

The relevance of agile change management in a dynamic business environment

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Abstract

Conventional change management approaches are increasingly reaching their limits in a business environment characterised by volatility, dynamics, and complexity. In other contexts, attempts are often made to counter these aspects with agile approaches. The extent to which this also makes sense in the field of change management has not been frequently investigated to date. The aim of this paper is therefore to examine the extent to which agile change management contributes to the successful handling of changes in a dynamic business environment. For this purpose, 30 interviews were conducted with change management and organisational development experts from various small, medium-sized, and large companies in Germany. The data obtained was primarily analysed qualitatively, using a structuring content analysis according to Mayring (2015). The results of the research show that change management can strongly benefit from agility. In particular, this is the case with respect to self-organisation, iteration, and experimentation. Agile change management makes sense even in more conventional, hierarchical organisations. However, there are indeed organisation-, project- or context-specific characteristics that speak particularly in favour of the use of agile change management approaches or make more conventional change management approaches seem more reasonable. Often, it is even advisable to use a clever mixture of both.

Keywords: Change management, agile change management, dynamics, complexity, VUCA-World

JEL codes: M21, M54, M59

1. Introduction

Studies show that in practice about 70% of large-scale change management initiatives in organisations have failed in the past (among others: Worley, Mohrman, 2014; Beer, Nohria, 2000). The variety of forms of change has recently been increasing and the pace of change has been accelerating (Bohn et al., 2019; Mingardon, Simioni, Adida, 2018), which makes successful change management even more challenging. Especially when the pace of change is high and the environment is complex and dynamic, organisations tend to make hasty decisions, choose an unsuitable approach to change or even steer the whole company in the wrong direction (Narasimhan, Barsoux, 2018). In the past, the organisational ability to change, which included breaking up existing structures or fighting against employee resistance to change, was essential for organisations to meet external changes, support defined change goals and move from one state to another (Le Grand, Deneckere, 2019; Trost, 2019). The ability to change as well as the ongoing development of organisations and their employees will likely be even more important in a highly complex, fast-moving business environment (By, 2005; Keenan, et al., 2012; Bruch, et al., 2019). The management consultancy McKinsey states that “*mastering the art of changing quickly is now a critical competitive advantage*” (Ewenstein, Smith, Sologar, 2015). Rowland (2017) even suggests that the cost of failure in change is rising: “*How you do change fundamentally determines where you end up*” (Rowland, 2017, p. 12). However, emerging challenges in the business environment have an impact on change management, whereby “*unpredictable, turbulent and dynamic conditions change the very nature of change*” (Rowland, 2017, p. 11). In a world in which change becomes everyday life, the speed of change continuously increases and constant radical reinvention is almost considered a necessity, change management in organisations somehow also needs to change to avoid being obsolete (Jick, Sturtevant, 2017; Michels, 2019; Worley, Mohrman, 2014). Boston Consulting Group states that in times of major economic and social shifts, “*organizations absolutely must do a better job of managing change [...]*” (Keenan, et al., 2012). “*The traditional foundational approach to change management, no matter how rigorous, is no longer sufficient*” (Mingardon, et al., 2018).

Agile is currently a widespread form of working that promotes speed and flexibility. It began in software development and quickly became an overarching trend in business (Kohnke, Wieser, 2019). The use of the concept in change management has been increasingly discussed in recent years (Streit, 2013), especially since conventional change management approaches based on concepts of stability and controllability often reach their limits in a dynamic business environment (Jick, Sturtevant, 2017; Le Grand, Deneckere, 2019). Nevertheless, there is little research on the extent to which agile change management can contribute to the successful handling of change in a dynamic business environment. To address this research question, semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts in the field of change management and organisational development. The data obtained was analysed using a qualitative literature analysis according to Mayring (2015). The expert interviews and the resulting findings are the main content of this paper.

