

# ENTERPRISE AGILITY

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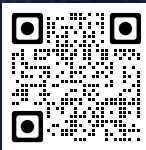
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RECRUITMENT

Gap analysis: how to secure the skills required for agility

A severe shortage of technical and agile expertise is forcing firms to offer inflated salaries, but there are other effective ways to attract the talent they so badly need

Christine Horton

For many companies, the inability to recruit and retain all the employees they need is one of the biggest roadblocks to success. This is particularly so in cloud computing, AI, big data and cybersecurity – some of the key specialisms an enterprise requires to achieve agility. And the problem isn't limited to the technical side. There are also shortages of people with agile delivery skills, such as scrum masters, and of those with support skills to help prepare employees for the transformation, such as agile coaches and business change experts.

“Without people in those key roles, firms are too often trapped in traditional waterfall delivery methods, which prevents them from adapting to uncertainty,” says Chris Bull, change management capability lead at BAE Systems Digital Intelligence. “It also means that they don't use the latest software delivery concepts. It's imperative to provide new functionality in a timely and agile manner.”

It's hardly surprising, then, that 80% of IT professionals view skills gaps as a high or medium risk to their teams' ability to meet their objectives, according to Skillsfort's 2022 *IT Skills & Salary Report*.

A further consequence of the skills shortage is that businesses are having to pay a premium to attract the talent they need.

“Salary inflation is probably running higher than we've ever seen,” reports Bev White, CEO of Nash Squared, a recruitment consultancy and provider of IT outsourcing services. “As businesses push forward on key tech investments, there is so much demand for IT professionals. Skills shortages are worse than ever, intensifying the wage war – employers are having to offer up to 40% more for some roles. Our latest *Digital Leadership Report* shows that 70% of the digital leaders in our global survey say that skills shortages are preventing them from keeping up with the pace of change – the highest we've ever recorded. The most severe shortages are for data analysts, cybersecurity specialists and technical architects. But organisations cannot continue offering higher salaries. Six in 10 digital leaders believe that pay demands have become unsustainable.”

Aside from offering enticing salaries, there are other effective ways



Cécilia Arcus via iStock

to attract the right candidates. Many companies have accepted that people expect more than they did from their employers – and that better training, technology and hybrid working policies are what applicants are looking for too.

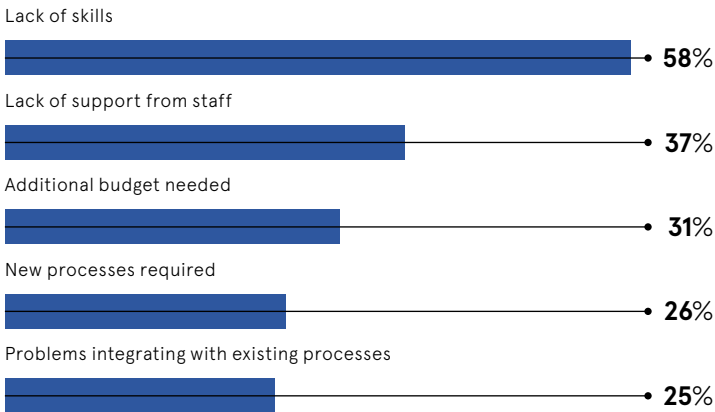
Take Booking.com, for instance. It's preparing to open a new £100m HQ in Manchester, which is set to accommodate about 1,000 employees. Austin Sheppard is CTO and vice-president of engineering for the firm's “trips” business unit. He says that “we know that, if we're to remain agile, we must be creative in attracting new talent. As such,

the company isn't relying on salary alone to find the right people. It's diversifying its recruitment strategy to include graduate and apprenticeship programmes, as well as partnering with initiatives such as Tech Returners, which encourages people who've taken a career break to come back to the profession. The employment landscape has changed significantly over the past two years, so it's become more important than ever to think about creating a workplace that is attractive to potential employees.”

Booking.com is even offering benefits such as a €1,000 (£875) annual

THE DIGITAL SKILLS GAP IS THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE TO COMPANIES' DIGITAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Transformation barriers most often cited by private sector employers in the UK



Hays, 2022

accommodation allowance; €200 to spend on Booking.com services; enhanced maternity and paternity leave entitlements; free private healthcare; free life insurance; and so-called Booking cares days, when employees are encouraged to contribute their time to support good causes in the local community. Employees also worked a four-day week over the summer. The firm says that it will continue exploring how more flexible working patterns can benefit all parties.

“People ultimately want to work somewhere with a positive culture. An attractive office environment that complements homeworking is key to that,” Sheppard says.

Flexible working and business agility certainly seem to be natural bedfellows. Offering hybrid and/or remote options should give an employer a bigger pool of talent to pick from. Indeed, employees can potentially be based anywhere in the world for a wide range of roles.

“About a quarter of digital leaders say that their adoption of remote working has enabled them to start recruiting overseas,” White says. “The ability to find highly skilled talent at a lower rate may save money in some cases, but the most important thing is that it enables them to secure the talent they need and fill the capability gaps that are holding them back.”

Nash Squared advises employers to consider how to enhance the talent they already have at their disposal, she adds. “Can you establish mechanisms for more effective collaboration, ideas generation and innovation? Are you incentivising your teams effectively enough to find new and better ways of achieving key objectives?”

It's important to remember that IT-related changes do not bring agility on their own, Bull stresses. He suggests that employers look beyond traditional technical roles. They need to consider hiring agile coaches and change management specialists, as well as communications and culture experts.

“This combination plays a key role not only in facilitating a true shift in business agility but also in teaching leaders how to promote the required transformations and inspire employees to adapt to volatility,” he explains. “Ultimately, building an enterprise change management capability is a way to achieve business-critical agility and, in turn, a sustainable competitive advantage.”





OntheRunPhoto via iStock

STRATEGY

# Lessons to take from Amazon’s ‘spaghetti at the wall’ approach

While Jeff Bezos may have billions of R&D dollars at his disposal, even small businesses can learn something from his company’s willingness to experiment and its focus on customer experience

Kanny Morgan

Amazon has tried many things over the years. It’s also failed many times. The firm’s consumer ventures have been a truly mixed bag. While the Echo smart speaker and the Kindle tablet were both hits, its Fire smartphones fizzled out, for instance. Having virtually killed off the traditional high-street bookstore in the late 2010s, it opened several of its own across the US – and soon closed them, choosing instead to focus on its bricks-and-mortar grocery business.

Despite these ups and downs, few brands are as recognisable – or as innovative, with products ranging from a home-monitoring robot to a bedside sleep tracker. It even has a marketplace for works of fine art worth millions of pounds.

Its ‘throwing spaghetti at the wall and seeing what sticks’ strategy is paying off, with the firm automatically becoming a force to be reckoned with in any market it chooses to enter. Of course, with a market cap of just under \$1tn (£840bn), Amazon can afford to take several hefty punts in its bid to realise Jeff Bezos’ dream of creating “an everything store”.

Even so, it’s worth examining the company’s approach to see whether it’s possible – or advisable – for those without buckets of cash to try replicating elements of it.

Bethan Vincent is the founder and managing partner of Open Velocity, a consultancy that helps fast-growing tech firms with their marketing strategies. She thinks that Amazon’s focus on innovation is what truly sets the brand apart.

“You have to be innovating constantly to escape the competition,” says Vincent, who adds that the impediment she has often seen, particularly in larger organisations, is “a real fear of committing to test something, because people don’t want to disrupt the status quo”. To prime a business for the sort of innovation that could give it a competitive edge, its leaders must first “foster a culture where people can disagree with you. That’s when you get the most productive ideas and outcomes,” she argues.

Simon Vaarning, chief technology officer at software developer Walr, agrees. The key to developing an innovative mindset is establishing

“a really good team atmosphere in which everyone feels empowered. This is all about building an environment where you have full trust and respect, no matter what your status is in the business,” he explains. “It should be an environment where you’re allowed to fail, because – let’s face it – innovation is also about failing. You need to understand that you can do that.”

A 2015 study of team performance at Google concluded that such psychological safety was the most crucial feature of a high-performing



**You can’t do innovation in isolation, you can’t do innovation without customers – and you can’t involve them without being able to shift stuff on the back end**

group. More recent academic research conducted in South Korea has also highlighted this link.

While Amazon can test fully formed new offerings on an international scale if it wants to, this level of experimentation is clearly unviable for most firms. But, for those wishing to take a leaf out of the Bezos play-book, the minimum viable product (MVP) is a popular enabler.

In essence, an MVP is the most basic form of a new offering, which can be used to gather feedback from the early adopters before more money is spent on adding bells and whistles. Vincent explains that this approach requires firms “to ask themselves: ‘What is the smallest iteration that enables us to test out an idea and validate that it’s the right model?’”

