs your voice.

Ricardo Peters believes agility is not a process but a human journey. As an Agile Coach, Speaker, and Leadership Mentor, he helps people and organizations rediscover their strength, purpose, and adaptability. Blending strengths-based development, emotional intelligence, and real-world experience, Ricardo champions meaningful transformation — from the inside out.

SCRUM

THE MASTERMIND OF AGILE



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Let's explore the concept of a mastermind and how the Scrum framework enables this powerful form of collective problem solving. It describes moments of breakthrough insight that occur when people are attuned to one another's thoughts and ideas, not just their own updates.

Introduction: The Power of Collective Thinking

In a world where innovation is the currency of progress, the ability to solve complex problems and adapt rapidly is crucial. Yet, few things spark insight like a room full of people actively tuned in — not just to speak, but to truly listen, absorb, and build upon each other's ideas. This is the essence of a *mastermind*. It's not just about being in a meeting. It's about creating a space where minds resonate, amplify, and elevate.

The concept of the mastermind isn't new. Napoleon Hill, in his classic book *"Think and Grow Rich"*, defined a mastermind as "the coordination of knowledge and effort in a spirit of harmony, between two or more people, for the attainment of a definite purpose." When that principle is intentionally baked into how a team works — like in Scrum — it becomes a



powerful engine of acceleration.

The Mastermind Moment

Have you ever watched someone's eyes light up mid-meeting — where they suddenly *get it*? You can almost see the spark ignite. It often doesn't come from someone telling them what to do, but from being immersed in a stream of thought. They've been quietly processing while others share, and then suddenly: clarity. That's a mastermind in action.

This isn't about committee thinking or consensus. It's not about everyone voting on the best idea. Instead, it's about mental tuning — how the vibrations of different perspectives interact to create resonance.

Scrum as a Mastermind Engine

Where traditional meetings may lack purpose or clarity, Scrum provides a rhythmic, structured space for this mastermind energy to unfold. Each ceremony — Sprint Planning, Daily Scrum, Sprint Review, and Sprint Retrospective — is an invitation to collective intelligence.

Scrum teams are uniquely positioned to operate as a mastermind because the structure encourages:

- **Active listening:** Everyone has a voice, but more importantly, everyone is expected to hear.
- **Shared ownership:** The success of the work belongs to the team, not individuals.
- **Frequent feedback:** Insight is continuous, not delayed.

These ingredients prime a team for breakthroughs.

Why Scrum Outpaces Other Frameworks in This Space

Other Agile approaches have their strengths, but here's why Scrum stands out as a mastermind enabler:

- **Kanban** is great for flow and visualization, but it emphasizes individual work more than team intelligence.
- **Pair programming** is a miniature mastermind, but limited to two people at a time.
- **SAFe** and large-scale Agile frameworks create coordination across teams, but often dilute the intimacy needed for real-time collaborative breakthroughs.

Scrum, by contrast, is *small enough to stay connected and structured enough to sustain growth*.

Its events are built to:

- Surface insight
- Encourage feedback
- Generate shared accountability

Each Sprint is a loop of deepening trust and shared learning.

Why This Matters Now

Remote work, distributed teams, and the pace of modern delivery have made human connection more difficult — but also more necessary. Scrum isn't just a productivity framework; it's a tool for cultivating shared awareness and accelerating innovation.

A well-functioning Scrum team becomes more than a group of professionals working side by side. It becomes a conduit for collective insight. It becomes a mastermind.

Try This with Your Team

- **Prime the team:** Before a Scrum event, ask team members to come in with a mindset of curiosity, not certainty.
- **Pause more:** Give space between updates or reflections. Let insights land.
- **Watch for resonance:** When someone lights up — follow that thread.

Reflection Prompt — When was the last time you had a breakthrough by listening to someone else work through their thoughts? What did it teach you?

Key Takeaways

- A mastermind is less about consensus and more about cognitive resonance.
- Scrum provides structured opportunities for this resonance to happen.
- Teams that embrace the mastermind mindset will naturally accelerate.

Finally Elevate Together

The True Power of a Mastermind Isn't in the Process — It's in the People.

By now, you've seen how Scrum isn't just a framework for delivering work — it's a system for thinking together, failing together, and growing together. Each ceremony becomes a doorway into deeper connection. Every Sprint becomes an invitation to level up not just output, but *insight*.

What makes Scrum the mastermind of Agile isn't just the events. It's the spirit behind them:

- Listen before speaking.
- Support before solving.
- Reflect before reacting.

