How to Create a Groundswell for an Agile Transformation

The human aspects of successful organizational change.

ca technologies®

Building an Agile Business

Agile transformations are people-powered.

Agile development is only one attribute of an agile business. If you want to create a truly agile business, you need to change the way you conceive, prioritize, build and launch new innovations. To make the whole value chain faster and more flexible, you'll need to embark on an enterprise-wide agile transformation that upgrades all the moving parts of your organization and how they work together.

An agile transformation involves people across the organization, so you'll need to get strategy planners, policy makers, portfolio leaders, product owners, project managers, engineers, coders and marketers working together. It's a value chain system: one weak link can jeopardize the agility of the whole.

People are the key to large-scale business change.

Planning out steps is the easy part. Getting people to take those steps is the real challenge. It takes more than an executive order to drive change. You need to consider and address the human issues; to bring people with you on your journey.

"Evidence suggests that much of the mechanistic organizational model antagonizes human nature," states PWC's landmark 2007 study, "Human Change Management: Herding Cats".[1] "At best, people comply reluctantly and, at worst, actively resist management initiatives." For a transformation to stick, you need people to shift their thinking and behavior. Without majority support from the people in your organization, the inertia of the current reality will prevent the change you envision.

So how do you build the critical mass of support you need to make your agile transformation work (and make it stick)? An agile transformation isn't easy, but it can be made easier if you work to break down resistance and create sufficient groundswell to push the change past the tipping point.

> "70 percent of complex, large-scale change programs don't reach their stated goals."
>
> McKinsey&Company[2]

In this report, we look at how you can create the groundswell you need to succeed. We look at critical people issues that will ultimately decide the fate of your agile transformation:

- Winning over hearts and minds: changing the way people think and feel about agile
- Groundswell vs. resistance: agile transformation doesn't have to be like pushing a rock up a hill
- Decoding resistance: what people say and what they really mean
- What to communicate: clarity is the key
- Who you need to engage: business transformation involves everybody
- How to communicate: getting the message across
- A groundswell is fluid: success requires ongoing commitment

1 Mark J. Dawson, Mark L. Jones, "Human Change Management: Herding Cats," PwC, 2007.

2 Michael Bucy, Adrian Finlayson, Chris Moye, Greg Kelly, "The 'how' of transformation," McKinsey&Company, May 2016.

Winning Over Hearts and Minds
Changing the way people think and feel.

Expect resistance... and support.

It would be great to have everybody on board with your agile transformation from day one–but that won't happen. It never happens. People who see your transformation initiative as an essential step will provide enthusiastic support. Others will actively resist the change. Some will have seen business transformations fail before (and carry the battle scars), or will say, "It's just another management fad." A few will be resistant simply because they don't like the team driving it.

Many people fear change; it takes them out of their comfort zones. You're asking them to leave behind everything that is familiar and take a leap of faith. This fear of the unknown can be a powerful, visceral emotion that drives people to push against business change. On the flipside, many people in your organization will have a much larger risk appetite. They're hungry for progress, get excited about the possibilities of change, and have a burning desire to experiment and push boundaries to find a better way.

Although it would be easy to simply label people as for or against a transformation, the nature of support and resistance isn't black and white. Different people get excited or worried to different degrees; it's a spectrum. And when we accept this as a spectrum, we begin to see how we can address resistance and move people from resistance to support.

The rational argument isn't enough.

It's hard to change people's behavior, even when there are excellent reasons to do so. Facts and figures only go so far. To quote change guru John Kotter in his influential book, "Our Iceberg is Melting", "change is emotional."[3] You need to address the way people feel about the change. Creating a groundswell involves winning over hearts and minds in your organization–through a combination of emotional and intellectual appeals.

The challenge is to win the hearts and minds of many different types of people, across many groups, in different roles, with their own individual feelings and motivations. It's not easy, but you will need this broad base of support to make your agile transformation work–and make it stick.

