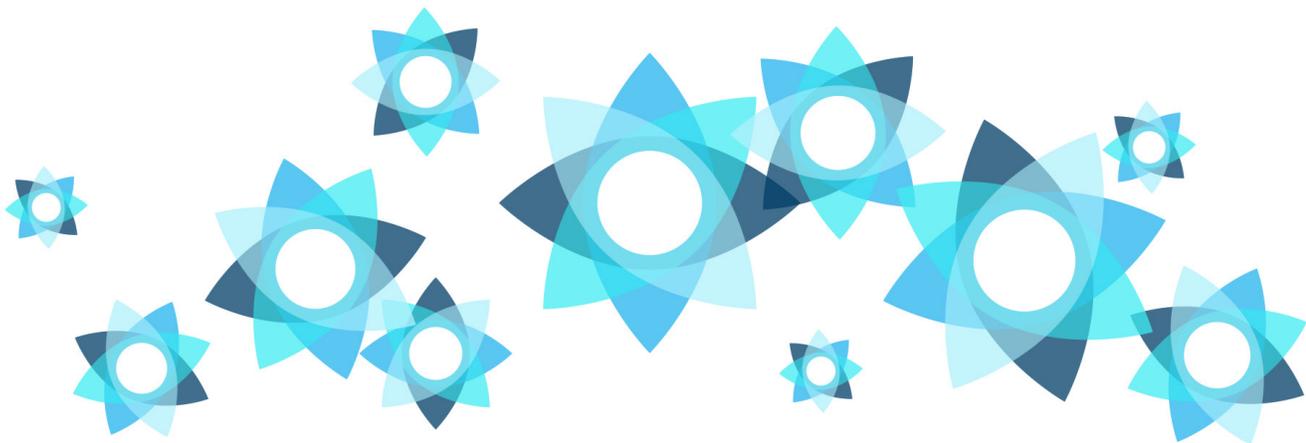


# How to foster an agile culture to drive better outcomes

## Introduction

Agile is a way of working that was originally created to improve software development, but its measurable effect on business results has made it an attractive way to work for all types of organizations and teams. Agile is not simply an initiative, nor is it a mode of project management. It is the ability to navigate complexity with speed and clarity of purpose to achieve the best outcomes.

To practice agile, enable small, interdisciplinary teams to engage in short “sprints,” or brief periods of iterative work. These sprints are defined by clear tasks and are prioritized for business value. The team’s work is frequently assessed and recalibrated. Agile thinking eliminates unnecessary processes and artificial boundaries to fuel a culture of radical collaboration. It helps companies focus energy on what matters most to clients.



Agile methods can help your organization stay competitive and lead in your marketplace by delivering greater client value with speed, simplicity and continuous improvement. For example, a global telecommunications company working with an agile IBM team has shortened average cycle times for project development from six months to 12 weeks, and it continues to get shorter and shorter. In addition, another agile team reduced the telecom's average customer order delivery process from five weeks to five days, reducing costs.

Agile organizations may also notice improved employee morale and increased revenue and growth.

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## Step one

Begin with clarity about the outcome, and let it guide every step along the way.

Determine what is most important to your customers, then cultivate a fanatical focus on delivering those outcomes. Break down the steps for doing so. Create a "backlog," or list of priorities that will help you achieve these goals, with priorities listed in descending order. As you set those priorities with your team, ensure they understand how they deliver value to your customers and to your organization. Adjust and update priorities by engaging with your clients in creative, transparent ways. Encourage your team to be flexible and plan in a way to take advantage of their awareness of changes in customer needs.

## Step two

Listen, iterate, learn and course correct rather than wait until your product or service is perfect.

Create an environment that empowers employees to unleash their potential by challenging the status quo. Leading with agility requires ongoing feedback, smart thinking, and an environment that fosters open communication and diversity of thought.

Focus not on speed, but on speed-to-value, meaning delivering real business value as soon as feasible. Agile focuses on clarity of outcomes to avoid wasting time on building out materials or experiences that address executives' perceptions but may fail to address real user needs. Rapid iteration and experimentation allow end users and/or customers to regularly experience new benefits quickly, and offer feedback quickly.

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## Step three

Encourage self-direction for teams to unleash innovation, instead of concentrating decision-making in the hands of a select few.

Learning is at the core of an agile culture. Encourage your teams to apply agile concepts by experimenting with tools and activities that eliminate hindering processes and generate better solutions. For example, engage in an agile work session that ensures everyone in the room has a voice. Do so by asking team members to write their individual ideas on Post-it notes, and then group similar ideas together to visualize consensus around feasible concepts. Enable your team to determine the most effective ways for them to achieve desired results together. Remind them, and yourself, that agile is not about processes; it's about empowerment.

## Step four

Always ask, “How can we get better?”

Agile is not just a set of steps to be followed mechanically to completion. In agile, you are never done. The techniques are a way of doing and the principles are a way of thinking—new behaviors and a new mindset that can achieve true culture change within more traditional, “top down” or “waterfall” enterprises and organizations. Don’t think of agile as a set of best practices, a term that implies there is only one right way to achieve outcomes. Continuously look for better ways to deliver and improve upon superior results.