Anyone who shopped at Amazon 20 years ago may remember the web-site’s clunky design, its overwhelming product categorisations and the numerous clicks it required of users to complete transactions. A masterpiece of user experience it was not, yet it was functional.

Likewise, early users of Amazon Web Services may recall that it started as an incomplete offering, with missing tools and patchy documentation. Crucially, though, it gained a foothold in the market because it was deemed adequate – and therefore viable enough for Amazon to spend more on improving it.

Vincent stresses how crucial it is to the success of the MVP approach to listen carefully to the feedback provided by early adopters and keep this in mind when enhancing the product. At Open Velocity, she ensures that all client businesses speak to their customers regularly, because listening to users doesn’t have to mean implementing a large-scale customer survey programme.

“At Amazon, our main business model is delighting the customer,” says one of the firm’s data scientists. “We’re willing to experiment if it means that the customer is going to enjoy the outcome.”

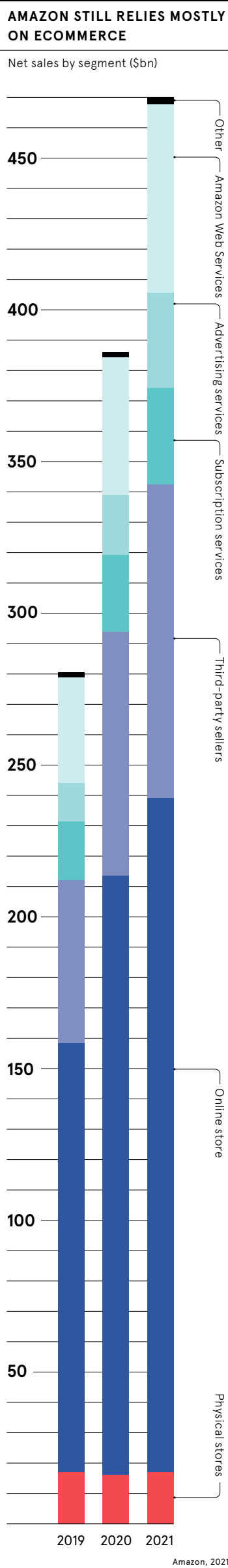
This factor is key to Walr’s preferred way of engaging the help of early adopters. It likes to go one step further than the MVP, favouring a “minimum lovable product”, says Vaarning. “We want to create some joy in working with it. By involving our user experience team at an early stage, we focus on ensuring what we’ve built is really enjoyable to use.”

He adds that delighting the early adopters not only invites constructive criticism from enthusiasts who want to make a good offering even better; it also encourages them to become brand ambassadors.

It can sometimes be hard for a firm to hear criticism from customers about its shiny new creation, however well intentioned, Vincent notes, but it is a vital part of the process. Equally, it’s worth remembering that it can be a “very frustrating experience for customers” when it seems to them that their carefully considered feedback is falling on deaf ears.

“You can’t do innovation in isolation, you can’t do innovation without customers – and you can’t involve them without being able to shift stuff on the back end,” she says. “There is no point in doing any of this if you aren’t willing to iterate.” ●

There are 19 Amazon Fresh checkout-free grocery stores operating in the UK. All of these are in London apart from the recently opened store in Sevenoaks, Kent



# Agility in the renaissance of executive coaching

Following a year of so-called ‘permacrisis’, the C-suite is becoming accustomed to turning adversity into advantage. Here’s how businesses are going all-in on leadership agility

The idea that hostile environments are a hotbed for solid leadership is by no means revolutionary, and 2022 has been a scorcher. For many businesses, the prolonged period of uncertainty that has dominated newsfeeds in recent years has provided leaders with a new opportunity to test their mettle. With heads of departments itching to stay ahead of the competition, establishing enterprise agility has begun to take top billing on many CEOs’ agendas. However, delivering a nimble approach to business strategy is sufficiently challenging, before factoring in the need to galvanise an entire workforce around this principle. While companies may commit significant investment into creating agile structures and processes, successfully putting this into practice only works if employees have the right mindsets, tools and behaviours to keep up.

Embedding an agile culture across an organisation allows teams to respond quickly to market changes, client demands and deadlines, and in turn, organisations can make decisions and act on those decisions at pace.

Marion Gamel, EzraX master coach and X-Google, advocates a top-down, people-first approach. “Coaching can have a profound impact on the level of agility of a leader or an entire team. A coach can help you understand why you may be concerned about a transformation or a time of change and be more in control of your reaction,” she says.

Knowledge, processes and training programs are not enough to inspire agility. Rather, nurturing growth mindsets and helping employees to build a tolerance for uncertainty is paramount. While some people may be more naturally disposed to agile, most need help to get there.

Gamel explains: “Despite the fact that the brain is an organ built to adapt, it is not fond of change. Our brain strives to be efficient – preferring to fire down well-trodden neural paths, that are cemented over time through habit and routine. Changing how we think and behave requires neurons to

fire in new ways and demands more cognitive energy. That’s why we tend to stick to what we know.”

## Digging deeper

Although behaviour is complex, it is not a mystery. Sinéad Keenan, SVP of Ezra’s Impact Labs, outlines four behavioural insights that are primed to derail businesses’ agility efforts.

First, people are more disposed to change when they feel successful. Moreso than failure, success is a unifying force that creates teachable moments. Those with perfectionist tendencies might agonise over being ‘good enough’; others may discount feedback that challenges their success.

Second, a consistent finding is that people are motivated by a sense of progress. Whereas agility means embracing setbacks and a chop-and-change mentality, employees are operating at a human level and need a degree of certainty, routine and a clear sense of progress to thrive.

Accountability is the next step towards agile behaviours. People tend to prefer short-term gains to long-term ones which is why they often prefer to do nothing than change. But, simply stating to a coach that they will try something out means being held to account, and they are more likely to do it.

Finally, competing commitments can derail efforts to be agile. Managers may be fully committed to empowering their teams to be flexible and responsive while, often without realising, feeling a need to maintain control and mitigate potential mistakes.

Ezra leverages these human insights to drive personal behaviour change at scale. Its highly skilled coaches build that success mindset, make agile a habit, or capability, and uncover those competing commitments which may derail best intentions.

Gamel challenges businesses to walk this line. “Coaching conversations often help build confidence and clarify your personal narrative, empowering you to dare to shift and innovate. At the executive level, coaching helps leaders to inspire trust and create



**Changing how we think and behave requires neurons to fire in new ways and demands more cognitive energy. That’s why we tend to stick to what we know**

followership, the required foundation to drive change,” she says.

## Next generation leadership

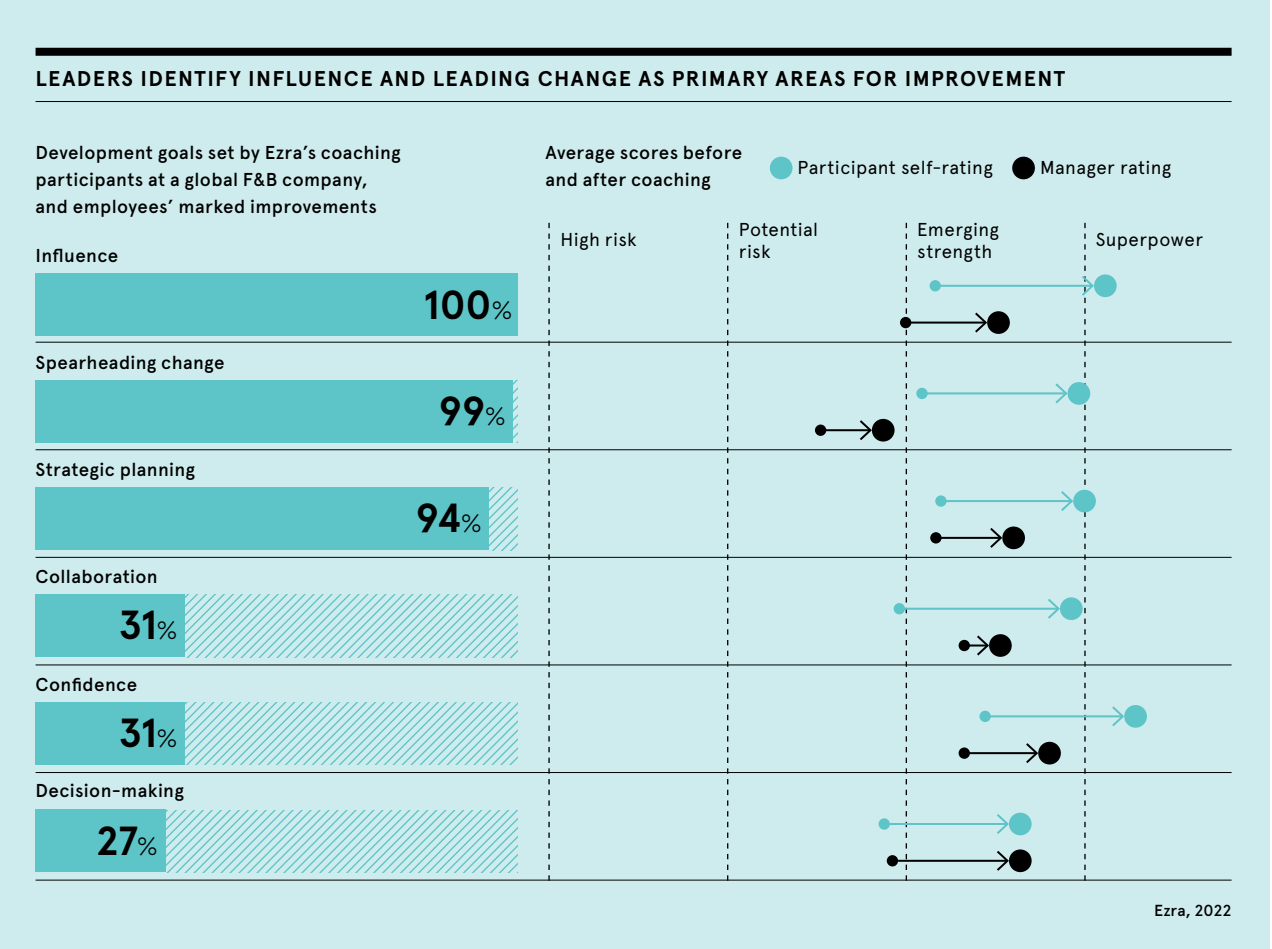
The trend towards remote working has brought with it a new wave of online coaching, explains Dan White, leadership development specialist at Ezra and director of Ezra’s Impact Labs.