2. Theoretical Framework

Agility is currently a strong trend in organisations in a wide range of industries. Using various agile methods, companies are trying to become faster and more flexible, primarily driven by increasing competitive pressure and the dynamics of change (Kohnke, Wieser, 2019). Capgemini Consulting already stated in 2012 that change management would be well advised to learn from new agile project methods (Bohn, et al., 2012). Since then, there have been increasingly more discussions about agile change management and a flexible, continuous implementation of changes in short cycles, especially among change experts (Streit, 2013; Trost, 2018). Considering that conventional change management appears to have reached its limits in today's complex, unstable business environments, these considerations are highly relevant and allow a radically different view on how to deal with change. Nevertheless, agile change management is still a relatively new field of scientific study. While there are many contributions to agile project management as well as change management, there is no systematic analysis of the topic of agile change management (Kohnke, Wieser, 2019) and there are only a few approaches of agile change management offered in scientific literature. There also seems to be a need to catch up on this topic in practice. A current study by Kienbaum and SAP shows that HR functions in general currently rate their performance as rather weak concerning the topic of agility. However, according to the authors, the subject is expected to become much more important in the future (Jochmann, et al., 2020). The consultancy PwC further refers specifically to transformation and change management and predicts that the importance of this function will increase from 72% in 2019 to 86% in 2025 (Bruch, et. al., 2019). However, according to the PwC study, only 25% of HR managers consider themselves well prepared for future challenges in this area. This demonstrates that there is enormous pressure to act and that it is necessary to "[...] to close [...] blatant gaps in the shortest possible time [...]" (Bruch, et. al., 2019, p. 8, translation by the author).

On the topic of agile and change management, Kohnke and Wieser (2019) distinguish between three different forms, which they see as a continuum. The first form is called 'change without agile' and it refers to non-agile organisations in which non-agile change projects – such as regulatory reorganisations or post-merger integrations – are carried out with classical change management methods. Therefore, this form of change management bears no relation to agile, except by showcasing its absence. The second one is called 'change to agile', whereby this form is about increasing the agility in organisations. This is often called agile transformation and it is a challenging, complex change project for organisations. The final variant of agile and change management is 'change within agile', concerning organisations that are already agile (or at least partially agile) and continuously initiate change processes. In the authors' opinion, this form is an exception in traditional hierarchal organisations (Kohnke, Wieser, 2019). Trost (2018) also makes the distinction between these three forms of change management and agile. The author also mentions a fourth form, which involves a shift from agility to more stability and hierarchy, but he does not consider it relevant. Several other authors only examine the change towards a more agile organisation ('change to agile').

Other than studying the aforementioned scenarios of agility and change in organisations, it also makes sense to consider the question of what exactly agile change management means from another perspective. Kohnke and Wieser (2019) claim that agility arrived in

change management long ago, despite the lack of a systematic approach to the subject. The authors pursue the question of whether agile change management is revolutionising change consulting, and they draw parallels between the agile manifesto and the topic of change management.

According to the agile manifesto, the focus in agile working is on the following (Beck, et. al., 2001):

1. Individuals and interactions (over processes and tools)
2. Working software (over comprehensive documentation)
3. Customer collaboration (over contract negotiation)
4. Responding to change (over following a plan)

If these principles are applied to change management, it becomes apparent that they correspond to several fundamental aspects already found there (Kohnke, Wieser, 2019). Change management is about the human side of change, while processes and tools only serve as support. From a systemic perspective, interactions and their mutual influences in the overall system also play a major role (Luhmann, Baecker, 2017). Thus, the principle of 'focus on people' fits well with the first principle of the agile manifesto (Kohnke, Wieser, 2019).

The second principle of the agile manifesto can also be found in change management, which is about achieving defined change goals by changing behaviour and attitudes. Consequently, rather than focusing on detailed analysis and documentation, it is a solution-oriented and pragmatic approach (Kohnke, Wieser, 2019).

Successful change requires trustful cooperation between the parties involved. In change management, collaborative behaviour is promoted, whereby the principle of 'partnership' plays a major role. This shows clear similarities with the customer orientation emphasised in the agile manifesto (Kohnke, Wieser, 2019).

The final principle of the agile manifesto states that reacting to change is more important than following a plan (Beck, et. al., 2001). Kohnke and Wieser (2019) state that this principle is also vital for change management and that the adaptation of defined change measures is common practice. However, conventional change management seems to be driven by planning rather than a response to change (Trost, 2018). An essential difference to agile change management could therefore be a more flexible, process-oriented approach and regular feedback loops in the latter. For example, Franklin (2014) also claims that *"an agile approach is ideally suited [...] because of its emphasis on allowing the solution to evolve as the factors driving the need for change also evolve"* (Franklin, 2014, p. 7). The author emphasises the advantage of planning one aspect of change after another, trying out each one of them under real business conditions and seeing what effect it has, rather than spending months planning a big new idea that may not have the intended result.

A rather conventional understanding is that change is often a lengthy and far-reaching process (Trost, 2019). However, controlling committees and extensive planning are the opposite of agility. Agile change management has a cyclic approach to change and it helps organisations to consistently react to changes (Frei, 2016). It avoids detailed advance planning. This eliminates the pressure of trying to predict the future and shortens the time to the implementation of a change. Changes are broken down into small entities and are implemented in increments. There is no waiting for the end of the change initiative, at which point the employees are presented with a comprehensive solution; instead, agility requires close cooperation, transparency, and regular feedback. The advantages of the

changes can be realised directly so that the change project begins to pay off before it has been finalised. By allowing the details to be defined step by step as more knowledge is gained about the situation, the quality of the change improves through continuous learning and improvement. Furthermore, the changes are always up to date and appropriate (Franklin, 2014). In an agile approach to change management, change is no longer an exception, but rather it becomes the rule. This eliminates the fear of change (Frei, 2016). In summary: *“The pace of change, flexibility [...], frequent iterations and greater collaboration make an agile approach a powerful tool for the effective delivery of change”* (Franklin, 2014, p. 10).

3. Methodology and Data

To work out the current state of research on the topic of changing change management a scientific literature research was conducted at first. For this purpose, relevant literature was searched in different scientific databases (e.g., Science Direct, Springer, Wiley Online, Taylor & Francis Group, Emerald Insight, Scopus). The literature research was supplemented with recent publications and studies by economic enterprises and management consulting firms.

Based on the situation and challenges outlined in the previous chapter, the research aimed to answer the following question: *To what extent does agile change management contribute to a successful handling of changes in a dynamic business environment?*

As the subject area investigated in this research is very complex and novel, it can hardly be explained by concrete cause-effect relationships alone. Therefore, it was intended to use the method of expert interviews and benefit from the technical expertise as well as direct practical knowledge of selected experts.

A total of 30 expert interviews were conducted. This number of experts enables deriving a strong database and still being able to handle the number of interviews. In principle, the question about the sample size is not easy to answer in qualitative research, as there are no general indications in contrast to quantitative research. In literature, it is said that one should continue to collect data until theoretical saturation is reached. Given that proposals for the sample size vary between 5 and 60 interviews (Akremi, 2014), a number of 30 interviews thus represents a good average. Moreover, at this number, saturation seemed to have been reached in terms of new theoretical content.

In science, there is also a lively discussion about what exactly makes an expert an expert (Liebold, Trinczek, 2002). According to Sprondel (1979), experts have special knowledge that can be understood as *“socially institutionalised expertise”* (Sprondel, 1979, p. 141, translated by the author). They can thus be distinguished from laypersons who only have pure everyday or general knowledge (Sprondel, 1979).

The purposely selected experts in this research qualify themselves through specific knowledge and experience regarding work in the area of organisational development or change management in agile or hierarchical organisations. This gives them an above-average level of expertise compared to other people. For example, 20% of the experts have more than 15 years of experience in the field, 30% between 5 and 15 years, and 47% between 2 and 5 years. Naturally, the number of years spent working on a topic is only one indicator of the extent of one's expertise.

For 10% of the interviewed experts, the term and the topic of 'agile change management' in particular, was not well known and not relevant until the interview. A further 30% of the experts were aware of the topic, but a more detailed examination of it had only place on a smaller scale at best to date. Otherwise, the underlying content was known and relevant, but the term 'agile change management' was simply not used. For the remaining 60%, the term and the topic of 'agile change management' were already known and relevant.

In addition to professional expertise, care was also taken in the selection of respondents to ensure that they reflected the employment structure in Germany. According to Destatis (2020), the distribution of persons in employment by economic sector in Germany is divided into 75% services, 24% production as well as 1% agriculture, forestry, and fishing. By considering a corresponding weighting of the economic sectors when selecting the interview partners, it should be ensured that the results are as close as possible to the expected results of the basic population and that the sample of experts is consequently as representative as possible.

The selected experts come from various small, medium-sized or large companies in the industry that have their own internal change management teams or areas (48%), as well as from business consultancies or independent consultants that offer services in this field (52%). The job titles and hierarchical levels of the interviewees are very diverse and range from (Senior) Consultant, (Senior) Manager, Director, Partner, and Head of in areas such as Change Management, Human Resources-/ Organisational Development, Transformation, Leadership or People to (Agile-/ Management-/ Executive-) Coach, Trainer, Systemic-/ Organisational Advisor, or Project-/ Transformation-/ Change Manager. Further details on the experts and the companies for which they work are not given due to data protection and anonymity.

