



## Leadership in agile environments

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Questions and answers from the Inform webinar

25 January 2022

## What you asked us

Here are the Q&A from our webinar on Monday 25 January 2022.

This webinar was about agile leadership. Agile is a mindset that empowers organisations and employees, creating high performing teams. The key benefits of agile working are recognised as increased customer satisfaction, faster time to market, greater innovation and increased employee engagement.

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## About the speakers

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### **Sara Sharkey CBE, Deloitte Director**

Sara Sharkey is an experienced leader in defence IT and digital services who served for 30 years in the British Army before joining Deloitte in 2021. Her Army career encompassed electronic warfare, operational deployments, training and leadership mentoring and for the last decade application development and cloud services.

She led the start-up of what is now emerging as the UK Defence Digital Foundry enabling Defence to shift to dynamic software delivery. Sara also led the delivery of secure cloud services at an enterprise scale within Defence as well providing pioneering leadership into Medical and Identity IS transformation programmes.

Follow [Sara Sharkey on LinkedIn](#)

### **Natasha Bradley, Commercial Manager at The Inform Team**

Natasha has worked in the IT industry for over 12 years and has a good understanding of technology and how it can be used to overcome business challenges. Before joining Inform, Natasha ran a sales and marketing business for five years, delivering services

to a range of Microsoft partners in the UK. Natasha has innovative ideas on how to use technology and is working with several large NHS trusts to introduce new ways of working with Microsoft Teams.

Connect with [Natasha on LinkedIn](#)

## The questions

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We've indicated the initials of the person answering the questions. The answers are either as they were given in the session or with some additional information added after more time for reflection.

Question	By	Answer
<p><b>With the public purse always being a driver in the past for projects, failing was not an option.</b></p> <p><b>Yet in agile your much more exposed to something not working because it hasn't gone through all the processes of testing.</b></p> <p><b>How do you manage that requirement to change the mentality of the people to not be frightened of failing?</b></p>	SS	<p>That was one of the hardest things.</p> <p>When I was in army digital services we went on a journey. It took three years to shift a senior leaderships mindset and in year one I wrote a business case, this was around a protocol Westminster, which tracked training readiness of army units.</p> <p>In year one we said here's all our requirements and this is what we're going to do. This is how much it's going to cost. And I got the business case signed off.</p> <p>At the end of that year went, well, I kind of said I was going to do all that stuff but I only did about 60% of it. So, I did not do 40% of it but we did this other 40% instead. So, actually the customers really pleased.</p> <p>So again, the business case in the second year they said well 50% of this we'll definitely do this, the other 50% we may do some of this.</p>

		<p>Third year I said I need a million pound for two teams because they got to realise the value of having standing value streams that were resolved with time and people, but we could flex what the backlog was going through.</p> <p>It took quite a long journey and in that time the business realised that you could put something in that backlog and see it delivered and have an impact and that was that.</p> <p>Yet at scale when you hit the wider defence programmes you either can do under the bonnet, so you have an overarching business case, and you have a bit of X ability underneath. There is a big transformation programme going on looking agile and how they're going to do that but unless they start really switching to product lines and having standard funding standing product lines as opposed to start / stop projects and I think this is probably the big thing for me is I need to think less about an equipment programme, because that equipment word, instantly makes you think about some tangible.</p>
<p><b>What if your approach to working in a waterfall environment and working in an agile way?</b></p>	<p>SS</p>	<p>It takes time, it's a bit of a marathon.</p> <p>You must evidence by doing and showing the value.</p> <p>There are two elements where I move teams from waterfall mindsets to agile delivery.</p> <p>Get the mastery sorted and work hard on the purpose and start at a small scale. By the end other teams are clamouring to do it and really build on the culture and set an example.</p> <p>You've got to push away your blockers.</p>

<p><b>How do you work with organisational culture and bring clients in on the journey?</b></p>	<p>SS</p>	<p>The disconnect between business and digital is very much alive. Not realising that digital belongs to business and the business must be engaged.</p> <p>The way it's worked for me, we reset whole programmes and looking at collaborative behaviours. What's driving the business? Are the delivery team delivering the outcomes? Who is part of the delivery outcomes? So, we worked hard to build a delivery team that had the same culture and was held accountable for the outcomes.</p> <p>We brought the business much closer to the decision cycle.</p>
<p><b>What advice could you give us as to how we lead in this hybrid world?</b></p>	<p>SS</p>	<p>Cameras are key. Now when you have cameras on, you can build that rapport quicker. You can make people feel really engaged.</p> <p>We need to be very mindful of people's circumstances. And there are people with different needs. And you can let each team define their ways of working and what works best.</p> <p>It's not a one size fits all answer. Every team needs to work positively and actively and find a solution that works for them.</p>
<p><b>What are your feelings towards the use of agile to take difficult contracts forward?</b></p>	<p>SS</p>	<p>The defences contracting mindset is about contracting for very clear requirement and deliverables. Our contracts are quite transactional. And it's almost driven by fear of failure – so if there's a contract – we can hold the contractor against delivery.</p> <p>There's a lot of focus in G-Cloud and DOS and there's a lot that goes into defining what a contract is – and what are people asking for. It can get really difficult.</p>

		<p>Where I've seen it work: when a director was hot on collaboration and culture. As we were putting in new contracts we were driving in collaborative behaviours and expectations. Making sure teams were multifunctional. And we even made sure to give them names and an identity which was outside if they were military or civil servants and allowed them to go and solve a problem while empowering them to get on.</p>
<p><b>What tools helped with collaboration?</b></p>	<p>SS</p>	<p>When it comes to virtual – it's how you use a tool. When it comes to Microsoft Teams – Teams has a Kanban board. You can put work in progress, complete or delivered. Because you're making sure your work is visible rather than having it tucked into emails and chats.</p> <p>I used Microsoft Teams Kanban board to help defence support the NHS when we needed to deliver during COVID. We used Teams to see what was going on and cut down on the traffic and emails and questions. People just went to the Kanban board and have a plan and think about that culture mindset.</p>

Have a question that's not answered here or want to talk about your own project? [Contact Natasha](#) and she can help.