“Technology in learning has moved on. We can now meet the learner where they are, at the point of need, so that they can learn in context, better than we ever could before.” In the digital economy, White suggests nixing rigid learning timeslots, instead providing learners with more extensive virtual resources, including systems that can be programmed to trigger events automatically.

“We can use the best bits of technology, the smart bits, to line up the right experiences for the right people at the right time... This gives the learning a chance to become sticky. After all, you’re more likely to remember what you learned if there isn’t a six-month lag, or if you’re not learning the skill after you already needed to know it.”

Digital environments allow for tighter targeting of the unique needs of each learner, says White. “When we deliver face-to-face learning, something I’ve done a lot, we do get that feeling that not all of the content is relevant to all learners.” White continues: “In a virtual world, we don’t need to accept those hit-and-miss rates anymore.”

## Commercial feature



## Down to a science

Ezra is a leading global virtual coaching provider that delivers individualised leadership coaching through a global network of over 2,000 world-class accredited coaches. Its Impact Labs provides in-house behavioural science capability, backed by the data for an evidence-based approach to coaching. At a cohort level, this means working with individuals to track meaningful organisation metrics and demonstrate the impact of an intervention.

For example, food and beverage company Kraft Heinz teamed up with Ezra to prepare different leaders at different levels and across different teams across the business to roll out a new global business structure.

With the change looming, Ezra and Kraft Heinz sought to provide strategic continuity across a dozen countries, assessing potential pain points and designing a coaching programme that took into account the desired culture and values set out by its new CEO. Ezra coaches worked with 135 leaders from different levels of the organisation, conducting more than 800 individual sessions.

Stacey Johnson, head of leadership and culture at Kraft Heinz, said: “One of the things that Ezra offered was pure flexibility for our employees. The ease of being able to find and match with a coach based on a profile on an app. The ability to take a call before work, during work hours or after work.”

Johnson continues: “We are able to leverage Ezra’s huge network of leadership coaching so that our employees in China could get a coach just like our colleagues in the UK and the US.”

If winning behaviours are carefully cultivated and baked into an organisation’s DNA, whether facing planned operational changes or preparing for the unknown, winning outcomes will follow. As the Churchillian adage goes, success is not final, and failure never fatal. For businesses, agility means harnessing the courage to continue.

For more information, visit [helloezra.com](https://helloezra.com)





## Putting coaching into practice

Of 160 senior leaders at a global bank, half were provided with tailored executive coaching for a period of three months. For the other 50%, it was business as usual. The cohort, responsible for the performance of around 2000 employees, tracked and measured their business outcomes periodically throughout the coaching intervention on both sides of the aisle. Results were not immediate. Each consisting of about 1000 people, both teams’ performance showed minimal signs of improvement in the first month of implementation.

But, after six weeks, leaders that received executive coaching had begun to outperform their peers. By the end of the programme, a productivity gap of 18% had emerged in teams led by coached leaders versus those led by their uncoached counterparts. The scheme highlighted some key findings around leadership behaviour and business growth. Key among them was that consistency provides a firm leadership foundation. From this vantage point, leaders can form more agile teams as the backbone of their departments.





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PERFORMANCE

# Smells like victory: what Skunk Works can teach us about extreme innovation

The remarkable feats of Lockheed’s elite warplane design team have inspired several corporate imitators. Are any of the rules set by its visionary creator in 1943 applicable in business today?



The SR-71 Blackbird spy plane that Skunk Works developed in the mid-1960s could fly at Mach 3, enabling it to outpace any surface-to-air missile

Corbis via Getty Images

Mark Piesing

At the height of the second world war, US aerospace giant Lockheed entrusted Clarence “Kelly” Johnson to lead a crack unit of engineers on a series of top-secret projects for the government. Over the next three decades Johnson’s Skunk Works division designed and built several advanced aircraft, including the U-2 and SR-71 Blackbird reconnaissance planes, which the CIA used to spy on its Communist foes in the cold war. These innovators pushed the limits of what was technically possible, working to incredibly short schedules and strict budgets. Their feats earned Skunk Works a legendary status in the engineering world. The team exhibited many of the key characteristics of modern enterprise agility. Operating away from the prying eyes of Lockheed management, Johnson used memorable mantras, including “keep it simple”, and applied 14 rules and practices. His aim was to inspire the focused and responsive approach required to gain the maximum competitive advantage over a rival – or, in this case, America’s numerous enemies. But, as many would-be imitators in business have since discovered to

their cost, it’s not easy to duplicate the Skunk Works formula successfully. Even household names have tried and failed. Xerox – a copier company by more than name – followed much of the Skunk Works playbook when it set up a state-of-the-art R&D facility in Palo Alto, California, in 1969. “The objective was to come up with radical new ideas in the centre of computer science and technology, far away from Xerox’s HQ on the other side of the country,” explains James Hayton, professor of innovation and entrepreneurship at the University of Warwick. “And, lo and behold, it came up with some brilliant, brilliant technology.” Its ingenious computing innovations included a user interface featuring windows and graphic icons. Unfortunately, such advances were too far ahead of their time for the operating companies, which were not interested. It’s a daunting precedent for any firm thinking about replicating the Skunk Works model today. One of them is Hyox, a liquid hydrogen manufacturer that has created a Skunk-like facility in Toronto to develop its alternative fuel. Glenn

Martin, the firm’s co-founder and chief architect, is familiar with the potential pitfalls of this approach. “I worked on manned space systems at the McDonnell Douglas Phantom Works in the 1980s, including the lifeboat programme for the International Space Station,” he says. “While that was exciting, we lacked the inspirational leadership of a Kelly Johnson. I didn’t experience that level of entrepreneurial energy until I met Elon Musk and started working with SpaceX.” John Clegg is CTO at Hephæ Energy Technology, a startup that specialises in geothermal power generation. He believes that many business leaders who think they’re following the Skunk Works model “simply say: ‘OK, let’s create a Skunk Works. We’ll put these people in a separate location and see what they come up with.’ They don’t really understand how it’s done.” Clegg continues: “I was once put in charge of a team with the task of developing the technology for an autonomous well-drilling robot. We moved into a different building to work on the project. We developed the tech within two years, but it took four more to commercialise it. That was because we, working as a separate organisation, couldn’t draw on the same manufacturing team, sales people and customers as the rest of the company.” It’s worth examining precisely which ingredients made the original Skunk Works a success. First, there was the man himself. By the time his division was conceived at the height of the second world war, Johnson was a highly respected aircraft designer and had become a senior executive at Lockheed. Second, there was his decision to separate his team physically from the wider organisation – initially inside a marquee erected on the site – and to ban his fellow Lockheed executives from visiting. This was

possible only because of his power within the firm and the top-secret work he was undertaking. Lastly, Johnson insisted on – and was granted – absolute authority within Skunk Works. This granted him the freedom to implement a range of now-familiar techniques for creating an agile business. It featured a small, hand-picked team of elite professionals; close cooperation among different disciplines; and minimal bureaucracy. Crucially, the team’s members knew that failing fast would not be a career-limiting move, according to Paola Criscuolo, professor of innovation management at Imperial College Business School. “Kelly Johnson was obviously a fantastic leader and a very creative engineer, so that cannot be discounted in explaining the success of Skunk Works,” she says. “But the 14 rules and principles he put in place were important.” One of these was as follows: “A very simple drawing and drawing release system with great flexibility for making changes must be provided.” The implied instruction here was to test any given design frequently for flaws and, if any come to light, stop working on it, quickly adjust the blueprint to solve them and then move in the new direction apace. This ‘fail fast, learn fast’ approach was particularly important, given that Skunk Works was often operating on extremely tight schedules. Criscuolo notes that “Johnson had to build his very first jet fighter in only 180 days”. Skunk Works did have a significant and fortunate advantage over virtually all of its would-be imitators: it already had a big-spending customer – Uncle Sam – eagerly awaiting his products, so Johnson never had to concern himself with developing a marketing strategy. Any business leader thinking about establishing a modern-day

