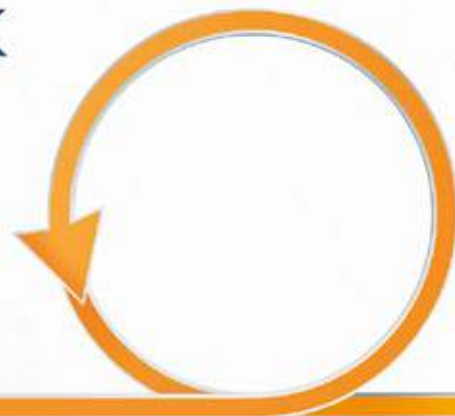'Great, practical and comprehensive. Learn how to apply the agile mindset directly to your business and see it flourish.'
MARCIN FLORYAN, TECH LEAD, COMPARETHEMARKET.COM

BEING
AGILE
IN BUSINESS

DISCOVER FASTER, SMARTER, LEANER WAYS TO WORK

BELINDA WALDOCK

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BEING AGILE IN BUSINESS

Agile and lean aren't just business buzzwords – they're the fast and efficient methodologies you need to change the way you work – for good.

'Great, practical and comprehensive. Learn how to apply the agile mindset directly to your business and see it flourish.'
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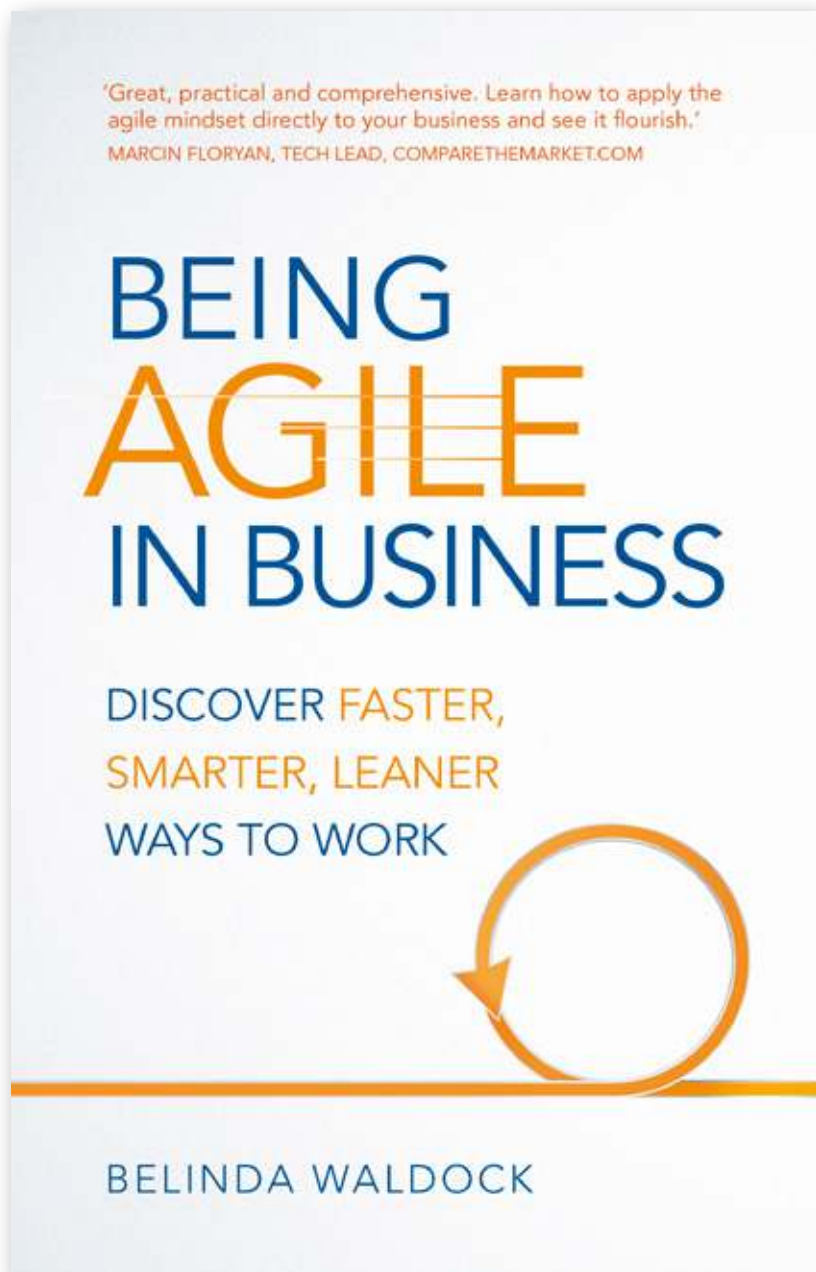
Work faster, think clearer and improve your agility, both professionally and personally, with a suite of powerful tools that will introduce you to the essential skills and mindsets of agile and lean and quickly encourage you to start thinking differently.

