

LC WHITE PAPER SERIES

REIMAGINE: THE X-FACTOR FOR AGILE TRANSFORMATION

Dave Schrader, PhD

Senior Partner, Leadership Circle

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Much has been written and said about the need to become more agile these days. And it's no wonder, given the overwhelming amount of VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity). To adapt to an environment of continuous change, one thing is clear: the old models of leadership and organization are falling far short of what's needed. Over the last fifty years or so, our legacy organization models, rooted as they are in large, bureaucratic hierarchies, have proved unable to adapt quickly enough to stay ahead of crosscurrents of change. You know this and, as you've tried to bring about change, have probably felt the frustration of the defensive inertia by which so many cling to the status quo; that's why you're seeking to reimagine your organization.

When we ask clients to reimagine their organizations as truly agile, we hear them dream about organizations that are constantly evolving and learning, with fluid structures in which teams form and disband as needed, where capital flows easily toward promising ideas, where stakeholders (and especially customers) are involved as partners, leadership is democratized, and everyone collectively is reaching for an agreed-upon North Star that provides purpose, meaning, and alignment. All of these intuitions

that arise when clients dream about what could be, are in line with the best of agile thinking and research. It's clear that we know in our gut what's needed.

One organization that has trusted its intuition about their need to become more agile is Roche

Pharmaceuticals. Roche is a 125 year old Swiss company that has evolved in numerous ways over its long history, but recently decided to become radically agile in response to global changes in healthcare and society. Four years ago, they launched a customized leadership process that combined an invitation to reimagine aspects of its business, organizational, and performing models with a focus on deep leadership mindset transformation. The combination proved truly catalytic and unleashed hundreds of agile experiments throughout their global organization. Some of these experiments have radically redesigned the way budgeting is done, how R&D interfaces with the commercial organization, how teams are formed and disbanded, and the ways governance is thought about. The results have been stunning: new medicines

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are now made available much faster than before, regulatory stakeholders are brought into the process earlier than ever, and they're developing more fluid ways to repurpose resources and capital to stay ahead of the change curves.

One thing that's very clear is that leading an agile transformation requires a new kind of leadership: more Creative and more collective.

The good news is that, right now, they're not alone. The world of business generally is in a grand phase of experimentation. Uncountable numbers of initiatives are being launched in thousands of companies worldwide in search of the right mix of agile organizational designs, processes, and methods that work for them. One thing is becoming very clear: there is no one right mix or recipe. Everything depends on the business and industry you're in and the needs of the stakeholders in your operating ecosystem. The discovery of the mix

of variations that works—for this moment, anyway—is a process of guided evolution and collective learning. Another thing that's clear is that leading an agile transformation requires a new kind of leadership. Because it's obvious that to use traditional command-and-control forcing to implement “the solution,” is to attempt to become agile in a very unagile way.

And yet this happens all too often.

In our well-meaning zeal to move quickly and efficiency, companies too often focus on branded methods and techniques such as Scrum, Design Thinking, Kanban, or Tribes-Chapters-Squads, and get everyone trained up on the new way of doing everything. There is initially much excitement and hope for removing non-value-added wastes of time and creating more meaningful team structures. And then...? Within months, people are tired of the “overttechniquing” of everything and a creeping cynicism begins to taint the very idea of agility. When every short meeting becomes a “stand-up” and every long meeting is a “sprint,” nothing's really changed. And everyone knows it.

Simply put, agile just doesn't “boot up” on the Reactive stage of mind

Why does this happen so frequently? It'd be easy to give a litany of reasons, for example: inertia, psychological ownership of past ways of working, poor implementation plans, undercapitalized learning and training, differing perceptions of risk, generational perspectives, etc. And certainly there is truth in all of these reasons and they need to be taken into account.

But the deeper answer is both simple and difficult. It has to do with what we, and many, in the field of leadership are calling “vertical development.” As we mature in our lives and at work, we have the potential to grow through well-mapped stages of maturity or consciousness. At each successive stage our perspective enlarges, our openness to novelty and complexity increases, and our egoic needs fade a bit while, at the same time, our commitment to serving the whole community around us grows. As we mature from stage to stage, we begin to need less certainty, stability, simple answers and control over our environment. We become more and more comfortable with VUCA as a permanent state of being. This is the promise of growing vertically.

A metaphor can help make this a bit more concrete. Think of the agile techniques and methods discussed above as apps: as if they were software designed to organize meetings, processes, and organization architecture. All of these can help a business adapt to change more organically, faster, and with an increased focus on customers. But no matter how elegant and useful any app is, it's only as good as the OS (Operating System) on which it's running. Now, let's take this metaphor one step deeper: consider two different computer operating systems: Windows 3.1 (I know, I date myself) and Windows 10. I can still taste the bile of frustration when my computer would freeze with the "blue screen of death" as I tried to do more than two things at once on v3.1. In contrast, you can multi-task all day long on Windows 10, which is a much more sophisticated operating system designed to handle more complexity.

Likewise, what's needed for leaders in an agile world is a more sophisticated, evolved internal operating system or mindset, one that can handle the constant transformation and innovation of agile environments. This is where the Leadership Circle's approach to vertical development comes in.



At the Leadership Circle, we focus on the two primary stages in which 80% of us live our lives: the Reactive and Creative stages. The differences between the two couldn't be more stark, along with the implications for leadership effectiveness and agile performance. The Reactive stage of leadership seeks stability and tries to maintain the predictability of the status quo. The Creative stage is committed to innovating to get to a North Star (an inspirational, customer-focused purpose). The Reactive stage sees authority and accountability as role-based; the Creative stage sees these as inherent to every person, arising from within (and so, anyone can lead, given the right moment). The Reactive stage of leadership tends to take a fear-based "play not to lose" approach to risk-taking, whereas the Creative stage tends to focus more (though not exclusively!) on the upside learning potential of risk-taking and "plays to win."

To become an agile organization, several things must change together, and do so with persistence over time. Most importantly, it requires a shift from Reactive to Creative, both for individual leaders and the collective leadership as a whole. Simultaneously, old assumptions about business models, operating models, and performing models need to be examined and challenged, knowing that "what got us here, won't get us there." An invitation for all stakeholders to participate

You can probably see where this argument is going: The move from a traditional organization to an agile one requires a Creative or higher (Integral stage) level of leadership consciousness

in reimagining the role and purpose of the organization is issued and held open. And experiments... lots of experiments with new ways of working need to be undertaken in a spirit of learning. All for the sake of a serving a purpose that inspires and motivates.

Recently, in the spirit of agile evolution, we've created a new catalytic process we've fittingly called, Reimagine. It is designed to offer a context to our clients' leaders to begin the alchemy of working simultaneously on their own personal and collective leadership transformation and on reimagining their organization (in whole or part). It's a completely virtual cohort-based process that blends in-depth facilitated conversations with online, self-paced artificial intelligence (AI) supported learning "workouts." There is a strong focus on action-learning and real time experimentation with organizational transformation. Based on our in-person work in large client systems in the midst of transformation, we've incorporated what we've learned there.

Contact our team to learn more about the Reimagine process.