



**NEW TOOLS
FOR A
#NEWWORK
ENVIRONMENT
AT THE
UNITED NATIONS**
From Pilot to Scale



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Executive Summary

This report was written in collaboration with the i2i Hub and the Geneva Innovation Movement Association. Members of these entities participated in observing and evaluating the Agile pilot to provide an external perspective on the outcomes. The report is based on their observations. The i2i Hub for Innovation is a research competence center at the University of Geneva. Its goals are to develop applicable research for fostering innovation. The Geneva Innovation Movement Association creates pathways for innovation in the Geneva ecosystem through networks, skills development and thought leadership.

The current environment of technological advancements and complex global problems is creating unprecedented change in the way people work and how developmental budgets are allocated. These pressures along with other rising internal tensions led to the rise of a United Nations #NewWork staff movement. Through this movement, the United Nations (UN) is looking to change the way it tackles the world's challenges through new forms of collaboration, innovation, and coordination. As part of this internal movement within the UN system, a recently piloted programme aimed to introduce new agile collaboration techniques to rejuvenate and enhance the way in which the

UN works. Key findings of this pilot program showed a desire of staff members to have the opportunity for training and be empowered to use new ways of working, such as agile collaboration techniques. Pilot findings also highlighted the adaptability of such techniques across different functions and regions, and the key role for leadership in facilitating and supporting its scale. Based on the insights developed from this pilot project, a scaling of Modern Agile work forms system-wide within the UN is suggested through training opportunities at all levels, dedicated time and support resources, and the development of new evaluation tools.



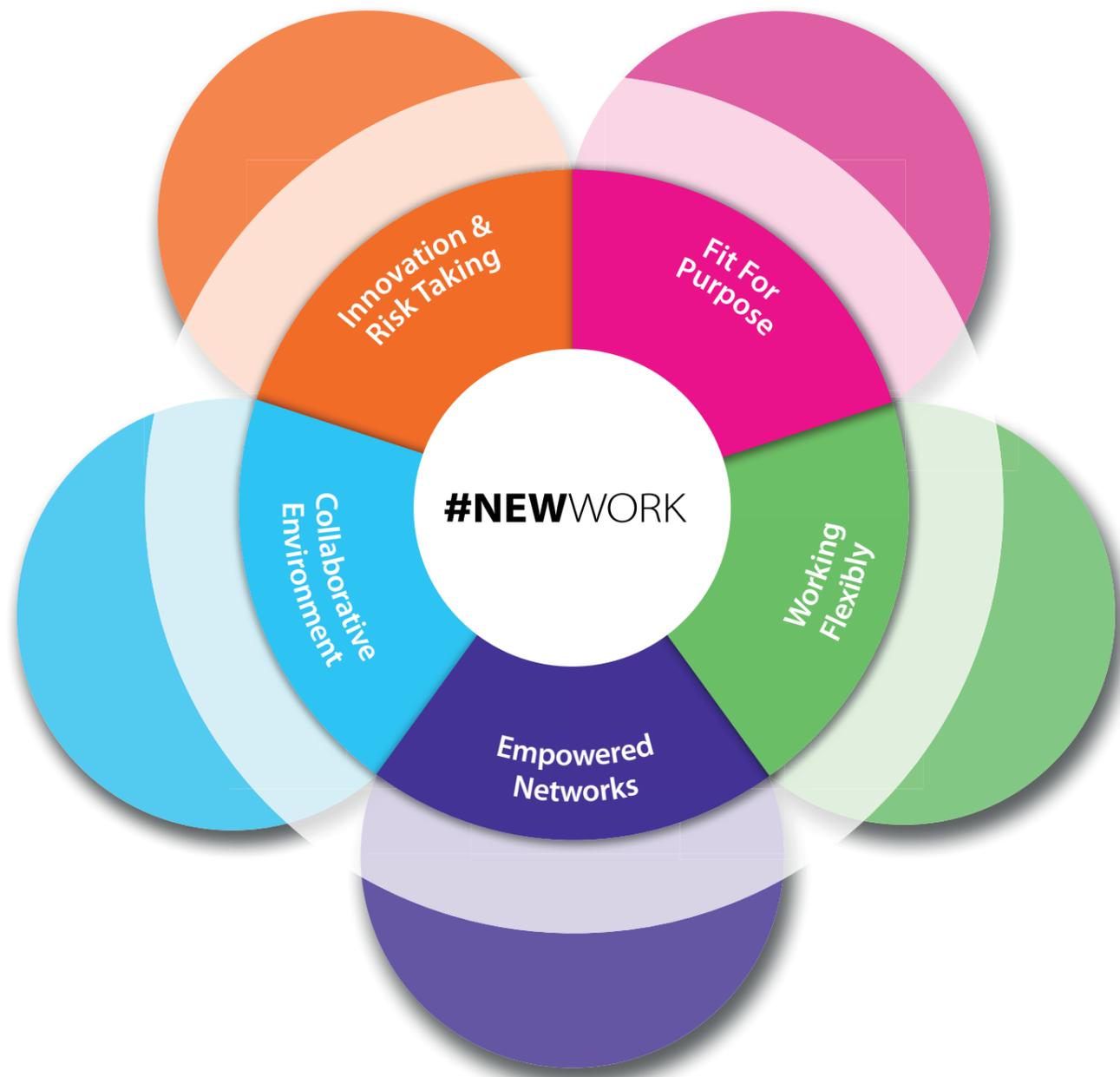
Introduction and Pilot Goals

In the context of technological change, complexity and volatility, and currently in the face of the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 crisis, new challenges call for new solutions. As quickly as the grand challenges facing us as a society evolve, the organizations tackling these challenges are required to adapt their strategies, their structures and their tools. The UN is no exception and not only is the Organization as a whole being called to adapt to the diverse and changing needs of its clients, but it is also being looked to as a leader for finding creative and modern solutions to today's complex and evolving challenges. In order to step up to the plate, staff members of the UN are seeing the need to use innovative, agile and creative methods for their work.