- Get up to speed: learn all about agile and lean and how they can work for you

- Stop wasting time: think smart, act fast, be adaptable and get more done

- Be efficient: spot opportunities, maximise your resources and blast through barriers

- Get results: maximise quality and value and turn your ideas into reality

For a clear, collaborative and more enjoyable way to work, start being agile – today!

Available to buy now in eBook or print at your favourite bookshop.

Being Agile in Business

INTRODUCTION

Welcome. This book provides business professionals with a philosophy, strategy and suite of tools to help you work smarter, leaner and succeed faster. It will help you to:

- understand and apply agile methods in your working world;

- discover strategies and tools to make you work faster and better;

- find out how to anticipate change and navigate uncertainty;

- gain immediate clarity and control in any situation;

- streamline and improve your day-to-day workflow;

- uncover new ways to communicate and collaborate.

Adopting agile and lean methodologies can help to bring success faster by structuring your time differently. For example, if you find yourself in long planning meetings where you feel your time would be better spent doing some work, agile and lean provides a model for quick meetings with clear actions on what to do next.

It will provide you with tools to simplify communication and visibility in your working environment, ensuring the best use of time and resources. Use the tools with your colleagues to improve your abilities as a team player.

Use this book to find ways to identify strengths and opportunities, and uncover barriers and bottlenecks that are limiting your performance. This simple method and toolbox enables you to turn ideas into reality, using an approach that embraces learning and collaboration. As well as tactics, tools, templates, materials and guides, this book contains case studies and exercises to find the best way for you to thrive and succeed in any situation.

I assume you have picked this book primarily because you would like to become better at what you do. You want to make your job easier, increase enjoyment and satisfaction and generate positive results so that you can progress and excel in your career.

You may have a great opportunity on the horizon that you wish to explore, or you may feel stuck in your current position. You may be firefighting in your job day to day, going through extreme change, whether personally or as an organisation, which means the future is uncertain and decisions have to be made. You may be simply intrigued by a new technique for becoming a better business professional.

Whether your personal preference is to take a scientific or a creative approach to your work, these methods have been found to enable both approaches to be incorporated. The tools and methods are structured to allow you to pick out the bits that work for you. The case studies, shown by ⬡, and exercises, shown by ⬤, will help you to adapt and evolve them to suit your style and environment.

The book is split into sections to help you to approach and practise being more agile in your working environment.

The approach in this book is an adaptation of ideas and concepts from agile and lean, taking the best of both to present one unified way of working. The practical heart of the book is Part 3, where you yourself can experiment by personally adopting agile tactics and tools. The book is divided into four parts:

- **Part 1 Being agile** – defines what agile is, the characteristics of an agile and lean business professional and the reasoning for developing these traits within your working practices.

- **Part 2 Agile thinking** – explores why we want and need to be agile in the jobs we do, and the drivers and beliefs needed to adopt an agile approach.

- **Part 3 Agile approaches** – the methods, techniques, tools, materials, practices that give you the structure to be able to act in an agile way.

- **Part 4 Agile culture** – will help you to consider how you can scale and share agile with those you work with, simple steps on how to create a great working environment through collaboration, and how to expand your agility beyond yourself to your teams and organisation.

These techniques can be used to help you beyond your professional life too, whether it is a project to renovate your house, or just thinking through something that is playing on your mind to gain some perspective and find a way forward.

