

Agile Journey discussion series:
("Sharing is Learning"):

Agile – Out of Control?

By Yesper Olsen at January 2021
(Request/Feedback: yesper@yescoaching.dk)

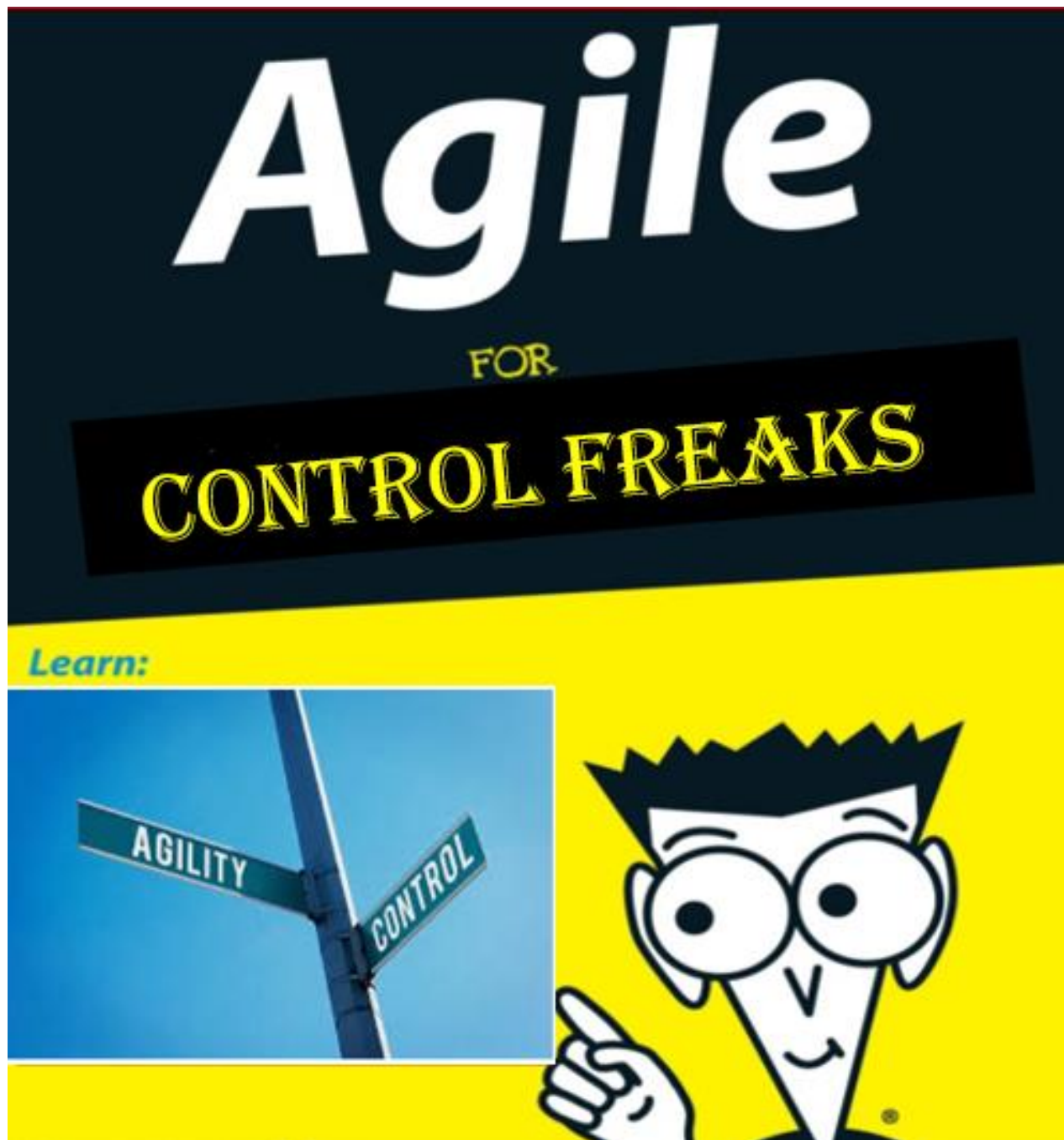


Table of Contents

Welcome.....	3
Introduction.....	3
What is Control?.....	4
Control levels and other reflections?	5
Control at Portfolio level	5
Control at Program/Governance level	7
Control at Team level	7
Control in SCRUM	8
Control by Principles/Values	8
4 P's of control.....	8
Control your mind.....	9
Wrap up: Agile – Out of Control ?	11
Source/References and other inspiration:	12
Apendix.....	13
Apendix01: Agile Manifesto	13
Apendix02: Agile Principles	14
Apendix03: Outcome /Business Focus in One Picture	16
Apendix04: “Do the Right Things Right”	17

Welcome

You just entered my brainstorming room. In this room I will like to share my thoughts on control and especially in the context of Agile.