Skunk Works in their organisation would do well, then, to consider some key questions first. For instance, how would the company separate radical innovation from business as usual and then integrate any outputs from the standalone R&D division back into the central operation? And is there an inspiring leader with a proven record in the relevant field available in the organisation to take charge of such a unit? Another important consideration is whether the company can foster an effective working relationship between that leader (Hayton uses the term “champion”) and the corporate leaders (“sponsors”). “Just like Johnson had been at Lockheed, the champion must be good at self-advocacy and be well connected across the broader enterprise,” Hayton argues. “The right person will have the ability to influence others and the social and emotional intelligence to understand how the whole organisation works. On the other hand, sponsors must understand the nature of the risk they’re taking with a Skunk Works and its importance to the long-term health of the wider business.” Then there’s the small matter of developing an agile culture inside the innovation unit. This can be aided by choosing the most appropriate people to work in it – those who enjoy operating with relative autonomy, for instance – and perhaps, as in the cold war, by giving them a specific goal and a tight schedule in which to achieve it. The unit’s location is an important consideration too, especially if it requires a larger number of highly skilled people than the wider business can spare, observes Andrew Gaule, CEO at innovation consultancy Aimava. “If you’re seeking to innovate in oil exploration, for instance, you probably should be doing that in Houston or Aberdeen, because most

“  
Kelly Johnson was obviously a fantastic leader and a very creative engineer, so that cannot be discounted in explaining the success of Skunk Works

of the experts are located in those cities,” he says. “If you want to develop electric vehicles, your ideal site is more likely to be in Silicon Valley or Shenzhen.” Gaule adds that any leadership team that’s tempted to establish a Skunk Works should treat it as one of a range of tools available to a firm seeking to enable agile innovation. “You should also have a corporate venture team in place,” he suggests. “You should be investing in funds or managing a startup ecosystem and you should be encouraging innovation in your core business as well.” One key lesson that businesses should learn from the Skunk Works model can be drawn more from the experiences of Johnson’s imitators, according to Criscuolo. “The general impression is that they fail,” she says. “But the problem is that failure is a necessary part of the process when you’re trying something new.” For Martin, the most important insight he has taken from Johnson’s story and applied to Hyox is that every member of the leadership team must have the same attitude to innovation if the necessary hard-driving culture is to be maintained. “That, more than any other factor”, he argues, “is crucial.” ●



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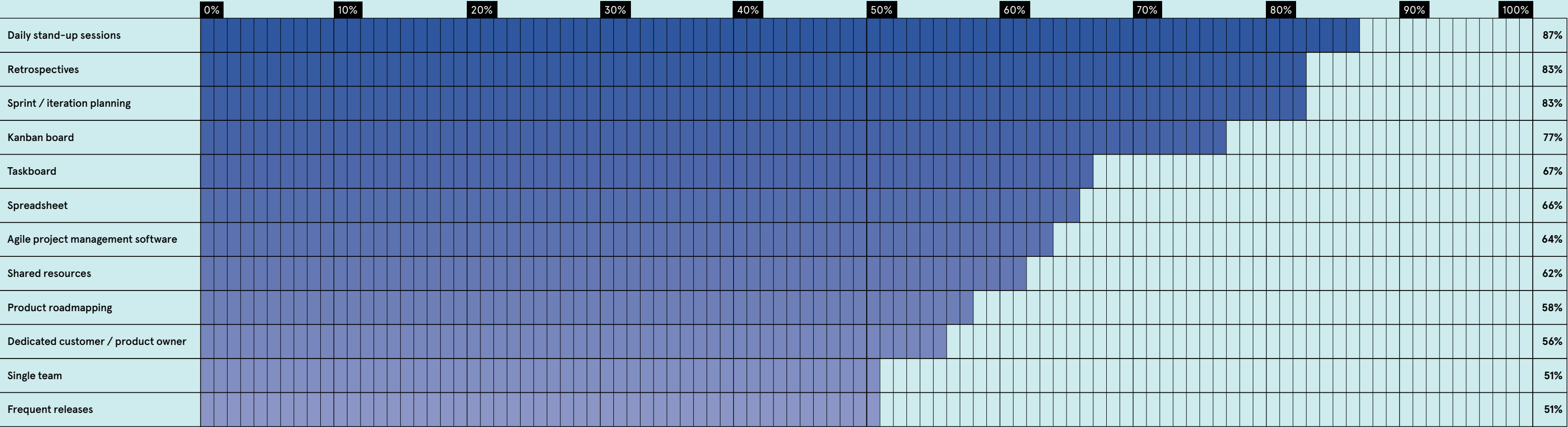
# GOING AGILE

It may have started out as a way for software developers to get their projects over the line, but the formal agile methodology has since spread to all kinds of functions – and it’s become big business in its own right, with an estimated global value in excess of \$20bn (£16.5bn). Indeed, many companies are investing in specialist coaches to guide staff through the process of adopting scrum, kanban or extreme programming (XP). But what do you get from hiring an agile coach? And how do you measure their effectiveness?

POPULAR TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

Responses of agile users worldwide to the survey question: “Which of the following does your organisation use?”

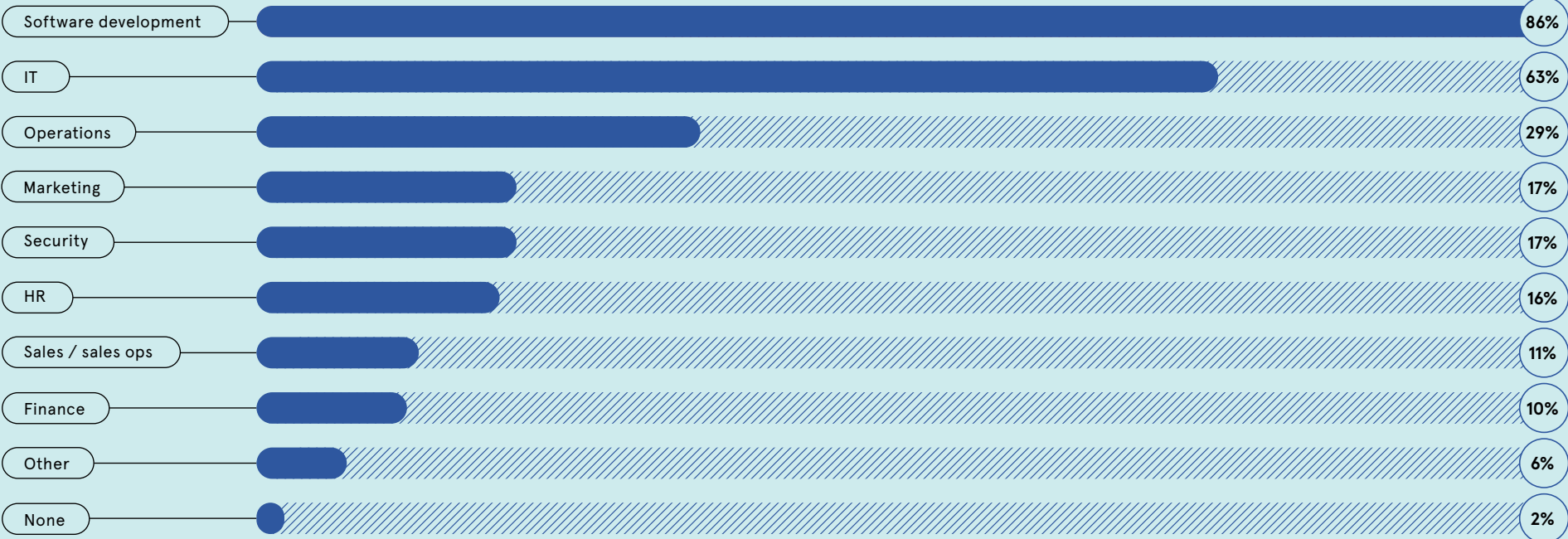
Digital.AI, 2021



WHICH TEAMS ARE GOING AGILE?

