Agile things

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By

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Enjoy your trip, follow the map

I stumbled upon this image. Christopher Webb designed this London Subway map of all the different ways to work. It has to do with Agile thinking and different frameworks and methods to work in this way of thinking. Apart from the fact that it is a complex network it made me think. You can look at it the same way as you look at a real subway map. The whole is complex. So many directions and options to travel. But that is the whole point. You don't need to go everywhere. You just need to pick one destination and take the correct route to get there. When you travel in the real world you just need to follow one, maybe two colors to get to your destination.

The same goes for change within your company. Don't do everything. Pick one route and stick to it. Forget all the other tunnels and tracks and just travel to where you want to go. Or at least what feels right to go to. I often see companies that adapt to almost everything. Who mix up various routes and try to get somewhere and often that does not work. Like in real live traveling you cannot just pick the nice stations and skip the boring, smelly and ugly once. You need to pass each one. And that is why I like this map. Not for all the information it provides and the connections it shows. But for the metaphor it provides. So I can keep this blog very short and hope that you get what I'm try to explain. If you want to get to a certain destination, pick your framework, method or way of working. Do every step, even the once you don't like or that don't seem to add value. Learn from each step and know why you like or dislike it and see what is there. Until you get to where you want to be. And if you see a different route that get's you to the same destination and it feels that it is better suited for you, then take it. But only switch stations at the right moment.

And sometimes the old road seems like the best. But like in real life sometimes you have to take a new direction to get to new places. Traveling back gets you nowhere apart from places where you already have been. Oh and a few more obvious ones. It's much more fun to travel together. If you get lost get back to the map and the fun of traveling is not the destination it is the trip itself. So enjoy the ride and have a fun journey (I wanted to say safe but that's a bit too much of a metafore)

Kill the hybrid

Often I venture into companies that already started to use some sort of Agile way of working like with Scrum or Kanban. When it concerns a large company, frameworks like Scrum or Kanban most of the time aren't enough. So scaling methodologies are available like LeSS (Large Scale Scrum), SAFe (Scaled Agile Framework) or Nexus. But often I don't see this happen. In most cases a hybrid form is incorporated into the company. The Spotify methode, I didn't even know there was one, is used like a very popular way of making things bigger. Always spiked with SAFe, LeSS and Scrum parts. Unfortunately only the easy parts and that is where it goes wrong.

Don't get me wrong, even though as a coach i'm quite a fan of using a good framework or methodology, i'm not a Agile fanatic. I don't go running around yelling at people when they do it wrong. If it works it works. But when you want to change a large environment you need to take into account all the variables. It is not just adopting a nice model from a music publisher and throw in a weekly retrospective, some stand ups and a half designed Kanban board. Every scaling model has it's own unique way of working. In every model there are great things that can work immediately but also, and often more things, that don't seem to work as easy or as fast as one would like. And by throwing those out and just use what seems nice is not the way to go. When designing a hybrid you need to know what you are doing and just copying that what the competitor does is very dangerous. Even copying a model that was presented by a music publisher two years ago. Sure, the Spotify way of working is great. It has cool names and the way of working seems to work. But it works for spotify. And you are not Spotify, even if you publish music. I bet that your company DNA, people, culture, product and so on is different. Be careful what you take on as your perfect way of working. Don't become someone else's untamable hybrid even when it looks so cool on Youtube.

Agile has to do with change. And change has to do with pain. If you don't feel pain then you are not changing. Most of the time when I introduce a framework I get to hear that what I show will not work. "That will never work at our company, it is way too different from what we are used here" but that is exactly the point. In order to change you need to do something that is not what you already do, otherwise why would it be called change? Also when you want to move with your company into a different direction, you need to move with the entire company. Not just the development departments but also with management, board, customers and so on. It is movement and you can only move fast and easy if everyone moves in the same directions (I know it's obvious but that's what i'm here for).

A hybrid develops over time. It is not something you engineer before you start. A hybrid forms due to small changes to a basic model. Start with Scrum, SAFe or LeSS or whatever model you prefer and fits best. And over time adapt it, tweak it and shape it so it works. But even better. Don't! If you really want to do it the right way start with adapting,

tweaking and shaping your company. Then you actually are changing. When you keep the model that you incorporate in tact and change the way you work so it starts to work, then you are actually doing the right thing. Don't design a hybrid but try to kill the hybrid. Don't become a next Spotify adaptor but become your own original. This means you have to go through the changes the hard way. There are no shortcuts. Change takes time and dedication. But let's face it. What is more fun and something to be proud of?. To become another company who copied something from the others or one who stayed true to itself with the help of a well designed framework. I know what I would choose.