The expert interviews were conducted online in the period from 20th January to 4th March 2021. The duration of the interviews ranged from 25 to 52 minutes per interview. The average conversation time was 36 minutes. To allow a certain comparability of the interviews and facilitate the evaluation, the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner. In contrast to a completely structured interview, the experts can then still name topics that are not recorded before but which they consider particularly relevant regarding the research objectives. Besides, a semi-structured interview guide enables the interviewer to make specific adjustments according to the interview situation and, for example, to ask some further or deeper questions (Kaiser 2014; Gläser and Laudel 2010). Therefore, an interview guide with the most important questions was prepared in advance.

At the beginning of the interviews, data on the interviewees' professional background and specific experience in the field was gathered. Subsequently, the interviewees were asked whether they had already come into contact with the topic of agile change management. The concept of agile change management on which this study is based was explained to them. Then, they were asked – among other things – the extent to which their understanding of the topic goes hand in hand with it or what they see differently. After clarifying the terms, the interviewees were asked about the change management approach they currently use in their organisation. The question was whether this could be described as rather agile or conventional and how well or poorly they are currently positioned with their approach. They were also questioned about the extent to which they

thought that requirements of change management in a dynamic business environment can be met by agile change management. The next step of the interviews dealt with the possibilities, limits and areas of application of agile versus conventional change management approaches. Finally, possible recommendations for executives and change managers on how to deal with change management in times of high dynamics and complexity were asked. The future of change management was also addressed. Finally, the experts had the opportunity to make additional comments and mention aspects that they further considered important in this context.

After the successful conclusion of the interviews, the contents were written down in original language, considering the generally prevailing rules of transcription, with no documentation of facial expressions, gestures or pauses. Interjections, repetitions, and stuttering were also omitted in favour of reading flow and better understanding. Besides, personal and company-related data and information were anonymised. In this process, the 30 interviewed experts were marked with the codes E I to E XXX.

The evaluation of the expert interviews was undertaken with a structuring content analysis according to Mayring (2015). A decisive advantage of the quantitative content analysis over other methods is its anchoring in communication science. In the course of the rule-based analysis, the statements of the authors or the interviewed experts are understood and interpreted within their context. Besides, the analysis is broken down into individual interpretation steps so that it is comprehensible and verifiable for third parties. The evaluation of the data thus happens as holistic and unbiased as possible (Mayring, Fenzl, 2014; Mayring, 2015). After the examination of the different variants of content analysis, the structuring content analysis was chosen, aiming to extract content aspects and topics from the data material and summarise them with the help of categories (Mayring, 2015). In this case, the categories were formed deductively in the course of the structuring. This means that the main categories are established and defined before the material is analysed, after which specific elements are extracted from the collected data material (Mayring, 2015). For example, in this research, the formation of the main categories was based on the information obtained in the literature review or the semi-structured interview guide used in the expert interviews. The collected data material was then reviewed concerning the respective research questions. All relevant statements of the authors or experts were assigned to the appropriate categories and sorted accordingly. In doing so, the categories were continuously modified and further specified. To finally achieve a precise formulation and delimitation of the different categories, the main statements of the respective categories were described in a brief definition. Moreover, textual evidence from the data material was provided for the various categories (Mayring, 2015).

The generated transcripts of the interviews served as the basis for the evaluation. They can be downloaded from public data storage at Harvard Dataverse (compare Grocholski (2021)).

4. Research Results

In the interviews, many of the experts agreed with the definition of agile change management presented to them. For example, in this definition it was stated that change is an ongoing process and it is considered a normal state. This was explicitly emphasised again by some experts when they were asked about additional characteristics of agile change management. The definition given to the experts also stated that change is iterative and incremental. It is not about single, fundamental changes, but rather anchoring small parallel change management actions. The focus is on experimentation, obtaining feedback and achieving quick wins. The experts added that it is about using an experimental approach that is open to results or only oriented towards a rough vision and that an appropriate or context-dependent adaptation as well as an iterative procedure are important. Regarding the initiation of change, the definition indicated that changes are – where possible – initiated and driven by the employees in a self-organised way. In this context, many experts declared that agile change management not only means self-organised, bottom-up change and that pure grassroots movements are still very rare. According to the experts, the impulse for change from top management plays an important role, especially in traditional, hierarchical organisations, or at least the strong commitment of the management does. The initiation of change should therefore come from both sides, namely top-down and bottom-up. This in no way contradicts an agile change management approach. In the context of communication in agile change management, a few experts added that it is target group-specific, ongoing and transparent. The timing and method of communication are precisely chosen and agile communication formats may be used. According to the definition that the experts were provided with, agile change management is about empowerment, participation, and establishing a lasting ability to change. The experts also emphasised a different target direction than in conventional change management. Many of them emphasised that agile change management aims to further develop the company as a whole to become a change-ready organisation that not only reacts but also actively initiates change itself. In this context, one embarks on a journey of which it is not yet known where it will lead. This is why it is about empowering people so that they are ready for change and can deal well with uncertainty. A few aspects were not explicitly included in the previous definition but were considered relevant and characteristic by the experts. For example, almost one-third of the experts emphasised the use of agile methods (e.g. agile meeting formats, Scrum-logics and -roles) and the application of agile principles in change management. The topic of mindset was also mentioned by some experts. In this context, it was about developing an agile way of thinking, anchoring an attitude of openness towards change and taking on responsibility as well as self-empowerment.