Responses of agile users worldwide to the survey question: “Which areas of your organisation have adopted agile principles and practices?”

Digital.AI, 2021



89%

of agile teams are geographically distributed and working remotely

85%

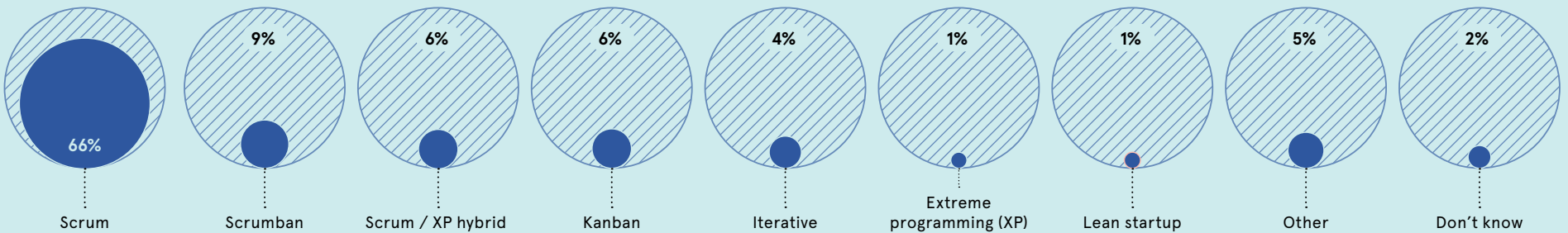
of agile coaches spend less than three years working with any one company

Digital.AI, 2021

MOST COMMON FORMS OF AGILE

Responses of agile users worldwide to the survey question: “Which agile methodology do you follow most closely at the team level?”

Digital.AI, 2021







TEAM MANAGEMENT

# 5 ways to master agile collaboration

How do you ensure that everyone in your firm is working well as a team? Effective collaboration is at the heart of what it means to be an agile enterprise, yet many companies simply stop considering this factor once they have put the right people in place. Here's what they should be focusing on thereafter

Leo King

**T**raditional approaches to collaboration are as outdated as the fax machine. While most businesses have digitalised, many have allowed historic cultural gaps between departments to widen, leading to disharmony and the stifling of innovation.

The chasm between classic teamwork and the reality after the pandemic lockdowns is stark. For nearly all UK firms, remote working arrived in a flash with Covid – and thousands are still struggling to clarify expectations, prevent exclusion and create team environments that encourage creativity. Three-quarters of employees who are concerned about remote working report that teamwork has floundered, according to research by Lucid Software.

Top-performing businesses are taking a different approach, though. They are distinguished by more

mutually beneficial working methods, effective leadership by example and the clever use of tools. Such qualities are making them more responsive to emerging trends.

Here are five key things that businesses can do to emulate them.

“**Connection and collaboration go hand in hand, but it takes intentionality, introspection and ideation for companies to get all this right**”

## 1 Foster a culture of psychological safety

Businesses first need to create a setting where collaboration flourishes.

Daniel Newman, a founding partner at Futurum Research, stresses the “utmost importance” of establishing positive working environments in the era of remote and hybrid working. Such practices have “heightened the importance of culture because some of the non-verbal cues and relationship-building that used to occur have been lost”.

While the central office naturally fosters human connections, remote

working does not. At HubSpot, a specialist in customer relationship management, a culturally careful pre-Covid move to hybrid working improved productivity and morale. All but 12% of employees work at least partially outside HQ.

Meaghan Williams, the company's manager of hybrid enablement, says the challenge for employers is to retain authentic interaction. “Connection and collaboration go hand in hand, but it's going to take intentionality, introspection and ideation

for companies to get all this right,” she observes.

Dr Constance Hadley is an organisational psychologist and lecturer at Boston University's Questrom School of Business. She says that shared psychological safety underpins forward-thinking teamwork.

“That's the starting point, because collaboration and idea-sharing involve a leap of faith,” Hadley says. “People need to feel comfortable enough to ask what they fear might be stupid questions.”

## 2 Encourage experimentation

The next natural step is to support employees' development of ideas. To keep evolving, companies must ensure that their people are motivated to experiment in their teams, put forward shared concepts and take healthy risks.

Achieving this means committing to the creation of the right incentives and conditions for employees, Hadley explains. “It needs to be the

norm for new ideas to emerge, even if this is from the failure of other ideas. If you're asking for ideas, it's critical to communicate what you're trying to achieve, to set parameters, to reward people for their contributions and to allocate funding to good concepts.”

Forum discussions and non-work catch-up sessions can be key elements of such an environment.

Newman notes that the most successful firms find a balance in “enabling experimentation and failure, with rapid adaptation to get to the right results faster”. Proactive companies want to see experimentation because they took confidence from what they achieved in the depths of the Covid crisis, when the concepts of failing fast and failing forward enabled rapid learning, he adds.

## 3 Introduce agile leadership expertise

Business leaders have to lead by example when it comes to collaboration, perhaps by showing some vulnerability and a willingness to learn.

On a more detailed level, expert coaches can help to shape teams' mindsets. Tze Lin Kui is a senior agile coach at market intelligence company GfK. He explains that he aims to “enable and connect people so they work collaboratively to solve problems”, whether that's through facilitated meetings or workshops.

“People can be defensive about their own ideas,” he says. “One of the consequences is that those who are passive withdraw from the discussion, even if they have great ideas.”

Team leaders should aim to eliminate ego from the culture, creating instead a shared success environment, according to Ahmed Sidky, an expert advising companies on cultivating agile thought processes.

“The agile mindset is based on knowing that we live in a fluid, uncertain world,” he says. “Failure is important and inevitable. The

goal is to learn early and fail fast, not taking anything personally.”

Ongoing transformational learning is the key to establishing these more productive mindsets, Sidky adds. “It goes much deeper than training. You have to get to the core of how people think to influence their behaviour and achieve agility.”

Bernd Greifeneder is the founder and CTO of Dynatrace, a specialist in monitoring system infrastructure and user experience. He reports that the firm's leadership team prepared the ground for remote working before the pandemic by fine-tuning the employee experience.

“One of our most critical steps was to reimagine corporate IT as an ‘employee digital enablement group,’” Greifeneder says. The group enabled staff to collaborate with anyone in a similar time zone. Meanwhile, with staff visiting the office at least once a fortnight, the firm's premises were rebranded as a ‘collaboration space’, so that people “don't see their journey to the office as ‘going into work’”.

## 4 Ensure that meetings are focused, but encourage natural connections

Leanness is an essential part of collaborative efficiency, which means meetings must have a clear running order and involve only those who are needed. With the frequency of meeting rising 153% in the depths of the Covid crisis, according to Microsoft Teams data, many firms are seeking to eliminate unnecessary sessions.

At GfK, meetings are optimised and time-limited, with clear objectives and only the essential people present. But at the same time there is a focus on fostering natural and enjoyable connections.

Kui explains: “In my teams, we standardise the types of meetings we need and we timebox each type.

At the organisational level, we set aside time for fun learning and innovative activities such as training, workshops and hackathons. This all helps to generate new ideas.”

By contrast, at companies that have opted to ban meetings entirely, open-ended conversations are often missed the most, experts note, with many of those businesses eventually reinstating weekly check-in sessions to see how people are doing. Many have also moved to ensure that remote employees can engage socially online or attend offices several times a month, so that more casual discussions and rapport-building interactions can occur.

## 5 Use supporting tools judiciously

While culture, practices and processes are the main ingredients of collaborative success, technology is a key enabler. At HubSpot, the right tools and education have been key to overcoming time-zone differences while keeping team members motivated and aligned.

“As well as providing resources for asynchronous communication, we use tools such as Loom, Lucidspark and Slack to aid hybrid collaboration at scale,” Williams says.

Simple tech-based adjustments can also improve the fluidity of day-to-day collaborations. In addition to moving internal applications to the cloud, Dynatrace has reduced the scale of its services requiring access

via a virtual private network and introduced single sign-on systems to streamline access to its collaboration platforms.

But some tools can still hinder collaboration by enabling a deluge of unstructured communication. As Hadley observes: “Managers are spending a lot of time writing emails or holding one-to-ones because they can't as easily conduct the meetings that would help them find out what's going on in their teams.”

Perhaps it will only be when AI-based systems can truly triage and deal with routine internal communications that managers will have the time to really focus on enabling effective collaboration. ●



# How democratising design is unlocking business benefits

Collaborative design can bulk up your bottom line and improve employee engagement

**A**sk many companies where design fits into their processes and they'll look at you askance. The reality is that until relatively recently, design was often the last thing many businesses thought about.