This article and room are primarily for you if you:

- Like traditional control and really cannot see and alternatives
- Like control, but also can see the backside on this in innovation, flexibility, T2M etc.
- Are curios on control in an agile context

Whatever excuse you have - welcome in my brainstorm room. 😊

Introduction

Agile has been around for long time, so off cause there is a lot of opinions and myths.

Here are some examples:

<i>"Agile development is not disciplined"</i>	<i>"Agile development is just another fad / hype"</i>	"Agile means teams cannot be controlled by management"
"Agile teams do not plan"	<i>"Agile means you never have to write documentation"</i>	<i>"Agile works only for small projects; it does not scale"</i>
"Agile development is not predictable"	"Agile means I can change my mind whenever I want to"	<i>"Agile teams do not work hard, they just play foosball"</i>

I really would like to discuss and include a lot of these in this brainstorm– but this time I primary would touch myths like the **yellow** ones.

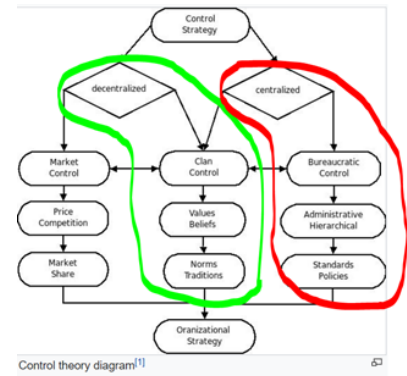
This article in my “Agile Journey discussion Series” (See reference) is actual just a reflection (Refinement) of another way to consider control in general and more specifically for Agile Journeys.

The intention is to share reflections, not science – that’s why I call it “Brainstorm room for improvement” or in Agile terms: “Inspect”, (“Discuss/Learn”), and maybe” Adjust and adapt”

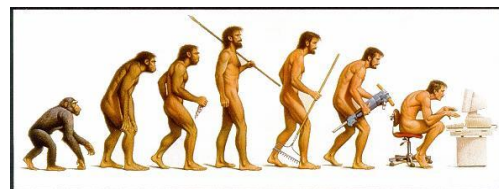


What is Control?

If you try to answer this by [Control theory \(sociology\)](#), you could start answering this by looking at the Control Theory Diagram. In my mind (maybe a myth) the agile mindset is mostly in the **green** area while traditional mindset (e.g. Waterfall) is more in the **red** area.



If you try to answer this by evolutionary theory and the brain of Darwin, you could consider this its actual the result of the control (Survival of the fittest) actual is more interesting than the control itself?



In the agile mindset the PoC, MVP, T2M and actual survival/outcome/Value is more important than controlling – since control is not a delivery.

(*Note: PoC= Prove of concept, MVP = Minimum Viable Product, T2M= Time To Market)

In an ideal Lean World (science fiction and doesn't exist 😊) control would probably be called "Waste"

Enough philosophical introduction, provocation and strange comparisons 😊

The bottom line is:

- You must consider why and the effect of control if you like to keep it
- Controlling is reducing the span of options and flexibility.
- To feel in control is sometime just a feeling and mindset and often more subjective than objective.

If you are interested in more about control in general, I recommend you read the book of Lyssa

Adkins (Ref02) of my Articles (Ref14) where terms like "Command-and-control-aholic" and "The art of unlearning" is addressed.

In the next chapters I will go more into details on actual levels of control and add some facts/hints etc.

Control levels and other reflections?

I have a background as an IT consultant for more than 33 years and have been in this nice IT agile business for very long. One of my ways to stay in “control” in an agile and complex world is to actually use structures as my backbone.

So, for the last many years I have used agile elements from Scrum/KanBan/SAFe etc. as my model of reference. Below I will use this sort of structure for describing detailed control levels.