Discover how to anticipate change and navigate uncertainty.

Gain immediate clarity and control in any situation.

Streamline and improve your day-to-day workflow.

Uncover new ways to communicate and collaborate.

1. Agile background

> **KEY LEARNING POINT**
>
> Learn about the sources of the methods and practices behind agile.

Agile is a globally recognised term for a set of methods and practices that have emerged in the technology sectors to improve the development of software (first named as a software development methodology in 2001 in the 'Manifesto for Agile Software Development', http://agilemanifesto.org). Agile draws upon other management methods such as lean, *kanban* and coaching. Agile has evolved within the software sector to support project management, time management, quality improvement and team performance. The agile methodology provides a change and decision support structure and toolkit.

> **'Agile software development is a group of software development methods in which requirements and solutions evolve through collaboration between self-organizing, cross-functional teams. It promotes adaptive planning, evolutionary development, early delivery, continuous improvement and encourages rapid and flexible response to change. '**
>
> **AGILE SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT – WIKIPEDIA, 2014 (available under the Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike License)**

Lean is a methodology that was developed within the manufacturing sector (derived from the Toyota Production System in the 1990s) to support mass production with an ability to continuously improve both the products and manufacturing processes. Lean emphasises a model that looks to take out cost and add value in a business's core activities. Agile draws on the objectives of reducing waste and that of promoting and prioritising activities that add value.

Kanban is a Japanese word meaning signboard. Within agile is it used as a visual representation of work in progress. The method was developed as a system by Taiichi Ohno, Toyota's chief engineer, to maintain a high level of production as well as to manage continuous improvement of products. Kanban is demand-driven in that work is produced on demand, based on

customer behaviour and, where possible, just in time. Improvements are responded to quickly when demand for change is observed and integrated into production and delivery processes. The use of kanban within software development has been developed since as a visual tool to help manage the delivery of software solutions (by David J. Anderson, see Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kanban_%28development%29) and, more broadly, particularly in the knowledge sector.

Coaching as a process is a person-centred methodology, which promotes a solution-focused, goal-orientated approach to personal and professional development. The method works to enable an individual to achieve a greater state of self-awareness and of the environment and people around them. Agile coaching aims to empower the individual or team to become self-managing and self-organising in reaching their goals.

According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology MIT, research into the use of agile practices within a business suggests that high-agility businesses generate 30 per cent more profit and grow 37 per cent faster than companies with low agility (Project Management Institute, 2012) , see Figure 2.1. Others are beginning to recognise that management methods being used in the technology sectors, particularly in the software sector, are 20 years ahead of traditional management techniques: legacies from the 1980s and 1990s that continue to be used despite significant changes to the business environment since.

Traditional management tactics are unable to cope with the rapid change needed to keep pace with global markets and emerging technologies. Plans are often out of date before they are completed and, by the time a product reaches the market, the consumer has moved onto the next new innovation.

> Agile provides a new approach to delivering success in today's working environments, addressing growing issues. Agile is agile in its own right and is evolving and flexing continually to meet changing needs and improve its performance as a management tool.

This book aims to introduce the necessary and essential agile concepts and approaches to help you to begin your agile journey.

2. Agile benefits

> **KEY LEARNING POINT**
>
> Explore the problems that agile can help to solve and the benefits that agile working can bring.

The benefits of being agile include:

- lightening your mental load;
- embracing and managing change;
- delivering value early;
- gaining a competitive edge;
- communicating effectively;
- maintaining workflow and focus;
- making good decisions rapidly;
- enabling personal growth and skills.

Problems to solve

If you can identify with any of these problems, then agile tools and thinking can help you to find a way through to a solution:

- lack of visibility and clarity;
- delays due to blocks and bottlenecks;
- too much work or nothing to do;
- moving goalposts and scope creep;
- uncertainty of a way forward;
- starting projects but not finishing them;
- running late and over budget;
- poor communication/collaborative working;
- managing a changing environment;
- procrastination and low morale.

📖 Agile survey

Since 2011 I have been working with small and medium-sized businesses to adopt agile and lean practices into their business strategies and product development practices. These businesses were surveyed to identify the benefits of their adoption of agile.