That's where innovation lives. That's where trust builds. That's where high-performing teams are forged.



Idea Communication Networks
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Greg Mester, Jr., founder of Idea Communication Networks, Inc., is a dynamic speaker, coach, and creator of #5amMesterScrum. Over 1,250 short-form shows and 14 million views on YouTube, Greg's mission: help professionals balance work and life while maximizing value. His expertise spans agile methodologies, leadership, and career development.

This Isn't the End — It's a Start

The most powerful thing you can do now is bring this mindset to your team:

- Make the next Daily Scrum a moment of shared curiosity.
- Turn your next Retrospective into a mirror for growth, not just metrics.
- Invite your stakeholders into the Review as partners, not critics.

Don't wait for permission. Start modeling it.

Be the one who shares. Be the one who listens deeply. Be the one who forgives fast.

And you'll see: The mastermind shows up. The ideas flow. The team rises.

The Superpower of Forgiveness

One reason Scrum teams become effective masterminds is a secret ingredient: forgiveness.

You will make mistakes in a Sprint. So will your teammates. Without the explicit or implicit ability to *forgive quickly*, growth halts. Without forgiveness, there is no safe space to experiment. No place to reflect honestly. No room to challenge each other constructively.

Forgiveness doesn't mean lack of standards — it means grace under learning. It's a team norm that says, "We're in this together, and we will fall forward together."

Final Reflection

What would it mean for your team—not just to work better — but to *think better* together?

Because when minds align, and hearts stay open, nothing is out of reach.

Scrum isn't the goal. Mastery of collective thinking is.



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MAKING PRODUCT WORK: EXPLORING THE AGILE PRODUCT OPERATING MODEL (APOM)

Eric is co-author of UML for Database Design and UML for Mere Mortals. As COO of Scrum.org, Eric is responsible for all aspects of marketing, support, outbound communications, Professional Scrum Trainer programs, partners and operations for Scrum.org. Eric was program director at IBM and Rational Software where he was originally hired in 1999 by original Scrum Team member John Scumniotales for who he worked for several years and worked closely with another original Scrum Team member Jeff McKenna sitting in the next desk. At IBM and Rational Eric was responsible for application lifecycle management (ALM), DevOps, Data Governance and Agile solutions. Previously he held the role of director of marketing for INetU (now ViaWest). Before INetU, Eric has held product management and marketing roles with other organizations including: Ivar Jacobson Consulting, CAST Software and Logic Works Inc. (Acquired by Platinum Technologies and CA), as product manager for ERwin.

In an era of constant change and rising complexity, traditional operating models are no longer enough. The Agile Product Operating Model (APOM) is designed to help organizations deliver value continuously, adapt faster, and thrive in uncertainty. Practices like Evidence-Based Management can help organizations thrive in uncertainty and deliver enduring value.

So what does this all mean? How do organizations shift to a product focus?

In a recent whitepaper, Scrum.org breaks down how organizations have evolved over the years and how a shift to a product focus is paramount in adapting to today's uncertainty and emerging digital technologies. This article helps outline key areas of the paper and APOM.



The Agile Product Operating Model (APOM)
<https://www.scrum.org/agile-product-operating-model/>



Shifting to Product-Focused Approach

In a traditional environment, teams break down work into a series of milestones, and focus on delivering against those milestones as a whole project. Projects are successful when the plan doesn't change, so teams can deliver against the plan and status is measured against progress toward milestones.

Focusing on a project mindset without considering the product undermines a team's ability to deliver value. Projects themselves are not bad, but the mindset can be restrictive, reducing the team's ability to be flexible and focus on value. A product mindset creates this clarity and focus on value and real outcomes.

Moving to a product focus is not just a case of changing **mindset**. Organizations need to consider **team alignment** as well as **funding and measurement**. Organizations must embrace a product operating model to make these things real. Because these products are digital, that operating model must be agile. Digital products are impacted by uncertainty in terms of client needs/expectations, technology, and the landscape those products fit within, so Agile is the perfect fit.

Knowing what your products are is key

Products are a mechanism by which organizations invest, manage and deliver value. They are vehicles that deliver value with a clear boundary. The product ideally has known stakeholders, well-defined users, customers who pay for it and people who use it. A product could be a service that an organization provides, a physical product or something more abstract. Ultimately, this leads to aligning around the customer and the outcomes. It also provides organizations with a clear understanding of cost, investment and value.

