



**AGILE CHANGE**  
*management limited*

# Adopting agile change for your situation

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## Introduction

Agile change management is our best hope of making progress in a high pressure environment. By chunking up change into smaller pieces we can introduce some new ways of working whilst we sort out the more complex issues. Agile change realizes benefits from these changes as early as possible, by ensuring that they are prioritized according to their business value. Organizations want to be agile in their approach to change – to have the ability to move quickly and easily.

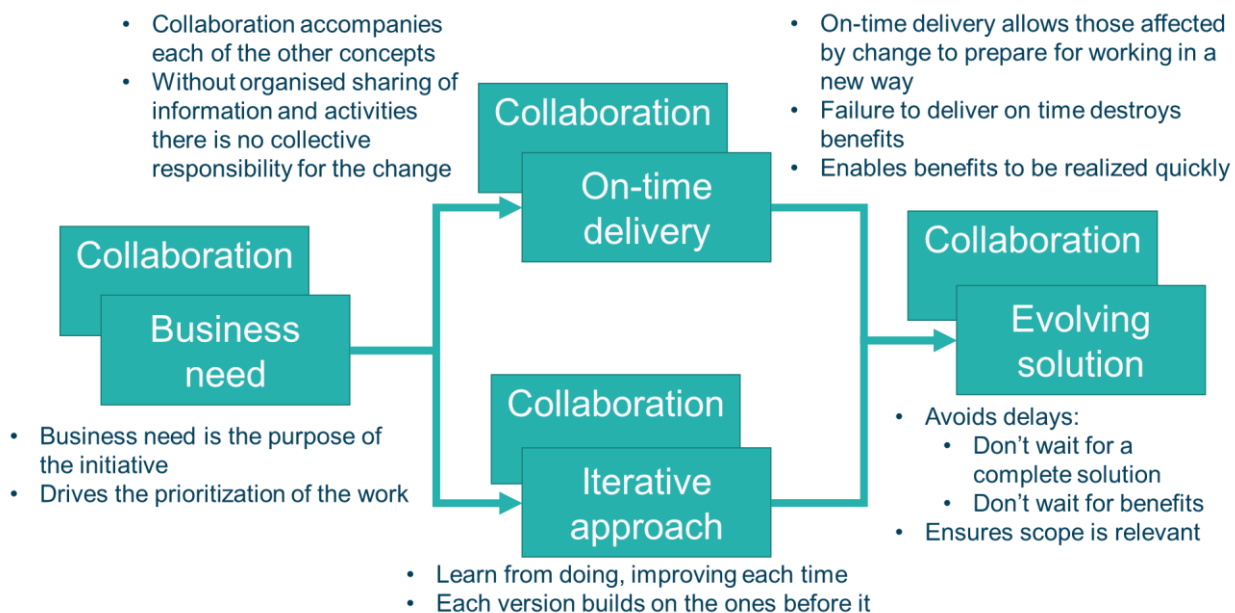
Agile change is a way to identify, plan and implement change, applying principles from the Agile community and techniques from the change management profession. The purpose is to align the project activities that create tangible change with emotional and psychological support that encourages the adoption of new ways of working.

This agility ensures that the changes we create continue to evolve to meet the needs of our organizations and have the greatest possible chance of realizing the benefits that are promised and expected.

## Agile concepts

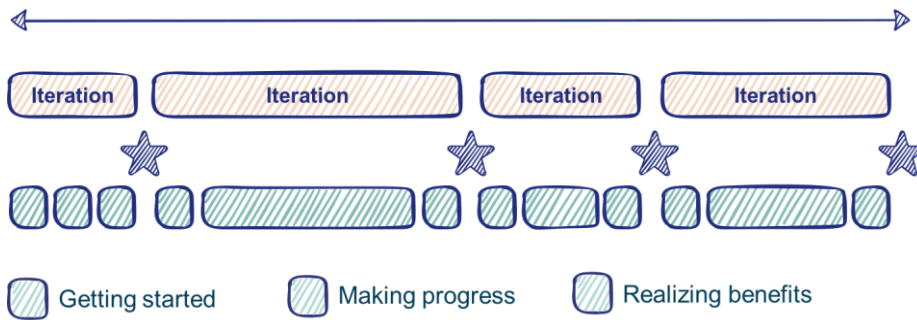
Agile change brings together the principles of agile and the activities of behaviour change. It is not a methodology, because it is not a prescriptive approach. It does not list specific procedures and methods, it doesn't specify who is expected to do what (that never works in real life!). It demonstrates how the ideas that form the various agile approaches can be used to create new ways of working.