The survey confirmed the benefits of adoption with agile businesses, reporting:

- a more flexible approach to business;
- improved responsiveness through improved workflow;
- improved communications and team cohesion;
- improved efficiency in general;
- better customer service and satisfaction;
- improved times to market;
- better product testing.

All participants reported enthusiastically from their experiences of implementing agile. Highlights of what was considered to work especially well included testing, process simplification and the board.

Companies also reported better team morale, better time efficiency due to the time management tool and an improved responsiveness to 'mission creep' (Oxford Innovation Services Ltd, 2012).

The survey also identified improved quality, focus and change management through the adoption of agile methods. Many of the businesses reported agile moving into other areas of the business beyond product development, such as strategy, human resources (HR), marketing and sales.

The project was extended in 2012 to work with businesses from a diverse variety of sectors to support the evolvement of agile practices for their use. Following the success of their adoption, the methods have continued to adapt and evolve to be suitable for most business professionals.
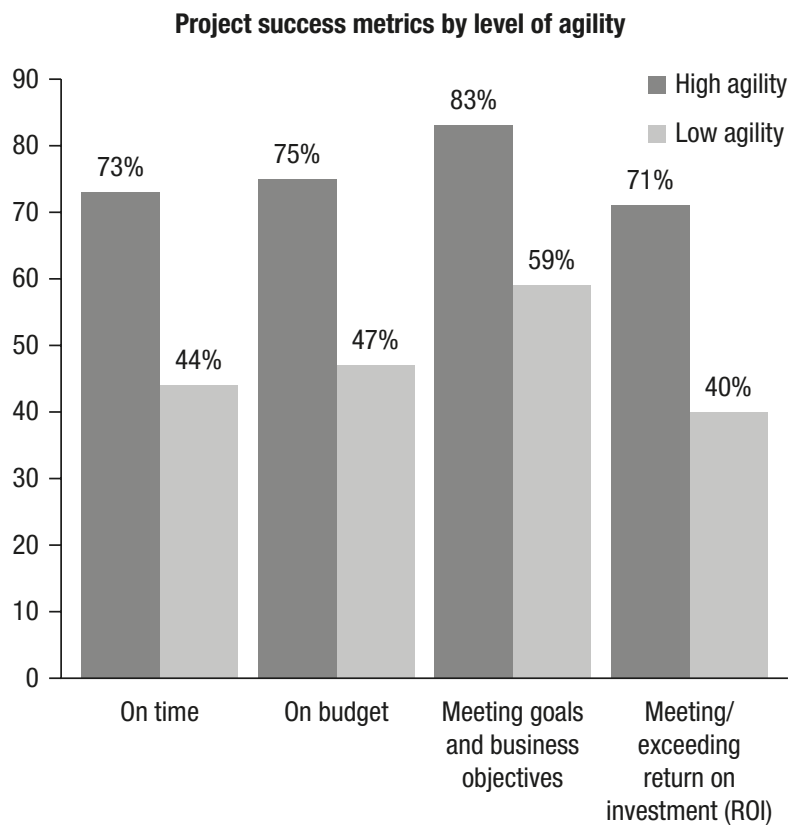
Project success metrics by level of agility

Figure 2.1   Organisational agility
Source: Project Management Institute (2012)

Agile is a flexible working structure that enables you to visualise your workflow in real time to improve:

- **responsiveness;**

- **communications;**

- **productivity;**

- **motivation;**

- **resource management;**

- **quality of work;**

- **planning and prioritisation;**

- **focus.**

'"Agile on the Beach 2014" asked conference attendees if being agile made them happy. 95 per cent said yes!'

'AGILE ON THE BEACH 2014' CONFERENCE SURVEY RESULTS

3. Agile characteristics

> **KEY LEARNING POINT**
>
> Identify what being agile means to you.

What does being agile mean to you?

A word or two may spring to mind, or perhaps you picture an agile person, thing or situation. A gymnast, a rock climber, a race horse, a racing yacht, lifeboats, operating theatres, the All Blacks rugby team and a Formula 1 pit stop team are all examples of being agile.

