JCURV PERSPECTIVES

COVID-19 HAS REQUIRED ENHANCED ORGANISATIONAL AGILITY, BUT WILL IT STICK AS THE LOCKDOWN EASES?

What drove the agile transformation of your company?

A. CEO

B. COO

C. COVID-19

In partnership with the Agile Business Consortium, we surveyed over 150 people covering executives, heads of transformation and delivery teams to understand what learnings could be taken from how companies have responded to the Covid-19 crisis, that would strengthen Agile ways of working.

There were three main findings:
1. **Covid-19 has forced many organisations to operate at unprecedented levels of pace in order to adapt**
2. **Organisations have been able to achieve this step change by radically changing the way they manage change using agile principles**
3. **Their overwhelming concern however was if these learnings and practices gained from the crisis will be sustained as the world returns to some level of 'normality.**

This highlights the need for organisations to take the time out to reflect on what they have learned from managing in the crisis, to make their organisations stronger at managing change as they enter the new normal.

A silver lining from the crisis
Due to the immediate and changing stresses of Covid-19, organisations have had to radically change their ways of working, to respond at pace. In many businesses this has led to extraordinary results at an unprecedented pace.

"We've been trying to integrate data platforms across two brands for over two years but met with much resistance due to organisational silos. Due to Covid-19, we had to analyse the collective data from these sources, and were able to integrate them within 2 weeks as a result of having a clear priority, and cross-functional teams dedicated to solving this issue."
Chief Data officer – FTSE 100 organisation

Our research identified seven top learnings relating to how change is being managed during Covid-19 that would be beneficial for organisations to sustain beyond the crisis. See figure 1.

Figure 1. What are the key learnings from Covid-19 that will enhance agility in the longer term? Top 7 learnings rated by value to the organisation (% of total responses)

The survey highlights that organisations have been able to achieve these unprecedented results as they have introduced or amplified many of the agile principles at enterprise level. These principles include empowerment, flatter hierarchy, openness to test and learn, transparency and cross-functional working.

Interestingly the second most valued learning related to the benefits of remote working on productivity and cost management. We have had many clients comment on how meetings are radically more effective as they are being run with clearer objectives and more rigour. We have seen several organisations already start to downsize their offices or even consider going permanently virtual, like Facebook. A reduced office footprint would radically reduce overheads and create a business operating model that could ignite competitive advantage.

Will the change stick? Take the time out to do a retrospective at all levels
We interviewed several Exco-level leaders and their main concern was that these learnings would be forgotten as soon as lockdown relaxes. They felt that they wouldn't have the time to incorporate the Covid-19 learnings into their change management frameworks due to the ongoing business pressure and priorities.

It's important to dedicate time, as a business and at each level of the organisation to capture the learnings from this period of time and ensure the positive changes that have been made are incorporated into BAU change practices. The prize for those who do take the time out is the increased level of speed and efficiency of change seen both in the crisis and in the long term – a true competitive advantage.

As a boss of mine from years ago said, "you should never waste a crisis".

JCURV is a London-based management consultancy with a mission to increase the agility of the UK. We work with leading global and UK-based firms including several FTSE 100 companies.

Agile Business Consortium is the not-for-profit professional body for business agility, and we are now in our 25th year. Our mission is to lead, promote and enable business agility worldwide.