The Agile Product Operating Model



An Agile Product Operating Model is, as the name implies, an operating model for each product that supports an agile mindset. So, ultimately, it is the alignment of an organization around a product(s).

An Agile Product Operating Model brings together various bodies of knowledge, Professional Scrum, product thinking and modern product management practices to create an organization that can respond to change and deliver valuable products to customers. It is an evidence-based approach,

The Agile Product Operating Model (APOM) comprises the four areas of:

- **Strategy – The Why** – A clear, transparent

description of the elements of value (economics), business, technology, and operations

- **People - The Who** – Defining how people are organized and developed and the culture and incentive model within which they work
- **Structure** – The Rules and Tools - The governance foundations, 3rd party contracting, process and supporting systems and technology
- **Value Cycle** – The practices that enable agile discovery, delivery, and operations

Each element adds to the overall operating model, allowing the organization to build an environment where its products thrive.



How does Evidence-Based Management tie in?

At the core of APOM is using evidence to evaluate product work and team effectiveness. Evidence supports strategic change, ensuring the product moves in the right direction.

Scrum.org developed Evidence-Based Management (EBM)[™] to address the lack of clarity around what work is being done and why. EBM helps organizations align goals with work by focusing on measurable outcomes and regular progress review.

EBM centers on four value areas that balance market impact and organizational capability:

- **Current Value (CV)** – Value delivered today
- **Unrealized Value (UV)** – Potential future value
- **Time to Market (T2M)** – Speed of delivering new value
- **Ability to Innovate (A2I)** – Effectiveness in improving value

With EBM, goals and outcomes drive decisions, giving teams clear purpose and direction.

Conclusion

There is more to unpack when shifting to an Agile Product Operating Model (APOM), including Agile Product Portfolio Management and Change Management. Dive deeper into these insights in the full whitepaper titled - The Agile Product Operating Model (APOM) - an Evidence-Based Approach.



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AI AS THE NEW AGILE INSTRUMENT

Generative AI (GenAI) has become one of the most debated technologies of our time. Some view it as revolutionary, a tool destined to reshape industries and the future of work, while others regard it with skepticism — an intrusive force threatening human creativity and employment. However, instead of treating AI as a disruptive entity or a replacement for human expertise, **consider it an instrument — an enhancement to human capabilities rather than a substitute for them.**

Treating AI as an Instrument, a Tool

AI is everywhere now, and teams are either leaning into it or resisting its presence. Some see it as an efficiency booster, others as a potential threat. I prefer to **approach AI as an instrument**: a tool, not a decision-maker. Much like any innovation that shapes the way we work, it needs thoughtful integration. Agile teams thrive on rapid iteration, learning, and adaptability, and when AI is used strategically, it will support those processes and goals.

But the key is **knowing where it fits**. AI isn't a replacement for expertise or problem-solving, it's an accelerator for efficiency, a way to uncover new perspectives and structure information faster. The biggest mistake teams (and management) make is assuming AI can “take over” human responsibilities. It's tempting to rely on it too much, but that's where risks emerge: the flawed outputs, misplaced confidence, and inefficiencies that, instead of making things better, **create more work**. AI should amplify strengths, not override them. If it slows us down instead of speeding things up, it's not the right tool for the job.



How My Team Uses GenAI

Our Agile team has experimented extensively with GenAI to determine where it enhances productivity and where it introduces risk. Here's how we **effectively integrate AI into our workflow**:

- **Education** — While AI cannot replace deep expertise, it can provide accessible explanations. Whether it's learning about emerging technologies, regulatory frameworks, or software architecture, AI helps distill complex concepts into **digestible insights**, enabling faster onboarding and learning new skillsets.
- **Domain Knowledge** — AI's ability to aggregate information allows it to function as a **knowledge repository**. While its responses require verification, it serves as a valuable tool for **generating references and exploring unfamiliar subject areas** efficiently.
- **Structuring Information and Data** — Whether organizing documentation, summarizing reports, or refining research findings, AI accelerates the process of **structuring raw data into coherent, actionable formats**. This allows our team to focus on **analysis and decision-making rather than manual categorization**. It also produces very useful templates and offers stunning document formatting — helping my team to present information with clarity and impact.
- **Eloquent and Impactful Writing, Culture-Specific Communication** — One of AI's most effective applications is **refining written communication**. From drafting emails to tailoring messages for specific audiences, AI ensures that language is **clear, precise, and culturally sensitive**, allowing us to **enhance engagement and documentation quality**.
- **Brainstorming** — AI is an excellent brainstorming assistant, helping generate **new ideas, alternative perspectives, and thought-provoking questions**. It supports my team in **rapid ideation**, fostering innovation without limiting creativity.

