

Adrie Dolman

# AGILE COACHING

the dutch way

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# **preface**

***How to help organizations  
discover ways to deliver  
the highest value  
in the shortest time and with the least risk***

*With the current dire shortage of real agile coaches, we need more than just superficial knowledge – we need experts. Many books merely describe agile theory, methods, and processes but for a successful agile coach, having a mental model of their own is crucial.*

*Successful agile coaches see the organization as a system and assume the role of a system developer. They facilitate an organic process that breaks through old patterns, paving the way for the agile organization. All this is done according to the system approach, built up based on the mental model and the meaning assigned to it by the people who are part of the system.*

*This book does not purport to change you and prescribe what you should or should not do. This book describes in detail the beliefs and steps with which you can become a successful agile coach, while staying true to yourself.*

*I hope you enjoy reading this book!*

*Adrie Dolman MSc*

## Preface Ahmed Sidky (Los Angeles Metropolitan Area, USA)

*Adrie Dolman's book is a true gift to the agile coaching community. Years of insights and experiences coaching individuals, teams, and organizations are curated into this amazing book. There are countless practical tips, tricks, learnings, models, and tools that will enhance any agile coach and accelerate their growth and skill development.*

*Adrie's focus on Agile as a mindset and how to coach to that mindset is brilliant. This book is truly a great addition to any Agile coach's library. If you are an aspiring agile coach this is a must-read.*

*Ahmed Sidky, Ph.D.*

*President of the International Consortium for Agile (ICAgile)*

*Head of Business Agility at Riot Games*

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## Preface Andrea Fryrear (Colorado, USA)

*There are no shortage of resources on Agile coaching in the world, but many of them assume that you're doing two things: developing software and using Scrum exclusively. What Adrie has created here, however, is a deeply practical guide for any and all Agile coaches, leaving such unhelpful assumptions at the door.*

*Adrie is diligent in avoiding prescription and leaning into description, but I can guarantee that the following pages will nonetheless be enormously practical for agilists looking to build up their coaching capabilities. Despite having spent many years of my own in the trenches working with Agile marketing teams, I found myself highlighting entire sections for reference. I'm already looking forward to sharing the illuminating charts and diagrams with my own team of coaches to help guide their individual growth.*

*And yet this book isn't just a simple how-to or a compilation of exercises. Adrie shows us the full arc of Agile's evolution, tracing its origins far beyond twentieth-century software development and back into the minds of pioneers of the scientific method hundreds of years ago. He skillfully*

*connects this history to how coaches need to show up for their teams, freeing them from dogmatic adherence to practices that may or may not apply to the kinds of work their teams are doing.*

*From Francis Bacon to Steve Denning, Adrie deftly tracks how Agile came to be the defining method for getting stuff done in the twenty-first century. What's more, he plucks out important takeaways from all its phases to guide Agile coaches whose working life is far more complex, uncertain, and ambiguous than the one Bacon found himself in.*

*Being an Agile coach is one of the most severely challenging and deeply rewarding jobs on the planet. Sometimes it feels like both of those things in the course of a single meeting. At times being an Agile coach is akin to trudging through the desert with no supplies, trying to reach an uncertain destination while herding a reluctant pack of cats. Resources like this one are an oasis on this difficult journey.*

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*If you're an experienced Agile coach, rejoice. Here's a careful, considerate fellow practitioner who's opening his toolkit to share ideas with you.*

*If you're looking to start on your Agile coaching journey, great news. Someone who's spent years traversing that path has come back to offer guidance.*

*Agile coaches of all kinds will find value in these pages. For those, like me, who spend our days bringing Agile outside the realms of software development or IT, you won't encounter overwhelming references to releases, demos, bugs, or code bases. Anyone who tries to nurture the Agile mindset and its corresponding ways of working should stop messing around with my introduction, and dig into this outstanding resource right away.*

