

ZUZANA ŠOCHOVÁ

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# **The Agile Leader**

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# The Agile Leader

## *Leveraging the Power of Influence*

**Zuzana Šochová**



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# CONTENTS

<i>Forewords</i>	xi
<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xxi
<i>About the Author</i>	xxiii
<b>Part I. Agile Leader—Unleash Your Leadership Potential</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1. How It All Started</b>	<b>3</b>
The Need for Change	6
<b>2. Leadership Is a State of Mind</b>	<b>9</b>
What Is Agile?	9
<i>Why Agile?</i>	13
<i>What Is Agile Leadership About?</i>	20
<i>What Is the Difference between Leader and Manager?</i>	21
<i>Why Is It Important to Be an Agile Leader?</i>	22
<b>3. Organizational Evolution</b>	<b>25</b>
Organization 1.0: Traditional	25
Organization 2.0: Knowledge	28

Organization 3.0: Agile	31
Reflect on Your Organization	34
<b>4. The Agile Leader</b>	37
The Servant Leader	40
The Leader-Leader	44
The Leadership Agility: From Expert to Catalyst	48
<i>The Expert</i>	49
<i>The Achiever</i>	50
<i>The Catalyst</i>	51
<i>The Agile Leader Journey</i>	57
<i>Positivity</i>	62
<i>Listening</i>	65
<b>5. The Agile Leadership Model</b>	75
Get Awareness	77
Embrace It	78
<i>Act Upon</i>	80
<i>Integrate It in a Circle</i>	80
<b>6. Competencies</b>	87
Vision and Purpose	88
Three Levels of Reality	92
High Dream and Low Dream	94
Bringing Down the Vision	95
Motivation	100
<i>Theory X and Theory Y</i>	103
Engagement	107
Super-chickens	109
Feedback	113
Giving Feedback	116
Learn from Feedback	119
Decision	122
Sociocracy	124
Power and Control Cycles	126

Collaboration	128
Facilitation	132
Four-Player Model	134
Coaching	139
Change	141
The Change Dynamic	142
Force Fields	145
Competencies Self-Evaluation	148
<b>7. Meta-skills</b>	153
The Me Domain	154
The We Domain	155
The World Domain	156
<b>8. Building an Agile Organization</b>	161
Inside Out	162
Evolutionary Purpose	166
Emergent Leadership	168
Culture	172
“We” Culture	183
Competing Values	194
Network Structure	200
Smart versus Healthy	202
Reinventing Organizations	205
<b>Part II. The Different Parts of an Agile Organization</b>	211
<b>9. Business Agility</b>	213
Agile at the Executive Level	216
The CEO in an Agile Organization	220
Agile Board of Directors	223
<i>Team over Individuals and Hierarchy</i>	224
<i>Flexibility over Fixed Plans and Budgets</i>	224
<i>Strategic over Operational</i>	225



<b>10. Agile HR and Finance</b>	229
Agile HR	229
<i>Supporting the Culture Shift</i>	230
<i>Recruiting</i>	231
<i>The Interview Process</i>	234
<i>Evaluations and Performance Reviews</i>	238
<i>Coaching for Growth</i>	239
<i>Retrospectives and Peer Feedback</i>	241
<i>Career Paths and Salaries</i>	243
<i>What You Can Do in More Agile Environments</i>	244
<i>What to Do in an Agile Organization</i>	247
<i>Leadership and Self-Deception</i>	249
<i>Leadership, System Coaching, and Large       Groups Facilitation</i>	250
Agile Finance	253
<b>11. Tools and Practices</b>	257
System Coaching and Facilitation	257
Open Space	259
<i>Diversity of Roles</i>	262
<i>What You Need to Prepare</i>	264
<i>Where Organizations Can Use Open Space</i>	265
<i>How to Start</i>	267
World Café	270
Systems Thinking	274
Radical Transparency	277
Experiment, Inspect, and Adapt	285
Be Inclusive	286
Have Courage	288
Growing Trust	290
<i>Team Building</i>	291
<i>Personal Maps</i>	292
<i>Assessment</i>	295

Teamwork	296
Building Communities	298
<b>12. Summary</b>	303
Organizational Perspective	304
Agile Leader Perspective	307
What's Next	310
<b><i>Bibliography</i></b>	313
<b><i>Index</i></b>	321

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## FOREWORDS

### Foreword by Johanna Rothman

We hear a lot about agile leadership these days. The good news is that everyone realizes they need some agility in their organizations. The bad news is that too few people understand how to change their behaviors to become agile leaders.

What does agile leadership really mean?

In *Agile Leadership*, Zuzana Šochová explains—clearly and with examples—how each of us might think about agile leadership. She helps us navigate agile leadership by explaining the various organizational structures, how agile leadership might work, and the overall agile leadership journey.

As you read, she encourages you to take notes and experiment. Do so. You might learn about yourself—an excellent idea for any leader. You might select some experiments to try for yourself, your team, and your organization.

You will learn to look for feedback at every opportunity, to consider how transparent you can be, and how to try new things.

I particularly like that every chapter offers suggestions for books to read. And there's an extensive bibliography at the back. When I read books like this, I sometimes want to investigate a topic more fully. This book encourages us to do so.

Are you ready to be an agile leader? You can lead from anywhere in the organization. And if you want your organization to become an agile organization, you *must* lead. When leaders change themselves, the rest of the organization will follow.

I hope you enjoy this book. I did.

—*Johanna Rothman,*

*author of Modern Management Made Easy and other books*

## **Foreword by Evan Leybourn**

Never before in the history of humanity has there been such a demand for business leaders to be truly agile. Leaders who create alignment in the people around them when all is changing. Leaders who face volatility and ambiguity with confidence in their own—and their team’s—ability to adapt. And leaders who see, and embrace, the complexity in the systems around them. Throughout history, there have always been visionary and agile leaders—the great architects, generals, and explorers who have seen opportunity in adversity and found innovation to be the key to achieving their goals.

At the turn of the century, something changed. The drive for predictability, efficiency, and scale drove a new kind of leadership. Systems such as scientific management emerged to help leaders plan, repeat, and grow. And for a while it seemed like we were bringing order to our chaotic world, but we only hid the chaos under a layer of process and bureaucracy.

You can hide for only so long. In the hundred years between 1900 to 2000, the world population grew by 275 percent from 1.6 to more than 6 billion, while global total gross domestic product (GDP; also known as gross world product [GWP]) increased by more than 3,600 percent (from \$1.1 trillion to \$41 trillion in 1900 US dollars). Complexity grew. Today, we find ourselves needing leaders who are more visionary than scientific, who see the systems for what they are and not what we want them to be.

Given the scale of growth, leadership is no longer for the exclusive few who, by luck or circumstance, find themselves in a position to inspire and lead. Today, there are hundreds of thousands of companies in need of such leadership.

And so, the leader of today must be developed and grown, not found. Which brings us, very neatly, to agile leadership.

—*Evan Leybourn,*  
*founder of the Business Agility Institute*

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## PREFACE

In the last two decades, a powerful movement has revolutionized the world of work.

Agility is the idea that we can put people before processes, focus on creating value, work in self-organizing teams, and cooperate directly with our customers to iteratively build increasingly useful and valuable products. Various organizations have grown to support this movement, including the Scrum Alliance, which offers training on the agile mindset and best practices. The movement has grown so popular so quickly that *agile* is now recognized as a key requirement for managing the modern workplace.

I was fortunate to get into agile and Scrum in the early days. After completing my studies in computer science, I earned increasingly responsible roles. Becoming a manager of others opened my eyes to the reality of the modern work world and how agile could change everything, given proper leadership.

I became a sort of evangelist, introducing agile practices to companies, and a Scrum trainer, organizing and speaking at conferences, eventually being elected to the Scrum Alliance Board of Directors.

How did a young woman with colorful hair from a little-known country in the center of Europe achieve this? Certainly not by luck or wishful thinking. It's been hard and often uncomfortable work,



constantly questioning conventional wisdom, stretching and challenging myself and others.

I've already written blogs, articles, and books about agile, including *The Great ScrumMaster: #ScrumMasterWay*, where I present my ideas and experiences with servant leadership and how to guide teams on their journey to agility.

In all this time, I've increasingly been called an "agile leader." And yet, I've repeatedly had to ask myself: What does being a leader in agile really mean? Is it an oxymoron, when we are supposed to be self-organizing, to even seek leadership? Who is an agile leader, and what does an agile leader do?

Answering these questions eventually led to the creation of the Certified Agile Leadership program at the Scrum Alliance.

Over the years, I've collected so much information about leadership, most of it common sense, some of it contradictory or counterintuitive, that it became obvious I had to write it all down and put it into some sort of order. The result is this book.

This book is *not* a collection of recipes that, if followed, can transform anyone, step by step, into an agile leader ready to change the world. Rather, you may consider this to be more like a tasting menu or buffet where you can sample the various concepts and principles of agile leadership, so you can build your own set of tools and skills that works for you. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Your leadership style must suit your unique personality, circumstances, and constraints. This book aims to help you find the ideas that will guide you in your own personal journey.

So, feel free to skip around, browse this book, and take what works for you. Maybe when you're feeling stumped, or in a rut, needing a bit of inspiration, this book can help. I've included exercises, assessments, examples, and real-world stories of agile transformation. Take what works for you, and feel free to skip over what doesn't.

In the end, leadership is about providing a shared vision and changing organizations and cultures to achieve this vision. You will find a wealth of ideas, techniques, and hopefully inspiration so that you know you are not alone in your agile leadership journey.

### WHO SHOULD READ THIS BOOK

This book is intended for anyone who has the **courage to challenge the status quo of traditional organizational design and become an agile leader.**

It's for managers, directors, executives, entrepreneurs, and anyone who is willing to take over the responsibility and ownership and become a leader. It's for anyone who has a passion to change things and anyone who cares about improving the agility at the organizational level. Leadership is a state of the mind; you don't need to have any positional power to become an agile leader.

