

Changing content marketing production using agile practices

Pauliina Vehniäinen



Author Pauliina Vehniäinen	
Degree programme Degree Programme in Communication Management	
Thesis title Changing content marketing production using agile practices	Number of pages and appendix pages 57 + 11
<p>This thesis studies how an agile approach can be used to improve the content production process in content marketing. The background lies in the author's experience in website development projects that have been managed in an agile way, and the realization that also website content and other content marketing could be managed using an agile approach. Change leadership emerged as a crucial enabler for the success of the project.</p> <p>The theoretical part studies the frameworks of change leadership, agile methodologies, marketing and content marketing, and combines these in the framework of agile marketing. The difference between an agile approach, agile methodologies and agile practices is explained, and individual agile practices are studied to select the most suitable combination for the case company's content marketing needs.</p> <p>The empirical research happened in Ruukki Construction's content marketing team during a two-month period in the fall of 2017. The scope of the project was to improve the effectiveness, transparency and flexibility of the content production process by implementing an agile way of working. The research questions sought to get answers on how agile practices could support the content marketing process, and if work methods could also be developed in an agile way. Analysing and developing the effectiveness of marketing content itself was not in the scope of this project.</p> <p>The research method was action research, which is carried out along the action rather than from the outside, and together with the organization which is being studied. Action research is run in cycles where the object of the research such as content marketing production is assessed and developed, and findings are used to plan the next cycle of the research. Because agile thinking also includes iterative, time-boxed development phases called sprints, the action research cycles and the agile sprints were combined into one-week development periods that we called sprints according to the agile approach. In the beginning and consequently in the end of each sprint was a weekly meeting called sprint review and sprint planning, where the experiences from the previous sprint were taken as base for planning the upcoming sprint. Change leadership practices were used to drive this change in the organization.</p> <p>A questionnaire was used in the end of the project to find out if the content marketing team members thought that the content production process had in fact turned agile, and if the change was beneficial. The result was positive: majority of the respondents agreed that both the content production process and the process to continuously develop work methods had turned agile and easier to follow, and that Ruukki Construction should continue to run content marketing in an agile way.</p> <p>Based on this research, it can be concluded that agile practices can support the content marketing process, and that change leadership plays a crucial role in implementing changes to work methods. Further development should be done on fine-tuning the set of agile practices specifically for content marketing's needs.</p>	
Keywords change leadership, agile marketing, agile, content marketing, marketing process	

Table of contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Background.....	1
1.2	Marketing and content production at Ruukki Construction.....	2
1.3	Objectives and research questions	4
1.4	Scope and limitations	4
1.5	Thesis structure	4
2	Change leadership	5
2.1	Principles for leading change	5
2.2	Stakeholder relations	6
3	Agile methodologies	8
3.1	Lean philosophy.....	10
3.2	Scrum	11
3.3	Kanban	12
4	Marketing	15
4.1	Marketing communications	15
4.2	Content marketing.....	17
4.3	Agile marketing	18
5	Conducting the research	21
5.1	Action research.....	21
5.2	Data collection methods.....	25
5.2.1	Pre-step: Context and purpose.....	26
5.2.2	Cycle 1: Setting up the agile way of working	34
5.2.3	Cycle 2: Developing deadline setting, analysing results and archiving	35
5.2.4	Cycle 3: Iterating on deadline setting.....	36
5.2.5	Cycle 4: Introducing checklist functionality	37
5.2.6	Cycle 5: Developing team communication.....	38
5.2.7	Cycle 6: General findings when 75 % of the implementation project has been reached.....	39
5.2.8	Cycle 7: Creating more value for target audiences, and continuously iterating the internal process	40
5.2.9	Cycle 8: Iterating future planning schedule and weekly meeting's role	41
5.2.10	Cycle 9: Closing of the agile work methods implementation project	41
6	Findings	43
7	Discussion.....	48
7.1	Change leadership and managing stakeholders.....	48
7.2	Selecting agile methods and practices	50
7.3	Agile process in practice and action research	50

7.4	Usefulness and limitations	52
7.5	Suggestions for further research	52
7.6	Reflection on my learning from the thesis process	53
7.7	Conclusions	53
	References	55
	Appendices	58
	Appendix 1. Screenshots from the online Kanban boards in Trello.....	58
	Appendix 2. Questionnaire cover letter.....	60
	Appendix 3. Questionnaire results.....	61

1 Introduction

Ruukki Construction has recently started several initiatives to rise on a new level of content marketing capability to provide valuable content for its business-to-business target audiences. The first step towards more strategic content marketing was the creation of a new content strategy. At the same time, we in Ruukki Construction's content marketing team saw the need to make the content production process more systematic, transparent, and flexible to manage. We started to foster the idea of introducing agile thinking into it.

This thesis studies what agile methodologies are and how they can be used in marketing. The empirical part describes how action research was used to find out if agile practices could support the content production process and the ways of working in Ruukki Construction's content marketing team. Change leadership emerged as a crucial enabler for the success of the project.

1.1 Background

I've worked in the marketing and communications field for over 16 years, specializing in digital marketing. The combination of marketing and digital has offered me a viewpoint into the development of both marketing strategies and the technologies that enable a lot of the marketing that we do today.

For a long time already, marketing hasn't been outbound, pushing messages out to the customers. It has become inbound, trying to pull customers towards the company with good content, search engine optimization and visibility on social media. (Halligan & Shah 2010; 29, 32-33, 85.) In the past ten years, I've seen content marketing becoming a buzzword in doing just that: companies and marketers have come to understand that their target audiences prefer valuable and helpful content over traditional marketing messages that are just about trying to sell things to them.

Over in the software development world which I've followed closely because of my digital aspect, agile has been a buzzword for some 25 years and has now become the most used project management methodology in that industry. In many ways, digital marketing falls in the crossroads of marketing and software development. It's marketing, but it also requires a lot of software in the form of for example content management systems which are used for publishing web content, and product management systems which are used to publish product information to websites. When new websites are designed and launched, they are often run with agile project management methods. Having worked in this cross-

roads for a long time, I've grown to like the systematic and transparent approach of agile web projects – how easy it is to see what needs to be done in what priority order, what is currently being worked on, who is working on what, and when it will be finished – and how easy it is to refine the scope according to changed needs since the work progresses in small but working increments.

At the same time, I'm sometimes frustrated with how the marketing content for those websites and other marketing channels is produced. It isn't always clear what the priorities are, what the content will be, who is working on what, when it will be finished, who will publish it and how we marketers make sure that the results will be used to steer future activities so that we do more of what works, and less of what doesn't. As content marketing started to grow ever more important, I started to think how we could leverage the work that we do. It led me to wonder if other marketing activities than just website projects could be planned and executed in an agile way – could agile methodologies be applied to content production?

To take Ruukki Construction's content production to the next level and to ensure a constant flow of valuable content to our target audiences, I suggested that we would try implementing agile practices into it. Luckily the timing was perfect. Instead of being commissioned as a project, this thesis research became part of my work to introduce agile marketing practices to Ruukki Construction's content production process.

Change leadership was needed to drive, communicate and sell the change in work methods to the organization, both on director level and in the content marketing team. Next I will introduce this background of what kind of company Ruukki Construction is, and how their marketing function is set up.