Agile can be defined in a number of ways depending on the context in which they are used to describe someone or something that is responsive, flexible and fast. There are equally numerous ways in which you can apply and adopt agile and lean behaviour.

One simple and easily sourced key tool you need when initially adopting the agile methodology is sticky notes.

The great thing about sticky notes is that they are in themselves very agile.

By their nature sticky notes are flexible and easy to use, you can quickly capture and share information. If you record things on sticky notes they are wonderfully visible and tactile, groups of notes can be easily reviewed and moved around to reorder and restructure them without having to rewrite everything.

Sticky notes aren't permanent or fixed either so you can easily change, swap, add and remove individual notes without impacting other notes.

Sticky notes

The first agile tool is a very simple one: sticky notes (eg Post-it notes or other similar self adhesive notes) are often used for reminders and messages in the office and at home.

Sticky notes are a great tool for adopting an agile approach to get information out of your head and the heads of your colleagues. Use them for ideas, thoughts and expectations, and to break things down into manageable chunks of work that can be reviewed.

Personally, I used to be a real list person, except often it would get to the point where I was so busy or so much was happening that I would spend an inefficient amount of time writing, rewriting and reordering lists. Since adopting sticky notes, the only lists I write these days are shopping lists and, admittedly, even those are always written on a sticky note, as I use agile within my personal and professional life! So, if your list often gets too long, I wholeheartedly recommend buying yourself some sticky notes and giving the method a try.

When mapping out the notes, just let your thoughts flow onto the notes in whatever order they come to mind. The first step is to get your thoughts out of your head and onto paper. They may be linked to a particular topic or goal and, at this point, the notes do not have to be in any particular order or size; the emphasis is on getting things out of your head, and it seems that, in most cases, our minds seem to hold things randomly and not in any particular order.

Each thought should have its own sticky note. If you find yourself writing lists or multiple items on the note, separate these into individual notes. Once you feel you have everything out of your head, then you can begin to order and group your sticky notes into a structure or format that helps you to organise and map these into something that makes sense. The exercises and tools provided in this book provide a number of options for mapping a volume of notes into structures and formats that allow them to be qualified, validated and actioned.

✒ Defining agile

What characteristics do you associate with being agile?

Using your sticky notes, or the following blank diagram, start capturing any words or images that you associate with the word agile.

- Start with a sticky note and write the word agile in the centre.

- Whatever comes to mind, capture these in single words, images or short phrases and write them on more notes, one per note, and place them around your central note, building up a map of associations.

Allow your mind to freely connect to another thought and capture these, too, on separate notes. These could lead you to specific situations relevant to you. Capture occasions where you feel you were agile or lean in your actions or approach, and identify the feelings, values and behaviour in that scenario.

Once that thought is captured on paper, return to thinking of the word 'agile' and see what else comes to mind.

Try not to pause, hesitate or dismiss any thoughts, just write them down as they come to you, one per sticky note; you can always discard them later if you wish. If you do not have any sticky notes yet, use the blank diagram below to capture your thoughts.
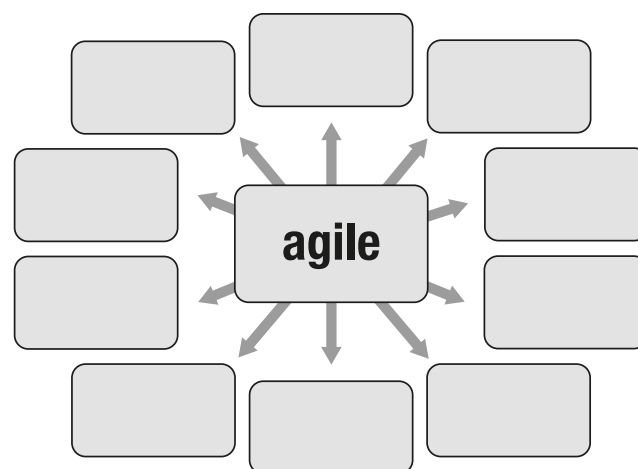

Figure 3.1   Agile characteristics map

The map you create is unlikely to be the same as another, although it may have some commonalities.

Once you have captured your thoughts, study your notes and see if there are connections or themes among them. Look for patterns and relationships and move them around to reflect this. Group similar words together to form key themes.