"All too often, people and organizations don't see the need for change. They don't correctly identify what to do, or successfully make it happen, or make it stick. Businesses don't. School systems don't. Nations don't."

John Kotter, "Our Iceberg is Melting"

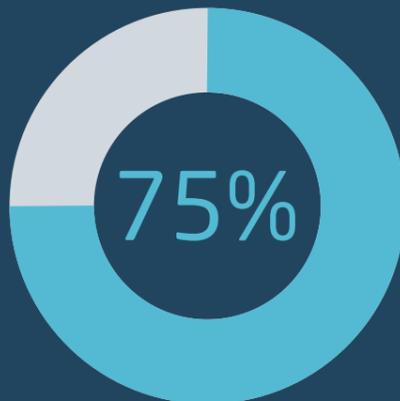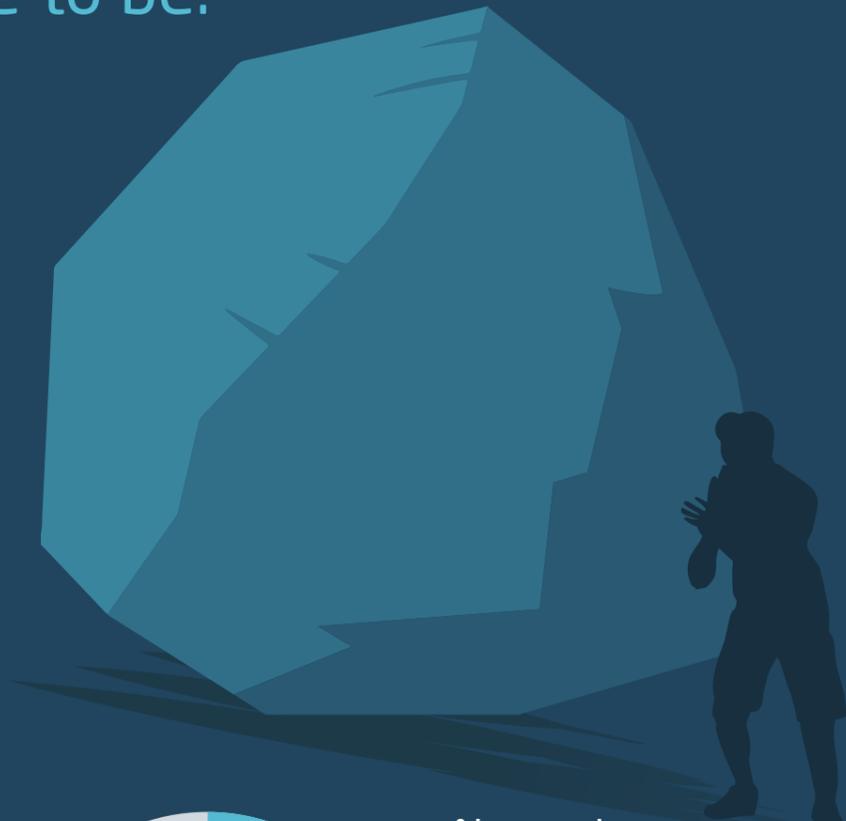3 John Kotter, "Our Iceberg is Melting", Macmillan Publishing, 2005.

Groundswell vs. Resistance

An agile transformation can be hard, but it doesn't have to be.

Success requires a critical mass of support.

Your agile transformation is like pushing a large rock up a steep hill. The top of the hill is the tipping point, the point at which business agility is the new reality in your organization. It's a heavy rock, representing the inertia of the status quo (people are settled in the way they think, what they do and how they do it). So you'll need a lot of people pushing just to make the rock move. You'll need more people to sustain movement for long enough to get it to the top of the hill. People get fatigued by change. They lose faith and stumble. Or they get called away to push other rocks up other hills. With all these

things considered, you will need a critical mass of support to push the rock to the top of the hill. You will need people with energy and stamina to keep the rock moving in the right direction and avoid a regression back into old habits. But, above all, you will need these de facto transformation leaders to be enthusiastic and encouraging throughout the agile journey.

