

The AGILE MIND-SET

GIL BROZA

Making Agile Processes Work



Agile Values: What Practitioners Care About the Most

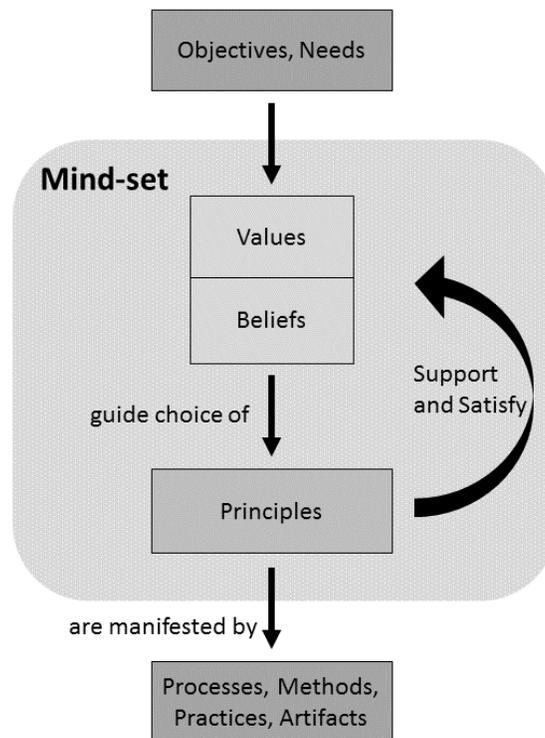
Agile is anchored in four foundational values – meaning, if you choose the Agile approach for the work at hand, your top-ranked values include (and don't contradict) the Agile four:

People come first, before product and before process. Those people are everyone with a stake in the work, not just the team that produces it; customers and managers are people too. This value is known as “individuals and interactions.”

Adaptation. Opportunities and need for change – of mind, of understanding, or of circumstance – will occur; embrace those changes that are worth embracing. Adaptation encompasses the readiness, ability, and willingness to respond to change. The change may apply to people, process, or product.

Early and frequent value delivery. The work has some customer, perhaps even several. They might be paying, or not. The workers ought to focus relentlessly on doing valuable work and making a difference, so their customers see an early and frequent return on investment.

Customer collaboration. The producers of the work ought to collaborate with their customers for the result to truly delight them. It is a spirit of partnership, not of vendor-buyer or winner-loser.



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Agile Beliefs: What Practitioners Hold to Be True

Beliefs about people

Agile is congruent with Theory Y, which says that competent, motivated, trusted, and supported people will do well. Nevertheless, as human beings they will get some (even many) things wrong. Even when they're right, they're not perfect, but working closely together enriches the outcomes that they could achieve individually. In light of the four values, people with an Agile mind-set believe that the best model that manages the downside and elevates the upside is the self-organizing, collaborative team.

Beliefs about the customer

Two of the Agile values are focused on the customer – the entity that wants the results of the work (the two other values, a little less so). However, in Agile mind-set, the customer is not always right. In fact, its basic belief is that customers can't – and, being adaptive, shouldn't – pinpoint future needs and wants. They should have a good handle on what's needed *now*, and even that's fleeting; delaying implementation will make those requirements go stale. The sensible thing to do, therefore, is to focus intently on what the customer needs now. Knowing the top needs and fulfilling them is being effective; from an Agile perspective, being effective matters more than being efficient.

Beliefs about the work

The Agile mind-set is formulated particularly for *complex* work. As such, it's based on a particular belief: *emergence*, or *evolution* – rather than planning – is an appropriate response to complexity. Practitioners believe that the best enabler of emergence is the short feedback loop. Since feedback, emergence, and adaptation imply frequent change, a key Agile assumption is that the cost of change *can remain low*. When this isn't the case – for instance in some civil engineering projects – Agile will probably not be a good fit.

It bears repeating that all the abovementioned statements are only *beliefs*. They cannot be proven the way mathematical laws can. Agile practitioners adhere to these beliefs – and use them to justify their choice of principles – because they see enough compelling evidence for their validity.

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The Agile Principles

Meta-Principles

	Principle	Meaning
	Feedback	Establish short, actionable feedback loops everywhere
	Learning	Continuously learn about the customers, the business, the team, and the work
	Improvement	Process and teamwork improvements are welcome anytime, and product improvements almost anytime

Work-Related Principles

Aspect	Principle	Meaning
Supporting business objectives	Cadence	Deliver value as frequently as needed and possible
	Reliability	Deliver value now and avoid compromising future ability to deliver value
	Cost of Change	Organize work and team to reduce the cost of change, not the cost of work
Making the work count	Outcome	Begin with the end in mind
	Effective	Take care of being effective, then of being efficient
	Defer	Postpone decisions till the last responsible moment
	Simplicity	Maximize the amount of work <i>not</i> done
	Experiment	Fail fast and cheap and maximize the learning from that
Making progress	Shippable ("Get to 'done'")	When the time-box ends, have the product in a working, shippable, and preferably deployed state
	Quality	Pay constant attention to quality and technical excellence
	Time-box	Plan work using time-boxes
	Results	Value delivery by the team matters more than individual utilization

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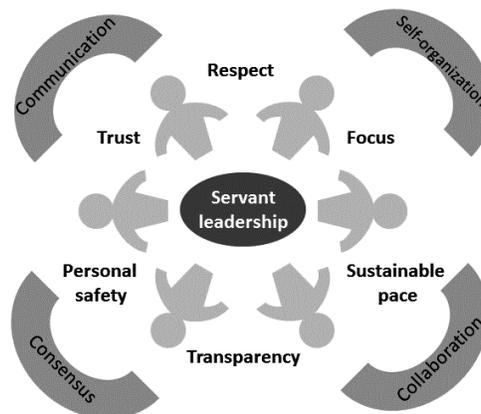
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People-Related Principles

Aspect	Principle	Meaning
Individuals	Respect	Honor others' humanity and sense of worth
	Trust	Assume others would act professionally and conscientiously
	Transparency	Have easy access to the information that guides decisions and actions
	Safety	Expect no harm or retribution for acting in what you think is the shared interest
	Focus	Allow yourself (and others) to focus on one task at a time
	Sustainable	Be able to perform for a long time without sacrifice
Interactions	Self-organizing Teams	Given known priorities and parameters, team members decide who will do what when
	Collaboration	Team members share ownership of results and artifacts
	Communication	Keep colleagues informed
	Consensus	Everyone who takes part in making a decision will support it outside of the room
	Leadership	Servant leaders grow teams in a trusting, supportive, humane environment



*The Agile principles regarding people
("Individuals and interactions")*

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