This book guides you through your very first steps on the agile leadership journey, bringing the tasting menu of the relevant agile leadership concepts to help you decide where you would like to grow as a leader and how you can help your organization to achieve a higher level of the business agility.

Each chapter contains several assessments, exercises, and practical examples that will help you to connect the theory with your day-to-day life and reflect on your personal leadership style and organizational agility. If you don't like to write directly in the book, you can always use Post-it Notes for the exercises and assessments.

The book doesn't explain what agile, Scrum, and Kanban are or how to scale agile. It's not about frameworks, practices, or tools. It's also not for people who are confident that their way of working doesn't need any significant change.

The book summarizes my experience from leadership positions—entrepreneur, managing director, director of engineering, HR director, director of the board, and from one additional role that people often miss when speaking about leadership: a

ScrumMaster, which is a great example of servant leadership. It also builds on top of my coaching experience helping organizations on their agile journey and coaching executives on their agile leadership journey. Last but not least, it builds on top of my experience from running the Certified Agile Leadership program (Scrum Alliance), which is an almost year-long program where I work with a variety of leaders across the world and across different industries on their agile leadership transformation.

## HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

This book is divided into two parts. The first part, *The Agile Leader—Unleash Your Leadership Potential*, guides you through the steps of becoming an agile leader, and the second part, *The Different Parts of an Agile Organization*, shows practical cases of how different parts of agile organization works.

### Part I: The Agile Leader—Unleash Your Leadership Potential

*Chapter 1, How It All Started:* I share my story about the beginning of my agile leadership journey, changing one organization to a flat structure based on self-organized teams.

*Chapter 2, Leadership Is a State of Mind:* We cover the basic reasons for agile leadership, implementing agile at the organizational level, the difference between leader and manager, and why being an agile leader is important for the success of agile at the organizational level.

*Chapter 3, Organizational Evolution:* We look into the organizational development from a traditional Organization 1.0 to a knowledge Organization 2.0 to an agile Organization 3.0.

*Chapter 4, The Agile Leader:* We talk about different models and types of leaders so you can reflect on your style and preferences.

*Chapter 5, The Agile Leadership Model:* We describe the key model for agile leadership based on seeing an organization as a system.

*Chapter 6, Competencies:* We focus on agile leader competencies. This chapter, and especially the self-evaluation at the end, shows you nice opportunities to grow as an agile leader.

*Chapter 7, Meta-skills:* We look at high-level cognitive skills and abilities through the Me, We, and World domains.

*Chapter 8, Agile Organization:* We focus on agile organizational design, structure, and culture.

## **Part II: The Different Parts of an Agile Organization**

*Chapter 9, Business Agility:* We describe how the executive team, the board of directors, and the CEO roles can change in an agile organization.

*Chapter 10, Agile HR and Finance:* We go deeper to the practical agile application in HR, covering the typical HR functions of recruiting, evaluations and performance review, career paths, and salaries and describe how agile changes the budgeting processes.

*Chapter 11, Tools and Practices:* We look into the practical tips, tools, and practices that are common in an agile organization, such as large-group facilitation, systems coaching, building trust, enhancing transparency, and forming great teams and communities.

*Chapter 12, Summary:* We put together an overview of different concepts mentioned in the book and show them all together in context.

Let me invite you to join this degustation of a variety of concepts, carefully designed by me, as chef, to inspire agile leaders. Taste different chapters as courses, feel the mixture of ideas as various flavors, let the assessments and exercises become the aroma

sensed in your nose, enjoy the real-life stories as a secret spice. Having a great meal is a unique experience, and I hope this book brings you a unique experience of becoming an agile leader.

—*Zuzana (Zuzi) Šochová*

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Special thanks to my family for their support; without them I would not have been able to finish this book.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Zuzana Šochová**, Agile Coach, Certified Scrum Trainer (CST), and Certified Agile Leadership Educator (CALE), has more than 20 years of experience in the IT industry. She led one of the very first agile international projects in the Czech Republic, focusing on distributed Scrum teams, working in different time zones between Europe and the United States. Now she is a leading expert on agile and Scrum practices in both startups and big corporations. She has experience with agile adoption in telco, finance, health care, automotive, mobile, and high-tech software companies. She's been helping companies with agile and Scrum across Europe, India, Southeast Asia, and the United States.



Zuzi has worked in various positions, starting as a software developer for life- and mission-critical systems, continuing as a ScrumMaster and director of engineering and director of HR. She has been working as an independent agile coach and trainer since 2010, specializing in leadership, organizational and team coaching, facilitations, and culture change using agile and Scrum.

Zuzi is a well-known international speaker. She is a founder of the Czech Agile Community, which organizes the annual Agile



Prague Conference. She is a CST and CTC with the Scrum Alliance. She received her MBA from Sheffield Hallam University (Great Britain) and her master's in computer science and computer graphics from the Czech Technical University. She is the author of the book *The Great ScrumMaster: #ScrumMasterWay* (Addison-Wesley, 2017) and coauthor of *Agile Methods Project Management* (Computer Press, 2014), written in the Czech language. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the Scrum Alliance (USA), was recognized as one the Top 130 Project Management Influencers in 2019, and is included in the Lean In Agile 100 (LIA 100), an initiative to identify women making significant contributions in lean and agile spaces across the globe.

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## 2

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## LEADERSHIP IS A STATE OF MIND

Many books focus on leadership, but not that many focus on *agile leadership*. Why does that matter? Because leadership has changed significantly over the past few decades. What used to be an effective leadership style in a traditional



organization might be counterproductive in agile environments. The most effective leaders, who had been great working with individuals in traditional structures, might be struggling or completely failing to work with teams and systems. But let's answer some questions before we deep-dive into the change.

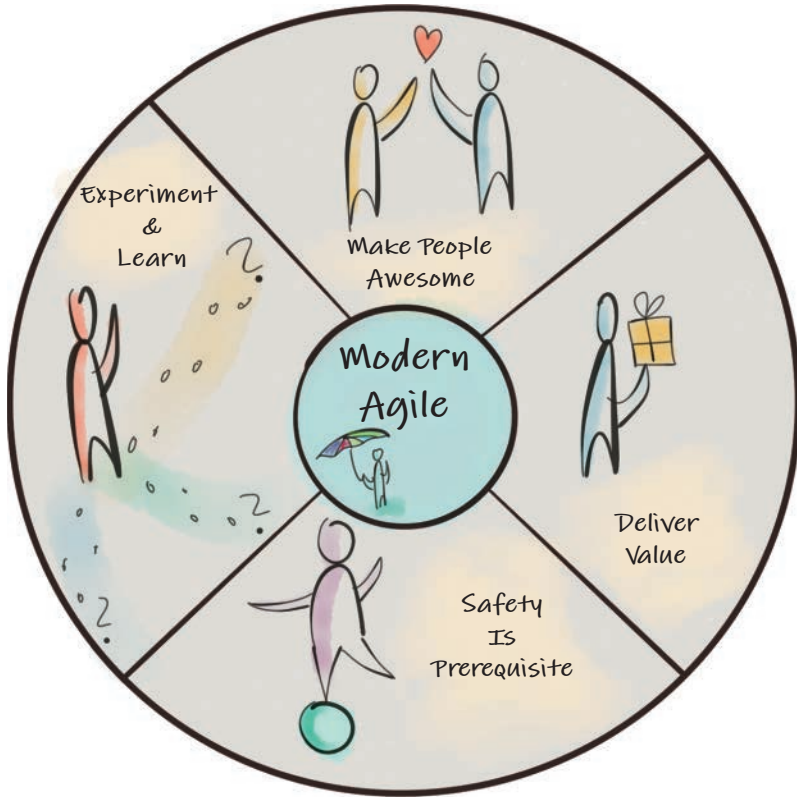
### WHAT IS AGILE?

What does *agile* mean in the first place? Let's first clear up some of the most common misconceptions and misunderstandings. Agile is

a mindset, a philosophy, a different way of working. It changes the way you think and how you approach tasks, team mates, and work in general. It's not a process, method, or framework to be implemented, which makes it very flexible. It's all about culture and changing the way you think about business. It's based on transparency, team collaboration, a higher level of the autonomy, and creating impact through frequent value delivery.

When I first heard about agile and Scrum, I didn't like them. It felt like a process overkill. We were putting too much focus on the practices and not much on the mindset and culture, which is actually a very common mistake. I still remember when, as a new ScrumMaster, I introduced agile to the team and my only argument was that we have to use it because our customer required it. I could not have cared less about being agile. *Just get the work done and move on*, I thought. However, it turned out that even “technical agile”—before we understood the mindset and instead took it as only a set of practices, processes, and rules—helped us in areas where we thought we were already great. It was a big surprise for us.

A few years later, when I had some experience in building agile organizations, I was a managing director of a small web studio, and we used agile not only to deliver our products and services and build relationships with customers but also as an overall way to design strategy and inspect and adapt our business model. Interestingly, though the delivery process improvement was outstanding—we shortened the time to market from a couple of months to just a few days—the business impact was not relevant until we fully embraced agility at all levels and started experimenting with the business model and strategic decision-making process. Agility at a single-team level can create a huge impact on team members' motivation and efficiency, but the business impact is usually limited. Agility at the organizational level has much bigger potential.



In one word, *agile* stands for “adaptiveness.” Although agile started in the software development, it’s widely applicable anywhere you can imagine. Over the years, agile has spread from IT toward other parts of the business: agile HR, agile finance, agile marketing, business agility, and agile leadership, where the Modern Agile [Kerievsky19] concept created by Joshua Kerievsky is more relevant than the original Agile Manifesto.<sup>1</sup>

Modern Agile has four principles: make people awesome, experiment and learn rapidly, deliver value continuously, and make safety a prerequisite. Making people awesome is a starting point for the mindset change. It’s all about relationships.

