



~~The end of agile~~ > The beginning of agility

Right now, you are thinking you couldn't care less about agile and are wondering why you'd want to read this book. You've likely been through multiple so-called agile transformations. The executives who paid for it claim it was successful in your town hall. But what you got is nothing more than surface-level change. Your challenges either still exist, or things have gotten worse. I know because I've joined so many companies after one or more failed transformations. I wrote this book to explain why it failed and where you can go now.

Does any of this sound familiar?

- Squads, tribes, chapters, and guilds
- Iteration managers
- Agile delivery managers
- Velocity
- Agile Project Managers
- Capability uplift
- RTE's
- Crew Leads
- Performance Leads
- Release trains
- Agile maturity assessments
- 2-week sprints only
- Agile playbooks
- Agile OpModel
- Agile change managers
- Jira
- OKRs must be achieved
- Epics and features
- Big Room Planning/Quarterly Planning

Were you told the above would get you the following?

- Faster delivery
- Better customer satisfaction
- Alignment with business goals
- Better risk management
- Better product quality
- Better ROI

Well, I'm here to tell you it's all lies, and none of those things have anything to do with helping companies be their best in today's ever-evolving world. It is all pointless stuff to make companies feel like they are changing. However, none of those outcomes came true even after multiple "transformations" took place because companies have been told agile is a thing you can make teams do, which is wrong.

In this book, I'll take you through the most common things being sold as agile, and we'll look at why they fail and discover possible ways for dealing with work aimed at helping companies thrive.

Agile is a way of being. It's a shift away from processes and tools towards individuals and interactions. It's a shift from considerable upfront planning to creating a flow of work focused on outcomes, not outputs. It's a shift from pet projects to valuable solutions addressing customer challenges. So-called "agile transformations" are an exercise in futility.

If this sounds familiar post-transformation, you likely achieved little to no agility:

- If it still takes months to make decisions
- If decisions are locked
- If people are told how they must work
- If people are told what tools they must use
- If people are told what meetings they must attend
- If work is funded rather than teams
- If new vocabulary is mandated
- If people are still referred to as resources
- If the people are still moved to the work rather than the work being brought to the people
- If there are still constant changes in the priorities, teams need to focus on
- If teams have too many things to focus on at once
- If team members are part of multiple teams
- If managers are part of Scrum teams
- If the business and tech are still referred to separately

As a leader, you play a part in shaping whether your company continues along the same old path, or it improves and excels. Bad agile will not help you reach your goals. It will cause your best employees to leave. And it will keep your customers unhappy. Why would anyone be ok with that? I've written this book for you because I know you want to help your teams be the best they can be, but how do you know if what you are being sold will help or hurt?

Why does this book exist?

I became an agile coach because while I loved being in tech, I wasn't happy with most of my jobs. Team member contributions weren't appreciated. Developer insights were not seen as valuable. Products took years to plan and even longer to build, and in the end, poor quality work was released because deadlines were never reasonable. There was always too much work, and even if there was proof something we were building wouldn't work, nobody was allowed to stray from the carefully planned specs. It wasn't until I discovered personal kanban and started to understand agile and lean principles that I realized work didn't have to be painful. I used reality to be transparent about what

was and was not possible for me and my teams. I communicated with demanding stakeholders, taking conversations from antagonistic and demanding to ones with understanding and mutual respect. I've spent years learning everything I could and putting it into practice so I could help others create exceptional environments. Unfortunately, the big (and many small) consultancies found ways to commoditize agile. Now, I find myself surrounded by people with no work experience, no agile experience, no training experience, and no coaching experience who call themselves coaches and spread the all-too-familiar anti-patterns. A move to agility shouldn't be painful, and yet, here we are.