To create agile change, we need to apply the agile concepts, as these are the core elements of this approach:



## Roadmap

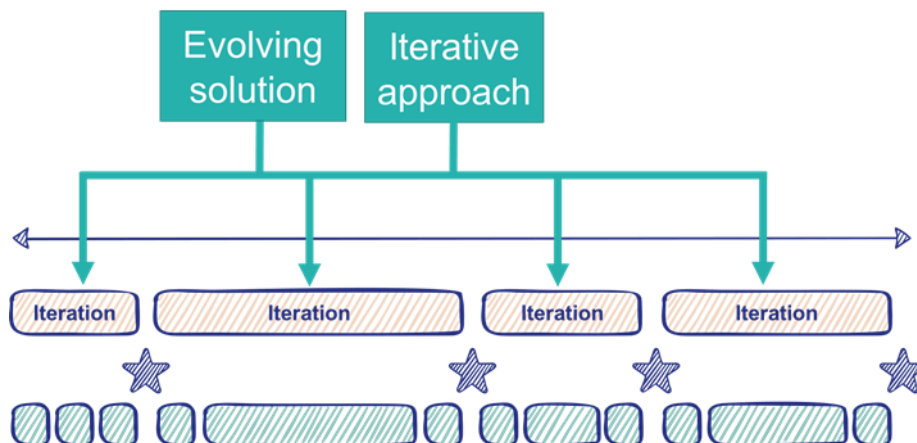
These concepts generate the plan for an agile change initiative, called a roadmap. The roadmap is a simple, intuitive visual of what outcomes will be delivered and when. This roadmap applies to all types of organizational change, flexing in length to reflect the needs of each change, whilst still undertaking the core activities that need to apply to all changes.



To provide a simple “journey planner” the roadmap has a repeatable set of steps for the activities needed to move from idea to successful implementation, grouped together in three processes:

- Getting started – this process defines and plans the work that will take place in the iteration. Those participating in the change will decide what the iteration is expected to achieve, identify what work is required and how this will be allocated across the available resources.
- Making progress – this process creates the changes. This is the most significant part of the iteration, to which most time and resources are dedicated because it is where the new ways of working are designed and tested.
- Realizing benefits – this process deploys the changes into the live business environment and checks that the desired benefits are being generated. This retains the focus on business need throughout the life of the change.

## Evolving solution and an iterative approach



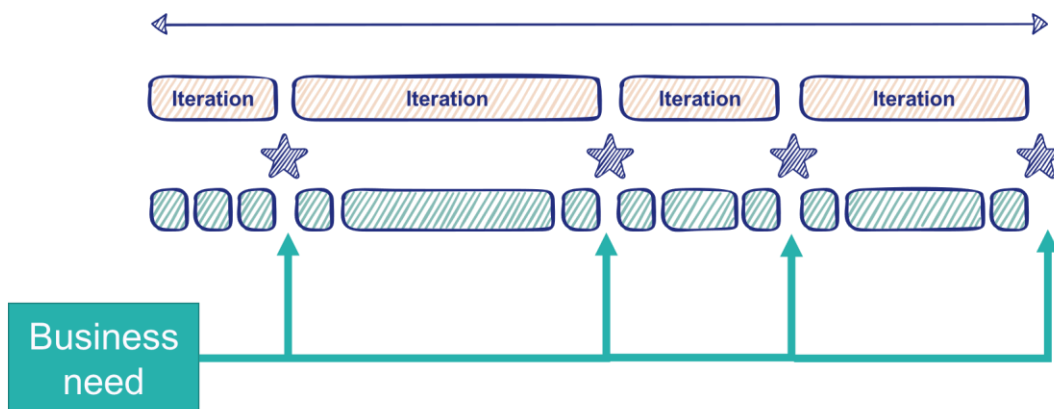
I think the key word here is solution – not evolving! We need to focus on delivering new capabilities to the business, so that our organisations can do things they could not do before – solving existing problems and taking advantage of new opportunities.

