Enable Rapid Response to Changing Business Needs with Agile and DevOps

At a Glance

Agile and DevOps bring rapid agility. To reap the benefits, organizations must:

- Ensure strong leadership support of Agile and DevOps enablement

- Scale an enterprise mindset

- Promote a culture of change and learning — and enable it

- Modernize methodically

Successful companies today are lean, agile organizations with executives who have a vision and a mindset that empowers collaboration so employees can achieve that vision. These organizations must be agile because rapidly responding to dynamic market demands without compromising quality is required for survival. Achieving business transformation and agility requires commitment from leadership at the very top of an organization, including C-suite, business and technology leaders. Each must be committed to the agile/digital transformation and must communicate that support clearly throughout the transformation journey.

Agile and DevOps are disrupters of the conventional software development life cycle. Combining Agile and DevOps with elements such as cloud, testing, security, risk management and compliance creates a modernized technology delivery approach that can help an organization achieve greater speed, reduced risk, and enhanced quality and experience. Agile accelerates and shortens the software development life cycle by focusing on smaller, incremental builds and continuous iteration, while DevOps underpins the Agile release cycle through a standardized, automated and well-governed process. CIOs bring value to business agility by championing an Agile and DevOps framework for a quick, adaptive response to market conditions and competitive pressures. They build and maintain a value-driven, cross-functional infrastructure using the right technology, people and processes.

Like a strong, stable foundation, forming and maintaining an Agile and DevOps enterprise architecture brings the built-in flexibility needed to transition from the status quo to new capabilities for pivoting on demand. This contributes to accelerated development and enhanced defect detection and correction, resulting in improved quality. DevOps stresses transparency, increased communication and cross-functional collaboration. In terms of relative significance, software development, testing and

implementation are all considered equal. Agile enables an elastic way of working through technical platforms so employees can quickly and flexibly deliver innovation and greater value to the market. Meanwhile, DevOps maintains modernization momentum by driving ongoing transformation.

Agile and DevOps lean on a mindset shift from traditional approaches to empowered self-organized teams, incremental builds with fast learning cycles, and continuous improvement. These are all tied to an enterprise architecture that includes the business vision and capabilities within the business architecture with clear buy-in from top leadership. CIOs are instrumental in helping to permeate an Agile, lean mindset throughout the C-suite and the organization. They must demonstrate to stakeholders that Agile delivers steady value sooner as compared to waterfall approaches where value is released at program completion.

An Agile tone at the top is crucial

Successful enablement of Agile and DevOps requires full support of business leadership from the top down. Without this support, the transition will not succeed. Business and technology leaders must be committed to the Agile/digital transformation and must communicate this support clearly and continually throughout the transformation process. CIOs must provide guidance through clear definitions of the vision, strategy, goals, objectives and metrics for employees to adopt, including KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and objectives and key results (OKRs). It is critical that employees and other stakeholders align with the stated vision and goals. Communication and employee engagement builds commitment, so organizations should ensure that

status updates on the transformation are shared with employees through town hall meetings, video updates and other communications.

Leaders must be forward-thinking and go beyond walking the walk; they must provide steadfast, active support. Successful CIOs and business leaders understand that business agility, which includes Agile and DevOps enablement, does not come easily. To bring value, a culture that is creative and innovative must be built. The concept that no idea is a bad idea should be the standard. To avoid stifling creativity, organizations should clearly define the vision and then unleash its human capital to figure out the details of achieving the stated vision.

However, experienced CIOs recognize that — rather than being risk-averse — there are smart ways to take risks. While teams should be encouraged toward innovation, a "fail early/fail fast" approach should be adopted. Rapid testing, learning from failure, pivoting and moving forward with other innovative ideas is core to Agile and DevOps enablement.

Scale an enterprise mindset

For effective response to market demands, the organization must have an enterprise mindset toward digital transformation, as opposed to a siloed approach. Where market demands prompt a business to pivot, the entire organization must be uniformly responsive. To enable all functions of the organization to work towards the same vision and objectives, incentives and motivations across the enterprise must all support and align with a singular vision. To gain commitment, leveraging a collaborative approach rather than a hierarchical one is more effective.

Promote a culture of change — and enable it

Every stakeholder must accept forthcoming change. Building an Agile Center of Excellence (ACE) enables the necessary changes to achieve corporate vision. An ACE promotes the transformation and ensures that people are in alignment with vision, strategy, goals and objectives.

Likewise, the leadership team and the CIO must keep a strong pulse on employee pain points. Conducting roundtable discussions and performing surveys provide insight on areas requiring improvement. To assess how employees are feeling and to support engagement, open communication is a must. It informs how and when to provide necessary support, including training and coaching, so everyone can keep working toward enabling the corporate vision.

Modernization is a journey, not a mission

Organizations should upgrade, replace or substitute technology incrementally and as feasible. They should not attempt to modernize every aspect of the business in one avalanche. To the extent there are capabilities that have become obsolete or are no longer bringing value, it may be best to return to square one — go to the whiteboard and start from scratch on a particular process or technology.

Collaborate comprehensively

Digital modernization is a time for having a collaborative, enterprise mindset. Silos must be broken down and the concept of looking for individual benefits should be stricken. To enable collaboration and transparency, frequent and proactive communication is essential.

Having a governance structure for the transformation that is inclusive of key players is a must. It is paramount to include the CIO and other innovative leaders at the executive roundtable. Business executives and technology leaders alike, including CIOs and CDOs, all must have a voice in high-level decision-making, and it is essential that their input is considered. Doing so supports a governance structure that enables business leaders to inform IT and, likewise, enables IT executives to inform business decision-making.

All hands on deck

The domino effect of change and adaptation requires that all functions of the business respond by transforming — in unison. A failure to respond in one or more of the organization's functions will cause the enterprise transformation to topple. For that reason, to keep pace, everyone in the organization from marketing and sales to audit, risk and compliance must adopt an Agile, lean mindset. Leveraging Agile and DevOps enables rapid response and fulfillment of market demands.

C-suite support is integral to the ability of each function to pivot and respond to the changes needed for agile reaction. For example, chief data officers (CDOs) rely on real-time intelligence by collecting user information. Organizations must shift away from periodic reporting to real-time analytics to feed the Agile and DevOps process and quickly respond to market changes. Middle management must be fully committed to the transformation and aligned with the business's vision as they are the boots-on-the-ground agents of change. They promote and ensure employees are achieving goals and supporting the business vision. Anything short of commitment and full alignment of business vision results in delayed transformation at best — or failure at worst.

What should organizations do now?

Transformation is challenging and requires adjustments over time. However, it is imperative for organizations to choose a starting point. When assessing current status and establishing Agile and DevOps readiness, organizations should:

- Establish the business vision, roadmap and transformation impacts
- Understand the reason for the transformation and analyze the benefits gained
- Understand the roadblocks to short-term and long-term transformation
- Understand the organization's challenges for a clearer view on the appropriateness of an Agile or digital transformation
- Establish and define metrics — KPIs and OKRs

Agile and DevOps enables technical agility for organizations. Keeping pace demands that organizations pivot rapidly to meet and exceed expectations. To win at enterprise transformation, a business must leverage Agile and DevOps uniformly across the organization, for a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

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