1.2 Marketing and content production at Ruukki Construction

Ruukki Construction is a division of global steel company SSAB. It produces and sells energy-efficient steel solutions to the business-to-business (B2B) construction market and steel roofs to consumers. Ruukki Construction has its headquarters in Helsinki, Finland, and its operating markets are Northern, Eastern and Central Europe. The SSAB corporation's headquarters is located in Stockholm, Sweden, and it operates in over 50 countries.

There are six members in Ruukki Construction's central marketing team at the headquarters: the marketing and communications director, two digital specialists, one CRM (Customer Relationship Management) specialist, one media relations specialist, and one per-

son responsible for the Finnish market. Other local markets have small marketing teams in their respective countries and areas. The content marketing team however spans further: it includes some of the people in the central marketing team, but also specialists from different parts of the organization who produce content about their own area of expertise. Still, the total number of people in the content marketing team was only about six until this project was started. Content is produced mostly in-house, but external marketing and communications agencies are used especially in strategically most important campaigns. Everyday content production happens by the marketing team's digital specialists, who keep the websites up to date, and the media relations specialist who produces news, customer stories and references. New content is published every week on the company website, in its social media channels, and as press releases.

The most important target audiences for Ruukki Construction's B2B content marketing are architects and other building designers, real estate investors, and construction companies. Marketing is planned on strategy level once a year along with the business strategy. It defines the strategic themes, the overall marketing budget and its largest allocations. Changes to the yearly marketing plans are mostly done due to campaign needs not anticipated at the time of the planning. Because of the fairly small central marketing team, changes to the strategic marketing plans have been quite easy to plan and communicate, but the work method has not been agile. Campaigns and longer-term activities are fully planned before the implementation starts, so work is not carried out in iterative increments and tested with target audiences. Analytics – although followed – are not used to drive the content production until after the campaign is over and the next ones are being planned.

The content production process is not transparent either: people don't have a view into what all the upcoming and currently produced content is. Only the person responsible for a content piece is well aware of what it should be like and when it will be finished – this can happen also within campaigns when several people are working on different parts of the campaign content. Decisions and material related to different marketing activities often lie in people's emails and in miscellaneous folders on individual's computers, so they are complicated to find even for the person who is working on them, not to mention the whole content marketing team. Utilizing the content in different channels is also up to the digital specialists, so others don't have clear picture on where, how and when their content will be published.

Ruukki Construction produces good content for clearly defined target audiences, but there is an acknowledged need for process improvement. It's time to leverage content production with a more systematic, transparent and flexible agile approach.

1.3 Objectives and research questions

The main objective of the thesis is that, as a result from a two-month implementation project, Ruukki Construction has a consistent way of working in place for managing content marketing activities in an agile way. As a subobjective, there should be a way of working in place also to develop the work methods themselves in an agile way. The research questions are:

How can agile practices support the content marketing process?

Can work methods be developed in an agile way?

1.4 Scope and limitations

A literature review was conducted to find the most suitable set of agile practices for Ruukki Construction's content production process. The empirical part of this thesis describes how the selected agile practices were implemented and fine-tuned using action research. I've chosen to use the word agile *practices* instead of agile *methods* when describing Ruukki Construction's project, as best practices were picked from several agile methodologies into a combination that works optimally for the company.

Analysing and developing the effectiveness of marketing content itself was not in the scope of this project.

1.5 Thesis structure

In chapters 2, 3 and 4, I will present the relevant frameworks for this development project: change leadership, agile methodologies, marketing and content marketing – and then I will combine these in the framework of agile marketing.

In chapter 5, I will describe how the agile practices implementation project at Ruukki Construction was carried out using action research.

Finally, I will present the findings from the implementation project in chapter 6, and discuss the meaning of the results, suggest future development areas, and reflect on my own learning during the thesis project in chapter 7.

2 Change leadership

Change leadership refers to the models, processes and practices that are used to drive, control and support change in organizations. It played a major role in how well I was able to carry out the change in work methods for the content marketing team and other stakeholders. The most relevant change leadership and stakeholder management practices to this project are presented in the next subchapters.

Organizational change can be classified from several perspectives. The magnitude of change affects how easy it is to drive it. For example in the case of re-organizing a whole company, the change is substantial. Fine-tuning work instructions on the other hand is minor and convergent change. The division between substitutive and additive change is similar. As the name suggests, substitutive change replaces something with something new, and changes the whole company. Additive change adds to the current state: it's gradual and aims at improving performance on work process level, such as in this agile practices implementation project. Change leadership is needed on both levels, and during the change process, good change leaders fine-tune their own work according to their learnings on what seems to work for the organization. (Cornelissen 2014; 221-222, 226.)

2.1 Principles for leading change

Kotter's (2012, 23; Kotter & Rathgeber 2005, 130-131) eight-step process describes the building blocks for succeeding in a major change project. I think that the same principles apply to smaller-scale change as well, adapted to the project at hand. A few of Kotter's steps were especially relevant for the agile work methods project at Ruukki Construction, so I selected them to be presented here.

A key factor in this change project's success was Kotter's step two, creating the guiding coalition. According to it, change should be guided by a team that has "position power" (key people such as line managers included, to the extent that others aren't able to stop them), leadership skills and authority, is credible and able to communicate, is analytical, and sees the need to act urgently (Kotter 2012, 23; Kotter & Rathgeber 2005, 130).

Kotter's step three (Kotter & Rathgeber 2005, 130), developing vision and strategy, should be an inevitable stage in any change project. A change is always done for a reason, and linked to that reason there should be a target. Kotter often refers to major organizational change, but all change projects should have goals and strategies to reach them. The target is also the base for evaluating whether the project turns out to be a success.

The vision and strategy need to be communicated well and repeatedly for the organization to understand them. Kotter's (2012, 23; Kotter & Rathgeber 2005, 131) step four about communication includes not only that, but also the note that the guiding coalition should act as role models of the change. I think that in a development project, for example the case of introducing new ways of working in Ruukki Construction, an enthusiastic attitude by the guiding coalition makes a big difference in the drive that people will feel when working together to make the change happen. In fact, I think that the successful implementation of many hard change leadership skills relies on softer skills, such as being able to listen to and address people's concerns, and to act in a compassionate and supporting way. Driving and communicating about change is a lot about the mental side.

The shift from the traditional way of planning work to an agile mindset is also mental. But agile thinking is also merciful and rewarding. As one of the creators of the Agile Manifesto, Jeff Sutherland, talks about changing a team's mental state: one should strive to break down work into small steps, and that in a cyclical way of working, every cycle and every day is another chance to improve (Sutherland 2014; 81, 84, 147). This is a good starting point for our implementation project.

In a change project, change leadership is practiced towards the project's stakeholders. In the next subchapter I will talk about what stakeholders are and how to communicate with them.

2.2 Stakeholder relations

According to the classic definition by Freeman (1984, in Cornelissen 2014, 44), "a stakeholder is any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's purpose and objectives". To apply this to a project, we simply need to replace "organization's purpose and objectives" with "project's purpose and objectives". Therefore a change project's stakeholder is someone who is affected by the change, or takes part in making the change happen.

In order to communicate with each stakeholder group in a way that drives the change within that group and resonates with the people in it, the stakeholder groups and their drivers need to be identified. Their level of influence to the change project's success should also be understood, and that information should be used to prioritize communication efforts. One way to do this is to map the stakeholders on a quadrant chart called the power-interest matrix, where the axes are stakeholders' interest toward the activity and

the power they have in regard to it. (Cornelissen 2014; 46, 50-51.) I will return to the stakeholder mapping for Ruukki Construction's project in chapter 5.2.1.