*Andrea Fryrear*

*Agile Marketing Coach & Trainer, Co-Founder AgileSherpas*

## Preface Michael K Sahota (North York, Canada)

*When Adrie Dolman reached out to me to see if I would write a foreword, I wondered to myself: Who is this guy? How can he contribute to such a crowded field? How does his work relate to the work I am bringing to the world? Agile Coaching is a complex, broad topic: there are many valuable, distinct and even contradictory views.*

*What this book delivers is a practical, human in-the-trenches view of what it takes day in and day out to operate as an agent of change. The book is full of many useful tools and models that will help anyone aspiring to be an effective Agile Coach.*

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*The part of the book that resonated the most with my own views is the importance of your own development. He says “Your most important tool is you, and you have to master that tool properly before you start using it.” This is a point that often gets missed and is actually the foundation of one’s effectiveness.*

*What may happen as you dive into the practices of this book is that you discover your own leadership and how to make local change to culture without talking about it. My hope for you is that you begin to model the shift of what Agile is really all about.*

*I hope you enjoy it.*

*Michael K Sahota  
Certified Enterprise Coach, Author, Trainer and Consultant*

## Preface John Cass (Washington, USA)

*In 2008 when I became aware of agile for marketers, the Dutch were ahead of the curve with the practice. So I was excited to learn when Adrie Dolman had written his new book “Agile Coaching - The Dutch Way”. His book is all about how agile coaches approach agile coaching. This book is a how-to for coaches. What stood out for me was the thorough*

*review of how to become an agile coach for an organization; from maturity models, to toolboxes, to personal insights from Adrie on what to expect. Great stuff for team members wanting to become an agile coach the Dutch way!*

*John Cass*

*Organizer, Boston Agile Marketing Meetup*

*Podcaster, A Deep Dive into Agile Marketing with John Cass*

### **Preface André Felippa, (Sao Paulo, Brazil)**

*Do you aspire to become an Agile Coach? Or maybe you are already an experienced agilist looking for new inspiration, examples and practical tools?*

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*For a long time I've been searching for great practical recommendations for Agile Coaches like myself. And there are already plenty of books in the market which cover the Agile frameworks, team-forming and scaling-up, but Adrie's book is quite unique.*

*Adrie skillfully draws from his own extensive coaching experience to offer us a structured pathway to become a great Agile Coach, covering all aspects of this delightful job, whilst also sharing a wealth of helpful and practical examples, tools and techniques, which can easily inspire and be applied by any agile enthusiast, regardless of your own agile maturity level.*

*I hope that you may enjoy the reading and extract as much value from this great book as I did.*

*André Felippa*

*C-Level Agile Coach and MD at Adventures Inc. / Brazil*

## **Evan Leybourn (Victoria, Australia)**

*At the time of writing this preface, the Agile Manifesto is just about to turn 20 years old. And yet, as Adrie makes clear in his book, agility is much older than that. This is nowhere clearer than in Aesop's Fables, a collection of stories and fables from ancient Greece over 2500 years ago (between 620–564 BCE). Let me share with you the fable of the Oak and the Reed (translated by George Fyler Townsend in 1887).*

*A very large Oak was uprooted by the wind and thrown across a stream. It fell among some Reeds, which it thus addressed: "I wonder how you, who are so light and weak, are not entirely crushed by these strong winds." They replied, "You fight and contend with the wind, and consequently you are destroyed; while we on the contrary bend before the least breath of air, and therefore remain unbroken, and escape."*