1. Agile was popularized by the Manifesto for Agile Software Development: <http://agilemanifesto.org>.

Let's make people successful, happy, and content and make their lives better—this applies to everyone in the organizational ecosystem, including customers, employees, and shareholders. The next two principles are about helping people to collaborate and to learn about the business and their way of working through small experiments in how to deliver the right value. All three groups are supporting one other and building on top of each other. The fourth principle is a precondition. Safety is a prerequisite for any agility. If you don't have a high level of trust, agile will not work. People will feel far from awesome, they will be afraid to experiment and to come up with innovative and creative solutions, and the value delivered will suffer. Agile needs a “safe to fail” culture where people take failure as an opportunity to learn and improve, not to blame, judge, or punish.

Good agile needs all four segments. Imagine your organization. How agile are you according to the four Modern Agile principles? On a scale 1 to 10, where do you see your organization?

	1	10	
People are taken as resources who do the job.	◆	◆	We care about making people awesome.
We follow processes and guidelines.	◆	◆	We experiment and learn rapidly.
We focus on task efficiency.	◆	◆	We focus on delivering value continuously.
Failure is only an opportunity to blame.	◆	◆	We make safety a prerequisite, and we learn from failures.

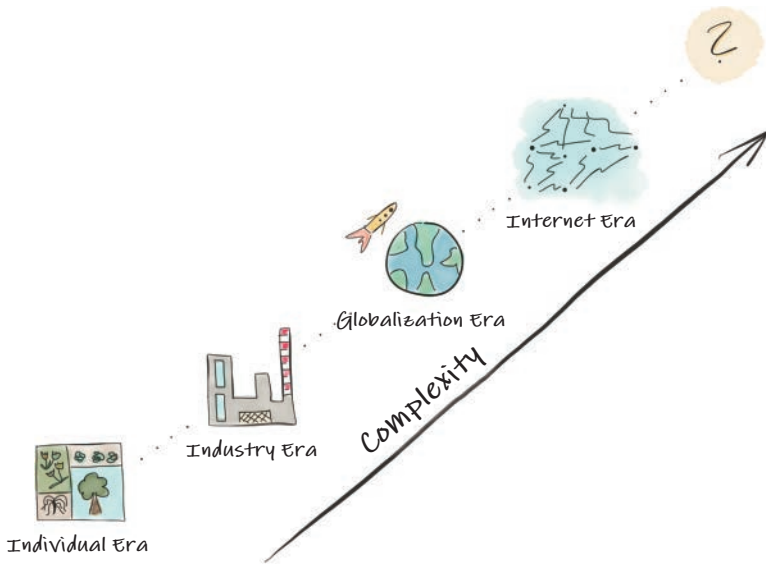
*What makes your team or organization Agile? What are the aspects you are missing?*



Your  
notes ...

### **Why Agile?**

Agile is a response to new business realities and challenges. It brings flexible business models and allows organizations to succeed in today's constantly changing world. Most of the modern management and organizational design traces its roots back to the early 1900s [Kotter12], when the problems organizations were solving were very different. If you look at how business has changed in just the past twenty years and how many originally successful organizations failed to keep up and consequently went out of business, you cannot doubt that organizational change is a requirement for success.



Let's take a step back and look at how the world has changed over the past centuries. Hundreds of years ago, in the individual era, the world was quite stable and simple. Every family had its own field. Most towns had only one restaurant, one shop, one hotel. People were less dependent on each other. The businesses were local, people worked as individuals. And then the world changed: the Industrial Revolution made impossible things possible, faster, and more complicated. People didn't like the change at first, but it didn't matter—the world was not asking their opinions, and the change happened anyway. Sabotaging machines in the factories didn't prevent it; trying to preserve the old world by using horses instead of cars didn't stop it either. The old way of doing business became too slow and was not competitive. The pressure was unstoppable, and companies either kept up to speed and survived or disappeared forever.

The Industrial Age gave birth to management as we know it now. Taylorism was born. All the management practices oriented toward task optimization, planning, and control have their roots in this period. But the world was not static and continued changing

even faster. The new era ushered in by globalization and followed by the Internet completely changed not only the business world but our lives. It doesn't matter anymore where your company office is. You don't even need one. Instant communication and accessibility have redesigned everything. Companies such as Google and Facebook created the new virtual business, which companies such as Uber and Airbnb took to the next level. None of that would be possible without the Internet. Similar to the public resistance seen at the beginning of the industrial era, we may not like this change, we may try to fight with it and block Uber and Airbnb from running their services, but the trend is not stoppable. These exact companies may disappear, but the world is not going back. Day after day it becomes faster and increasingly complex. We not only can't stop the upcoming new eras, but we can't predict them either. We don't know what's next.

I still remember when my friend asked me during my computer science studies (in the mid-1990s) if I wanted an email address. Why would I need an email? I asked him. You have to have it, he said. And now, can you imagine a life without it? It has become an integral part of our lives. It's the same with globalization. When our teachers at the MBA program were talking about globalization as a critically important trend, I didn't believe them. It would affect a few companies, yes. But would it be a major game changer? Not really. And now, we might not like it, but it is our current reality. The real power of globalization is when you combine it with the speed of information over the Internet. It allows anyone, no matter where they are located, even hidden in a small village somewhere in the mountains, to connect and completely change your business, with just one click. It's as simple as that, as fast as you can imagine. There is no extra cost for traveling and opening an office. The world is global, it's even more global than we think, and no borders or regulations can stop it.

*Day by day, the world is changing faster and faster and becomes more and more complex.*



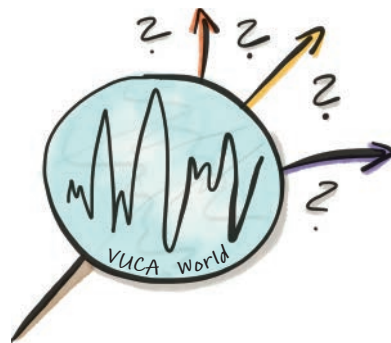
When I ask participants at my leadership classes what's next, they often say “artificial intelligence,” “machine learning,” and a return to “individualism.” But here is the point: when we talk about it, it's already here, and while we might not see it yet, it's already happening. The truth is, we don't know what's next. But whatever it is, it's going to redesign the game—it will make the impossible possible and will redraw the map of the business world and our lives. No one knows what that is yet. But so far, the trend has always been the same: significantly faster changes and more complexity. The transformation is so fast that products you used five years ago are old now, the lives we lived ten years ago were very different, and everything is changing, which makes planning almost impossible.

*It's time to change. Stop creating plans. Inspect and adapt.*

All we can do is accept that we don't know what's next. And this time, the change won't be for the next generation—it will happen within the next year or two. In this rapidly evolving world, we need to change the way we work, right now, when there is still time to do it, and we need to inspect and adapt because the traditional plans are changing so fast that it makes no sense to create them.

The world is so different now, and yet we are still trying to use the same way of working as was practiced in the early 1900s. Interesting, right?

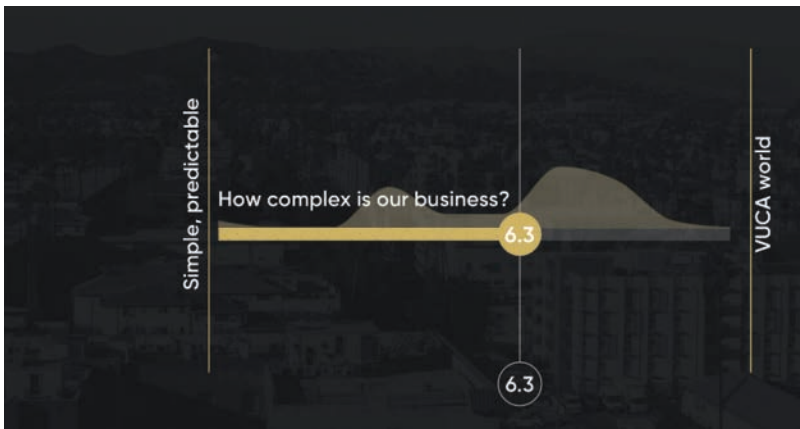
Currently, we speak about living in the VUCA world [Bennett14]—the world with high volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. The world that is unpredictable. Now is the time for a change. Agility offers the answer to the current complex problems and allows us to



be more adaptive and responsive to change. Inspection and adaptation rather than creating fixed plans seem to be a better fit for our dynamic world.

Companies change not because there is a new method or framework. They change because they have to. Agile is not your goal—it’s a necessity to survive and to succeed in today’s complex and constantly changing world.

I do an exercise with executives and senior managers who are interested in implementing agile in their organization. I ask them how complex, unpredictable, and fast-changing their business is. Their answers always vary widely, but there are hardly any organizations where the majority of the group would classify the business as predictable. They have different reasons behind the unpredictability: business model disrupters, customers expecting flexibility that is hard to achieve with classical structures, or significant changes in regulations. And most of them are saying, “If we don’t start changing now, we might not make it at all.”



*Example of the VUCA exercise*



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In our company, when we changed our way of working and started our agile journey, most of our competitors were operating on year plans and fixed budget and scope, and it usually took them a few months to build an up-to-speed team for the customer. We were very well aware of the growing influence of the VUCA challenges, which created a huge pressure for the entire information and communication technology (ICT) business, so we turned the whole business model around. We offered high flexibility as the key differentiator, allowing our customers to add a new team in less than a week, and we allowed flexibility on a Sprint<sup>3</sup> basis in our contracts. In a simple way, with every Sprint, the customers had a chance to experience what we had finished at the Sprint Review,<sup>4</sup> they gave us feedback, and based on the overall value delivered, they could choose to continue investing in the next Sprint or not. Teams were learning new skills much faster as a result of intensive collaboration, and we got an up-to-speed team in less than three Sprints.

