

Innovation and the Agile Manifesto: Individuals & Interactions, Customer Collaboration, and Responding to Change in Corporate IT

Demands on Corporate IT departments continue to increase as digital opportunities create competitive advantages. Yet, many organizations struggle to create an environment where innovation thrives. In fact, IT leaders may accidentally discourage innovation through heavy processes that prioritize risk mitigation and cost avoidance. One solution may be adopting an Agile mindset, defined by the [Agile Manifesto](#).

As IT departments [balance the stability](#) of existing technology with speed in delivering new solutions, many embark on an [Agile transformation](#), often focusing on processes and routines that align with the methodology. For many, the transformations include hiring new positions, like Scrum Masters or Product Owners, to usher in the new way of working. However, successful Agile implementations require a mindset shift that challenges the current state by prioritizing individuals and interactions, customer collaboration, and responding to change to deliver valuable, working solutions. This Agile mindset may also contribute to an innovation culture of change readiness, future-oriented thinking, autonomy, and cross-functional communication, but these connections must be at the forefront of a transformation to come to fruition.

Individuals & Interactions

The Agile Manifesto promotes relationship-building and communication through the first cornerstone of *individuals and interactions*. By making people the center of IT, employees have more freedom to question processes and tools for the purposes they serve. As a result, the emphasis on *individuals and interactions* may inspire innovative behaviors, like cross-functional communication, informal networks, and curiosity.

Prioritizing *individuals and interactions* over processes and tools align with the stated core values of many organizations as they emphasize people, including employees and customers. However,

Additional References

instilling this principle into the practices of an organization may require re-thinking previously held beliefs about how work gets done. Processes that signal low trust, [reduce autonomy, or slow down decision-making](#) detract from living this Agile cornerstone and reduce the likelihood of innovation.

Customer Collaboration

Just as the *individuals and interactions* principle of the Agile manifesto emphasizes the people-side of technology, *customer collaboration* encourages IT professionals to understand the customer's needs and build a partnership to deliver valuable working solutions. Corporate IT departments often struggle to get a seat at the table, instead responding to tickets and feature requests without the opportunity to provide their unique insights and ideas. Likewise, customers and stakeholders may feel discouraged when communicating with technology teams who doubt their systems knowledge or technical expertise. Yet, this concept of collaboration can build a functional relationship that [democratizes innovation](#) and promotes user-centric outcomes.

The Agile mindset seeks to build a bridge between these two seemingly separate groups by aligning on a shared commitment to delivering a valuable solution. [Collaboration and communication across functions](#) are markers of innovation, and this agile principle creates a foundation for successful creativity and innovation. However, it isn't as simple as it sounds.

With long-established silos, these groups may feel at odds and may even question if they genuinely have the same goals within the company. As new relationships form, [psychological safety](#) must be developed for ideas to be voiced, supported, and implemented.

Responding to Change

As the manifesto continues, *responding to change* is prioritized over keeping a plan. This final cornerstone promotes

adaptability as new information comes to light and encourages learning while doing. Change readiness supports innovation efforts with a future-oriented perspective and establishes a willingness to try new things.

Responding to change over keeping a plan may be one of the scarier Agile principles for organizational leaders to adopt. With pressures to perform, a plan provides comfort as leaders display the value they and their teams offer to the company. Unfortunately, a plan is not guaranteed as conditions evolve throughout a project. The planning process may feel like risk mitigation, but it more closely resembles risk aversion, and risks still exist within the volatile technology landscape.

In today's volatile and uncertain world, this Agile principle encourages [resiliency and adaptability](#), which may create courage in the face of change. In this way, team members may feel inspired to create change through innovation instead of staying stagnant in the current state.

Getting Started

Adopting the Agile mindset and these manifesto principles create a foundation for an innovation culture. However, building commitment to these principles requires intentional change leadership. To get started, consider the following action items:

- Recognize the impact of an Agile mindset on innovation.
- Examine the current state for underlying beliefs or processes that detract from an Agile mindset.
- Help employees connect the manifesto to key outcomes, particularly innovation.

Through a shared understanding of how an Agile mindset intersects with an innovation culture, IT departments can excel in both areas.

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