

The Agile Practitioner Tom Bellinson February 2021

All Things Agile

Well it's 2021 finally and we're all hoping that it will be a happier year. For those of my readers who appreciated my somewhat longer form, I hope you will stay with me this year as I make a shift in my approach to The Agile Practitioner. My plan is to write shorter, more focused pieces on specific (and hopefully practical) topics that have surfaced during my own agile practice. I am very fortunate to work with an organization that is farther than most along our agile journey. We still have places to go and there may be opportunities to learn from our shortcomings as much as our successes.

This month, I'd like to focus on agility writ large. If you are involved in software development and work with modern professionals, you already understand the fundamentals of agility. Meanwhile, the rest of your organization may be less familiar. I am reminded of John Donne's famous poem [No Man Is An Island](#). The same can be said for teams, groups, departments, or whatever you call the sub-organizations within your company. Each of these teams (we'll call them that here) develops its own unique culture, but it is informed by the culture of the organization at the highest level.

It is hard for teams to care more about things than the organization-wide culture. For example, if your organization cares more about speed than quality, your team will find resistance if it tries to care more about quality than speed. Agility is no different. If the organization writ large does not care about agility as much as your team, they will continually slow you down.

Therefore, as an agile team, it is your responsibility (and necessity) to educate other parts of the organization about the benefits of agility. At ITHAKA, when I hear our president talk about holding a retrospective with the leadership team to identify learning opportunities from the

last planning cycle, I know that we are able to check that box. A large portion of our organization does not do software development, but they are not excluded from the agile practices that the software development teams brought to us.

The benefits of this are easy to measure. We do not get micromanaged from above. Teams that manage our content receive the same level of trust from leadership as those who are building the software platform on which that content is served to our users. This allows the experts on those teams to continually learn and experiment with new ways to achieve their objectives virtually unimpeded by people outside the team with lesser understanding of their problem-space.

Do we always get it right? Of course not! Managers must strike a delicate balance between asserting the organizational vision on teams and meddling in their affairs. This requires judgment calls that are not always easy to make. What is important is that managers are actively weighing their decisions about how to intercede against the right criteria: does this rise to the level of a vision type course correction?

There are so many resources out there proffering the benefits of agile management methodologies. You should avail yourself of some of them and put together a presentation to share with your leadership. You owe it to your own team to spread the wealth throughout your whole organization. Your teammates will thank you

AUTHOR

Tom Bellinson

Mr. Bellinson has been working in information technology positions for over 30 years. His diverse background has allowed him to gain intimate working knowledge in technical, marketing, sales and executive roles. Most recently, Mr. Bellinson finds himself serving as a Scrum Master for ITHAKA, a global online research service. From 2008 to 2011 Bellinson worked with at risk businesses in Michigan through a State funded program which was administered by the University of Michigan. Prior to working for the University of Michigan, Mr. Bellinson served as Vice President of an ERP software company, an independent business and IT consultant, as chief information officer of an automotive engineering services company and as founder and

President of a systems integration firm that was a pioneer in Internet services marketplace. Bellinson holds a degree in Communications with a Minor in Management from Oakland University in Rochester, MI and has a variety of technical certifications including APICS CPIM and CSCP.