“Design can be an afterthought, or perhaps some business leaders are still figuring out what to do with it,” says Noah Levin, vice-president of product design at Figma.

The reason for the reticence is that design has historically been siloed within many companies, carried out by separate teams which present ideas and iterate based on feedback. The old way of working is often slow and inefficient, and produces impractical, underwhelming results for everyone.

Then there are those businesses that do recognise design's importance, but their approach to it may be reactionary: that is, they see that customers are unhappy about the user experience and only then realise that something needs to be fixed.

Yet you only have to look at the likes of Apple and Airbnb to understand how

design can be vital to a business's success. It's how firms win or lose – and not just global technology businesses. Every company needs to prioritise it.

“From the layout of the screens which factories use to start up their processes and machines, to the self-service checkouts that shoppers use in stores, design is at the heart of everything,” says Levin. “It's the apps companies ask users to use, and the websites they push visitors towards. Any experience customers interact with has to be designed – and designed well.”

Bad user experience, on the other hand, comes with high costs, not least at a time when disposable incomes are tight and company budgets are being cut. Unhappy customers who have bad experiences with the key touchpoints of a company are less likely to return. That has a meaningful impact on the bottom line.

Bad design is a big problem – and it often stems from misalignment between design teams and those who know a business and its customers the best. Every degree of separation between the person who uses the tool and the person who designs the tool can introduce friction. It's therefore best to have stakeholders from across the business feeding into design decisions where possible – or even designing concepts and ideas together.

That's where the latest generation of collaborative design tools can help. For instance, Figma, a collaborative design interface tool which runs in the web browser, empowers everyone to feed into the key decisions that make or break a business, no matter whether they think of themselves as design-minded or not. “Most people have some idea of what design is, but

they might not have visibility of the design process and so can't take part,” says Levin. “That's partly because traditional design tools made it hard for everyone to contribute. One of the fun parts about Figma is that it makes it easy for the entire company to access, view and contribute to design work.”

A key part of this is finding a tool which fosters a collaborative spirit and engenders real-time integration and collaborative design from all stakeholders in the process. When used well, modern collaborative design tools can help to unlock insights from points of view that might previously have been ignored. Indeed, roughly two-thirds of Figma's users identify as something other than a “designer”.

“Historically, ideas have only been able to go so far,” says Levin. “Someone can be talking about something for a long time before it becomes reality.” But being able to see a visual mock-up can help move companies forward and provide sensible, usable solutions for their customers. That makes meaningful change happen easier and more quickly than it did in the past – keeping those customers happy, and businesses afloat. “It can really change the trajectory of a company when it's not just words anymore,” says Levin. “That helps show a company's ideas in a real and visual context that's easy for anyone to understand and act on.”

For more information please visit [figma.com](https://figma.com)

# Figma



CULTURE

# From fragility to agility: can you win over the doubters?

An agile transformation offers several potential benefits, but not everyone will be comfortable with this shift. It takes strong and empathetic leadership to bring hesitant team members on board

Morag Cuddeford-Jones

There are numerous advantages to adopting agility as a business, from closer collaboration and greater transparency to clearer goals and more empowering management methods. But, no matter how positive the outcomes may be, some people will find the process of achieving them mightily uncomfortable. As Pam Ashby, an agile marketing specialist and certified coach, warns: “If you get it wrong, teams can become disorientated and resist the change.” The solution? Strong and empathetic leadership. “Enabling the shift towards continuous improvement takes great leadership – and it’s not easy,” she says. “Leaders must create an environment where

competent colleagues are trusted to take control of their work. Teams need to feel safe.” It’s something that the top team at Moonpig realised early in the firm’s agile transition, according to Peter Donlon, its chief product and technology officer. “Resistance to change is always hard to overcome, but you can make it easier if the leadership is fully bought into the agile way and leads by example,” he says. “This was absolutely the case for us as a technology business. And being a high-growth company has also given us the chance to hire people with the right skills and attitudes to complement that agility.” Yet not everyone, even when they’re being shown the way, will


be an enthusiastic follower. Bringing the whole company around to the idea requires leaders to engage at the grass-roots level. That’s the view of Eleanor Gibson, an agile coach and the founder of Tilt, an agile consultancy focused on not-for-profit enterprises. She explains: “We start by asking people what factors are hindering them from doing their best work.



vegie via iStock

“You’re sure to fail if you focus on converting the most difficult people first. Instead, start with the folk who are showing the most interest

Once we know these, we can show them how agile working could alleviate their pain.” One technique is to invite a ‘constructive rant’, giving people the freedom to vent for a few minutes about every barrier that’s preventing them from realising their ambitions. Leaders must then guide their team to flip that around to what they want instead. “That gives you brilliant information to explain how agile ways of working could help you to advance,” Gibson says. But the constructive rant won’t always be enough. Indeed, no matter how positively you talk about agility, there will usually be a few tough nuts left to crack. “If you have someone in the team who’s really resistant to changing, helping them to notice what isn’t working is a really powerful technique,” Gibson suggests. “In enabling them to see that what they’re doing is ineffective, it diverts them from thinking that a change will be scary and uncomfortable.” Leaders will naturally be concerned about the amount of time and energy they may have to expend in winning the hardcore sceptics over. Could that derail the overall process? “Don’t start with them,” Gibson advises. “You’re sure to fail if you



frakes via iStock

### Argot nought: how to minimise the alienating effect of agile jargon

The terminology that’s widely used by agile practitioners can be offputting to some people, sometimes hindering change just as much as the practicalities of implementing the new approach. Eleanor Gibson points out that the terms that specialists use for some processes “get in the way of shared understanding”. But she stresses that there is no rule stipulating that teams adopting agile principles must use all the associated jargon. “The important thing is to describe a given process so that everyone knows what it’s about, not to name it once and for all. For instance, we often don’t use the term ‘sprints’; we say ‘a two-week cycle of work’ or even ‘chunks’,” Gibson says. “Don’t be afraid to use colloquialisms.”

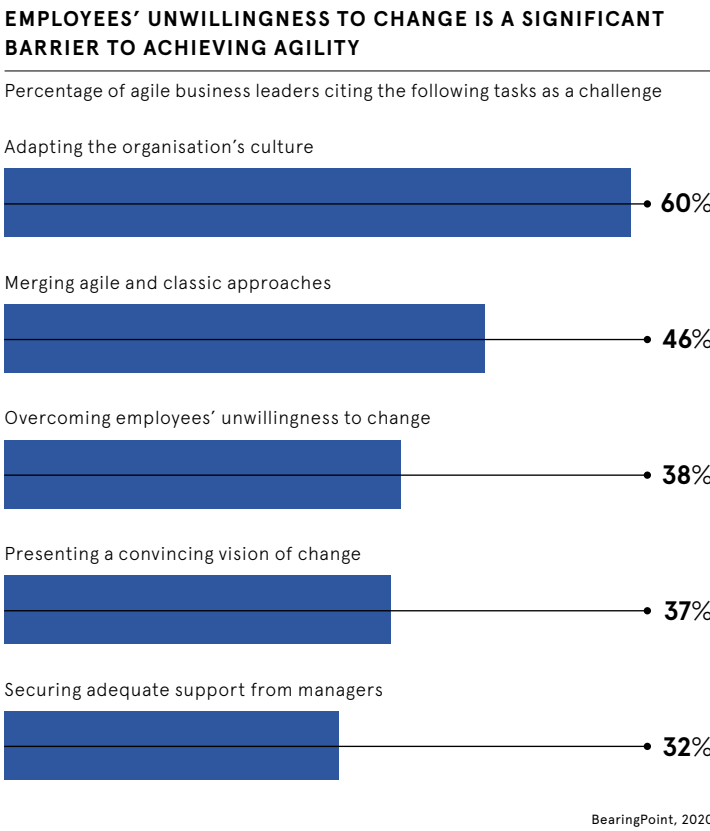
Peter Donlon agrees: “The more self-explanatory a term is, the more likely we are to use it. For example, we refer to a cross-disciplined group of people as a ‘squad’. When you start talking about ‘chapters’, ‘tribes’ and ‘guilds’, adoption becomes much harder, as you’re putting up a much higher barrier to understanding.” Gibson warns that people can hide behind jargon, talking the talk rather than actually doing the work that’s required. With this in mind, she suggests that business leaders try to avoid mentioning technical terms too much, especially at the start of a transition. “Ideally, you want to talk about agile as little as you can before getting people learning through doing,” she says. “Give the minimum information and just get people started.”