The evolution of UN work to effectively and efficiently meet the modern needs of its clients and beneficiaries will depend on an evolution of the tools and processes employed by its staff to efficiently deliver. Alarming, however, staff are expressing concern for their capacity and empowerment to meet these needs. In 2017, a UN staff survey of nearly 15,000 UN Secretariat staff members highlighted a key issue within the day-to-day operations of the UN in achieving its goals. Of 14 categories, 'agility' was the lowest ranked, and 'innovation' the third lowest. Despite both innovation and agility being key skills needed to tackle the challenges facing today's society and

achieve the sustainability goals determined by nation states globally, staff members felt neither of these skills were being developed, implemented and sufficiently supported internally. Staff members' reflections remained similarly concerning in 2019, when employees expressed worry in the recurring engagement survey that their skills were out-of-date, and that career progression and skill development needed improvement. Additionally, staff highlighted a further need for cross-entity cooperation to tackle cross-sector global challenges.

To address these growing concerns, staff took the initiative to join forces and to work towards a culture that empowers staff members to embrace a growth mindset, to collaborate and to feel encouraged rather than threatened by change. They aimed to create an environment that encourages perpetual skill development and growth. This staff movement led to the creation of the #NewWork initiative that aims to change the UN workplace culture to create the 'UN we want'. UN staff members recognized the need for change and are proactively working to create an organizational culture fit for tackling modern-day global challenges. From driving adoption of collaborative technologies and new meeting techniques, to launching innovation events, improving service to clients and beneficiaries, and promoting flexible working arrangements, #NewWork has already delivered substantial positive changes to the way the UN works.



#NewWork Themes

#NewWork initiatives fall under five key themes, which have evolved as more colleagues became involved in co-creating the initiative, identifying new challenges and solutions (see graphic adjacent). These themes are in constant evolution but provide a current snapshot of where the initiative is now, and how the Agile Pilot fits within these current themes.

- **Innovation & Risk-Taking:** nurtures a culture in which managers and staff are empowered to innovate, are comfortable to take measured risks, and dare to fail.
- **Fit for the Future:** focuses on improving staff skills and knowledge, ensures that opportunities to learn and develop are accessible to all, and values continuous growth.
- **Working Flexibly:** builds a culture that embraces flexible working and managing outcomes not presence, fosters a common mindset towards flexible working, and capitalizes on the use of technology to support new ways of working.
- **Collaborative Environment:** fosters inter- and cross-departmental collaboration, learning and sharing of experiences, and improves communication within and between teams.
- **Empowered Networks:** promotes new types of reporting structures, including self-managing interdisciplinary and project-based teams.

For more information on #NewWork, please visit the [SharePoint site](#).

The Agile Pilot

Agility and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances is an important aspect of all of the themes behind the #NewWork agenda. In its efforts to empower staff members to change the status quo and to step up to the modern challenges facing the UN and society as a whole, the #NewWork initiative has highlighted the need for a more agile and empowered workforce. This has led to a joint initiative with the United Nations Office of Geneva (UNOG), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), and the UN Headquarters in New York to empower networks through the integration of agile collaboration techniques within the UN environment. The term “agile” refers to a form of project management initially developed for the software industry, based on delivering requirements iteratively and incrementally throughout the life cycle of a project. Since its initial inception, however, agile tools and techniques have been applied throughout manifold sectors and organizational forms. Agile collaborative techniques implies not only the use of new tools, but the understanding of joint values and principles, the adoption of new practices, seen as a “radical alternative to command-and-control-style management.”¹ Agile collaborative techniques aim to empower both teams and individuals in a way that balances individual freedom with collective coordination, instils a powerful common purpose and develops respectful, accountable and collaborative mind-sets.

Through a pilot program, the global #NewWork core team has introduced agile collaboration techniques to four different teams in different duty stations of the UN Secretariat. This white paper presents the initial findings of this pilot programme and presents a proposal for further integrating the agile practices for absorption UN-wide.

The project highlighted six key objectives, including:

- I. Introduce agility:** To introduce elements of agility within the UN system by putting in place self-organizing/management teams who will practice agile work methods and reflect on how these techniques could be embedded within the UN workforce.
- II. Collaborate internally:** To empower teams to collaborate across categories and levels, duty stations and units in a non-hierarchical way, to take ownership of their commitments and to create venues in which teams can share insights so that useful improvements or standards emerge. This empowerment is seen as breaking the silo way of working seen currently in UN work culture.
- III. Understand barriers and overcome them:** To enable a deeper understanding of organizational impediments that prevent teams to become fully agile and find ways/seek initiatives to remove them.
- IV. Multiply learning:** To leverage the newly gained skills of pilot participants for organizational multiplication and present tested options for others to adapt agile approaches to their work.
- V. Collaborate externally:** To encourage collaboration with external providers to ensure that state of the art tools are applied and that the participants are able to get the most of this experience to be able to scale it up.

