



Trends in Agile: Business Agility

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THE AGILE CONFERENCE (<http://www.agilealliance.org/agile2019/>) is the largest global symposium on agile software development, catering particularly to practitioners. Agile 2019, held 5–9 August in Washington, D.C., drew more than 2,400 participants.

World of Distraction

Chris Bailey's keynote "How to Manage Your Attention in a World of Distraction" focused on his long-term research about productivity. In his book *Hyperfocus*, Bailey reflects on how constant connectivity is one of the worst disruptions to our focus and productivity. He says that the state of our attention determines the state of our lives. Bailey claims that our attention has never been as overwhelmed and in demand as it is today; we've never been so busy while accomplishing so little; and we've grown increasingly uncomfortable with a lack of stimulation and distraction. He argues that we switch tasks every 40 s because the world around us is so stimulating. His solution: spend two weeks making our minds less simulated. Initially, we will feel restless. But on the other side of restlessness, we will

find focus. He also makes a distinction between being intentionally productive and unintentionally unproductive. Doing nothing is, ironically, one of the best ways to be productive, because when you do nothing, you rest your mind. You can watch his talk at <http://bit.ly/PD-2020-Jan-01>.

World of Perfection

Lynne Cazaly's presentation "Ish: The Problem With our Pursuit for Perfection and the Life-Changing Practice of Good Enough" noted that perfectionism—the irrational desire to achieve and criticize ourselves and others—is on the rise. However, there is no relationship between perfectionism and high performance. Perfectionism is usually described as the "favorite flaw." In her book *Ish*, she shares stories about the lies perfectionists tell themselves, for example, that working more on something will make it better. According to Cazaly, research shows that "at the task level, spending more time on something, doesn't result in it being better." Rather, this extra work leads to "higher stress, lower satisfaction, less recognition, fewer opportunities, and less security." She shares that being more "ish" (which means somewhat, more or less, and to some extent) is

a more flexible, helpful, and effective way to think and work. We should strive for iteration over perfection more often. You can view her talk at <http://bit.ly/PD-2020-Jan-02>.

World of Fun

In Portia Tung's talk "Playful Leadership: How to Enable Transformational Change and Have Fun Doing It," she explored why play is the most effective and efficient way of enabling individuals to learn, lead, and work together. She pointed out that getting a daily amount of play is at least as important as taking vitamins and ensuring that we have a healthy diet and plenty of exercise. In fact, daily play fosters a growth-oriented approach that enables people to change with relative ease and even experience joy instead of resistance and anguish. Her talk is available at <http://bit.ly/PD-2020-Jan-03>.

The Practitioner Conference-Outreach Initiative

At Agile 2019, *IEEE Software* held its fourth practitioner conference-outreach initiative. In collaboration with the Agile Alliance (www.agilealliance.org), *IEEE Software* chaired the Future of Agile Software Development track, which attracted more than 800 participants.

Here, we report on three of the nine presentations.

In their highly interactive session “Beyond Agile: Thriving on Digitalization With Beyond Budgeting, Open Space, and Sociocracy,” Jutta Eckstein and John Buck argued that digitalization calls for rapid organizational flexibility and adaptability. This mind-set impacts all dimensions of a company: its strategy, structure, and processes. Thus, businesses are expected to be flexible, rapidly responsive, and resilient to change. In other words, they must be agile. Yet, doing agile (the mechanics) is different from being agile (the mind-set). The agile mind-set enables an organization to apply flexible agile patterns not only to software-development teams but the whole company. During the workshop, the authors discussed how the concepts of beyond budgeting, open space, sociocracy, and agile can be combined into an overarching framework for enterprise agility. Together, these concepts enable a company not only to survive but to thrive on (digital) disruptions through entrepreneur initiatives.

Al Shalloway’s presentation “Agile in Its Third Decade” discussed problems in the current state of agile adoption. He mentioned business agility and diversity as key drivers of the future of agile and discussed five shifts that he believes must occur for industry to achieve the next level of enterprise agility. First, organizations need to shift their focus to business-value streams and how to optimize them to build minimal business-value increments rather than keeping their focus on teams and programs. Second, companies need to employ systems thinking to understand and optimize complex organizational networks. Third, businesses must put more emphasis on building an agile culture. Fourth, they must replace the current dogmatic approach to

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implementing agile with a scientific, empirical method based on evidence rather than opinion. Finally, companies need to move from being highly structured toward more fluid communities of people working together, where everyone contributes their own expertise to solve the task at hand.


In Luiz Claudio Parzianello’s presentation “Business Owner: The Most Critical Role for the Future of Agile,” he identified business agility as the new buzzword when discussing agile transformation in terms of whole organizations. He indicated that there is a growing movement of agile-at-scale in terms of processes and tools but not in business transformation. Now, after this evolution, organizations face a bottleneck when they move from the delivery perspective to discovery, which

gives product owners and managers the new critical roles in agile transformations instead of the scrum master and agile coach. Because top management is noticing that bottlenecks occur at the business perspective (the need to make faster and smarter decisions and support product and operations perspectives through short cycles of strategy analysis and execution), Parzianello has defined a new role: business owners. They are lean-agile leaders responsible for evolving a business context (ownership) by developing new capabilities (needs) leveraged by awesome people and technologies (solutions). He argued that the business owner is beginning to emerge as the most critical role in any effective organizational transformation that aims to achieve the benefits of agility.

Similar to previous years, we observed a clear trend at the 2019 conference: business agility. The need for it arises because the world has never been so volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA). Therefore, organizations must adapt quickly to market changes, internally and externally; respond rapidly and flexibly to customer demands; adapt and lead change in a productive and cost-effective way without compromising quality; and continuously maintain a competitive advantage. We argue that this trend is an evolution of the concept identified during the 2018

Agile conference: strategic agility.¹ It is important to emphasize that strategic agility, or business agility, is different from organizational agility. While the latter talks about agility only in terms of how to compact and change your organizational structure to deal with the VUCA world, the former is concerned with enabling businesses and individuals to be more adaptive, creative, and resilient to pivot and remain necessary to customers and changing market needs. For more information on business agility, visit <https://www.agilebusiness.org/page/WhatisBusinessAgility> and <https://businessagility.institute/>.

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Reference

1. R. Prikladnicki, C. Lassenius, and J. C. Carver, "Trends in agile updated: Perspectives from the practitioners," *IEEE Softw.*, vol. 35, no. 1, pp. 109–111, Jan.–Feb. 2018. doi: 10.1109/MS.2017.4541042.



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