Commercial feature

“People always ask whether a new buzzword or piece of technology that’s being introduced is just another fad we’re going through

focus on converting the most difficult people first. Instead, start with the folk who are showing the most interest or those who know that things really need to change.” Donlon reports that Moonpig has applied this tactic to great effect. Fortunately, the company “already had some great examples of where agile ways of working had delivered results for us. Seeing a real demonstration of how a team could react quickly to a change in the market and deliver fast results inspired others in the business to want to do the same thing.” This kind of motivation is particularly important in the third sector, where the enthusiasm of employees to advance a worthy cause is one of the most valuable resources a charity can draw on. It’s one of the reasons why Gareth Ellis-Thomas, director of transformation and technology at Prostate Cancer UK, worked with both an external agile coach and an in-house specialist to improve collaboration in his team. “We wanted to find a way to respond to customer needs more quickly,” he explains. “Our annual business planning cycle meant that people would have great ideas at the start of the year, but conditions could change considerably in 12 months. There was lots of collaboration among people across the country, but sometimes its formal nature held them back. I wanted to give them tools and processes that would aid teamwork.” Although the project has been a success, with staff reporting that

they are more customer-focused, efficient and responsive to changes in the market as a result of their agile transformation. Despite this, it hasn’t all been plain sailing. “There was quite a lot of scepticism about it,” Ellis-Thomas recalls. “People always ask whether a new buzzword or piece of technology that’s being introduced is just another fad we’re going through.” To show any doubters a convincing example of agile working in action, he started with a small experiment that didn’t involve technology. Ellis-Thomas ensured that “some of the ceremonies and rituals” of agile working – including stand-up meetings – started taking place in a part of the charity’s office where other employees could look over and see for themselves what these processes looked like. That generated interest among them and helped to build enthusiasm for the planned changes. Gibson points out that, even among the most willing participants, certain aspects of agile working might not sit comfortably. Leaders must therefore recognise the elements that are likely to chime best with their teams and adapt their approach accordingly. “Stand-ups are about establishing transparency and shared accountability. If you want to achieve these in a way that doesn’t involve those 15-minute sessions, then absolutely go for it,” she advises. “That’s what taking an agile approach to agile transformation is all about. As long as there are clear measures of success, how you do it is up to you.” ●



## Q&A

# Helping business leaders drive planet-positive change

Xynteo’s managing partner **Jonah Grunsell** explains how to stay on track when it comes to reaching net zero



**Q How can leaders avoid net-zero ambitions being disrupted by day-to-day concerns?**  
**A** One common mistake is they don’t integrate a net-zero strategy into their core corporate strategy. With sustainability, you must weave it into everything that you do, and every pillar of your strategy must have a sustainability lens to create a direct link between your planet-positive commitments and the operational levers needed to realise them. Leaders should adopt a holistic scorecard and governance framework to measure progress against all metrics, rather than a separate ESG scorecard, which can make sustainability metrics less of a priority and not a critical part of running a high-performance organisation, as it should be.

staff don’t feel empowered to act. Implementing change is only possible by thinking beyond the C-suite. Setting up cross-functional and cross-geographic teams at different levels of the business and empowering those teams can help drive faster, more impactful change. If you don’t, it rarely gets to the top of the priority list in the C-suite, and change implementation often becomes secondary to business-as-usual priorities.

**Q What skills do leadership teams need to create planet-positive impact?**  
**A** The first is agility. That’s about process, governance and making sure that enablers are in place to help create rapid change. Too many great ideas fail at the start because organisations have too many barriers associated with processes and ways of working. The second is having a culture of creativity and ensuring people within leadership have the capabilities and mindset to think about creative solutions to challenges. The third is empathy. Impactful change is only successful if you bring your people with you. If you don’t carefully consider the impact of change on your people and demonstrate genuine empathy, then often that change is doomed to failure.

“One common mistake is businesses don’t integrate net zero strategy into their core corporate strategy. With sustainability, you must weave it into everything that you do

**Q What challenges do larger businesses face when shifting to more planet-friendly models?**  
**A** Larger organisations tend to be hierarchical and fail to delegate when it comes to who is responsible for driving ecosystem change, while junior

**Q How can organisations embed sustainability through collaboration with external stakeholders?**  
**A** Data sharing is one very important factor when it comes to enabling effective leadership and strategic decision making to realise impact. There is a huge amount of environmental data out there to support driving planet-positive change, but we’re pretty insight-poor. Without sharing data and insight across organisations, it’s hard to see the full picture about how you enact change. You end up working within an echo chamber and not engaging with different organisations who might have a very different perspective. By having holistic data and insight, you can identify what levers you can pull to drive positive change.

**Q Why do leaders need to think wider on net zero to achieve ecosystem change?**  
**A** It’s easy for organisations to identify key groups and stakeholders to engage with, but have you really thought about why they would want to engage with you and whether they are ready to engage? If you don’t find common ground and identify shared outcomes, there is no reason for them to engage and you will be unlikely to effectively work with them. Ecosystem change can seem big and scary because of the number and complexity of different actors involved. Starting with a small subset, cause group or thematic segment where you’ve got a shared business case and then scaling from there is often the best approach.

For more information visit [xynteo.com](https://xynteo.com)







Gabe R&A via iStock

TECHNOLOGY

# Anything goes – why businesses are flocking to the XaaS model

Everything as a service (XaaS) is becoming the credo of tech-savvy agile firms, especially SMEs concerned about cash flow. After all, why buy when you can rent?

Charles Orton-Jones

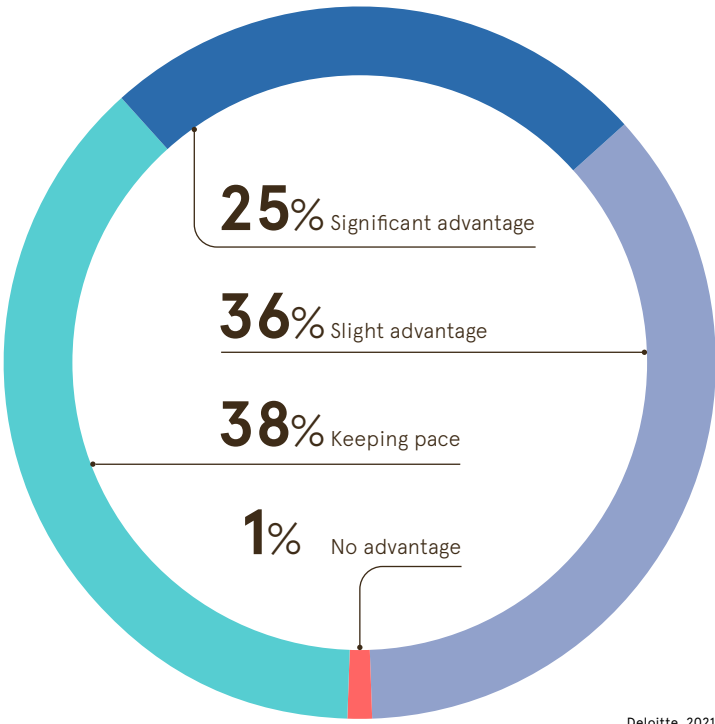
“The stress? It’s extreme,” says James Rubythron, founder and MD of The Muddy Paw dog-grooming chain. “You despair of paying wages on time – or at all. It can stop you from doing anything.” And the cause of this torture? “It’s cash flow. Always. You can be profitable and turning away customers at the door, but you won’t be able to pay your bills if your cash flow isn’t sorted. Then your internet gets cut off and that’s it.” Rubythron’s plan is to open 200 grooming salons across the UK. But every new location ties up cash for

months while the premises are fitted out and staff are hired. “We have had days where I’m not sure if I can pay salaries. People’s mortgages are depending on this. It’s horrendous,” he admits. Fortunately, there is help at hand. The Muddy Paw is fully XaaS. The X stands for either anything or everything as a service. “We love XaaS,” Rubythron says. “We rent everything as a service. Our email system is business Gmail. It means that there’s nothing for us to run – no responsibility. For payments, we use Zettle and pay a

percentage of each sale as a fee. If we don’t trade at a location, we pay nothing. We’re running two booking systems – Savvy and Shake Your Tail – to work out which one is better. Both are monthly cloud services. Our accounts software is a cloud-based subscription package. Even our cars are rented.” The result is an ultra-lean enterprise. Capital is sunk into new venues rather than operational acquisitions. It’s an agile philosophy in an economy where nimble cash management is king. “We don’t even have an IT guy,” Rubythron says. There is seemingly nothing that cannot be acquired as a service these days. Office space, data storage, cybersecurity, performance dashboards and even quantum computing are all accessible on a pay-as-you-go basis. “In essence, the XaaS issue is the old ‘buy or build’ question,” says Michele Tucci, chief strategy officer of Credolab, a software provider for banks. He rattles through the benefits. “Speed to market is first and foremost. XaaS solutions can be deployed within days or even hours.” Product maturity is another key consideration. “By opting for a ‘buy’ solution rather than a ‘build’

