

# Lean-Agility: From Blockage To Balance

Real agility improvement must balance speed, quality, and cost



*"Speed is everything! Ditch all the red tape!"*

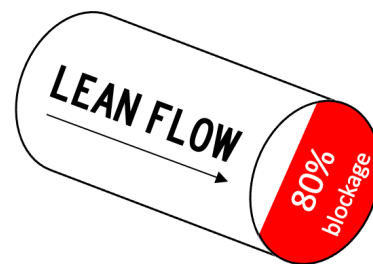


*"... but you don't have to answer to the Chief Security Officer. Or the regulators. Or the CFO."*

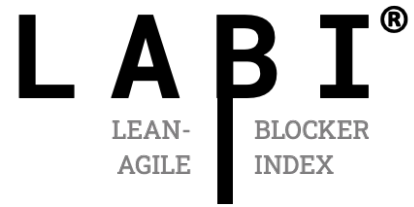
Since the early days of software development, "agility" meant having better capabilities to respond quickly to market changes – for example, development processes that emphasized lightweight requirements (e.g., customer-centric "user stories" instead of heavy up-front requirements), rapid prototyping, and Software Development Lifecycle (SDLC) tool automation. The agile manifesto was born, and its principles continue to guide software development practices to this day.

As the software development industry showed success with agility efforts, larger organizations started taking notice – also wanting to deliver, maintain, and operate products and services with better agility. It became clear that holistic digital product lifecycle agility goes beyond software development automation and Scrum/XP practices -- for example, bringing in more timely viewpoints of product development/marketing, quality assurance (QA), project portfolio management (PPM), organizational change management (OCM), and Information Technology (IT). In short, more stakeholders needed to participate in the development, quality, stability and economic sustainability of the product's entire lifecycle.

Whereas a typical speed-related question might be: *"how fast is our DevOps code check-in and unit-test completion?"*, a balanced blockage question might be: *"how fast can a product go from idea to a quality-assured, economically viable release?"* While there is no silver bullet to answer this, there is a method to identify "symptoms" that indicate blockage, and incentivize capability owners to work together – improving key relevant capabilities (e.g., DevOps, EA, App Portfolio Mgt). This, in turn, will reduce blockage – while still considering impacts of quality and cost.



The “Lean-Agile Blocker Index” (LABI) is a method and dashboard visualizers that collect information to depict a simple number: the percent blockage of the continuous delivery pipeline (CDP) that prevents the successful delivery of products to market. LABI first determines the ideal “target balance zone” across three dimensions: speed, quality and cost. This is the “Dimension Focus Weight”, which accommodates strategic “ground conditions” at the time. LABI is focused on symptoms and outcomes, and minimum quality requirements are approximated using FMEA (Failure Modes and Effects Analysis) techniques to quantify the consequences of poor quality.



For example, an organization (in period 1) may have competitive priorities and heavy investment. The importance of quality is set at 45% (“minimum quality”), speed is 55% (“whatever remains”), and cost is not a focus right now. Weights are set accordingly that will incentivize capability owners to “pull the right levers” to make speed and quality improvements (e.g., Lean-Agile training, DevOps/testing improvements). In period 2, technical debt may be of more concern, and cost capability “levers” may become prioritized (e.g., application portfolio management/rationalization initiative) – reducing speed, but not quality.

Then, *symptoms* are measured as Key Symptom Indicators (KSIs) that block “successful product release” considering the dimensions, and matches them against capabilities needed to improve the most important dimensions. Capability owners have objectives, and make commitments (targets) to reduce blockage of specific KSIs (e.g., “SAFe for Architects training will reduce # of system architect dependency strings by 20%”). Using this information, a lean business case can be built to justify investment in one capability over another, for a given period. Additional dashboards can also show improvement in specific dimensions (e.g., we had 20% blockage reduction with respect to speed, 36% blockage reduction with respect to quality, and 19% blockage increase with respect to cost).

Executives, product/project managers and capability owners work together to discuss context, set targets, and make improvements – helping reduce blockage and get closer to the goal: faster release quality-assured, economically viable products and services.



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