Cornelissen lists types of communication strategies to achieve different levels of effects on stakeholders: informational strategy to create awareness, informational or persuasive strategy to increase understanding, and dialogue strategy to promote involvement. The informational strategy is merely about informing stakeholders about an activity, whereas the persuasive strategy is about seeking effect on the stakeholder's knowledge, perspective and behavior related to the activity through discussion – "selling" the activity to the stakeholders. The dialogue strategy takes communication one step further and seeks mutual understanding and decision-making through the exchange of opinions. (Cornelissen 2014, 51-52.) In the case of Ruukki Construction's project to implement agile practices into the content production process, the persuasive and dialogue strategies proved to be useful. The project needed to be sold to the directors and managers in order to create the guiding coalition. And using dialogue strategy to involve the management and the content marketing team in decision making committed them to the planning and implementation of the new ways of working.

3 Agile methodologies

Agile is a way of managing projects. It was originally used in software development, but nowadays agile thinking has set footprint in managing many kinds of work, from sales to human resources (Olajiga 2017; 171-180, 189-192, 237-250), from house remodeling to teaching (Sutherland 2014; 10, 82-83, 204-211). Marketing has also been managed in an agile way, and this thesis research will add to that knowledge.

The concept of agile was formulated by a group of 17 leading American software development managers in 2001 when they came together to discuss a lighter way of managing software projects (Brinker 2016, 57). Before that time the most common method was waterfall, in which requirements are specified in detailed documentation before the development starts, and the project usually progresses in pre-determined phases (Smart 2016, 30; Brinker 2016, 66-67) according to what has been specified. As a result of the 2001 meeting, the software development managers' group came up with the so-called Agile Manifesto (Measey & Radtac 2015, 3-4). In the manifesto, the group states that it values "individuals and interactions over processes and tools, working software over comprehensive documentation, customer collaboration over contract negotiation, and responding to change over following a plan" (it's good to note that they see value in all of these things, but put higher value on the new ways of working). (Beck & al. 2001a.)

The group elaborated on the manifesto's idea in the twelve principles behind their thinking. According to the first principle, most important is to meet the customer's expectations by delivering working software early in the project and continuously. Some of the other principles further explain the emphasis on individuals and interactions by stating that teams should be built using motivated and empowered individuals, that self-organizing teams deliver best results, that "business people" and developers must work together every day, and that the most efficient information sharing happens face-to-face. The team should also take time to reflect on their own way of working and make adjustments if needed. One of the essentials is simplicity, or leaving as much work as possible undone. (Beck & al. 2001b.)

Today, agile is the most common of the so-called adaptive approaches, which is a common term for the opposite of waterfall-type predictive approaches. I think that the agile principles are good general guidelines for doing any kind of work more efficiently, including marketing. The details of applying agile principles to marketing will of course need to be defined, and I will return to that in chapter 4.3.

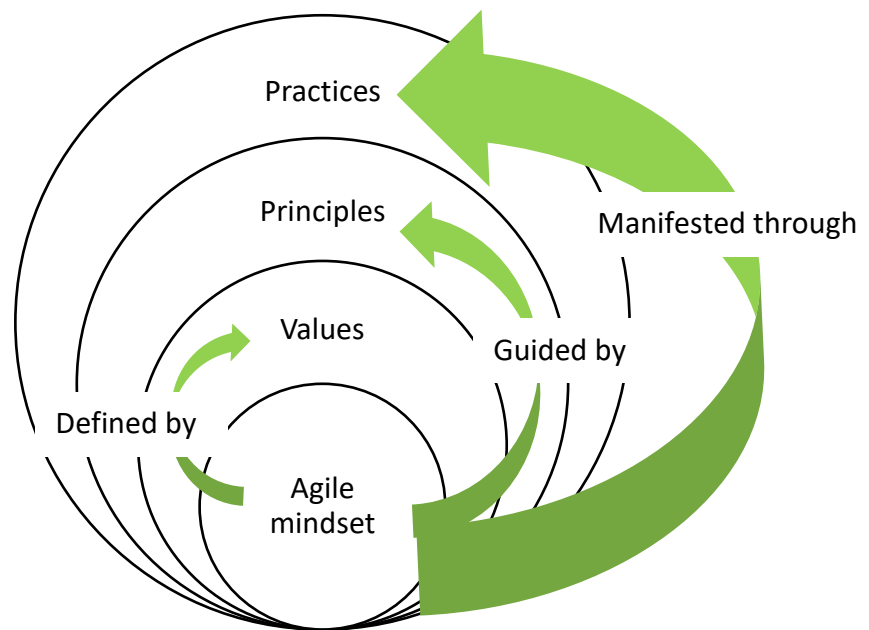


Figure 1. The relationship between an agile mindset and agile values, principles and practices (Project Management Institute & Agile Alliance 2017, 10, paraphrased)

Terms such as agile approach or mindset, agile principles, agile practices and agile methodologies are used quite freely in literature. Project Management Institute and Agile Alliance (2017, 10) have tried to illustrate the differences by mapping some of the terms in expanding circles presented in figure 1. In their presentation, the agile mindset (often called agile approach) is at the core of agile thinking. It's defined by the values from the Agile Manifesto (individuals and interactions, working software, customer collaboration and responding to change (Beck & al. 2001a). The twelve principles from behind the Agile Manifesto guide the mindset, and several practices manifest it. (Project Management Institute & Agile Alliance 2017, 10.) For the purpose of this thesis project, I talk about an agile approach or mindset when referring to the overall idea of simple, fast and iterative way of working, agile methodologies when talking about agile that has a specific name such as Scrum, Kanban or Lean, and agile practices when I talk about individual traits that are typical of all agile thinking.

For the readers' ability to recognize these terms while getting acquainted with agile, in the next subchapters I will present brief descriptions of a few terms commonly used in addition to, or instead of agile.

3.1 Lean philosophy

Lean philosophy originated in the manufacturing industry, where ways of working have been under constant development. In the early days of producing goods, products were crafted one by one by highly skilled workers. As that proved to be expensive, mass production was developed in the beginning of the 20th century to produce standardized products in high volumes. Mass production machines were expensive and developed for one purpose, and workers operating them needed a lower skill level than craft workers. The process was vulnerable to disruptions, so manufacturers needed to use buffers such as additional supplies and workers to ensure the continuation of the production flow. And because changing the produced product was even more expensive than running the existing process, it was tempting to continue producing the same products for as long as possible. This made products more affordable, but decreased variety and also offered less variety for the workers. (Womack, Jones & Roos 2007, 11.)

What we currently call agile methods got their first manifestation in lean production. It originated after World War II in car manufacturer Toyota's production line, where workers with multiple skills were put to work on automated and flexibly operable equipment. This was a major efficiency improvement compared to the previously mentioned ways of working, as it solved the cost level issue of craft production and the inflexibility of mass production. Now products were produced in high volumes but with large variety, and people and other assets were easier to re-assign according to production needs. To summarize, mass production concentrates on producing a limited set of products in as high volumes as possible with an acceptable number of defects and a maximum level of inventory. Lean production's goal is to continually strive for less defects, smaller costs and inventories, and more product variety. The word "lean" started to refer to using less of everything (which is also reflected in the Agile Manifesto's principle of simplicity mentioned above). (Womack, Jones & Roos 2007, 9-12.)