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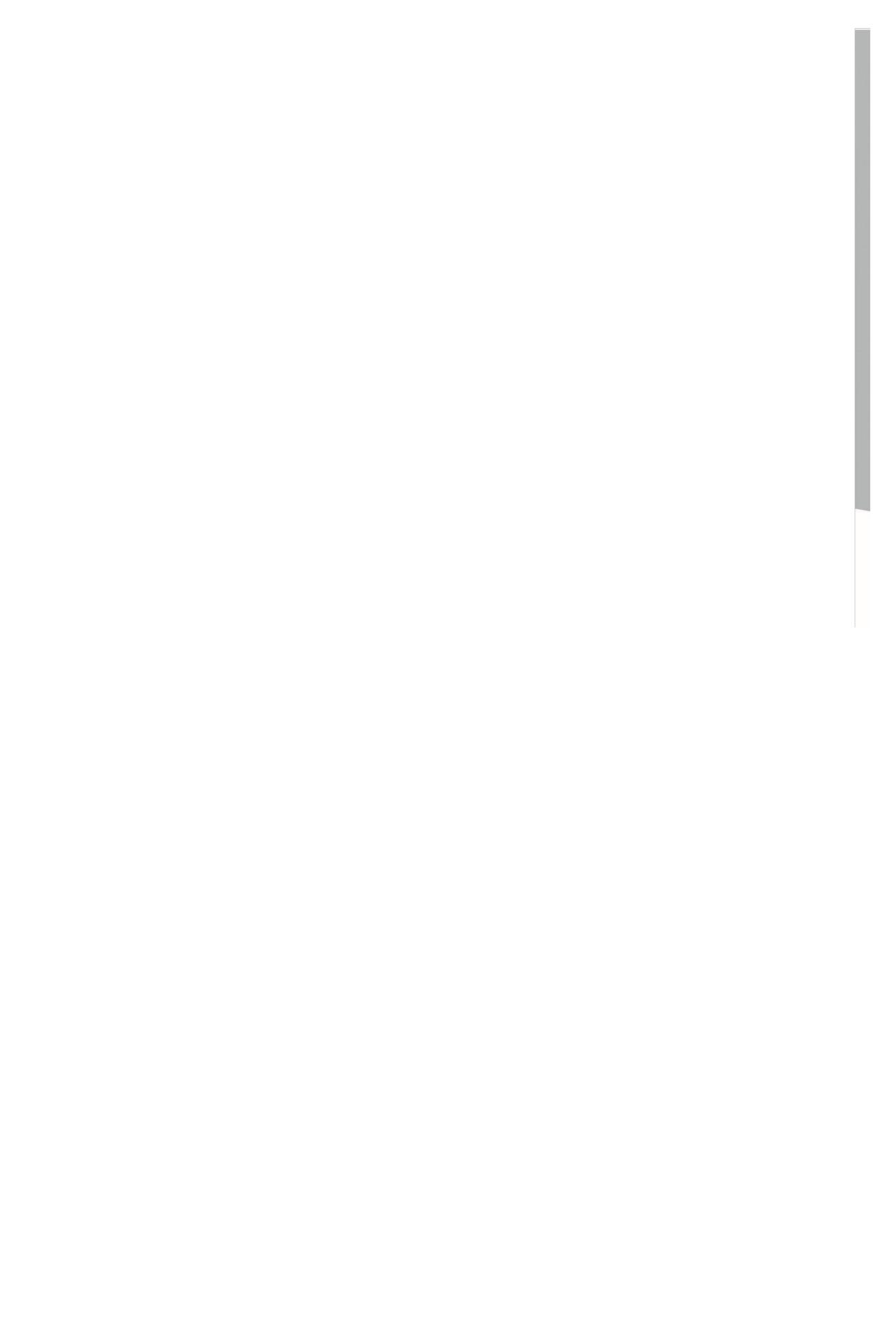
*This remains one of the best descriptions of agility today. So the question must be asked, if agility has been valued for millennia, why is it that we have so many Oaks in modern business? The simple answer is that agility is harder to achieve and maintain than rigidity; and when the winds are calm no one values agility. But, to extend the metaphor, the winds aren't calm. Just take a look back at the last decade, from 2010 to 2020, to see how volatile and unpredictable the world we live in is.*

