

Agile thinking

An agile mindset helps people respond to change and adapt, and is the foundation for an agile organization



Developing an agile organization is only possible if organizations first develop an agile mindset so that employees can feel empowered, solve more complex problems, and better engaged in the work they do.

Transformation is about rethinking how the people, processes, and tools operate within an organization, and an agile organization depends on the evolution of these three areas simultaneously.

However, changing the culture has proven to be very difficult for agencies, said John Turley, digital transformation consultant at Adaptavist.

“The tools and the processes bit is relatively easy. We’ve been doing that for years,” he said. “The

transformation of mindset culture is really the challenging bit.”

An agile mindset helps people make sense of the world and respond to change so that they can grow and adapt as problems get more complex over time.

“By increasing complexity of mindset, we can close the gap of complexity in the environment,

and that reduces people’s anxiety, increases wellbeing, and increases performance,” Turley said.

People will develop a mindset based on the environment—or social network—that they are in. It is useful to give people more autonomy so that they can continue to learn, grow and work well in teams, he added.

“The fundamentals of developing an agile organization are relative power, motivational orientation, and psychological complexity,” Turley said. “If you want to be a more agile organization, we are proposing you need to increase those things.”

If an organization can change those things, then they can improve employee engagement, which is important to creating “more

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opportunities for people to engage in joyous, meaningful work,” he said. Employee engagement also boosts individual and team performance.

There are three common social network structures—hierarchical, clique, and cross-functional—which describe how people connect with one another and how information flows throughout the organization.

There is a correlation between organizations that have a high level of hierarchical network structures where the information flow is up and down, and a low employee engagement score, Turley said. In this structure, employees typically don’t know what is required to do their job.

The goal is to have lateral flow of information to support cross-functional teams because the conversations between people in an organization “carry fundamental information that invites autonomy or demands compliance, and supports a balancing out of relative power and invites a growing, increasing psychological complexity,” he said. “It’s the conversations that are key. That is what we have learned.”

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However, while the social network is important, it can’t be turned on and off. “You can’t turn a dial to adjust the motivational orientation,” he said.

Dialogue and how people talk with one another, as well as the patterns of dialogue that unfold across the entire organization is what has to change. Patterns of conversation are developmental, Turley said, adding that they have a degree of complexity which can increase, similar to mindset.

A higher level of complexity makes it easier for people to solve problems.

While organizations can apply this approach in a practical sense, it requires asking hard questions. “It starts with you. What is your role in in the patterns of conversation that are unfolding? Are you serious about transformation,” he asked. “You have to be prepared to take a long hard look at yourself and your impact on what is going on.”

Organizations can change the way employees speak to one another, and when this happens, people get more value out of their work as they create a new social network with the people they are working with.

“Relative power, motivational orientation, and psychological complexity are the fundamentals that provide the social network, manifesting patterns of conversations, which are key,” Turley said.

Agency leaders should be less reliant on hierarchical structures and invite and support more autonomy “just to shift the balance a little bit. If you want those cross-functional teams, they have to be autonomous.”



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