Nowadays the terms lean and agile are used quite flexibly to describe adaptive work methods (Brinker 2016, 59) in which everything redundant is dropped, be it too rigid planning, too strictly guided teams of experts, or too much time to market. The focus has been put on customer need, the flexible process and team that concentrate on fast delivery of viable products, and iteration when needed.

3.2 Scrum

Scrum is a specific agile method often used in software development, but also in project management in other fields (Sutherland 2014, 203; Brinker 2016, 57-58).

Some of the characteristics of Scrum are working incrementally and iteratively in pre-defined time slots called sprints that are most often one to four weeks long. All tasks to be done are stored in a list called (product) backlog as items. There is a product owner who is in charge of what is being developed, makes sure the aim is at the business value and therefore keeps the items in the backlog prioritized. In the beginning of each sprint, the development team holds a sprint planning meeting where they pick items from the product backlog to a sprint backlog according to the items' priority order and the team's estimation on how much work they will be able to finish during the coming sprint. During the sprint there are daily 15-minute check-up meetings called daily scrums. In the end of each sprint, there is a sprint review meeting to present what was done during the sprint, and a meeting called retrospective where the team reflects their own way of working and aims to improve it. A person called scrum master facilitates the whole process, calls in the meetings and removes impediments from the team's way. When Scrum is applied to marketing, the scrum master is essentially the project manager of the process. (Smart 2016, 46-48, 52; Sutherland 2014; 77, 234-235, 237-238; Brinker 2016, 57-58; Adkins 2010, 171.) Figure 2 illustrates the sprint phases and some of the most important terms in Scrum.

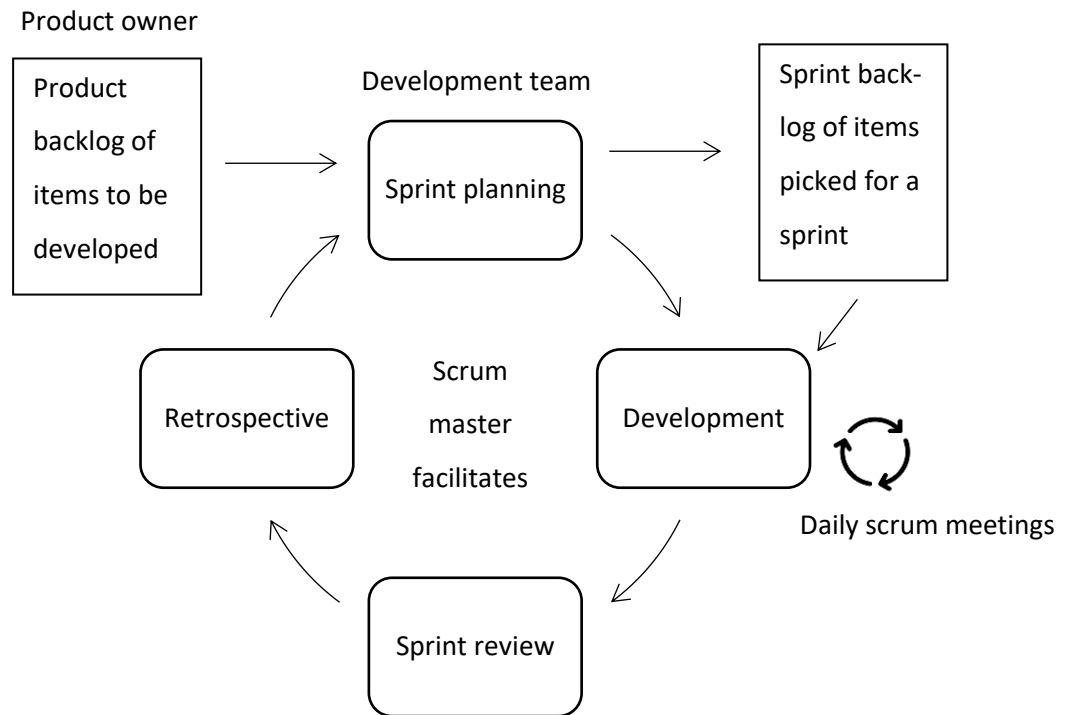


Figure 2. Simplified illustration of sprint phases and terms in Scrum

One could say that in everyday language, agile and lean are used as common terms that refer to the whole way of thinking, whereas Scrum takes the concept onto a practical level with its detailed definitions on the roles and ways of working. Brinker (2016, 59) acknowledges the similar uses of the terms, but tries to make a difference by describing Lean's target as efficiency (removing waste) and agile's target as speed and adaptability. There are also many other agile methodologies that utilize the general rules of the agile approach but differ in their detailed ways of working. I'll briefly introduce one more of them, Kanban, for the purpose that it works well for continuous work such as producing marketing content, and was selected as the basis for the agile ways of working at Ruukki Construction.

3.3 Kanban

As mentioned above, Kanban is an agile method well suited for continuous work. Its origins lie in Lean, but its context is similar to Scrum's (Brinker 2016, 58-59). Kanban also uses a backlog, but unlike in Scrum, there are no time slots like sprints in which tasks would be selected and done. Instead, there's one backlog of all tasks to be done, and they are taken from the backlog as the development team starts working on them. Figure 3

presents a basic Kanban board with mock-up content for a website project. The tasks move on the board from left to right as the team takes the tasks under work from the backlog of to do's. (Smart 2016, 54-55; Brinker 2016, 58-59.) The columns can be named according to the project's needs.

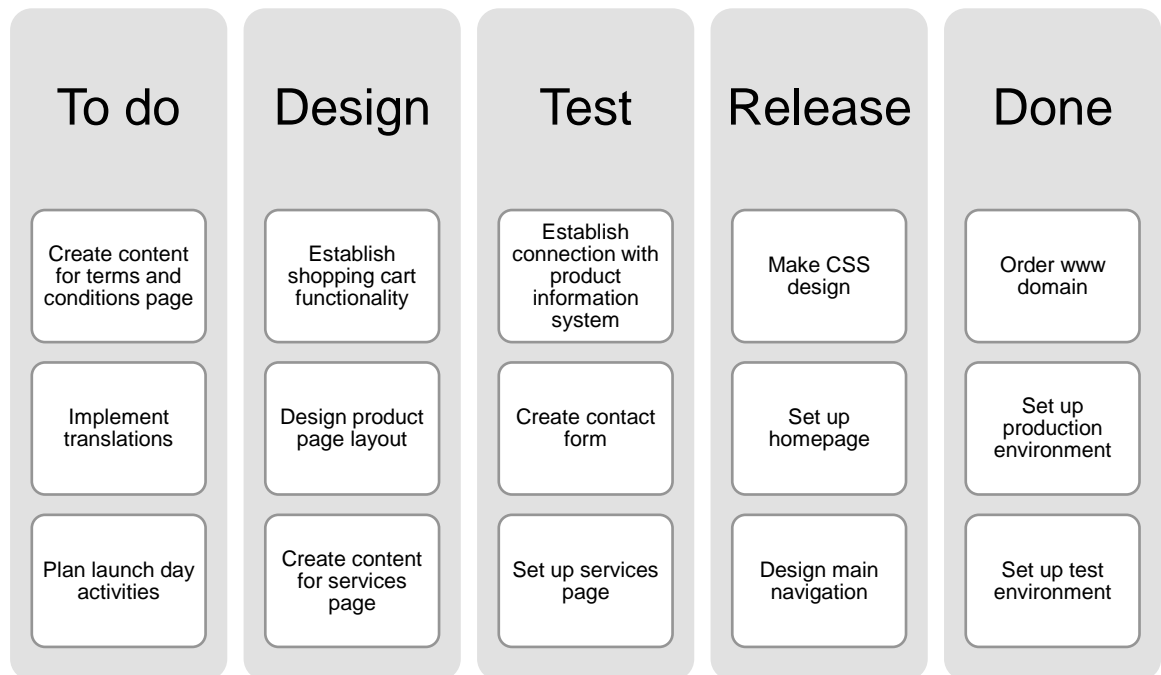


Figure 3. Example of a Kanban board (Smart 2016, 55, paraphrased with mock-up content for a website project). The tasks move on the board from left to right. The columns can be named according to the project's needs.