I remember one meeting with a new client where we were discussing how we were going to work together. We asked the client if the company had ever outsourced anything. "Yes," the manager said. "So how did it go?" I asked. Long story short, it turned out they were just finalizing one project with a vendor, and literally nothing had gone well. The product was late, it didn't work as they expected, there were many misunderstandings and miscommunications that resulted in a number of bugs being claimed as change requests and therefore cost extra . . . the list went on. We listened carefully to the client's story, and when she finished, all I needed to say was, "Sorry to hear that. It must have been very stressful for you. But that's the reason why we work differently." You could see the surprise in her eyes. "What do you mean by that? Tell us more about it," she said. We got her interest, and linking our way of working to the pains her company had just experienced only increased her curiosity and willingness to give our way a try. But she was still quite hesitant to say yes. "It all sounds very interesting, but can you give us a reference, some company of our size that has worked this way with you?" she asked. We gave her the reference and also offered to start with a low-risk trial project for them to experience how it would be to work this way.

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3. Sprint is a fixed timebox iteration during which the increment of the product is created. It's part of the Scrum framework. <https://www.scrumguides.org>

4. Sprint Review is an event in Scrum that allows teams to get feedback from the customers on the value delivered during the Sprint.

It took a while to convince our clients that our way of working was better than what they were used to, but in the long term, we were successful. Interestingly, our flexibility and our radically different approach were tempting enough, so our clients always gave it a try. And once they experienced it, the partnership we built, the transparency we provided, and the working product increments we delivered in every short iteration built high levels of trust in our cooperation. Step by step, we grew our teams at the expense of the competitors, who were pushed to the margins.

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### **What Is Agile Leadership About?**

As the world becomes steadily more dynamic and complex, organizations have to change to stay competitive. They must become more flexible, team-oriented, and self-organized. And as a consequence, leaders need to adopt another approach to motivate people and lead the organizations to keep up the speed. We speak about knowledge management, creativity, the need for innovations—and in the past few years about agile leadership—which help leaders to understand the nature of the change that is happening in business right now and prepare them to react effectively to the challenges modern organizations have brought on in all their complexity. The less predictable the business is, the more organizations are failing with traditional leadership approaches, which optimize for repetitive tasks and consistency.

*Agile leadership is the leadership of tomorrow.*

Agile leadership is not about how to implement agile, Scrum, Kanban, eXtreme Programming, or lean principles. You have people in your organization who can do that. Being an agile leader is a state of mind. We build a world where  $1 + 1 = \text{more\_than\_two}$ , a world that is not divided between winners and losers but where both can win and creativity can make a difference in the equation.

### **What Is the Difference between Leader and Manager?**

First, all managers are leaders; however, leaders don't necessarily need to be managers. Being a leader is not a position. No one can be promoted to be a leader. It's only your own choice if you decide to become one.

*Everyone can become a leader, it's only your own decision.*

In an agile organization, where hierarchy becomes less important, we put more focus on leadership than on management. There is no positional authority given to a leader. Leaders gain their influence from their actions and behaviors and from their service to the people around them, and their power grows through the respect of others. Traditional managers, on the other hand, are often associated with decision making and certain positional power that must be given to them. Having said that, leadership is a state of mind. Everyone can be a leader. Some of us just might be kind of sleeping, afraid to take over the responsibility and start an initiative. However, there is nothing other than yourself preventing you from becoming a leader.

*Leadership is a state of mind, not a position.*

You are the leader, so don't wait for anyone else. Agile is not about practices, rules, or processes. Agile is about a different way of thinking, a different way of approaching things, a different mindset. And it's all in your hands. You are the leader, and the only obstacle between the leadership state of mind and the traditional hierarchical mindset are your own mindset and your own habits.

---

On my agile journey, the most difficult task was to be consistent with the change I intended to create and to be a role model of an agile leader. When I took over the department of 120 people and human resources, I had a vision to build a flexible and fast-learning environment based on the network of the self-organized teams without management. The most important job I had in front of me was to grow leaders who would leverage the power of influence over positional power. Easier to say than do.

I already had my experience with it as a Scrum Master and agile coach, but doing the same at the director level is different. You are fighting not only against your own habits but against the tempting positional power you have, which, if you use it, can temporarily make everything much more efficient and faster. If I could have just told the team what to do on day-to-day tasks, I wouldn't have had to spend hours helping people around me to understand the situation and make their own decisions. It was super time consuming. I spent all my time at work talking to people and helping them to collaborate and take over the initiatives. I spent evenings at home catching up with my work. Telling them exactly what to do was so very tempting. But shortcuts never work well. If I had given up then, they never would have made it. And I would have been stuck as the central decisionmaker and advisor forever—they would never have gotten a chance to come up with innovative and creative solutions, and we would still have been just another ordinary company unable to make a difference for our clients.

Persistence was key. In a few months, it paid off, and I was able to step back and enjoy the power of self-organization. The department was running by itself toward the mission of added-value solutions.

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### **Why Is It Important to Be an Agile Leader?**

Agile leaders are key to any agile organization. The more agile leadership exists in the organization, the more likely the overall mindset changes and the agile transformation will be successful. Having a critical mass of agile leadership is crucial for any agile environment; without it, we are only creating another process and adding terminology, and all we get is “fake agile,” not business results.

*Leaders need to change first. The organization will follow.*

Being an agile leader is more important than ever. Nearly every corporation is willing to experiment with at least one agile project. As organizational agility grows, the gap between traditional management and the agile way of working is getting bigger and creates frustration on both sides. The teams are frustrated because management is not supporting them and the organization is not helping them on their agile journey. Management is frustrated because it

doesn't know how to produce agile leaders and grow the collaborative team-oriented environment. "When we speak with leaders about this kind of system, most agree intellectually that power, decision making, and resource allocation should be distributed. But making that happen is another matter. Their great fear is that the organization will fall into chaos" [Kerievsky19]. Though that is a common concern, I would argue that agile brings harmony. The well-functioning teams deliver value to the customers regularly, effortlessly, and with joy, which in turn provides motivation and energy within the organization to create innovative solutions and address the day-to-day business challenges.

*Agile leadership helps you to face the challenges of the VUCA world.*

It's not an easy or a short process—agile is a journey. However, even after just a few iterations, you will see the results. Given the dynamics and complexity of the world today, there is no other way.



Agile leadership helps you to face the challenges of the VUCA world. "Nobody has really recommended command-and-control leadership for a long time. But no fully formed alternative has emerged, either. That's partly because high-level executives are ambivalent about changing their own behavior" [Ancona19].

This book is a great opportunity for change. It brings all the useful agile leadership concepts on a plateau for leaders to sample and decide



how they can get closer to becoming agile leaders. Start growing agile leaders today, and the organizational agility will grow along.

### **Books to Read**

- *The Age of Agile: How Smart Companies Are Transforming the Way Work Gets Done*, Stephen Denning (New York: AMACOM, 2018).
- *Managing for Happiness: Games, Tools, and Practices to Motivate Any Team*, Jurgen Appelo (New York: Wiley, 2016).
- *Scrum: The Art of Doing Twice the Work in Half the Time*, Jeff Sutherland and J. J. Sutherland (London: Random House, 2014).
- *Scrum: A Practical Guide to the Most Popular Agile Process*, Kenneth S. Rubin (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Addison-Wesley, 2017).

### **In a Nutshell**

- Agile is a response to new business realities and challenges of a VUCA world.
- Agile brings flexible business models and allows organizations to succeed in today's constantly changing world.
- Being agile is focusing on making people awesome, learning through experiments, delivering value, and making safety a prerequisite.
- Leadership is a state of mind, not a position.
- Leaders need to change first. The organization will follow.
- Agile organizations need a different style of leadership. Agile leaders need to focus on building flexible systems and growing other leaders.
- Agile leaders don't need to use power but to leverage the power of influence.

## INDEX

### Symbols

- 7 Rules for Positive, Productive Change* (Derby), 152
- 80/20 rule, 225–226

### A

- Accelerate* (Kotter), 35
- accountability, 126
- Achiever level leadership, 50–51, 139
- Acker, Marsha, 258
- acting upon situations, 80
- Adams, William A. 84
- adaptiveness, need for, 11, 28–31
- ADP Research Institute Global Study of Engagement, 107–109
- The Advantage* (Lencioni), 202, 210
- The Age of Agile* (Denning), 24
- Agile Coaching Institute, 141
- agile finance, 253–256
  - Beyond Budgeting
    - principles, 253–254
  - book recommendations for, 256
  - case study of, 254–256
- agile HR (human resources), 229–252.
  - See also* coaching
  - book recommendations for, 256
  - career paths and salaries, 243–249
  - culture shift in, 230–231
  - evaluations and performance
    - reviews, 238–239
  - focus shift in, 229–230
  - interview process, 234–237
  - large groups facilitation, 250–252
  - leadership and self-deception,
    - 249–250
  - peer feedback, 241–243
  - purpose-culture-engagement, 234
  - recruiting, 231–234
  - retrospectives, 241–243
- Agile Leader Competencies Map, 87.
  - See also* competencies
- agile leader journey, 57–72
  - autonomy, 70–72
    - assessment of, 71–72
    - characteristics of, 70–71
  - listening in, 65–69
    - “me” listening, 65
    - “we” listening, 66
    - “world” channel listening, 66
  - overview of, 57–58
  - positivity in
    - assessment of, 64–65
    - importance of, 62–65
  - purpose of
    - assessment of, 59–60

