The Agile Workplace with Mandy Chooi

"Purpose, Leadership & People to transform from large and conventional to nimble, digital and innovative."

MANDY CHOOI

Hedley May
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Have a purpose and a 'real story'

You need an authentic purpose and narrative from the top.

Ideally the CEO can express how this purpose is meaningfully true for her/him as a person, and why the organisation is willing to risk a period of upheaval to invest in the change.

Align all elements of your organisational transformation around your purpose, so that the story is simple, coherent and meaningful.

You have to be able to answer 'why should I care?'

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Hedley May thinking.

Lead from the front

You cannot move the train from the carriage in the middle. If the change is significant it needs to involve the engine, the track and the operating schedules.

This is about making real change not just creating 45 agile working groups.

Agile is not something that happens - on a Wednesday - in the CIO function.

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Hedley May thinking.

Change at the organisational level

Things will not be the same and this is not about 'others' changing.

This is about systemic change that impacts people at the core of what they believe – their sense of self-worth, values, how they enjoy working, what they fear to lose, their perception of risk… A lot of this is asking people to step into the unknown.

Agile must go to the core of the organisational belief system.

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Smaller than you think

Agile has to be agile.

Try to show more than tell. It is not about preparing lots of detailed presentations but you have to do it quickly while also 'treading lightly'.

Humans are bad at imagining what they haven't seen or don't know – so start small to show success.

You have to implement it to show the way it can be done and be honest about what worked and what needs to be done better. Test, learn, iterate, test again.

Hedley May *thinking.*

You get what you measure

Are you the 'good or the bad wolf?' It depends which one you feed.

In any battle of the wanted vs the unwanted, the one you feed will always win. *Cherokee proverb*

HR practices can shape behaviour with many processes (appraisals, reward, promotions etc.) but how well do they 'feed' the team, or do they continue to push for individual motives?

Empowered and collaborative behaviours are virtually impossible without trust, fairness, and a real belief that we are in this together.

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Transparency is not the same as trust

Agile relies on autonomy and independence, which in turn requires trust.

Being transparent about how your company operates is always required, but it is not the same as having a strong trusting culture.

A strong ask for transparency can indicate a loss of trust has already occurred in the system, and the need for transparency is a fix.

If people won't believe you unless you strip down and show your hand every time, then you have a trust issue that needs to be fixed by doing more than just implementing transparency.

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Hedley May thinking.

Managing a team is very different

Agile requires you to replace the conventional management hierarchy. Self-organising teams need leadership and direction but they don't need management in the conventional style.

Instead of operating top-down, power is distributed, giving individuals and teams more freedom to self-manage, while staying aligned to purpose.

Leaders are there to coach to purpose and effective team dynamics, bring out the best in people and remove barriers.

It is not about 'open plan, bean bag chairs and free sushi' as they don't deliver anything in themselves. They provide the opportunity to physically be together in a stimulating environment, but without the right motivation and capability, productive collaboration will not happen by accident.

It is always about Leadership

Leadership needs to be rooted in their purpose, and that of the organisation. In a complex world the answers are never clear and they never sit within one person or even one team.

Leading is an expression of who you are and what is most important to you. Which of course requires self-awareness, honesty, humility and courage.

"How can I be wrong?" "What do I need to learn?" "What different questions do I need to ask?"

The agile environment can be very exposing – with no walls and strange (or no) job titles, there is 'nowhere to hide'.

What are you willing to give up and what is your appetite for risk and failure?

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And finally….

Why do you want to be Agile?

- Who benefits?
- What is the business goal?
- What version of Agile can best deliver your desired outcome?
- What do you want to keep?
- What can you let go?
- What are you prepared to show your customers and your clients?

What are the processes that will shape behaviours?

- Overt and covert.
- If you want collaboration – make things bottom up rather than top down.
- Appraisals – focus on what people learn, not what they did.
- Agile is a big thing, it's a mind-set change, not just going to a workshop.

'Top down' Agile is not really Agile

- People do best if they have meaningful work, autonomy, recognition, can continuously learn, and they feel fairly treated.
- The core capabilities needed are the abilities to learn, adapt and make other people better.