For all control levels, an important Agile control element is *Fast Feedback (forward)*. This means that you as part of any model or framework should “automatically” get feedback, to enable you to adjust while moving forward.

You can say: “You stay in control by learning from feedback telling you that you are off track”. Feedback loops in agile is often much shorter than traditional projects and waterfall methodologies.

This does not mean that I, allways, recommend using structure/framework to stay in control (See my articles in Ref09 about framework). Primary because this is NOT a delivery in it self , but often it helps since it’s easier to see if you are on track or not.

With these notes, join my “control” reflections below where I cover this:

- [Control at Portfolio level](#)
- [Control at Program/Governance level](#)
- [Control at Team level](#)
- [Control in SCRUM](#)
- [Control by Principles/Values](#)
- [Control by 4 P’s](#)
- [Control your mind](#)

[Control at Portfolio level](#)

This is normally the level where you want to be sure and control that all you do is aligned with the at any time identified strategy. This is where you, for obvious reasons, want to make sure executives and stakeholders feel in control and can see the vision is being executed.

This is the **very key** in the control dimension if you have a vision of being more agile and want to do fast alignment with the rapid marked changes.

This very often where real agile organization should be born – just being agile at “lower” levels does not normally work since forcing traditional control/measurement/steerco top down will in the long run restrict or remove the agility.

“You get what you measure”

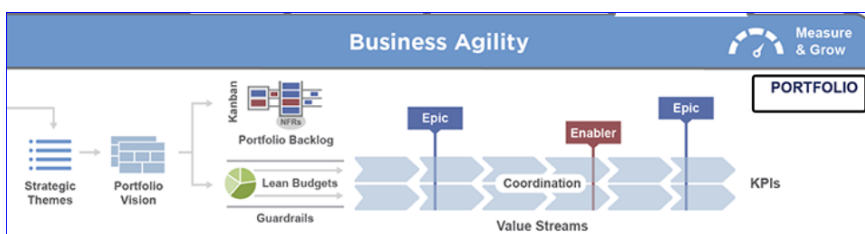
Using traditional measurements like OKR, KPI, CSF, standard Steerco reporting for the actual work you will in the long run move get that – even if it add value or not.

(Note: OKR = Objective Key Results, KPI = Key Performance Indicators , CSF= Critical Success Factors)

This means that changing the control at this level is a prerequisite for **real Business agility**.

This is not breaking news, and a framework like SAFe also address some business practices to empower this. For example:

- 1) How to move for Strategic Themes --> Portfolio Vision/Canvas/Backlog --> Lean/Value stream founding:



- 2) How to stay in “Control” by using and organizing inspired by [Lean Portfolio Management](#) :

So, to stay in “control” at Portfolio level demands a paradigm shift. For example, doing and believing in Lean budgeting and funding of value streams instead of traditional programs/projects.

This also reduces the need for traditional steering committees and top down approaches.

In the portfolio level and level below the traditional control is in many ways changed from traditional OKR/KPI’s to full transparencies and trust and actual measurement of real value/outcome KPI’s

In appendix04 the link between the different level illustrated.



Figure 2. The three dimensions of Lean Portfolio Management

So, bottom line you must change the control mindset here to get the Agile benefits on “lower” levels.

Control at Program/Governance level

When the Portfolio level “feel” in control and is confident that the right direction is set and transparently can track the progress by backlogs/boards the program/governance layer job is to stay in control, but keep the flexibility in agile way.

The part of LPM called “Agile Portfolio Operation” actually is key to do so without killing the agile agenda.

At this level control can be achieved by simply empowering cross team/function/organization cooperation, synchronization and deliveries.

Again, this is not breaking news, so frameworks like SAFe have tried to orchestrate this in what they call ART ([Agile Release Trains](#)) at the [Program level](#) (Note: In SAFe 5.0 Program/Team level is merged).

Another important control element is that you do work in manageable increments at both Team- (Often 2 weeks) and Program- (often 10-12 weeks) and Portfolio level (1-2 quarters) and this reduce the risk and add possibility to adjust on regularly basis to stay in control.

