Case Study: Agile Careers - Rui Carvalho

For Rui Carvalho, agility has become a guiding principle and a core belief. Now Head of Engineering at luxury travel company Edge Retreats, his agile journey has taken him from post-graduate student to an agile career and an agile approach to life.

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Rui Carvalho

Summary

Challenges:
- Gaining fulfilment in the workplace
- Embracing and responding to change
- Balancing process with people skills
- Delivering value at the right time

Solutions:
- Understanding agile principle and practice
- Extending agile thinking beyond method to mindset
- Being eager to respond, adapt and grow
- Taking an integrated and holistic view
The challenge:
Targeting fulfilment in the workplace

Talking to Rui Carvalho, it’s clear that his working life has always been more about purpose than profit, aiming for fulfilment more than financial gain. He started his university studies in Civil Engineering in Portugal, soon realised his passion was for Software Engineering and he then pursued a degree in this area.

He later studied an MSc in Web Development at Kingston University London, where he was taught by Agile Business Consortium Director Dr Islam Choudhury, and formally learnt about agile for the first time.

Rui demonstrates a growth mindset and has continued to add a range of technical, business and marketing accreditations to his skill set, keeping in touch with the Consortium along the way. He is also shortly to become Islam’s student once more, to achieve AgilePM® certification.

‘I’ve been wary of corporate heavyweight organisations,’ he reflects, ‘I wanted to work in an organisation where I could use a broad range of skills, and not be pigeon-holed or held back from developing by the inertia of the past. I’ve intentionally sought out organisations that can be more agile and embrace change, rather than resisting it: the ones that are prepared to look harder at new ideas. I wanted to work in a ‘learning organisation’ that was prepared to try stuff out.’

The solution:
An agile approach

‘I discovered agile development when I was doing my MSc at Kingston University,’ Rui explains, ‘My course included a whole module on agility. It taught me how to develop ideas productively without feeling that I had to figure out every detail at the start’. The module that Rui refers to is now known as Agile Practices®, a stand-alone course from the Agile Business Consortium offered by several universities throughout the UK.

‘By this time, I was experienced in PRINCE2® and XP. I’d already been managing software development teams, including virtual ones, and I knew the importance of good collaborative practices, of focusing on client needs, feedback loops, and business value. The module on agility made me realise that many of the practices I valued, and my natural skills, were aligned with an agile approach. I’d been heading in the right direction but without the guidance and structure of a framework. I needed the agile training to hit the right balance between adaptability and rigour, to provide a safe environment for the client even while we were experimenting and evolving in response to changing needs.

Kingston University, where Rui first learnt about agility
The results: Developing an agile career

Once Rui had been introduced to agility in a way that gave him a detailed understanding of the practices, skills and mindset that were the foundations of the approach, he was keen to move his career forward in an agile direction. ‘I decided to do my dissertation on agile working,’ he reveals, ‘because this gave me an ideal opportunity to learn from my early project management experience. I chose to explore the challenges of communication in distributed teams – a situation I had experienced and where agility had offered me a new perspective – and I was lucky enough to have Dr Islam Choudhury as my supervisor to support this work.’

After his MSc, Rui worked for an organisation which used a Scrum approach. ‘Over this time, I became increasingly aware of the behavioural side of effective working. How people default to certain patterns and that there are good, and less good, ways of following an agile methodology.

‘I began to appreciate that agility isn’t just about methods such as Scrum, but about targeting business value – which I now see as one of the most critical aspects of agility. The hardest part of agility is understanding the philosophy. Doing a process doesn’t make you agile.’ This is one of the key points that the Agile Business Consortium seeks to emphasise.

‘It became increasingly clear to me that agility didn’t only need to be about business! I’m a perfectionist by nature and inclined to get angry with myself if I don’t get things right first time. I started to realise that it’s ok to work in an iterative way, to revisit things and change them until they become the shape you want. I began to see that the best results can be achieved through adaptation and that sometimes it’s a case of doing just enough to get the value that’s needed.

‘In some cases, this can make the difference between something getting finished or not getting it done at all.’

‘Value and time are very interconnected. It’s pointless delivering perfection if the need has passed by the time the job is complete.’

Agile development and Business Agility

Rui maintained his relationship with the Agile Business Consortium and Dr Islam Choudhury, who have played a significant role in developing his thinking around agile and agility more widely. In June 2018, Islam invited him to become Ambassador for Portugal for the Consortium, to work more closely with the Portuguese agile community.

‘I value my role as a Consortium ambassador,’ Rui confirms, ‘It allows me to contribute to the development of agile thinking in Portugal and has given me opportunities to share my own agile journey and to connect with the fascinating experience of the wider network of ambassadors.’

Today, Rui is just as keen to continue developing his expertise and passion for agile working. ‘My membership of the Consortium gives me access to a wealth of knowledge and a great network of people’ says Rui. ‘I can access certifications, meet professionals in agility from a wide range of disciplines, and learn about areas of agile I didn’t even know about!’

Rui is now applying his agile thinking in a broad sense to deliver overall business agility at Edge Retreats. ‘Agility is a great mindset for building a company suited to a future of innovation,’ he affirms. ‘Business Agility allows us to develop a mindset that thrives on change, with the ability to acknowledge and respond to the different perspectives of shareholders, stakeholders and customers.

‘It’s important to take an integrated holistic view,’ he continues, ‘To step back and allow agile to work organically across the organisation. Once you can detach yourself from any specific aspect of agility, then an agile approach becomes the glue that pulls together everything you do.’

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Rui at the Agile Business Conference 2017
How to find out more:

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Membership of the Agile Business Consortium
Membership is a way of connecting with the agility community, helping one another with ideas, techniques and spreading the word of agile among businesses and individuals. We are here to support our members with their agile growth and transformations.
www.agilebusiness.org/membership

Agile Business Consortium:
Agile Business Consortium is the not-for-profit professional body for business agility, and we are now in our 25th year. Our mission is to lead, promote and enable business agility worldwide.

We are the brains behind AgilePM®, AgileBA®, AgilePgM® and AgileDS™. Through APMG International we have certified over 100,000 Agile Project Managers around the globe. We are the world’s oldest agile organisation and organisers of the world’s longest running Agile Business Conference.

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