Core to agility is not planning everything in detail up front, but delivering change as early as possible, and building on this iteratively throughout the life of the initiative. This gives us the opportunity to respond to change rather than stay on a set course that may no longer fit changes in the wider business environment or be responsive to the feedback we are receiving internally.

The roadmap delivers capabilities one iteration at a time. We start with our desired outcome and break this into smaller more specific capabilities achieved iteration after iteration.

## Business need

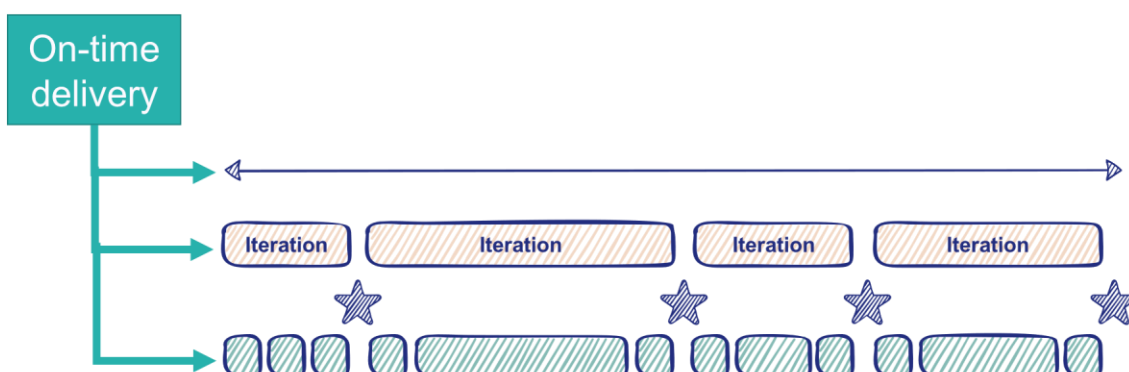
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The outcomes that form the evolving solution are selected based on the priorities of the business, what their current pressure points are, what they need to perform more effectively in the short term, and the things they need to be able to do in the future that will keep them ahead of the game.

## On-time delivery

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An evolving solution allows us to do exactly what it says, we evolve, develop, grow, progress the solution over time. This can appear quite threatening if you are the one authorising the changes, because it feels as if you don't know what you are going to get.

On time delivery provides a level of certainty because we might not know all the details, but we know we are getting the ability to do something we could not do before, and we know exactly when that is going to come on stream.

We keep to time by rigorously prioritizing our work to ensure that the activities essential to the outcome are undertaken first. "Nice to have" features and functions come after, so if the essentials take longer than planned, we can still deliver on time because the essentials have at least been completed.

### Collaboration

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To keep everything we are doing as relevant, practical and useful as possible, lets work with those most affected by the change, those that will have to adopt new ways of working. Sounds simple but collaboration means organised sharing of information and activities, so we need to put some thought into this. The plethora of hybrid working responses post pandemic has made this more challenging but also helped us.

There is a need for greater transparency on who is available when and greater thought about what work we do when we need to quietly focus and when we need to work with others in the moment to share ideas and perspectives.