The Pilot Teams

The pilot project introduced modern agile collaboration techniques to four selected teams/change agents that committed to reflect, explore, develop creative ideas, speak up and inspire to do some inter-session work. Based on the basic premises of Modern Agile and taking into account common structures found in the UN system, four teams were selected for the pilot. The selection process was based on the following requirements:

- I. Global reach:** Before selecting the participants, it was determined that the pilot should be based on a global sample, and it was pre-determined that teams would be selected from UN duty stations in Switzerland, the United States of America, and Thailand. In addition, a global team would be represented by the #NewWork team.
- II. Functional diversity:** The #NewWork team aimed to identify a diverse group of participants that are representative of the diverse functions within the UN system. Teams were chosen that performed functions that were found throughout the UN ecosystem. For example, the budget and planning section was chosen because it is a section that exists in most agencies - meaning that lessons learned could be generalizable.

III. Both leaders and learners: Teams represented both traditionally rigid and increasingly agile departments, to test the applicability in both conditions. Some functions depended on rigid rules to effectively conduct their activities, while others were found to already be creating more adaptive and agile environments. To evaluate how these techniques could be adapted in more conservative and rigid functions, it was decided to include such a team in the pilot.

IV. Commitment and interest: Participants were selected based on previous interactions with the #NewWork team and through showing interest in developing new and agile techniques at work or were identified as already having committed to implementing agile tools in their daily work. This ensured that incentives were not required for participation because a desire to learn and a basic commitment to growth were already present with all selected team members.

These four teams consisted of a programme planning and budget section (Geneva based), a strategic planning and policy services section (New York based), a cross functional team (Bangkok based) as well as the #NewWork global team. Each team was composed of 5-19 members including at different levels. Where applicable, interns working with the team also participated.

¹ Darrell, K.R., Sutherland, J. & Takeuchi, H. (2016) Embracing Agile. Harvard Business Review, <https://hbr.org/2016/05/embracing-agile>

Tools and concepts

BOX 1

The Agile Methodology

Agile is an iterative approach to delivering a project throughout its life cycle. A well-known management process, it has evolved since its foundation in the software industry to be adaptable to all working environments. Modern Agile, the adaptation from traditional agile techniques, simplifies and streamlines traditional agile processes while also enhancing its adaptability to all working environments. Agile tools and concepts were chosen to pilot at the United Nations due to its founding principles of trust, flexibility, empowerment and collaboration. Modern Agile, rather than traditional agile techniques, was found to be more applicable for the international, evolving and sensitive environment that is unique to the United Nations. Unlike other project-management techniques, Modern Agile is flexible and developed to be adapted to each user's unique needs, motivations and objectives.

While adopting Modern Agile (see box 1 for more details) is about empowering teams to achieve objectives, rather than about adopting new tools or practices, the journey of learning to operate with agility is often developed through the sharing of tools, practices and concepts. Participants are encouraged to practice these tools and concepts as a means of developing an agile culture and a growth mindset, and it is up to each individual and each team to choose what tools and concepts they continue to utilize as they move forward in their agile journey.

The two-month pilot was facilitated by InsightPact, a geographically diverse and multi-generational facilitation team that is committed to build creative capacity, foster empathy, transform conflict, and increase agility. The facilitators led the four participating UN teams through four interactive mini workshops. Each workshop provided a methodological intro into the Modern Agile framework and then allowed participants to practice, explore and reflect themselves on the value contribution and obstacles of adaptability.

Members of the Agile Teams Pilot were introduced to a number of tools and concepts referred to collectively within this report as agile collaboration techniques. Participants were encouraged to begin using these techniques within their teams, combining them as they see fit. Some teams were already using some of these tools and concepts, while others were complete novices. These techniques were based on key concepts (see table 1) that are the foundation for Modern Agile. Building on these concepts, a series of tools (see table 2) were introduced, explained and experimented by the pilot teams in order to teach an agile mindset and to implement agile collaboration. Both through role play and workshop exercises, as well as in their daily routines at work, these tools were seen as a way to develop an agile mindset, changing the way team members tackle daily tasks.

TABLE 1

Modern Agile Concepts The prerequisites of developing an agile mindset

Developing a growth mindset

The underlying concept behind #NewWork's objective of achieving positive change, this concept is also key to an agile mindset. A growth mindset, or the willingness to grow and learn from others, is found to lead to a tendency to embrace challenges, persist in the face of setbacks, see effort as the path to mastery and to learn from criticism. With this mindset, every other concept becomes easier and more natural to implement.

Creating a safe environment

While many UN staff members attend to the physical safety of themselves and their colleagues, agile teams are encouraged to also make the psychological safety of themselves and their colleagues paramount. In this concept, safety is seen as both a basic human need and as well as an essential tool to unlocking high performance. When referring to safety here, teams are encouraged to ensure the protection of people's time, information, reputation, money, health and relationships. In the final survey of participants, more than half of pilot team members were applying this concept to a significant extent in their work during the pilot.

Experimentation and rapid learning

Once a safe environment is established, experimentation becomes both accepted and encouraged. While many staff members of the UN have become accustomed to delivering with perfection, afraid of making mistakes that may have wide-spread implications, the right environment can enable the acceptance of mistakes and a rapid-yet-fulfilling learning curve. Team members are encouraged by this concept to fail, and recognize the learnings in doing so. When in the right environment and through the right processes, failure is seen as a form of experimentation and learning and therefore encouraged if addressed accordingly. Modern agile is a commitment to making experiments "safe to fail" so that team members are not afraid to conduct more experiences and to learn quickly from the outcomes.

Continuous value delivery

While many teams within the UN are accustomed to refraining from delivering products until they are deemed fully complete, in alignment with the stigma associated with failing, agile teams are encouraged to deliver faster and more often throughout the project cycle. Team members are encouraged to ask themselves "how could valuable work be delivered faster?" and movement is paramount over perfection. If team members are no longer afraid to fail, action is not paralyzed and teams are able to deliver continuously. This doesn't imply publishing unfinished work, but rather integrating more iterative stages of completion to enable constant feedback and reflection throughout the process. This requires team members to divide large amounts of value into smaller pieces that may be delivered safely now rather than later.

Helping others do their best work

Since one's team depends on a collective effort, this concept encourages team members to ask themselves how they can make the other people in their ecosystem be their best version of themselves. In modern agile, this includes the people who use, make, buy, sell or fund the team's products or services. In the United Nations, this would of course include the Member States, donors, civil society, colleagues and other international organizations or private sector organizations collaborating with the team. The concept requires team members to learn the context and pain points of the people in their ecosystem, what holds them back and what they aspire to achieve, in order to consider how they can help them to achieve their goals - which also helps us to achieve ours.

TABLE 2

Tools to practice and foster an agile mindset

Tools used to teach the agile mindset

The nine “whys” In order to develop a growth mindset and encourage curiosity within a safe environment, participants were encouraged to use this tool as a team exercise. The tool is a simple task of asking the question “why”, through various forms, nine times in a row to get to the root of a particular situation or to uncover a purpose. We often only ask why one time, and feel obtrusive or uncompromising if we should persist in our questioning. However, an agile mindset encourages curiosity in a positive and safe environment.

Practicing gratitude While many of us may practice gratitude in our personal lives, it is rarely an aspect of our work life. Actively introducing gratitude into daily work and improving the psychological safety of the environment support all of the concepts of agile working. One way this can be utilized is to include 5 minutes of gratitude as part of weekly meetings.

Asking “Yes, and” This tool is a training of our reactions to our colleagues ideas and experiments. While we can often get accustomed to responding “no, but...” as a means of moving a project along to achieve tight deadlines, agile working encourages the exploration of all ideas. To practice this reaction so that it comes naturally in daily tasks, teams can hold each other accountable in meetings by using only “yes, and...” responses.

Tools used to execute Modern Agile

Setting ground rules A key concept that agile workers require is a safe space within which to operate their tasks. This tool aims to ensure a consistent understanding of safety and the concept. It can be used through a physical or digital space where all team members can set the ground rules and design a safe space that enables agility. The ground rules may include concepts such as being open minded, agreeing to disagree, active listening, working in small groups, no cell phones, etc.

Accountability partners Creating an agile mindset, as the pilot teams discovered, does not happen from one day to the next. As each of these tools aims to help flex our agile muscles and develop new forms of interaction and work, it can be helpful to be reminded and encouraged along the way. This tool is simply ensuring that someone is holding one accountable and encouraging growth. Staff members can find a partner that is also working on developing an agile mindset to help cheer them on (and vice-versa). Partners can also help each other to see the big picture, while also holding each other accountable in a compassionate and holistic way. Within a team, this can help create shared accountability where team members hold one another accountable and thereby improve team performance.

Iterations/time box To help team members employ the concept of experimentation and rapid learning, tasks should be broken down to shorter sprints rather than one long marathon. Breaking tasks into bite-size pieces that include a planning stage, building/task work, and review in each stage enables constant feedback from relevant stakeholders and continued adjustments of course.

The daily touch-point While many UN staff members ensure the effective and efficient meeting of Member States and other UN clients on a regular basis, they can often overlook the importance of daily contact with their own team. A very short, five-to-ten-minute daily meeting, is a tool seen as creating a safe space when teams discuss the day’s tasks and priorities and obstacles in the way for achieving the daily goals. Daily touch-points can support team cohesion, security, collaboration and problem-identification.

Iteration or weekly meetings In addition to the daily touch points, an agile mindset depends on constant iteration, review and adjustments to work plans. To help instill this concept, teams may use a weekly scheduled meeting, or may schedule meetings to align with the iterations of their project. The regularity of these meetings instill a mindset of constant improvement, learning and the safety surrounding experimentation. The meeting’s objective should be reviewing progress, learning from failures, obtaining feedback from stakeholders and planning for the next phase of work.

Team task board Whether physically or virtually connected, teams can use these tools to keep on top of tasks, help all team members to feel on-top of their own tasks and aligned with their colleagues as the project constantly progresses. A physical or digital board can be used to house all tasks, big and small, that have yet to be started or prioritized. This is simply a space to put everything that needs to get done. Tasks are then moved along the Kanban board once they are taken into action. The Kanban board is a log of progress, tracking tasks as they move from “to-do” (or the backlog), to “doing”, to “done” to keep track of progress along a particular iteration or time box.

Retrospectives A key aspect of iterative agile work is reflecting, learning and adapting to feedback. To start to develop this concept within a team, this tool ensures the active reflection on progress, successes and failures at the end of each iteration. The tool is simply a reminder to take the time to review what went well, what didn’t go well, and what should change in the next iteration or phase. This could also be seen as evaluating what teams should start doing, stop doing, and keep doing, as the next phase of work begins. The focus of a retrospective is not on tasks, but on the relationships and interactions within the team.