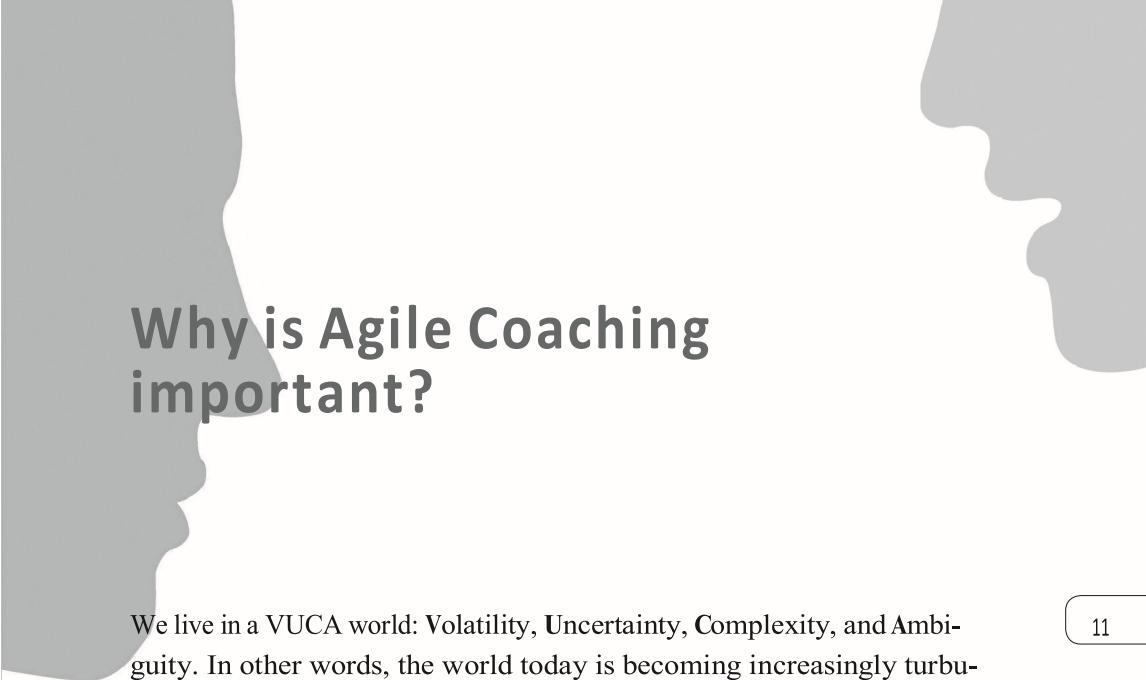
*Which is where agile coaching comes in. Whether in a marketing team, product development, or across an entire organization, agile coaching helps people who aspire to agility, achieve it. And for any aspiring coach, Adrie's book is a mustread, and practical, guide to the craft.*

*Evan Leybourn  
CEO, Business Agility Institute*

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# Why is Agile Coaching important?

We live in a VUCA world: Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity. In other words, the world today is becoming increasingly turbulent, unstable and vague. Organizations are taking a radical turn in their search for a system that can easily adapt to rapid changes. Agility is one such system. It is not hype—agile is the new lifeline.

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People want to matter and be of value. They want to develop and be a part of something that they can be proud of. People derive their self-esteem from a winning sports club, a volunteer organization, a happy family or a promising company, for example.

Agile Coaching gives new meaning to organizations and people in the VUCA world. It serves as the basis for an organic company culture, an inspiring team spirit, and healthy, motivated people. This cannot be achieved by just calling something agile (Agile In Name Only) or encouraging your teams to scrum without an agile mindset. The environment in which the agile team operates must actually be agile, and the team and the mindset of the team members should also be purely agile. This requires, or rather demands, real agile coaching, much more and much better than the current average. The people who demonstrate they are capable of top-level performance with an agile mindset are still very much the

large minority. The longer the rest continues to lag behind, the higher the market share that the handful of agile purists will have thrown into their lap. This brings unwanted inequality into the world, and unnecessarily so. In my opinion, the majority of organizations should be able to add high value to the market. Not only would this make these organizations more pleasant, profitable and valuable, it would also contribute to equality in our society and happiness for many.

