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I seriously doubt that agile initiatives can have success in the long run if they are not supported by an enterprise and business architecture framework that can be reused and enhanced from one project to the next. Digital transformation is not about a one-time change project or about spontaneous business activities. Digitization is more about transforming many dimensions of an organization with a structured approach involving business and enterprise architecture. This article will demonstrate how architecture can ensure success of agile digital transformation initiatives. Agile practices in organizations Agile practices are increasingly used for the digitization of today's organizations because business environment demands sound decision making and quick follow through to address global competition treats and rapid market disturbances. According to a 2018 survey entitled How Agile and DevOps Enable Digital Readiness and Transformation, about 80% of surveyed organizations have committed to adopting agile practices in their software development. Surveyed companies are using agile practices in most of the principal business functions. Yet some organizations seem to have more success than others. Although a clear majority of organizations seem to be doing agile in some way, only 18% of them claim to have implemented agile practices broadly, deeply, and consistently across their organization, making them "4.1 times more likely to have the right vision and strategy, and 2.3 times more likely to have a culture to support risk-taking." All others are somewhat struggling with their agile practice, putting them far away from these numbers. Business and Architecture could be instrumental in increasing significantly the ratio of companies deploying successfully their agile methodologies broadly and consistently everywhere in their organization. Agile practices and architecture As indicated in this whitepaper entitled "Business Architecture and Agile Methodologies", the structure and frameworks delivered by a business and enterprise architecture practice can be used to palliate some of the possible shortcomings of projects pursued using agile practices. Agile practices combined to Architecture will avoid many pitfalls. Agile teams are too often by nature self-organizing and do not always have line of site to other teams' efforts. This can result in an agile team delivering a project in time and in budget that has considered all specified requirements for a particular group within the organization and yet has failed to consider the interdependencies of their project to other initiatives going on in parallel involving other groups of the organization. Having an enterprise and business architecture practice in place making its framework available to all involved business and IT stakeholders will contribute in closing the external communication gaps that an agile team may experience. Tracing agile requirements constructs to an enterprise and business architecture frame of reference makes it possible for agile teams to identify more easily the areas that require work within an accepted and well-articulated business perspective. Using business architecture value streams linked to their enabling capabilities (including their relevant measurements), involved business units, and participating internal and external stakeholders, an agile team can prioritize the work according to business leaders' insights and priorities. The alignment of epics to value streams, and user stories to capabilities and all relevant element of the organisation frameworks highlights the requirements and features that require priority focus more precisely, at a quicker pace and at a lower risk of failure for future release planning, as shown in Figure 5 of this article entitled "Align Your Requirements to Corporate Strategies Using Business Architecture". Its user story is defined by elements from the enterprise and business architecture framework of the organization described in detail with all relevant relationships. Some of these elements can be capabilities, information, stakeholders, processes, and value streams/stages/items. The Scaled Agile Framework Among the most popular and highly scalable agile methodologies used today by large corporations is Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe). In brief, SAFe is a knowledge-based framework for delivering solutions that deliver business value, scales agile practices, and incorporates lean principles and practices into an organization. This framework provides requirements teams and business analysts with a way to decompose strategic value streams and deliver focused value using 50 to 125 employee Agile release 'train' development teams to reduce software development cycle time. SAFe provides comprehensive guidance to develop better systems and software in large organizations more rapidly. This video, entitled "SAFe 4.0 in 5 minutes", provides a very good 5-minute explanation. The framework is getting very popular and is generating great results as shown in numerous business cases. It is not surprising that today 60% of US Fortune 100 companies have SAFe® trained practitioners, according to this blog. Early enterprise and business architecture engagement preferable As pointed out in this article entitled "Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe) and Architecture", enterprise and business architects should start engaging early ideally before the beginning of the SAFe Scrum and Kanban continuous delivery pipeline by focusing basically in these two tasks. First, enterprise and business architects should make sure to link every value stage of the SAFe Value Streams to its enabling capabilities, information concepts and its various departments and business units to clarify how the business really works. Second, enterprise and business architects need to translate the business strategic themes into more detailed epics. By putting more resources into business architecture at the beginning of the SAFe process, odds that the program delivers systems and software more useful to its business users increase significantly. The modeling executed by enterprise and business architects also facilitates the epic owner's efforts. When an epic is approved to move from the backlog for review and further business analysis, the epic owner has the responsibility of creating a lightweight business case. This involves examining the size, the impact, and the exact benefits of the epic for the organization. By using the enterprise and business architects' detailed model, epic owners have a far better understanding of the business scope of their epics and of the benefits the epic will deliver to the organization. This should speed up the business analysis required to expedite the epic to its next phase. This advisory role of the enterprise and business architect within the SAFe® value stream and program levels is not limited in assisting epic owners and business analysts, it can also continue with solution managers and product managers among others. Conclusion Agile practices are still maturing. To scale, they require an enterprise and business architecture framework in their organizations. With the other 3 domains of enterprise architecture, the domain of business architecture should be an integral part of implementing a successful agile framework, like SAFe for example, to bridge the work and communication more smoothly and effectively between the agile development teams and the business stakeholders. By involving business and enterprise architects to perform impact analysis and other forms of modeling at the portfolio level, organizations can identify more detailed and optimal approaches in solving business problems. It is becoming imperative to have business and enterprise architects more involved and collaborate with SAFe portfolio managers to provide a more precise business context and develop epics that can then be prioritized and developed to deliver projects that are closer aligned to the strategies that matter to business stakeholders. In brief, the addition of business and enterprise architects in an organization will increase the delivery performance of all agile teams in an organization. Leer en español Leer en portugués The idea of "agile" thinking or innovation, along with its close cousin "lean," has spread far beyond its product development and manufacturing roots. It's not uncommon now to hear about the agile approach to budgeting, talent management, or even running a family meeting. Agile is a powerful process for product development, but many organizations are taking it too far and using it to avoid careful planning and preparation. They'll get a better result if they combine it with a different approach that we learned working as executives at Amazon. "Working backwards" can make up for agile's shortcomings in the crucial early stages. How Agile Companies Get Ahead of Themselves Agile might seem perfectly suited for when a company is developing a product or service that doesn't exist and is looking to move quickly. In these cases, it's difficult to simply interview customers or watch them in action, because they can't respond to a hypothetical product. The solution is to develop a prototype, or minimum viable product. Through a series of sprints, typically lasting two weeks, a product team puts together something that's good enough to show customers and get their reaction. If the idea bombs, well at least the team got that information quickly and with only a small investment — and maybe they'll uncover a better idea in the process. If it gets traction, then the team can quickly iterate to create an even better product. Contrast that with the working backwards approach, which is all about planning. Working backwards emerged in 2004; Amazon's e-commerce strategies had proven successful, and the company was aggressively seeking new opportunities with a large potential market. Where should it look? Rather than jumping into developing a plausible product — what an agile mindset might encourage — the company preached going slow to go fast. CEO Jeff Bezos often called himself the "chief slowdown officer," and he got involved when he thought teams were moving quickly into coding without clearly defining the customer problem and an elegant product solution. The working backwards approach requires a fully realized vision of a proposed product, embodied in a written press release for the product's launch. This felt wrong, even unnatural, to software developers and product managers who wanted to get going on coding already. Teams typically spent weeks, if not months, hashing out this press release — along with an FAQ that explained to colleagues, customers, and senior management how Amazon could create this wonderful offering at an affordable yet profitable price. Only when the executives were satisfied with these documents could anyone start writing code and actually assemble the product. The practice has stuck: To this day Amazon works backwards from what it thinks will delight customers, even if it currently lacks the capabilities to make that product. The Kindle e-reader, AWS cloud computing services, and the Echo voice assistant with Alexa all came from working backwards, at a time when Amazon had little experience in making devices or hosting other companies' activities on its servers. Yet all three of these offerings became hit products. Over time each has attracted competitors, but they continue to hold the largest market share. Speed Isn't Everything The fundamental problem with agile, as many companies use it, is that its relentless pace biases developers. They want to get out a minimum viable product in only a few weeks, so they skip on scoping out just what the product should accomplish. Or worse, in our experience, they make two kinds of compromises. First, rather than take the time and uncertainty to develop a new capability, they go with the skills they currently have. They accept their existing constraints, which automatically limits the potential for a high-growth offering. Second, they curtail their ambitions on the product. Instead of a major breakthrough, they tend toward only incremental improvements on existing offerings. Or if they do go bold, their minimum viable product isn't really viable at all, so customers can't give realistic feedback. The developers haven't had time to do their homework and prepare something that's sustainable. The team tells itself that whatever information they get is still valuable toward some future breakthrough product. But that future rarely comes. Too often, the process of two-week sprints becomes the thing, and the team never gets the time and space to step back and obsess over what is needed to truly delight customers. Teams think in bite-sized chunks based on the resources that they already have — there's no time for the careful thinking that breakthroughs require. Agile proponents worry that a working backwards approach takes the authority and urgency away from teams to launch new code, get feedback from customers, and iterate rapidly. But speed isn't everything, especially when it comes to breakthrough products. Don't confuse writing code with making progress per se. By working backwards, you can actually get a successful product to market faster. How to Make Agile Work Better We're not arguing that companies should throw agile out the window. It's still a highly effective tool for product development, especially software-driven offerings. Many of its principles and processes have been used successfully by Amazon and other companies. After all, most product development involves only incremental changes. You don't need a lot of thought around these improvements. Just put together two rough alternatives and try them out in the real world, where you'll get vital feedback. Teams with breakthrough products can benefit from agile as well, once they've done the kind of advance work involved with the working backwards approach. When you're in the coding and product construction phase, you want to move quickly and avoid getting bogged down. Sprints keep you on track and ensure that you actually get something to market. The best solution, then, is to combine agile with something like working backwards. Amazon, for example, has learned to use the working backwards process for idea development, but then follow agile to build and ship the product. If a giant like Amazon can switch course like that, then even startup companies can follow suit.

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