The Number One Mistake
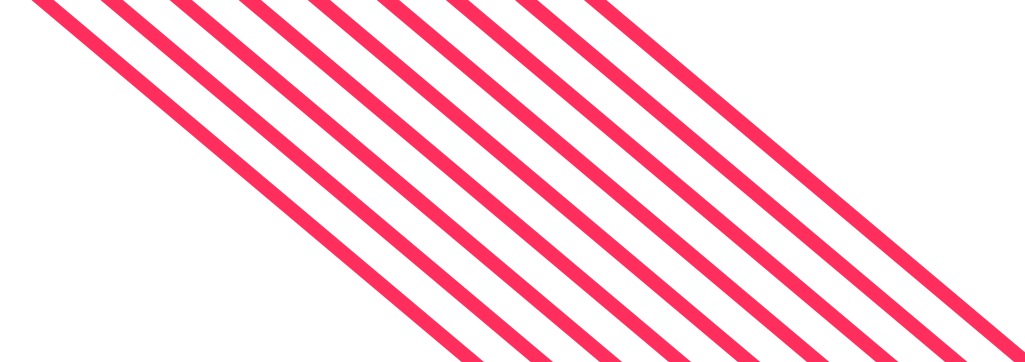## Organisations Make When Going Agile

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Why aren't all organisations Agile if it's *such a great thing?*

Try to remember when you last heard a negative opinion about Agility. We work with plenty of people, helping them start their journey of Agility, and we hear constant praise for this way of work.

It's amazing to see how this method of work has crossed the chasm between industries. From the corridors of universities to the factory floors, the word *"Agile"* is being conjugated endlessly. Many have predicted that its popularity will dwindle over the years, but it's still going from strength to strength, and there are good reasons for it.

And yet, with this method being born more than 20 years ago now, we still observe organisations struggling to get on board despite their best efforts and far-reaching change initiatives. **Why is that so?**

There are countless reports, articles and conference talks trying to answer this question. We think the answer does not need dozens of graphs and hours of narrated PowerPoint slides. As with most things in life and business, there is one major contributing factor that is responsible for a significant part of Agile adoption challenges.

In our experience, there's nothing wrong with Agility itself. That being said, we've seen time and time again how organisations make the same mistake, preventing themselves from reaping the full benefit of this way of work.

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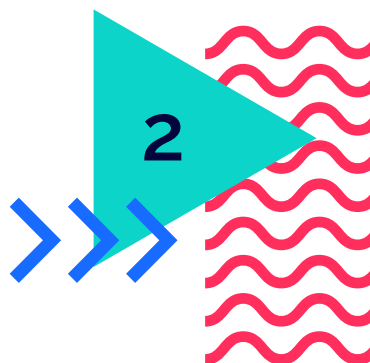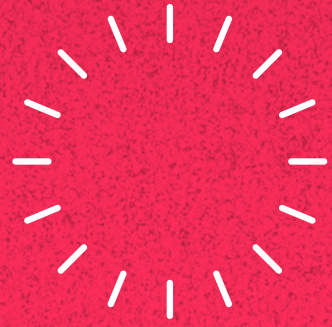
They are not taking Agile seriously

It sounds generic, doesn't it? And yet we're sure you've seen it happen.

We've seen it and been disappointed by it quite a few times ourselves. In fact, we think that it's quite common for people not to give Agility the attention it deserves from the get-go.

We have some examples for you, and we want to touch on the three most common reasons why organisations fail to take Agile seriously and what can be done about it. We've seen more, but we believe that these three are the most common and are probably the ones you might have experienced yourself when championing Agility in your organisation.

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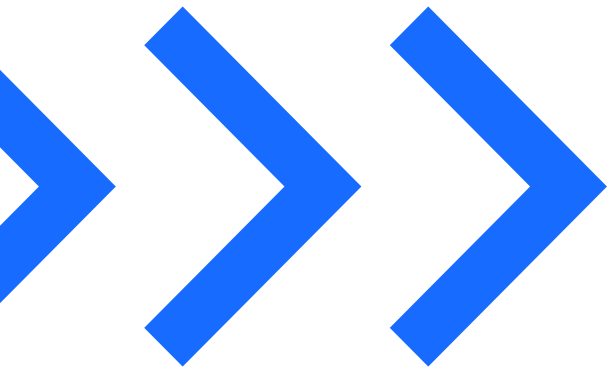
Agile is deceptively *simple*

Agile is one of those words that seems like a no-brainer; who wouldn't want to be Agile after all?

We've heard countless definitions of Agility, but sadly, in our opinion, there isn't a universal one out there that would capture all or even most of its aspects.