A Kanban project pays attention to the average time a task takes to proceed through the board, and it limits the amount of tasks that can be in a certain development phase at the same time. A Kanban board's strength is in its way to visualize what is being worked on, who is working on each task, and when the tasks are planned to be finished. It's also easy to add tasks and re-prioritize as the need arises. (Smart 2016, 54-56.)

There are no pre-defined roles for Kanban project team members (Brinker 2016, 58), but Kanban allows for having specialized roles in the project team (in a marketing context, for example the content marketing team) since the team doesn't need to commit to finishing everything in a sprint together. Team members can be working on different tasks that are in different phases on the Kanban board. Smart (2016, 70) thinks that Kanban is often a better fit for managing marketing activities than Scrum because of its flexibility.

As the above definitions and examples demonstrate, different agile methodologies offer many individual agile practices to choose from, to develop a combination that best works for the company and project at hand.

4 Marketing

Marketing has been defined endless times by different authors and institutions, but some of the most used definitions in marketing textbooks are from The American Marketing Association and The Chartered Institute of Marketing. The American Marketing Association (2013) defines marketing as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners and society at large”. The Chartered Institute of Marketing continues to rely on its definition from 1976 that it’s “the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements profitably” (The Chartered Institute of Marketing 1976).

Both of these definitions refer to mutual benefit for the marketer and the customer, which very well describes also the type of marketing related to this thesis project, content marketing – defined in more detail in chapter 4.2. However, neither definition emphasizes relationship building and customer retention (Grönroos, C. 2009a, in Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 5). Perhaps those attributes will get more attention as marketing develops: a newer definition by Armstrong, Kotler and Opresnik (2017, 32) takes these into account by defining marketing as “engaging customers and managing profitable customer relationships”. I think that content marketing is a good tool for building relationships and increasing retention, as it promotes the marketer’s subject matter expertise and aims to add conversation between the marketer and the customers. In my opinion, these are also effective ways to pursue the goals that Grönroos’s (2009b, 317) sets for marketing: attract customers, retain customers, and increase customer value.

Brassington and Pettitt (2013, 5) summarize the discussion on the definitions by calling marketing one kind of “demand management activity”. They make a positive note that according to these definitions, marketing is not something just added on top of actual business, but a management process that includes planning, analyzing, controlling, and allocated monetary, human and physical resource investments (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 3). The development project described in this thesis is one example of organizations investing in systematically developing their marketing function.

4.1 Marketing communications

The above definitions link marketing firmly with business value. Marketing communications is one way of creating that value by engaging with customers through means of communication.

Fill defines marketing communications as organizations and audiences engaging in two-way relationships, where participants present messages to each other and act upon them. Responses that signify changes in attitude (for example, attributes linked with a brand or product), emotion or behavior are sought with messages that possess value. (Fill 2013; 18, 116-118.)

Marketing communications can lead target groups through a sequential buying process such as the famous AIDA model (figure 4) that guides the target group member from getting their attention (A) towards raising their interest (I) to establishing a desire (D) in the marketed product or brand, to making a purchase or other wanted action (A). (Strong 1925; in Fill 2013, 114.)

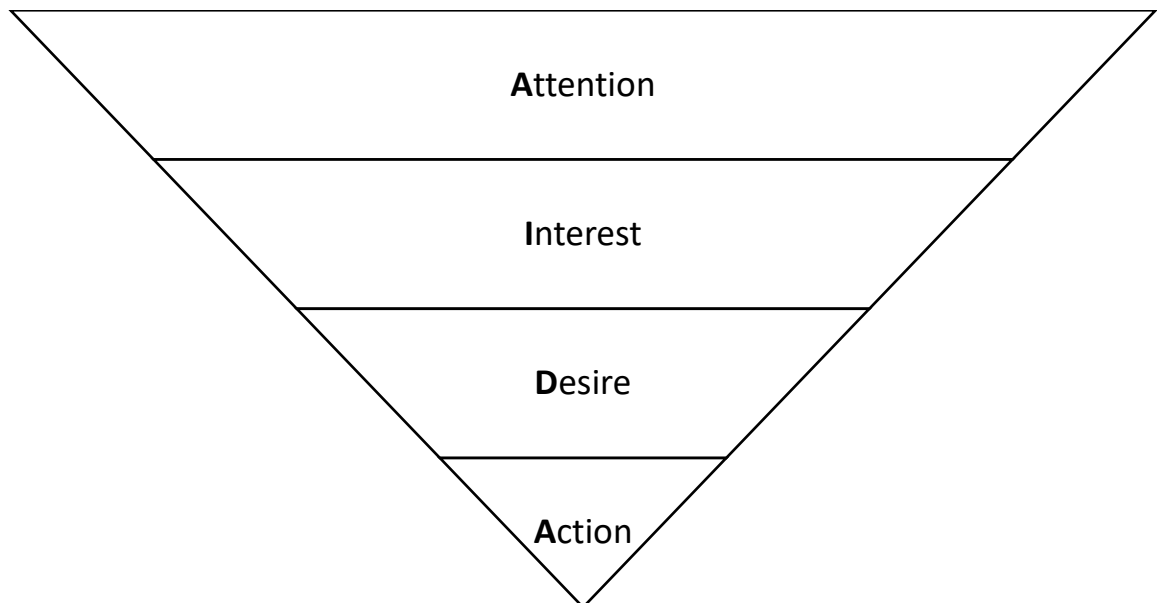


Figure 4. The AIDA model of the sequential buying process (Strong 1925; in Fill 2013, 114, paraphrased)

Marketing communications can make an effect also through shaping customer relationships throughout the different phases in the customer relationship lifecycle (Fill 2013, 121-125). As in the sequential buying process, different kinds of marketing communication is effective in different phases of the customer relationship lifecycle.

One way to stay in the target audiences' minds throughout the different phases they are in is to continuously publish interesting and valuable content for them – content marketing.

4.2 Content marketing

Content marketing has become an important type of marketing communications. It means marketing by providing target audiences with content that is relevant and valuable to them. The relevance and value can be of different natures. For example, content can help solve a problem that a target audience member has, it can provide valuable new insight to help boost a target audience member's own business, it can be tools that a target audience can use, it can be entertaining, and so on. The immediate goal of content marketing activities is to move customers forward in a sequential buying process such as AIDA (see figure 4) just like in all marketing, but longer-term aims can be in brand building and establishing thought leadership within the company's field of business.

Joe Pulizzi is the founder of the Content Marketing Institute, a content marketing training organization originally founded in 2007 under a previous name. His definition of content marketing brings together the marketing aspect and the business need for it: "Content marketing is the marketing and business process for creating and distributing relevant and valuable content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience - with the objective of driving profitable customer action" (Pulizzi 2012).