Overall, many experts highlighted that an agile approach in change management is nothing truly new and parts of it are already included in other approaches, especially those with a systemic background. In this respect, they mostly referred to topics such as experimentation and reflection or an iterative and participative approach. Furthermore, it was often said that it is clear anyway that conventional plan-based and mainly top-down driven change approaches no longer work under the current conditions, and that agile change management is more or less without an alternative. E XXVIII said in this context:

"[...] a change management that is not agile [...] fails to achieve its goal" (E XXVIII, translated by the author). Some experts even said that approaches such as Lewin's or Kotter's have never really worked. For example, E XV stated: *"[...] it has never been the case that something [...] works completely statically, you then break it up and put it back together again. I think it's always been iterative procedure [...]"* (E XV, translated by the author). Another frequently-mentioned point by the experts is that a distinction between conventional and agile change management approaches may not be necessary for practice and is often not clearly possible, as there are many hybrid forms and shades of grey between these two extremes.

When asked about their own change management approach, it became apparent that about one-third of the experts interviewed currently use a more conventional change management approach. Furthermore, almost 40% use a more agile approach, even if it is not always clearly referred to as such. According to the statements of some experts working in consulting companies, it can be assumed that consulting firms in particular take on a pioneering role when it comes to agile change management. For example, E XX expressed: *"[...] we have [...] the claim [...] to be in a pioneering role, to be aware of the change trends and to see what our clients need"* (E XX, translated by the author). Around 30% of the experts said that they use a mixed form, which fits with the earlier-mentioned comment on hybrid forms between agile and conventional change management. According to the experts, the final design of the change management approach is often highly individual and depends on the respective area, culture and context. However, the importance of agile change management was rated quite high. Regardless of the approach used, some of the experts explicitly said that it would be good for the company to move (even) more in the direction of agile change management, if only in some points.

The previously-researched requirements for change management in a dynamic business environment can apparently be largely met with an agile change management approach. For example, especially experimentation and adaptation or a stepwise, iterative approach are inherent to the process of agile change management and can therefore be fulfilled very well. However, some of the requirements not only refer to change management but to the whole organisation and therefore must be ensured in advance. For example, this applies to topics related to culture, mindset, behaviour or competencies. Nonetheless, a major challenge in agile change management is the issue of providing security and stability, for example.

In general, it can be claimed that change can strongly benefit from agility; for example, in terms of self-organisation, iteration, and experimentation. Agile change management represents a realistic approach to the current business environment, in which the desired target state cannot be described exactly in advance. It makes it possible to handle the increasing complexity, speed, and required flexibility. Furthermore, an agile change management approach has a high customer and demand orientation. Cooperation and participation can also lead to higher motivation, increased joint commitment and assumption of responsibility. An iterative, experimental procedure allows for rapid learning cycles, regular correction and adjustment, and a certain openness to solutions. Agile change management allows using the knowledge from within the organisation and receiving quick feedback on change initiatives. Besides, it makes it possible to quickly show tangible results and make first successes visible to then gain further insights. In the long run, this may result in higher efficiency. Some experts also emphasised the advantage

that an agile change management approach views change as an ongoing process. Agile change management creates greater sustainability, the readiness to change increases and further changes become easier. In addition, it enables transparent handling of uncertainty, which leads to more realistic expectation management. Structured processing of changes can bring back security and orientation and by continuously developing and implementing change initiatives, fewer resources are wasted. However, since change can actually no longer be managed and there is no underlying causal steering logic, the term 'change management' is somewhat controversial. Moreover, the use of the term 'agile change management' can trigger resistance, since the concept of agility has already been burnt in some places. Otherwise, following the expert interviews, agile change management actually has no limits if one considers the compatibility of the topic in the organisation, starts where the organisation currently is and implements it step by step. Nevertheless, there are some challenges; for example, when organisations are very large and have strong hierarchical or bureaucratic structures and regulations, when the compatibility of agility is low and there is no agile mindset or when the need for security and predictability is quite high.

