

AGILE AT SCALE. IT WORKS.

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Being agile at a small scale is easy – in a team of 5 – 10 people, adapting agile approaches does not take a lot of time and is straightforward.



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Being agile at a bigger Enterprise is starting to be challenging: there are multiple teams, multiple products etc. and some care needs to be taken if the Enterprise as a whole is to be „agile“.



Now consider agile transformation at a large organization such as a bank:

- 8.000 employees, of that 400 in IT
- IT is seen only as a „support“ as the core of business lies elsewhere
- on IT level, no „products“ exist, only systems which are integrated in spaghetti style due to 10 – 15 years of development
- large organization is also a very political place
- there are no clear and personified responsibilities (= you have many people contributing to any decision made, usually from different departments)

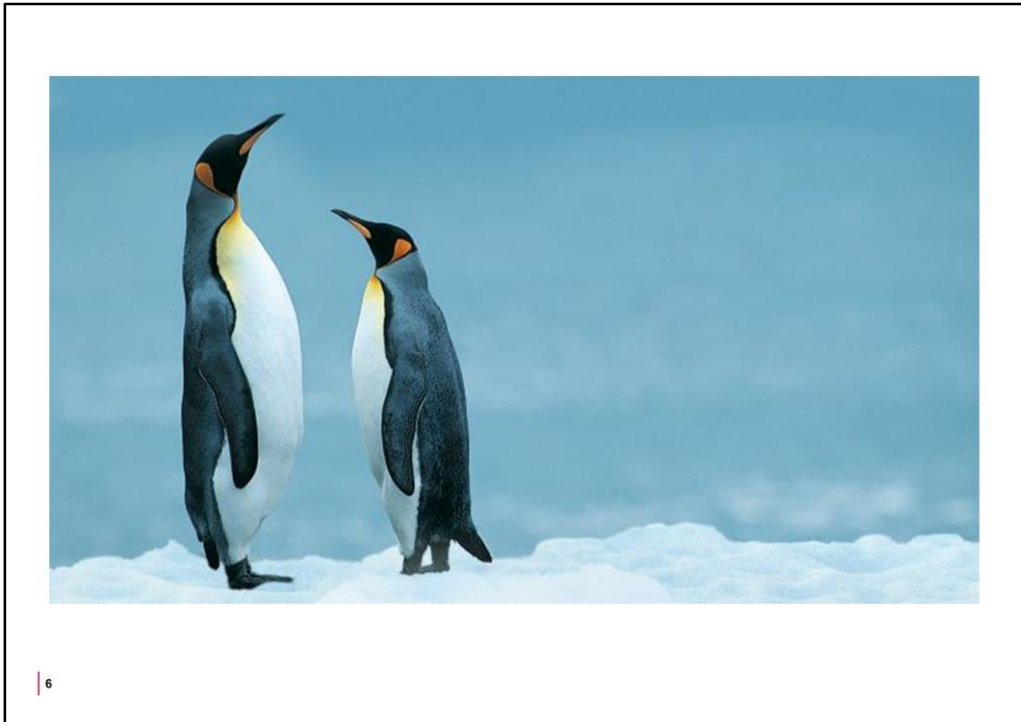


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So, how did we manage to be agile? And how do we know we are (or we are getting there)?

We started in 2011 by (as I call it) an accident. A huge project with firm deadline came. We knew that should we use our traditional (waterfall based) approach, we would have (maybe) detailed analysis by the deadline. So, we started searching for alternatives. And luckily, we got an invitation to one scrum presentation. And that was it.

The beginnings were of course disastrous – we were unprepared, we had no time to define any processes, any guidelines. So we just started. And of course we missed the deadline. But we delivered with only a small delay. After that, we tried to really transform ourselves to agile ways of delivering software.



We tried bottom-up approach. It work to an extent.