Good content marketing builds trust in the target audiences – the company or brand is there to help, not only to market its products. Content marketing also provides starting points for customer interaction with content that can be commented on and shared. It builds brand image with the types of content the company chooses to publish, and supports the company being on top of the target audiences' minds when they are considering their purchases.

The requirement that content should be valuable to the target audiences places demands on content production. Often it's not the marketing department that is able to show the most relevant subject matter expertise, but it's the industry specialists working in other departments in the company. Because of this and the need to publish content at fast pace to stay on top of the customers' minds, content production needs to be managed systematically, and be continuously developed based on results from previous actions. One way to improve the content production process could be applying an agile approach to it, like this thesis suggests. In the next subchapter, I will combine the frameworks of marketing and agile methodologies into agile marketing.

4.3 Agile marketing

As agile methodologies spread in the software industry, marketers in those companies started to notice their benefits and consider using an agile approach also in marketing. Among the first mentions of agile related to marketing was Matt Blumberg's blog post (2006, in Brinker 2016, 61).

Olajiga (2017, 13) defines agile marketing shortly as "the collective agility of people, processes and technology to improve marketing performance". On the other hand, Beck & al. (2001a) stated in their Agile Manifesto that agile "values individuals and interactions over processes and tools", placing less emphasis on processes and technology than Olajiga. I think this has to do with the starting point of each. The intention of the writers of the Agile Manifesto was to stress that the point of agile is not about following a strictly defined process or utilizing certain technological tools, that individuals and interactions are the key. Olajiga approaches agility from the perspective of marketing, which may already have processes in place and tools in use. He sees important that those processes are changed towards being more agile (as is done in my project in Ruukki Construction), and that the tools that are used are suitable for the new way of working.

Why start managing marketing in an agile way, rather than stick to the old way of thorough planning and prompt execution? Olajiga (2017, 9) claims that marketing activities are often unstructured. According to him, activities are planned with assumptions rather than qualitative data about customers and, similarly to what Smart (2016, 11-12) says, marketing planning lacks the ability to adapt to changing situations. Even though new digital platforms offer better analytics on campaigns than before, so far the planning itself hasn't developed much. (Olajiga 2017; 9, 15.) Sutherland mentions that with traditional pre-planning, a good idea in the start may turn into a completely wrong idea by the time the project is finished. It's better to give customers something as soon as possible to understand if the direction of the work is what it should be. (Sutherland 2014, 73.) Smart explains that there is a gap between the level of customer experience that marketing wants to reach, and the reality that customers perceive: traditionally marketers would spend a year in planning and executing activities to close the gap, but because of the complexity and the rapid development of marketing technology today, the gap only gets wider during that time. Therefore adaptive approaches are key to be a successful marketer these days. (Smart 2016, 11-12.)

Olajiga thinks along the same lines from the point of view of customers' technology use: thanks to customers being able to communicate about their experiences faster than ever,

without agility companies would have a hard time in keeping up with all the possible touchpoints. But agility also opens up new possibilities for marketing to take part in aftersales and customer service, which have traditionally been mostly out of marketing's control. Agility offers a more flexible way for reacting to customer needs together with these departments that have direct contact with customers. (Olajiga 2017; 21, 157.)

Implementing agile practices can help in bringing structure and visibility into marketing work, allow for easy re-prioritizing when situations change, and help in continuous improvement through easy follow-up of activities. Thanks to the increased visibility and the agility of planning, limited budget can be quickly steered towards activities that provide the best results and answer to the customers' needs (Olajiga 2017, 157). All of these concerns are familiar from what I presented in chapter 1 about Ruukki Construction's content marketing work, so it seems that an agile way of working could very well answer some of them.

Since an agile approach runs across the entire thinking of how work is managed, it can be applied to marketing on many levels. Marketing teams can be given the mandate to self-organize according to the tasks at hand. Marketing processes can be developed to become more iterative and transparent. Marketing activities can be planned and executed in an iterative way, where results from each activity are followed closely and planning future activities is based on the results of the previous activities.

Agile methods and individual agile practices can be applied to all types of marketing but in my opinion, they suit the needs of content marketing especially well. Agility puts the customer's needs in the center, and content marketing is all about what is useful and valuable to the target audiences. Marketing content needs to be continuously tested: what kind of content resonates with the target audiences and how well, and what kind of content doesn't. Is there a gap in what kind of content is being offered and what the target audiences' needs are? Agile practices such as good visibility to what is being produced, incremental development of the content, and continuous iteration based on results provide ways to constantly develop content marketing towards what the target audiences need and want.

In addition to external expectations from customers, internal expectations may also be better managed in an agile environment. Internal work orders often create chaos in the marketing department because they fly in from all around the organization, everyone wants their need to be dealt with first, and marketing somehow tries to cope with all the tasks here and there. The transparency of the agile workflow can help in keeping track of

all the tasks, and offers a way to easily re-prioritize and follow how each job progresses. (Olajiga 2017; 116-117, 195.)

Which agile method to follow then? Smart argues that Kanban is often a better fit for managing marketing activities than Scrum because of its flexibility, but that Scrum still fits certain types of activities well. Activities that provide steady feedback for iteration such as search engine optimization may be a good fit for Scrum. This only emphasizes that companies should select the best combination of agile practices for their projects' needs (Smart 2016, 70).

5 Conducting the research

At the time a new content strategy was created for Ruukki Construction, a decision was made to select and implement useful agile practices to the content production process to make it more systematic, transparent and flexible to manage. This research is about implementing the selected agile practices and fine-tuning them along the course of the project using action research.

In the next subchapters I will present the methodology and data collection and analysis methods that I used to conduct the research and the project. After that I will present the course of the research and the findings from it. Finally, I will discuss the findings and the reliability and validity of the research.

For the research method for this project, I looked at constructive research and action research. Constructive research is used to change the practices of an organization by finding solutions to practical questions, while applying theoretical knowledge to the research. It starts by defining and understanding the problem, continues by coming up with a solution and testing it, linking it with theoretical knowledge, and evaluating its applicability. This could have been a useful method for this project as the company was looking for a solution to improve the content production process, but I was looking for something more agile – something that I could use to develop the ways of working step by step. Action research proved to be perfect for this need, so I selected it and will present it in detail in the next subchapter.

5.1 Action research

In action research, the research happens along the action, rather than looking at the action from the outside (Coghlan & Brannick 2014, 6). When doing action research in an organization, a member of the organization takes the role of a researcher in addition to the role that they normally have. The people involved in the action contribute to the research by participating in activities of the action research cycle presented in figure 5. The goal is to develop the object of the research in a collaborative manner with the people who are part of the action, and at the same time gain scientific knowledge on the topic. (Coghlan & Brannick 2014; xiv, 6.) This was perfect for Ruukki Construction's project because I as the project manager was part of the content marketing team myself. Furthermore, the project was a joint effort within the content marketing team to see if agile practices could improve our content production process, so it was natural to do the development together. The

scientific knowledge gained along the project about agile practices being useful in content production comes in the form of results and discussion in this thesis.

Following the principles of agile thinking, we wanted to develop also the ways of working iteratively. This works well together with action research, where development and re-research happen in an iterative cycle of planning, taking action, evaluating the action, leading again to planning. For in-house action research, Coghlan and Brannick have complemented the cycle with a pre-step for defining the context and purpose of the research (see figure 5). (Coghlan & Brannick 2014; 6, 9-11.)