## ONE-QUARTER OF XAAS ADOPTERS HAVE SECURED A SIGNIFICANT COMPETITIVE EDGE AS A RESULT

Responses of US IT professionals when asked what level of competitive advantage they have gained from deploying XaaS



Deloitte, 2021

one, you get a tried and scalable solution without needing to spend time testing and refining it. The flexibility of XaaS helps companies to scale up or down quickly as needed. It brings the latest updates on new tech as soon as they’re available. Most of these upgrades will also be automated, which means no pause and no disruption.” The cost flexibility of XaaS is critical, Tucci adds. “The scalability of this model means that vendors can offer a cost-effective term licence subscription based on consumption, so you pay only for what you use monthly or yearly. It compares favourably with bespoke solutions and ongoing maintenance and support costs.” There’s also the option to switch providers as and when required. If a service isn’t performing, it’s pulled out and substituted like a Lego block. When you add it all up, XaaS is a formidable proposition. Potent it may be, but XaaS is not without its weaknesses. There are good reasons to resist adopting the model fully. There are risks concerning data security and compliance, for instance. If sensitive material is held by a third party, what happens in a catastrophe? “In cloud and hybrid environments, you’re responsible for ensuring that all your data is secure and legally held,” warns James Blake, chief information security officer at Cohesity, a specialist in data resilience. “This is known as the cloud’s shared responsibility mode. Cloud providers can be chosen to be custodians of an organisation’s data, but the responsibility always lies with that organisation to ensure that it has aligned its risk tolerance to its cloud deployment.” Tucci believes that most companies simply don’t appreciate that this is an obligation. “I am often amazed at the lack of understanding that people have of the shared

responsibility model – in everything from backing up and maintaining a redundant architecture through to patching,” he observes. “A classic example is Microsoft 365, which states explicitly that consumers of this service should be provisioning their own back-up and restoration capabilities atop those provided by Microsoft.” Then there’s the question of scale. At what point do organisations benefit from developing their own tools in house? For larger companies, it can make sense to develop even peripheral services to derive exactly what they need. “Amazon has developed its own videoconferencing tool,” points out Jun Seki, chief technical officer at wealth manager Rosecut. “TikTok has developed an internal messaging tool called Lark as an alternative to Slack. Even Gmail was an internal tool before Google opened it up to everyone.” Seki believes that the tipping point at which XaaS may become uneconomical is earlier than is often assumed. “The cost of licences starts to rise pretty quickly,” he says. “You can pay crazy amounts. Once you reach 100 people, subscription fees become expensive. Companies then start thinking that if they take development in house, they can build the software how they want it, with customisations.” The debate, then, is nuanced, but the trend line points only one way. XaaS is the new normal. It may just take a bit of getting used to. “As with any innovation, there might be people in a company who resist using XaaS – just as people once didn’t trust smartphones, preferring to work with push-button models,” Tucci says. “But, over time, the latter have simply left the market. For most people, this is a matter of getting used to something new and giving up the comfort of what they already know.” ●



You get a tried and scalable solution without needing to spend time testing and refining it

INSIGHT

## ‘An agile supply chain relies on communication, openness and trust’

The disruptions of recent years are an opportunity to lay the foundations for greater business agility, says John Jeffcock, CEO of C-suite network Winmark Global

No business leader in the UK today would dispute that we live in volatile times. Indeed, businesses’ experiences of Brexit and Covid have shown that big changes at speed are not only possible, but sometimes essential for survival. Just look at Sainsbury’s. Early in the pandemic, the government forcibly shut down 123,000 restaurants at a stroke. As a result, the supermarket giants needed to ensure that customers could access the extra food they’d need to fill the gap left by all those missing restaurant meals. Sainsbury’s responded by reallocating 30,000 employees from its Argos stores to its supermarkets over the course of a single weekend. On the following Monday morning, the Argos staff were all in place in their new roles, most of them in new uniforms. Sainsbury’s would not have contemplated such a move before the pandemic – or perhaps even thought that it was possible. They say that necessity is the mother of invention, but in this case Covid was the mother of agility. So, what does it take to pull off that kind of pivot? As a rough guide, four simple rules for enterprise agility might look a little like this: ● Focus on what is important and what is aligned with your purpose. ● Have the ability, at short notice, to step out of the day-to-day as a team to address the risk or opportunity. ● Have the right questions and information to make the best possible decision. ● Have the flexibility, interconnectivity, resources and partners to deliver a new direction at speed. Of course, the larger and more complex your organisation, the more difficult it will be to follow these rules. Large interconnected teams are more dependent on other elements of the organisation, which can sometimes act as a brake on agility. In fact, managing these intersections lies at the heart of enterprise agility. As Gustavo Ghory, former vice-president for global manufacturing at P&G and chief supply chain officer at Kimberly-Clark, puts it: “When it comes to agility, we tend to look at the supply chain and its ecosystem of collaborators. While good, that is extremely narrow. Enterprise-wide agility is a bigger game, one requiring a serious look

at how the company turns strategies into products and services and delivers them; how the business plan is orchestrated across functions and external collaborators; the flow of resources; how the organisation reacts to change; and how leaders instigate and manage change to get stronger results.” Having the right relationships with your partners is vital here. “One key enabler of enterprise agility is the curation of a supply chain which includes a breadth and depth of trusted partners,” says Daniel Cameron, a former chief procurement officer at Quilter, Pearson and Goldman Sachs. “All supply chains should offer the basics of scale and reach, but one built with a group of genuine partners will provide access to enhanced execution speed and flexibility to adapt, delivering greater value, lowering risk and more.” That’s bound to take some work. “Creating these partnerships takes energy,” Cameron says. “And, as with any relationship, it relies on important ingredients to make it successful, including communication, openness and trust. Partners should be sought from all areas of the supply chain – established incumbents as well as new entrants and startups – providing a balance of scale and innovation.” So, of the four rules for enterprise agility, it’s the fourth – ensuring the flexibility, interconnectivity, resources and partners to deliver a new direction at speed – that really requires some extra attention. And, crucially, it’s worth dedicating time and resources to that now, before another crisis moment arrives. ●



John Jeffcock  
CEO, Winmark Global

## Q&A

# How best-practice agility benefits both corporations and professionals

Adjusting to change has always been a challenge, but the pandemic has taken this to a whole new level. **Markus Bause** of PeopleCert – the global leader in the assessment and certification of professional skills – discusses why the current business climate calls for the kind of agility that only an up-to-date skill base can bring



**Q Why is the need for business agility so urgent now?**

**A** In the past, a company might develop a business case, feed it down to different departments and check whether it had been successful later. Clearly, that approach cannot work in today’s turbulent business climate because it’s based on speculation instead of quantifiable actions. Companies should be resilient to uncertainty and open to change. What’s needed now is continuous adjustment and assessment, a mindset that should be reflected in both leaders and employees.

**Q What are the benefits of the best-practice frameworks you offer?**

**A** We must remember that there’s a difference between ‘doing agile’ and ‘being agile’. When you want to transform your organisation

from static to dynamic, the first step is to bring on the capabilities for that change: the skills, knowledge, frameworks and procedures which can be driven by the kinds of tools we offer. ITIL and PRINCE2, as well as Scrum, are agile methodologies that help IT and project management professionals develop a consistent approach. But this is only the beginning of that transformational journey. Ultimately, it’s about using these tools to establish new principles of work that will help you adapt to change in the long run.

**Q Why do most companies have a poor track record of investing in skills development?**

**A** When there’s a tough economic situation, the first budget to be cut is always the one covering people and their education. It may seem like the easy choice, but it is not the right one. One might worry about investing in employees and then having them leave. But there’s also a cost involved in not investing in your staff and having them stay.

**Q Why do you advocate for best practice framework adoption?**

**A** In this era of continuous change, we should create networks of value, where professionals meet and exchange knowledge. And for these networks to be feasible, professionals need to speak the same common business language. ITIL, PRINCE2 and Scrum can provide the standard approach that we are looking for, ensuring consistency throughout a business’s operations.

**Q Do best-practice frameworks benefit organisations and professionals to the same extent?**

**A** Well, for the organisation, it’s about providing increased efficiency and productivity with reduced costs and time to market. And for individuals who know that continuous upskilling and reskilling is vital, the globally recognised certification we offer can boost their careers, bringing better jobs and higher pay. It means better jobs and higher pay. But it’s also a means of building the confidence to deal with day-to-day challenges.

**Q But these products are not an end in themselves, right?**

**A** What’s important is that these are not ‘silver bullet’ solutions. They’re the first step to developing fundamental knowledge within a company, to raising the maturity level so it can be adapted to the environment. There are huge possibilities for productivity gains here, but that’s just one side of the coin. By embracing a mindset of continuous learning as part of your company culture, you can get more engaged customers and more creative and motivated employees who have more fun at work, which is highly important to young people entering employment today. But that’s another story.

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