After concluding another contract where a company had bought yet another package of bad agile from a big consulting firm, I was beyond frustrated. Swarms of consultants had come in, calling each other "agile experts" and cranking out slide decks having nothing to do with agility. The clients were told to follow the decks, and agility would happen. A reorg took place based on what the consultants said but with no thought about what this would do to the people who'd already been through multiple reorgs and, worse, without solid reasoning about what these changes were meant to accomplish. This company followed the same path to despair as so many others, and I needed a way to vent. I sat at my desk and started writing a new blog post, "Tales From a Tired Agile Coach." It ended up being a very long list of all the garbage being sold to unsuspecting execs. I realized it was way too long to be a blog post in today's TL; DR culture, so I broke it into short statements I was posting on LinkedIn along with #stopbadagile. Over time, I began painting birds and let them say all the things I'd been bottling up. Writing it was not only incredibly cathartic for me, but I was also getting messages from people around the world thanking me for bringing bad agile to the surface in a way that helped them have difficult conversations about the path their company was on.

Companies used to hire agile coaches and let them guide them toward meaningful change. Now, all coaches get asked to do is force Scrum, pretend the Spotify model exists, follow SAFe, and facilitate pointless quarterly planning sessions. Whenever we mention improvements they might make, they say, "No, you need to follow the playbook."

Learning to coach companies to create high-performing teams in a system of work built on trust, transparency, and humane treatment of people takes years to master. It requires years of experience in many industries at all company levels, deep study of all things agile and lean, and involvement with the worldwide community. It's not a role you can gift to someone and expect anything but chaos. Most "agile transformations," say you need 100s of coaches and Scrum Masters, but you'll learn in this book that people can't help you by selling you something they don't understand.

If people are selling you the stuff in this book, stop listening to them. Stop paying them and start paying attention to what your employees are saying. Everywhere I go, I see employees suffering, asking for help, and being told the new "ways of working" will solve all their problems, and they just need to "lean in."

If you are a leader in an organization paying for bad agile, I hope to help show you how you can help share why this needs to stop before more time and money is spent on something that won't bring about anything but pain for you and your people. I hope you'll share this book with your colleagues. I hope you have some deep discussions about why the things your company has been sold in the past didn't produce the desired results and never will.

As I write this chapter, I now have over 100 birds like the one on the cover that I'm using to expose bad agile. I have not exhausted the items in the original blog post and will continue to add to it. The amount of bad agile being pushed on people is heartbreaking. Fortunately, the community that understands what agile truly is is working tirelessly worldwide to help people understand they can stop the madness and embrace the true meaning of agility. We help people because we have experienced first-hand how much better work can feel when agile and lean principles and practices are central to how a company treats its customers and employees. Many of us speak around the world about the things we've seen to help others understand what great can look like. We share our experiences with others so people don't have to suffer under inhumane work environments. We do this to satisfy the desire to watch work environments change for the better. We spend our time and money learning from and teaching others because we know the benefits.

I hope you read this and make changes based on what you learn. I hope you eventually experience the brilliance of working in a company with agility at its core. Please reach out if you have any questions about what you see here. I'm always happy to connect with people who are curious to improve

~~Agile Transformation~~ > Agile Evolution

There is no such thing as an agile transformation. Agile is something you are, not something you do.

Consultancies worldwide are selling prefab solutions to companies and promising that if they follow the playbook, adhere to the OpModel, and use the same "ways of working," they will be agile. Nothing could be further from the truth. If the only downside was that nothing changed, I wouldn't have felt the need to write a book, but the fallout from bad agile is much worse.

- Change fatigue;
- Burnout;
- Layoffs;
- Millions wasted;
- Misinformation spreading;
- Quality slipping;

- Unsatisfied leaders;
- Unhappy employees;
- Unhappy customers.