Key pilot learnings

A set of key learnings were extracted from the pilot program in regard to a desire among staff members for agile working techniques system-wide, the ability for both rigid and flexible UN teams to adopt agile techniques and principles, and the support system needed to empower staff for scaling of agile work. These three key learnings are based on comments of participants and observations during the pilot, as well as a survey conducted at the end of the project. These learnings were then discussed with a subset of participants in order to validate the findings.

Key learning 1 A desire for scale

The pilot showed that there were great possibilities to use collaborative thinking and hands-on approaches and examples to bring change to the traditional UN ways of working. One of the key learnings from this pilot was that staff members are both open to, as well as calling for, new methods of working based on more flexibility, a safe environment for learning, and a more collaborative process. Participants recognized the constraints associated with work programs mandated by Member States, but during the pilot, they acknowledged that these constraints could be overcome to breed innovation.

This key learning aligns with the findings of the UN staff engagement survey where staff members felt their skills were outdated and that more collaboration was needed to tackle today's challenges. Positive reflections on the pilot such as those listed below illustrate participants' desire to continue to work in an agile environment, using the concepts and tools introduced in this pilot with a broader group of colleagues. Participants felt that the agile collaboration techniques taught could help the UN ensure it remains relevant and adapts to the evolving needs of its clients and beneficiaries. During the pilot, one participant commented "where our client is questioning the usefulness of the UN work, this is particularly useful. Experimenting and learning rapidly is very important to us to make us relevant, and it is important as a team or as a UN staff to reflect and learn from our experiences and move ahead."

Example reflections from pilot participants on the positive pilot experience:

“The pilot was a great reminder how important it is to provide a safe space for teams and to continue reminding ourselves that people are the most important asset.”

“I was happy to receive the invitation to be part of Agile workshop. The workshop enhanced my perception of agile mindset and encouraged me to practice it not only at work but everyday life.”

“It's exciting to be part in the very first agile pilot in the UN!”

“I felt valued and empowered to take ownership of my working environment.”

“Very enriching experience that put together several colleagues from different offices. We all shared our experience and got to practice agile working together, thus proving that agile work can indeed be implemented if all parties are committed.”

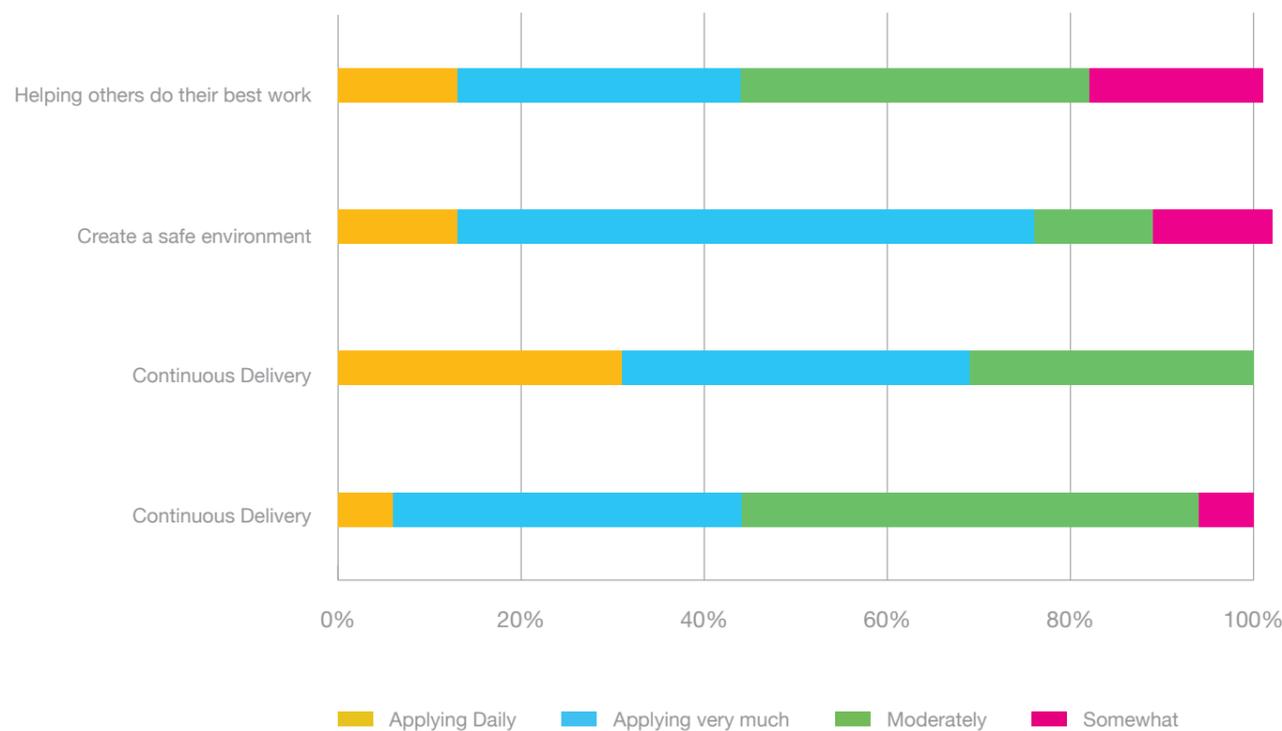
Key learning 2 Adaptable system-wide

The second key learning was that agile techniques were able to be utilized by a range of teams, with different cultures and functions. By design, pilot teams were chosen to test these techniques on both rigid or inflexible functions that depend on regulations and rigid formulas to perform their work, with more flexible functions, as well as on teams made up of many functions working together. The results of the pilot found that agile techniques

were adaptable to any function - even the most rigid. At the conclusion of the pilot, 80% of survey respondents found some change in their team's way of working, as well as a change in the way they personally tackled challenges at work. Additionally, it was found that the four concepts included in the post-pilot survey were all being applied to some degree by all of the survey participants (see Figure 1). While creating a psychologically safe environment was by far the most used principle, a number of survey participants were applying the other principles moderately or very much.