- identification of, 58–62
- agile leadership, 11, 37–38
  - agile leader journey, 57–72
    - autonomy, 70–72
    - listening, 65–69
    - overview of, 57–58
    - positivity in, 62–65
    - purpose of, 58–62
  - agile organizations, building,
    - 161–162. *See also*
    - organizational culture
  - community-centric teams,
    - 204–205
  - cross-functional teams, 204–205
  - emergent leadership, 168–170
  - evolutionary purpose, 166–168
  - inside out, 162–166
  - network structure, 200–201
  - Reinventing Organizations
    - model, 205–209
  - smart versus healthy
    - requirements, 202–204
  - team formation, 170–172
- assessment of, 46–53
- benefits of, 13–20
- book recommendations for, 73, 84
- case study of, 39–40
- competencies
  - Agile Leader Competencies
    - Map, 87
  - book recommendations for, 152
  - change implementation,
    - 141–148
  - coaching. *See* coaching
  - collaboration, 128–131
  - decision making, 122–128
  - facilitation, 132–138
  - feedback, 113–121
  - Four-Player model, 134–138
  - motivation, 100–112
  - self-evaluation of, 148–151
  - vision and purpose, 88–100
- continuous education, development,
  - and learning, 310–311
- definition of, 9–11
- emergent leadership, 168–170
- evolutionary purpose of, 166–168
- growth in leadership, 121–122
- importance of, 22–24
- as key to success in VUCA world,
  - 308–309
- leader-follower approach to, 45
- leader-leader approach to, 44–53
- leadership agility journey, 48–53
- Leadership Circle Profile, 119–121
- levels of, 48–53, 55–56
  - Achiever, 50–51, 139
  - assessment of, 52–53
  - Catalyst, 51–52, 139
  - Expert, 49–50, 139
- as means of achieving goals, 3–6
- meta-skills
  - book recommendations for, 159
  - collaboration, 155–156
  - commitment, 156
  - competencies versus, 153
  - courage, 157
  - curiosity, 154
  - diversity, 156
  - focus, 157
  - in Me domain, 154–155
  - openness, 156
  - patience, 154
  - playfulness, 154
  - respect, 154
  - trust, 156
  - truthfulness, 157
  - in We domain, 155–156
  - in World domain, 156–159
- model for
  - acting upon situation, 80
  - benefits of, 75–76
  - circular integration of, 80–84
  - embracing of situation, 78–79

- examples of, 76–77, 80–84
    - gaining of awareness, 77–78, 137–138
  - organizational evolution and environmental complexity and, 28–31
  - Organization 1.0 (traditional), 25–28
  - Organization 2.0 (knowledge), 28–31
  - Organization 3.0 (agile), 31–34
  - organizational perspective on, 304–307
  - perspectives in
    - Agile leader, 307–310
    - organizational, 304–307
  - principles of, 11–13
  - self-awareness and intent, 54–55
  - self-deception and, 249–250
  - servant leader approach to, 40–44, 247–248
  - as state of mind, 20
    - book recommendations for, 24
    - leaders versus managers, 21–22
  - tribal leadership, 183–194
    - assessment of, 191–192
    - definition of, 183–184
    - “I’m Great (and You Are Not)” tribes, 185–186
    - “Life Is Great” tribes, 189–191
    - “Life Sucks” tribes, 184
    - “My Life Sucks” tribes, 184
    - in partnerships/alliances, 193–194
    - “We Are Great” tribes, 186–188
  - visualization map for, 303–304
- Agile Lean Europe Network
- Vision, 244
- Agile Manifesto, 11
- agile organizations
- building, 161–162. *See also* organizational culture
  - community-centric teams, 204–205
  - cross-functional teams, 204–205
  - emergent leadership, 168–170
  - evolutionary purpose, 166–168
  - failures, reasons for, 162–166
  - inside out, 162–166
  - network structure, 200–201
  - Reinventing Organizations model, 205–209
  - smart versus healthy requirements, 202–204
  - team formation, 170–172
- business agility
- assessment of, 214–215
  - board of directors, 223–227
  - book recommendations for, 227
  - CEOs, 220–223
  - concept of, 213–214
  - executive-level agility, 216–219
  - radical self-organization, 215–216
- community building, 298–300
- case study of, 299–300
  - importance of, 298–299
- culture. *See* organizational culture
- “fake agile” 162
- finance, 253–256
- Beyond Budgeting principles, 253–254
  - book recommendations for, 256
  - case study of, 254–256
- growing trust in, 290–296
- healthy relationships and, 293–294
  - importance of, 290–291
  - personal maps, 292–294
  - Table Group assessment, 295–296
  - team building, 291–292
- HR (human resources), 229–252
- book recommendations for, 256

- career paths and salaries, 243–249
- coaching for growth, 239–241
- culture shift in, 230–231
- evaluations and performance reviews, 238–239
- focus shift in, 229–230
- interview process, 234–237
- large groups facilitation, 250–252
- leadership and self-deception, 249–250
- peer feedback, 241–243
- purpose-culture-engagement, 234
- recruiting, 231–234
- retrospectives, 241–243
- system coaching, 250–252
- perspectives on
  - agile leader perspective, 307–310
  - organizational perspective, 304–307
- philosophy and beliefs of, 31–34
- radical transparency in, 277–290
  - assessment of, 288–289
  - case studies of, 279–280, 283–284, 289–290
  - courage and, 288
  - as enabler of agility, 277–283
  - experiments, running, 285–286
  - inclusiveness, 286–288
- system coaching and facilitation, 139–141, 250–252, 257–274.
  - See also* ORSC (Organizational Relationship System Coaching)
- for growth, 239–241
- High Dream/Low Dream exercise, 94–95, 257
- Open Space, 77, 241–242, 251–252, 259–270
- ORSC (Organizational Relationship System Coaching). *See* ORSC (Organizational Relationship System Coaching)
- pair, 131–132
- shifting culture with, 306
- system coaching, 250–252
- value of, 258
- World Café, 242–248
- systems thinking, 274–277
  - case study of, 276–277
  - causal loop diagrams, 274–275
- teams
  - board of directors as, 224
  - community-centric, 204–205
  - cross-functional, 204–205
  - formation of, 170–172
  - goal setting for, 238–239
  - pair work, 131–132
  - siloes, 305
  - team building, 291–292
  - team interviews, 236
  - team metaphor, 98
  - teamwork, 296–298
- Agile People* (Thoren), 256
- agile philosophy
  - assessment of, 11–13
  - benefits of, 13–20
- business
  - assessment of, 213–214
  - board of directors, 223–227
  - book recommendations for, 227
  - CEOs, 220–223
  - concept of, 213–214
  - executive-level agility, 216–219
  - radical self-organization, 215–216
- definition of, 9–11
- principles of, 11–13
- technical, 10

- agile transformations, 161–162
    - community-centric teams, 204–205
    - cross-functional teams, 204–205
    - culture, 172–199
      - competing values framework, 194–199
    - fixed structure, mindset killed by, 174–176
    - importance of, 172–174
    - mindset/structure balance, 177–182
    - open structure, chaos caused by, 176–177
    - power of, 182–183
    - tribal leadership, 183–194
    - “we” culture, 183–194
  - emergent leadership, 168–170
  - evolutionary purpose, 166–168
  - failures, reasons for, 162–166
  - inside out, 162–166
  - network structure, 200–201
  - Reinventing Organizations model, 205–209
  - smart versus healthy requirements, 202–204
  - team formation, 170–172
  - Agile2010, 6
  - Airbnb, 14
  - alliances, tribal leadership mismatches in, 193–194
  - Anderson, Robert J. 57, 84
  - annual budgets, 305
  - Appelo, Jurgen, 24
  - The Art and Science of Facilitation* (Acker), 258
  - artificial intelligence, 16
  - assessments
    - agile leadership style, 46–53
    - agile organization, 11–13
    - autonomy, 71–72
    - business agility, 213–214
    - competencies, 148–151
    - decision making, 123–124
    - engagement, 107–109
    - environment, 309–310
    - evolutionary purpose, 167–168
    - executive-level agility, 218–219
    - feedback, 115–116
    - force field analysis, 147–148
    - leadership levels, 52–53, 55–56
    - mindset/structure balance, 178–180
    - motivation practices, 109–112
    - Open Space, 268–270
    - positivity, 64–65
    - purpose, 59–60
    - radical transparency, 288–289
    - Reinventing Organizations model, 207–209
    - servant leadership, 43–44
    - smart versus healthy requirements, 202–204
    - strategic goals, 163–166
    - theory X and theory Y, 104
    - tribal leadership, 191–192
    - trust, 295–296
    - vision and purpose, 90–91
    - VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) world, 17–18
  - autonomy, 70–72
    - assessment of, 71–72
    - characteristics of, 70–71
  - Avery, Christopher, 84, 126
  - awareness
    - about processes, 246
    - gaining, 77–78, 137–138
- B**
- Belhrens, Pete, 55–56
  - Benes, Ondrej, 170–172, 234
  - Beyond Budgeting principles, 253–254
  - blaming, 76
  - board of directors, 223–227
    - case study of, 226–227
    - challenges for, 223–224
    - flexibility of, 224–225

