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**AGILITY
+ AGILE PRACTICES
= THE WINNING
COMBINATION**

SURVIVAL SKILLS EDITION



Agile companies aren't just fast. They're smart, lean, and resilient.

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to Part 2 in this series of articles on the critical role of business agility in our fast-paced and unpredictable world. If you missed Part 1, you can [access it here](#).

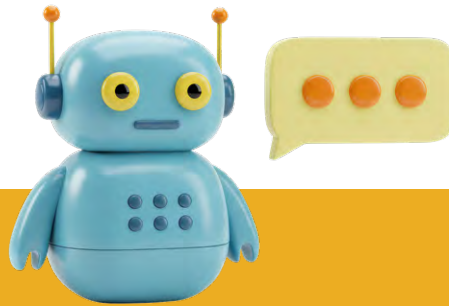
I've spent nearly three decades as a business and marketing consultant, and today, this is my rallying cry: Companies must become more Agile (with a capital A) to survive, compete, and grow.

- Customer demands are rapidly evolving.
- Traditional product development cycles are getting shorter.
- Companies must introduce new products and services with greater speed to stay relevant.
- Market disruption is constant, with new business models, startups, and digital platforms changing how business is conducted.
- Companies need real-time data, analytics, and Agile workflows to make faster, smarter decisions.
- Talent expectations are changing. Professionals want flexibility, purpose, and empowerment.

As you'll see in the following pages, agility isn't just a buzzword. It's about being able to anticipate change, adapt with intelligence (based on facts), and respond fast. In today's world, agility isn't optional; it's a set of skills required for survival.

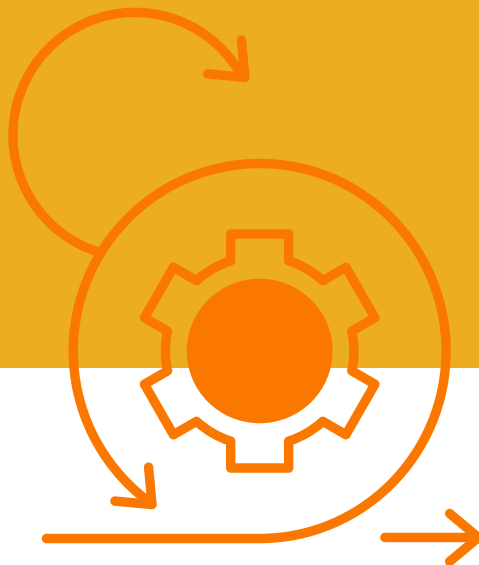


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by David Cooper

The Future of Business: Agility as a Competitive Advantage

As a business leader or owner, you strive to maintain a model of excellence for your organization and your brand. Key tenets for success include upholding your values (internally and externally), developing effective products and services, and delivering on a genuine commitment to service.

Those are shatterproof principles. They have been the bedrocks for keeping companies stable, competitive, and profitable for hundreds of years. Until now.

Values, innovation, and service will always be essential, but that triangle has morphed into a model with four corners instead of three. What's the fourth cornerstone?

Today and going forward, the most important competitive advantage is **adaptability powered by intelligence**.

What does that mean? Adaptability



powered by intelligence has its own triangle of components:

1. **Agility**
2. **Data-driven decision making**
3. **Continuous innovation**

The advantages of these three components have sparked a shift away from stationary competitive advantages, such as physical assets, to the embrace of dynamic internal capabilities and the strength of external partnerships.



You may be familiar with the asset-light business model. You may even be involved in creating one, and if so, I applaud you. This strategy has been adopted by countless companies in the pursuit of agility and being able to quickly scale in managing growing demand while maintaining performance and reliability.

In a nutshell, companies are turning to new technologies, real-time business analytics, and outsourcing asset-heavy functions to strategic partners. This makes organizations more agile and allows them to pour all their energies into the core functions of their businesses.

Let's look closer at those three components and their advantages.

1 **Agility: The impact of emerging technologies on business dexterity**

Digital transformation is an operational imperative and it's having a profound impact on business agility in the United States and globally. It is fundamentally changing how organizations operate, interact with customers, create value, and hasten speed to market. And it's happening fast.

