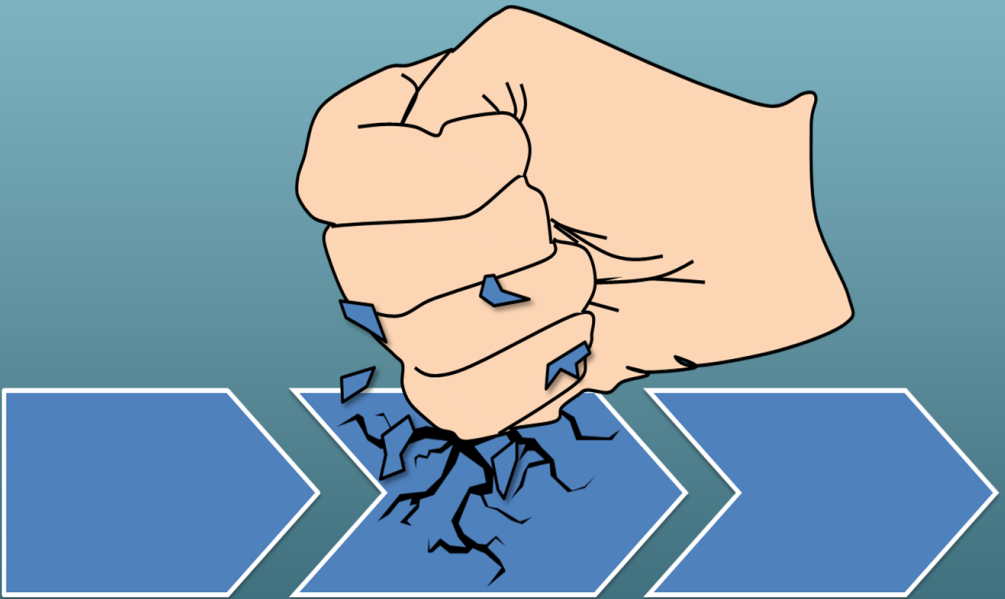


EXTREME AGILITY



MICHAEL KÜSTERS



Extreme Agility

Michael Küsters

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Also By Michael Küsters

The Spirit of Scrum

*To my beloved wife, Tô Giang, for your continuous and
unconditional support.*

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Introduction

“The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking.” - Albert Einstein

Extreme Agility is a collection of thoughts that you may highly disagree with. Many are in conflict with the teachings of business administration - and may also contradict your personal experience. This book purposefully exposes you to a different way of thinking through small anecdotes and provoking headlines.

Maybe you won't get beyond the index before you state *“This guy is totally bonkers”*. That's okay - just a few years ago, I myself might have argued, *“Is the author a lunatic?”* I'm not. I consulted dozens of organizations and led critical initiatives to success. Today, I coach, train, mentor and consult others to help them become more successful. A common theme is: *“As long as you continue thinking and*

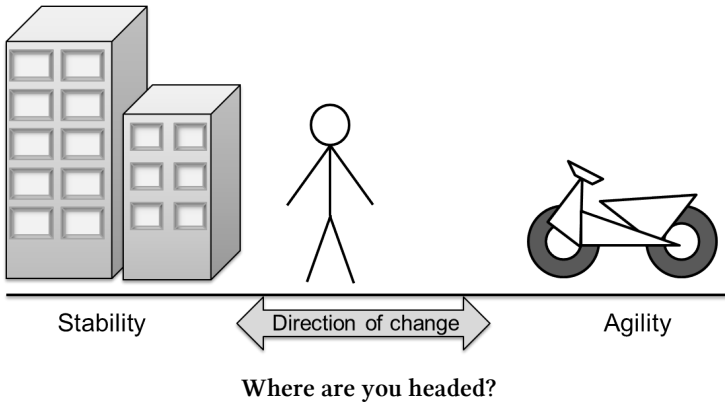
doing what you always did, nothing will change”

The suggestions made in this book are hyperbole - and at the same time, they aren't. I have observed dozens of companies and how they work. Some have taken certain topics to heart and have benefitted greatly: Their understanding grew, their processes became more effective - and their ventures more profitable.

I don't encourage you to implement the things mentioned in this book without understanding either *what* you are doing, *why* you're doing - or *how* to do it. Instead, I expose you to a whole load of problems that you might never knew you had. I purposefully do not offer you a way how to solve them: You might just do what I suggest without reflection and then blame me for giving you terrible ideas.

Once you discover how the underlying message of each section can benefit in your situation - you are ready for *Extreme Agility!*

It's all about change



Regardless of where you stand, how far you want to go or where you want to be: You need to take at least one step - to make a significant change - otherwise, there will be no change. Only by changing towards the direction that you want to go, will you actually make progress. This book offers a vast amount of suggestions for directions into which you might want to be heading. Some are complementary, others mutually exclusive - there will be no “100% mark” that you can achieve by following the book. I offer you

options, it's up to you what to make of them, which to pick or how far to take them.

The intention of this book

“It can be the result of habitual tendency, whatever the cause, to view the world with limited sets of options. Conversely, some believe free will is the ability to choose from beyond apparent options.” - from Wikipedia



If you had to choose a random spot, would you choose the black or white side?