## **Why would you want to be an agile coach?**

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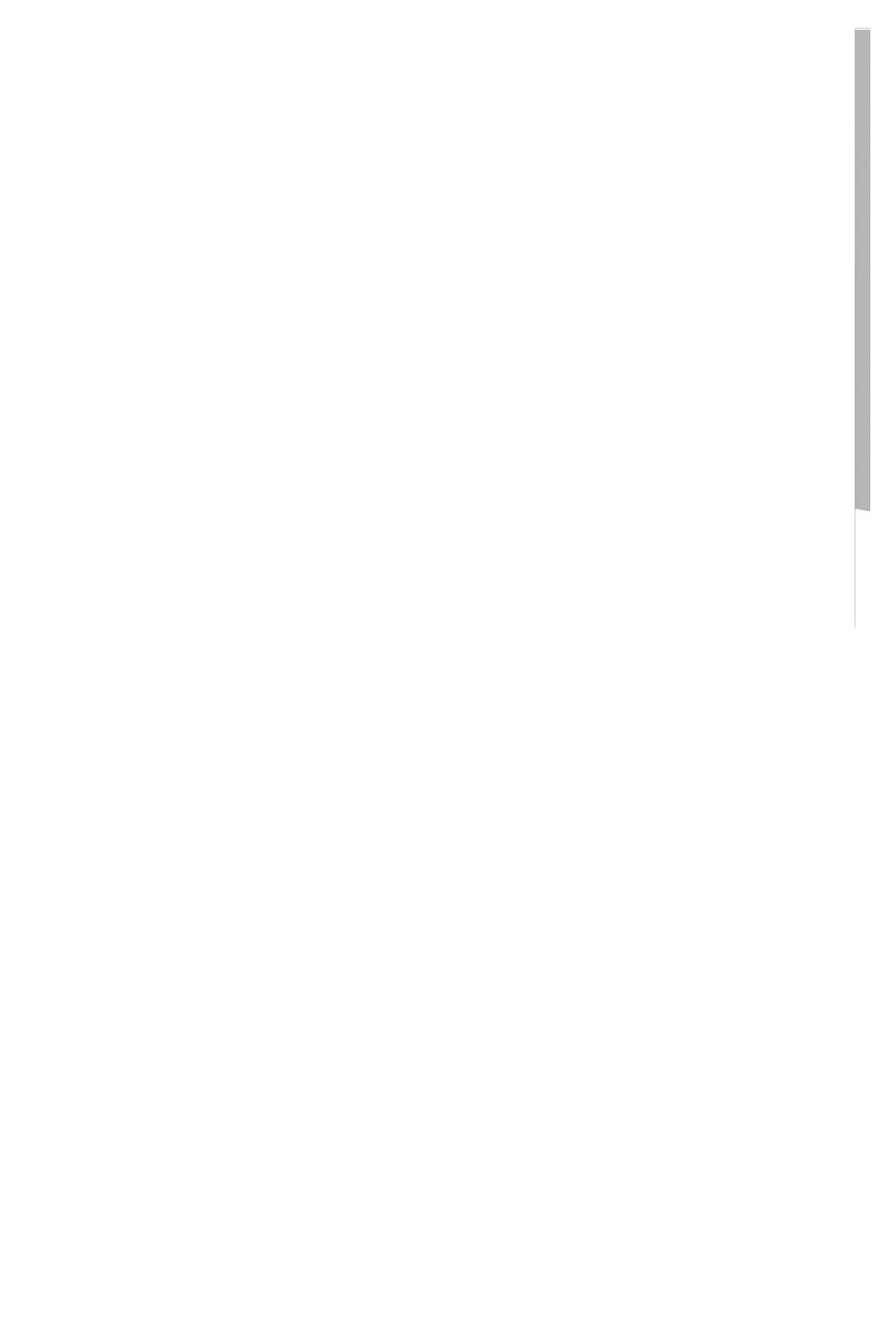
If it frustrates you that organizations in our current VUCA climate are holding themselves back and thus undermining their future prospects. And if you get a kick out of helping the people in those organizations emerge from their paralysis of old thinking patterns, so that they can deliver the highest value in the market. Then you are probably an agile coach or want to become one. Or maybe you are an entrepreneur, interim manager, troubleshooter, company doctor, consultant, trainer, speaker or manager with an agile mindset, and you act like an agile coach. Confused? In the course of this book, you will come to understand that there are more agile coaches than people who call themselves agile coaches. And that there are people who call themselves agile coach but aren't in reality. What organizations need are real agile coaches, lots of real agile coaches. I hope you are one or want to become one. You will make the world a little bit better.

