



DEVELOPING AGILE COMPETENCES FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

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1. Introduction

Digital disruption is everywhere. Whether you are doing your shopping, listening to music, traveling or communicating, the chances are you are making use of digital services in one form or another. Innovation and technology not only change jobs continuously; they also change complete business models or even make them obsolete. Often this leads to significant disruption of the status quo, such as the way in which successful digital platforms (where consumers sell to other consumers) have threatened the business of taxi companies, replaced the high street shops, and taken the place of traditional hotels.

The pace of change is such that we can say with almost certainty that the next disruption is just around the corner – we just don't yet know what it is. The Covid-19 pandemic served to highlight this fact even more strongly. In 2021, when many pizza chains were thriving in the pandemic, Texas-based Cici's filed for bankruptcy, having failed to transform their buffet restaurant concept to a takeaway service. Another example is Brooks Brothers, founded in 1818 and credited with dressing 40 presidents of the United States. As business clothing went out of fashion, they failed to adapt quickly enough to the 'athleisure' style of clothing desired by the new mass of home workers; and filed for bankruptcy in 2020.

A corporate capability to be able to respond to this speed of innovation and change is essential to survive. **Agile helps develop this capability.** Together with the transition to the world of digital services and concepts, it enables organizations to be future proof.

Digital transformation offers massive business opportunities to organizations, not just to increase efficiency via the digital optimization of business processes, but for truly transforming the way they conduct business and interact with their customers. Developing an agile approach offers a way to achieve this.

Completely new services and products facilitate global competition via the digital highway which not only offers new opportunities for the organization but also more domains of business. In a more extreme form this can lead to a complete disruption of your business model – so you better change before your as yet unknown competitor does! Examples in the domains of telco-services and fintech are everywhere. The lack of capability in digital transformation is the main reason that over 50% of the companies on the Fortune 500 list have disappeared since 2000 (as reported by Pierre Nanterm, the CEO of Accenture, to the World Economic Forum) and organizations are keen to avoid being part of this statistic. **Moving with the digital times has become a matter of pure survival for companies, both large and small and across all industry sectors.**

Flexibility and responsiveness to change are key to digital transformation efforts, and this has led to the emergence of new ways of working. **The purpose of this paper is to set out EXIN's vision on the development of Agile related skills and knowledge in the digital world for interested parties: corporate organizations, training organizations, and business and IT professionals.** This paper considers the importance of Agile, the ability to sustainably transform to Agile in today's fast-moving environment, the skills which professionals need to acquire in order to be future-ready, and how to develop competences related specifically to Agile and Scrum to ensure relevance in the digital age. It provides an introduction to EXIN's Agile Scrum certification program and associated Career Path certifications.

2. Importance of Agile in the Digital World



“Now more than ever, during one of the most uncertain periods of time in modern history, we need to rely on that defining human capacity to adapt. It’s the key to coming out of this pandemic stronger and more resilient than we were ever before.”

ANDREW FILEV

REPORTED BY FORBES, MAY 2021

2. Importance of Agile in the Digital World

In fast-moving times, where organizations require the flexibility to adapt quickly to changing market needs, competitive environments and even global pandemics, a traditional (waterfall) approach to the development of products and services is no longer adequate. The traditional way of working is not only time consuming, but it also embeds miscommunication and generates quality flaws.

A paradigm shift is needed.

Many of us still remember the days when customer requirements and project deliverables were defined right at the beginning of a project – with a timeline often spanning a year or even several years – and these were then considered 'fixed' with no real flexibility to change during the course of the project. The result was often not only different from what was promised – but also no longer what the customer wanted or needed because of new insights, changing market demands, and new technical and business opportunities. As organizations started to enter into a phase of digital transformation, these shortcomings became even more evident.

When the Agile Manifesto was written in February of 2001 in Utah by seventeen like-minded individuals, it offered a new way of approaching product development; in fact, it embraced a whole new mindset. One which provides the required flexibility and responsiveness to change, respects the autonomy of employees, and offers a customer-centric approach where collaboration is key. All this leads to faster delivery of high-quality products and services, more aligned with business needs.

The power of the Agile Manifesto is in its simplicity; by placing a higher value on certain behaviors than on others, it has revolutionized the way products are developed, with increased focus on outcomes and value as seen from the customer's perspective. It is also worth noting that twelve principles were defined and to this day, these form the backbone of any evaluation of whether an approach is agile or not!

The Agile Manifesto

INDIVIDUALS AND OPERATIONS	over	PROCESSES AND TOOLS
WORKING PRODUCT	over	COMPREHENSIVE DOCUMENTATION
CUSTOMER COLLABORATION	over	CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS
RESPONDING TO CHANGE	over	FOLLOWING A PLAN

Source: www.agilemanifesto.org

2. Importance of Agile in the Digital World

Various methods underpinned the basic precepts of the Manifesto and the accompanying 12 principles, and even more methods and techniques have evolved since. They all offer a framework for working in short, fixed timescales – usually between two and four weeks - to deliver (part of) a working product. This incremental delivery has proven to be very valuable, not only for a quicker Return on Investment, but also in making sure that what is delivered is better aligned to the customer's (often changing) needs.



2. Importance of Agile in the Digital World

The benefits of an Agile way of working are multiple, as can be seen in the extract below from the 15th State of Agile Report from 2021 (see www.stateofagile.com). The prime benefits are clear and come to the fore in all such market research reports into the benefits of adopting Agile. It comes down to increased acceleration and ability to incorporate change.

It is easy to see why an Agile way of working has such a prominent role in the development of products and services in the digital age, where change is a given. It moves the focus away from bureaucracy, over-standardization and formalized agreements, towards a truly collaborative approach, where responding to change is built in. The Agile way of working is now widely being applied to the development of all kinds of products. For example, NASA engineers use Agile methods to develop critical applications for the Space Launch System (SLS); and Tesla's Agile approach has given them an edge over all other car manufacturers when it comes to vehicle software updates. The principles contained within the manifesto have been incorporated into most project management philosophies and methodologies worldwide, and they are used today in all kinds of projects, not only for the development of software.

64% - Enhance ability to manage changing priorities

64% - Accelerate software delivery

47% - Increase team productivity

47% - Improve business/IT alignment

42% - Enhance software quality

41% - Enhance delivery predictability

40% - Improve project visibility

39% - Reduce project risk

39% - Better respond to volatile market conditions

35% - Improve team morale

24% - Improve engineering discipline

24% - Better manage distributed teams

23% - Reduce project cost

20% - Increase software maintainability



*Respondents were able to make multiple selections. 5% indicated 'Other'.

3. Agile Principles and Scrum Practices in the Digital Skillset



The digital world makes new demands on professionals in terms of which skills and competences they need to master in order to survive and even thrive. Technical skills are no longer sufficient in isolation; the professional of today needs to have a much broader array of competences in order to add value to the business.

3. Agile Principles and Scrum Practices in the Digital Skillset

Knowledge and skills related to Agile have an important role in adding value to digital businesses. Deloitte's model entitled 'Skills necessary for digital transformation' can be a useful reference point when considering the competences required to support business in the digital age.

'Agile structure' is mentioned as a separate required skill, due to how important responsiveness to change is in order for digital transformation efforts to succeed. The word 'structure' is interesting in this context, since agile (with a small 'a') is more of a mindset than a structure; however, a structured approach (Agile with a big 'A') is required to enable the practical application of the agile principles. Agile frameworks like Scrum provide an excellent structure to support working in an Agile way.

Most of the other skills mentioned in Deloitte's model also have a strong link with Agile. The strong focus within Agile on collaboration with the customer is aligned with the skills related to 'Collaborative processes' and 'UX design.' Professionals with these skills regularly engage with customers and build customer feedback into the design of products; this becomes business as usual, which means customers get what they want and need, which in turn builds customer loyalty. An agile mindset also supports the development of an 'Entrepreneurial spirit' as the approach significantly speeds up the development of products, which supports the business in introducing new and innovative products and services in a timely way.