Figure 1 - Application of four Agile principles

Answers to the question "To what extent are you applying the guiding concepts of Modern Agile in your teams after this pilot?"



When asked about expected changes in their work if agile methods continue to be implemented, pilot participants believed that these principles could help create new ways of interacting as a team and to change the organizational structure making work less hierarchical and more collaborative. Examples of comments from survey participants are:

(In response to the question "In which aspects of your work have you seen or expect to see the greatest change using agile methodologies?")

"I expect to use more of the "making people awesome" principle and encourage team members to use the principle of enhanced psychological safety and reflection methodology more often."

"Teamwork. Many in the UN are used to bureaucratic, linear, silo-based working structures. I'm hoping this agile course reaches those [still using those outdated methods]."

"As a communication officer, I am hoping to use the Agile methodologies to steer the organizational culture."

"In engagement with colleagues, making the team feel awesome."

Key learning 3

Support from the top essential for scale

A final insight from the pilot is regarding the support systems required to scale agile techniques and methods throughout the UN Secretariat. While the first two key learnings suggest that there is potential for scaling agile-based methods throughout the United Nations System, a number of requirements were identified by the participants of the pilot project. These requirements or enabling factors include a focus on leadership from the top in facilitating the use of agile collaboration techniques, most particularly being the support to foster a psychologically safe environment (through both mindset changes at the top as well as resource allocation). Additionally, participants felt that time was a significant factor preventing them from utilizing all of the tools or principles of agile work, and a need for further training to better understand all of the benefits of the aforementioned tools and principles.

Creating safety from the top through mindsets and resources

A key concern of a number of pilot participants was whether the key concept of creating a safe environment would be blocked or enabled from the leadership of the Organization. Participants recognized the need for this environment being organization-wide, and if leadership was not also contributing to the protection of this safe environment, agile collaboration techniques would not thrive. As one participant said during the workshop, “psychological safety is really the prerequisite to use this in the work environment and to be able to feel comfortable people need to be confident that they will not be judged, that they will

learn from the process, and they will receive honest feedback. That is the most difficult thing to create as a manager - giving this space to learn and to fail.” Another participant added to this comment, “without leadership support, we cannot move on with this culture or mindset.” This was echoed by another participant who said “in a team environment we need the safe space and willingness to take feedback. The leaders need to understand the need to make them feel safe. The importance of the whole team is key - sometimes one may have a manager that can make them feel safe, but a supervisor less so, and a leader even less so - so it’s important that everyone has this mindset.” It was also mentioned by a participant that a key obstacle coming from leadership is the fact that performance evaluations are based on the individual not the team.

In the post-pilot survey, nearly 60% of surveyed participants believed that support from top management would be required to further scale agile methodologies within the UN, and when asked what they would need from supervisors to maintain an agile mindset they said the following:

“*Psychological safety within the team and organization.*”

“*Clear priorities, aligned with provision of adequate resources (human resources, and financial) and providing online tools that enable an efficient management of the team’s tasks.*”

“*Having a growth mind-set and making the environment safe for experimenting new ideas.*”

“*Our IT needs to make a bold move in enabling us to use digital collaboration tools. There has not been much support on this besides how to use a digital whiteboard and how to use MS Teams. Even better: we decide which tools we need.*”

“*Space to “do things one’s way” and also increase awareness of staff to gain trust and support from supervisors, create a virtuous cycle for collaboration.*”

Initial time investment

While all participants expressed interest to further enhance their learning and continue to train in agile collaboration techniques, the survey participants identified “time” as a top obstacle. During the pilot participants noted that they didn’t always have the time needed to practice what they were learning, regretting that they were not able to dedicate sufficient time. For example, one participant noted in the final session that they felt it “went too quickly and [that they] didn’t have enough time to apply it in work.” They added that “you have to practice it, you can’t just attend the sessions.” Another

participant said, “the biggest challenge is the time.” It is important to note, however, that the initial time investment at the beginning of the process of learning and implementing an agile mindset, aims to pay off in efficiency and collaboration in a later stage. While time allocation is not unique to this particular pilot, and is indeed a requirement for most project implementations, it is important to highlight the front-loaded requirement for time investment to learn the techniques and re-work internal processes as necessary associated with agile methods.

While agile techniques aim to change the concept of time by breaking it up into shorter “sprints”, the implementation of the techniques also requires added reflection, retrospection and time for learning, particularly at the start. Participants expressed frustration both with their lack of time allowance to be able to practice these techniques, as well as the desire to be able to conduct additional training - which would of course require additional time. Approximately 85% of surveyed participants noted dedicated time for working on and improving agile techniques as needed to scale this project, with nearly 90% feeling that more training on the tools would be needed to scale. Examples of comments from survey participants regarding the time and training obstacles preventing them from implementing agile principles are: “time and workload,” “lack of time,” “Work priorities due to year end. Less time to explore tools,” “time, multiple priorities,” “work-life balance- limited time per day to complete all the necessary tasks,” “time and having the team I am working with trained on applying the same principles and tools,” “time, always in firefighting mode! We are demanded to do more and more but with less but there is still rigidity in the system,” and “often I am the only one who is a little trained, that gives much responsibility and needs many personal resources.”