The meaning of words is unique for every one of us. While there are commonalities, we all perceive and process things slightly differently to the next person. This is a good thing because once we know what we believe to be the definition of something, we can share this with others to ensure there is clarity between ourselves.

The next maps of agile definitions have been created from a number of sources, including group discussions and definitions found online (Figure 3.2). Some almost everyone will say, others are one-offs, and there most certainly are others that are not included here. Figure 3.3 shows key themes, chunking them into seven key agile characteristics.

Using sticky notes with your team, your manager and your customers can be incredibly valuable in ensuring understanding between all parties. The activity of mapping ideas and discussing them supports communication. Communication is a two-way activity: we talk and we listen. To improve your listening skills, active listening is a great technique for helping to ensure you are listening and clarifying what others are telling you.

📖 Mapping definitions

A successful restaurant owner, Andrew, had plans to open a new restaurant. His current restaurant was based in a seaside town and the new restaurant was linked to a local city farm development. His finance manager, Teresa, enthusiastically had taken a lead on producing the initial business plan, and there was informal involvement from his existing marketing manager and non-executive directors.

There were a number of different options for the style, market and product that would model the businesses vision. One particular idea from Andrew was for a diner-style restaurant which, in Teresa's mind, conjured up ideas of a motorway service cafe.

Equipped with the sticky note mapping method and sticky notes, Teresa was armed with a collaboration game to help the team come to a shared vision
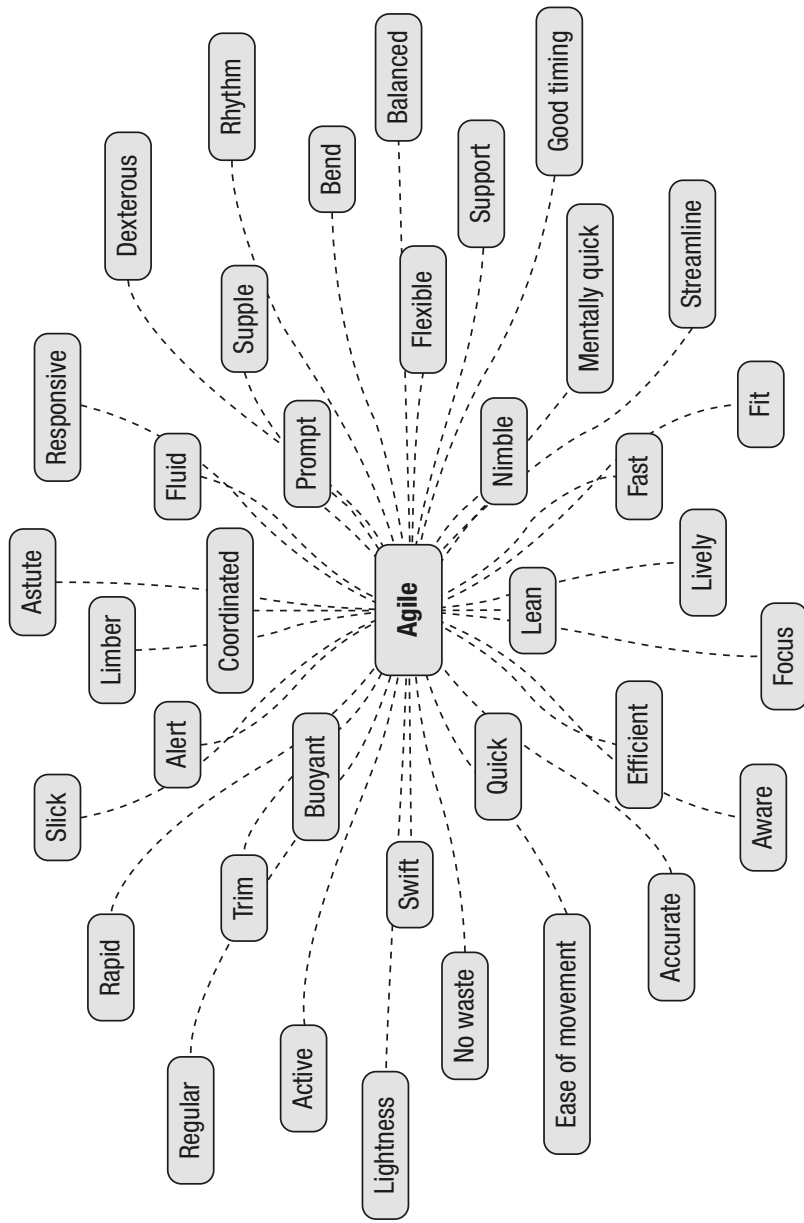
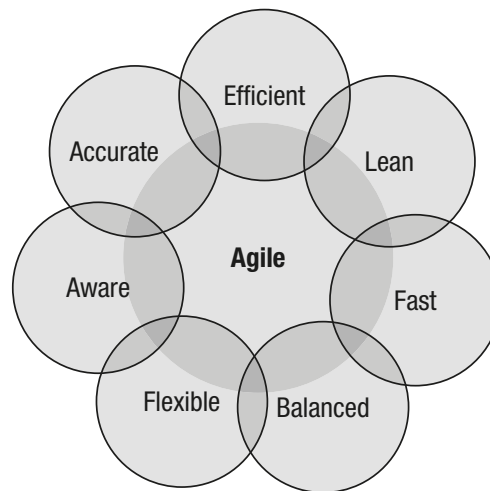**Figure 3.2   Example of an agile characteristics map**

