Doing

Section 7 Agility

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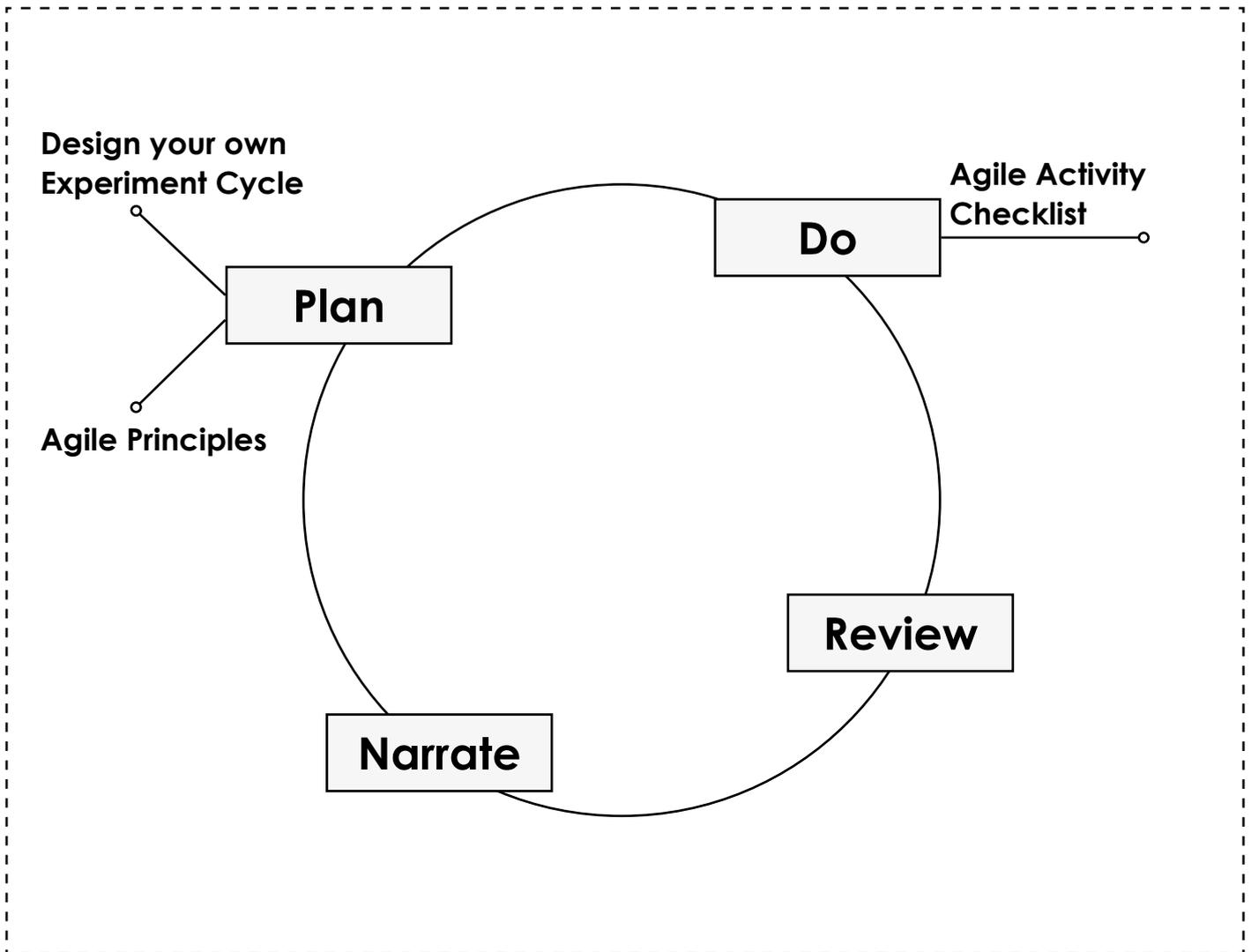
This page illustrates how to 'do' the core concept of this section. We've shown where each tool of the Doing section can provide more information as you work through your Scaffolded social learning design.

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Design your own Experiment Cycle

When you ask learners to go experiment they might react with questions and confusion about how to proceed. Here are a few tips that you can use if you choose to include the opportunity for experimentation in your learning opportunity.

• Frame the space as a place for rehearsal without consequence

Before asking learners to build and engage in experimentation, be clear about the purpose of this activity and that the time spent here is intended for practice and learning. Reassure them that experiments, by their very nature, are unpredictable and we cannot know the outcomes in advance. However, this is an opportunity to collaborate with others, try new ideas and improve on them, learning what works and why.

• Require experiments to be time bound, eg 6 weeks

The experiment should be time bound, challenging learners to plan, do, test, review, do and test again in that time. As a learning exercise, there should be enough time to create two versions of the idea and reflection on the results. Consider where experimentation fits into the greater context of your learning opportunity.