What solutions are companies leveraging to become more agile? Here are a few...

■ **Artificial intelligence (AI) is leading the way.** Business leaders are seeing how artificial intelligence delivers measurable business value and impact – from cost savings to revenue growth, value creation, faster decisions, smarter product development, personalization, predictive analytics and forecasting, and so much more. Yes, it's big, and

yes, AI is constantly advancing.

I like this description from Russell Rosario, cofounder at Profit Leap: "As we delve into the future trends in AI, it's like stepping into a room where the lights get brighter with every step. The journey of AI is far from static; it's evolving, growing, and reshaping the way we think about technology and business."

His article, How to Implement AI in Your Business the Right Way, is a solid primer on the big picture, with how-to's on getting started or expanding the use of AI.

■ **Low-code (or no-code) platforms** level the playing field, enabling non-developers to create and build applications that automate workflows and other business functions. These tools don't just reduce operational bottlenecks and elevate neglected functions; they also create a culture of innovation.

■ **Cloud computing** is also evolving with lightning speed, simplifying how organizations build and manage digital infrastructures – without the need for deep in-house expertise. Today's platforms are feature-rich in helping companies stay competitive, agile, and able to leverage cloud technologies to drive innovation and growth. Cloud providers are integrating AI into their platforms, accelerating a company's ability to understand and deploy AI. And cloud-agnostic solutions make it easier to manage multi-cloud platforms without being locked in with a single provider.

■ **Application programming interfaces (API)**, the wonderful technology that acts as a messenger between IT programs,

along with microservices, where software comprises small independent services that communicate over APIs, greatly increase flexibility within an organization, speed up application deployment, and make it easier to integrate new services. Everything is interoperable.

...companies are turning to new technologies, real-time business analytics, and outsourcing asset-heavy functions to strategic partners.

This makes organizations more agile and allows them to pour all their energies into the core functions of their businesses.

■ **Automation and robotics** enhance operational speed and improve accuracy while freeing up human resources to attend to higher-value work. These solutions



absorb and perform manual work functions in both digital and physical applications.

■ **Cybersecurity and Zero Trust architectures** protect a company's systems by ensuring every request for access is verified, and agility is built in to ensure the stringent protocols perform even faster than traditional system and data security models.

"Zero Trust is a security framework that mandates stringent identity verification for every user and device attempting to access resources, regardless of whether they are inside or outside the organization's network," explains Ryan Terry, senior product marketing manager at CrowdStrike. "Unlike traditional security models that rely on a defined network perimeter, Zero Trust operates on the principle that no user or system should be automatically trusted. Instead, continuous authentication, authorization, and validation of security configurations are required

before access is granted to applications and data."

■ **AI-powered chatbots** are fast becoming a customer's best friend. While earlier models could lead to frustrating experiences, the most advanced solutions streamline the customer service experience by offering instant support, highly relevant responses, personalized interactions, and the intelligence to escalate customers to human support if needed for even greater satisfaction.

■ **Blockchain technology** has grown far beyond cryptocurrency transactions. In fact, it's all around us, enabling secure transactions through decentralized, tamper-proof data records. It's one of the newest tools for businesses of all types and sizes and ideal for application in any industry where data integrity is essential. A key benefit is that it allows any individual or commercial entity to securely interact or conduct transactions with another, without

the need for an intermediary, such as a bank, insurance company, logistics provider, or other middleman.

All these technologies and many more make companies more agile in reducing time to scale, providing better support for remote teams, speeding the deployment of new products and services, substantially increasing operational efficiency, and generating higher revenue.

2 Data-driven decision making: The role of data and analytics in driving agility

Modern data management practices cultivate business agility by enabling faster, more informed decisions, building stronger leadership, identifying clear market opportunities, and providing deep insights into the shopping and buying behaviors of customers and prospects. Data and analytics also sharpen R&D efforts, enable ROI-driven marketing, identify customer opportunities for fast upselling and cross-selling, increase operational efficiency, and drive higher revenue.