In short, **using GenAI for the time-saving and productivity is highly effective**, provided it operates under human oversight. The ability to **streamline repetitive tasks** allows Agile teams to focus on strategy, collaboration, and execution rather than spending time on manual effort.

Where GenAI is Risky, Ineffective, or Dangerous

Despite its advantages, GenAI is **far from infallible**, and there are critical areas where its use can result in inefficiency, inaccuracies, or even harm. These risks must be **identified and actively mitigated** within Agile environments:

- **Producing Coding Artifacts** — When debugging AI-generated code takes more time than writing it from scratch, **the intended efficiency evaporates**. While AI can assist with syntax and function creation, relying on it entirely for complex logic or architectural decisions can lead to **flawed implementation and technical debt**.
- **Testing Coverage and Test Design** — AI lacks an **intuitive understanding of context, edge cases, and exploratory testing methodologies**. While it can help generate test cases, human testers must **validate and refine** these suggestions to ensure coverage meets **real-world scenarios, critical risks and the nuances of computer-human interaction**. Through our experiments with multiple automated test case generation tools, we observed that coverage is inconsistent, **no more than 50% of the cases were truly useful**. This highlights the importance of human oversight in test design to maintain quality and relevance.
- **Generating Articles or Documents Without Fact-Checking** — AI can produce well-structured content, but **factual accuracy is a persistent challenge**. When drafting reports or research-driven articles, relying solely on AI without verification **introduces risks of misinformation**, potentially undermining credibility.
- **Trusting AI with a Task After One Positive Result** — A successful AI-generated response does not guarantee continued reliability. **Blind confidence in AI's performance can lead to errors**, particularly



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when outcomes are **context-dependent or require nuanced judgment**. GenAI is non-deterministic by design, meaning its outputs can vary unpredictably. Relying on its consistency as a core strategy is **not advisable**, as its responses can fluctuate and require human validation.

- **Using AI in Legal Matters — Legal interpretation requires human expertise**. AI can summarize legal concepts but should never be relied on for **case analysis, contract review, or compliance assessments** without **qualified human validation**.
- **Using Public AI Services for Confidential Information — Data security should always be a priority**. Inputting proprietary, sensitive, or classified information into AI-powered platforms can **expose organizations to privacy risks**, violating regulatory standards and confidentiality agreements.

Bringing it All Together

When **strategically integrated**, AI empowers Agile teams to **move faster, think smarter, and collaborate more effectively**. It serves as an **instrument for efficiency**, enhancing workflows without replacing human expertise. However, when AI generates more churn than clarity — whether through **flawed outputs, security risks, or unreliable decision-making** — it ultimately slows down progress rather than accelerating it.

The key takeaway? **Use AI where it enhances agility but avoid it where its limitations create inefficiency**. A well-balanced approach allows Agile teams to **maximize productivity while maintaining quality, security, and reliability** — ensuring that AI remains an asset rather than a liability.



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WHY CONVENTIONAL AGILE FAILS TO DELIVER ACCEPTABLE VALUE FOR MONEY

Good results quickly help your client survive and thrive. At some point top management will begin to take action if they do not find the value they expected and the results they were promised.

How many managers plainly said they would pay the people 'doing Agile' handsomely once they provided the results expected of them, but not a penny prior? No cure, no pay.



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[2] Gilb, T., (2025). Agile ENGINEERING. Free Copy on Dropbox.

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/jz4lh97cvgbmmcvb35uoy/h?dl=0&e=3&preview=++10+JUNE+2025+SCRUM+ALLIANCE+John+Barratt.pdf&rlkey=kb7lux8smmg20ti29y4iccb4u&st=ofxmn0jn>

[3] Gilb, T., (2018, February 23). How Well Does the Agile Manifesto Align with Principles that Lead to Success in Product Development?. Project Performance International.

<https://www.ppi-int.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/SyEN-062.pdf>

'Conventional Agile' has been thoroughly tried, and it was found wanting. Agile of the Certification Manifesto variety was sold to a gullible crowd of IT people and MBA managers. This same crowd has adopted lots of other fads, and failed at all of them. This same crowd regularly adopts purely political solutions that fail to give the results they hoped for. I have had problems finding evidence [5] that 'conventional Agile' actually is a clear cause of anything good or impressive. Available case studies have no data, correlation, or multiple value dimensions, just pointless jargon.