#NewWork through agile collaboration – how to scale learning throughout the UN

The Agile Pilot has demonstrated the utility of this approach to UN staff, but – as with every #NewWork initiative – colleagues will only be able to unleash the full potential if it is widely-applied and implemented across the Organization. To scale modern agile throughout the UN, learnings from this pilot project indicate that three key factors must be considered. They are the need for resources, including time and additional training, the importance of senior leadership support, and the requirement of a new organizational culture which rewards collective and team progress. These three areas are briefly discussed below with suggestions for implementation.

Resource requirements

The pilot project makes clear that in addition to training resources, sufficient time is needed for individuals and teams to make the most use of what an agile working method has to offer. In order to ensure staff members have sufficient time to develop these and other skills, training and professional development should be made a priority and seen as a positive use of time within the Organization. This can be achieved through the allowance of “training hours” such as is currently allowed through the language training programs at the UN, or through other methods that formalize and regularize the use of time at work for advancing one’s skills.

However, in addition to time, staff members will require dedicated resources for the continued advancement of their skills. One suggestion by a pilot participant is the creation of a central team or virtual support desk where staff can go to find additional resources, get regular or ad-hoc support when unsure of how to tackle particular obstacles or use certain tools, where they can go to find answers to technological questions or where they can find additional training resources. This central helpdesk could be facilitated through #NewWork, but should ensure that each local office has a focal point for location-specific questions such as those relating to technological support.

Support from senior leadership

With psychological safety being a top prerequisite for staff members being able to use agile collaboration techniques, the concept of safety and a growth mindset must be supported by senior leadership of the Organization. This will require all levels of the Organization to understand the benefits of agile methods, as well as actively practicing the principles underlying agile practices (listed in Table 1). If staff do not feel supported by their supervisors, they will not be able to adjust their work practices prioritizing learning, collaboration and speed over perfection and individual achievements. This can be achieved at all levels of the Organization. This will naturally support the final requirement for a culture which rewards collective progress rather than only individual achievements. If leaders only sell an idea and but don’t mean it, it will ultimately not be successful. Everyone at all levels has to be self-activated and self-motivated to see the new way of working through.

