

# Scaling work from traditional to agile methods

Believe it or not, agile methodology has been around for almost two decades. Even so, some organizations still struggle to adopt and enjoy the benefits of agile delivery. Perhaps leadership doesn't think it's right for them. Or maybe a failed early attempt at implementation gives them pause.

But as the world accelerates, it has become increasingly obvious that companies must find new ways to:

- Pivot plans and objectives at the pace of the market
- Adjust with minimal disruption
- Improve decision-making and reduce mid- and post-delivery corrections
- Successfully compete with agile competitors

This can be done by adopting an agile way of thinking—a mindset woven into the culture and integrated into every aspect of the business. This guide provides an overview of the five levels of agility, helping you understand where your organization falls and how to begin your own journey.

## Fitness level 1: Adoption

Level 1 organizations have begun to implement agile principles through self-organized teams, adaptive, customer-focused development processes, backlog management, and a regular development and delivery cadence. The benefits of agile practices are being recognized and plans are being made for expansion.

Characteristics:

- Pockets of agile adoption, likely focused in IT
- Some evidence of success: faster, higher-quality solutions, developed at lower costs
- Inconsistent performance as agile practices mature and adoption grows
- Some areas of the business interested in agile while others are violently opposed



A PMI Pulse of the Profession report recently stated that nearly three quarters of your competitors use agile.

### Fitness level 2: Expanding across teams

Level 2 businesses seek to expand agile benefits across additional projects and teams in more areas of business. They're refining agile approaches and creating a regular cadence that can scale. The organization stops doing agile and starts being agile.

Characteristics:

- Agile expansion to new business areas and projects
- Challenges incorporating agile into traditional project planning and management
- Active leadership investment, sharing of best practices
- Growing practitioner confidence as mindset adjusts from hierarchical to agile

### Fitness level 3: Expanding beyond projects

Agile teams now exist throughout the business and agile practices direct how work gets done. There's been a significant uplift in operational efficiency. Agile begins to scale vertically into strategic elements of the business and a center of excellence helps ensure all practices are integrated and scalable.

Characteristics:

- Expansion of agile beyond projects and into operational areas of the business
- Alignment of products, programs, and outcomes with agile approaches and structure
- The culture looks to apply agile concepts in as many areas as possible
- Agile has become a hub of how work gets done, driven by an agile center of excellence

### Fitness level 4: Applying agile to strategy

Level 4 orgs have completed the transition from doing to being agile, and they've begun to apply agile at the strategic planning level. Lean and SAFe portfolio management are introduced to ensure the most valuable work is prioritized and work in progress is limited. Agile-driven budgeting and governance mechanisms ensure continuous alignment between investments and needs.

Characteristics:

- A complete cultural commitment to being agile
- Alignment between this agile element of maturity and the separate planning element
- Integration of agile principles into every aspect of how an organization operates



PwC reports that agile projects are

**28%**

more successful than traditional ones. The slower the agile adoption, the more opportunities lost.



McKinsey notes that today's product managers plan "daily or weekly feature releases, as well as the product road map for the next six to 24 months." Agile must be fully integrated to accommodate such an aggressive timeframe.



VersionOne's State of Agile report shows that the biggest barrier to scaling agile is a misaligned culture – an issue cited by

**52%**

of respondents.

### Level 5: Optimal business agility

The entire business is agile—from planning through delivery and benefits management. The organization rapidly adjusts operations, investments, and strategies with minimal disruption in response to shifting external factors. Innovation is maximized, threats are minimized, and resources are deployed effectively.

Characteristics:

- Ongoing investment in emerging technologies
- A culture that embraces continuous change
- Unprecedented levels of success at every turn

### The journey to fitness

Organizations that haven't embraced project-level agile are already behind. They need to immediately invest in and expand agile across all projects. This requires training, process, agile coaches, and an internal center of excellence.

This requires creating a culture that thinks and acts in an agile way and embracing digital transformation technologies that can be applied on top of agile practices to optimize performance.

Agile fitness is a long journey, but it delivers performance improvements at every level. Wherever you are, ServiceNow has a solution to support your IT organization.

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Forbes' Achieving Greater  
Agility report shows

92%

of execs see organizational  
agility as business critical.