A false dichotomy - also called “false dilemma”, is a situation where people *think* that they must choose between two or more specific presented options, when there are other options which that person may not be aware of while they decide. Take a look at the Wikipedia quote: How often have you encountered this kind of thinking: *“If we don’t do it like **this**, then it’s not going to work!”* - a classic false dichotomy caused by a limited perspective.

Here are just a few examples, which we will explore

more in-depth later in the book:

- We need a hierarchy to maintain order in the company.
- We need a detailed action plan to ensure project success.
- We need to measure whether we are on the right track.

These statements are cleverly disguised false dilemmas. Let's just dissect the first one. The hidden implication is: "*Either hierarchy, or chaos.*" The dichotomy is much easier to spot when we put it like this. The false dilemma is: "*I do not know any other method of preventing chaos except creating a hierarchy*" - equating the speaker's ignorance about alternatives with an absolute absence of further options.

This book has been written to help you become aware of such false dilemmas and to provide hints of existing alternate options. The magic happens when you leave the

trodden paths, in order to discover new and better ways of moving forward.

Teasers

This preview contains a few teasers from the full book.

Be without past

“I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead” - The Bible, Philippians 3:13

“In the past, everything was better” - with this jaded view, we often reminisce times long gone, times that will never come back.

And we forget the very reasons why things changed. *Some* things might have appeared better in the past, but they are merely components of a larger system that no longer exists. Just imagine putting a memory stick into a tape recorder and pressing “play” - it just doesn’t work. If you’re an older generation you might still remember how often tapes messed up and you had to discard them.

We apply inapplicable, outdated ways of working and never discover that they are broken until someone who has never done that before wonders what we are doing - maybe even longer! When I go into an organization that

is sheltered from change, I see this very thing happening. I went to some places long ago and when I returned a decade later, the faces had changed - but not they way they do things! Companies get stuck in a weird kind of time warp.

The market is adapting rapidly, the needs of your customers change, capability potential evolves - if you desire to retain a former state, your organization becomes a fairytale land disconnected from the continuously evolving business world.

You can not rely on *anything* that “worked before”. Likewise, you can’t rely that things which “didn’t work before” still don’t work. Shape the future as if there were no past!

Eliminate the business side

“Who needs business, anyways? Let’s just do geek stuff. Life would be so much better without those nagging people from the business side.” Or so - many developers may think. Yes, the business people do change their mind as they learn new things about the market - and yes, what they want is sometimes completely unreasonable from a technical perspective. But why do they make unrealistic promises to the customer - well: because the company needs to earn money, even if the people from the IT side are too slow with delivery. And that’s where the problem comes from: Because you *have* a business side. If you didn’t a business side, this issue would be non-existent.

Side always means that there is a dividing line, and depending on where people stand, their perspective - their opinion - their direction differs. As long as you have multiple “sides” within your organization, the clashes, the blaming, the conflict, the tension, the overload, the unmet

expectations - they all will never end! You can not have a “business side” and a “technology side” and expect the problems to go away. The cure is simple: stop having “sides” at all!

Cross deadlines

Let's face it: *There is no deadline*. Deadlines are just an arbitrary date that someone has put on the calendar in order to exercise pressure on someone. Are you even aware that a "deadline" is a military term meaning "*If you cross this line, you will be shot dead*"?

Let me explain how deadlines are used: A customer, client, manager or whoever just proclaims "*You must do this by then, otherwise you will have a problem.*" - usually without even asking you whether that is realistic.

Now, let's get back to the military origin of the idiom: You have a pack mule carrying 500 pounds, and need to get the cargo to a different place. Now, if that mule doesn't move as fast as you intend it, you shoot it. *Smart move!* Now, who's going to carry that cargo? You. Congratulations.

Let me re-phrase what a deadline means: "You must do this by then, otherwise I will have a problem." That's more

like it. If a deadline is being set for you, you can safely ignore it - because you're not the one who has the biggest problem. Someone else has. And that person better learn to talk with you before making an unrealistic decision that affects others.

Deadlines are wishful thinking, and just like all other wishes, somewhere between optional and irrelevant. Cross them - and see what happens.

Metrics are worthless

“Metrics are not a device for restraining the mad” - James Fenton

There are certainly reasons to use certain metrics for forward-looking strategic planning, but metrics are a terrible way of detecting problems within the system. Metrics are set up everywhere in large organizations. It's amazing that a central statistics department isn't a core building block of organizational design. Every manager has their own metrics for tracking whatever matters to them. At frequent intervals, they look at these numbers, then put a smile on their face when the trend is positive and get a heart attack when the trend is negative. They think that they made an important discovery when their metric underwent a significant change.

Yet, that's the most useless way of applying metrics that you can think of.

Metrics usually measure the status quo. Even interpo-

lation techniques can only detect ongoing anomalies. By the time the needle on a gauge moves, *some* change has occurred. It is too late to do something - because something has been done *already*. Someone, somewhere in the organization should be able to tell a more comprehensive story than “*The numbers changed.*”. If you know who that someone and their story is - why don’t you listen to them instead of looking at a graph? If you *don’t* know who that someone is, then you have no clue where your numbers come from and your metrics provide nothing more than an illusion of control.

When a metric shows you a problem that nobody has noted before, you have a much bigger problem than the one you see on the metric: Your people aren’t thinking ahead or they aren’t communicating properly.

When a problem becomes visible on a metric, someone should already have done something about it or your organization has issues.