So in other words: “The worst case scenario is that you lose last increment”

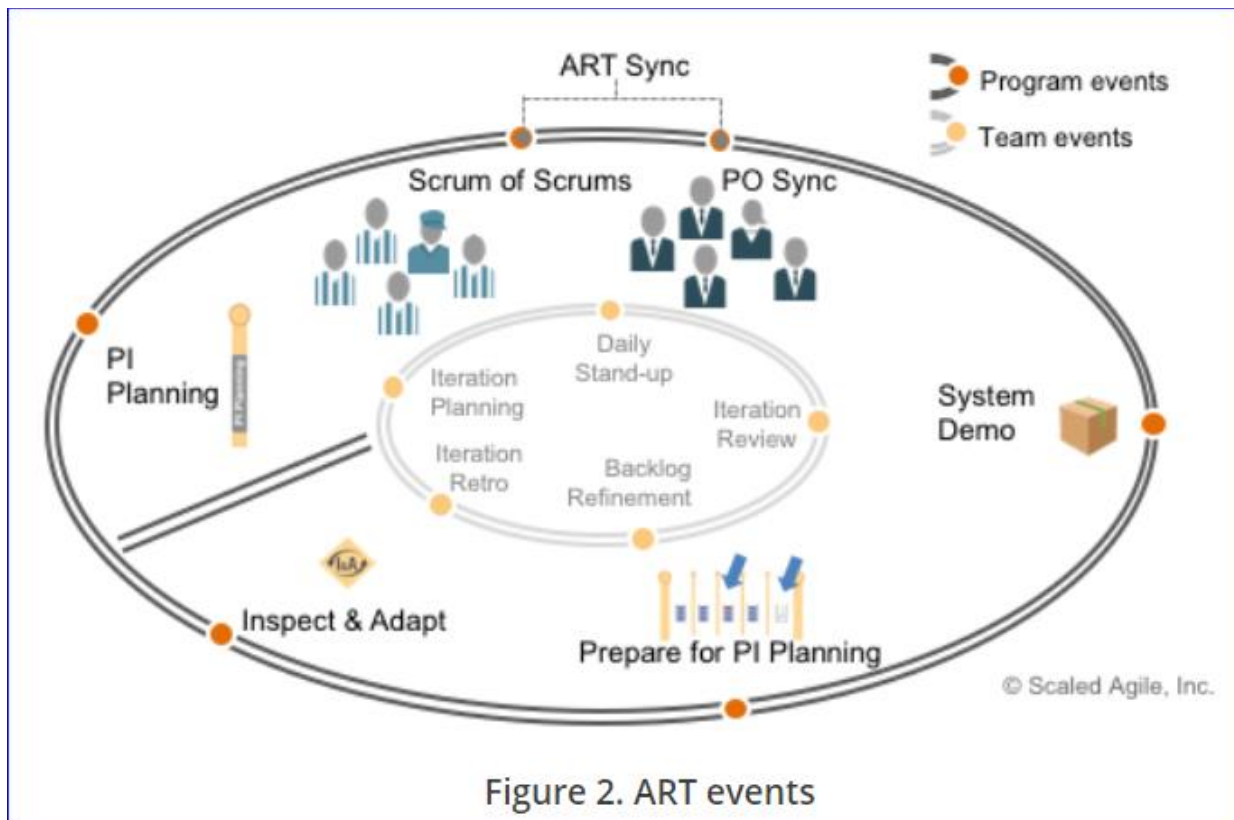
Other best practices is doing it in other ways, but the key here to stay in control is transparently make sure all have the same overall picture so that the agile teams (Team level) know how their “playground for agile and innovative game” is, and know how to benefit from others achievements and deliverables.

Control at Team level

The next level is team level. The Portfolio and Program level should set the overall direction and “Why”, and with that clearly communicated to the Team level, the team(s) is empowered to make the “How”.

Here, again, the control is **transparency** and **trust** and knowing when to be free and innovative and when to aligning in a structured way (SCRUM etc. helps).

Frameworks like SAFe does this alignment beside normal sprinting and SCRUM orchestrate at cross functions synchronization ([PO, Scrum and CoP](#)) and long term planning at what they call [PI Planning](#):



So, the control here I primary coordination and protect the agile playground.

Control in SCRUM

SCRUM (also in the 2020 version) should be considered as a structure for empowering the recurrently coordination and sharing of delivery and knowledge etc. So, the primary control in SCRUM is to actually give a structure for transparency and protect the agility of the team.

Another Control element is that you do all in small increments (normal 14 days) so this is the maximum you waste/risk you invest.