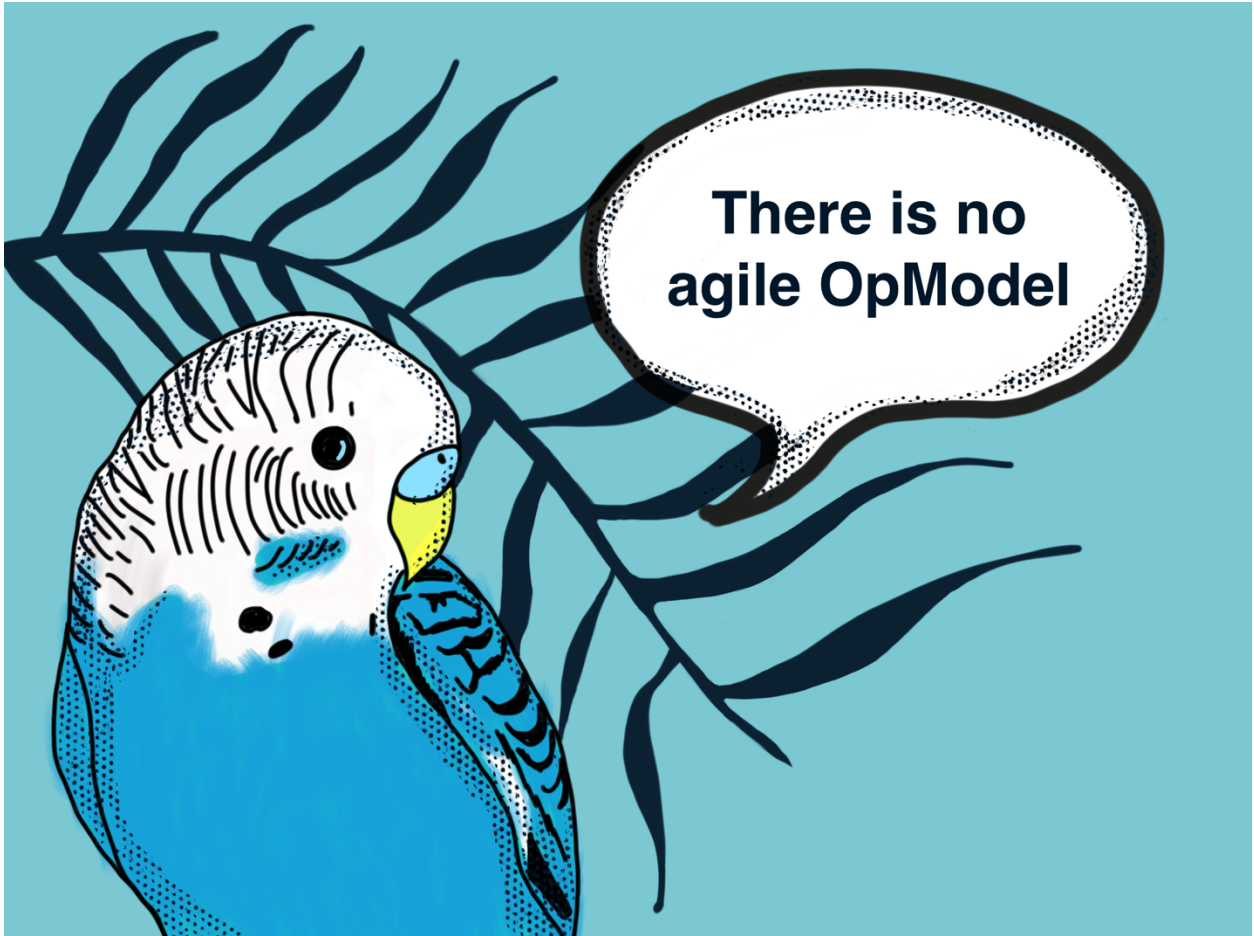
Every day, you hear about another large company claiming to have been "doing agile for years," is laying off all their agile people and claiming agile didn't work for them. But if you dig deeper, you'll find what I'll share in this book is what they were doing. They have no clue what they were sold as a solution, which could never have led to them being an agile organization. Moving to agility is a move toward changing how a company plans, delivers, communicates, learns, and improves. No amount of force-fed "ways of working" will move a company in the right direction.

An agile company does not look like this:

- One way of working
- Everyone must use the same tools
- Managing individual capacity
- Team members being on multiple teams
- Scrum is the only framework
- Jira/Confluence for everyone
- Starting with a scaling framework
- Role changes
- Chapters, guilds, squads, crews, and tribes
- Only two-week cadences are allowed
- All teams start and stop sprints at the same time

An agile company looks like this:

- Autonomous self-organizing teams making strategic decisions based on data and customer input
- Management ensures teams understand the vision of the company and the teams work on the most important work to achieve the company's goals
- Inspection and adaptation are the norm
- All decisions are transparent
- There is a focus on learning
- There is no forced change
- Teams are funded, not projects
- People are referred to as people, not resources
- There is a significant investment in tech
- Teams work on value-driven work until the desired outcomes are achieved or something else becomes more valuable
- When teams bring up challenges, leadership works with them to solve them



There is no agile OpModel

If a consultant claims to have an OpModel that will make your company agile, they are lying. Even using a respected framework like Scrum does not guarantee agility, nor is it suitable for every type of team. Again, agile isn't something you do. Following a framework won't help if a company is risk-averse, overly bureaucratic, slow to change, siloed, etc.

