

Agile NGOs  
survive and thrive better.

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# About us



We build better NGOs



We help them be better funded



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# What does it mean?

An agile NGO is **less based on hierarchy** and **more on localised decision-making and shared information**. It is a shift from the old-fashioned, traditional, hierarchical structure to a more organic, responsive, and **flexible** one. As a result, agile organisations are **quick to change** course if necessary – and thus better equipped to respond to challenges.

## Why go agile?

- It's the better way to cope.
- It's the better way to be prepared for all scenarios.
- It prioritises data-led learning and accountability.
- It drives operating models with more impact.
- It allows for a trust-based culture.
- Not suitable for routine-based work.



# What we will cover



- 1) Lessons learned from 10 years transforming non-profits into agile and better funded organisations
- 2) Five attributes that made our partners successful in the past two years
- 3) What can leaders do now?

# Lessons learnt from transformations since 2011

- **People change, when leaders do.**

Agile management is based on trust, data obsession, transparency, faster learning and adaptation. Where leaders internalise this, partners, staff and donors follow.

- **Want to break the silo & bureaucracy?**

Build a platform that democratises information & allows rapid new team formation

- **Digital first & Data obsessed: Measure, report, learn → foresight**

When a bot can do it, let it do it (meeting booking, sentiment surveys, financial dashboard, colleague of the month vote, work time measure (who overworks & burns out, who is a bottleneck (unreplied messages measure)).

# Lessons learnt from transformations since 2011

- **Make work work for people**

(go digital first to power hybrid, own time, own responsibility, less control, more results based work)

- **Funding follows ideas & performance: Not the other way around**

When our child rights-supporting NGOs partner innovated and published their performance more, funding partners became more interested

# What made our partners successful



## WarChild Holland

### Put learning at the core of programmes

- Prioritising data collection, automated analysis and learning in team
- Basis for a continuous improvement and new programming cycle
- Venture based project groups form and dissolve as needed

Data centrality

## European mid-sized NGO

### Localise all we do

- Defined 3 impact pathways
- Field offices to develop new programmes autonomously within impact pathway
- Resulted in heavy locations of approach and local ownership
- Data and impact data database updated weekly

Rapid new programme development

## US and global NGO

### Diversify funding base

- Grand based model too restrictive & not generating enough unrestricted funds
- Fast paced 6 developed alternative income streams over intensive 10 weeks sprints
- 2 substantial new income streams development over 18 months

Income generation

# What made our partners successful



## Interpeace

**Let people (only) do what they do best**

**Talent drives the work**

- The biggest fundraiser ran the office.
- When we asked people what they really do well and can own results for, we changed work structure around those
- It worked. The best networkers pulled in significant funding since 2019.

## US mid-sized NGO

**The best structure fits on a post-it note.**

**Keep it simple**

- A global NGOs structure was too complex to run.
- The new structure is radically simple, making silos impossible
  - a. A global back office for Ops Support
  - b. Single point of lead for projects
  - c. Country offices (only) run programmes.

## Large global NGO

**Get the funding you need, not the one you can get**

**Income generation**

- Drive for unrestricted funding via fundraising was not successful.
- But they realised that what they do is essential for the local population from where large manufacturers are hiring.
- They now sell peace and social outreach programmes, not grants. (Took 2.5 years)

# What leaders can do now



1. **Change the mindset:** Beyond the old NGO model into the business of solving problems for humans, society and the planet.
2. **Expect gradual change:** It's an evolution
3. **Acknowledge the change, humble and frank**
4. **Get the data:** How are you doing compared to the rest? What funding is there? How efficient are we? Good information makes good decisions
5. **Hope for the best.** Prepare for the worst: the next disruption is sure to come (reserves, agile strategy)
6. **Collaborate and learn (a lot)**

1

## Agile Structures & Systems

To adapt, scale and localise work

2

## Digital work platform

Automise routine work, boost collaboration and analysis

3

## Change the funding mix

Form new donor partnerships faster and boost budgeting & forecasting capacity

4

## Data is key. Knowledge is better.

Collection -> Analysis -> Insight -> Foresight

5

## Make work work for people

Flexible, clear arrangements, Digital Platform based work to allow work anytime

# STAY IN TOUCH!

We are here to make doing good better. We help non-profit organisations secure more funding, drive innovation and develop smarter strategies.