With law our land shall rise, but it will perish with lawlessness

The Agile Manifesto was written in February of 2001 by seventeen independent-minded software practitioners . While the participants didn't agree about much, they found consensus around four main values. For those of you who are not aware they are as follows.

> We are uncovering better ways of developing software by doing it and helping others do it. Through this work we have come to value:
>
> **Individuals and interactions** over processes and tools
>
> **Working software** over comprehensive documentation
>
> **Customer collaboration** over contract negotiation
>
> **Responding to change** over following a plan
>
> That is, while there is value in the items on the right, we value the items on the left more.

I think everyone working with Scrum or any other agile framework should be aware of the manifesto (if you're not, shame on you).

But the Agile manifesto is nothing new. Working together and do something that is worth something for someone is a good idea. Knowing that a plan does not always work and things might change is good to know and react upon. For a while now the manifesto is used. As agile coaches we say that is good to be agile and not do agile and that is fine, but it is still a concept that for most newbees is hard to grasp. We work together and deliver software or something else but still clinch to old habits and ways of thinking. It is not easy to become agile and change your mindset overnight. And how can you become something if there is not a real example. Or if you like, there is not a real role-model. I like the way the first agile thinkers came up with this but I wouldn't wanna be them. I'm not a Sutherland, Swabber or any other agile founding father (that sounded really scary). So how can you become something else without something to inspire you. It's fine that you can work in a team and deliver high quality products to a happy and engaged customer, but that does not turn you in a agile minded person. So where can we find inspiration?

As I said, the manifesto is not something new. There is something that is much older and it originated somewhere in 10th century. Yes, more than a thousand years ago somewhere in the north of europe. Somewhere in the Norse world the first of these laws originated amongst the vikings. They were not made up with Agile in mind but with something else as a goal. They were written to conquer and rule. The vikings came up

with the "Viking laws" and over the years they changed a bit. The Norse also were very straightforward incoming up with all kinds of laws and agreements on how to behave or life together. The very word LAW in English is a Viking word. After the vikings stopped their reign of terror and christianity spread, the laws changed and became less aggressive. But the first four basic laws are still very powerful. So what are they, and keep in mind that the sub-laws derived from the original four laws.

First law: Be brave and aggressive
Now this one strikes me as a good first rule when you are a warrior, but it can also be used in business. It is also very well usable in producing something. So what does it mean, Be brave and aggressive?

- Be direct
- Grab all opportunities
- Use varying methods of attack
- Be versatile and agile
- Attack one target at the time
- Don't plan everything in detail
- Use top quality weapons

Second law: Be prepared
Need I say more. It's all about team and team dynamics. And to be prepared means you can do the following.

- Keep weapons in good condition
- Keep in shape
- Find good battle comrades
- Agree on important points
- Choose one chief

Third law: Be a good merchant
This one could apply to product owners, salespeople and even managers. I think it should be an sales oath.

- Find out what the market needs
- Don't promise what you cannot deliver
- Don't demand overpayment
- Arrange things so that you can return

Fourth law: Keep the camp in order
Workplace, work environment and working together. And it is not just keeping you sprintboard up to date.

- keep things tidy and organized
- Arrange enjoyable activities which strengthen the group
- Make sure everybody does useful work
- Consult all members of the group for advice

If you read these laws with a working environment in mind it makes sense for your team and even your company. These simple laws worked for the vikings and admittedly they are written so they are a bit more acceptable for our thinking. The vikings didn't have a workplace or went out to find what the marked needed. And also being on the other side of the viking blade was not a really good place to be as they used these laws to plunder, pillage and rape. But for the vikings it worked.

From now on I don't print the Agile manifesto to be posted on the wall, I provide a cool poster with these viking laws. I think they are much better to understand and relate to. Because let's be honest. I much more like to be associated with a tough viking then with one of the seventeen software practitioners who gathered in Utah to come up with the Agile manifesto. I'd rather be a Agile Viking then a Agile Coach. I think I will put that on my next business card.

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The Curriculum Vitae is history

Let's face it. The Curriculum Vitae (CV) does not work. Curriculum vitae is a Latin expression which can be loosely translated as [the] course of [my] life according to Wikipedia and is used by many of as to show to potential employers what we have done with our professional lives. It is a sum of all the thing that are in the past, our former jobs, education and so on. I'm sure that you as a reader have your own version. Needly designed with the right typeface, layout and information, ready to provide at the first opportunity. Or better, ready to provide at the first demand. So why does it not work?

