: What are common barriers and challenges to becoming agile?

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Any major change is always somewhat challenging and becoming agile and doing agile is a major change. Transitioning to an agile mindset from a bureaucratic mindset is especially challenging. People and culture are major barriers that hinder organizational transformation to become agile, cf., Krill (2013). Attitude and behavioral changes are difficult, people develop bad habits and often an organization's culture is reinforcing. So organization culture can be a major barrier and hence a challenge. A lack of experienced agile leaders is sometimes a barrier or an excuse.

Overall, learning new ways to work can be viewed as burdensome, costly and unnecessary. Some people are more comfortable with the routine of a bureaucratic process. These champions of details are more concerned with the procedure and reporting rather than on delivering value. In many organizations, following the rules that control activities become more important than delivering results.

Is the theory of the agile manifesto unrealistic and impossible to implement? Latham (2019) argues that agile "is unworkable in practice for too many teams". He argues most teams lack a foundation for calm, rational decision-making. Perhaps that is true, but training and culture can reinforce the need for calm and rationality. Supposedly, there is too much stress, anxiety, uncertainty, and pressure so teams often abandon agile and don't reflect on their work, prioritize and think about value. Agile teams must be insulated from stress, uncertainty, and other factors. Working in short time-boxed periods with prioritized goals helps create greater certainty. A person with an agile mindset must stay focused on outcomes. People can and must learn to cope with stress, pressure, uncertainty and even anxiety. Contemporary organizations must develop cultures that support individuals and teams.

Do some people lack the intellectual capacity needed to become agile? That claim seems like an elitist barrier. Agile organizations and teams can benefit from including people with a wide range of abilities and interests. Becoming agile involves learning to live with change, learning to embrace and accept change, and learning to continually create change. In many situations, accepting that people have differential abilities and yet can contribute is part of becoming agile.

Agile is about much more than methods like Scrum, Extreme Programming (XP), and Feature Driven Development (FDD). Being agile means a team knows and uses selectively various methods and approaches. Scrum may be a poor fit for many projects and the language of Scrum or XP may harm creativity and constrain implementing general agile values, cf., Church (2015). BUT, implementing agile is not some dogmatic, one size fits all, Scrum Fest approach to change. Rather

agile gives people the freedom to try something new and to change and adapt while delivering value.

There are multiple barriers. Denning (2012) identifies some attitude barriers. First, agile is perceived by some as a process that is only for star performers and hence most employees can't be agile. This negative attitude is self-defeating. Second, some argue agile doesn't fit an organizational culture of respecting the chain of command and defining job responsibilities. Agile is not a chain of command way of working, but perhaps that approach no longer works in most situations. Third, some think agile methods only work for small projects. That is **not** true, multiple small agile teams can work together to deliver value on large projects. Fourth, Agile can be effective without co-location. Face-to-face interactions among team members and stakeholders have benefits, but agile teams can be distributed geographically and successfully complete projects. The agile dance changes and technology play a bigger role, but agile people can make it work.

Also according to Denning, there are also process and structural obstacles. Agile is a mindset and it is not a "complete" methodology. Teams and managers often need to adopt additional project management processes. To find success, managers will need to change and enhance the organization's reward system to motivate both individuals and teams. Agile is **not limited or only** appropriate for software development, an agile mindset can enhance and improve most projects. Software development was an initial testbed for agile values and new methods of work.

Becoming agile occurs at multiple levels. An agile organization is an adhocracy and not a bureaucracy. An adhocracy is a flexible, adaptable and less formal organization. It uses specialized, multidisciplinary teams grouped by functions and projects. The organization has simple standardized procedures, limited rule-following, a shared division of responsibility, a flat hierarchy, and an emphasis on personal, collaborative relationships. Becoming an agile organization eliminates complicated rules and procedures.

To implement agile methods and processes in an organization, influential decision-makers must want to overcome the barriers and challenges to becoming agile.

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