Essentially, data and analytics eliminate dangerous guesswork and replace it with agile and informed actions, giving business leaders the clarity, speed, and confidence to adapt quickly to change, whether in responding to customers, navigating supply disruptions, or staying ahead of the competition.

At The Cooper Group (TCG), we prioritize the use of data analytics to ensure companies benefit from sound business and marketing strategies. We marshal and analyze data and turn it into actionable

practices for greater speed and stronger performance in today's technology-driven environment.

3 Continuous innovation: Building a resilient and adaptable organization

Companies that are resilient and adaptable don't just react to change; they expect it, anticipate it, learn from it – and more than anything else, they create it. They stay relevant by constantly building their internal strengths to respond and innovate faster when challenges and opportunities arise.

Take IBM for example. They've been around for nearly 115 years, originally as a maker of mechanical tabulating machines. Then they shifted to building mainframes and later to software and services. And today, IBM is a leader in artificial intelligence and cloud computing.

And there's Amazon, known for its resilience, adaptability, flexibility, and most recently, its globally deployed IT and data prowess with Amazon Web Services, cloud computing, AI, and automation – tools that not only power Amazon's own business but have become industry standards that are in use by companies worldwide.

Here's what companies do to become innovative, resilient, and adaptable:

- Promote a companywide agility mindset and build a culture that's focused on innovation. Create internal innovation labs or teams that explore ideas and leverage cross-functional teams to capitalize on diverse, in-house skills and perspectives.

- Foster an internal culture where employees feel safe in speaking up, making mistakes, and offering ideas and solutions. Reward employees for innovation, not just execution. Encourage open communication among all team members, regardless of their title or position (flatten the hierarchy!).

- Hire and reward employees who are flexible and able to grasp and demonstrate agility.

- Implement an agile method to explore and test new ideas, then vet and pursue the best concepts.

- Empower decentralized decision making by encouraging teams to make fast, informed decisions.

- Train leaders in crisis management, to be calm and confident under pressure.

- Have contingency plans in place for harmful external factors that may impact the business, such as a downturn in the economy, supply chain disruptions, or unexpected crises.

- Build redundancy into operations to maintain business continuity during disruptions and single points of failure – in talent, supply chains, and infrastructure.

- Make fast decisions based on real-time data analytics, which provide factual insights into daily business activities, transactions, and forecasting.

- Adopt flexible and highly scalable systems, like cloud computing and modular platforms that allow for easy pivots and smooth delivery of innovations.

- Prioritize continuous learning among employees and teams by upskilling, cross-training, and giving employees hands-on exposure to new technologies.

- Maintain strong relationships with customers, partners, vendors, suppliers, and contractors whose support, loyalty, and advocacy are crucial during disruptions or crises.

- Have cash reserves and access to credit in place to provide flexibility to innovate when opportunity strikes. Control costs with a lean cost structure to be able to pivot during market shifts and changes.

- Stay close to customers and on top of the market. Use customer insights and market data to keep a solid pulse on emerging trends and competitor actions. Strike while the iron is hot!

Build your future on all four corners of an adaptable and competitive company

Values, innovation, service, and adaptability powered by intelligence – these are the cornerstones that make a solid foundation for the future of your business. When you build on top of this foundation, you can cultivate the right combination of strategic planning, organizational culture, operational flexibility, and the continuous innovation you need to flourish in the months and years ahead.



by **David Cooper**

AGILE PRACTICES:

Embrace & Instill Proven Methods

For quite some time, we've been operating in a business environment where the only thing that stays constant is change. Innovation and demand are the tireless accelerators of change – and technology is one of the great enablers.

But would it surprise you to know that technology is only as powerful as the methods that are employed in using it? The greatest enabler of all in being Agile and innovative is a holistic work approach, an agility mindset. This is what makes it possible for businesses to adapt, compete, innovate, and sustain success in the face of constant change.

If you haven't yet crossed the threshold, allow me to usher you into the remarkable world of Agile methodologies for project management and product development – the practices that help teams work more efficiently, quickly adapt to changes, and deliver faster value to customers.