### Applying agile change to our most common challenges

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The roadmap is a core agile change planning technique which is central to delivering agile change. Using this technique alongside application of the agile change concepts enables us to solve some of our most common challenges including:

- Everything is changing around us
- Uncertainty is hard to sell
- More effective sponsorship
- Aligning an agile approach with a waterfall project delivery
- Not enough available resources from the business to collaborate with
- Too many other changes taking place at the same time

### Everything is changing around us

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The core issue here is the urge to wait until there is greater certainty about priorities and requirements before taking action. It is the feeling that it would be safer to wait, not start work until we know all the details because otherwise we might waste our efforts by doing the wrong thing.



We want certainty but the problem is, this certainty cannot be achieved. We are living in a volatile, ever changing world, and we need ways of taking action even though we have an imperfect view of the business environment in which we operate.

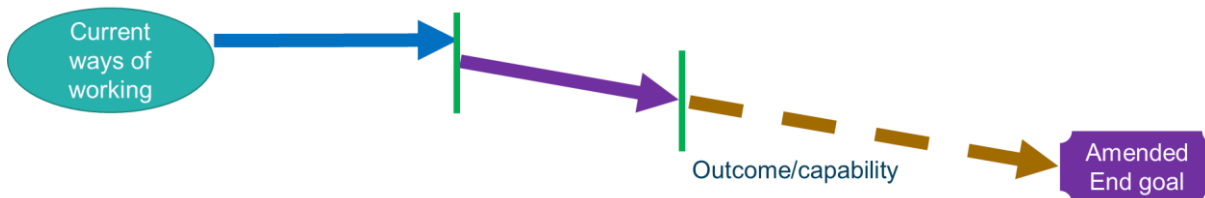
Actioning what we do know, whilst allowing unknowns to become clearer over time enables us to get started, safe in the knowledge that we can incorporate changes as we learn more about our environment and the reaction to the changes we are making.

To do this, we start by identifying the bigger picture, our end goal for our initiative. This end goal is a description of the strategically important capabilities that our organisation needs to be successful in the future.

Using this end goal as the guide point for where we want to get to, we undertake some initial ideas, that contribute to achieving this end goal. We put these ideas into operational use to realise early benefits and learn what is working and what still needs to change.



We scan our horizon to see what has changed, what is working and how far we are from our end goal. We use this up-to-date assessment to identify what we need to do next. We create and implement these ideas, creating the next iteration of our change.



Once this next round of ideas have been implemented, we repeat our horizon scanning to see what has changed and what we need to do next to achieve our end goal.



## Uncertainty is hard to sell

This incremental approach works well in enabling us to get things done. However, it makes it harder to convince others we know what we are doing, because we cannot produce a detailed plan of everything that is going to happen.

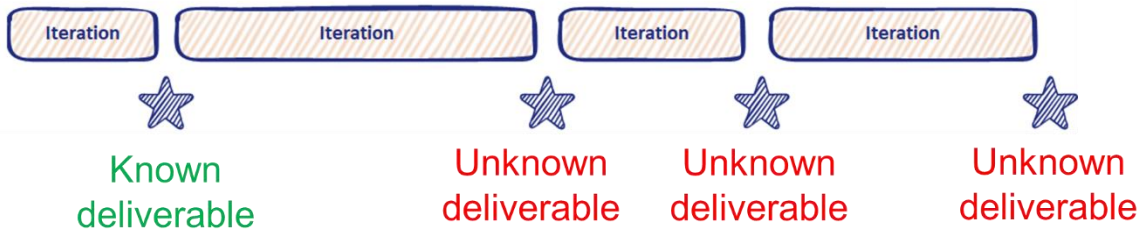
This is where we need to shift our description of our work, away from the specifics of what we are going to do, to an explanation of what we will achieve. We can break our end goal into a series of new capabilities, each of which are useful in their own right, and contribute to the bigger picture of how the organisation will work in the future.

This stops us promising specific features and functions, that when we start work we realise might not be the right things. Too much detail too removes our ability to be agile. Concentrating on specific deliverables means we can only describe the most immediate delivery as everything else is not yet known as this work is not yet defined.

