Agile by Choice: What you can expect from the book

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What to expect in the book and how it can improve your

leadership and professional performance.

Author of *Agile By Choice*, Lukas Michel, explains what to expect in his book and how it can improve your leadership and professional performance.

In this book, I will argue that agile starts with the leader, who personally makes the shift to people-centricity. If leaders want their organizations to become more agile, then they first need to transform themselves before they interfere to change their organizations. The shift from traditional command-and-control to enabling people is a transformation that requires experience which most leaders don't have. Just talking about agile is not the same as practising it. Without the initial personal shift and focus on people, the larger organizational shift is doomed to fail. A such, this book guides your choice of agile, supports you to personally make the shift, and offers ideas and tools to help you achieve mastery in putting agile to work in your organization. A people-centric attitude must precede your choice of agile.

Fine nuances in your language reveal where you are: "empowering people," "set targets," "we need to educate leaders," "middle managers don't get it," "people need strong leadership." If you hear yourself using these or similar phrases, then it's time to deeply dig into this book and make agile your choice.

Here is your first break. If you are not already convinced to

read *Agile by Choice*, then I suggest you use Tool #1, The Virus Check. Viruses are interference that willingly or unwillingly creeps into your organization to limit the potential of your people.

The people-centric shift follows the principles of mentoring with awareness, insights and learning as the steps. As such, *Agile by Choice* functions as a workbook that raises awareness of the possibility of turning opinions into meaning, provides the insights required to separate symptoms from root causes, and guides learning so as to translate ideas into action for you to make your personal shift. The workbook will be your companion for your personal journey with breaks on the way to agile.

Throughout this book, agile breaks serve as nudges that will challenge your thinking, offer additional insights and facilitate your decisions during your agile journey.

Agile by Choice expands on leadership, going beyond my three previous books, which offer different pers pectives on agile and people-centric management along the following dimensions:

- *The Performance Triangle* (Michel, 2013) is a compendium on strategic agility with 9 business cases, 50 elements and 300 practices.
- *Management Design* (Michel, 2021; 3rd edition) presents visual thinking and the process of designing agile management at scale with 16 business cases.
- *People-Centric Management* (Michel, 2020) contains nine business cases and explores the transformation process required to establish people-centric management and agile organizations.

Agile by Choice adds an individual dimension to agile, people-centric and dynamic capabilities. It starts with the individual executive who wants their management and organization to transform to agile. *The Performance Triangle*, *Management*

Design, *People-Centric Management* and *Agile by Choice* combine to form (respectively) a model, the thinking, the process and the action plan, together providing a holistic perspective on agile, people-centricity and dynamism that starts at the top:

- If you were born agile and lead that way, I suggest that you use *Management Design* to scale agile throughout your organization.
- If you are in charge of an organization that needs to become agile, then I suggest you read *The Performance Triangle* to dig into the elements that make up a truly agile organization. Use the diagnostic tool in that book to raise awareness.
- If you are about to start your agile transformation, *People-Centric Management* will help you to expedite the process with your management team. Use the diagnostic tool in that book to gain insights and raise awareness of people-centricity.
- If you are digital native and want to dig deeper into the agile elements, then I suggest that you use the free Diagnostic tool (see management-insights.ch) to find out what people-centric, agile and dynamic capabilities can add to your bottom line.
- If you wish to work on yourself to become agile before you begin to make changes with your management team and organization, then continue to read *Agile by Choice*. Use the Agile Diagnostic (Tool #4) to guide and expedite your learning.

Agile by Choice helps you to establish the conditions for talents to use their full potential, perform at their peak and meet higher challenges. That's what people-centricity is all about. Your personal challenges (Chapter 1) set the context; the five leadership dimensions of people, organization, management, work and operations (introduced in Chapter

2) define the work environment; the inner game (covered in Chapter 3) offers the techniques; and resources (Chapter 4) provide the means for talents like you to perform at the peak.

The inner game constitutes the art of relaxing distorting thoughts. It is a technique for coping with higher challenges. Doubts, stress, fear, biased focus, and limiting concepts and assumptions distort our thoughts, decisions, behaviours and actions. This keeps us from operating at our full potential. The inner game, a concept initially developed by Timothy Gallwey (2000), the author of the renowned *Inner Game* books on tennis, golf and work, provides essential insights into what is required for people to learn faster and perform at their peak.

A FULL OVERVIEW OF THIS BOOK IS AS FOLLOWS:

- Chapter 1 is Nudge #1 on your agile journey. It helps you to examine your business challenges and establish a solid foundation from which to start the agile journey. It offers the *why* for agile.
- Chapter 2 raises your awareness of agile around five leadership dimensions: people, organization, management, work and operations. It offers the Agile Diagnostic tool with models to point to the elements that require your attention. As such, Nudge #2 offers the *what* of agile.
- Chapter 3 explores the power of the inner game and flow with awareness, choice and trust as the key elements of people-centric and agile work. Nudges #3 to #6 are about the *how* of agile and about enabling you to reach clarity of flow.
- Chapter 4 examines your resources: how you can use energy, focus of attention, time and space to ensure sufficient resources are available for you to make the people-centric shift. Nudges #7 to #11 mobilize your resources to make agile work.
- Chapter 5 is about decision-making – the opportunity to establish leadership everywhere. Nudge #12 takes you

through what executives do and the need for agile systems.