When someone asks you what Agile is, you probably don't want to answer, *"it's complicated"*, even though it might actually be the only correct answer after all.

After more than 20 years since its inception, Agility has evolved to be a multifaceted philosophy of work encompassing organisational culture, leadership, human relationships and technical practices. No wonder that in

order to reach the right audience, it often gets simplified.

Having standups, using sticky notes, creating Jira tickets or even giving people strange titles like Scrum Master is, unfortunately, as deep as many people's understanding goes. Sadly paired with this limited grasp of Agility, people expect that it is straightforward to practice.

**After all, if it's so simple, how difficult can it be to apply?**

And herein lies the problem: you can not expect someone to embark on a significant and often tough journey of a mindset change for a simple *"tweak"* in how people work. It's a challenging problem to deal with, especially since the belief above is already deeply ingrained in the minds of people and the organisational consciousness.

Sadly most Agile frameworks and methods are not helpful. They're often marketed in really simple terms, in a similar way to how you might try to drive customer adoption of your product.

At Humble Associates, we're not afraid to walk a different path to other consultancies out there - because a different path is needed to reach a better destination.

We focus on demonstrating openness and authenticity. We will be upfront with you about what it takes to be Agile and what the journey ahead might look like. Authenticity is not always popular; people are used to smiles and consultants saying *"Yes sir/ma'am,"* however we all know where that leads.

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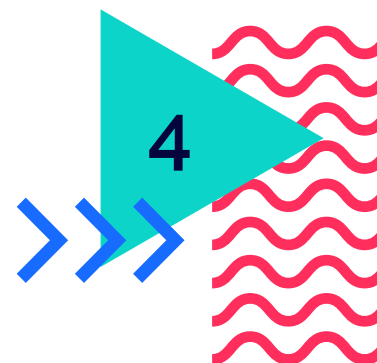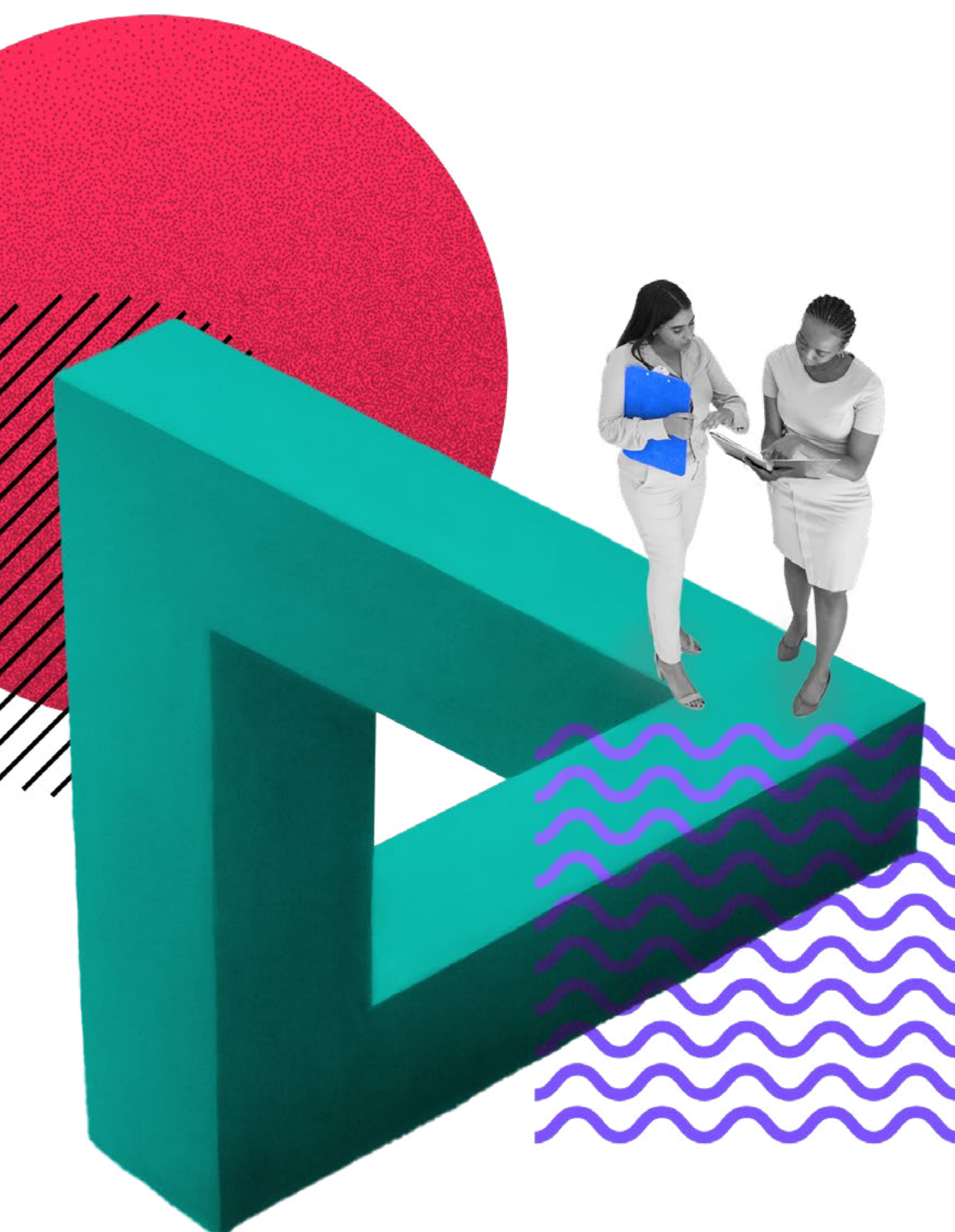
People think that Agile is about *IT project management*