Much more information here: <https://www.scrum.org/>

Control by Principles/Values

The core for keeping the agile freedom (without too many strict rules/policies) and still have a common direction is often handled by values and principles (See Appendix 01 and 02 for Scrum).

This is done simply by keeping this at “Why” level and not “How” level and this gives freedom to be agile and still stay in control.

This is also illustrated in Appendix 04: “Do the Right Things Right”

4 P's of control

Talking about Control, this is also a matter of your focus and what you want to be in control of. You cannot control everything.

I use 4 P's as lighthouses for my direction, both as a servant leader, but also team member:

- **P**assion:
 - o Without Passion no real quality and results – so to be in control the focus should be on Passion.
- **P**eople:
 - o Nothing can be done without People, so as for Passion real focus on motivation and People would make better results and control
- **P**roduct:
 - o If you don't make Products, Deliveries, output, outcome and value, you in the long run you will be out of control/business. Simply because this is the reason we work and get paid.
- **P**rocess:
 - o To be in control of, is a very good idea to agree on a process/structure to reduce waste and increase cooperation/knowledges building.

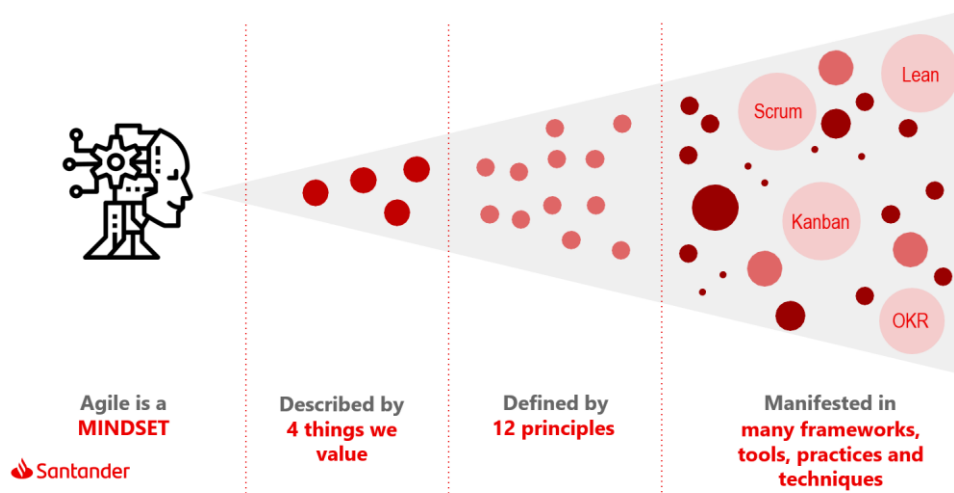
Control your mind

All changes start in your mind, and **control is as feeling and often subjective** (even if it look objective in OKR, KPI,CSF's, reportings)

So to ~~be~~ feel in control starts with you, and it should be a **mindset at all levels** for a real cultural change in you company (see portfolio level).

This is illustrated a little bit by this picture:

Agile is a MINDSET that help us to achieve Agility!



So beside really understand the mindset/Values of the agile manifesto (See appenix01) and the 12 principles (See Appendic02) you also must build real trust and dare to be transparent and much more.



So, by this I thank you for joining me so far, and remember this article is also just my first Product Increment for your fast track feedback!

Wrap up: Agile – Out of Control ?

Congratulations, you've reached this sweet spot, hope you enjoyed my control reflections and maybe even built you own reflections on top of that.

My wrap up/conclusion is that: **yes**, you are in just as much in control in the Agile world as in other worlds and it all depends on Why, What and How you implement you control strategy.

But first of all, its dependence on **trust, transparency, mindset** and an agreed structure/model/framework for this is could help.

Just like my 4 P's I also have 3 T's as key for staying in control:

- **Transparency** – “Showing is Knowing”. So, if you don't share good and bad status, you cannot be control
- **Trust** - If you don't really trust your people and management, you will use all your energy on bureaucratic control (see chapter 4)
- **Tool** – A Tool supporting structure/model helps focus on the “out of control” instead on things that are in control.

I hope you got some inspiration and would like to join me on other agile journeys or parties (See References)

Final quotes/souvenirs:

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step” (Lao Tzu)

“The first giant step is in your mind” (Yesper)

“You do everything twice – first in you mind then in reality (Stephen Covey)

“ Change your mind for a change” (Yesper)

With this I thank you joining my so far on my journey – to be continued....

