

Agility Drift Detection Guide

Early Warning Signs & Recovery Actions

A companion resource from *Agile Meets AI*, Chapter 9

Agility doesn't disappear overnight—it erodes through small compromises. Four distinct types of drift threaten agility, each with different triggers and interventions. Use this guide to detect drift early and take corrective action.

PRESSURE-INDUCED DRIFT


When deadlines loom, leaders regress to command-and-control. Teams learn that empowerment is conditional.

Red Flags

- ☐ Decisions teams used to own now require approvals
- ☐ Meeting frequency increases
- ☐ Status reporting becomes more detailed and frequent
- ☐ Teams stop raising problems (leadership too stressed)
- ☐ Retrospectives get canceled ("no time right now")

Quick Actions

- Identify decisions you're tempted to take back—consciously leave them with the team
- Create a team agreement for high-pressure initiatives
- Continue open discussion when problems arise
- Run retrospectives—these provide valuable learnings

 **Health Check:** "When pressure hits, what is the first sign we are drifting away from our agile values?"

SUCCESS-INDUCED DRIFT


Success creates complacency. "We've always done it this way" becomes justification to stop improving.

Red Flags

- ☐ Retrospectives generate few to no action items
- ☐ Team hasn't run a meaningful experiment in 2+ sprints
- ☐ Suggestions for change met with "if it ain't broke..."
- ☐ Processes haven't evolved in months despite changing conditions

Quick Actions

- Add a standing retro question: "What are we doing simply because we've always done it?"
- Celebrate experiments and learning, not just delivery
- Examine practices that haven't changed in 6 months
- Bring in outside perspective to challenge assumptions

 **Health Check:** "What would we do differently if we assumed our current success was about to end?"

LEADERSHIP-CHANGE DRIFT


New executives bring assumptions from previous organizations. Without deliberate onboarding, they default to what they know.

Red Flags

- ☐ New leadership implements processes without adapting to context
- ☐ Teams asked to justify existing practices
- ☐ Decision-making slows as new approval layers appear
- ☐ Open communication between teams and leadership erodes

Quick Actions

- Document current practices with outcomes achieved
- Surface concerns on proposed changes early
- Prepare cultural onboarding: what works, what's been tried, what was learned
- Advocate for observation before intervention

 **Health Check:** "How would we explain our current practices to someone who has never seen them work?"

TECHNOLOGY-INDUCED DRIFT

Teams adopt new tools (including AI) without examining how they change collaboration. The tool becomes the focus.

Red Flags

- ☐ Teams resist tools that could significantly improve work
- ☐ Teams are unaware of the capabilities in the tools they already use
- ☐ Tool proliferation creates context-switching costs
- ☐ Teams can't articulate what problems their tools solve
- ☐ Skills that AI handles are no longer practiced or taught

Quick Actions

- Quarterly review of tools available vs. tools in use
- Consolidate where different tools solve the same problem
- Create a safe space to experiment with new tools
- Schedule regular "manual mode" to complete tasks without AI
- Establish clear guidelines on tool usage

 **Health Check:** "If our AI tools disappeared tomorrow, what would we struggle to do?"

Key Insight

The drift is predictable, which means it is preventable. Diagnostics only work if you use them—build the habit of regular assessment into your team's rhythm.

A final question: "Who is watching for drift, and how will they raise the alarm?"

From *Agile Meets AI: A Pragmatic Guide for Modern Teams* by Sheila Eckert

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