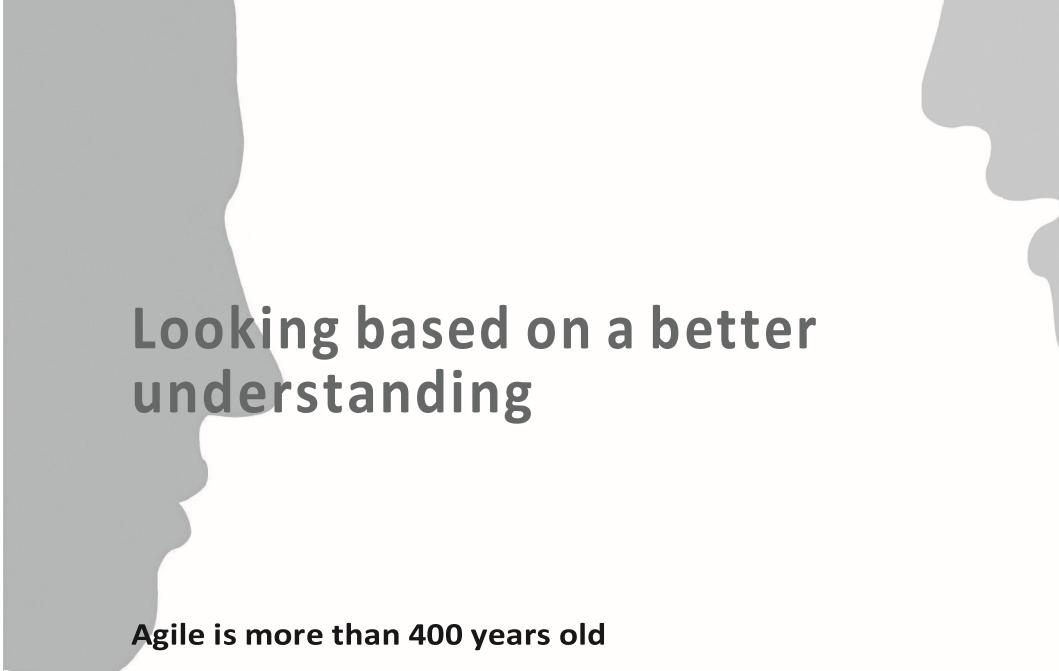
## **If you look with different eyes, you see new things**

Every change or improvement starts with a different way of looking: different from how it is generally viewed. If you want to develop a better car, you should not look at the current cars with their current standards. It helps to start by looking at the users of cars differently, to really understand their needs, and then to think about how you can make a better car.

This is the line I follow in this book. I always want to approach the topics based on the mental model. In other words, how does an agile coach look at this? Based on which interpretation, knowledge, and belief? My expectation is that the people who read this book are also able to look at things in a different way. Next, I describe how an agile coach deals with this in practice.

Many things about agile and agile working are unclear. You may have adopted a prevailing view, which is not always useful when you want to become or be a good agile coach. That is why on the following pages I will first introduce some common misconceptions about agile. This will help you to re-interpret several confusing words and ways of thinking.





## Looking based on a better understanding

**Agile is more than 400 years old**

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Many people think that agile was invented in the IT sector. Many books that write a few lines about agile even say so outright. But this is not true. Agility as a scientific method is actually 400 years old and has its origins in 1620. The method was inspired by the Italian physicist, astronomer, mathematician and philosopher Galileo Galilei, and established by scientific pioneer Francis Bacon. The latter is also known as the father of empiricism. Bacon argued that researchers should be like small children, and that the best way to learn from observed facts is through experimentation and observation. His dedication likely resulted in his death: he died of pneumonia in 1626 while studying the effects of freezing meat on its shelf life.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the method was enriched from various scientific sides with pragmatism and refined empiricism, creating a practically usable empirical cycle that we still use today, albeit in an improved form: