

How to practice Agile in times of COVID-19¹

Aina Aliieva

This is the first time in a history of humanity when the whole world is dealing with the same problem, discussing the same news and complaining about ruined plans. Same as others, I also had many plans for this spring. I planned to finally go back to my hometown after 6 years of living abroad, participate in a couple of conferences and learn salsa. Even now I had completely different plans for this long Easter weekend rather than writing this article. But life is unpredictable and that's why I love it.

Coming to Canada around 5 years ago I learnt the term "Agile". The initial meaning of this term is "able to move quickly and easily." There is a specific meaning if we talk about the style of work in the organization: "a method of project management, used especially for software development, that is characterized by the division of tasks into short phases of work and frequent reassessment and adaptation of plans." Having understood that I had an agile mindset a long time before I learned this word, I was inspired to use agility not just in a work environment but in personal planning. I wrote a couple of articles about agile in personal planning, spoke at several events and conferences and even started writing a book. However, nowadays I have a chance to be agile, adaptable and flexible not just at work and personal planning but in my life in general.

The first sign of agility and flexibility is how quickly I can adapt to new circumstances and reprioritize my goals and activities under the present situation. From time to time during the retrospectives with my teams at work I ask 2 questions:

"What we can control?", "What we can't control?"

We write a list of obstacles and then identify if we can control it or not. If there is something out of our control, so why not just accept the reality and adapt. For example, nowadays I can't control the COVID spreading or length of quarantine. So, the option I have is just admitting the reality and live according to it. The other question is what I can control. There are so many things under my control, so why not concentrate on them?!

- I can control my emotions, reactions and mindfulness
- I can control my attitude
- I can keep following my habits while working from home, such as wake up early, dress up and so on
- I can't control the amount of upsetting news I read per day

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I can keep writing items for my list, but I think the idea is clear.

Another question I like to ask myself is **“What challenges do I have?”**. “Challenges” is a different word from “blockers” or something which is completely out of my control. “Challenges” means that there is something on my way which makes it more difficult but not impossible. For example, I do public speaking. I love it. But I always do it face to face with the audience and have never done it online. So, now my challenge is to learn how to do webinars and deliver information without having constant eye contact with people.

As some of you already guessed it is not enough just to identify challenges. It is important to create a plan on how I can overcome them. So, my next question is: **“How to overcome the challenges I have?”** For example, to overcome a challenge of delivering information using a different style on webinars might be to be better prepared to make sure that I know exactly who my audience is, are they multicultural people or is it just one culture, to use examples related to this specific audience and prepare jokes keeping in mind the cultural adjustments.

The following question is: **“What tools do I have?”** For instance, during my public performance, I can use my charisma and emotional intelligence to read the audience and understand if they are following me or not. These counts as tools as well. Talking about a more traditional definition of tools I could have PowerPoint slides and a projector. Do I need the same tools to overcome my challenges? Yes, I can still use EI and charisma but instead of projector I will need an excellent internet connection and a camera.

When we have changes in project direction or life direction there are always some resources we can't have anymore but on the other hand, there is always something we can have. So, the next question is: **“What additional resources do I have?”** And the first word came to mind – Time. I used to work from the office and spent a couple of hours everyday travelling back and forth. Now I work from home and have this extra time. So, why not to use it? Also I used to have many meetings after work and unfortunately I don't have my social life at this moment but I have an additional extra couple of hours every day! So why not to use agility in real-time and reorganize my daily routine?!

And the last question before everybody gets bored – **“what new opportunities do I have?”** No matter what might happen in our lives there are always new opportunities. In my case, I have an opportunity to become more progressive and technical savvy and challenge myself to do and to learn what I avoided before. For example, to become an expert in delivering webinars.

Most of you know that working in an agile environment means having main ceremonies such as daily standups, planning, retrospectives, reviews and refinements. I use these ceremonies for personal planning and for life agility too.

First of all, keeping these ceremonies as a part of my daily routines keeps me disciplined. I believe that it is crucial to be disciplined during the quarantine. As Eliud Kipchoge said:

“Only the disciplined ones in life are free. If you are undisciplined, you are a slave to your moods and your passions.”

Secondly, these ceremonies help me to stop and think about my goals, plans and vision of life.

I have an article about how I do personal planning using agile ceremonies which can be seen here <https://hundreddares.com/self-development/agile-tools-for-personal-planning/>

Here I would like to stop on daily stand-ups. In agile environment teams hold a daily scrum meeting called the "daily scrum" or daily stand up. The purpose is to ensure that the entire team is aware of impediments, what stories are done or not done, and what tasks are ready to be pulled from one team member's to-do list into someone else's. To succeed in this purpose each team member normally answer 3 questions:

- What did you do yesterday?
- What will you do today?
- Are there any impediments in your way?

I also have personal standups with myself every morning. I adjusted these questions for my personal purposes but still, I start my morning routines with 3 questions:

- What is important?
 - What do I want to accomplish?
 - What I am going to do today?
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And, in the end, the lesson I've learned in a current situation: everything I am able to do now, I need to do now. Don't put off till tomorrow what you can do today.

About the Author



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Aina Aliieva is a Scrum Master with 4 years of experience in Project Management and 4 years in an Agile environment. She is also CEO and instructor in Bee Agile Tutoring. She teaches Project Management, Agile and goal setting for organizations around the world. She has managed and consulted on projects for the technical, construction, and engineering disciplines.

Aina has a Masters's degree in electrical engineering and an MBA in technology. She has PMP and PMI-ACP certificates. Aina is an active member of PMI CWCC (Canadian West Coast Chapter), PMI Ukraine Chapter and UAE PMI. She is also a Program Manager, Disciplined Agile in PMI CWCC.

Aina is an experienced public speaker and coach. She also helps in personal planning and setting up goals. In her free time, Aina participates in different mentorship programs, speaks at webinars and interviews people for her personal blog.

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