The truth is not in there

At first, let look at the name, Curriculum vitae, course of life. It is a document that looks backwards in time. It tells what you have done. This seems something of importance but we all know that in our CV we only tell the things that we are proud of. We tell of our achievements and the victories, it doesn't say anything about the lessons learned. The struggle, the pitfalls or the failures. Why, because we are not keen to share this and potential employers would skip your CV if you would mention them. This is strange as it is in these lessons that makes us unique and also very interesting. So we keep those difficult questions for the job interview where we have to share a little of our bad experiences but not to much as that would also jeopardize the interview and the change of being hired. So when you come to think of it we lie on our CV and try to camouflage the truth as much as we can. So first of all, what is the point in writing down the past when it is only half the real thing. And sharing a reference, same thing. You would not share the name of the manager of the job that you screwed up, or the one that screwed you up.

You don't want to go back

Second, we send our CV to potential employers in the hope to move forward. To get that new job or assignment and to grow and learn more. Most of the time we do that because we have to. either the current job is ending or we are not happy at where we are. If you look back into your past all of us have jobs that we hated but also jobs that we really liked at that point in time. But there is a very small change that you would want to go back to that former job. Even if it was the greatest job in the universe, there was a reason that you moved on. Either you got bored and there weren't enough challenges. Or the payment was bad. Maybe the company moved and you were not that dedicated to move with them, or they simply went bankrupt. Just to name a few. Either way those ships have sailed and you moved on. So why keep lingering in the past. As I mentioned before, we only tell the good things about our past experiences so again there is no point in doing this.

Surpassing the teacher

The third thing is what we have learned. We sum up all our training, certificates, diplomas and so on. Nothing wrong with that as it is something that you have achieved and worked hard to get. But how many of you remember their basic teachings. All that gained

knowledge has grown over the years and we added a lot more from experience, reading and doing. When I look at my own learning past I even got diploma's for welding, steel machinist and even electrician. Trust me, you don't want me in your workshop or let me do your electrical wiring. I simply forgot and probably end up making a mess of it. But still people ask me for information about that part of my life. Who cares, I moved on way beyond that knowledge. Although I still have some affection to technique. So, when we are honest about what we know, most of it is from experience and learning on the job. Even from reading but I haven't seen a single CV where there is a prefered booklist.

Look ahead

So three things that just look into our past and none of them makes any sense. So what should we do then. Well that is very simple. Talk about what you would like to do. Where do you want to go, what is it that you still want to learn or experience. Often we are asked to write a motivation alongside that CV. Why do we want to work somewhere? Well to be honest, I don't want to work anywhere. I much more would like to sit in my garden drinking a cold beer and reading a good book. I would only trade that for a really nice challenge, something cool, where there are great people from whom I can learn and share my own experience with. I would love to leave my garden and cold beer if I can really make a change somewhere. And no, i don't want to do what I did in the past. The same things over and over again, I want to grow, learn, teach and experience. When I'm asked why I want to work at a certain company I have no idea because I haven't worked there yet. I do know they have a great product or service that I would like to get to know more of and maybe even leave my mark on it so maybe it can become even better.

Who do you want?

When you think of this as an employer, who would you rather have. Someone who has done the same thing over and over again at different companies. Or someone who is keen on doing new things, eager to grow and willing to make mistakes and learn from them. I agree that a CV provides a shallow look into someone's past, but admit that someone's future is much more interesting. A new thing, especially in europe is the Resumé. A short description that, when done right, tells what someone would like to do. What they want to learn and where they want to go. My CV, that I hate to use and send, is about 4 to 6 pages long. My Resumé is one page and let's you know what I like. It has two or three lines in it about what I have done and learned. Until now I have had more success with it, than with my Curriculum Vitae. And I'm even replacing my Resumé with just a picture of myself with my passions displayed.

Conclusion

The CV is looking backwards and somehow, the way they are written, not really reliable. You better spend time in looking what someone is willing to do and where they can take you. Don't look for someone with ten years of experience. Look for someone who is willing to experience for the next ten years. You want energy not waste. And be honest, you want

to read a small poem about someone's dreams, not a six page history book. And if you want to know about someone's past. Just ask them over for a nice cup of coffee, I'm sure you will switch very fast towards dreaming about the possible future instead of lingering in the past.