- strategic focus of, 225–226
    - as team, 224
  - Boggs, Melissa, 204–205, 223
  - Bogsnes, Bjarte, 256
  - book recommendations, 73
    - agile HR (human resources) and finance, 256
    - agile leadership as state of mind, 24
    - agile leadership model, 84
    - business agility, 227
    - on competencies, 152
    - meta-skills, 159
    - organizational evolution, 35
    - tools and practices, 301
  - Bringing Down the Vision exercise, 95–100, 257
    - Metaphor Sharing phase, 96–97
    - My Metaphor phase, 96–97
    - Sharing phase, 99–100
    - Team Metaphor phase, 98, 99
  - Brodzinski, Pawel, 215–216
  - Brown, Brené, 293
  - Buck, John, 210, 246, 262
  - budgets
    - annual, 305
    - flexibility over, 224–225
  - Buffer, 281
  - business agility
    - assessment of, 213–214
    - board of directors, 223–227
      - case study of, 226–227
      - challenges for, 223–224
      - flexibility of, 224–225
      - strategic focus of, 225–226
      - as team, 224
    - book recommendations for, 227
    - CEOs, 220–223
    - concept of, 213–214
    - executive-level agility, 216–219
    - radical self-organization, 215–216
  - Business Agility Institute, 311
  - Business Agility Report, 213–214
  - Bystand approach, Four-Player Model, 134–138
- C**
- CAL (Certified Agile Leadership), 311
  - career paths, 243–249
  - Catalyst level leadership, 51–52, 139
  - causal loop diagrams, 274–275
  - CEC (Certified Enterprise Coach), 311
  - CEOs, in agile organizations, 220–223
  - Certified Agile Leadership (CAL), 311
  - Certified Enterprise Coach (CEC), 311
  - Certified Scrum Trainer (CST), 311
  - Certified Team Coach (CTC), 311
  - change
    - change dynamic, 142–143
    - force field analysis of, 145–148
    - implementation of, 141–148
      - case study of, 144–145
      - change dynamic, 142–143
      - force field analysis of, 145–148
      - levels of change, 141–142
    - let-it-grow approach to, 307–309
    - levels of, 141–142
    - need for, 6–7, 16–20
  - CHOICE case study, 226–227
  - coaching, 139–141, 257–274.
    - See also* ORSC (Organizational Relationship System Coaching)
    - for growth, 239–241
  - High Dream/Low Dream exercise, 94–95, 257
  - Open Space, 77, 241–242, 251–252, 259–262
    - assessment of, 268–270
    - diversity of roles in, 262–264
    - guidelines for use, 265–267
    - Organizational Open Space, 262
    - preparation for, 264–265
    - principles of, 260–261
    - rules of, 259–260

- starting, 267–268
- pair, 131–132
- shifting culture with, 306
- system coaching, 250–252
- value of, 258
- World Café
  - Agile Lean Europe Network Vision, 244
  - awareness about processes, 246
  - expectations from roles, 247–248
  - overview of, 242–244
- Cohn, Mike, 6
- COIN conversation model, 117–118
- Co-Learning, 276–277, 289–290
- collaboration, 128–131, 155–156
  - importance of, 128–131
  - pair work, 131–132
  - recruiting for, 231–234
- commitment, 156, 239–240
- community building, 298–300
  - case study of, 299–300
  - importance of, 298–299
- community-centric teams, 204–205
- Company-wide Agility with Beyond Budgeting, Open Space & Sociocracy* (Eckstein and Buck), 210, 246, 262
- competencies
  - Agile Leader Competencies Map, 87
  - book recommendations for, 152
  - change implementation, 141–148
    - case study of, 144–145
    - change dynamic, 142–143
    - force field analysis of, 145–148
    - levels of change, 141–142
  - coaching. *See* coaching
  - collaboration, 128–131
    - importance of, 128–131
    - pair work, 131–132
  - decision making, 122–128
    - assessment of, 123–124
    - Power and Control Cycles, 126–128
  - feedback, 113–121
    - assessment of, 115–116
    - COIN conversation model for, 117–118
    - giving, 116–118
    - importance of, 113–115
    - learning from, 119–121
  - Four-Player model of, 134–138
  - meta-skills versus, 153
  - motivation, 100–112
    - engagement, 107–109
    - nature of, 100–102
    - super-chickens metaphor, 109–112
    - theory X and theory Y, 103–107, 163–164, 174
  - self-evaluation of, 148–151
  - vision and purpose, 88–100
    - assessment of, 90–91
    - Bringing Down the Vision exercise, 95–100
    - definition of, 88–92
    - High Dream/Low Dream exercise, 94–95
    - three levels of reality model, 92–94
- competing values framework, 194–199
  - large finance corporation example, 197–199
  - midsize IT company example, 195
  - overview of, 194–195
  - small service organization example, 196–197
- complexity, environmental
  - actions to address, 82–83
  - and organizational models, 28–31
- consent, 125
- contempt, 76
- context, feedback, 117
- continuous education, 310–311
- continuous improvement, 125
- contracts, fixed time and scope, 305
- sociocracy, 124–126



Control Cycle, 126–128  
 courage, 157, 239–240, 288  
*Creating Intelligent Teams* (Rød and Fridjhon), 159  
 creative competencies, Leadership Circle Profile, 119–121  
 creativity, 20, 261  
 criticism, 76  
 cross-functional teams, 204–205, 304–307  
 CST (Certified Scrum Trainer), 311  
 CTC (Certified Team Coach), 311  
 culture, organizational, 172–199  
   of agile HR (human resources), 230–231  
   competing values framework, 194–199  
     large finance corporation example, 197–199  
     midsize IT company example, 195  
     overview of, 194–195  
     small service organization example, 196–197  
   fixed structure, mindset killed by, 174–176  
   importance of, 172–174  
   mindset/structure balance, 177–182  
   open structure, chaos caused by, 176–177  
   power of, 182–183  
   practices for shifting, 304–307  
   tribal leadership, 183–194  
     assessment of, 191–192  
     definition of, 183–184  
     “*I’m Great (and You Are Not)*” tribes, 185–186  
     “*Life Is Great*” tribes, 189–191  
     “*Life Sucks*” tribes, 184  
     “*My Life Sucks*” tribes, 184  
   in partnerships/alliances, 193–194

“*We Are Great*” tribes, 186–188  
 “we” culture, 183–194  
 curiosity, 154  
 CVs (curricula vitae), 234

## D

Dalio, Ray, 281  
 “*Dark Scrum*” 162  
 Davey, Sandra, 226–227  
 de Smet, Jurgen, 289–290  
 decision making, 122–128  
   assessment of, 123–124  
   Power and Control Cycles, 126–128  
   sociocracy, 124–126  
 defensiveness, 76  
 Denning, Stephen, 24, 35  
 Derby, Esther, 152  
 Deutsche Telekom IT, 170–172  
 diagrams, causal loop, 274–275  
 directors, board of. *See* board of directors  
 DiSC, 295–296  
 diversity, 156  
 Dodo Pizza, 281  
 dreams. *See* vision

## E

Eckstein, Jutta, 210, 246, 262  
 education, resources for, 310–311  
 effectiveness principle, 125  
 embracing of situation, 78–79  
 emergent leadership, 168–170  
 Emotional Intelligence, 76  
 empiricism, 124–126  
 engagement, 107–109  
 Englelmann, Eric, 279–280  
 environment, assessment of, 309–310  
 environmental complexity  
   actions to address, 82–83  
   and organizational models, 28–31  
 equivalence, 126  
 evaluations, 238–239

- evolution of organizations
    - book recommendations for, 35
    - environmental complexity and, 28–31
    - evolutionary purpose, 166–168
    - Organization 1.0 (traditional), 25–28
    - Organization 2.0 (knowledge), 28–31
    - Organization 3.0 (agile), 31–34
  - Evolvagility* (Hamman), 227
  - executive-level agility, 216–219
  - exercises. *See also* assessments
    - Bringing Down the Vision, 95–100
      - Metaphor Sharing phase, 96–97
      - My Metaphor phase, 96–97
      - Sharing phase, 99–100
      - Team Metaphor phase, 98, 99
    - environment, 309–310
    - High Dream/Low Dream, 94–95
    - Modern Agile principles, 11–13
    - Table Group assessment, 295–296
  - experiments, transparency through, 285–286. *See also* assessments; exercises
  - Expert level leadership, 49–50, 139
- F**
- Facebook, 14
  - facilitation, 257–274. *See also* coaching
    - Four-Player model, 134–138
    - High Dream/Low Dream exercise, 94–95, 257
    - Open Space, 77, 241–242, 251–252, 259–262
      - assessment of, 268–270
      - diversity of roles in, 262–264
      - guidelines for use, 265–267
      - Organizational Open Space, 262
      - preparation for, 264–265
      - principles of, 260–261
      - rules of, 259–260
      - starting, 267–268
  - ORSC (Organizational Relationship System Coaching), 257, 311
  - value of, 258
  - World Café
    - Agile Lean Europe Network Vision, 244
    - awareness about processes, 246
    - expectations from roles, 247–248
    - overview of, 242–244
  - “fake agile” 162
  - Fearless Change (Manns and Rising), 152
  - feedback, 113–121
    - assessment of, 115–116
    - COIN conversation model for, 117–118
    - giving, 116–118
    - importance of, 113–115
    - learning from, 119–121
    - peer, 241–243
  - finance, in agile organizations, 253–256
    - Beyond Budgeting principles, 253–254
    - book recommendations for, 256
    - case study of, 254–256
  - Fischer-Wright, Halee, 210
  - The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (Lencionis), 291
  - fixed plans, flexibility over, 224–225
  - fixed structure, mindset killed by, 174–176
  - flat organizations, 203–204
  - flexibility, of board of directors, 224–225
  - focus, 157, 230–231, 239–240
  - Follow approach, Four-Player Model, 134–138
  - force field analysis, 145–148
  - Four Horsemen of Toxic Behavior, 76
  - Four-Player model, 134–138
  - Fridjhon, Marita, 159

**G**

Gantt charts, 200  
 Geometric, 279–280  
 giving feedback, 116–118  
 Global Study of Engagement (ADP Research Institute), 107–109  
 globalization, 14–15  
 goals  
   Agile as means of achieving, 3–6  
   need for change, 6–7  
   setting, 238–239  
 Google, 14, 169, 232  
*The Great ScrumMaster* (Šochová), 59–60  
 green organizations, 214  
 Greenleaf, Robert K. 40–41  
 groups, facilitation of, 250–252  
 GROW model, 240–241  
 growing trust, 290–296  
   healthy relationships and, 293–294  
   importance of, 290–291  
   personal maps, 292–294  
   Table Group assessment, 295–296  
   team building, 291–292  
 growth, coaching for, 239–241

