FLIGHT LEVELS ACADEMY

Flight Levels

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A SHORT INTRODUCTION

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A SHORT INTRODUCTION

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Contents

Foreword

"Ten Years After" was the name of the British rock band that caused a sensation in the 1960s. If the band were still around today, they would be the ideal cast for a little serenade. After all, it was exactly 10 years ago that we wrote our first book together, "Kanban Change Leadership". A lot has happened since then. More books, articles, lectures, community events followed, but above all a multitude of customer projects in which we were able to apply and expand our findings. It is in line with the culture of continuous improvement we envisaged back in 2011 that we have consistently moved from the level of agile teams towards agile organisational development. The Flight Levels summarise this movement without creating an authoritarian theoretical construct that is cast in stone. Rather, they represent an open model of thinking and communication that gains fresh nuances with every practical application and is discussed in detail by an international Flight Levels community.
With this booklet, we want to introduce the Flight Levels model to a wider audience. For this purpose we describe:

- **the basic idea** of different levels of flow and their importance for organisations
- **the five core activities** that are applied at all levels
- **the three levels:** operational implementation, coordination, and strategy
- **the interactions** between the individual levels i.e. the Flight Levels System Architecture
- **the introduction process**, i.e. everything you should consider in terms of change and leadership to take off with Flight Levels in the best possible wa.

This booklet aims to create a solid foundation for Flight Levels practitioners from all contexts. On the one hand, we want to provide an entry-level, concise understanding of what Flight Levels offers, to as many practitioners and managers as possible. And on the other hand, we would like to provide experienced agilists with the most current thinking around the topic. We are looking forward to the upcoming discussions we wish to ignite through this publication.

Sigi Kaltenecker & Klaus Leopold

01

What is "Flight Levels"?

Get the basic ideas of the model

What is "Flight Levels"?

The origin of Flight Levels can probably be dated back to 2011 when we were supposed to "make 300 teams agile". In doing so, we would probably have instigated the greatest sub-optimisation of all time, which would have resulted in doing more harm than good for the client. Why? In the book "Rethinking Agile" by Klaus, one of the reasons for the disappointing transformation results was that the dependencies between the individual teams and products were not coordinated or managed. These unmanaged **dependencies** exist not only between teams that are supposed to deliver a product together - but they also exist between the different planning horizons of an organisation: what is decided strategically and then implemented operationally are often worlds apart. Horizontally as well as vertically, the fundamental problem is: people either don't talk to each other enough or they don't talk to each other about the right things at the right time. If an organisation wants to be able to act in a truly agile way, it has to look at all value streams **from strategy to implementation** and bridge the often large chasms that open up in each value stream between different decision-making and implementation activities. The **Flight Levels Model** has developed from these considerations.

The Flight Levels Model is a thinking tool to understand **WHERE** in an organisation you need to do WHAT in order to achieve the desired results and/or improvements. To do this, it is not always necessary to redesign roles and responsibilities or to create new organisational structures. Rather, the question is: Where in the value streams can we focus our attention to achieve a substantial improvement with as little (structural) change as possible? To answer this question we need to map out the organisation's work systems, together with their interdependencies, as well as the work managed by each work system and the route the work takes in order to produce value.

Here is another request from the inventor: Please do not use the Flight Levels model to restructure a company or to divide it according to Flight Levels! (à la "We want the Spotify model")
The Flight Levels model is neither an organisational model nor a maturity model, nor is it a hierarchy - Flight Level 3 is therefore not three times better or more important than Flight Level 1. The beautiful illustration you will see on one of the next pages is not an organisational chart!

In aviation, a flight level describes **how high** an aircraft flies. Depending on the altitude, the level of detail with which you can perceive a landscape changes. If you fly very high, you can see for miles into the distance, however, you can no longer recognise every detail on the ground. If, on the other hand, you fly low, you can almost see into your bedroom window, but you can no longer see the extent of a city, for example.

So **each Flight Level** has its advantages and **special attributes**, but it also has its **limitations in the scope** of what the people on board can recognise.

We find the **same principle** in organisations: Here, a Flight Level is to be understood as a planning and design horizon. Accordingly, we distinguish three Flight Levels that are not to be understood hierarchically: the **strategic level**, the **coordination level** and the **team level**. A comprehensive and similarly detailed picture of the performance of different value streams in an organisation only emerges when the perspectives of these three Flight Levels are brought together, aligned and coordinated. Therefore, by applying the Flight Levels Model mindset, it is possible to find out where the levers for improvement lie within the organisation.

It is therefore not important with which methods, for example, individual teams or departments work. What is important is how **the communication and cooperation** between the Flight Levels as well as between different units on the individual levels are organised.

If improvements are made here, the entire value creation begins to optimise - and that is, after all, **our goal.**

The real driver of improvement is not the 3 Flight Levels themselves, but the five activities that are set in a continuous cycle on and between the Flight Levels. These five activities are the air traffic control, so to speak: they can be used to coordinate and improve the movement of initiatives through **the value stream.**

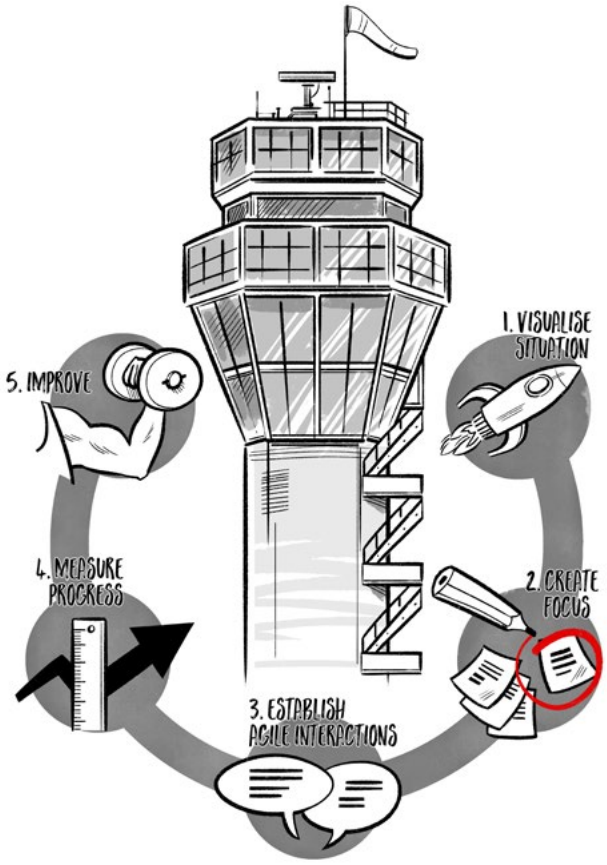
If an organisation wants to be able to act in a truly agile way, it has to look at all value streams from **strategy to implementation.**

02

Five activities

Learn what to apply
at all Flight Levels

Five activities



The following five activities should be applied continuously at all Flight Levels if the goal is not "agile teams" but "true business agility".

2.1. Visualise the situation

In knowledge work, we have the problem that it is difficult to grasp what is actually being done. At the end of a working day, there is not a half-finished table somewhere, but rather an idea exists in someone's head, documents are whirring through the cloud or a piece of code is waiting on a computer to be processed further. That which is invisible often causes misunderstandings, making the coordination of interdependent people, teams or departments much more difficult.

