

# EMBRACING AGILE

## How to start your own agile transformation

We live in turbulent times. Our customers' wants and needs are changing by the day, and we face the threat of disruption by our current and potential competitors. For managers, it is imperative to ensure their organisations are able to adapt to these rapidly-changing conditions, lest they risk redundancy.

So, how exactly do we equip ourselves to deal with this uncertainty? The answer lies in fostering a collaborative culture within our organisations where we work with full ownership to deliver high-value products to our customers. Sounds a bit vague but these are, in a nut-shell, the principles on which the Agile Mindset was founded.

In 2001, a group of software developers in the US decided to change their way of work. This decision was brought about by the fact that traditional "waterfall" product management was failing in the face of rapidly-changing conditions. These developers were bound by constraints imposed by their respective organisations' archaic bureaucratic procedures, micro-managing by line managers, and multiple stakeholders to hand-off work to. This prevented them from making any quick changes to their software to meet new customer demands. By the time they did make any changes, it was already too late. So to break the never-ending cycle of chasing after approvals and waiting for reply emails, they created the Agile Manifesto.

The manifesto contains a set of values that focuses on keeping customers at the core of product design, empowering teams within organisations to make their own decisions, and allowing rapid prototyping and experimentation. Most importantly, it focused mainly on embracing failures and responding to changes, instead of following a rigid plan.

All of that sounds amazing but it is impossible to implement them without a few tools and processes to facilitate the mind-set shift. This is why there are multiple Agile Frameworks to guide organisations in structuring their work in an Agile manner. You may have heard of some of them - Scrum, Kanban, XP, SAFe, etc.

This article will not go into too much depth regarding these frameworks (that will be reserved for future pieces) but it will give you an idea of the reasoning behind the methodologies so you can start engaging your employees to become more Agile.

### CUSTOMERS ARE AT THE HEART OF AGILE

Traditional product management follows a closed-silo approach where we do everything inside-out. We collect customer



insights at the onset of a product's lifecycle, but fail to address exactly how we can add value in our stakeholders' lives by talking to them throughout the entire process. During the development phase, customers are not approached again. This is a key factor as to why a lot of traditional projects end up creating products that customers don't want. In Agile management, we involve the customer at every step of the process, even during execution.

### AGILE MANDATES A SHARED VISION ACROSS THE ORGANISATION

The shared vision or North Star for an organisation provides the backdrop for all employees to do their work. It dictates what the company stands for, who their customers are, how and where they buy their products from, and so on. It gives everyone a clear idea of where the organisation wants to be, which is important because it's important for everyone to have the same image of a successful organisation. Everyone should

know what the organisation's ideal state is. This allows for proper autonomy in teams, which brings us to our next point.

### AGILE EMPOWERS TEAMS

In Bangladesh, managers have a tendency to micromanage a lot of their employees' work. They give specific directions and allow for little flexibility. This sort of controlling behaviour perpetuates a feeling which prompts employees to think that they're just one small cog in a large machine. This feeling of not feeling like their actions are making an impact causes unproductivity, lack of motivation and discourages creativity. In a rapidly-changing world, we need motivated teams who are not afraid to try new solutions. That is why Agile prioritises empowering teams to promote innovation and instil motivation.

For managers, this means taking a step back and only providing high-level guidance in accordance with the company's North Star. Managers will guide employees

regarding the company objectives, but they will allow employees to take charge of how to achieve said objectives.

For employees, they need to be arranged into cross-functional, self-managing teams with complete authority over their respective product lines. These are called squads and their focus is to develop small iterations of their products over a small time period called sprints.

Hopefully the aforementioned points will give you a good foundation from which you will launch your Agile Transformation. If you have any queries regarding Agile, feel free to leave me an email.

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## THE BOSSMAN

BY E. RAZA RONNY



## Improve your business writing

Working in business means dealing more with sales and profit margins, and less with writing or articulate literature. Most fail to realise that the challenges involving better sales or marketing is closely related to how effectively we communicate via emails, written media, or content advertising platforms. With that in mind, the following guideline may help in avoiding confusion in all written media by aiding you in getting your message across to your stakeholders.