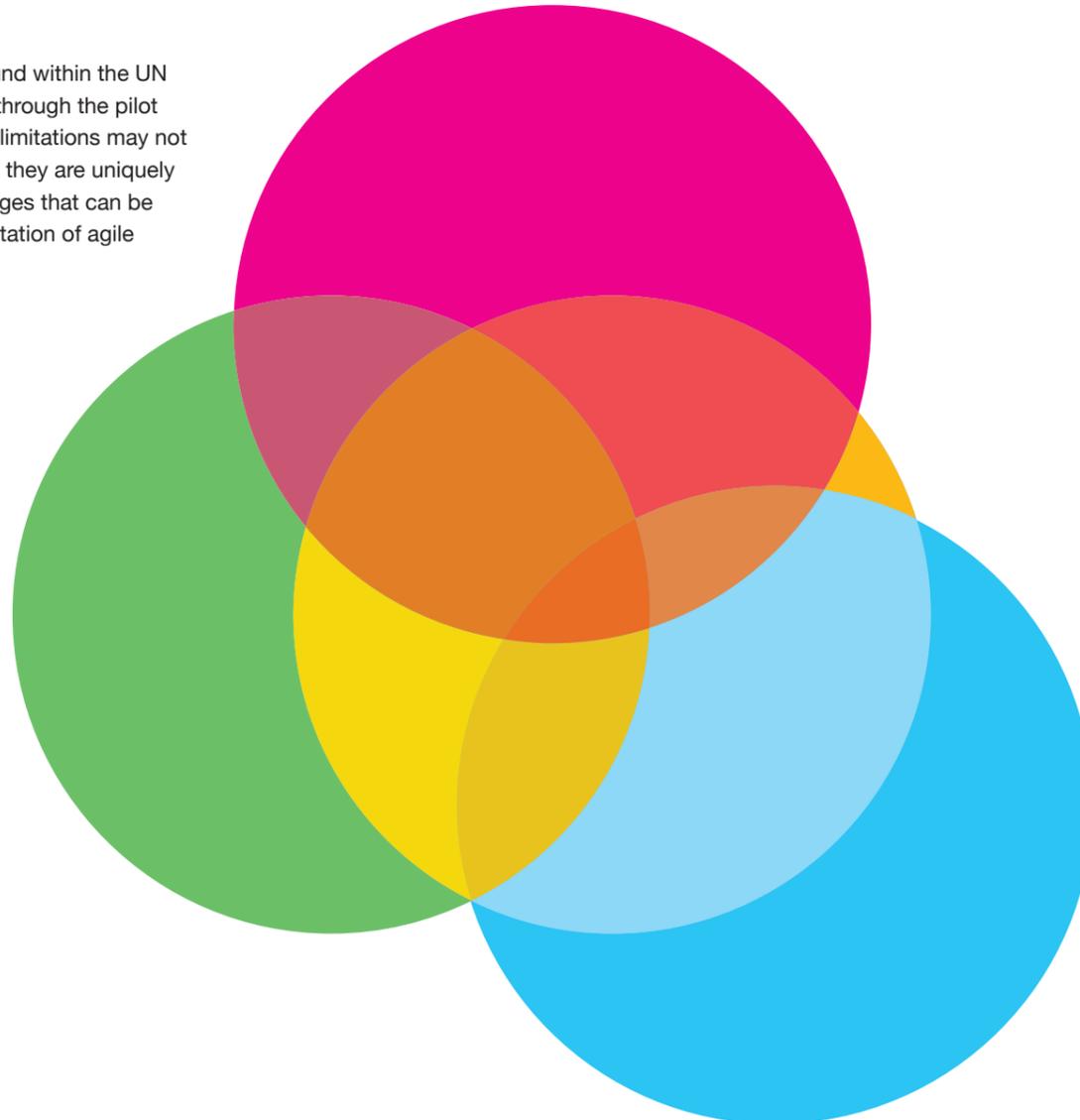
Culture of collective progress

As one participant highlighted in the pilot, the UN’s currently focuses on individual achievements given that the annual staff evaluations are on an individual rather than team level. Given that agile techniques prioritize team progress and build on retrospectives which include the clients as stakeholders, evaluations should also reflect the collaborative priorities of this new work form. HR can empower a collective mind-set among staff members by encouraging team-level goals and re-word annual evaluations to encourage reflection of the individual’s interactions with team members as well as a team-level reflection. Goals set at the beginning of the year should also be set as a team, with individuals considering how they hope to contribute not just to the achievements of the team, but to the cohesion, inclusiveness, and collaboration of the team as a unit. Participants noted that the one of the key upsides of participating in the pilot was being able to get to know colleagues in a meaningful way. The pilot provided an ample space for exchange with others and consequently broke down some of the silos that exist in the Organization.

Accelerating towards a Value-Based Agile Way of Working in the UN

To make the Agile methodology and ways of working owned and ingrained in the UN, it may need to be combined, recombined, and renamed to align with the purpose and value driven nature of the Organization. What came through clearly in the pilot is that agile methodologies can and must be adapted and adjusted for use in the UN context to reflect and serve the values of the UN and its staff members.

These limitations which were found within the UN context and solutions identified through the pilot are highlighted below. While the limitations may not be unique to the United Nations, they are uniquely identified in that they are challenges that can be overcome through the implementation of agile collaborative techniques.



Challenges in the traditional UN Context	Solutions offered by an “Agile UN”
<p>Dependence on Top-down Push Individuals believe the Organization needs to make the change and are unwilling to drive the change themselves</p>	<p>Agile vs Hierarchy While leadership can facilitate change, change is ultimately self-driven and individuals who want change need to propel it forward. The institution cannot be the sole contributor.</p>
<p>Clear Work Boundaries UN staff tend to expect clear guardrails at work and become overwhelmed when asked to be creative as this clashes with traditional work culture</p>	<p>Creative Thinking Enabling creative thinking through peer-learning and incentives</p>
<p>Lack of Centralized Technical Collaboration Platforms Lack of shared Kanban Boards and other tools were detrimental to teams working effectively virtually</p>	<p>Technical Leadership Create a centralized set of collaboration tools to enable broader engagement</p>
<p>Time Zones Driven Inequality Working across time zones disadvantage some teams and created difficulty</p>	<p>The Birth of the Asynchronous Organization Not everyone needs to be working at the same time</p>
<p>Conservative UN Language The UN’s inclusive values resulted in clashes with the perceived progressive language of the Agile methodology</p>	<p>A New Agile UN Language Incorporate the spirit of the UN into the language and methodology of Agile. This means some tools do not apply and can give birth to other.</p>
<p>Job Profiles Rigid and Misleading: Often teams were seen to have difficulties allocating tasks and understanding capabilities due to job profiles that were not aligned with the actual job to be done</p>	<p>Rethinking Job Profiles and Tasks Allocation: Allowing more flexibility in re-skilling and fluidity in the hiring process would enable stronger more transparent teams</p>
<p>Over-problematizing People were unable to innovate due to over-thinking</p>	<p>Go for it Attitude and mindset shift – just go for it and try out a new idea</p>
<p>High-Level Vision Many staff have a strong need for perfection and a desire to succeed from the beginning with the big project</p>	<p>Experiment and Fail Learn and try again.</p>

Ultimately the pilot showed that there are pockets within the UN where experimentation is possible. The next step will be about identifying more of those pockets and starting to enact long-term positive change to improve the way people work and engage with the Organization and each other.

Examples of concrete areas of application could include incorporating the modern agile methodology with UN values as a voluntary training opportunity – to allow newly onboarded colleagues to see how the UN works and how to work within the UN. This would also enable existing colleagues to learn about productivity and efficiency tools. Promoting the initiative on the global level by offering training to interested teams rather than individuals can support the adoption of Modern Agile across the Organization. The teams can be connected to exchange learning and experiences. Another concrete example to scale involves developing a peer-created toolbox which would act as a repository of video testimonials and best practices on applying methodologies (such as Agile) to the specific UN context. Some existing projects to connect to would be the Agile Performance Management, Competency Framework and culture change initiatives already taking place in the UN. This would go a long way to showing what an application of these tools means in the UN and how results can be achieved. It would also enable the Organization to host a repository and safe space for questions with the potential to provide mentorship for people to learn further from their peers who have already executed change in their team's work practices.