Necessary skills



UX DESIGN

AGILE STRUCTURE

ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

COLLABORATIVE PROCESSES

BUSINESS ACUMEN

TECHNOLOGICAL SAVVINESS

4. EXIN Agile Scrum Certification Program and Career Paths

The EXIN Agile Scrum certification program supports professionals in developing the required competences in Agile and Scrum in the digital world.

The program covers the agile values, principles and mindset, all needed to be understood in order to support the development of an agile culture; as well as the specific techniques related to the Scrum framework, so that professionals are equipped with the right structure and practices to be able to apply an Agile approach based on Scrum. In the Agile domain, Scrum is the most popular framework. It is easy to adopt and learn and works very well on a team level. This differentiates EXIN's certification from other programs out there, which tend to focus on either one or the other (the agile principles or the Scrum framework) but not both combined.



4. EXIN Agile Scrum Certification Program and Career Paths



“EXIN Agile Scrum brings the agile approach to projects of any kind and is not restricted to the software engineering environment as traditional SCRUM methods are.”

LUTZ WEIGELT

OWNER OF NEW HORIZONS OF HAMBURG, LEIPZIG
AND HANOVER, GERMAN MASTER FRANCHISEE

4. EXIN Agile Scrum Certification Program and Career Paths

The EXIN Agile Scrum certification program is depicted on the right hand corner of this page.

The **EXIN Agile Scrum Foundation** certificate provides professionals from all types of backgrounds with an introduction to the main agile principles and the core concepts of the Scrum framework.

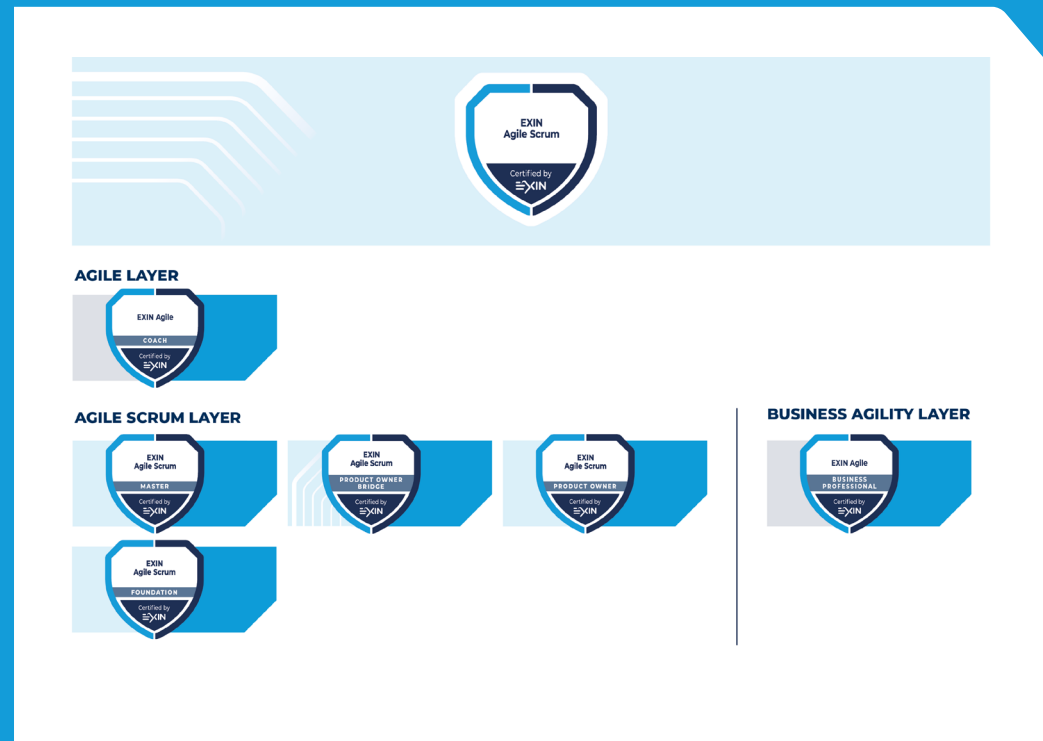
The **EXIN Agile Scrum Master** and **Product Owner** certifications are role-based, and help to prepare professionals to perform a particular role as part of a Scrum-based team. These role-based certificates include practical assignments to ensure a focus on applying knowledge in practice, as required for the role, as opposed to just testing theoretical knowledge.