Therefore, before we even think of solutions, **the current situation** should **become visible** to all involved. The idea is to visualise the work and activities that are to be changed. This way the people involved can better understand how the work items and their related activities run

through the organisation and what interactions there are between the different departments and teams in the organisation.

In the agile world, the work is mainly visualised on boards - but anything that can represent a situation well and make it easier to understand is allowed.

2.2. Create focus

Fortunately, people will always have more ideas than they can actually implement. But working on all the ideas at the same time doesn't help much, because then everything takes longer to get done. For something to be finished within an acceptable time frame, we need to focus on a certain amount of concurrent work and **implement it step by step**. This also helps to reduce dependencies and planning uncertainties. Only when something is finished do we start something new - because: Starting work costs money. Finishing work makes money.

2.3. Establish agile interactions

The point of managing dependencies, for example with the help of product boards, is not the boards themselves. The important thing is that the right people talk to each other about what they see on the board. By "establishing agile interactions" we don't mean simply gossipping over coffee. The reason we deliberately don't use terms like meeting, standup, etc. is this: Most of the time, the problem in companies is not that there are too few meetings. The problem is rather that either nothing of substance is said in these meetings, no decisions are made or after the meeting, all participants are just as smart as they were before (this is then called "result-neutral"). That's why we now refuse to tell people which meetings they have to hold, when and for how long, in order to be agile. This does not necessarily improve the result. Real communication means that there is an answer to an input - in other words, there is an exchange. Ideally, the participants review the information together and derive actions from it, if necessary.

So what is really important is the **content and outcome** of

interactions, not their quantity or title. A few principles have proven to be effective in communication:

- **Let's make it short, but more often.** This might sound like a bad idea. It simply means that if people who share a common goal communicate with each other at a higher frequency, they will get feedback sooner and can respond to problems more quickly. The more often these conversations take place, the shorter they can be, or the shorter they will eventually become by themselves because those involved learn to get to the heart of the matter quickly and make decisions.

- **Communicate with foresight.** "We started three weeks ago and are already done with our part. Now you have to take over!" When such sentences are uttered, there is usually a sense of relief, because the challenges are being aired. Wherever people or teams who are part of a system (need to) work together on something, conversations should be looking ahead and keeping each other in mind. For example, before one team gets started on its part of a product, all other teams involved should know about it and have enough time to organise themselves accordingly. It may turn out that the start time is not ideal and that this would cause delays further along in the process. It is a matter of courtesy to say openly to the other parties involved: "This is what we have in mind and this is what is coming up..."

  Of course, you can talk about many things when time has no consequence. But what are the most important agile interactions that should take place at and between the different Flight Levels if an organisation wants to learn, improve and eventually even become agile? So far, we have identified four key questions that can help to find appropriate communication formats and content:

- **Communication across the organisation:** How do we create

coordination in short loops?

- **Communication about the work:** How do we decide what to do?
- **Communication about responsibilities and processes:** How do we decide how to do something?
- **Communication about quality:** How do we improve?

Please do not see these questions dogmatically! They make a lot of sense in the context of many companies we have had the pleasure of getting to know so far. But they are not the only permissible questions and they are certainly not the only possible ones. Which questions and which communication formats are subsequently useful depends on the company in question. People in the aviation industry, for example, like to ensure that aeroplanes stay in the air - so there are many other appropriate communication formats around the topic of risk and safety.

We don't mind if a company continues to use the term „meeting" to describe regular, results-oriented discussions. It's not about abolishing meetings. What's important is that these regular conversations generate recognisable value, because converting oxygen into carbon dioxide should not be the only purpose for conversations.

To ensure that everyone involved has the same understanding of a particular communication format, it has proven useful for the invitees and, where appropriate, key stakeholders to define the key features together and record them in a canvas (a fancy word for "form"). This makes it clear what the purpose of a communication format is and what decisions are to be made in the process. This is also nothing more than visualisation. If the rules change, the content of the form - sorry: canvas - is updated accordingly.

2.4. Measuring progress

If you work with the "Simsalabim!" method, your teams will jump three times as high and five times as far - and in half the time! Agile frameworks come with all kinds of promises. This gives the impression that everything and anything has to be measured to have a total overview - because that's the only way to react appropriately to the market, isn't it?

For some companies, however, the metric "predictability", for example, is secondary. At sipgate, an innovative telco in Germany, for example, the lead time plays the main role. We were told there: "It's great when we find out when our work is finished. But it's not that important for us, because we have three deadlines a year: Christmas - we can't postpone that - and two trade fairs. We should have something finished by then.

Measurements are nothing more than a **constant feedback loop:** they show whether we have come closer to a goal or not, whether we have improved or deteriorated.

However, the meaningfulness and significance of measurements depend on the company and the context. What is considered improvement or progress is highly individual for each organisation. Therefore, the Flight Level Model does **not specify specific** measurements.

For meaningful measurement, the hype should not be the primary motivator. The real power comes from a group's negotiated, shared understanding of what should be measured, why and how, through the **communication process**. Let's say the common goal is: higher quality. If someone throws this goal around, everyone will almost certainly nod in agreement. But as soon as they ask: "How can we tell that quality has improved? ", a murmur will go through the crowd. Has quality increased if the number of bug fixes has decreased? Do we notice it in the positive feedback from customers? Or by the decreasing number of calls to the support hotline? There are many indicators for better quality. But which ones are really **meaningful and relevant** must be defined again and

again through conversation.

It becomes even more difficult with a huge hot air balloon called "agility", which is inflated by countless expectations and interpretations. For one, agility means delivering faster to the market - another finds tree-hugging agile. Before everyone else in the organisation is bothered with a confusing, off-the-rails transformation, a common understanding should first be found in this broad spectrum of definitions:

"How will we notice in three months whether our organisation has become more agile?"

2.5. Implement improvements

"We could take a look at this or that; we could see if this or that ..." - You can have many nice conversations about improvements, but: the proof of the pudding is in the eating. In other words: improvement only happens when something is actually done. That is why it is so important to those of us at the Flight Levels Academy to explicitly emphasise improving as an activity in a continuous cycle. Improvement is an integral part of the work, for which capacity and opportunities should be provided within the respective work model.

Most of the time, the problem in companies is not that there are too few meetings. The problem is rather that either **nothing of substance** is said in these meetings, no decisions are made or after the meeting, all participants are just **as smart as they were before.**

03

Three levels

Get an overview of the operational, the coordination and the strategic level.