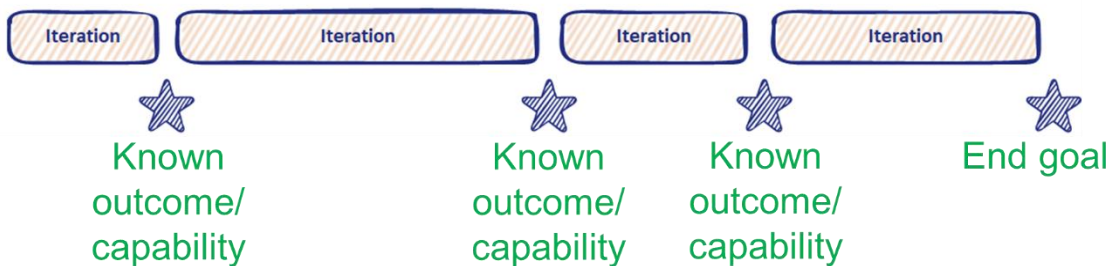
Instead, we can describe a path towards the end goal, with each step a new capability i.e. what the organisation will be able to do, not exactly how it will be able to do it. In this way we can offer an end to end plan at the start of the initiative but still retain the flexibility to prioritise our ideas based on feedback and changes in our environment.

I have shown this diagram to lots of sponsors and senior leadership teams and seen them visibly relax as they realise they are not commissioning chaos.

Old way – agile makes us look like we don't know what we are doing



New way – we can explain the differences we will make to the business





## More effective sponsorship

By changing our emphasis from a list of work we are going to do to a description of the capabilities the organisation will have, we can help our sponsors lead more effectively. Too often, sponsorship descends into a micro-management review of the work we have been doing, checking that it is on time and on budget.

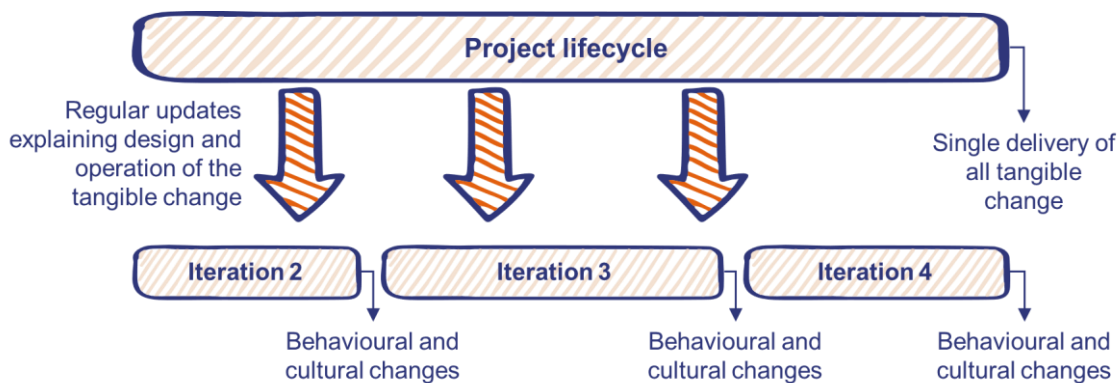
A sponsor who has limited understanding of the detail of the work does not add value when they minutely review the detail of how that work is progressing. An effective sponsor questions the impact on the business, not the specifics of the activity itself. This increases their engagement because it increases their appreciation of the value of the initiative they are sponsoring

By elevating the conversation to a review of the capabilities delivered and the difference that has been made to the business, we can focus attention on the difference that the change initiative is making. This enables the sponsor to engage at a more strategic level that is a better fit for their role.

## Aligning an agile approach with a waterfall project delivery

If the tangible changes are created by a separate project team, using a traditional or waterfall approach, these project deliverables will not be available until the end of the last iteration.

During this time, use an agile change approach to create the new ways of working, developing, and deploying the behavioural change activities.



