

## Agility: The Secret to Great(er) People Experiences

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We seem to be talking a lot about the need for companies to be agile lately, especially in product development and customer experience.

A number of months back I attended an event, where a CX leader was talking about the creation of seamless customer journeys.

She was talking about the importance of agility in the customer experience - - placing the customer at the center of their experience - - building and maintaining trust, operating with empathy, creating impressions and detailed understandings of expectations, and delivering on those expectations.

Where contemporary customer experience places the customer at the center of their experience, the same is not often true for our talent.

We seem to apply a different set of rules to our people's experiences.

What we do instead is create rules and procedures that create consistency and stability within the people experience, but not necessarily agility.

By creating detailed people systems and processes designed for the masses, we risk not meeting the needs of the individual, their unique circumstances, and changing circumstances of the business itself.

To explore my point, I want to tell you the story of my son Oliver and the people practices of my employer, [Zendesk](#) - - a company that exists to place the customer at the center of their experience and to help companies get out of the customer's way.

Oliver was born in November 2018, and with his arrival, a significant shift in my personal priorities and values occurred.

I was going to need to work a little differently, a little more flexibly.

I've talked about many of these experiences previously:

- [Workplace flexibility with an agile mindset](#)
- [Parental Leave: What the hell is a secondary career anyway?](#)

Prior experience suggests that flexibility infers a series of trade-offs - - a way of finding time and space for myself both within and aside from my work - - a series of judgment calls and paybacks, underlined by a strong sense of guilt in engaging inflexible practices.

I recall vividly the guilt attached to working from home or taking a half-day to attend a personal matter, despite the extraordinary hours that I might work and the quality of my outcomes. This guilt remains with me still, even within a culture that actively promotes and supports these working practices.

Here lays the problem, that many modern definitions of workplace flexibility are defined on an employer's terms. That is, the employer stipulates what constitutes flexible work, and, perhaps more importantly, what does not.

Jumping back to the present, and since Oliver's arrival, my appetite for making trade-offs has reduced significantly. Sacrificing my role as a father and as contributing partner at home is simply not an option.

Lucky for me, Zendesk is proactive in allowing people to determine their definition of the work-life blend, and provide the necessary tools and mechanisms that enable these practices.

This starts to bring us a little closer to agility, which moves beyond flexibility and begins to examine the factors that enable individuals to define and negotiate their work preferences and flows.

At Zendesk, I have always had the freedom to work at the times and in the places that suit me, so long as I execute on what really matters - - my individually defined outcomes and goals.

What results is that my work has benefited from me working at my optimal moments, which respond to the peaks and troughs of my productivity.

My work has not degraded the quality of my personal life or required me to make unreasonable trade-offs. I remain squarely at the centre of my experience, aided by an agile culture and network of colleagues that I love.

These past months, it's become more and more apparent that what I've been exploring and hoping to understand was not just the nature of flexibility in my working culture, but the nature of workplace agility that enables it.

The key here is empowering the individual to bring an optimal solution to the table and keeping them at the center of their experience, in the context of their circumstances.

### > **Person first, at the center of their experience.**

To consider this first point, let us reflect on a basic behaviorist principle - - that people respond differently under different circumstances. This is influenced by conditioning and lifelong learning.

We must also accept that people and relationships are complicated.

Agility addresses these fundamental principles, in that we relinquish a great deal of control of that experience back to the individual at its centre, but with reasonable guardrails, which are provided by other agile values.

### > **Clear expectations, freedom in execution.**

Agile values suggest we spend less time on detailed documentation and focus more on working solutions. It suggests that we must avoid getting bogged down in detail, delegations, and over-definition, at the risk of losing flexibility and pace.

What people need without the unnecessary minutiae.

Work must be measured on tangible factors - - impact and output - - productivity as opposed to mere presence, and the manner of execution does not invite scrutiny absent reason.

This must to be reinforced by a culture of trust and psychological safety in application, which removes fear, guilt and judgment.

These behaviors must be exhibited and reinforced by leaders, and successful applications must be appropriately highlighted and rewarded.

### > Ongoing engagement, regular reflection.

Agile values suggest that the customer and product team shift to a mode of collaboration, rather than heavy, prior negotiation. The customer is engaged throughout the entirety of the process, which ensures the product remains on track with the customer's expectations.

The same is true of people experiences, where each team member remains connected to their individual objectives, how those objectives impact and influence the work of their team, **and in turn how that team influences their function and the work of the business.**

This provides the leader an opportunity to inform the work of the contributors, shift direction, lead members through change or changing expectations and provide valuable feedback.

It empowers the individual to remain connected to the purpose of their role (their purpose for being); to provide upward feedback on the status of work, on challenges, to inform and influence change, and to remain connected and accountable to the agreed outcomes.

### > Each day an iteration, changing and new.

Traditional models view change as a process to be managed, that is expensive and to be avoided. They assume workflows are long and change detailed and cumbersome.

Agile methods allow teams to modify the process and make it fit the team rather than the other way around.

This essentially brings us full circle, which is to say that we must keep the person at the center of their experience, and assuming that all values are maintained, the individual is enabled to modify their own mode of operating to suit them.

Agility is, after all, about our people remaining nimble, in the context of their whole experience.

In the same way that Zendesk helps companies place customers at the center, we need to do the same for our people. We need to get out of their way and let them succeed on their own terms.

For me, agility means that I get to be a valued employee and as close to a kick-ass dad as I possibly can be.

Agility means that I don't have to compromise being a dad with being a good employee, because as much as I love Zendesk, it will never win that battle.

**The post "Agility: The Secret to Great(er) People Experiences" was first published by Daniel Mottau here** <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/agility-secret-greater-people-experiences-daniel-mottau/>

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<https://thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/agility-the-secret-to-greater-people-experiences>