Support must compensate for resistance.

But it's not as simple as that. Some people (active resisters) will be trying to push the rock back down the hill because they have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo; they like the rock where it is. Others may get confused and push the rock sideways. Others still (passives) may be sitting on the rock; simply going with the flow.

To get the rock to the top of the hill, the energy and stamina of your supporters must outweigh the energy and stamina of the resistors. Even when both sides are matched, the weight of the rock (the inertia of the status quo) will bring the rock back to where it started. A groundswell means having sufficient support to overwhelm resistance.

75%

Almost three-quarters of transformation programs fail because they don't create the necessary groundswell of support[4]

The support-resistance scale

Each person in your organization will be somewhere on the support-resistance scale, with passives sitting in the middle. If you can work out where people are on the spectrum, it will help you work out what you need to do to gain their support.

SUPPORT　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　**RESISTANCE**

Champions	Change agents	Passives	Skeptics	Protesters
Vocal supporters that push for change and actively recruit other supporters. Key to success.	Active and highly energetic supporters, committed to pushing the rock to the top of the hill.	Fence-sitters conserving energy. They wait until they see if it's worth the risk before they act.	Stubborn cynics, jaded by the failure of previous business transformations, who believe, "It'll never work."	Energetic resisters that push against change; actively recruiting other protesters and skeptics.

4 Mark J. Dawson, Mark L. Jones, "Human Change Management: Herding Cats," PwC, 2007.

Decoding Resistance
What people say and what they really mean.

There are many things people say to protest change. The variations are endless but they follow some common themes.

Each objection relates to an underlying (and usually unstated) reason why they are pushing back. When you can map what people say to what they really think and feel–you get to the heart of resistance and can identify what you need to do about it. Of course, every organization is different. The following is simply an example. In your own organization, you will need to listen carefully to your people and take the broader context into consideration.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY	WHAT THEY REALLY MEAN	WHAT THEY FEEL	WHAT YOU CAN DO
We're doing just fine.	This is a huge shock. I'm too overwhelmed to think rationally about this. I don't yet know if I like the idea or not.	Fear. Ignorance. I didn't see this coming, and nobody told me what was being planned. The prospect of being forced out of my comfort zone terrifies me.	Be transparent. Give them time. Maintain interaction so that they can get used to the idea. Communicate what's NOT going to change to give them some sense of stability.
It's too big of a change.	I don't know how big this change is. I'm going to make an assumption that this is impossible.	Fear. Confusion. Uncertainty. The scale (and impact) is unknown, meaning I can't process the change and work out what it means to me.	Knowledge dispels fear. Communicate the change story. Show them the framework. Show them the path. Give them clarity.

WHAT PEOPLE SAY	WHAT THEY REALLY MEAN	WHAT THEY FEEL	WHAT YOU CAN DO
We're too busy to change.	I'm scared of the transition, not the idea. This is going to have a negative effect on the KPIs on which I'm evaluated and rewarded.	Fear. I'm worried about the complexity and duration of the transformation journey– and the disruption it will cause.	Break it down into bite size chunks: a series of manageable steps that can be more easily absorbed without serious disruption. Show how KPIs will change to reflect the new reality.
It's not my job.	I don't see how I fit into this. This is so far away from how we do things now, I don't even recognize it.	Ignorance. Redundancy. I can't identify the part I will play in the new way of working. Am I going to lose my job? Am I going to lose my authority?	Communication. Give them a degree of autonomy. Include them in the design of the change. Empower them to take control over the change, instead of simply responding to it.
That won't work here.	I feel I have no say in what happens. Every time we adopt one of these best practice frameworks, it doesn't fit.	Anger. Betrayal. I feel a sense of powerlessness. I've gone from being in control of what I do to being sidelined by an imported idea.	Engage them and listen to their input. Empower them to take control over the change as it applies to them, instead of simply following a prescribed plan.
I've seen it fail in other organizations.	I'm fed up with changes that go nowhere. These transformation programs never work out.	Anger. Frustration. I've participated in previous transformations and they've all failed to deliver the promised benefits. Is this genuine or just another "management fad"?	This isn't resistance to change, it's disappointment at failure. It's a cry for transformation that is real and that works. These people are potential change champions–if you can convince them that this time there is a real commitment to follow through.