Churning out code six times faster is not valuable [4, 5]. It is merely a greater quantity of an unknown value, likely bad since the focus is on production speed rather than stakeholder value.

We can't stop immature techies or corrupt management from adopting methods that do not really serve their organizations. What can happen is that a few of you can decide to do things with honor – manage projects productively, deliver great value, and find serious employers and clients, like I have [1].

I did my first successful 'Agile' project in 1960 [2, slide 2]. Now I am 84, retired, and proud of my 'Agile Value' on public record [1]. Will you be proud when you retire?

WHAT I BELIEVE YOU NEED TO DO, TO MAKE AGILE GREAT AGAIN

- 1** Analyze stakeholders and their values more deeply [8], do not limit yourself to users, customers and user stories.
- 2** Quantify all critical stakeholder values so you know what's really required, and so you can be held accountable for the resulting value [2, 4, 5]
- 3** Prioritize the 'values to deliver early', based on stakeholder influence [8].
- 4** Do competent design and architecture to meet the top ten critical value requirements within multiple resource budgets and other constraints. Not the user story - an oversimplified ambiguity about designs for values.
- 5** Do a Value Delivery Sprint. Maybe it has no code at all! Decompose months-long strategies into real, measurable Value Delivery (not 'code written') increments, about a week long [6]. If you are incompetent or in denial, ask your AI friend to do this, it's good at it.
- 6** Plan to measure every value delivery step for the most important values, and use the feedback (not a 'stand up meeting') to understand if your design is delivering value. Rough measurements are better than none! [1, Case 6, Confirmit]
- 7** Apply these Agile engineering [2] principles to all parts and levels of your organization, not just IT coding. A good example is the Management Strategy level [10]. Get managers to really understand Agile 'as it should be'. Then, get them willing and able to support real Agile throughout the organization. Their business school will not teach them anything like this, but maybe you will?



[4] Gilb, T., (2024, October 1). Values First: A Suggestion for the next step in our systems development maturity. ResearchGate.

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<https://www.bcs.org/events-calendar/2025/may/webinar-delivering-value-quantified-qualities-and-measuring-agile-engineering/>

Tom Gilb is the author of 10 paper books, about 25 digital books, and hundreds of papers on requirements, design, project management and related subjects. Tom has guest lectured at universities all over UK, Europe, China, India, USA, Korea – and has been a keynote speaker at dozens of technical conferences internationally. His methods were adopted at Intel, Boeing, HP, IBM, Philips Medical, Ericsson, Nokia, Siemens, Schlumberger, Sony, Microsoft, JP Morgan, Citigroup, and Credit Suisse. He is widely cited as the pioneer of the Agile rapid development cycle, with his own agile method 'Evo' [Gilb, T. (1988). Principles of Software Engineering Management. Addison-Wesley Professional.] successfully being used as a front end, for serious quality requirements, and for Scrum. His 2005 book 'Competitive Engineering' is a substantial definition and set of template standards for quantified requirements, design, project management, and quality control ideas.

See <https://www.gilb.com/p/competitive-engineering> (free pdf) See <https://leanpub.com/u/tomgilb> for digital book production, including several requirements books, like Quanteer-ing, and Value Requirements.



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[10] Gilb, T., Mäkelä J., Coleman, J. A., & Sarnecki, M. (2025, July 14) StrategyRing: Advanced Strategic Planning using Engineering. Free Copy on Dropbox.

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REIMAGINING AGILITY IN THE AGE OF AI: WHAT I LEARNED FROM TWO DOZEN EXECUTIVE CONVERSATIONS

Over the past eight months, I had the privilege of interviewing more than two dozen technology and business leaders across industries, from drone-enabled smart farms and AI research institutes to legacy manufacturing firms where human intuition still outranks any algorithm.

These candid conversations shed light on how organizations today think about agility, innovation, and sustainable value creation in a world reshaped by uncertainty and exponential tech growth.

Three core themes emerged, offering a snapshot of current priorities and a roadmap for the next few years.

1. AI Adoption: Cut Through the Noise, Not the People

AI is undoubtedly the loudest trend in the room, but many organizations struggle to translate its hype into business value. Across industries, the average return on AI initiatives still hovers at about 7%, with only the top decile of organizations achieving higher returns.* Many early-stage projects are driven by FOMO rather than strategy, often outperforming neither traditional investments nor more mature digital transformations.