In the interviews, it emerged in the discussion whether change management is still a relevant topic in agile organisations. In this regard, it can be said that change needs drivers, structured methodological support and the overarching coordination of individual initiatives in agile organisations as well. However, due to the established agile principles, greater openness to change and a higher ability to transform, change often works better and faster. Agile change management approaches make sense in principle, including in a conventionally hierarchical environment. However, there are organisation-, project- or context-specific features that speak particularly for the use of agile change management approaches or make the use of more conventional approaches seem more reasonable. For example, agile change management is especially suitable for start-ups and smaller, very open organisations. Furthermore, if an agile mindset and the compatibility of agile working are present in the organisation or business area, if there is a high level of complexity and dynamics, and if the target picture is quite unspecific, such as in the case of culture/ mindset changes or the general development of a VUCA-capable organisation. On the other hand, conventional change management approaches are recommended when the compatibility of agility is low due to the culture and mindset in the organisation, or when the complexity is manageable and the target picture of a change project is quite clearly defined in advance. Accordingly, it seems advisable to use a wise mix of conventional and agile change management approaches.

Finally, the recommendations for successful agile change management presented in Table 1 were identified on the basis of the expert statements.

Table 1: Recommendations for successful agile change management
(illustration based on the results of the expert interviews)

Recommendation	Description
Balancing conventional and agile approaches	It is advisable to use a smart mix of conventional and agile change management approaches, always look at what works best and be pragmatic in doing so.
Using agile change management approaches depending on the present base	One should pay close attention to where the organisation comes from, as well as its current maturity level. Moreover, it is important to explore what the employees currently need and how well they cope with agile change management. Depending on this, the change management approach should start where the organisation stands.
Development/ establishment of an appropriate mindset	For an agile change management approach to be truly effective, a corresponding mindset among the managers and employees is required and should be developed. For example, openness to change, courage, a desire to experiment and to try things out as well as a positive culture of making mistakes and learning are important. If this is not the case, agile methods are applied, although a large part of the effect is lost.
Adaptation of the leadership understanding/ style	Agile change management is supported by a suitable understanding of leadership. In this context, trust, handing over responsibility, empowerment, offering space, support, and enabling are essential factors. However, depending on the specific situation, different leadership styles may make sense.
Building change competencies among the employees and managers, empowerment to deal with uncertainty and dynamics	It is important to build up change competencies among managers and employees and enable them to deal with uncertainty, disorientation and dynamics. In this context resilience, acceptance, cognitive flexibility, the ability to rethink or emotional stability are important, among others.
Ensuring transparency and open, empathic communication	It is recommended to ensure transparency and communicate openly, even when there is a high level of uncertainty. Employee orientation, mutual appreciation and empathy are also important in this context.
Regular reflection and change of perspectives, gathering a mood picture from the organisation	It is advisable to regularly reflect on where one currently stands. Especially managers should continuously observe themselves and question their role and self-image. It is also relevant to change perspectives, listen empathically, be receptive to what is reflected by the organisation and regularly get a picture of the mood in the organisation.
Providing stability/ security	In the context of agile change management, it is crucial to try to provide stability and psychological security; for example, through openness, clarity, transparency, social exchange or good interpersonal relationships.

Taking time and proceeding step by step	It is advisable to take small steps in the direction of an agile change management approach, slowly get closer, and give oneself time, especially if one has taken a fundamentally different approach thus far.
Trying things out	The recommendation is to try out different change initiatives courageously, which can be undertaken on a small scale at the beginning. Subsequently, it is a matter of looking at what fits and expanding it. In doing so, one should perhaps break away from very linear thinking and causal-cause-effect relationships.
Demonstrating an inspiring vision and a clear why	The management should show a clear why and an exciting vision. This is not about a clear goal, nor about the way to get there, but rather about a rough direction.
Authenticity and exemplary function of change managers/ consultants and executives	Change managers/ consultants and executives should be authentic and exemplify what they stand for. This includes being open about their own possibilities, but also about their insecurities.
Focus on supporters, anchoring enablers/multipliers in the organisation	It is advisable to focus on the people who have a desire for change and use them as multipliers and enablers in the organisation.
Exchange, best-practice sharing and professional support	One should provide a platform for exchange and look at how other companies successfully undertake agile change management. Furthermore, it is advisable to obtain professional support.
Cross-sectoral cooperation, bundling of parallel measures and keeping the big picture in mind	In the context of agile change management, it is advisable to bundle measures that run in parallel and take care to avoid losing sight of the big picture. Care should also be taken to bring together competencies from different areas.
Establishing a clear own definition and carefully considering the wording	Agile change management often lacks a common understanding, whereby it is advisable to develop one's own precise definition of it to create clarity. Since the term 'agile change management' can sometimes encounter resistance, it is also wise to think carefully about how and whether to use the wording.