When we look at the actions–what you can do to overcome resistance–there are key themes that emerge: simplification, transparency, engagement, empowerment, clarity, authenticity and commitment. Most of these relate to communication–how you interact with the organization and what you say.

Communication
What to communicate

Effective communication is the driver of a groundswell and the antidote to resistance; correcting misconceptions, replacing fear with knowledge, uncertainty with clarity, and myth with reality. Good communication is about quality, not quantity; what you say and how you say it is important.

Address the status quo.

The first step is to challenge the status quo; to let people see the need for change before you talk about the specifics of your agile transformation. Tell the story of how the business environment has changed. Accept that the status quo used to make sense: that it was right for then, but not for now. Let the need for change sink in before you introduce disruptive and challenging concepts that can be the causes of stress and resistance. A full-scale attack on the current reality is an easy way to make enemies of the people who built it, so some sensitivity is required.

Define the new reality.

The false consensus effect is a threat to organizational transformation. Those in charge of driving change have a natural bias that others have the same viewpoint: in fact, they may not understand the issues, feel any need to change, or understand the new direction. Defining the target state is a critical step. It doesn't need to be highly granular; just enough to communicate the elemental differences clearly to each group. Spending weeks or months analyzing and documenting the impact on everybody in the organization goes against the nature of the agile approach. What you need is enough clarity to allow each stakeholder group to get a feel for the scope of the changes from their perspective–that means articulating what is going to change and what isn't.

Develop simple, compelling messages.

Start with why. If you fail to articulate the reasons for your agile transformation, all is lost. Work out a clear vision and define key messages that clarify the purpose. A lack of clarity leaves room for speculation. Speculation leads to myth and misinterpretation. Misinterpretation drives people to push in the wrong direction. A compelling change story is essential to communicate the why.

Appeal to hearts and minds.

Quantify the problems and distill the numbers into a compelling argument for change. Where articulating a threat is a powerful way to get attention and trigger short-term actions, you'll need to create positive emotions to sustain energetic support. Fill in the positives. Articulate the opportunity. Don't swamp people with too much information, but have the data ready to satisfy any statistically-minded doubters. Social proof–examples of how other organizations have succeeded–can make it real and help make people feel more comfortable with the idea.

"We have a tendency to over-estimate the degree to which other people agree with our beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviors."
Kendra Cherry, verywell.com[5]

5 Kendra Cherry, "What Is the False Consensus Effect?", April 2016.

Communication
Who you need to engage

Business transformation involves everybody.
An agile transformation affects what people do and how they do it, from the top of the organization right down to the bottom–and across departments and business functions. Even the people who won't play an obvious part–the administrative roles that fall outside of the value chain (like HR and facilities management)–will be impacted, because when business processes change, support processes need to change too. When you leave people out of the loop, you create a them-and-us mentality that can divide the organization.

Personalize communication.
People will struggle to interpret what an agile transformation means to them. A framework like the Scaled Agile Framework® (SAFe®) can help them see the whole (how structures and flows will change, and where they fit in).
But make sure you fill in the why for each group in the organization. People need to see the shape of the change from their perspective so that they can see how it will affect them.
That means customizing interaction to different target audiences. The changes to structures, processes, roles and systems will vary at different levels and in different groups, so one-size-fits-all messaging will fail to resonate and fail to create a groundswell.