Part of the challenge is structural. Responsible AI requires robust risk governance, compliance integration, and data transparency, all of which come with high overhead and organizational inertia. Add to that a murky ethical landscape and ongoing litigation risk, and the cost of doing it wrong often outweighs the gains of doing it fast.

Yet there's hope.

Organizations that align their AI efforts with business objectives and embed those efforts within trusted cross-functional teams are already beginning to see results. Several leaders shared how thoughtful AI implementation, paired with genuine change management, didn't just replace roles; it evolved them.

In the best cases, automation freed employees to take on more strategic, creative, or customer-centric responsibilities. The winning organizations aren't rushing in; they're entering with eyes wide open and their people by their side.

And yet, there's still a dangerous undercurrent of complacency. We see both individuals and even entire organizations clinging to the belief that they are irreplaceable in the age of AI. Maybe they are. But they're far more likely to be outpaced by those willing to adopt AI to

[*] Blair, K., Brenna, F., Fuller, N., Goehring, B., & Sanchez, M. (2025, June 9). From AI projects to profits: How agentic AI can sustain financial returns. IBM.

<https://www.ibm.com/thought-leadership/institute-business-value/en-us/report/agentic-ai-profits>

sharpen efficiency, elevate performance, and capture that final edge in an increasingly competitive market.

Whether your company is proactively investing in AI or lagging behind, the responsibility to stay relevant is personal. The pace of change doesn't wait for comfort zones. Adaptation is no longer optional. It's the baseline for survival.

In AI adoption, late but prepared beats early and reckless. However, avoiding the shift entirely is no longer a neutral stance. It's a sure path to irrelevance. Whether for your role or your entire business.

2. Innovation: It's an Inside Job

One of the most encouraging shifts I witnessed this year was the renewed focus on internal innovation. While many companies chase disruption externally, the smartest ones turn inward, empowering employees to lead change, not just absorb it.

The Baby Boomer generation is retiring, and with that, institutional knowledge is walking out the door. Some firms are tempted to use AI as a shortcut to fill the gap, but experience, judgment, and contextual awareness aren't easily replaced.

That's where structured innovation methods like TRIZ (the Theory of Inventive Problem Solving) come into play. With the right frameworks and executive support, even traditionally risk-averse organizations can reignite curiosity, surface latent expertise, and create pathways for sustainable differentiation.

Innovation doesn't require first-mover status. But it does require intent.

3. Cross-Functional Teams and Data-Driven Collaboration: The Future Is Fusion

One message was loud and clear: the siloed organization is a dying breed. High-performing companies prioritize end-to-end collaboration by merging business and technology from ideation through delivery to continuous improvement.

These "fusion teams" aren't just Agile by the process but agile in mindset, accountability, and ownership.



Ivan Gekht is a Siberian-born engineer with a background in rocket science and a mindset shaped by the Theory of Inventive Problem Solving. Since 2009, he's led Gehtsoft, where for two decades he's helped startups and Fortune 500s alike navigate high-stakes, high-complexity software challenges and turn them into high-yield results. With multiple certifications, media features, and frequent podcast appearances, Ivan skips the buzzwords, bets on thinking over titles, and still believes "impossible" just means someone gave up too early.

Success today depends on shared goals, integrated KPIs, and mutual understanding between product, tech, and business leaders. Data plays a crucial role here, not just as a reporting tool but as an active participant in decision-making. The organizations seeing the most ROI use real-time, human-centered, behavior-informed data from the start of design through to the product lifecycle.

But beware: bad data is worse than no data. Poor inputs can distort insights, break trust, and stall innovation. Clean, relevant, and purpose-driven data is now a foundational capability, not a competitive luxury.

If one theme unites these lessons, it's this: less hierarchy, more partnership, horizontally across departments and vertically from frontline to C-suite.

The final thought to remember is that the days of playing Agile theater are over. No more clinging to outdated roles or hiding behind titles. No more rigid corporate BS and no more passing the buck. Business and tech must stand side by side and be equally accountable for outcomes.

Anything less simply won't cut it.

Final Thoughts: The Next Frontier

The next few years will be transformative for our society.

Quantum computing is going to change the landscape even more. Maybe even reshaping entire industries.

Sets of skills that we value today, sets of tools in our toolkits - all evolve in real time. But the leaders I spoke with aren't just surviving this moment. They're shaping it, not by chasing every trend, but by making bold, strategic choices and investing in people as much as platforms.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine how we build, lead, and deliver value. Let's not use AI to replace what humans do. We should use it to *amplify* what we do best.

Success is just a few steps outside the comfort zone. Let's take those steps together.



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