Are you ready?

First order of business: Know the definition of "Agile"

In business today, Agile (with a capital A) is not just an adjective meaning quick or nimble. It has become a formalized business philosophy and way of operating for a growing number of companies.

In the business world, Agile is:

A methodology or framework – a structured approach for project management and developing products with its own principles, values, roles, and accelerated practices

A mindset or company culture that changes for the better how teams think, collaborate, embrace change, and continuously deliver value

A business philosophy that focuses on customer-centricity, rapid response to change, lean thinking, transparency, and critical feedback loops

An operating model in which Agile is baked into how the organization is structured, how it makes decisions, and how it delivers value at every level (not just in IT or development)

Let's explore Agile methodologies like Scrum and Kanban

Agile methodologies are a group of frameworks and practices used in project management and product development. Here's why they were created and the competitive advantages they bring to today's companies:

- Improved cross-team collaboration and overall productivity
- Broad transparency in processes across teams

they built on software. Again, they are frameworks for organizing and getting work done, not software products themselves.

This is what they are built on:

- Principles and practices (not code)
- Human collaboration, transparency, and feedback loops
- A mindset of continuous improvement and flexibility

Think of Agile as being built

developments

- Speed to market is critical
- Teams work in cross-functional ways
- The business environment is evolving or uncertain

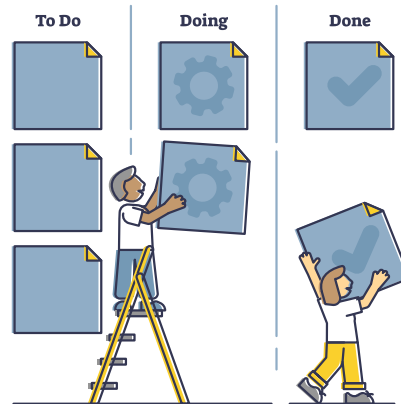
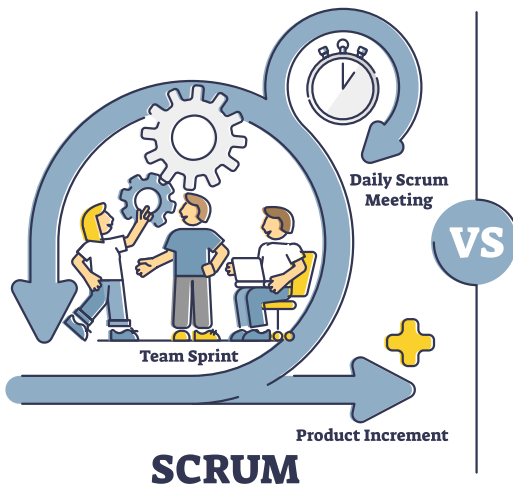
...in other words, Agile is most helpful with everything, everywhere, all at once!

How to choose the right one

Scrum and Kanban are two popular Agile methodologies that are used for project management and product development. There are several prominent Agile methodologies, each with its own strengths and suitability for different types of companies, teams, industries, and company goals.

Choosing the right Agile methodology depends on a company's size, industry, team structure, goals, and culture. There's no one-size-fits-all, but there are factors to consider that will lead to a smart decision. My advice is to answer some key questions, and then explore the prominent Agile methods out there that best fit the needs and goals of the organization. Such questions might include:

- What is your industry?
- What is the size of your organization (small, medium, large)?
- How fast do you need to deliver products or services (frequently or longer development cycles)?
- Are you new to Agile or experienced in working with its principles?
- What problems are you trying to solve?



KANBAN

- Increased flexibility and adaptability
- Reduced waste and improved efficiency
- Faster and more frequent delivery of working products
- Support for continuous improvement
- Better project outcomes
- Greater predictability in forecasting the completion of work

It's important to clarify that Agile methods are not software, nor are

on the same premise as Six Sigma – structured approaches for improving how work gets completed.