To make this possible we collaborate with the project team throughout our iterations, as we need them to share early designs of what they are creating. By maintaining this communication, we can share details of the assumptions we are making, the changing priorities in the business and the feedback as we workshop ideas and innovations with the business.

We will concentrate on developing behavioural and cultural changes, establishing new values, new priorities and new attitudes in line with how the organization needs to work in the future. Within the limitations of not being able to implement the tangible changes, we will make changes to processes,



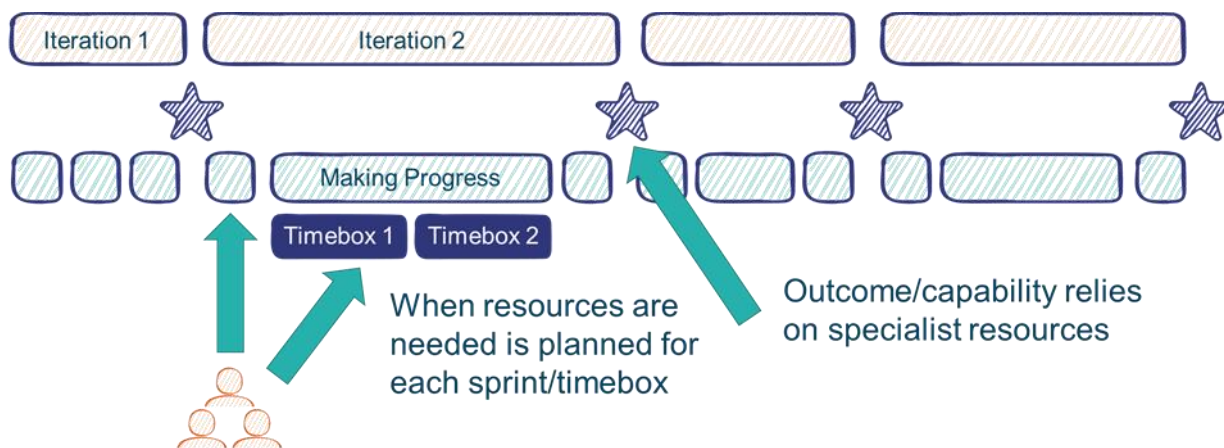
policies and standards, and re-structure roles and responsibilities in readiness for the arrival of the change solution.

To work in this way, we need to establish empathy and trust with the project team. Empathy is the understanding of the thoughts and feelings of another person. In this case the project team have a near impossible task, attempting to deliver complete solutions to a deadline that was calculated before any work commenced. This best guess will come under pressure as the work gets underway so the project team will not want to hear anymore requirements or feel that our change activities will grow the scope of their work.

To build a strong relationship we need to acknowledge their pressure whilst explaining how closer alignment with us could make their world better. Our role is to get the business ready to use what the project team are creating. We can head off problems and issues from the business and ensure everyone is trained and ready to start working in the new way. Our development of the new ways of working can provide the project team with use cases for testing and a resource pool for taking part in the testing, saving the project team from having to organise this.

## Not enough available resources from the business to collaborate with

The concept of deliver on-time can help secure the time of busy people. Using the roadmap we can tell people exactly when they are needed so they can plan their time and balance this need with the needs of their business as usual responsibilities.



Specialist resources needed are identified at start of iteration

We need to share our requirements for their involvement across two time horizons:

1. Short term time horizon – for a sprint/timebox we can be specific about the need for their involvement to create change