Concerning future development, based on the interviews it can be said that change management in general will probably play an even greater role in the future and represent a decisive competitive factor. In this context, agile change management – or at least individual aspects of it – will play an important role and possibly develop from a trend to a standard. However, conventional change management approaches are expected to continue to have their areas of application and – depending on the context – a suitable mix of agile and conventional change management approaches will be needed. Consequently, the field of change management is tending to become even broader and more complex. Therefore, the role of change managers or consultants will probably become even more demanding and new competence requirements will be added. In addition, it will become

fundamentally more important to build change competencies among employees. Moreover, in order to increase efficiency, change management will most likely be strongly digitalised in the future.

5. Discussion

In Harvard Business Review, Jensen Clayton (2021) speaks about the fact that traditional change management – which is characterised by heavy, lengthy processes – is not sufficient, especially against the background of the Covid-19 crisis. The author emphasises the importance of fast, agile and virtual change management. Jensen Clayton (2021) recommends creating a clear vision of change, empowering people, encouraging self-organised teams, using social media channels and influencers, and moving from large to smaller, real-time changes. These points fit very well with the recommendations for successful agile change management identified based on the experts' statements. However, the author does not elaborate on whether agile approaches replace or merely complement the traditional approaches in her opinion. According to the results of the study, the latter is more likely to be the case, at least initially. It became apparent several times that conventional approaches still have their areas of application and that a wise mix of approaches therefore seems sensible.

The research revealed that change management should be designed very individually depending on the organisation and context. It therefore makes sense – as also recommended by Higgs and Rowland (2005) – to give rather rough recommendations and general, guiding indications and try to move away from strict procedural models and descriptive theories as they have often been put forward in the past. Under the keyword change 4.0, Hinz (2020) also talks about principles instead of rules. Moreover, he says that it is necessary to use the *"whole repertoire of old and new change management"* (Hinz, 2020, translated by the author, p. 7), but speaks specifically of the context of digital transformation when saying so. Nevertheless, this statement can support the recommendation to expand existing change management practices with agile change management approaches and combine different approaches in a smart way depending on the situation, project and context. Study results by Rowland and Higgs (2008) show that change approaches that assume complexity have a positive relationship with success. In contrast according to the authors, a directive approach to change in particular is ineffective in most contexts (Higgs, Rowland, 2005). The authors therefore suggest that the reason for the failure of many change processes is the predominant use of formal, programmatic change approaches (Rowland, Higgs, 2008). This finding could suggest that the more complex that the environment becomes, the more the mix of agile and conventional approaches should shift towards agile.

An important result of the study was the relevance of ensuring stability and orientation by change management. This seems to play a decisive role especially in times of high dynamics and it represents a great challenge, particularly in agile change management approaches, to which special attention must be paid. In their article "Agility needs stability", Gergs, Lakeit and Linke (2018) also highlight the consequential problems of agile transition in organisations, which in their opinion are often given insufficient attention in current discussions. The authors emphasise that agility and stability are not fundamentally contradictory and they note that it is the task of management to

dynamically focus on these two spheres of tension, which are growing under current conditions.