Three levels

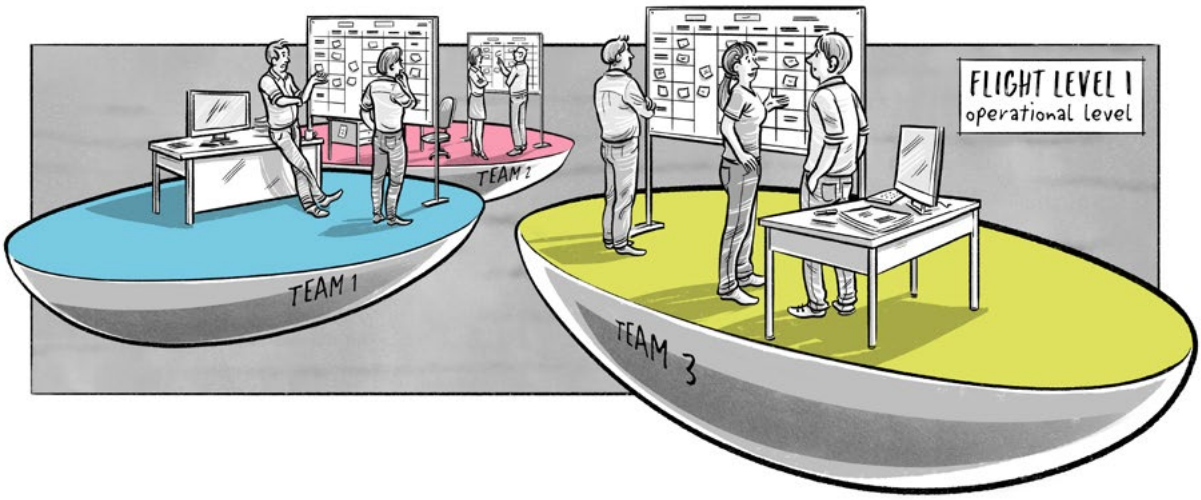
What is so unique about the 5 activities mentioned above? They are nothing new: similar cycles underlie Scrum, Kanban, Lean Startup or Design Thinking, although they are always linked to the specific mindsets and frameworks in these individual methods. Most of the time, they are also limited to the work in a single team.

The important point for us is that the activities themselves are completely independent of which "method" is used. It is quite simply **a cycle that leads to improvement.** Now, what is special about the Flight Levels Model is that this cycle is applied to all three Flight Levels so that all planning horizons and activities are aligned and the whole organisation achieves more business agility over time, by pulling in a common direction (and not just producing agile teams). First, let's look at what happens at each flight level.

3.1. Flight Level 1: operational level

Let's start **close to the ground.** The first level belongs to the teams that do the daily work - in product development, in marketing or sales, in customer service, in HR or the legal department, etc. The first level belongs to the teams that do the daily work. A team can optimise itself, or rather its workflow, by consistently performing the 5 activities.

It doesn't matter **what methods** a team uses to develop products or deliver services, for example - agile or otherwise - because the Flight Levels Model is method-agnostic. There is usually more than one team in a company and each prefers a different way of working. In a single organisation, you will therefore find **differently designed Flight Level 1** systems. So we cannot prescribe here what each of the 5 flight level 1 activities should look like. A team of lawyers will probably have to pay attention to different things in their processes and choice of focus than a team of mechanical engineers or software developers.



However, to generate **customer value**, these individual team systems usually have to cooperate in some way - **"no team is an island"**. If you ignore this and focus your optimisation efforts locally on individual teams, you run the risk of global system sub-optimisation: Yes, you get a high-performing team. However, the overall performance of the organisation - **i.e. the performance of** all teams taken together - will remain the same in the best case. Much more likely, it will even **decrease.**

Welcome to the world of systems thinking! Local optimisation usually leads to global sub-optimisation. The reason is **dependencies:** There will always be some remaining. These dependencies must be managed - that is the task of **Flight Level 2.**

3.2. Flight Level 2: Coordination

For a **product or service** to be created or delivered, several teams usually have to interact to achieve a valuable result. In most cases, there is already a lively exchange between these teams, but these interactions should also be goal-oriented. So the trick is to get the right teams (Flight Level 1) working on the right thing at the right time.
At Flight Level 2, we, therefore, zoom out from the individual team and visualise the **value stream**, i.e. the way a product takes shape from its conception until it is delivered to the customer.

At best, this is a simple end-to-end mapping of the value stream, but in reality, we encounter three variants of Flight Level 2 systems:

1. COORDINATION OF SEVERAL TEAMS

An online dealer wants to simplify the trade of used cars on the internet. Six teams are involved in the development and implementation of the platform. In regular conversations between representatives of the individual teams, it is clarified who has to coordinate with whom, when, at what point and how, so that value can be created for the customers. Again, we are method-agnostic, because for coordination it is completely irrelevant in which way the individual teams deliver.

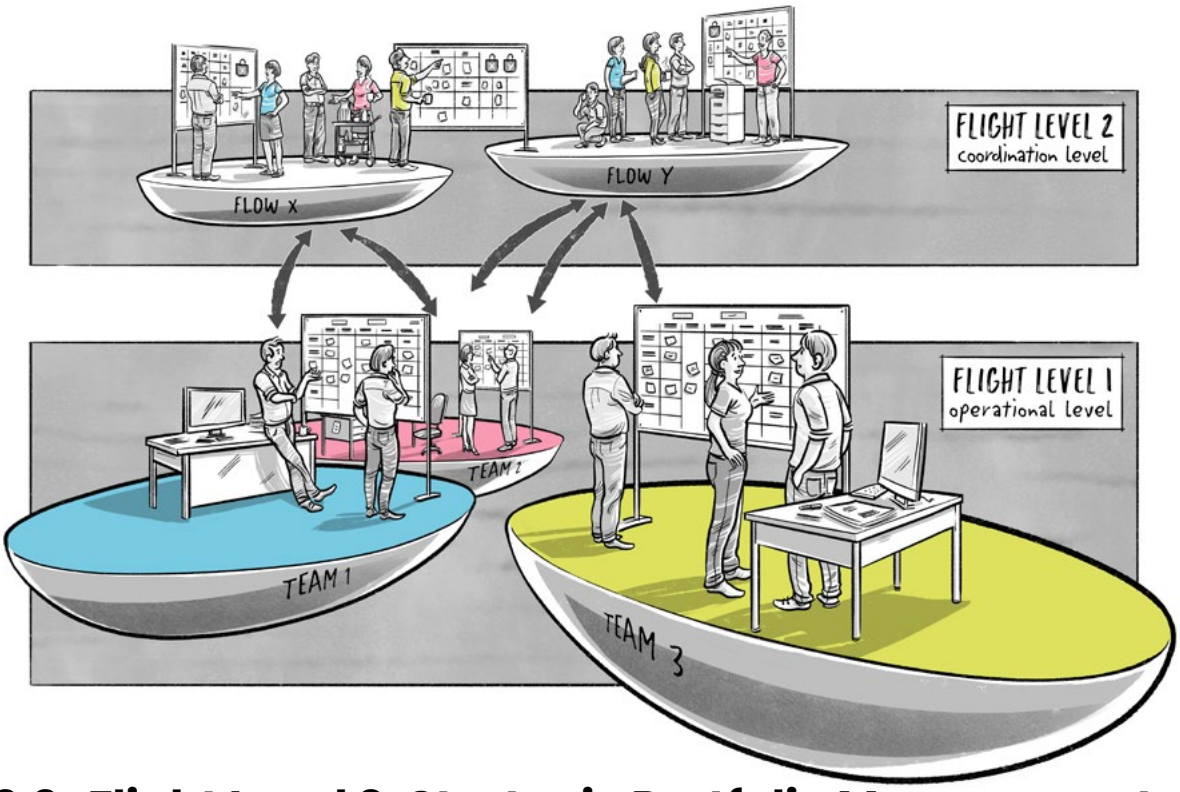
2. END-TO-END PARTIAL FLOW

Even if several teams work together, this does not necessarily mean end-to-end coordination in the sense of an entire value stream. Simply because sometimes several teams together only implement a self-contained section of a much larger product or project. Conversely, a single team can represent a complete Flight Level 2 system if it has end-to-end responsibility for an entire product. This is usually the case in small organisations.