- Chapter 6 explains the shift to people-centricity and how this unlocks your talents and those of your people. Nudge #13 is about how your mind-shift will make you the leader.
- Chapter 7 suggests that you engage your team in the agile experience. Nudge #14 offers awareness and insights around your experiential learning.

Agile by Choice comes with an appendix of 21 tools. Many of them I have used over the past 35 years with executives all over the world. I am thankful to my many expert colleagues, from whom I have borrowed some of the templates, ideas and practices. They are now yours.

Here are the beginnings of seven stories (based on real-life companies) that illustrate the journey of seven executives who have made the choice of agile.

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE: ENTREPRENEURSHIP

He is the new CEO of a large insurance company with 35,000 employees across the world. Bureaucracy has been creeping into the culture, driven by many staff experts with the best intentions to make the company better, and this bureaucracy is keeping highly trained executives from caring about the needs of demanding clients. The idea is to bring back entrepreneurship in a company that was once known as an innovative industry leader. The task is to gather all support staff around a shared agile agenda.

THE MANAGER: INNOVATION

He is a new business executive in charge of a division of a large pharmaceutical company with 2,500 employees in locations across the US, Europe and Japan. Agile is his choice but his management team is stuck in tradition. The question is how to get there faster, reinstall innovation and gain traction with a strong product pipeline. The task is to initiate agile with the management team.

THE ARCHITECT: AGILE MANAGEMENT

He is the chief of staff of a Swiss-based global think-tank with the challenge of matching the current business model with a management model that retains a high degree of flexibility in its operation. With a dominant annual event, the challenge is to maintain a level of staff capable of shaping the agenda and delivering a superior event. The task is to engage the executive team in the conversation, encouraging its members to serve as architects of agility.

THE TRANSLATOR: CEO OFFICE

She is the CEO office manager of a South African food company with 250 employees. Her challenge is to introduce agile in an environment that requires a high level of quality and total control throughout the entire value chain. Agile is on the other scale with an executive team and managers that do not know any different. The task is to translate between agile aspirations and management reality.

THE INTEGRATOR: CULTURE

He is the manager of a mid-sized US city with the vision to establish the best city administration in the country. With nearly 2,500 employees and 150 managers and supervisors in 12 departments that range from IT to the airport to police and gardening, he has a difficult integration task with a culture that serves as the umbrella. The task is to get all managers involved in a process that will make the city more agile and service friendly.

THE CHAIR: GROWTH

He is the investor, founder and chair of a sugar manufacturing start-up in the Middle East. His challenge is to scale agile management in line with business growth. With new managers and staff frequently joining the company to enable it to cope with this growth, agile is needed to manage the company’s development. The task is to create a scale model that can support the growth.

THE EXECUTIVE COACH: ENGAGEMENT

She is one of those executive coach who can handle big leaders with big transformation challenges. Her challenge is that most of

her clients need agile, but few recognize the need and even fewer know how to go about it. Dominant leaders want change in their organizations. The task is to get the process started with these leaders to prevent other fruitless change projects in their organizations.

Agile by Choice guides your personal shift with 14 nudges. They are gentle pushes for you to take a break, think, learn and initiate your shift:

1. Three tools to map your *expectations*, strategy and operating mode
2. Five dimensions to explore the agile *choices* regarding organization and management
3. Four principles of the *inner game* to help you reach flow more often
4. The light that raises *awareness* to help you reach clarity and better cope with complexity
5. The strategy of *choice* and self-responsibility to move despite ambiguity
6. The condition of *trust*, which mobilizes resources in times of uncertainty
7. The formula for your *return on management*
8. The power of the *energy* that drives engagement but requires refuelling
9. The technique to *focus attention* and learn to perform in a volatile environment
10. The rhythm to use *time* efficiently
11. The protocol that creates your *space* and accountability
12. The skills to make *decision-making* your advantage in the knowledge era
13. The mindset that will unlock the *talent* and distribute leadership everywhere
14. The cycle of *experiential learning* to establish new experience with leadership everywhere through agile capabilities, a client focus, people-centric management and

value for society

Agile by Choice offers experiential support with tools and exercises to enable leaders to personally gain experience with agile, learn fast to experience its benefits, and use the experience they have gained to personally make the shift to the principles of the inner game and use resources and better decision-making to reach agile mastery in today's world.

ABOUT THE BOOK

About Management Insights

Founded by Lukas Michel, Management Insights draws on more than 25 years of research and practice to help people understand how their organizations work. The Organization Twin brings organizational patterns into view for reflection, dialogue, and informed choice.

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