Agility has its roots in software development, but we believe it has long grown past its humble beginnings.

When knocking on the doors of Marketing, HR, Logistics and others, we often hear, *"that's not for us; we don't write software here"*.

Some would launch into a lecture about value, flow and hypothesis thinking, but we have seen the futility of lecturing, not the concepts themselves . Even with smart people in these functions understanding what Agility might be, it can be hard for them to find the passion for this new way of work. In our experience, people from these functions are sometimes wary of IT/software solutions, something that gets compounded with Agile's association with IT.

The way we deal with this problem is by inviting them to *"come and see"*; maybe there's something about this approach that resonates with them? Inviting and showing optionality often breeds curiosity that can transform into a burning fire of change. We believe that Agile can have its place in all aspects of our organisational lives, and we are confident that you'll be able to see it yourself.

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Leaders think that Agile is *for their teams and not for them*

It's somehow the norm that leaders have a lot of things competing for their attention.

This in itself is a separate problem, but with a diary that's booked solid and an inbox bursting at the seams, they feel like they have no choice but to simplify.

Usually, when we start talking with leaders of an organisation, we hear a lot of complaints about the *"Teams"*. It's like they are from a different species or cast. This "us vs them" mentality is one of the reasons why Agility is not taken seriously by the people in an organisation.

Agile is as much a culture of leadership as it is a way of work. Even the best intentions for organisational change will whittle away without the support of the decision-makers.
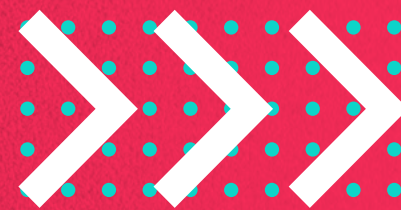
We believe that speaking truth to power seems to be the only viable option. Risky as it is, in our opinion it is dishonest not to do so.

The language of value and empathy is critical when inviting leaders to join, and with a persistent effort, they will start their own journeys.

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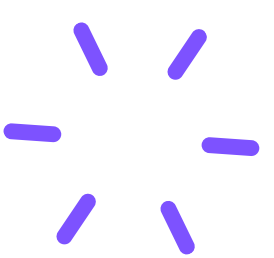
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There is still *hope*

What you've read in this short guide is just the tip of the iceberg. It may feel hopeless sometimes when you realise how much effort you need to put into a successful transformation. This is why so many organisations and change agents run out of steam. Even the best of intentions may not be enough.

But in fact, *"enough"* is the word that might help you move forward.

Our method to get people to take Agile seriously is to say *"no"* assertively. Now it's time to do things differently.

It can be pretty popular to always focus on the positive side of change, but in our experience, it's much easier to put lipstick on a pig than to stop a well-ingrained pattern of behaviour.

"If you want to see the benefits of Agility, you need to stop ...." is a sentence we use a lot, and one that can capture a lot of attention. We are under no illusion that it has also got us in trouble more times than we would have wanted to, but we respect our clients too much to let them wander around aimlessly in a zombie-agile state.

It's not about a *"no pain, no gain"* scenario either. Empathy and carrying attention are needed to succeed with the strategy above. This is why we rely so much on our coaching focused approach. When the organisation finally starts to take Agile with the seriousness it deserves, people will get frustrated.

The J-curve of change is an unavoidable part of any transformation, but when you see yourselves on its slope, it's a sign that you have started on a journey.

And trust us, once it has seriously started, you will not want to turn back.

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Book a call with us today to see how we can help build your plan for Agility

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