Building a coalition of local change champions.
Recruit change champions in each group to help you work out what an agile transformation means to the different teams and individuals in your organization. These local change champions will be able to communicate the change in the language of the audience they influence–and tell a more relevant and focused change story.

"About 75% of all organizational change programs fail, largely because employees feel left out of the process."
PwC[6]

6 Mark J. Dawson, Mark L. Jones, "Human Change Management: Herding Cats," PwC, 2007.

Communication
How to communicate

Transformation requires an active leadership.
In any large-scale business transformation, people in an organization look towards the leadership team for guidance. If they don't get it, they may assume that there is no executive support–and if the management aren't supporting it, then why should they? Likewise, superficial leadership support is a common point of failure for business transformations. The Project Management Institute states, "...an executive sponsor's active engagement is actually the top driver of project and program success."[7]

Business executives must play an active part in communicating the vision. Town hall events featuring the business leadership will help get the ball rolling and demonstrate that there is a solid commitment from the top. Executive engagement should be sustained throughout the transformation program. It is essential for people to see the organization moving forward as a single body. For an agile transformation to work, everybody must feel like they are part of the same organization, with a common goal. Without an executive mandate, an agile transformation program will lack this cohesion.

Telling the change story.
A business case might excite the executive management, but to engage the rest of the organization, you'll need to present a compelling change story. An effective change story addresses the triggers, creates a vision of the future and outlines the benefits to society, the customer, the company, the team and the individual. When you can communicate the impact at these five levels, you stand a better chance of resonating with a broad spectrum of personal motivating factors and creating support. It is dangerous to assume that the leadership and the rest of the organization are on the same page. To make it real, the change story might include examples of how things were done in the old way versus how they will be done in the new way.

"What looks like resistance is often a lack of clarity. So provide crystal clear direction."
Chip and Dan Heath, "Switch"[8]

7 Project Management Institute, "Pulse of the Profession", May 2016.
8 Chip and Dan Heath, "Switch: How to change things when change is hard," Random House Business, 2011.

A Groundswell Is Fluid
Success requires ongoing commitment.

A groundswell isn't one and done.

Managing support doesn't end when the transformation begins. Along the journey, you'll uncover new obstacles (and new benefits)–driving a continual shift in your support footprint. Enthusiastic people can become frustrated and lose faith when they hit seemingly insurmountable blockers. Skeptics can become champions when they begin to see that the change really can work. When you gain support you can move faster. When you lose support, you lose momentum and risk reverting to the status quo.

Don't allow complacency.

Change leaders need to be agile role models; to model the behavior they want to see in the organization. That means being agile in the way that you manage your agile transformation. Apply the agile principle of inspect-and-adapt to your initiative, continually measuring support and addressing challenges to ensure support stays above the critical mass threshold you need to achieve success. You will need to continually adapt to the realities of the transformation. As change happens, people will develop a new, deeper understanding, new ideas, new questions and new concerns.

Anticipate obstacles and be ready for the curveballs.

While you can anticipate many of the obstacles that people will come across on your agile journey, some will be discovered along the way. Stay closely engaged; when obstacles surface, you want to know about them fast. When issues fester, doubts can quickly turn supporters into skeptics. Obstacles can quickly collapse the base of support you have worked hard to build. It's a journey of inherent unpredictability, so you will need to stay alert all the way through. The ability to react fast is a core capability throughout your agile transformation, so continuous engagement and communication are critical success factors.

"Make sure you get education. Make sure you get people to attend training and get adopted into the agile environment so that they're ready to hit the floor running when they start."

Agile Coach, Avaya[9]

9 "Build Your Agile Business: The Sourcebook," CA Technologies, 2017.

Make Rapid Innovation Your New Reality.

Creating a groundswell—a critical mass of support—will help your agile transformation work and help make it stick. With strong support, agile thinking and practices can become a culturally ingrained habit, part of the DNA of your organization.

Learn more about how CA can help you create a groundswell for a successful agile transformation.
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