Figure 3.3 Agile characteristics

where an appropriate style, market and product were identified to take forward, or at least differentiate, the number of options that had been suggested.

As they began to explore each idea further, Teresa facilitated this using active listening and clarifying questions such as: 'Can you tell me a little more about this one?' To her relief, when the CEO started to talk about a diner, it became very clear that he was imagining a French bistro, following a recent holiday, fine dining and wonderful surroundings.

After a short time, the team had a number of solid ideas that would work together and that they could explore further. Throughout the conversation, queries were raised and actions set to research and develop each idea further.

The simple activity of mapping out the ideas and discussing them provided a visual aid to promote communication and develop a shared language within the team, so that everyone had a shared understanding of the definition of the goal.

Active listening

'**Active listening is a communication technique used in counselling, training and conflict resolution, which requires the listener to feed back what they hear to the speaker . . . to confirm what they have heard and moreover, to confirm the understanding of both parties.**'

WIKIPEDIA – 'ACTIVE LISTENING', 2014. (Available under the Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike License.)

It is good to ask open questions that help to clarify and understand the topic being discussed:

- What is the goal?

- What do you want?

- What do you not want?

- How would you describe the current situation?

- What is currently stopping you?

- What would work for you?

- What benefits would you like to see?

- What problems need to be solved?

- What would success look like?

- What other options are there?

- Is there anything else?

- Can you tell me more about that?

Use sticky notes to explore your thoughts and perspective.

Key characteristics of agile are:

- **accurate;**

- **efficient;**

- **lean;**

- **flexible;**

- **aware;**

- **fast;**

- **balanced.**

Belinda Waldock is an agile business coach and a professionally qualified Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) coach and mentor in business management with a Computer Science degree. Over the past 15 years Belinda has worked with small to medium-sized businesses in the UK, supporting information and communication technology (ICT) adoption and, more recently, agile adoption through Oxford Innovation. As programme manager and business coach for Agile Innovation, Belinda has worked with a broad range of high-growth businesses across most business sectors to adopt agile practices to leverage their growth aspirations.

'Learn a new way of working–quickly and simply.'
Michael Barritt, Managing Director, Sullivan Cuff Software Ltd

'How to use agile in any business. Every business could use a lesson in collaborating effectively, working more efficiently, and navigating uncertainty.'
Melissa Perri, CEO, ProdUX Labs

'An enjoyable read from cover to cover on the core practices and benefits of being agile.'
Kathryn Hughes, Group Program Manager, Client frameworks, Skype