Hayes and Richardson (2008) examined the extent to which Scrum can be implemented using Kotter's change model and found that while the model is helpful and supportive, in some places it is deficient or focuses on things that seem less important in this context. The authors concluded that a more tailored model is needed to support software development companies on their way from traditional to agile approaches. The study found that an agile change management approach makes sense especially in the development towards an agile organisation. Agile change management approaches could therefore possibly take this place. Furthermore, according to Appelo (2012), planned change approaches remain one of the main reasons for the failure of agile transformations. Accordingly, these findings seem to be consistent. Nevertheless, according to the research, agile change management approaches not only make sense in agile organisations or on the way to an agile organisation, nor are they exclusively suitable for complex projects with vague goals and dynamic environments. However, in the opposite case, they are probably not always necessary because the change can then also be depicted well in a conventional way. Furthermore, according to the results of a case study by Deloitte, change processes can become more customer-focused, effective and faster through the use of agile change principles, regardless of whether the project context is agile or conventional (Spelman, Fish, Webb, 2015). However, based on the results of this research, one requirement for agile change management approaches is an appropriate culture and leadership. If this is not the case, it becomes very challenging. Again, the Deloitte study supports this finding by stating that dealing with ambiguity and welcoming ever-changing requirements is particularly challenging for companies whose culture is strongly rooted in waterfall methods (Spelman, Fish, Webb, 2015). Furthermore, according to the results of the research, contrary to what one might think, structured processing of changes is also needed in agile organisations, even if change probably works better and faster there. However, the term 'change management' is debatable nonetheless. For one, in the theory examined and in the expert interviews, it was repeatedly questioned whether change is still manageable at all today. Schaffer (2021) continues to raise the question of whether all management is change management, stating that "*change never occurs as some sort of happening; it is part of everyday life*" (Schaffer, 2021). The author talks about change being seen as an extraordinary event that should be dealt with using certain techniques. He further elaborates that change should instead simply be seen as an essential permanent part of the leadership task. However, it emerged more strongly in the study that the responsibility for change should lie with both management and employees. While the management must have appropriate competencies, change capabilities should also be developed among the employees. Schaffer (2021) also suggests that instead of extensive planning of changes, there should simply be testing and learning in the process. This again fits very well with the study results. The idea of viewing the topic as an everyday occurrence rather than something extraordinary also matches the outcomes of the study very well. For example, one of the experts also says that "[...] *one must take the magnitude out of change management [...]*" (E III, translated by the author).

6. Conclusions

Change management is usually intended to support other areas in their transformation efforts. Nonetheless, in today's rather dynamic, unstable, and complex business environment, the discipline itself must undergo a transformation and fundamentally evolve to continue to have a significant impact. In the context of high complexity, dynamics, and uncertainty, agile approaches often enter into focus. The topic of agility is also attracting increasing attention in the context of change management. The extent to which agile change management contributes to a successful handling of changes in a dynamic business environment was therefore examined by conducting 30 interviews with experts in the area of change management and organisational development. Among others, the following conclusions could be drawn:

There is often no explicit understanding of agile change management. A distinction between conventional and agile change management approaches is also often not clearly possible in practice as there are many hybrids between these two extremes. About one-third of the experts interviewed said they currently use mixed forms of change management, while another third stated using a more conventional approach. Nearly 40% also stated they have a more agile approach to change management in their organisation. Regardless of the change management approach used, some of the experts explicitly said that it would be good for the organisation to move (even) more in the direction of agile change management, although perhaps only in some respects. The study moreover reveals that change management can strongly benefit from agility. In particular, this is the case with respect to self-organisation, iteration, and experimentation. Agile change management represents a realistic approach to the current business environment. It makes it possible to manage the increasing complexity, speed and required flexibility. Considering the compatibility of the topic, starting from where the organisation is at the moment and approaching the implementation step by step, an agile change management approach has no limits. Nevertheless, there are some challenges; for example, when organisations are very large and have strong hierarchical or bureaucratic structures and regulations, when agile compatibility is low and there is no agile mindset, or when the need for security and predictability is very high. In themselves, agile change management approaches make sense in principle, even in a conventionally hierarchical environment. However, there are organisation-, project- or context-specific characteristics that speak particularly in favour of the use of agile change management approaches or make the use of more conventional approaches seem more reasonable. Accordingly, it appears advisable to use a wise mix of conventional and agile change management approaches.

The 30 experts for the interviews were carefully selected, although certain limitations of the study must be acknowledged. For example, the number of interviews conducted was limited. A larger number of expert interviews would have ensured an even greater generalisability of the results. It is therefore recommended that the findings of this research are further explored, confirmed and supplemented in a larger research design based on an even broader data set. Since agile change management is a fairly new field of research and the empirical and practical data on it is quite limited to date, there remains strong room for further research. In particular, a detailed study of different agile and non-agile organisations that have been successfully using agile change management approaches for a longer time would be exciting. Here, for example, one could take a more specific look at differences, commonalities and specifics between different industries, change projects and contextual conditions. Further research could also be conducted into

a promising combination of agile and conventional change management approaches. In the course of this study, great focus was placed on Scrum, which plays an important role in agile working. In fact, the focus was also placed more on general agile principles and values than on agile methods themselves. However, it would certainly be also exciting and beneficial to go into further detail about various other agile methods and their application in change.

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