**H**

Hamman, Michael, 227  
 Hanouille, Yves, 131–132  
 Harper, Kay, 121–122  
 head type leaders, 120  
 health  
   healthy relationships, importance of, 293–294  
   organizational, 202–204  
 heart type leaders, 120  
 Heffeman, Margaret, 109  
 High Dream/Low Dream exercise, 94–95, 257  
 high transparency, 125  
 holocracy, 203–204

HR (human resources), 229–252.  
   *See also* coaching  
   book recommendations for, 256  
   career paths and salaries, 243–249  
   coaching for growth, 239–241  
   culture shift in, 230–231  
   evaluations and performance reviews, 238–239  
   focus shift in, 229–230  
   interview process, 234–237  
   large groups facilitation, 250–252  
   leadership and self-deception, 249–250  
   peer feedback, 241–243  
   purpose-culture-engagement, 234  
   recruiting, 231–234  
   retrospectives, 241–243  
   system coaching, 250–252

**I**

*I Thought It Was Me* (Brown), 293  
 ICF (International Coaching Federation), 139  
 ICT (information and communication technology), 19  
 “I’m Great (and You Are Not)” tribes, 185–186  
 Impact Mapping, 201  
*Implementing Beyond Budgeting* (Bogsnes), 256  
 incentives, 100–102  
 inclusiveness, transparency through, 286–288  
 individualism, 16  
 Industrial Revolution, 14  
 information and communication technology (ICT), 19  
 innovation, need for, 20  
 inside out agile transformations, 162–166  
 intent, 54–55  
 International Coaching Federation (ICF), 139

Internet, impact of, 14  
 interview process, 234–237  
 intrinsic motivation, 100–102

## J

Jira, 200  
 Joiner, Bill, 48–52, 73  
 Jones, Rickard, 39–40  
 journey to leadership, 48–53, 57–72  
   autonomy, 70–72  
     assessment of, 71–72  
     characteristics of, 70–71  
 leadership levels  
   Achiever level, 50–51, 139  
   assessment of, 52–53, 55–56  
   Catalyst level, 51–52, 139  
   Expert level, 49–50, 139  
 listening, 65–69  
   “me” listening, 65  
   “we” listening, 66  
   “world” channel listening, 66  
 overview of, 57–58  
 positivity in  
   assessment of, 64–65  
   importance of, 62–65  
 purpose of  
   assessment of, 59–60  
   identification of, 58–62

## K

Kantor, David, 134  
 Kerievsky, Joshua, 11  
 key performance indicators (KPIs),  
   28–29, 100, 187, 231, 238, 305  
 King, John, 210  
 knowledge management, 20  
 knowledge-based organizations, 28–31  
 Kotter, John P. 35, 152  
 KPIs (key performance indicators), 28,  
   100, 187, 231, 238, 252, 305  
 Kreyman, Kseniya, 236

## L

Laloux, Frederic, 205–207, 210  
 large groups facilitation, 250–252  
 The Law of Two Feet, 259–260  
 leader-follower style, 45  
 leader-leader style, 44–53  
*The Leader's Guide to Radical  
 Management* (Denning), 35  
 leadership. *See* Agile leadership  
*Leadership Agility* (Joiner), 48–53, 73  
   Achiever level leadership,  
     50–51, 139  
   Catalyst level leadership, 51–52,  
     139  
   Expert level leadership, 49–50, 139  
 leadership agility journey, 48–53  
*Leadership and Self-Deception*  
   (Arbinger), 249  
 Leadership Circle Profile, 119–121,  
   311  
*The Leadership Gift* (Avery), 126, 311  
 leadership growth, as core element to  
   agility, 121–122  
*Leading Change* (Kotter), 152  
 Lean Startup, 201  
 learning  
   from feedback, 119–121  
   resources for, 310–311  
 Lencioni, Patrick, 41, 73, 202, 210,  
   291, 301  
 LeSS framework, 113–114, 187, 201  
 let-it-grow approach, 307–309  
 Levels Board, Menlo Innovations,  
   283–284  
 Leybourn, Evan, 299–300  
 “Life Is Great” tribes, 189–191  
 “Life Sucks” tribes, 184  
 listening, 65–69  
   case study of, 144–145  
   “me” listening, 65  
   “we” listening, 66  
   “world” channel listening, 66

Logan, Dave, 183–194, 210  
 Lunar Logic case study, 215–216

## M

machine learning, 16  
 managers. *See also* leadership  
   history of, 13–15  
   leaders versus, 21–22  
   levels of, 48–53  
     Achiever, 50–51, 139  
     assessment of, 52–53, 55–56  
     Catalyst, 51–52, 139  
     Expert, 49–50, 139  
   in Organization 2.0 organizations,  
     28–31  
*Managing for Happiness* (Appelo), 24  
 Mams, Mary Lynn, 152  
 Marquet, David, 44–45, 73  
*Mastering Leadership* (Anderson and  
 Adams), 84  
 Mayflower case study, 246  
 MBTI, 295–296  
 McGregor, Douglas, 103–105  
 Me domain meta-skills, 154–155  
 “me” listening, 65  
 Menlo Innovations, 282–284  
 Mentimeter online tool, 280  
 metaphor, 89, 98  
 Metaphor Sharing phase, Bringing  
   Down the Vision exercise,  
   96–97  
 meta-skills  
   book recommendations for, 159  
   collaboration, 155–156  
   commitment, 156  
   competencies versus, 153  
   courage, 157  
   curiosity, 154  
   diversity, 156  
   focus, 157  
   in Me domain, 154–155  
   openness, 156

  patience, 154  
   playfulness, 154  
   respect, 154  
   trust, 156  
   truthfulness, 157  
   in We domain, 155–159  
 Mezick, Daniel, 301  
 mindset/structure balance, 177–182  
 models  
   agile leadership  
     acting upon situation, 80  
     benefits of, 75–76  
     book recommendations for, 84  
     circular integration of, 80–84  
     embracing of situation, 78–79  
     examples of, 76–77, 80–84  
     gaining of awareness, 77–78,  
       137–138  
   GROW, 240–241  
   organizational  
     environmental complexity and,  
       28–31  
     Organization 1.0 (traditional),  
       25–28  
     Organization 2.0 (knowledge),  
       28–31  
     Organization 3.0 (agile), 31–34  
     three levels of reality model, 92–94  
 Modern Agile, 11–13  
 monetary rewards, 101  
 motivation, 100–112  
   engagement, 107–109  
   nature of, 100–102  
   super-chickens metaphor, 109–112  
   theory X and theory Y, 103–107,  
     163–164, 174  
*The Motive* (Lencioni), 73  
 Move approach, Four-Player Model,  
   134–138  
 Muir, William, 109  
 “My Life Sucks” tribes, 184

My Metaphor phase, Bringing Down  
the Vision exercise, 96–97

## N

network structure, 200–201

NewBoCo, 279–280

Nexus, 187

## O

objectives and key results (OKRs), 187,  
226–227, 231

observation, in feedback, 117

Open Space, 77, 241–242, 251–252,  
259–262

assessment of, 268–270

diversity of roles in, 262–264

guidelines for use, 265–267

Organizational Open Space, 262

preparation for, 264–265

principles of, 260–261

rules of, 259–260

starting, 267–268

open structure, chaos caused by,  
176–177

openness, 156, 239–240

*The OpenSpace Agility Handbook*  
(Mezick et al.), 301

operations, strategy versus, 225–226

Oppose approach, Four-Player Model,  
134–138

Organization 1.0 (traditional) structure,  
25–28

Organization 2.0 (knowledge)  
structure, 28–31

Organization 3.0 (agile) structure,  
31–34

organizational culture, 172–199  
competing values framework,  
194–199

large finance corporation  
example, 197–199

midsize IT company example,  
195

overview of, 194–195

small service organization  
example, 196–197

fixed structure, mindset killed by,  
174–176

importance of, 172–174

mindset/structure balance, 177–182

open structure, chaos caused by,  
176–177

power of, 182–183

practices for shifting, 304–307

tribal leadership, 183–194

assessment of, 191–192

definition of, 183–184

“I’m Great (and You Are Not)”  
tribes, 185–186

“Life Is Great” tribes, 189–191

“Life Sucks” tribes, 184

“My Life Sucks” tribes, 184

in partnerships/alliances,  
193–194

“We Are Great” tribes, 186–188

“we” culture, 183–194

organizational evolution

book recommendations for, 35  
environmental complexity and,  
28–31

Organization 1.0 (traditional),  
25–28

Organization 2.0 (knowledge),  
28–31

Organization 3.0 (agile), 31–34

organizational perspective, 304–307

organizational Product Owner,  
220–223

Organizational Relationship System  
Coaching. *See* ORSC  
(Organizational Relationship  
System Coaching)

organizational ScrumMasters, 220–223

*Organize for Complexity* (Pflaeging), 210

ORSC (Organizational Relationship System Coaching), 75, 141, 311. *See also* coaching