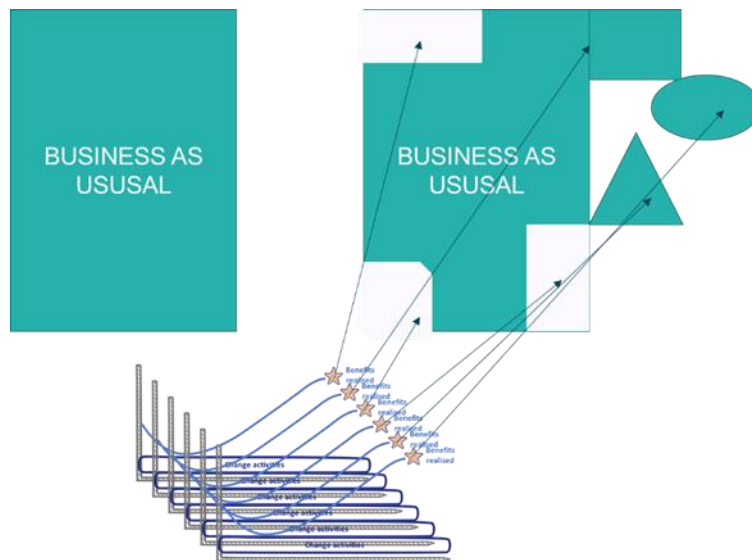


2. Future time horizon – by showing the outcomes/capabilities in future iterations across the whole roadmap, we are giving advanced notice to our specialist resources of when they are needed to contribute to the initiative

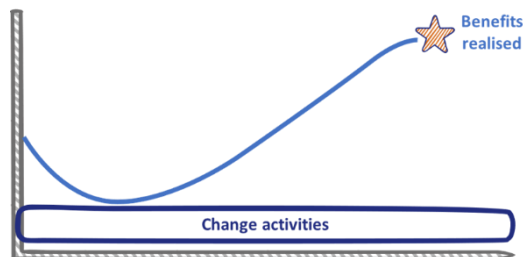
Applying the concept of collaboration helps because we organise what each person is contributing, and provide them with opportunities to explain what they are doing, how they will do it and when they will do it with other members of the team. This transparency amongst all those involved ensures the team form natural bonds with each other. It is also an effective use of time because the team is more likely to resolve issues amongst themselves than escalate issues to senior managers outside of the team, which creates delays.

## Too many other changes taking place at the same time

It is difficult to know what to do first when there are so many new ways of doing things that have to be applied to our work. The high volume of simultaneous and continuous change that is taking place means that change represents disruption to business as usual. Those impacted can find the flow, the priorities and the certainties of what they do feels under frequent attack.



Each wave of change creates a new version of business as usual, chipping away at certainty and also confidence. It is hard to concentrate when every day introduces something new and different. We lose our sense of stability, and this impacts our confidence. It is no surprise that the transition curve has a dip in productivity at its core.



Agile change means partnering the creation of tangible change with a clearly defined approach to behavioural change. We need to identify a comprehensive set of activities that lead us from our current habits and routines to the creation of a new normal, where we have forgotten how we used to do things because the change in our ways of working have become our accepted practice.

Having defined these behavioural change activities, we need to share them with all those affected, which in our organisations today is everyone. Organisational change is democratic, it impacts everyone.

The impacts are specific to individual roles, but the experience of change is universal. Knowing what is needed to create new ways of working must be partnered with a supportive environment. We must start with a “no blame” culture, a version of psychological safety where it is known that the mistakes arising from trying new things will not be punished, but seen as an important learning activity.

We also need to provide coaching to develop emotional resilience. Resilience is the ability to keep going despite setbacks and problems. It is a core skill and can be developed, it is not a personality trait that we either have or don't have. Provide training in the creation and application of practical coping mechanisms to enable people to manage the stress and uncertainty of continuous change.

### Conclusion

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Agile change provides solutions for our most common challenges. The concepts ensure that flexibility and adaptability are baked into the planning and the ongoing management of our project and change initiatives. If you don't know much about agile change, use this paper as the trigger to learn more and start making work easier for yourself.

### About the author

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I have been responsible for the successful delivery of effective change and for creating environments that support transformational change for over twenty years. I am the founder of the Continuous Change Community and the Chief Examiner of the Agile Change Agent qualification. I am a respected author of books and articles on change, project and programme management.

To access more resources about change management, connect with me on LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/in/melaniefranklin1> or visit my website [www.agilechangemanagement.co.uk](http://www.agilechangemanagement.co.uk)