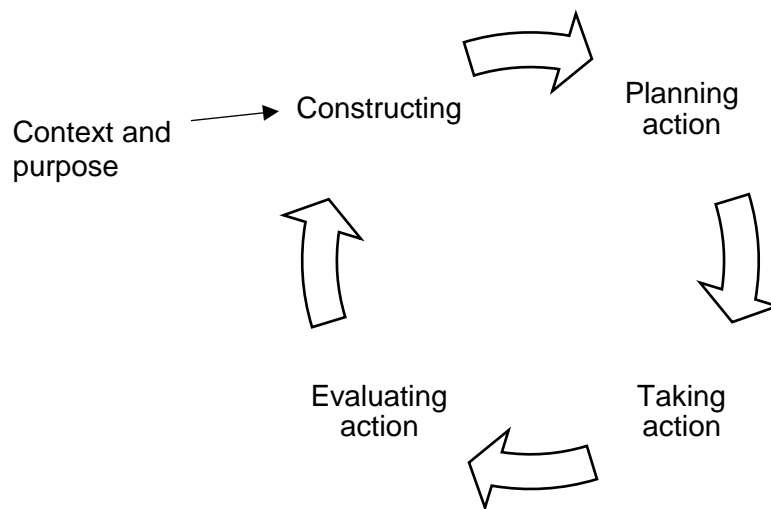


Figure 5. Action research cycle (Coghlan & Brannick 2014, 9, paraphrased)

McNiff (2016; 51-60, 132-133) has broadened the action research process by adding results validation and communication phases to it. Figure 6 presents this longer process where the action research cycles are a part of one phase of the total process. The communication phase can be for example presenting the findings in a thesis report.

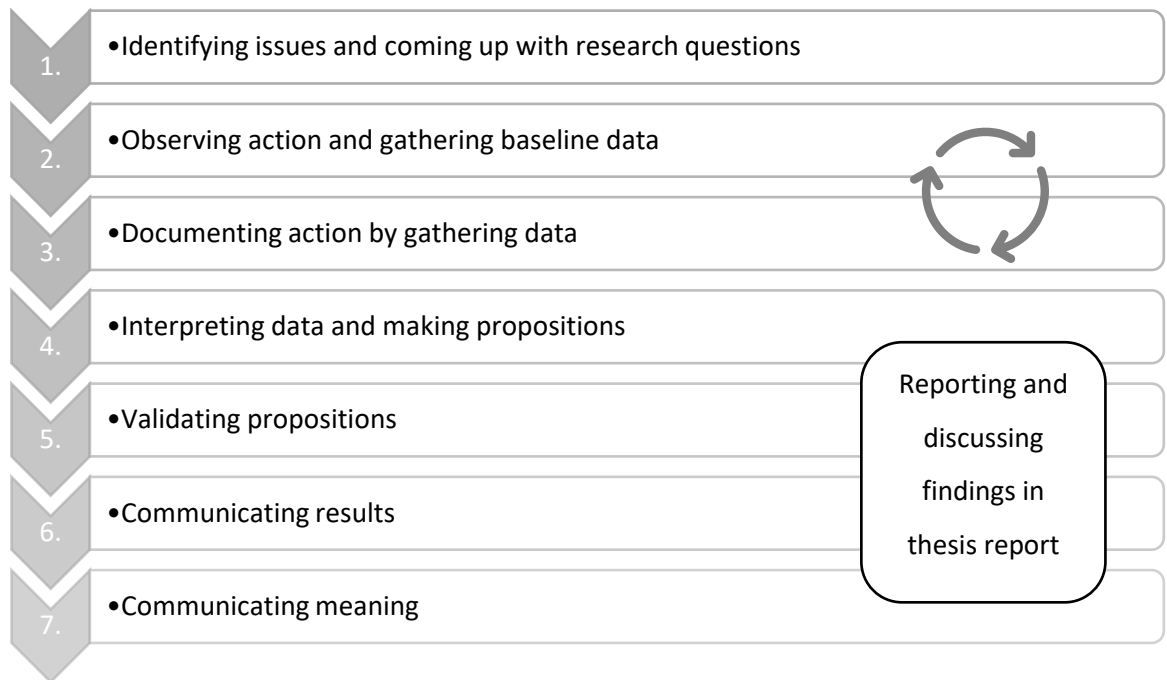


Figure 6. Action research process (McNiff 2016; 51-60, 132-133, paraphrased) – I have added a cycle icon to depict where the action research cycles happen in this longer process, and where findings are communicated for example in a thesis report

Next I will study the steps in the action research cycle (see again figure 5) in more detail, to prepare using this research method on the agile marketing project at Ruukki Construction.

Coghlan and Brannick’s pre-step defines the context and purpose of in-house action research (figure 5). It should include assessing the context in which the action will happen: what will be researched, why, what are the cultural (in this case, organizational culture) and structural forces that drive change, and what the aim is. Another task in the pre-step is to identify key people. Someone should have ownership of each matter related to the context of the project. Also the project group in which the action research will happen needs to be defined. (Coghlan & Brannick 2014, 9-10.)

The first actual step in the action research cycle is constructing which issue or issues of the research topic will be addressed in the first cycle. The second step is to plan the action to be taken in the first cycle. Reflecting the context and target of the research and based on the defined issues, the coming action is planned. In the third step, the planned action is carried out. If any interventions to the action should happen, the team should make the decision together to do so. Finally the last step of the action research cycle, before it spiralling back to the first step again, is to evaluate the action that was carried out. Both planned and unplanned outcomes are reviewed to see if the constructing was right, if

the actions were according to the constructing, if the action was carried out correctly, and what learnings should be taken to the next cycle. (Coghlan & Brannick 2014, 10-11.)

It's good to remember that in an action research project, there are always several re-search cycles going on at the same time, each at their own pace. One of the cycles can also be a meta cycle that reflects how the action research cycle itself is working. A common type of meta cycle is the focus of a thesis project, where the actual cycle is the action research around it. (Coghlan & Brannick 2014, 12-13.) For example in this thesis, the meta cycle is the iterative agile marketing cycle, and the actual cycle is the action research cycle that studies the agile implementation project.

As I will soon describe, during the course of the project in Ruukki Construction we ran nine sprints in an agile way. The same nine sprints were the development cycles in my action research about how the ways of working were developing. It gave us valuable insight into why people wanted the change happen, what individual practices from agile methods could support the change, and how people would react to them. And hopefully we would come to a common understanding in the end about how to continue.

Figure 7 presents the cycle from the content marketing team member's point of view. We started every cycle with a weekly sprint planning meeting where we took a look at the situation on the Kanban board, discussed any issues and possible ways to develop our way working from the previous week. During the week it was time for hands-on content production and analyzing the results from previously published content to improve future work. Everything related to a task was documented on the Kanban board for everyone else to see, to learn from, and to come back to if needed. Everyone was responsible for keeping their assigned tasks up to date and moving them to the next phases on the board when they were ready for that. To fully take advantage of the transparency of the tasks, everyone was also asked to spend some time commenting on others' tasks when that was relevant, and add new content and work method ideas to the backlog.