Where Agile methodologies are most helpful

The goal of Agile is to help teams work more efficiently, quickly adapt to change within the business or in the marketplace, and expedite the delivery of value to customers. It's most helpful when...

- Product or project requirements are likely to change
- Customers or other stakeholders want early and frequent input on

Every Agile methodology offers a guide and framework for internal adoption and application.

Marshal the power of iterative development and Continuous Delivery

'Iterative' is another term that merits a relevant explanation. Iterative development refers to project management or product development processes that are repeated many times on the road from initial creation to refinement and completion – and it is a core approach used within Agile methodologies.

Continuous Delivery (CD), which also strongly supports Agile principles, is the practice that automates the production and deployment of software and software updates – frequently, reliably, and with low risk.

Both practices fast-track a company's competitive pace and success in today's business climate.

What's key to the iterative process?

Being iterative is approaching one chunk or cycle at a time when developing a new product or project. For each chunk, each

process repetition (or iteration) in development is infused with improvements based on feedback, testing, and learning from the previous cycle – until the ideal version is achieved.

Let's say you're creating a new mobile app. Again, development is approached in small chunks or cycles. Here's how that works:

- > **ITERATION 1:** Build your basic login screen or user interface (UI).
- > **ITERATION 2:** Enhance the UI design and add a password reset capability and multi-factor authentication.
- > **ITERATION 3:** Conduct testing and gather feedback from users.
- > **ITERATION 4:** Improve the app based on user feedback.
- > **ITERATION 5:** Conduct more testing to determine if further refinement is needed.

So, after each key iteration, you test it, get user input, and improve it before moving to the next cycle in the development process.

The same approach is used in project management processes:

- > **ITERATION 1:** Plan a small part of your project.
- > **ITERATION 2:** Execute and deliver that part to team members to use and test.
- > **ITERATION 3:** Gather and review team feedback.
- > **ITERATION 4:** Refine and improve the next iteration of the first part based on team feedback.
- > **ITERATION 5:** Plan the next part of the project and repeat steps 1 through 4.

This cycle continues until the final project management process meets the desired quality and functionality.



After each key iteration, you test it, get user input, and improve it before moving to the next cycle in the development process.

The benefits of being iterative

- You get faster feedback from users and other stakeholders.
- You benefit from early detection of issues or bugs that need to be fixed.
- You have flexibility to change

Companies everywhere are heavily leveraging Agile methodologies, iterative development, and Continuous Delivery to boost agility.



direction without heavy investments in time or costs.

- Continuous improvements are fast and easy to achieve.

Continuous Delivery brings fast, safe, and automatic software updates

By applying CD, software code changes are automatically prepared for release to production, and ultimately, deployment. In simpler terms, your software is always in a deployable state so you can release updates at any time, quickly and safely.

- With CD, you build, test, and package your product in small, frequent updates.
- Each update goes through an



automated pipeline ... build, test, and staging.

- If the update passes all checks, it's ready to be deployed, either automatically or with the click of a button.

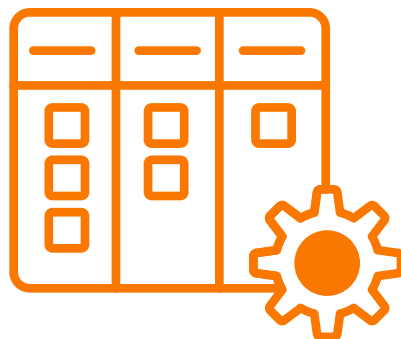
The benefits of Continuous Delivery

- You can deploy new products or software features, bug fixes, or updates at any time.
- Smaller changes are easier to test, understand, and roll back if necessary.

- Automated testing ensures errors are caught early.
- Teams learn faster and customers get new features sooner.
- Business units, developers, testers, and operations work closer together.

Leverage proven methods to become more Agile

Companies everywhere are heavily leveraging Agile methodologies, iterative development, and Continuous Delivery to boost agility, not just among their software and product development teams, but across their entire enterprises. These methods and practices are proven in enabling faster decision-making, faster product releases, higher customer engagement and responsiveness, and sustained resilience in a business world that changes overnight.



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