The **EXIN Agile Business Professional** is specifically targeted at non-IT business professionals and is focused on developing organizational business agility. This is a stand-alone certification but can also be used as a first stepping-stone towards the Agile Coach.

On the top of the program is the **EXIN Agile Coach**, an assessment-based certification, which is for very experienced professionals and is focused on the behaviors needed to guide an organization in the transition to an agile way of working, in a sustainable way.

Previous knowledge is recognized throughout the program, so that professionals can enter the certification program at the level that is appropriate to their level of experience, without the need to start at the bottom.

In addition, EXIN offers a number of Career Path certifications. Three of these Career Path certifications contain certification modules from the EXIN Agile Scrum certification program: the **EXIN Digital Service Manager**, the **EXIN Digital Transformation Officer**, and the **Agile Service Manager**.



4. EXIN Agile Scrum Certification Program and Career Paths

The EXIN Digital Service Manager certification provides three different routes for Service Management professionals based upon three distinctive perspectives. The **Optimization** perspective is focused on achieving digital optimization. The **Integration** perspective is focused on enabling digital service integration. The **Transformation** perspective is focused on realizing effective digital transformation.

All the three routes to the EXIN Digital Service Manager certification start with developing a broad spectrum of knowledge areas relevant to Service Management, including Agile Scrum. After that, each route includes advanced level certification to develop practical skills specific to the chosen perspective.



4. EXIN Agile Scrum Certification Program and Career Paths

The **EXIN Digital Transformation Officer** certification provides the right knowledge and skills for professionals who wish to play a crucial role in leading successful Digital Transformation. The Digital Transformation Officer (DTO) can enable an organization to take advantage of the opportunities offered by digitization. The certification includes an awareness of (emerging) technologies and their business impact on a Foundation level, as well as the Agile Business Professional, an advanced level certification covering the skills needed to achieve organizational business agility.



4. EXIN Agile Scrum Certification Program and Career Paths

The **EXIN Agile Service Manager** certification provides the right knowledge and skills for Service Management professionals operating in an agile environment. This role came about by applying agile principles to Service Management. This has led to a shift in Service Management for the better, with more focus on the customer, more agility and less waste. The EXIN Agile Service Manager certification includes the basic required knowledge of Agile Scrum and Service Management on a Foundation level, as well as VeriSM™ Professional, an advanced level certification which covers the skills needed to apply an agile approach to Service Management for the digital age.



4. EXIN Agile Scrum Certification Program and Career Paths

The EXIN Agile Scrum certification program has been developed in close partnership with both Subject Matter Experts and industry organizations, to ensure that the content is relevant and aligned with the market need. It is regularly updated to ensure new insights and market developments are incorporated as required.

“Being agile in today’s world is the difference between success and failure. It’s an agile mindset that distinguishes between organizations that serve the (constantly changing) needs of their customers and those that don’t.

But to Be agile you also need to know how to Do Agile, and unfortunately, we have seen Agile approaches that are not true to the letter and spirit of the Agile Manifesto and the 12 Agile principles. I always check what we do against these to make sure that when we Do Agile, we will also truly Be agile.

That is why I love Scrum, Scrum IS agile, it’s simple to learn and easy to use.

So, remember that success means BEING agile and DOING Agile right.”

JOHANN BOTHA

SERVICE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION LEADER & AUTHOR
EXIN CHIEF EXAMINER FOR AGILE SCRUM & DIGITAL
TRANSFORMATION

4. EXIN Agile Scrum Certification Program and Career Paths

Finally, as with all EXIN's certification programs, the EXIN Agile Scrum certification program is strongly aligned with the e-Competency Framework (the e-CF™), an independent framework for IT related competences which has been developed by the European Union.

Each certification within the program has been mapped to the e-CF™ so there is full transparency on which competences are covered and to which level, based on an internationally accepted standard. The result is that successful candidates receive an internationally recognized certificate provided by an independent Exam Institute, which allows them to demonstrate their knowledge and competences in the area of Agile and Scrum to the outside world and establish themselves as valuable assets in the digital age. The EXIN Agile Scrum certification program is:

- The only certification program which combines **both agnostic Agile principles and the Scrum framework**, for maximum relevancy;
- **Practical** to ensure what is learnt has maximum value on the work floor for better ROI;
- Aligned to an **international competency framework** (e-CF™);
- Developed together with industry experts and supported widely in the market, including external endorsement by an internationally recognized **Thought Leader** in the field of Agile and Digital Transformation;
- A **multi-layer** program which recognizes existing knowledge;
- Available in **multiple languages** to support local markets;
- Available via multiple channels so you can take your exam **anytime, anywhere**;
- A globally recognized, **independent** certification program with no lock-in.

EXIN's Agile Scrum certification program is available in 8 languages.
As of July 2022, more than 50,000 professionals have taken an EXIN Agile Scrum exam across more than 60 countries.



5. Summary

To conclude, being agile and an Agile way of working is more important now than ever before due to the forced acceleration of digital transformation as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Organizations are embracing the opportunities offered by digital transformation in order to survive and thrive. Change is a constant in the digital world and as such, the development of an agile mindset, combined with knowledge of Agile ways of working and the Scrum framework, are critical parts of the digital skillset needed by professionals today.

EXIN's Agile Scrum certification program and the associated Career Path certifications have been created with this in mind and help professionals develop the skills they need to perform crucial roles within organizations and develop a career path in the Agile domain. In addition, they can achieve an independent, internationally recognized certificate to prove their worth, making them valuable assets in today's competitive digital age.

6. About the Authors



Johann Botha

Johann Botha specializes in building digital age capabilities and developing practical skills to help organizations solve problems, grow people, facilitate difficult change, dream, scheme, but most importantly, DO!

He received global recognition for his role in Digital Transformation, Agile, Service Management, Entrepreneurship, Customer Experience Management, DevOps, Leadership, and Business Management & Strategy from institutions like the itSMF, HDI and Thinkers360.

Johann is the CEO of getITright®, the Chief Examiner for the EXIN Agile and Digital Transformation portfolio, a part-time lecturer at Nelson Mandela University, and an executive coach and advisor to tech start-ups, operating globally with offices in South African and the Netherlands.



Suzanne Galletly

As Portfolio Director at EXIN, Suzanne is accountable for the development and positioning of EXIN's certification portfolio, in line with market needs and industry trends. Next to her role within EXIN, Suzanne is also Chief Examiner for VeriSM™ at the International Foundation for Digital Competences (IFDC)

Suzanne is a certified Digital Transformation Officer and Agile Scrum Master. She has 7 years' experience in the IT services industry followed by more than 16 years' experience of competence development in the IT education industry and is a passionate advocate of lifelong learning.

7. About EXIN



www.exin.com

We are EXIN, an independent examination institute focusing on competencies required in the digital world. We offer an end-to-end solution for certifying professionals. We are proud to be part of the Software Improvement Group (SIG), as together, we are creating a healthier digital world. While SIG focuses on assessing and certifying IT Processes and Technology, we have our focus on People. Together, we cover the trifecta of People, Process, and Technology.

We have a long-standing reputation, having been founded in 1984 by the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs to deliver independent IT certifications. Since then, millions of professionals worldwide have successfully achieved an EXIN certification in a wide variety of fields. EXIN has a strong portfolio of certifications created using our high-quality processes in collaboration with leading experts in their respective fields.

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