A six step cycle you might use by dividing learners into small groups:
- **1:** Choose a challenge and brainstorm possible solutions.
  Choose a solution to test.
- **2:** Test the solution in the field (each individually or in pairs, depending on the context and group)
- **3:** Review the results of the test together. What were their observations, what needs to change?
- **4:** Re-iterate (plan and do again)
- **5:** Test again
- **6:** Review the results of the test together, what would the next iteration look like? What did they learn about the challenge based on the experiment? Review the past six weeks of working together; what worked well what needs to change?

• Invite learners to identify a topical challenge

For this part of the learning design, active social moderation is required. Learners each can post their experiment idea and ask for others' support in selecting it.

This is also a way to form groups of interest, as learners can self-select groups based on the challenge that they want to address.

It is important to note that learners should post a description of a challenge rather than an idea for a solution. Community Managers should be vigilant in making sure that learners present their challenge clearly.

• Require learners to be creative

The reason for posting challenges rather than solutions is that this is an opportunity for every learner to be able to relate the challenge to their own reality and contribute ideas for solutions from their perspective. There are many different ways for groups to get creative, brainstorming for example. Depending on the context, choose technology that will support fairness.

• Frame participation as discovery & co-creation

While learners can become invested in creating the perfect solution, remind them that the activity is as much about process as outcome: being mindful of each other's perspectives and ideas, remembering that the proposed solution need not be perfect if they agree it addresses the challenge. Learners will learn much more from testing than from the brainstorming process.

• Create mechanisms for feedback, informal or formal

'Mechanisms' are not just specific activities. They are tools, technology and/or values that ensure that when a learner or group shares a story, their effort will not go unanswered. They also help frame the learners' activities, and help remind them of what's ahead. For example, based again on the 6 week cycle, ask facilitators to schedule at least two meetings with each group, once at the beginning and once in the middle to make sure the groups are aligned, to talk about the experience and informally assess (see the Agile Activity Checklist). Another example might be to require weekly 'status reports' for the Learning Community that other learners can feedback on.

• Decide and communicate what and how you will assess the experiments

Assessment can be an obstacle to creativity or an inspiration, depending on how you frame it. Ensuring that learners understand that 'success' depends as much on process as outcome will give learners permission and freedom to try their ideas without sacrificing values. We don't want to create a 'cutthroat' Silicon Valley type of environment! Pay attention to the parts of the process and relate the activity to the overall goal and learning objectives. For example, based on the 6 week experiment cycle:

- **1:** How did learners arrive at a solution? Does it relate to and value diverse perspectives? How does it connect to overall goal?
- **3:** How were results collected and reviewed? What kinds of challenges were found, what will learners change the next time? Are they relevant to learning objectives?
- **6:** What were the lessons learned, about the idea and about the way they worked together? How did they share their stories with the wider learning community? What feedback did they provide to other groups?

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Elements of Agile Learning Design

When agile activities form part of the learning opportunity, Community Managers and Facilitators play an active role in the scaffolding that surrounds them. Even though learners are more-or-less autonomous in many activities, you should still keep the following in mind:

• Are there any obstacles to collaboration?

• Are learners communicating usefully?

• Are learner groups working independently?

• Is everyone having a good time?

• Are comments and feedback being integrated into new versions?

• Are Learner groups taking time to reflect on process and product?

• Is everyone familiar with the activity expectations?

• Does the activity respond to everyone's everyday reality?

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Agile Principles

The idea of 'agile principles' comes from software development. The Agile project management approach delivers regular outputs, and re-prioritises future developments based on those outputs, so if all is going well, some extra features might be included; if things are not going to plan, you might consider whether some other features can be dropped in order to concentrate on the really important ones. This approach was developed in response to 'waterfall' project management, in which the developer delivers a final product that it considers to be the perfect solution to the problem they have been given. It was seen that in practice, this rarely worked, and budgets and timelines would often have to be extended in order to get the right solution.

In 2001, a group of seventeen industry thought leaders came up with a manifesto that expressed their values:

"We are uncovering better ways of developing software by doing it and helping others do it. Through this work we have come to value:

"Individuals and interactions over processes and tools Working software over comprehensive documentation Customer collaboration over contract negotiation Responding to change over following a plan

"That is, while there is value in the items on the right, we value the items on the left more." (1)
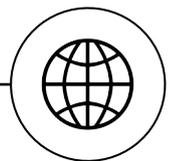
Smartsheet. (n.d.). Comprehensive Guide to the Agile Manifesto.

http://bit.ly/TheAgileManifesto An article exploring the 4 values and 12 principles of the Agile Manefesto for Software Development

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Make your Manifesto

When forming the learning community, include the opportunity for learners not only to decide their 'rules of engagement' but also to understand their shared values. Not just how learners should behave, but what attitudes are valued.

Invite learners to name the values that will help the learning community and the learners to expand their knowledge and the community knowledge base on your topic.

Other learners can add their ideas and 'vote' for the ones they agree with.

Choose the top values to create the learning community manifesto.