### UNDERSTAND WHAT CONSTITUTES GOOD BUSINESS WRITING

A common malpractice surrounding good business document is that we tend to think using serious and complicated phrasing, relying on proprietary terms, etc. will help our case. But it couldn't have been further away from the truth. Keeping the sentences short and succinct is of utmost importance to make our messages heard and for the main idea or request to get highlighted.

### KEEP NOTE OF YOUR AUDIENCE

You are writing your piece to sell to or convince the other party; you must take note of that before you begin. Setting the tone of the topic entirely depends on your audience and what they already know, especially when you determine the terminologies you want to use. While writing to a particular person, organisation, or group of people, look for ways to personalise the write-up by considering their interests and predominant predispositions.

### STICK TO A STRUCTURED APPROACH

Proceed with the write-up with a logical flow in it, which will be easier to do if you make a rough draft of it

beforehand by jotting down the key points of focus as a roadmap of the whole thing. If you are confused as to how to present your words, you'll likely confuse your readers too.

### COVER ONLY THE ESSENTIALS

The people working in business fields are very busy and distracted. In essence, people at the receiving end of our business writing will look for the core message your write-up or email contains, and not stress too much on whether it looks ultra-

word choices will take you a long way in improving your writing skills. Resources like Harvard Business Review, The Wall Street Journal, The Economist, Forbes, etc. and simple grammar books like Fowler's Modern English Usage, or Wren and Martin's English Grammar books will definitely help.

### SEEK EXPERT OPINION

Getting help from experienced business professionals who have worked and dealt with business



professional in style. Therefore, make sure you present your main idea as soon as possible, and avoid including all the details as though this is the only chance you'll get at it.

### READ UP FROM REFERENCE PAPERS AND MATERIALS

Being up-to-date with newsletters, journals, papers, magazines and other well-written material every day while paying attention to their style of writing, addressing, and

writing may help you identify possible areas of improvement and mistakes. Besides, re-reading and editing your pieces, and constantly revising them will help identify the patterns of common errors you make.

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## Making a DIFFERENCE

Bangladesh is rapidly moving towards middle income status by 2021. Our businesses definitely offer immense opportunities for the growing economy and this diversity needs a stage for the stories untold. See Bangladesh make its mark on the global map as Making a Difference brings you our proudest success stories from across the country.

## Work perks you should negotiate

Generally, we are so focused on the net salary we are going to get in a job that we often fail to focus on what may be equally, if not more tempting in the job package- the additional benefits or perks that come with it. So make sure to look for some of these rewarding incentives before settling for that job of your dreams.

### WORKING HOURS

Flexible work hours are probably the primary benefit you want to consider when taking up a job. Whether or not you'll be given the freedom to tweak your hours around according to what's suitable for you, while still within the office guidelines, can go a long way to boosting your productivity and even motivating you to work. Check up with the HR department if work-from-home is a feasible option.

### EDUCATION LOANS

Student benefits or help with finishing a degree can be something you can negotiate if you're midway through grad-school, or are a part-time student. Given other benefits are fewer compared to the industry standards, you may discuss with your employers if there's room for fitting this into the package.

### PAID TIME OFF

If work-life balance matters to you, you may want to spare substantial weightage to negotiate for this once you're hired. Many companies will highlight the hefty salary they offer, and not allow such benefits. But see if you can bring them to cut a portion from here and there, and add it into the time-off that you take.

### COMMUTING COSTS

If you live far away from your work-place, you may ask for a host of benefits such as getting an automobile

for the to-and-fro commute, adding your car to the company insurance policy, or having the company cover a certain portion of your vehicle expenses. Regarding the whole matter, Shadman Ul Karim, currently working at a multinational tobacco manufacturing company says, "Have a clear breakdown and understanding of the offered benefits and how to actually leverage them while in the job. If you're hired by a big-shot organisation, be prepared to hear that they have all their packages and benefits pre-structured with almost no room for negotiations. But you could always go ahead and ask; otherwise you will never know what better opportunities you may be missing out on."

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