3. COORDINATION OF MULTIPLE FLIGHT LEVEL 2 SYSTEMS

The larger an organisation is, the more value streams there are, of course - for example, in the form of different products and services. Accordingly, in a larger company, you will usually see more than one flight level 2 system and there can be dependencies between these value streams. For example, if something is changed in one product, something often needs to be changed in another product. In such cases, the various boards on which value streams are visualised are brought together physically or virtually to make the dependencies visible and thus manage them.

This is where operational portfolio management comes into being.



3.3. Flight Level 3: Strategic Portfolio Management

For a company, there is ideally a strategy - i.e. an idea of what position the company wants to occupy in a market (or different markets) in the long term and how the people in the organisation can achieve this goal together. Usually, developing and defining the strategy is considered a top management task. But the most beautiful strategy is of no use if only one side has a precise idea of where the journey should go. Flight Level 3 is therefore essentially about answering three questions:

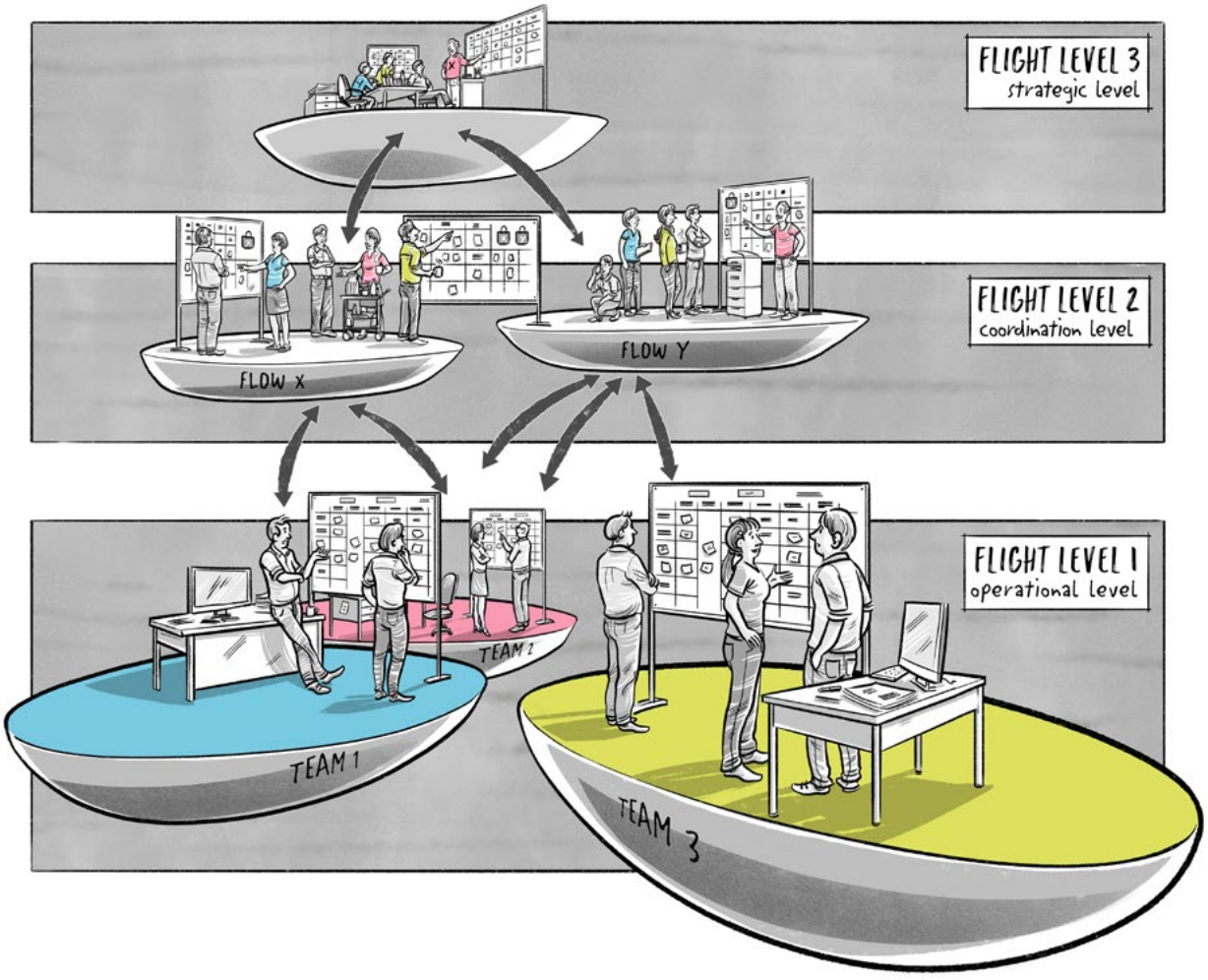
1. What is our strategy?
2. What outcomes do we want to achieve in different time horizons - for example after 3 years, in one year and within the next 3 months?
3. What actions can we derive from this for the immediate future (enter markets, launch products, start initiatives, etc.)?

These are questions that should be asked at regular intervals - and indeed, top management should not ask themselves these questions alone. To answer these questions, mutual connections and continuous

communication between all three Flight Levels - strategy, coordination and operational implementation - must be established. This means that "backward mapping", which often takes place at the end of the year, is no longer used. This is replaced by "forward mapping" - the joint planning of manageable steps and the ongoing checking of results at short intervals.

WHAT IS NOT PART OF FLIGHT LEVEL 3?

Even though the vision and the strategy are important starting points: Their elaboration itself is not part of the Flight Levels Model. In other words, while we are concerned with how the strategy is operationalised, we are not concerned with finding and formulating the strategy itself. Whether a company should conquer the Latin American or the Asian market next cannot be answered by the Flight Levels Model. But once the strategic decision has been made, thinking in terms of Flight Levels helps to implement the strategic sub-goals.



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04

Interactions between the Flight Levels

See what work system topologies, flight Items and flight routes are about

Interactions between the Flight Levels

Good, so you know what is meant by Flight Levels. But how do you manage and improve the interactions between the Flight Levels? Three steps are necessary for this:

1. **Definition of the work system topology:** What work systems currently exist in the organisation? How are these systems connected?

2. **Definition of Flight Items:** Which types of work are done in which work system?

3. **Description of Flight Routes:** How does work move through the work systems we have identified?

We call the topology, flight items and flight routes, the Flight Levels System Architecture. This should be visualised and examined if you want to work with the Flight Levels in a company.

4.1. Work System Topology

The Flight Levels are a **thinking and communication aid** that focuses on improving the **process organisation** and is intended to make it clear where which **levers are** available for solving a problem. With a representation of the Flight Levels as in the illustration, you will not get any further with this question in reality, therefore the warning once again:

The pretty Flight Levels poster is not the blueprint for a Flight Levels compliant organisational chart! In real life, things are a bit more challenging: first, we have to find out which work systems exist in an organisation at present. This means that we map the so-called **Topology** step by step: We examine the organisation for existing Flight

Level 1, Flight Level 2 and Flight Level 3 systems. Next, and of particular importance, is the question of which processes and dependencies currently exist between these systems. From this, we can see how they could be linked together to achieve more business agility.

WHAT IS A WORK SYSTEM OR FLIGHT LEVEL SYSTEM?

