

Agile Internal Audit: Recent insights from the field

Scrum as the first step in being Agile

There is an old saying among Agilists that the goal of adopting Agile is not to **do** Agile but to **be** Agile. In our six years at the forefront of Agile Internal Audit (IA), we've observed how the importance of **doing** is a precursor for **being**.

Agile is more than a set of practices and methods. At its core it's a mindset, but this mindset is not something that one can adopt as one would choose a shirt to wear. In order to develop the mindset, one must unlearn at least as much as is learned. As humans, each of us brings our own unique set of ideas and experiences into our lives and careers. Many of these things are so ingrained that we often don't even think about them. We do them as naturally as breathing.

With new clients, we often conduct a quick exercise, which we now invite you to try. Cross your arms, leave them there for a moment, then relax them at your side. Next, cross them again, but in the opposite way to which you are accustomed. We ask our clients how that feels, and typical responses are words like "strange," "unnatural," "uncomfortable," and "wrong." Almost everyone has an unconscious notion that there is a "right" and "wrong" way to cross one's arms.

The metaphor, of course, is that we all have a "right" way of doing things at work: the way we communicate, the way we lead, the way we organize teams. Adopting an Agile mindset is the equivalent of crossing one's arms in a new way because it changes the hourly, daily, and weekly cadences to which we are accustomed. Throughout our six years of experience coaching teams to use Agile IA, we have found that the **Scrum Framework** has been highly effective in helping teams understand the essence of the Agile mindset and enable transformation. The roles, events, and artifacts help develop a new set of habits that lead to transformative moments of insight regarding the Agile mindset.

We have noticed this seems to happen during the first six to ten weeks of applying Scrum. By this point, teams have encountered and overcome challenges stemming from their initial awkwardness with Sprints, Scrum Masters, and Stories. They've started understanding the purpose behind the practices and begun committing to the mindset.

One large consumer retailer's pilot team was uncomfortable about not planning the entire audit in advance. They questioned how they could start work before they had completed a comprehensive risk and control matrix (RCM). However, around six weeks in, they realized that building a complete RCM would have resulted in spending time on relatively unimportant risks. As the consumer retailer's audit vice president said,

"While they developed a thorough understanding of risk as the audit progressed, the idea of a continually prioritized backlog enabled them to direct more effort toward the risks that mattered most and eliminate time wasted on smaller risks."

This redirection of effort led to delivering audits that provided greater business impact, which stakeholders found more valuable.

At a large financial institution, a key issue was helping junior auditors connect their **individual tasks to the bigger picture** of the value and purpose of the audit. **Sprint Planning**, an Agile event that requires all team members to commit to work in the context of a larger team goal, was key. This institution's use of this Scrum event and other collaborative artifacts gave its staff a practical means for becoming a **collaborative, self-organizing team**—which is part of the mindset that experience shows is not achieved simply deciding to become it. As a result, junior staff felt like they better understood the areas they audit because they were involved in discussions on all of the work sets instead of just their particular tasks.

Introducing Scrum first helps teams practice Agile principles and **ways of working** and leads to a different **way of thinking about work**. It helps them develop the Agile mindset by making them exercise different “muscles” and thought patterns. It lays down a framework for customizing the methods once they understand the basics, creating flexibility to emphasize the Agile mindset in different ways depending on the needs of the day. In other words, it helps them cross their arms differently and feel comfortable with it.

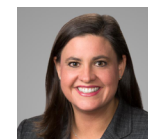
Next in the series: Showing up as an Agile leader.

Author

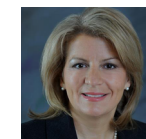


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