- we were able to make the development proces itself able (meaning we are able to respond to change, we can change scope fo a release mid-way through development and so on)
- we have introduced agile practices such as demo meetings and retrospectives within the team
- we started educating out to-be product owners and divided our application into „products“

But on the larger scale, bottom-up approach failed due to:

- the activity was seen as an IT aktivitiy
- lack of management support meant that other departments did not fully cooperate (both IT and BU side)
- Some „goodi intentions“ failed due to politics at higher places

However the bottom-up approach gave us something we could not have gained any other way:

- Experience

- real small-scale results
- sense of change amongst managers
- political knowledge



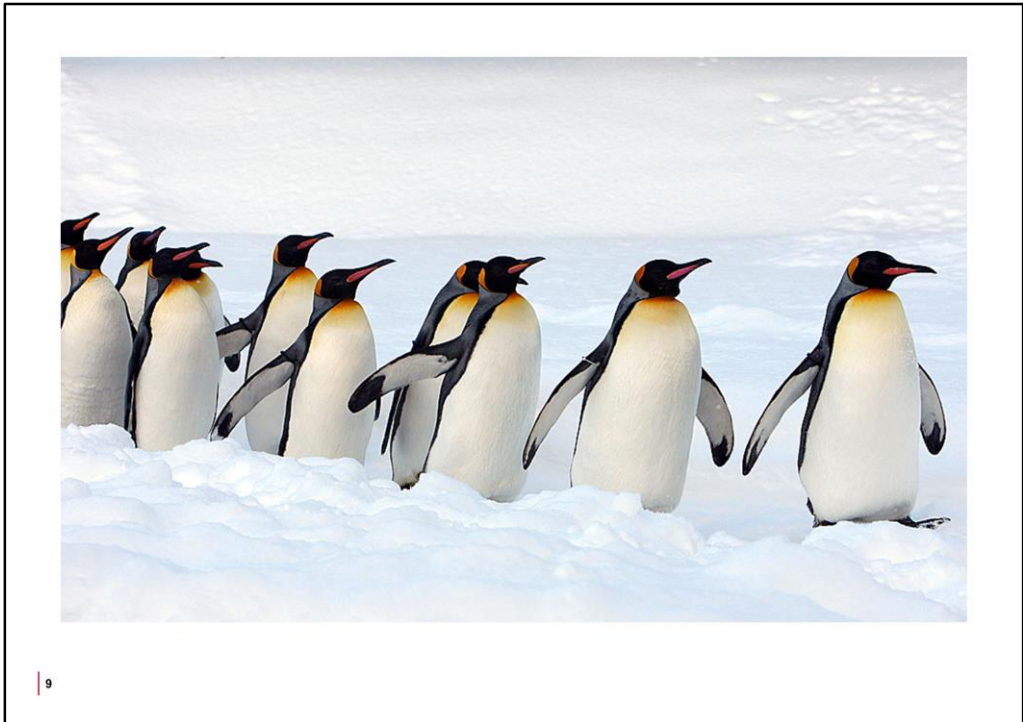
Due to the attention we have gained via our bottom-up approach and our perseverance, when the time for change within the management came, we were the ones who participated and to whom the managers listened. Through this we are now able to:

- move the agility to next levels by greater involvement of business (true product owners)
- simplify our integration-related problems due to slow but constant adoption of agile principles within other IT units
- look at customer requirements instead of intra-company requirements and obstacles



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And lastly. How do we know we are agile? Our one key driver towards agility is: time to market. And we do measurements and we know that by applying agile principles, we have been able to realize project that would take years in months. We are able to finish feasibilities previously estimated to take 6 months in 4 weeks. And we are constantly improving. Statistically speaking, during last 12 months, we have shortened average delivery of a project from 250 days to 155 days.



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So what do we have now:

- functional „scrum of scrums“ consisting of 6 teams
- product owners who are integral parts of teams and have the responsibility and guts to make decisions (there are occasional problems with this)
- ability to change priorities, react to change requests and shift release scope based on product owners' needs



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And what do we aim for:

- making other teams agile to free us from integration-related issues
- better product segmentation of our large application to allow our teams and product owners to specialize



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So, to conclude, my belief is that: agile approach works even in large organizations whose primary business is not IT itself.

If you are planning to transition your large organization, keep in mind that:

- the transition takes a lot of time (we have started in 2011 and are still not at the end)
- bottom-up approach cannot guarantee success outside of „your“ department
- you need to have some real-life examples how agile may benefit the management (better still find out how agile may help the organization move closer to its vision or fulfill its strategical goals)
- sometimes you are going to be grossly disappointed when your good ideas / intentions are blocked by the management – here you have to find real reasons why that happened and try to solve these



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Hopefully, I have not been too boring and have said at least something of interest. I will be of course more than happy to discuss anything in more detail together with my colleagues Marcela and Jirka who are in the room now and who are my accomplices in our agile transformation.