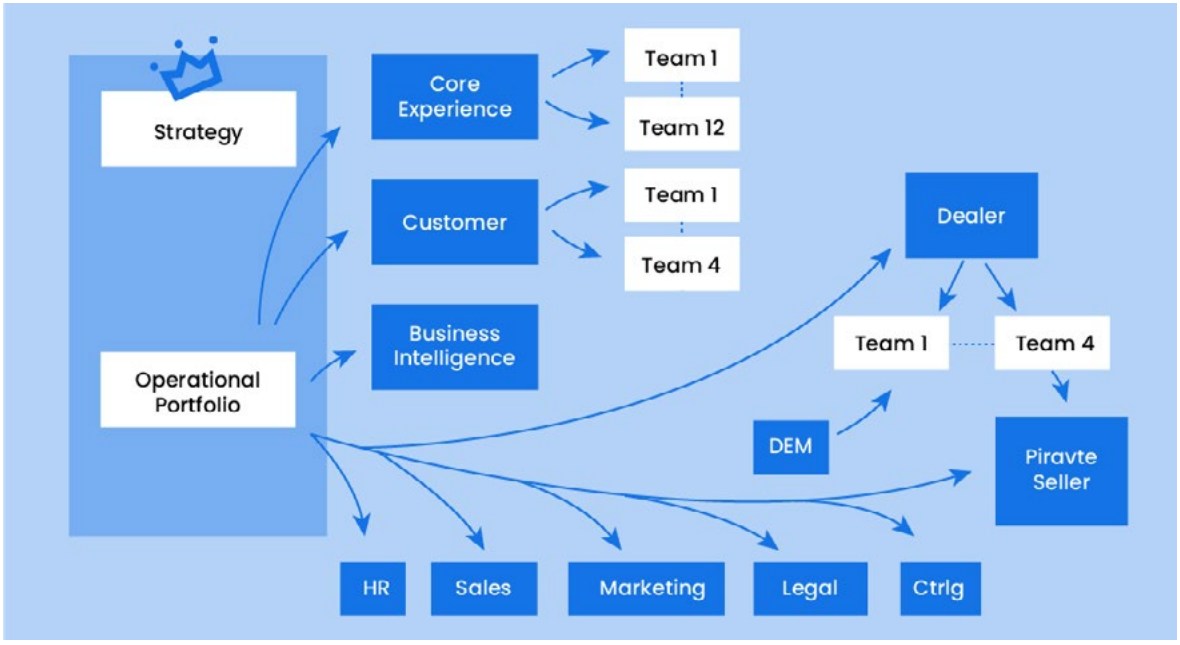
By a work or Flight Level system we mean: a section of the organisation in which the 5 activities are applied. Referring to the figure on the next page, such a section is represented by a box in the topology.

WHAT IS A WORK SYSTEM TOPOLOGY?

A topology generally describes the position and relationship of objects to each other. The Work System Topology is a visualisation that depicts which Flight Level systems are used in an organisation to do work and how they are connected to each other.

Finding Flight Level 1 systems is quite easy (but not always!), because here we can usually orient ourselves to the individual teams. Flight Level 3 systems always touch on strategy, so here too it is basically easy to work them out.

The biggest challenge lies in identifying the Flight Level 2 systems. Care is needed here, because it is precisely these hubs of coordination that are the key to business agility.



The illustrated example of a working system topology comes from real life and shows the Flight Level systems of a web platform for automotive advertisements:

- Here we see that **teams 1 to 12 (Flight Level 1)** have to work together on the "Core Experience" (a platform, hence Flight Level 2) and coordinate.

- **"Business Intelligence"** is a mixture of Flight Level 1 and 2 - we often find that too. In this specific case, the "Business Intelligence" platform was not a huge system with 50 people or more, but one with only 15 people involved in two teams. These two teams concluded that it didn't make much sense to build two separate team boards and another common board for coordination. Together they are responsible for the entire value chain anyway. So the two teams simply coordinate regularly in front of the Flight Level 2 board.

- In the case of **supporting services** such as sales, marketing, legal etc., on the other hand, it is again quite clear in this company that these are flight level 2 systems because they each consist of a single team. These departments show that working with Flight Levels is not about a single section of the organisation, for example, IT.

What stands out in this example is that all systems are connected to the "Company Wall". Why is that? In this organisation, we see many dependencies between the individual products. The Company Wall is the place where the representatives of these products coordinate the dependencies and the work to be done. We also see that the Company Wall is a mixture of Flight Level 2 and Flight Level 3 systems because strategic information is also managed here.

I hope it has become a little clearer that it is not a question of just building a few boards. But it is also important to remember that there is no right or wrong when it comes to Work System Topologies. You need

a first approximate overview of the existing process organisation. From this point on, topologies (= processes) can be designed and thought through according to different points of view - at Bayer, for example, this is called a "flight simulator" [Flight Levels Academy 7/2020], others even build "virtual organisations" in this way. A subsidiary of Bosch, for example, wanted to become more agile in its processes without having to initiate a complete reorganisation or transformation, which is much more difficult within a corporate structure [Flight Levels Academy 3/2021]. If the company could have been reorganised from the ground up, then structuring it by product teams would have made sense - but that was complete science fiction due to the circumstances. However, the sly foxes did the following: they designed the processes in their Flight Level 2 systems as if a reorganisation had taken place. There is now simply a board that corresponds to a product. "In front of" this board, stakeholders from around the world come together virtually to coordinate their work on the product across silos - while everyone remains in his or her place in the organisational structure. So Flight Level systems don't need to do away with existing silos, but they can create a better connection between them. The aim is to focus on the mostly invisible process organisation and make it visible.

4.2. Define Flight Items and describe Flight Routes

If we want strategy and operational implementation to connect across the existing Flight Level systems, then the next question immediately arises: **which work is managed and/or coordinated in which system?** We refer to this work with the super cool phrase of **"Flight Items"** (German translations welcome - **"Flugobjekte"** sounds weird, doesn't it?). For example, the agreement may be that Flight Level 3 deals with the definition of strategic outcomes, Flight Level 2 with the coordination of epics and Flight Level 1 with the implementation of derived tasks. That sounds very simple now. In reality, we experience it somewhat differently: just because everyone nods in agreement to a new lexicon does not mean that everyone understands the same thing for each of

the terms. A classic is "epic": for some, an epic is something that is done in three sprints; for others, it is projects that had a duration of up to two years in the pre-agile era. This means that not only do terms need to be found for the **Flight Items** - above all, it has to be defined what exactly is meant by each of these terms. So the big task is not so much to find the Flight Items, but rather to develop a commonly understood nomenclature for them.

Once we know what work moves through our systems, another question follows: **How** do the Flight Items move through the individual systems? So we try to understand their Flight Routes.

Show me your Flight routes and I'll tell you what makes your organisation tick!

What does it mean for example, if flight routes point mostly from the strategic to the operational level, but never from the operational to the strategic level? It could be that in this case a group of very smart people know everything and prefer to give instructions to the rest of the organisation. If, on the other hand, there are routes that run from the operational level back to the strategic level, then it seems that people from the coordinative and operational levels are involved in the strategic decisions and there is an alignment between the strategy and the results of the work. If the flight routes run mainly through Flight Level 2 or Flight Level 1 systems, then this is usually a sign that many decision-making powers and responsibilities are given to the executive units.

Flight routes can be used to draw conclusions about the functioning of an organisation. Unfortunately, many organisations are completely unaware of their flight routes and their impact on operations. **Visualising** helps to **identify and understand the disruptions** caused by unfavourable Flight Routes. Just because there is a board on every wall does not mean that anything has changed in terms of value creation for the customer. Too often, the board on the wall becomes a board that is top of mind.

