**Excerpt from:**

**“An approach to becoming Agile in a dynamic world.”**

***Helping employees develop scientific thinking empowers them to solve problems and make decisions.***

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**Agile = A way of managing for our time**

Anyone wanting to adopt the Agile approach should recognize that this is more than a project of implementing a set of Agile tools. You are modifying the dynamics of how an organization functions. The path you will end up taking in achieving this change isn’t completely predictable.

Fortunately, since scientific thinking is a universal meta skill that’s suitable for any goal, the same scientific-thinking approach works for deploying Agile mindset and habits in your own organization.

That’s what happened at Menlo Innovations in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Menlo is a well-known Agile benchmark, hosting thousands of visitors every year who seek to understand “The Menlo Way.”

Back at their beginning, Menlo’s founders Richard Sheridan and James Goebel didn’t simply decide one day to “be Agile.” They envisioned a deliberate culture that ended their previous experience of the “software death march,” with its low morale, long hours and failed projects. While they used Kent Beck’s book, “Extreme Programming Explained,” as a blueprint, they applied a scientific mindset to incrementally learn how to make the system work for them and their vision, in their setting.

Their first experiment was with two programmers who volunteered to try working as a pair for a few days. They practiced, learned, adjusted and, over time, created a now deeply-embedded structure and way of working that their teams believe in and practice every day.

Today Menlo doesn’t need a bureaucratic, top-down management system to check whether teams are staying on task and doing their jobs. Instead, leaders and managers at Menlo are responsible for how people work, not the content of their work and problem solving.

If you want to become more Agile in your organization, a few lessons from Menlo’s path are:

• Know where you want to go. Understand the shift that Agile is about.

• Start small, so you can iterate, learn and adjust more quickly. Nothing works as intended at first.

• Run deployment experiments with a scientific approach. Use the Toyota Kata if you like.

• You’re not testing to see if Agile works, but how to make Agile work in your business. Solve one problem at a time until it is working for you in your setting.

• Every organization is different. Scale up as you learn, not based on your preconceived notions about how you think deployment will go.

The management methods of the 20th century were arguably intended to reduce uncertainty, whereas the management methods of the 21st century may be as much about being effective and comfortable working within unavoidable uncertainty. That’s Agile.

Agile is about managing ourselves in a different way, to make our remarkable human abilities come to the fore. To do that, one of the most important things for managers to focus on is the patterns of thinking and acting we utilize as we strive for goals. What we are talking about is making the development of the creative capability and confidence of people in the organization a main aspect, and possibly the main aspect, of a manager’s job.

It’s quite amazing what we can achieve through practicing a practical form of scientific thinking. We humans are well equipped to meet challenges of all sorts—if we practice an effective way of doing that. Debating is not the most effective way of tapping our brainpower and collaborating to meet challenging goals. Argue instead about what might be the best next experiment on the way to your goal. Then do that experiment as soon as you can and see further.

Although practicing new skills involves effort and some initial discomfort, the more scientific thinking capability you develop in your teams, the more you can empower them to meet challenges that may have once seemed impossible. Based on our experience, you will quickly come to enjoy Toyota Kata. You’re likely to find the practice will even change your life.

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