

# The Perfect Match: Organizational Change Management and Agile

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*Technology finds a way to bring opposites together—in this case, organizational change management and Agile.*



In life, some things just go together. Peanut butter and jelly, s'mores and campfires, fall and pumpkin spice lattes, Tuesdays and tacos, and organizational change management (OCM) and Agile. Yes, most of these are food, but you get the idea.

So how do two approaches that have about 40 years between them come to find themselves in perfect harmony?

Since the early 2000s, the “Big Four” tech companies (Facebook, Apple, Google, and Amazon) have delivered more computing power to our fingertips. More importantly, the rate at which we have a newer, more powerful phone upgrade, new search engine, enhanced social media platform, and same-day delivery continues to exponentially grow. As consumers, we have also set the bar high for companies and organizations to deliver at breakneck speed.



How do companies keep up when it comes to designing, building, and delivering a product or capability faster to their customers and stakeholders? Enter Agile. Agile frameworks and methodologies have become famous for welcoming change and enabling companies an opportunity to realize a faster return on investment (ROI) through iterative delivery cycles. Agile teams work with internal and external stakeholders to prioritize the companies' highest-value items first. Each item is built incrementally, and feedback is encouraged early and often through iterative demos back to stakeholders. When contending with the standard set by the "Big Four," your company's latest gizmo or gadget could become outdated before your customers get their hands on it, and Agile allows you to survive in this brave new digital world.

The comfort and the ability for your organization and employees to adapt and go at "Agile" speed does require a dedicated and intentional change management framework. The good news is Agile and OCM are very complementary of each other.

Simply look at each approach's core tenants and guiding principles to see the stark resemblance. While historically, OCM has been applied in traditional "waterfall" environments, when it comes to technology, the need to break away from long, drawn-out linear development has brought OCM and Agile even closer.

OCM CALLS IT...	AGILE CALLS IT...
<b>Define the Change / Build the Case for Change</b>	<b>Value Alignment</b>
<p>Defining and building the case for change is the core and foundation of any change management strategy. The case for change must answer what the project/program/product is, why it must be done, and why it must be done now. The case for change, in turn, helps to build a coalition and leadership sponsorship and alignment around the change. Similarly, in Agile, value alignment is foundational in building a coalition around the defined value that the project or product will bring to the customer or stakeholder. Value alignment also helps to cut or extract functionality that ultimately does not contribute value to the final product.</p>	
<b>Bring Them Along for the Journey</b>	<b>Plan Incrementally and Facilitate Customer Demos</b>
<p>Technology development following a waterfall approach is often developed behind a curtain, and the stakeholder or user doesn't have the chance to experience the capability early and up front in the process until some form of User Acceptance Testing (UAT). One of OCM's key tenants is to engage early and often depending on how much a stakeholder is affected by the defined change. Allowing stakeholders to roll up their sleeves and be part of the creation of the new vision or end state can create sustaining engagement. The Agile approach subscribes to this philosophy through incremental planning and customer demos along the way.</p>	
<b>Understand Change Readiness and Impact</b>	<b>Respond to Change</b>
<p>Change management strategies and plans that fail are those that are created at the beginning of a project and never updated or refined to reflect the current organizational environment. While change is often a bad word in waterfall environments, Agile embraces change because ultimately the flexibility to shift priorities as new changes, requirements, and information become available means a better product for the customer. Whether it's key messages that aren't resonating for a stakeholder group or a major knowledge gap for a business function, the OCM team that can shift and pivot in an agile way to respond to change is most effective.</p>	
<b>Generate Quick Wins and Success Stories</b>	<b>Deliver Iteratively and Frequently</b>
<p>A major change management obstacle in any large-scale project is the lead time to realize tangible benefits and value. Stakeholders and customers in many instances need to wait months or years to be able to see, touch, and experience the capability and value promised by a system. In traditional waterfall environments, we try to identify the quick wins and success stories to demonstrate progress toward the ultimate vision. Unfortunately, it doesn't always hold up if it's not tangible. Agile, on the other hand, enables users to begin to experience a technology and feel those quick wins as fragments of a larger product are introduced to the user incrementally, generating faster ROI, user happiness, and team celebrations.</p>	

## LAYERING OCM INTO AN AGILE DEVELOPMENT ENVIRONMENT:

**A word of caution. OCM and Agile on paper are a perfect match. Hopefully, you've seen the uncanny similarities. But it's important to note that carrying out these approaches is not a "plug-and-play" exercise. We have outlined some considerations for layering OCM in an Agile environment.**

### Leaders own the story

Leadership sponsorship is critical for both waterfall and Agile approaches. With Agile, however, the rapid incremental nature relies on a constant, active presence of leadership, particularly when it comes to understanding and overcoming roadblocks and making decisions to keep the entire project team on track. Additionally, because we don't have the final solution product when things are being released, leaders need to be the reliable constant to crystalize what the end product looks like. Recruit a coalition of executive change agents within the organization to lead the change and communicate the vision. In the book about the Gang of Four, author Scott Galloway says, "The ultimate gift, in our digital age, is a CEO who has the storytelling talent to capture the imagination of the markets while surrounding themselves with people who can show incremental progress against that vision each day."

### Talk the talk

Both OCM and Agile come with their own language. For example, on the Agile side you have scrums, epics, and retrospectives. It's important that members of the OCM team and the broader Agile team understand and can translate what each other is saying early in the planning process.

### Revisit how "OCM work" is done

Traditional OCM activities aren't necessarily different in Agile versus waterfall. As we mentioned earlier, the work in Agile is iterative and broken up into smaller chunks where the output is anywhere from weeks to months instead of months to years. In turn, the change management associated with this style of development needs to be complementary. While you might not have the luxury of weeks and months of facilitating stakeholder interviews for a robust stakeholder analysis, you can mirror the Agile approach by segmenting the stakeholders and customers affected by the next release and layering their feedback. In turn, this will feed the next release and the one after.

### Show up

Agile is inherently fast, which can make leadership and team members uncomfortable and fearful of the pace right off the bat. This makes it that

much more critical for OCM team members to stay coordinated and in lockstep with the delivery cadence of Agile teams. One of the great things about Agile is it is principled in communication and collaboration through a series of recurring meetings. A great deal of activity is happening in meetings like scrums and retrospectives, and all along, team members are building rapport. For that reason, prioritizing those meetings and being actively engaged will go a long way in the overall success of the team.

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### Sources:

- 1 Scott Galloway, "The Four: The Hidden DNA of Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google"
- 2 "The History and Future of Change Management," <https://www.prosci.com/resources/articles/change-management-history-and-future>

The figure below is a model for what OCM layered in an Agile environment can look like when it is all put together.

When it comes down to it, doing OCM in an Agile environment isn't that daunting. It is a new way of thinking about the work and how it is layered in that type of environment. The activities are similar, but the approach to layering in OCM is where the nuances show up. Now, who's hungry?