YESper (Feedback: Yesper@yesc coaching.dk)

Source/References and other inspiration:

Ref. 01: LinkedIn profile: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jesperbergerolsen/>

Ref. 02: Own coaching company www.yescoaching.dk

Ref. 03: Inspiration by “Coaching Agile Teams” by Lyssa Adkins

Ref. 04: Inspiration by course “Advanced Agile Team Coaching” and book “The HitchHikers’s Guide to Agile Coaching” by Agile42

Ref. 05: Inspiration by “Clean Agile – Back t Basics” by Robert C. Martin

Ref. 06: Book: “Seven habits of highly effective peoples”(Steven R. Covey)

Ref. 07: Book: “Systemisk Coaching” by Hanne V. Moltke and more

Ref. 08: LinkedIn Doku: “Agile introduction made simple”:

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jesperbergerolsen_agile-introduction-made-simple-version-02-activity-6695996989156454400-pZL9

Ref. 09: LinkedIn Doku: “Does Agile Framework actual work”:

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jesperbergerolsen_does-agile-frame-actual-work-activity-6680542323400564736-ilpc

Ref. 10: LinkedIn Post: “Agile Hangover and Back to the Basic”:

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jesperbergerolsen_agile-scrum-safe-activity-6670335483358277632-dEGH

Ref. 11: LinkedIn Post: “Be on Track with DevOps”:

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jesperbergerolsen_agile-scrummaster-safe-activity-6618435085634977792-gWoG

Ref. 12: LinkedIn Post: “Defintion of Well Done”:

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jesperbergerolsen_agile-scrummaster-safe-activity-6612745994717147136-Wjl6

Ref. 13: LinkedIn Post: “Product Owner – more than just the owner” :

https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jesperbergerolsen_agile-scrum-productowner-activity-6610869358396751872-DdH6

Ref 14: LinkedIn Doku: “Are you a real Agile coach ?”

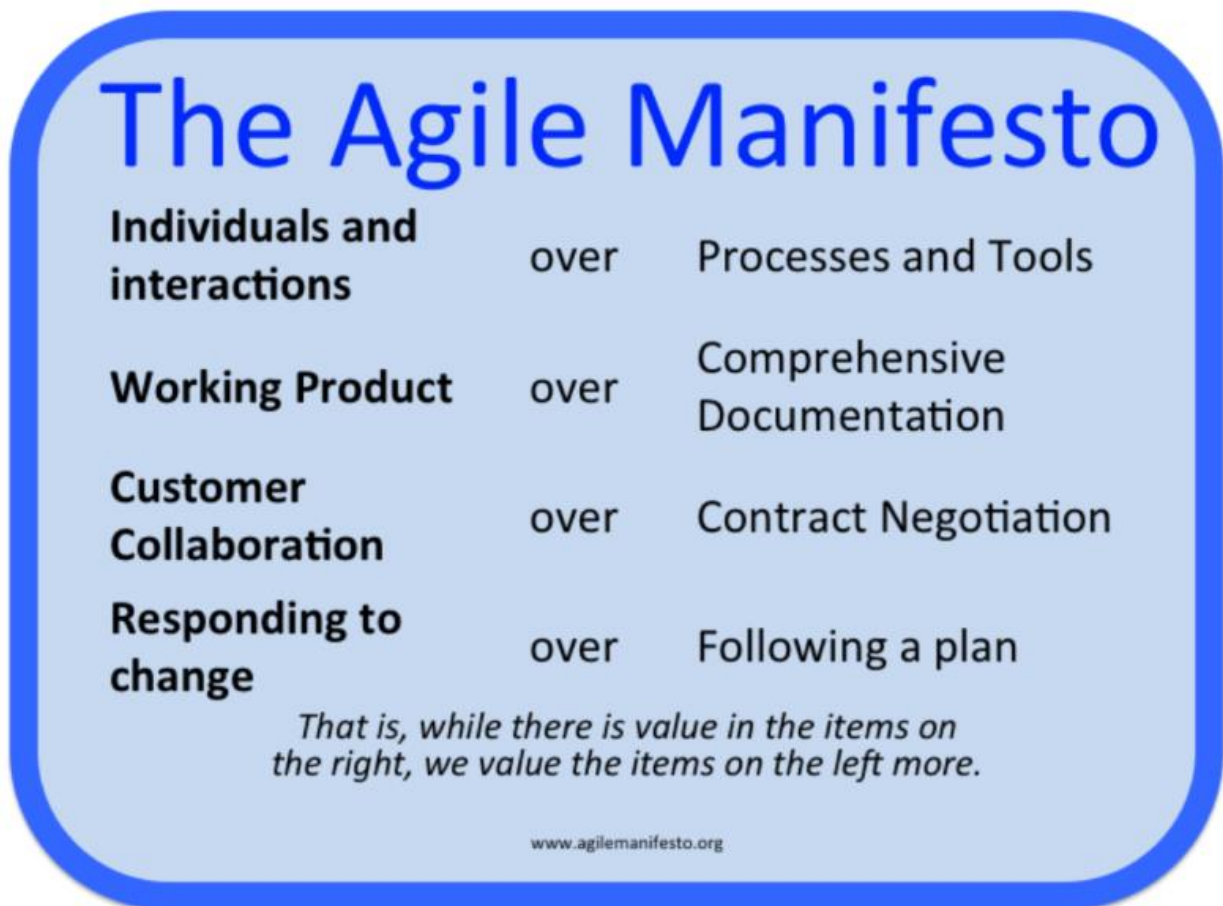
https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jesperbergerolsen_real-agile-coach-activity-6744575035144495104-tHJQ

Ref 15: LinkedIn Doku: “Agile Party for NewComers?”

[https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6747087224568901632/?commentUrn=urn%3Ali%3Acomment%3A\(ugcPost%3A6747087223474200576%2C6750021231346536449\)](https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6747087224568901632/?commentUrn=urn%3Ali%3Acomment%3A(ugcPost%3A6747087223474200576%2C6750021231346536449))

Appendix

Appendix01: Agile Manifesto



Comments:

- **Individuals and interactions over processes and tools**
 - Pasion, People and empowered team beats structure
- **Working software over comprehensive documentation**
 - Real result is outcome for business not administration.
- **Customer collaboration over contract negotiation**
 - Business should be considered is part of Agile team and not “the other side”
- **Responding to change over following a plan**
 - Embrace change and remember plan is not outcome

The 12 Agile Principles

The infographic displays 12 Agile Principles, each with a numbered icon and a brief description. The principles are arranged in two rows of six. A central box contains a numbered list of all 12 principles.

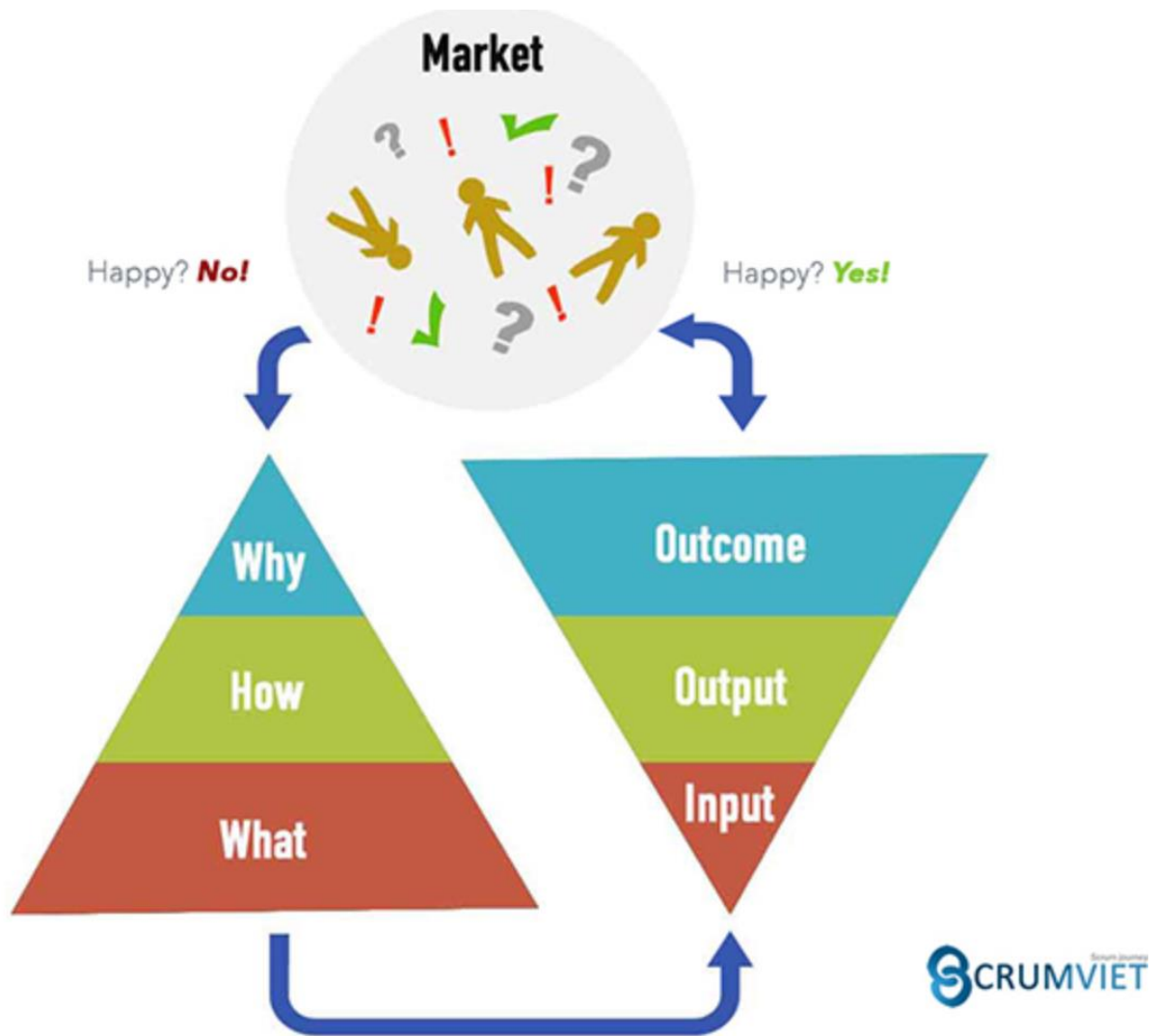
1. Satisfy the **customer**
2. Welcome **change**
3. Deliver **frequently**
4. Work **together**
5. Trust and **support**
6. Face-to-face **conversation**
7. Working **software**
8. Sustainable **development**
9. Continuous **attention**
10. Maintain **simplicity**
11. Self-organizing **teams**
12. Reflect and **adjust**

Comments:

1. Our highest priority is to satisfy the customer through early and continuous delivery of valuable software.
 - a. Focus on value, Output, Innovation and Outcome (See appendix03)
2. Welcome changing requirements, even late in development. Agile processes harness change for the customer’s competitive advantage.
 - a. Embrace changes, focus on enablers for this and keep options open
3. Deliver working software frequently, from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, with a preference to the shorter timescale.
 - a. Design for flexibility, T2M and DevOps
4. Businesspeople and developers must work together daily throughout the project.
 - a. One Agile team and Product Owner is more than just owner
5. Build projects around motivated individuals. Give them the environment and support they need and trust them to get the job done.
 - a. Prioritize the two first P’s **Passion and People** an the Job will get done (Product/Process).
6. The most efficient and effective method of conveying information to and within a development team is face-to-face conversation.
 - a. Walk the talk and “Listen to be understood”
7. Working software is the primary measure of progress.
 - a. Result, Output, Outcome and value (and more than just software)
8. Agile processes promote sustainable development. The sponsors, developers, and users should be able to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.
 - a. Consider long-term and Non-Functional Requirements (eg. Maintainability)
9. Continuous attention to technical excellence and good design enhances agility.

- a. Including reducing Technical Depth and long-term enablers as part of the job.
- 10. Simplicity—the art of maximizing the amount of work not done—is essential.
 - a. Just go for DoD and remember Software is just an enabler for real outcome (See Appendix03 and “Mona Lisa painting”)
- 11. The best architectures, requirements, and designs emerge from self-organizing teams.
 - a. Good Product comes from Pasion, People, motivation and real empowerment
- 12. At regular intervals, the team reflects on how to become more effective, then tunes and adjusts its behavior accordingly.
 - a. Never stop learn and unlearning

Apendix03: Outcome /Business Focus in One Picture



Apendix04: “Do the Right Things Right”