> The Flight Levels are a **thinking and communication aid** that focuses on improving the process organisation and is intended to make it clear where which levers are available for **solving a problem.**

05

Introducing Flight Levels

Explore the five activities of Flight Levels Change Leadership

Introducing Flight Levels

From what you have read in this booklet so far, you should by now have a good understanding of the essence of Flight Levels thinking and the Flight Levels communication model: from the basic idea of five core activities on three levels to the processes between the individual levels. But before you can get started, you need to clarify a few other questions: For example, the question of what exactly you want to improve; the question of how you will design the necessary change process that might lead to that improvement; or the question of what impact the Flight Levels will have on your leadership and corporate culture. The technical side of system design is only one side of the proverbial coin. It is inextricably linked to the social side, without which an organisation cannot take flight. The mirror-like connection between the technical and the social perspectives is not least reflected in the fact that there are also five core activities when it comes to change design:

1. Clarify where you are starting from
2. Create focus for improvement
3. Build a guiding coalition
4. Engage people
5. Apply an agile change approach

In the following sections, we would like to briefly describe each of these activities and thus provide you with a guide for the entire introduction process.

5.1. Clarify where you are starting from

What do you need to consider in order to effectively take off in the direction of business agility with Flight Levels? What necessary

preconditions should be ensured for this take off? How might you win over employees and managers for this journey? And what do you do if your journey includes 30, 50, 100 or even more people? These are some of the big question marks that arise when considering the Flight Levels thinking and design model in practice.
Traditional change management provides clear answers to these questions: define what your work processes should look like, draw up a roadmap with a precise sequence of steps, assign a project manager to ensure that they are implemented according to plan, and handle the whole thing in a traditional project management manner. However, the high rate of failed change initiatives and the rampant change fatigue among employees suggests that you won't get very far with this classic recipe. Even less so if you are interested in real business agility.
The good old principle "Drink your own champagne" (for friends of the rustic: "Eat your own dogfood") points emphatically to the fact that the path to company-wide agility should be designed in an agile way. It is also not advisable to start with idealised future states or target processes, but with the actual situation. How is work currently being done? What is going well? What is not going well? And what should be improved as a matter of priority?

It seems obvious to answer these questions with the help of agile interactions. The retrospective format was once invented for this purpose and has long been part of the standard repertoire of many teams. Of course, you can also conduct individual interviews with selected stakeholders. If your teams are already working in an agile way, you might as well combine the results of the different retrospectives. But you could also run a large group event and invite delegates from various teams, departments and hierarchical levels to a joint assessment. On the one hand, this enables direct exchange between the most diverse stakeholders in your work system - which, as experience shows, often leads to significantly different insights. Consequently, you are promoting a culture of agile interactions from the very beginning in order to consciously view the much-cited whole

elephant from different perspectives.
If this elephant is too big for you, then start small by comparing your own view with that of selected colleagues. What do they see similarly? What do they see differently? And where do you feel the strongest pull towards joint improvement? Last but not least, you can of course also call on the support of an agile coach for this. With professional questions, such a coach can encourage "thinking out loud", provide resonance to your answers and open up fresh perspectives.

5.2. Create focus for improvement

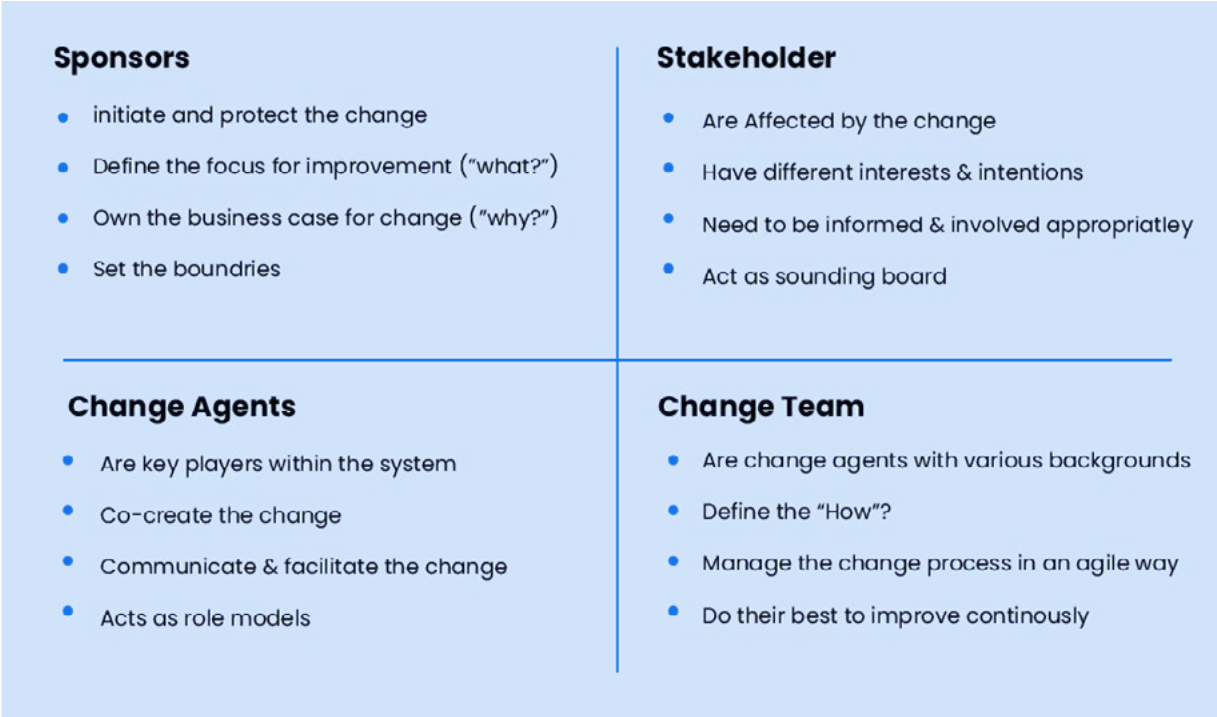
A mindful clarification of business challenges is also what gives orientation to your journey towards business agility. Unlike in classic change management, with the Flight Levels you are not aiming at predefined ideal states, but at a solution to a current business problem that is tailor-made for your situation. The shortening of time-to-market, a better balance between operations and new development, the reduction of costs through higher flow efficiency or the promotion of innovative products and services are common examples in this respect.

Becoming more agile is not a business challenge. The fact that agility is fashionable right now and is somehow part of digitalisation anyway should not be your primary motivation. Agility is a means, not an end - which unfortunately is often confused. So take enough time to formulate a clear "why". Your improvement initiative and the people involved in it will thank you!

5.3. Build a guiding coalition

If you have adequately captured your current situation and set a focus for improvement, you have already achieved a lot. Additionally, you need at least one sponsor who stands for the initiative as well as committed people who implement it in an agile way. "You'll never

walk alone", could be the motto borrowed from Liverpool FC for this leadership coalition that has proven itself in the introduction of Flight Levels. The following table provides a key overview of the roles and responsibilities relevant to this.