Too often, leadership buys into a framework because it's sold as something that will make them agile, and yet after years of following the framework, it's easy to see nothing has changed. This isn't a failure of agile; mindlessly following a framework isn't fixing the original challenges driving the company to seek out agile in the first place.

If there were a proven OpModel, everyone would use it, and my job would be obsolete, but this is not the case. In most places I go, someone has forced the latest bad OpModel, everyone gets training and a title change, teams get shuffled around in a new way they didn't have a say in choosing, they get more and more meetings, but the second management isn't looking they stop doing it. If people are told change will make things

better and it doesn't, they stop doing it even if the company is trying to mandate the change.

Sadly, this results in the same thing every time: a move back to their original ways of working. Teams must be taught how to surface their challenges. They need to be allowed to be transparent about those challenges. They need to be empowered to fix their challenges. They need to be allowed to find their path.



Scaling a broken system won't fix the system

Companies are told scaling frameworks can help them. Unfortunately, the only thing starting with a scaling framework leads to is unnecessary new roles, more meetings, more rules, and a lot less money, all the while not doing anything to address actual challenges facing your employees.

When companies start with a scaling framework, scaled agile fails everywhere. Look at any of those big companies laying off their agile people. They all talk about RTE's and release trains, SAFe, Jira, and squads. Sadly, saying it can help is the equivalent of putting a band-aid on a broken bone. The only people who think you can throw a scaling framework on a broken system and get good results are those profiting from selling it. It's far more successful to start with a couple of teams, set them up for success, teach them to work on solving their challenges, and move on to more teams when they are ready.

This isn't to say all scaling frameworks are bad; it's to say you have to be agile to scale agile.

If you have high-performing teams and need to scale, ensure communication, transparency, and alignment are top of mind, not a set of rigid rules, roles, and meetings.

Work slowly and ensure every change is needed. Some changes feel like they will work, but they won't. Teams should be allowed to stop doing things that aren't helping them improve.



Conformity is not the key to agility

Consultants will tell you that everyone must follow their one-size-fits-all solution. Several of them even convince leaders to monitor teams for compliance.

Agile is about using the information you must try and solve customer challenges. Agile is about working on solutions but looking for fast feedback to decide if you should continue. Agile is about looking at the work being done and gauging whether the company is moving in the direction it wants to go.

Every company is different. Every team is different. Every person is different.

If change is forced, these are things will inevitably happen:

- Employees won't be bought in.
- The mandated changes likely won't be fit for purpose and will cause frustration
- The teams may go through the motions for a while, but they will revert to their old habits
- If someone eventually gets hired to help and does know what good looks like, teams will be too burned out on change for change's sake and won't listen to yet another person talking about potential improvements

I've watched teams at so many companies crumble under mandated change. The people under mandated change are told they are empowered and yet are unable to make changes to the way they work. If I see people working the same way today as they did six months ago, I know they are not in an agile organization, and if bad-agile buzzwords are used, I know they've been sold bad agile. It's not up to managers to define the way teams must work. You can't dictate what frameworks a team uses. You shouldn't dictate what tools they use to track their work. You shouldn't dictate their meetings. Standardization will not lead to alignment. Alignment is much deeper than surface conformity. The path to greatness requires transparency, collaboration, and trust, not force.

***Chapter Two Conclusion

You now know agile can't be purchased and installed. You can't force change, and you can't benefit from someone else's solutions. So, what can you do?

Get an idea of the challenges facing your teams. Brainstorm what can be done to help them. Prioritize the challenges and help the teams grow.

If teams are reluctant to try something new, don't make them follow someone else's solution. Help the teams seek out possible improvements. If some people are unwilling to change, don't make them. As word spreads from successful teams, even the most resistant will often come around.

Since there is no ready-made solution to make a company agile, let's talk about the people who can help you evolve beyond the lies.