'A must-read for anyone considering adopting agile, it will significantly speed you to "aha" moments.'
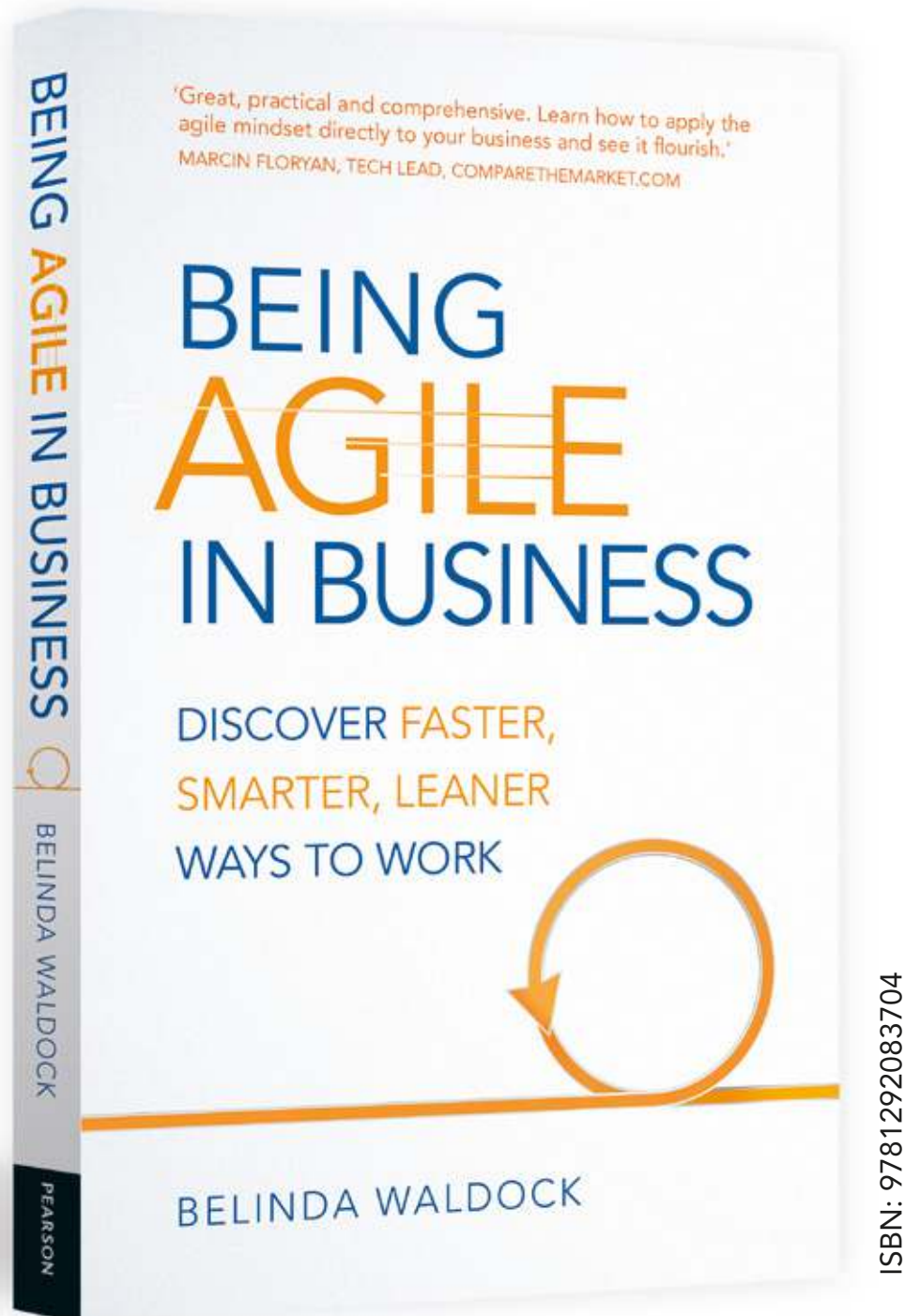Olly Brand, IBM and agile practitioner

'Such a wide range of useful and modern techniques. It's an inspirational manual for any business leader!'
Jim Barritt, Principal Consultant, ThoughtWorks

'Great, practical and comprehensive. Learn how to apply the agile mindset directly to your business and see it flourish.'
Marcin Floryan, Tech Lead, comparethemarket.com