

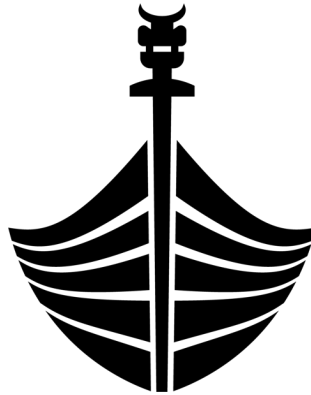
# Viking law

The new old way to victory



Likewise be all manner of beasts, when they be brought into the field  
and cried havoc, then every man to take his part.

Thomas De Brotherton, the first Earl of Norfolk



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For Haeley, my beautiful daughter and Luiza, the jumpy in my life.  
I love you both.



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The aim of this book is to enable coaches, change agents and leaders to use a more to the point and powerful approach to change using an old law.



## Preface

A few years back I fell into temptation and decide to submit my DNA to discover my ancestry. With a mother born in Cardiff Docks I was hoping for something exotic, but I ended up as a very boring 50% Welsh and 50% Viking, the former maternal and the later paternal. Snowden is in origin a Viking name and is linked to a physical location in Northumbria.

When three of us got together in a pub near Cheltenham to create the DSDM consortium towards the end of the last century I don't think we anticipated that eventually becoming one of the three feeds (along with Scrum and XP) into the Agile Manifesto. Or that Agile would take off with so much early promise. We were convinced that any approach to changing software development should be a collaboration between competitors not a proprietary land grab. We wanted to make difference, to achieve agility at scale.

Now we see Agile entering a commodification stage with large, structured frameworks that differ little from what came before and countless attempts to create a new Agile or Agile framework, always originated towards soft revenue from certification rather than the harder task of creating real value through the delivery of better systems. The commercial models of Agile have been proprietary in nature and to its loss.

Over the last three years I've been talking about rewilding agile, restoring balance and some sense of danger into a movement that has become moribund, albeit it (sic) SAFe. While somethings have changed, not enough has happened to make a sustainable difference. A few heroes happy to seek out Valhalla rather than compromise their integrity would be a welcome addition to the Agile community at this moment.

The four laws outlined in this book are interesting; enabling constraints to use the language of complexity. The anodyne language that characterises much of Agile matches the 'swampy blanket'

characterisation that the author mentions early on. I like the idea of sharpening axes and braiding beards, if for no other purpose that to break the meaningless platitudes of servant leadership, the agile mindset and so on.

This book will make you think, it will at times irritate you and some of the metaphors and assumptions may not feel comfortable. But that is a good thing. I found much to disagree with in this book and I can pay it no higher compliment. The Welsh and Norse aspects of my ancestry are in competition! So read it, but in the spirit with which you watch one of the great comedies of modern times namely the television series *Norsemen*, originally called *Vikingane*: think *Frøya* more than *Rufus*.

This book is an important contribution to revitalising Agile before it becomes moribund. I commend it to you

Dave Snowden  
Founder & Chief Scientific Officer  
The Cynefin Co

The Viking. And specific the Viking anno 2020. Not really, more like the Viking legislation, but the ones of the past. I am not going to explain the legislation in question; the author will do that. So why this foreword? After 26 years of operating in what we today call the Agile world, it is worth a consideration. This book is a good starting point. The original Viking was fearless, the modern-day Viking is part of one of the most tolerant regions in the world.

Then again, Agile is not static. It evolves. And still Agile transformations are difficult processes. The reason is obvious, the necessary paradigm shift is one of the hardest things to pull off. The old paradigms rule when it comes to reflexes. Many of us, especially management layers, do not have the Agile experience to switch gears when something happens that was not foreseen. The result is predictable, an old reflex.

And so, we innovate backwards after the initial transformation. In order to make that change sustainable, forward innovation is necessary, going where you have not been before. And that takes courage, it did centuries ago and it does today.

Come on Ragnar, you can do it!

Arie van Bennekum  
co- author Agile Manifesto



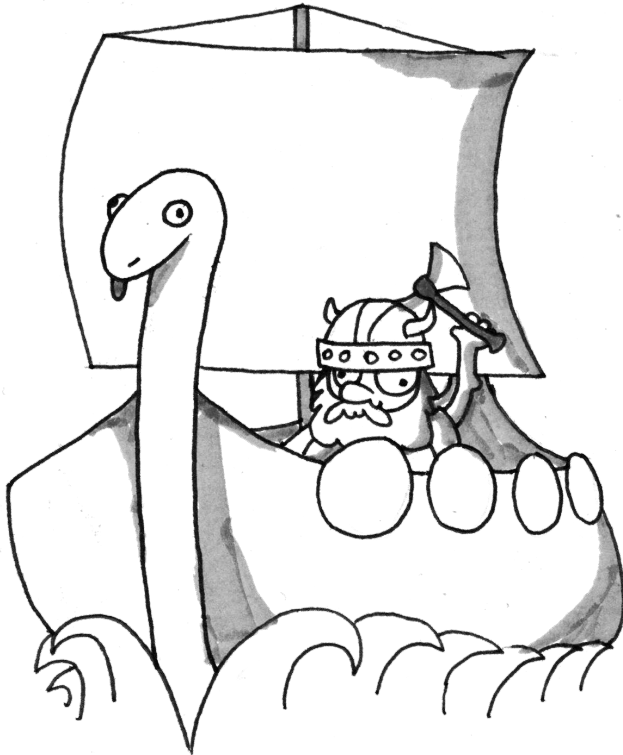
**"The house of the one who mocks others ends  
in fire"**

Viking - saying





## Introduction of the Viking law





Knoet got up earlier than usual that morning. Even though the last couple of months at sea were very draining, and he and his crew had just gotten home, he was feeling restless. The journey had been difficult and the takings had been very meagre. They really had to work for it this time. A lot of the smaller villages on their route had not yet been covered from their last visit, so the harvest was very limited. Other villages had vanished all together, and their citizens seemed to have merged into bigger and stronger fortresses that were very difficult to capture. For the first time in a long time they encountered hostiles and some of the men had to pay for it with their lives. They had been welcomed and the table of Odin and feast on all the comforts of Walhalla. Yet he missed them. His trusty sword hung on the wall, and his battered shield was resting in a corner. Both witnesses of the bloody battles. He had slept badly that night, and he wondered why his dreams had been so restless. Why did Nott, the goddess of the night, keep him awake?

It had started on the ship during their journey home. Was their way still the right way? Knoet's ideal image was a peaceful village for his people, and he hoped they would be prosperous. Maybe even grow into a city like those sprouting up North. Were the raids still enough to carry on? They had enough food because of their agriculture and livestock raising, but they didn't really develop. The riches they contrived on their raids allowed them to trade with other villages, amongst them some item they couldn't grow domestically. But was it really all worth the sacrifices? Odin would be pleased with their ongoing commitment. They were voracious and blood thirsty, yet there was still something missing among his crew. The long journey was tough and their battles even more so, and all of that for a small reward. Maybe things needed to be different. Maybe it was time for something new. Knoet didn't know. Were the gods trying to tell him this through his dreams? Was another sacrifice needed? Did they have to take a new path? He looked behind him at the boxbed. His beautiful wife. The one he loved and lived for, the one who always supported him. The years had also taken a toll on her. All that away from home. Taking care of their children, the animals and the farm was hard. Even with the help of the few slaves he had given her, taken from his raids, life was not easy. Especially the winters

were rough. On his travels he had seen the villages on the other side of the sea had a lot more in their lives. They weren't solely dependant on fishing, their livestock and agriculture for food. The villages were connected to one another, which made them flourish, despite the foreign influence. He had seen impressive fortifications. However, his men would find it complicated. No need to go out on the sea for battles. How would they serve Odin? How could he maintain order and still let his people be free to grow by themselves? Would oversea trade be profitable? Could that be the solution? Maybe he should start listening to Nehalennia, the goddess of sailors and merchants. She had protected them every step of the way and she had always been kind to him and his village. Knoet put on his boots, which were still covered in blood despite the seawater. He wrapped a thick fur around his shoulders and stepped out into the early morning cold. A good conversation with the shaman might provide him with some insights. The wise man had spoken to him before about the possible new ways of thinking, but he had always ignored them until now. It was time to put aside his pride and listen. He immediately thought of a well-known Viking proverb.

*"There is no better baggage to carry than common sense and a clear mind. In distant lands it is more useful than gold and it get the poor out of trouble."*

Knoet smiled. There might actually be some kind of truth to it.

## **Go to hell**

I first heard about Viking legislation a few years ago. A colleague was browsing a souvenir stand in Norway and stumbled upon a card with the laws printed on it. It intrigued him and he noticed that, even though the laws were ancient, they still hold truth today. It was very simply to apply them to the modern world, especially when it comes to business endeavours and working in an organisation. Even though the laws seem to be written recently and they feel like they fit the current times, they are in fact very old. They were invented over a thousand years ago, around the tenth century AD, somewhere in Northern Europe. Obviously they weren't written with the intention to change the

modern way of thinking in the corporate world. Even though you can imagine that chasing your opponents also creates opportunities for trade and other forms of engagements with tribes. And even with whole countries. Therefore, the balance would shift eventually. This way of doing business testifies of insight and an eye for the future. Yet you have to keep in mind, we are talking about the Vikings, a tough people that lived off of robbery and looting and they have come up with these first laws.

The word 'Law', meaning legislation, is in fact a Norwegian word which spread throughout the Northern population quickly. The Vikings slowly began to change their way of interacting with others. With the introduction of Christianity, the pillaging and robberies became more civilised. Laws were invented, including this one, to make clear regulations. Laws about trade, but also laws for people who cross the line. It took a while for those laws to come into effect for non-Vikings as well. Outside the Viking community people still had to deal with sword and axe for legislative. Eventually the new legislation would be introduced there too. It is remarkable that the Vikings have had such a positive influence on those cultures. Many words and even holidays have been incorporated into the native cultures of other countries. Think of the fir tree during Christmas time, this strongly resembles the Wodan-oak and the midwinter feast. Even the use of Santa Claus on his sleigh closely follows ancient Norse Mythology. If you are not interested in the pagan legacy but if you do believe in heaven and hell. It is good to know the latter is a Norwegian Goddess of inglorious death. So those people of the old North had left quite the footprint. The Viking Law is not an enforced law, more a way of thinking logically and mostly acknowledging the consequences if you were to deviate. So, you could view them more as good ideas. As a framework that can provide guidance.

## **History**

Even though I did not write this book with the idea of depicting the history of the Viking, there are much better books for that and people who are better at it. Mainly because history is not my area of expertise, and secondly, I just want to talk about the legislation. Of course, you

will read some pieces here and there about those tough Vikings, because they are a good example of what I am trying to tell you. However, let me remove some ambiguities just in case you think I'm forging history, or you might find out the things I will tell you did not exactly go the way I describe them. So, when I talk about Vikings, I talk about just them. I am aware that we could make a distinction between Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish and Danish Vikings. Nevertheless, in this book I do not make that distinction. I know the most about Norway, because I have been there several times and really like the place. Denmark I know a bit, because of my love of Lego. However, let's not dismiss Sweden and Finland. They too underwent development regarding the laws and order I have talked about before. Maybe if you were to do some research into the subject, you might find out the Viking laws actually originate from there. Who knows. For now, I would just like to state that the Viking laws discussed in this book were discovered by a good colleague of mine in Norway.

Then for some other uncertainties. Throughout the book you will find little drawings of Vikings. My daughter followed her imagination and drew accordingly. Yes, they have cone helmets. Yes, this is just a myth. As far as we know Vikings did not wear helmets with horns. So if your ancestors were Vikings, my apologies if I typecast them a tiny bit in this book. I can also report that these people were quite violent, but there were not the only ones. The Germanic tribes, Saxons, Romans, Huns, Persians and even the emerging Christians knew a thing or two about violence. Let's not forget the crusades, where the Christians spread their religion by sword.

Around the year 1000 the transition from the Early and Dark Middle Ages to the High Middle Ages took place. An era that can be characterised with a lot of wars, power shifts and changes in general. It defines itself by the importance of the feudal structures. The centralisation of authority. That is why the introduction of laws is so topical during that time. The Pope and the German emperor gained a lot of power in Europe and Central Europe targeted the Middle East. It certainly wasn't a peaceful time, but a sense of structure emerged. The Viking legislation is a clear example of that time, since it was invented

by the fist Vikings who ever scoured the seas in their Drakars searching for prey.

I could write a whole book on this period, on how the society changed from small tribes in villages to cities. On the migrations. On primal tribes such as the Goths, Eastern Germans, like the Vandals, Sueves and Iranian Alans. Writing this book allowed me to read up on new and interesting fact. A night browsing the internet surely is instructive, just as long as you leave FaceBook, YouTube and TikTok for the entertainment that they are. However, I am not writing a history book, I leave that for the professionals. And if you do read this book and happen upon historic errors, I hope you can forgive me. I have done my utmost best to describe the historical facts and I have done my homework. So maybe we can discuss any possible mistake over a good glass of Scottish or Norwegian Whiskey. But for now, let's stick to Viking legislation.

### **How can you use this book?**

The Viking law that I describe here consists of four main laws.

First law: be brave and aggressive

Second law: be prepared

Third law: be a good merchant

Fourth law: keep the camp in order

Each of these main laws consists of sub laws. Which made me enthusiastic when I started writing, I still am, because I was just going to write down all these laws and present my views on them. But at some point I just got stuck. It's not hard to vent about your ideas, but I wanted this to be beneficial and educative. A book that you, my reader, may be able to use as a frame of reference. We are talking about laws, after all, so you should be able to apply them. So I consulted a friend of mine, a lawyer. I asked her about contemporary legislation. Do our laws have sub laws? And if so, how do they work? She introduced me to a lot of articles and concepts, such as Explanatory Memorandum. Every law consists of several articles. Every article is an example of how to apply

the law. And every law starts with the Explanatory Memorandum to introduce it. This set up enabled me to structure my book about the Viking Laws. So I set up every article with my opinion by connecting it to situations we come across in the field. I have either experienced them myself or learned about them from my colleagues. At the end of each article I will show you how to implement them in the field. However, as I told you at the beginning the Viking Laws are not mandatory. I see them more as very good guide lines. And you can either adopt, ignore or readjust them, which ever suits you best. That is the beauty of ideas, you can shape them to fit your needs. That is the core idea of this book.

## **Looting and pillage**

When I started as a coach, first as a scrum master, I strongly believed in following the rules. Work processes such as Scrum had been invented in a certain way and they should be followed to a t. You cannot mix it up. No mixture of old lessons with new ways of working, and you certainly cannot mix different types of work processes. However, over the years I realised it might not be so black and white. There have been so many developments on the way of working and thinking. Every approach is unique and has good characteristics, but certainly some bad ones too. I have acquainted myself with quite a few. Even some I initially thought were wrongly developed and would most likely fail in practice.

To give you an idea, after scrum, I found the scale model LeSS<sup>1</sup> extremely interesting. It appealed to me and I felt it would be very applicable. On the one hand you had LeSS, but at the same time came SAFe<sup>2</sup>. As you can imagine, two camps arose. You were either in favour

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<sup>1</sup> LeSS stands for Large Scale Scrum. A way to apply the Scrum framework to larger organizations with more employees and teams and where those teams work together on a joint product. The e of LeSS has been added as a nod to the added e of the upscaling model SAFe.

<sup>2</sup> SAFe stands for Scaled Agile Framework and is a way of scaling up the iterative way of working as Scrum offers in large organizations. Again, teams work together on a larger whole and various new roles have been devised to make the scaling framework work. The e in SAFe has been added to make it sound good as an abbreviation.



of one or the other. Nevertheless, I decided to get certified in both LeSS and SAFe. So I registered for the SAFe-training. I was kind of sceptical in the beginning, but then I discovered some positive aspects of this model. The teacher was looking forward to my presence and the challenge it would bring with it. He was aware of me LeSS preference. However, I had to disappoint him, both ways of working have their strengths and weaknesses. So I continued. I learned about Holocracy and Sociocracy 3.0. I learned how to apply Lean in the midst of change, I even dare to say out loud I got my Prince 2 certificate. Wisdom comes with age they say, I like to add experience to that saying.

The use of Scrum, LeSS, SAFe, Kanban or whichever model you like does not work on its own. A mixture does. I might antagonise the hardcore fundamentalists here, but I have discovered this to be true over de years. Mixing is no crime. Just use whatever works best for you. The process of planning from the one model, communication from another. Whatever works best for you. Steal and use what you need. That is what the Vikings did. Plunder and loot wherever you can and use it when it serves you the best.

That is how I drafted this book. I will share experiences in order to, hopefully, show you what I have run into. Especially what I did in certain situations. I will not describe all the ways you can use those methods in detail, there are enough books about them. Or follow a course, if you are really interested. Nevertheless, I hope to get you started properly. I will tell you what books you could read. Which course you could follow. If you already know all of this, I hope to guide your focus on certain parts, techniques or games you can use. Furthermore, I like to shake things up, give you a different perspective. Consider what could happen when you apply one technique to something else. Above all, I hope I can give you the inspiration to dare. To go beyond your own boundaries.

### **Aaaarghhh**

It was the start of the first Covid-19 lockdown here in the Netherlands. Around the beginning of March 2020. Like most people, I was forced to

stay at home, and decided to focus my energy on writing. I had noticed then, and even before Covid-19, that people within organisations had become a bit hesitant. People neatly followed the rules, and slowly but surely passivity sneaked into the hustle and bustle of business. Everywhere I came a large company or a smaller and more agile organisation, a feeling of resignation prevailed in their way of working. Something I, as a one-man band, am kind of allergic to. What prevents you taking action in your workplace? To buckle down? To check whether what you are doing has added value? To take responsibility instead of accepting imposed accountability as an obligatory way of doing and thinking? I have met with managers and so-called leaders who were too afraid, or too weak, to press ahead.

This soft and agile way of working started to annoy me, it was like everything was covered in a swampy blanket. Do not get me wrong, the philosophy behind agile working is good, but it has lost its purpose along the way. It has become the way of thinking in the corporate world, yet no one really knows what it is about anymore. I like to awaken the world of business again. Press ahead and pull through. Being respectful is a good thing, that does not mean you have handle your affairs with a soft touch. Getting angry and showing some teeth is sometimes just the way to continue. A goal is not just a point on the horizon that stays just a point, otherwise you will never make it. Sometimes we do not just have to work with what we got, sometimes we have to invent new ways to progress. Pull out all the stops. Man the Drakar, sharpen the axes. Braid your beard. Finish your chalice. Ready the oars and put on your Berzerker face.

Be a Viking.

Blood and destruction shall be so in use  
And dreadful objects so familiar  
That mothers shall but smile when they behold  
Their infants quarter'd with the hands of war;  
All pity choked with custom of fell deeds:  
And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge,  
With Ate by his side come hot from hell,  
Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice  
**Cry 'Havoc,' and let slip the dogs of war;**  
That this foul deed shall smell above the earth  
With carrion men, groaning for burial  
From Julius Caesar , 1601 by William Shakespeare

"Oh shut the fuck up and just go and do it"  
Erwin Verweij during a stand-up