Experience shows that none of these roles, which are associated with different responsibilities, should be neglected. In particular, we have repeatedly observed attempts to introduce Flight Levels without a committed sponsor that are almost always doomed to failure. At the team level (Flight Level 1), such a bottom-up approach may well be effective. But when it comes to cross-team coordination (Flight Level 2), let alone the strategic portfolio (Flight Level 3) or a more comprehensive system architecture (Work Systems Topology), someone with influence in the organisation is needed who can secure the necessary boundaries. Whether this is done by a single sponsor with decision-making authority or by several (such as a management team) is not so important. What is important is that someone keeps the focus of the Flight Levels initiative and actively shapes the path to measurable improvements. For us, sponsorship therefore does not mean agile rhetoric.

It also goes beyond the allocation of sufficient resources in terms of time, money and attention. True sponsorship means that there are

one or more people who define the what and why of the improvement and actively co-create the necessary change process.

It goes without saying that this definition does not come naturally and similarly the group of people that shape the "how" do not fall from the sky and just make it happen. We have had the best experiences with the most diverse group composition possible, both for individual Flight Levels 2 or 3 systems and for larger system architectures. A diverse mix of people with different expertise, experience levels, leadership skills and personalities, representing the silo-spanning and hierarchy-bridging networking that we want to promote with Flight Levels as a whole. In some cases, the sponsor (or one of the sponsors) is also part of this mix, and in many cases at least one experienced Flight Levels coach is there to provide professional guidance as an experienced sparring partner.

However this group of pioneers is put together, it is often overlooked that it needs time and opportunities to practice in order to develop into a powerful change team. Mistakes are as inevitable as uncertainties, which often reflect organisational issues on an individual level.

The figure above reminds us that two more change roles are needed for their improvement initiative to succeed. First, the group of change agents who go far beyond the core team and act as active multipliers

and ambassadors. And secondly, the even larger group of stakeholders who are affected by the change in one way or another and ideally also benefit from the desired improvement. It is advisable not only to identify these two groups initially, but also to involve them appropriately. For a sustainable improvement, their regular feedback and engagement is indispensable. Resonating with the figure above, it could be argued that we can only make progress with Flight Levels if the idea of change becomes more and more widespread. Which finally leads us to the question of how this can be achieved.

5.4. Engage people

The Liverpool FC motto could be adapted as "You'll always fly together", when it comes to the concrete design of the change process with Flight Levels. "During an organisational change", Daniel Mezick and Mark Sheffield state emphatically, "you need employee engagement or you will fail". [Mezick & Sheffield 2018, S. 106].

But how do you get as many people engaged as possible? How can you turn the Flight Levels from an interesting idea of a few individuals into a medium for the better coordination of many experts? And how do you help these experts to create a more efficient process organisation? During the course of the Flight Levels initiatives that we have had the privilege of accompanying in the last few years, spanning a wide variety of industries and corporate sectors, some trend-setting responses have emerged. In the following, we would like to present some specific interaction formats that have proven themselves useful time and again. These formats include the retrospective, the work of the change team, the sparring partnership with Flight Level coaches and the regular coordination between change sponsors and those responsible for implementation. They also include formats that provide information, exchange and feedback on a broader level.

The format of the Flight Levels Introduction Workshop is of particular importance. After all, this workshop pursues three essential goals:

1. To engage a wide range of staff in an open exchange to get the broadest possible view of current strengths and challenges.

2. To provide basic knowledge to make the thinking model of the Flight Levels as tangible as possible.

3. Obtain feedback on the idea, achieve measurable improvements with the help of Flight Levels.

To achieve these three goals, the introductory workshop is deliberately designed as a large group event. The use of state-of-the-art facilitation methods ensures that even 30, 50 or 100 people can interact in an agile manner. A creative facilitation concept with presentations, reviews in small groups, visualisation of the most important answers and cross-group networking ensure a lively engagement with Flight Levels.

The broad arc of this large group event leads from the initial clarification of the current situation, through the presentation and discussion of the Flight Levels and ultimately to mapping, in which the participants bring together the core activities of Flight Levels with the challenges they defined at the beginning.

This workshop provides valuable insights for all stakeholders, but especially for sponsors and change team members. Firstly, they can check to what extent the analysis carried out in a small circle fits with the view of a large group of change agents and stakeholders: Are similar things seen as positive and as critical? Do the majority of participants see the same things as particularly challenging? And how well do the identified challenges fit with the focus for improvement set by the sponsor? Secondly, feedback from a large group shows how promising the Flight Levels approach seems: What connections do workshop participants see between the organisational problems they identify and the solutions offered by Flight Levels? How many critical questions are raised? And what is the basic attitude towards the envisaged change? In any case, the course of such a major event is a good litmus test for the energy for change and reinforces the emotional momentum that

no improvement initiative can do without.
The detailed review of the workshop process and the questions raised in it represents a focal point within the change agenda of both sponsor and change team. A mindful follow-up provides an important basis for decision-making and further action.

5.5. Apply an agile approach

The professional preparation, implementation and evaluation of the introductory workshop is undoubtedly an important stage of any improvement initiative based on Flight Levels. However, it is only one stage on the way to true business agility. Before that, there is a stage of initial clarification, in which explicit agreements on What? Why? Who? and How? are made. The focus of the introductory stage is on the positive feedback that the Flight Levels approach makes sense not only to sponsors and change team members but to a broad group of potential change agents and stakeholders. What follows this stage, therefore, depends on the outcomes of the workshop. Does it succeed in arousing sufficient curiosity and interest? Do the key messages get across? And do people see how Flight Levels can help THEM solve their most important challenges?

These questions must be taken seriously and discussed by all those responsible for change. A superficial "Yes!" does no one any good. Instead, it is about the open exchange of experiences to be able to make an informed decision. Do not strive for consensus here: you should neither expect that a single workshop will lead to one hundred percent agreement, nor that you will all come to the same conclusions. Rather, check whether, given the inevitable concerns and questions, you are sufficiently convinced that it is worth continuing your improvement journey.

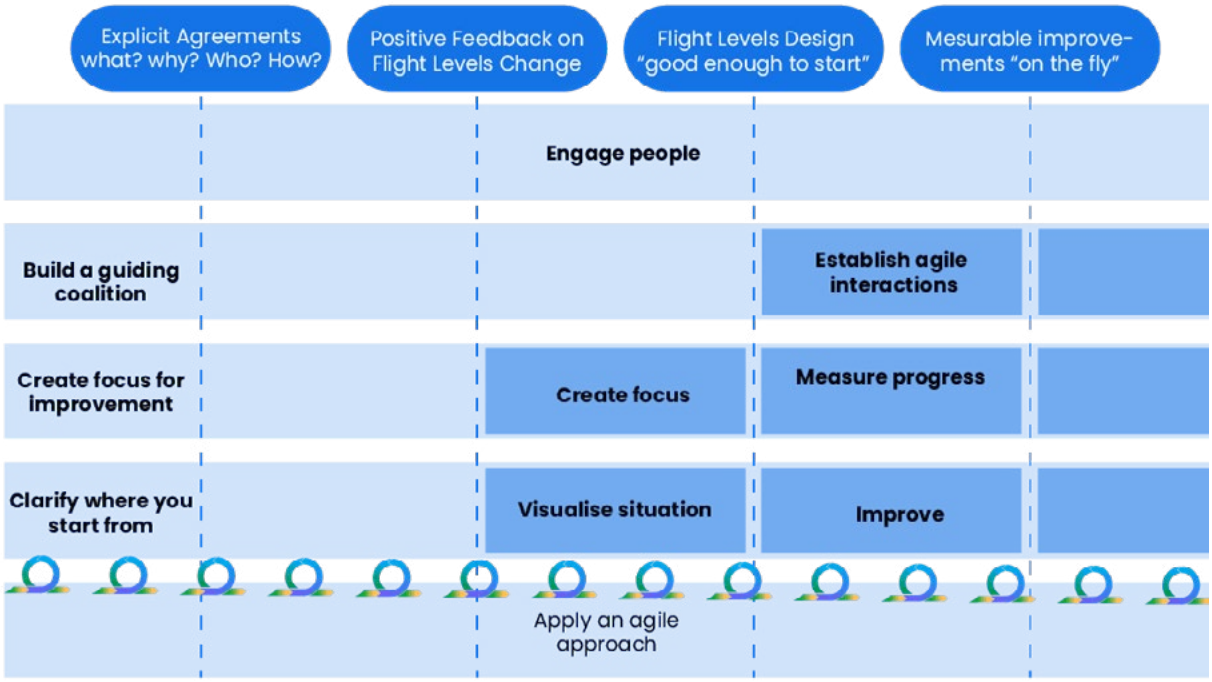
If this is the case, it is clear that your next step should be the first draft of a Flight Level system or System Architecture to start from. For this design, you can again refer to the five activities of a Flight Levels system: visualise the current situation, create focus and define which