Bringing Down the Vision exercise, 95–100

    Metaphor Sharing phase, 96–97

    My Metaphor phase, 96–97

    Sharing phase, 99–100

    Team Metaphor phase, 98, 99

tools from, 251–252, 257, 311

*Outcomes Over Output* (Seiden), 227

Overall Retrospective, 113–114

## P

pair work, 131–132

partnerships, tribal leadership

    mismatches in, 193–194

paths, career, 243–249

patience, 154

Pearce-McCall, Debra, 182–183

peer feedback, 241–243

performance reviews, 238–239, 305

personal development, resources for, 310–311

personal maps, 292–294

Pflaeging, Niels, 105, 210

pharaoh syndrome, 6

Pink, Daniel, 143

playfulness, 154

Pontes, Deborah, 301

POs (product owners)

    case study of, 83–84

    organizational, 220–223

positional power, 305

positivity

    assessment of, 64–65

    importance of, 62–65

Power Cycle, 126–128

principles, agile, 11–13

processes, awareness about, 246

product owners. *See* POs (product owners)

profiles, Leadership Circle Profile, 119–121

Prosilient Minds, 182–183

purpose, 88–100

    assessment of, 90–91

    Bringing Down the Vision exercise, 95–100

    Metaphor Sharing phase, 96–97

    My Metaphor phase, 96–97

    Sharing phase, 99–100

    Team Metaphor phase, 98, 99

definition of, 88–92

High Dream/Low Dream exercise, 94–95

purpose-culture-engagement, 234

three levels of reality model, 92–94

## Q–R

radical self-organization, 215–216

radical transparency, 277–290

    assessment of, 288–289

    case studies of, 279–280, 283–284, 289–290

    courage and, 288

    as enabler of agility, 277–283

    experiments, running, 285–286

    inclusiveness, 286–288

reactive tendencies, in Leadership Circle Profile, 119–121

reality, three levels of, 92–94

recommended reading, 73

    agile leadership as state of mind, 24

    agile leadership model, 84

    business agility, 227

    competencies, 152

    meta-skills, 159

    organizational evolution, 35

    tools and practices, 301

recruiting, 231–234

- Reinventing Organizations* (Laloux), 205–207, 210, 305
- Reinventing Organizations model, 205–209. *See also* agile transformations
- relationship orientation, in Leadership Circle Profile, 119–121
- Relationship Systems Intelligence, 76
- respect, 154, 239–240
- The Responsibility Process* (Avery), 84
- retrospectives, 113–114, 241–243
- reviews, performance, 238–239
- Rising, Linda, 144–145, 152
- Rød, Anne, 159
- role-splitting, 129
- S**
- Sahota, Michael K. 293–294
- salaries, 101, 243–249
- Sartwell, Josh, 283–284
- Schein, Edgar, 172
- Scholand, Matt, 283–284
- Scrum, 187
  - case study of, 83–84
  - “Dark Scrum” 162
  - executive-level, 218
  - Retrospectives, 113–114
  - values of, 239–240
- Scrum* (Rubin), 24
- Scrum* (Sutherland and Sutherland), 24
- Scrum Alliance, 59, 204–205, 223, 311
- Scrum Masters, 3–6
  - case study of, 83–84
  - organizational, 220–223
  - #ScrumMasterWay concept, 251–252
  - servant leadership of, 40–44
- #ScrumMasterWay concept, 251–252
- Seiden, Joshua, 227
- Seiter, Courtney, 281
- self-awareness, 54–55
- self-deception, leadership and, 249–250
- self-evaluations. *See* assessments
- self-organization, radical, 215–216
- “The Servant as Leader” (Greenleaf), 40–41
- servant leadership, 40–44, 247–248
  - assessment of, 43–44
  - characteristics of, 40–42
- Sharing phase, Bringing Down the Vision exercise, 99–100
- Sheffield, Mark, 301
- Shinsato, Harold, 301
- siloeed component teams, 305
- skills
  - meta-skills
    - book recommendations for, 159
    - collaboration, 155–156
    - commitment, 156
    - competencies versus, 153
    - courage, 157
    - curiosity, 154
    - diversity, 156
    - focus, 157
    - in Me domain, 154–155
    - openness, 156
    - patience, 154
    - playfulness, 154
    - respect, 154
    - trust, 156
    - truthfulness, 157
    - in We domain, 155–156
    - in World domain, 156–159
  - T-shaped, 239–240
- Slack, 281
- smart versus healthy requirements, 202–204
- Smet, Jurgen de, 276–277
- Social Intelligence, 76
- sociocracy, 124–126
- Spotify, 203–204
- Sprint Reviews, 19
- startup mindset, 245



- state of mind, agile leadership as, 20
    - book recommendations for, 24
    - leaders versus managers, 21–22
  - stonewalling, 76
  - Story Mapping, 201
  - strategic goals
    - Agile as means of achieving, 3–6
    - assessment of, 163–166
    - board of directors' focus on, 225–226
    - need for change, 6–7
  - structure
    - fixed, mindset killed by, 174–176
    - mindset/structure balance, 177–182
    - open, chaos caused by, 176–177
  - Sublett, Howard, 223
  - super-chickens metaphor, 109–112
  - Sutherland, J. J. 24
  - Sutherland, Jeff, 24
  - system coaching and facilitation, 139–141, 250–252, 257–274. *See also* ORSC (Organizational Relationship System Coaching)
    - for growth, 239–241
    - High Dream/Low Dream exercise, 94–95, 257
    - Open Space, 77, 241–242, 251–252, 259–262
      - assessment of, 268–270
      - diversity of roles in, 262–264
      - guidelines for use, 265–267
      - Organizational Open Space, 262
      - preparation for, 264–265
      - principles of, 260–261
      - rules of, 259–260
      - starting, 267–268
    - pair, 131–132
    - shifting culture with, 306
    - system coaching, 250–252
    - value of, 258
    - World Café
      - Agile Lean Europe Network Vision, 244
      - awareness about processes, 246
      - expectations from roles, 247–248
      - overview of, 242–244
  - systems thinking, 274–277
    - case study of, 276–277
    - causal loop diagrams, 274–275
- T**
- Table Group assessment, 295–296, 311
  - task orientation, in Leadership Circle Profile, 119–121
  - Taylorism, 14
  - teal organizations, 203–204, 214
  - Team Metaphor phase, Bringing Down the Vision exercise, 98, 99
  - teams
    - board of directors as, 224
    - community-centric, 204–205
    - cross-functional, 204–205
    - formation of, 170–172
    - goal setting for, 238–239
    - pair work, 131–132
    - siloes, 305
    - team building, 291–292
    - team interviews, 236
    - team metaphor, 98
    - teamwork, 296–298
  - Teamwork Dysfunctions model, 295–296
  - technical agile, 10
  - TEDWomen, 109
  - theory X and theory Y, 103–107, 163–164, 174
  - thinking, systems, 274–277
    - case study of, 276–277
    - causal loop diagrams, 274–275
  - Thoren, Pia-Maria, 256
  - three levels of reality model, 92–94
  - T-Mobile case study, 234
  - tools

- book recommendations for, 301
  - community building, 298–300
    - case study of, 299–300
    - importance of, 298–299
  - radical transparency, 277–290
    - assessment of, 288–289
    - case studies of, 279–280, 283–284, 289–290
    - courage and, 288
    - as enabler of agility, 277–283
    - experiments, running, 285–286
    - inclusiveness, 286–288
  - system coaching and facilitation, 257–274
  - systems thinking, 274–277
    - case study of, 276–277
    - causal loop diagrams, 274–275
  - teamwork, 296–298
  - trust, growing, 290–296
    - healthy relationships and, 293–294
    - importance of, 290–291
    - personal maps, 292–294
    - Table Group assessment, 295–296
    - team building, 291–292
  - toxic behavior, four horsemen of, 76
  - traditional pyramid organizations, 25–28
  - Trail Ridge case study, 54–56
  - transparency, 277–290
    - assessment of, 288–289
    - case studies of, 279–280, 283–284, 289–290
    - courage and, 288
    - as enabler of agility, 277–283
    - experiments, running, 285–286
    - inclusiveness, 286–288
  - tribal leadership, 183–194
    - assessment of, 191–192
    - definition of, 183–184
    - “I’m Great (and You Are Not)” tribes, 185–186
    - “Life Is Great” tribes, 189–191
    - “Life Sucks” tribes, 184
    - “My Life Sucks” tribes, 184
    - in partnerships/alliances, 193–194
    - “We Are Great” tribes, 186–188
  - Tribal Leadership* (Logan, King, and Fischer-Wright ), 183–194, 210
  - trust, growing, 156, 290–296
    - healthy relationships and, 293–294
    - importance of, 290–291
    - personal maps, 292–294
    - Table Group assessment, 295–296
    - team building, 291–292
  - truthfulness, 157
  - T-shaped skills, 239–240
  - Turn the Ship Around!* (Marquet), 44–45, 73
  - tw telecom case study, 254–256
- U–V**
- Uber, 14
  - UK retail bank case study, 39–40
  - values, competing values framework, 194–199
    - large finance corporation example, 197–199
    - midsize IT company example, 195
    - overview of, 194–195
    - small service organization example, 196–197
  - Valve Corporation, 262
  - vision, 88–100
    - assessment of, 90–91
    - Bringing Down the Vision exercise, 95–100
      - Actions phase, 99
      - Metaphor Sharing phase, 96–97
      - My Metaphor phase, 96–97
      - Sharing phase, 99–100

- Team Metaphor phase, 98
- definition of, 88–92
- High Dream/Low Dream exercise, 94–95
- three levels of reality model, 92–94
- visualization map, 303–304
- VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) world
  - Agile leadership as key to success in, 308–309
  - assessment of, 17–18
  - leadership challenges in, 38
  - need for change in, 16–20
  - organizational evolution for
    - environmental complexity and, 25–28
    - Organization 1.0 (traditional), 25–28
    - Organization 2.0 (knowledge), 28–31
    - Organization 3.0 (agile), 31–34
  - pressures from, 262

## W–X–Y–Z

- “We Are Great” tribes, 186–188
- “we” culture, 183–194
- We domain meta-skills, 155–156
- “we” listening, 66
- When* (Pink), 143
- White, Nevine, 254–256
- will type leaders, 120
- W.L. Gore, 262
- World Café, 77, 241–242, 251–252
  - Agile Lean Europe Network Vision, 244
  - awareness about processes, 246
  - expectations from roles, 247–248
  - overview of, 242–244
- “world” channel listening, 66
- World domain meta-skills, 156–159
- Zappos, 234, 282