By 2030, most of our services to NGOs will be free of charge. Training already is.

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New blog, podcast and upcoming events  
[www.mzninternational.com](http://www.mzninternational.com)



How to Turn Around a Financially Distressed NGO

25 May 2022 @ 2:00 pm - 3:00 pm CEST



Non-Profit Financial Planning in Uncertain Times

1 June 2022 @ 2:00 pm - 3:00 pm CEST

**MzN**

Do Good. Better!

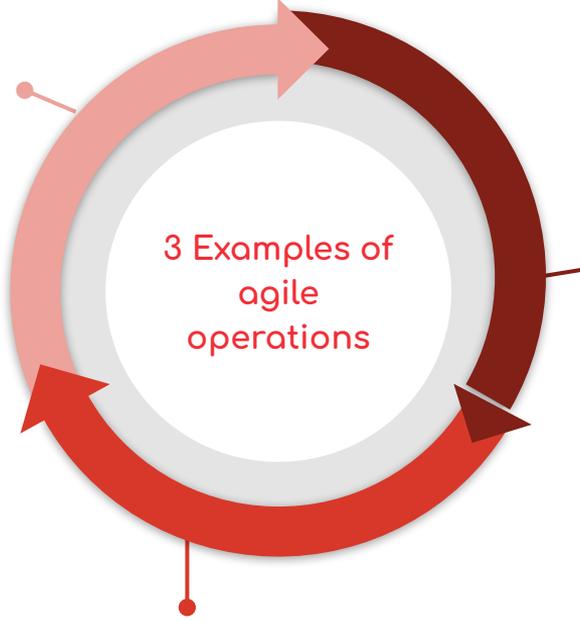
International

# Appendix

Lessons learned from agile transformations

- **Going agile does not mean dissolving structures.**
- **Trust and data transparency** are mutually reinforcing
- **Agile organisations try more and do more (different) things.** Let them
- **Data is the key to impact:** collection -> analysis -> insight -> foresight
- **Make work work for people:** Flexible work arrangements, platform-based work allows people to work when they want/can

Making operations  
agile is a good start...



**3 Examples of agile operations**

**Finance and budget management**

- Allows good budget control and within it operational freedom
- Embraces decolonisation and decision decentralisation
- Drives owner-management mentality over income generation
- Operates through a global digital platform built for collaboration

**Human resources**

- Empowering your employees to make hiring and firing decisions
- Teams form where and when needed, without top-down management
- Allowing cross-department collaboration - often gets rid of them
- Allows for a much stronger analysis - hindsight - insight - foresight learning loop

**Programs**

- Using value to respond to opportunities and possible changes
- Allowing development to occur in parallel with delivery
- Allowing user involvement (example of interactive development)
- Allowing stakeholders engagements (as example of program management)
- Teams become an evolving system

# Agile Management vs Waterfall Management, from theory to practice...

<b>Conditions</b>	<b>Agile Management</b>	<b>Waterfall Management</b>
<b>Project's Ownership</b>	The ownership is shared equally between all the members of the team as well as its associated stakeholders.	The project manager is considered as the owner of the project in terms of operations, until its accomplishment.
<b>Working Style</b>	Free flow of communication is encouraged so that everyone can float their ideas.	Hierarchical management is implemented. Which allows the implementation of directs from the top management only.
<b>Project Pre-planning</b>	The pre-planning phase remains active throughout every step of the project.	The pre-planning is conducted once before the initiation of every major phase of the project.
<b>Project Planning</b>	The plan is delivered to the client in distributed chunks.	A one-time plan is delivered to the client, along with a negligible margin of change.
<b>Modular Approach</b>	The work can be broken down into independently working modules, which can be improved by iterative updating.	The testing of the product cannot begin until the project is accomplished in terms of the developmental phase.
<b>Project's Deliverance</b>	The project is delivered as well as parallelly evolved in terms of incremental deliverance.	The project is delivered on a one-time basis.
<b>Change Affordability</b>	Late alterations to the project can be accommodated and will not incur significant losses.	Late alterations to the project can either be very expensive or impossible to accommodate.
<b>Managing Changes</b>	Changes can be made in any module at any point in the development phase, with a greater amount of flexibility.	A top-down pattern in managing changes is observed since the development of the project is carried on from one phase leading to another.