

Change to More Agility

A journey in five stages

Many large organizations aim for stability and can be described as »castles,« »oil tankers« or »Jumbo jets.« Being successful in our modern environment, however, requires more agile organizational structures – symbolically speaking, we are talking about »tent cities,« »speedboats« or »drones.« But how can you successfully transform your organization into becoming (more) agile?

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The journey towards an agile organization has five stages. This Agile Transformation Journey is more of a challenging expedition than a comfortable cruise. The order of the five stages makes sense and still, you might have to repeat certain stages or go back to the base camp.

1 Initiating a journey



Agile transformations require a starting impetus similar to that required by start-ups. There, energetic pioneers, a business idea meeting, a certain customer demand and starting capital funded by FFF (friends, fools and family) provide that impulse. The first stage in

an agile transformation calls for similar prerequisites: Intrinsically motivated pioneers who believe in agility, a strong purpose, a number of supporters (ideally in the top management too) and a powerful transformation story that shows how more agility can strengthen the company's future business. In this first stage, the pioneers mentioned need to have a good feeling for the interests of the stakeholders (who are our supporters, our opponents and what interests exist?) and the »buy-in« of those in power. A first rough route planning (transformation roadmap) provides orientation and the top management with the securities it needs to set off on this journey.

Tools to get started

Change story	Stakeholder portfolio
Learning story	Agility check

act towards agile developments and emotionally commit to agile work methods. Clarity about required actions alone is not enough, however. In order to steer the energy in the right direction, you need to generate a powerful vision of the future that provides an idea of your »new way of working« and trigger positive energy among the top management as well as at the base. From the interplay between required actions (away from ...), vision of the future (towards ...) and the knowledge of existing qualities (carry on ...), you can derive your first action areas that lead towards a more agile organization and »release« them to be tested in stage three.

Tools to specify the journey

Customer forum	Bottom-up feedback
Future creation	Change architecture

2

Creating awareness and orientation



3

Prototyping your »new way of working«



Stage two is about initiating a movement. Movements are always created through positive tension. People and organizations have to step outside their comfort zones. Feedback from customers who authentically contribute their insights into strengths and deficits of the traditional organization helps. The same applies to feedback from employees at the base who provide the top management with a taste of real life and formulate their expectations towards a cool employer. Classic project assignments won't help you get an agile movement off the ground. In order to initiate such a mobilization, you need fellow campaigners who volunteer to

Learning and development only work through productive action. Developments towards agility follow the logic of sprints with short learning cycles. Following the testing of new ways of working and the evaluation of success, the next steps are made. Prototypes should always be tested with volunteers – people who are willing to commit to learning processes, not afraid of failing and exceptionally dedicated. Typical prototyping formats include »Agile Islands«, Design Thinking initiatives, Google Sprints, Rapid Innovation Teams, Rapid Results Teams and cross-functional agile project teams. You may also choose to concentrate on units or ►

teams in which managers can simply give agile work methods (e. g. Kanban, OKR, delegation, new decision-making processes) a go together with their employees. In this context, the top management's job is to provide the required framework conditions. They need to invest in cool physical spaces that support agile working. And executives have to provide time and organizational freedom for the volunteers. To make sure these developments can take their course professionally, agile prototypes require the support of professional coaches and corresponding method training. On top of everything, they require the »permission to fail;« in other words, signals from the top management that prototypes are allowed to fail and that the organization is supposed to learn from these failures. Nevertheless, all activities need to be connected to business challenges. Without any impact on current or future business success, agile working is perceived as »l'art pour l'art« and will not get executives' buy-in. Overall, the goal of this third stage is to obtain practical experience, evaluate effects on the business and, above all, identify cultural opportunities and pitfalls through consistent debriefing.

Formats for prototyping

Google Sprint projects	Experiment agile methods
Rapid Results	Design Thinking initiatives
Agile Islands	Rapid Innovation Teams

**4
Scaling up**



Up to stage three, the top management issued the »license to play.« This is where it gets serious. Stage four requires a bigger leap to turn a traditional organization into an agile organization. It's about adapting organizational structures, fundamentally rethinking planning and control systems (see page 90) and redefining the role of leadership. Agile work methods are to be implemented across the board. And more often than not, it's also about sacrificing some »sacred cows.« All that can only work if the top management fully commits itself to these steps and if it itself is convinced of the effectiveness of agile organizational models (see page 15). More agile organizations are not an end in themselves, however. Top managers must sense that their business is better prepared for the future if they adopt agile design elements. Most often, this stage is also one involving serious staffing decisions. The organization has to ask itself who matches the leadership requirements of an agile organization (capability for delegating, embodying shared leadership and letting go of command and control). Who needs intensive leadership training? And what do you do with managers who are incapable of changing their roles? More often than not, you will have to find new jobs inside or outside the organization for those who had been valuable in the past. In a nutshell, managers require lots of attention, sound coaching and enough time to immerse themselves in this new agile mindset during this hot phase. Systems such as performance management, controlling, strategic planning and the like must also be consistently reshaped. The functions of Finance, HR and IT are particularly important in this context. They need to be important supporters of an agile development. In order to foster the development of behavioral patterns towards agility across the board, »outside-in effects,« meaning designing rooms and work environments promoting agile work (see page 87) can also help.

Possible blueprints for agile organizational models

Spotify Model	Exponential Organization
Holacracy	Teal Organization
Dual Operating System	LeSS

5

Anchoring the agile mindset



The development towards a (more) agile organization is never complete and an ongoing process. In stage five, the organization focuses on designing a continuous learning process in order to embed the agile mindset in the DNA of the organization. Critical success factors in this stage include the design of feedback processes, the tailoring of agile work methods and the further development of organizational ambidexterity (balance between operational excellence and innovation). The examples of ING, Buurtzorg or KEBA described in the »Cases« chapter that it pays off to embody agile principles.

Five principles to be agile

Customer orientation	Learning mindset
Accountability	Transparency
Positive concept of human being	

Leadership essentials during the journey

To make sure an organization is able to move freely on its way to becoming an agile organization, it requires consistently practiced leadership attention and communication processes that support a positive atmosphere within the company. This means in detail:

Leading the transformation journey

- Uphold the priority of this process even in daily business.
- Consistently manage stakeholder interests.
- Be aware of your own role as a leader and »walk the talk.«
- Work on your own development as a manager (see page 34).
- Appreciate success and openly address pain points.

Ensure a positive mood for transformation

- Share success stories and celebrate success.
- Communicate believable stories about agility.
- Utilize vivid interactive communication formats.
- Support agile grassroots movements in the company.
- Continuously make pulse checks testing the mood for transformation.

Are you now infected with the travel bug and want to explore the land of agility? If the answer is yes, set about designing your own individual transformation journey. You can't simply book one at your local travel agent's! ●

»It does not matter how slowly you go
as long as you do not stop.«

Confucius