

Four, Three, Two, One:

A Countdown to Agile Adoption



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Preface

In one sense, this book is a prequel to my other two books: *Understanding Agile Values and Principles*¹ and *Adopting Agile Values and Principles*².

I wrote the first book because, over the years I had been coaching and training Agile ideas, some people seemed to have never had a serious discussion of how the Manifesto's values and principles could apply to their situations. Indeed, some never heard of the values and principles except in passing comments during some framework training.

The second book was my effort to address ideas about each value and principle that I felt people should consider in pursuing their adoption of an Agile approach. I originally thought of calling it *Implementing Agile Values and Principles* but decided against that because I really wanted to focus, not on how to, but on “why”. In this regard, the first book could be considered a focus on “what”.

Based on things I would talk to people about during coaching and training, I felt there were ideas people needed to consider even before they focused on the Manifesto. My belief is that, by doing this and then approaching a study of the Manifesto, people could devise a path to their own “framework.” In Kanban fashion, this could evolve to fit them more effectively than a prescriptive framework.

The ideas presented in this book are intended to help organizations consider those things. Then, addressing Manifesto values and principles can help them devise their own path. However, there is nothing in this book or the other two that could not be used in any context to grow effectiveness in how people accomplish things together. The ideas, despite being addressed in an Agile context, are not restricted to only that kind of work.

An important goal of this book, as with the others, is to offer ideas for organizations to consider without trying to say specifically how they should implement them in their situation. If people reflect on how such ideas could apply to them, they are more likely to implement something that makes sense.

¹ <https://www.infoq.com/minibooks/agile-values-principles/>

² <https://leanpub.com/adoptingagilevaluesandprinciples>

Introduction

Contrary to much being written and discussed these days, I feel an organization can gain a great deal from pursuit of the Manifesto's values and principles. People have said the Manifesto is out of date and does not address things needed today.

The Manifesto was a statement of ideas at a point in time. I don't believe the Manifesto authors, in any way, felt they had all the ideas people would ever need. Indeed, the Manifesto starts with "We are uncovering," not "We have uncovered," making it clear they felt there would be more to learn as people adopted the values and principles in their organizations. I don't believe that invalidates what the Manifesto does say.

Unfortunately, not long after the Manifesto was published, the sense of what it meant to pursue an Agile approach became acquiring a framework and implementing its roles and rules. Rather than considering what the Manifesto meant for their organizations, "buying" a framework, where most of the decisions were made for them, seemed to be the efficient way to "do Agile." The idea of effectively "being Agile" seemed to be left aside in carrying out practices.

Efforts to implement frameworks were often called "transformations" though fundamental, long-term organizational changes were not what was happening. It was not even what people really sought being content with easier day-to-day transitional behaviors. As one person, whose name I apologize for forgetting, once said, "Companies don't put out RFPs for organizational change and continuous improvement."

Why do people think they can achieve agility by "acquiring" a framework? Perhaps it looks like a familiar procurement problem. You select a vendor who offers a solution, perhaps implement new tools, conduct framework training (perhaps only for a few people or the other extreme), implement trained behaviors, and wait to see the promised results. This ignores the fact that agility is primarily a shift in how to think about change, not just enacting different practices, as useful as they might be. Expectations to "do Agile" can collide with more beneficial goals, resulting in compliance to framework behaviors but limiting the potential for more broadly useful agility.

The Structure of the Book

The book is divided into four parts with chapters that cover things I encourage people to consider about their organizations. This is regardless of whether they are contemplating any adoption of new methods. Improving these things makes it easier for people to handle other things.

The first part covers things that, by themselves, might be all an organization³ needs to have a significant impact on improving its situation: communication, collaboration, trust, and servant leadership. These address the first Agile value about "Individuals and Interactions."

The second part addresses motivation including mention of demotivation, and motivational factors such as Dan Pink's ideas (autonomy, mastery, and purpose) and those of Jurgen Appelo. These address the important first statement in the fifth Agile principle.

³ In the book, an "organization" for you could be an individual team, a department, a project, or some larger organizational structure.

The third part addresses change since any adoption of new ideas means change. This includes challenges and resistance to change. Several Agile values and principles address change both by directly using that word or implying change in what they say.

The fourth part will cover “doing” something but without reference to any specific framework. It will include a brief review of Alistair Cockburn’s *Heart of Agile* and Joshua Kerievsky’s *Modern Agile*, both offering their own four focal points of agility. This is followed by a chapter on adoption without a formal framework which includes ideas for “doing” but intended as suggestions not requirements.

Closing out the book is a brief Afterword containing my suggestion for what might be the first things an organization could try after reading this book, including consideration of the Manifesto values and principles.

Part 1: Perhaps All You'll Need



Communication, collaboration, and trust form the support upon which effective Agile practices rest.

Trust is the foundation. Without it, communication is filtered, and collaboration is superficial.

Communication and Collaboration are the “pillars” that hold up the practices.

Agile practices at the top only deliver their promised agility when supported by the base and pillars.

When these three elements are strong, teams can adapt as needed. When weak, even implemented ceremonies can fail to deliver benefits and become empty rituals.

Importantly, these elements depend on one another. You cannot really

- communicate effectively if you cannot collaborate and trust one another.
- collaborate effectively if you cannot communicate and trust one another.
- trust one another effectively if you cannot communicate and collaborate.

Added to this is a fourth additional idea: servant leadership.

With the four of these, you may have all you need to start transforming⁴ an organization doing any kind of work.

⁴ I don't use this word lightly as I think doing these can truly change the form of what happens in an organization, not just check off items on a list of activities.