forms of communication and measurement you want to use for the desired improvement.
Before you put the system you have designed into operation, however, you should "risk" another feedback loop. The use of a so-called sounding board is a useful tool for this. Interested change agents and stakeholders are invited to a short workshop where feedback on the draft system design in the form of comments and questions is encouraged. This workshop has several advantages: Firstly, it provides transparent information before the official start of your first flight test; secondly, it allows you to check the actual quality of your design; and thirdly, through direct communication, you strengthen professional understanding and pick up on the feelings about the change.
The purpose of a sounding board is not to defend your draft design. Critical questions and suggestions for improvement are welcomed. However, as long as there are no obvious showstoppers, you should take these suggestions into your improvement backlog and take-off.
Viewed through an agile lens, all these stages can be seen as change iterations, each pursuing specific goals:

- explicit agreements on the planned change initiative: Why? What? Who? How?
- the building of a strong guiding coalition, i.e. the successive networking of sponsor, change team, change agents and stakeholders;
- exploring the Flight Levels model together to share knowledge and create motivation for change;
- the drafting of an initial system design or architecture;
- the collaborative inspect & adapt of the respective draft systems to avoid showstoppers and strengthen the guiding coalition for operations;

- the start of operations to achieve measurable improvements;

The following figure illustrates how such a process can look in stages.

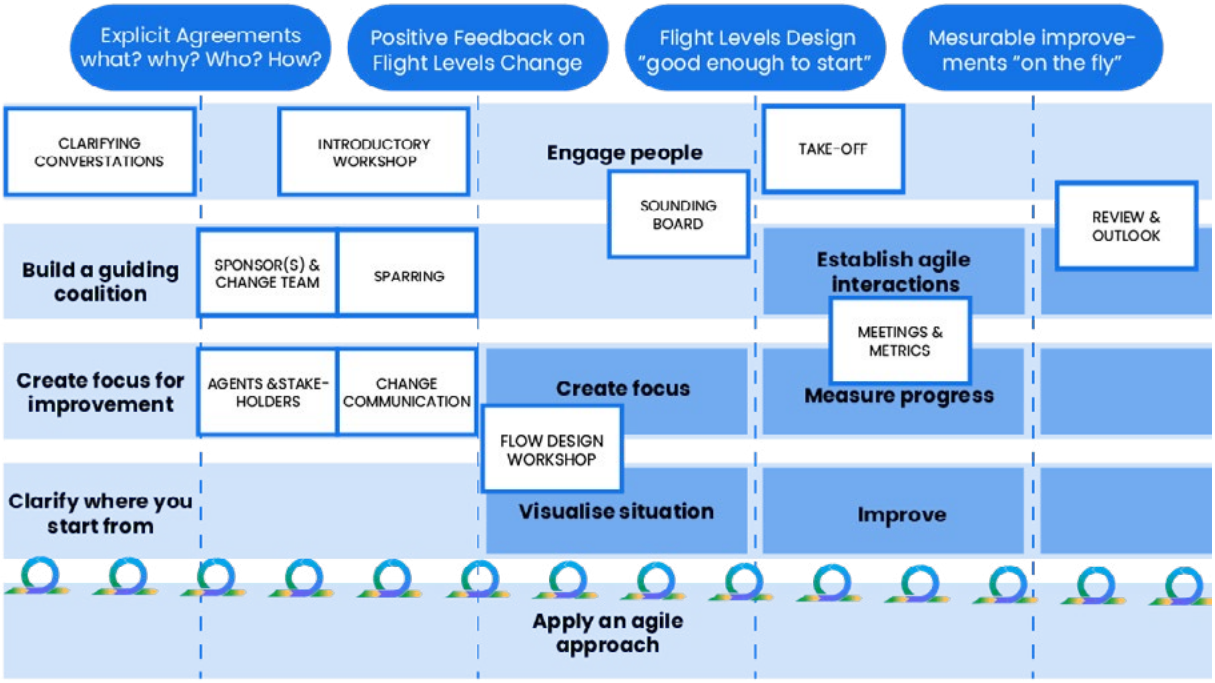


It is in the nature of an agile approach that these stages can look quite different. In one company it may already be difficult to reach clear agreements, in another no sponsor is found or several sponsors cannot agree. In a third, the change team doesn't really get going, and in a fourth, you don't get the desired feedback from your introductory workshop. Depending on the situation, you then need additional stages and actions.

Accordingly, the core principle of regular inspection & adaption is important and runs like a thread through the entire change process. These feedback loops are all the more powerful the more people are involved. Agile change does not happen by rolling out an expert plan once it has been drawn up. Rather, it stands and falls with the co-creative design by those affected.

It is therefore all the more important that the introduction of Flight Levels relies on the commitment of those who work in the respective system from the very beginning. To do this, you use different interaction

formats to actively involve those affected.
The figure below shows which of the previously described workshops have proven successful in the individual stages.



In summary, it's about getting as many people as possible on board, or rather in the cockpit, to take off together as smoothly as possible. Ideally, with each workshop, you will adopt a part of the culture of improvement that you want to promote with Flight Levels as a whole. The fact that you rely on the broadest possible coalition of helmsmen and women strengthens this culture. The collaborative Inspect & Adapt increases stability of change and minimises the risk of suboptimal takeoff or heaven forbid a crash landing!

The technical side of system design is only one side of the proverbial coin. It is inextricably linked to **the social side,** without which an organisation **cannot take flight.**

For those who want to raise and develop the potential for more business agility in organisations.

The Flight Levels Academy - offers individual workshops and comprehensive training for the practical use of Flight Levels. The aim is to support those who want to raise and develop the potential for more business agility in organisations. This is achieved through a worldwide network of Flight Levels Guides and Flight Levels Coaches with practical experience who help close the gap between strategy and operational implementation. The Flight Levels Academy also attaches great importance to community building: Practitioners from all sectors can meet at events such as the regular "Flight Club" and on online platforms of the Flight Levels Academy to learn from and with each other.

www.flightlevels.io

You can find all Flight Club episodes on:
https://www.youtube.com/c/FlightLevelsAcademy/featured.