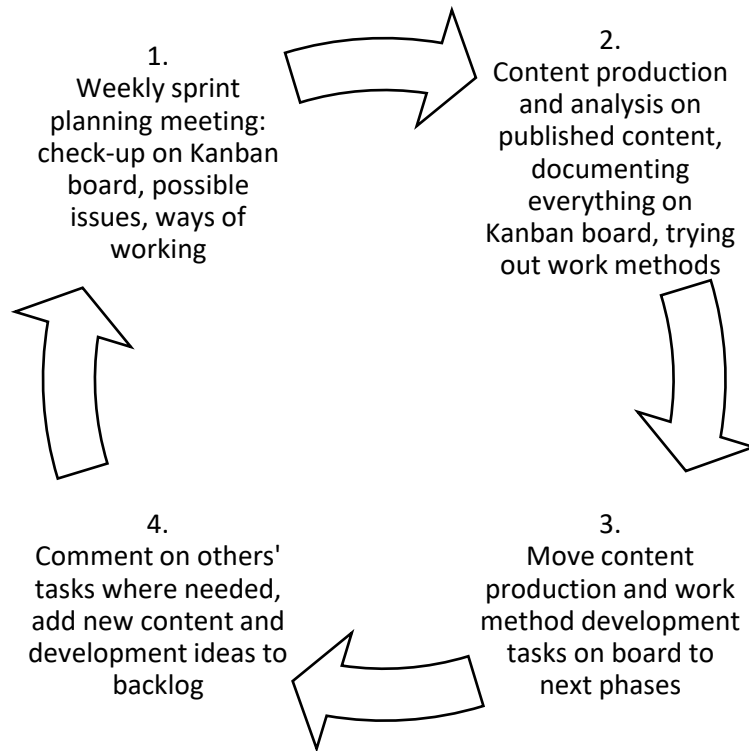


Figure 7. Ruukki Construction's agile content production process, and linked action research process on developing work methods

I think action research is very well suited for an organization that plans to try agile ways of working for two reasons. In a small-scale process development project, it would most often be overkill to bring in an external researcher. An employee who is already part of the process and takes the lead in researching it in a bit more detail is easy to arrange and doesn't need any introduction to the organization or the process. Because I was part of the content marketing team for which the agile work methods would be developed, I was particularly eager to use action research so I could lead the research from the inside and contribute to the team's work myself.

Also, since the cyclical and iterative process of action research is a natural fit with the cyclical and iterative practices in agile methods, and this is the reason I selected action research over constructive research for this project.

5.2 Data collection methods

McNiff (2016; 170-171, 179) mentions observation, notes taken in the field, diaries, score sheets, questionnaires and interviews as some ways to record action research. In this project, the weekly notes that I took of the action research cycles and the simultaneous agile sprints served as the most important qualitative data. Another important source of

documentation was the online tool Trello that was used to create and maintain the Kanban board for Ruukki Construction's content marketing. Most of the action happened around these two – the weekly cycle and the Kanban board, so it was easy to see how the ways of working evolved during the nine sprints. Additionally there were meetings held about specific content marketing activities, but the decisions from those were also documented in each activity's card on the Kanban board. I will present the action research cycles in detail in the next subchapter.

A quantitative method in the form of a questionnaire was used in the end of the project to validate if the content marketing team indeed thought that we had managed to make our content process consistently agile, and if it was beneficial. I will present the results of the questionnaire in chapter 6 about the findings of the research.

Next I will present the cycles of the action research, and how Ruukki Construction's content marketing process evolved towards agility during the project.

5.2.1 Pre-step: Context and purpose

As described earlier, there was an acknowledged need to improve the effectiveness, transparency and flexibility of the content production process. The purpose of the action research and the whole project was to see if agile practices could improve process, and if work methods could also be developed in an agile way. The goal was to have a consistent agile process in place by the end of the two-month implementation project.

To analyse the needs and influence of each stakeholder group for this project to be successful, and to make myself a visual reminder of their importance, I created the stakeholder power-interest matrix presented in figure 8. It puts identified stakeholder groups onto a quadrant chart according to the groups' influence and interest towards the topic being analysed (Mendelow 1991, in Cornelissen 2014, 50). In this case I'm looking at the stakeholder groups' influence on my project's success and their interest towards the project and using agile methodologies in general.

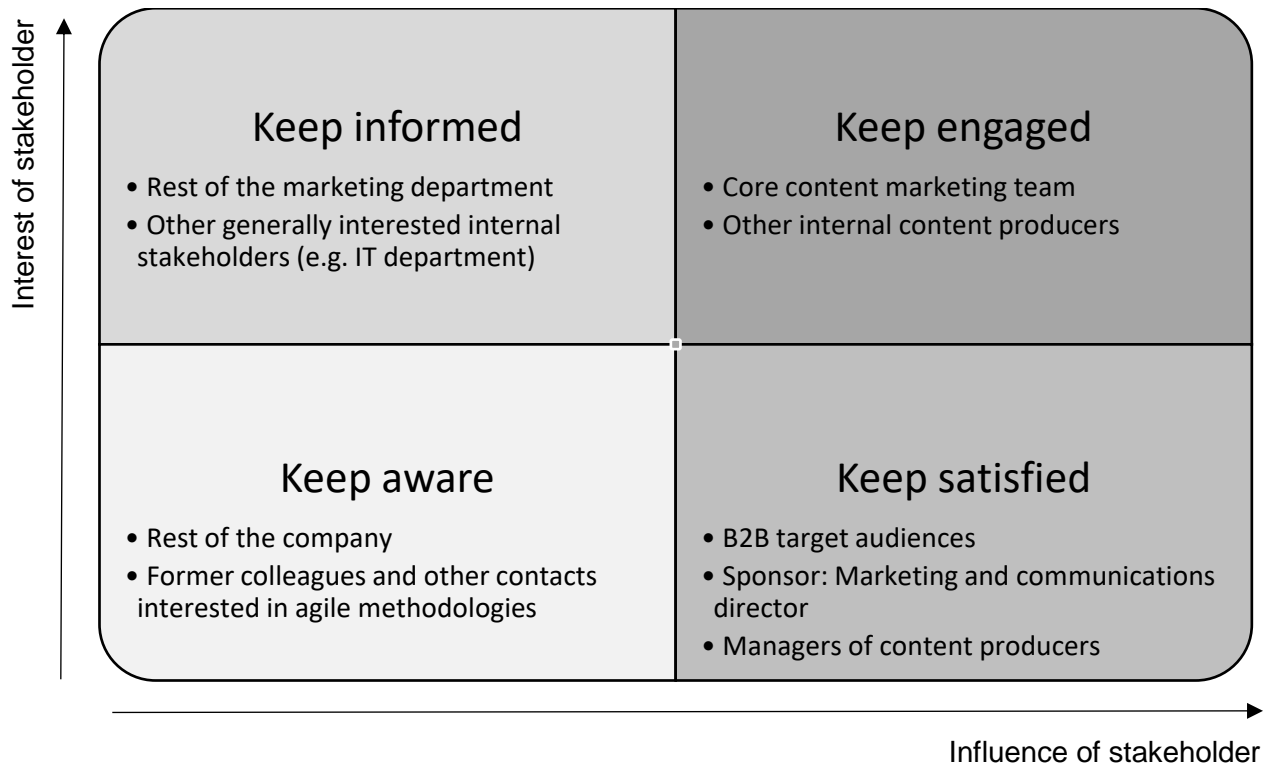


Figure 8. Power-interest matrix of the project's stakeholders (adapted from Measey & Radtac Ltd 2015, 52)

The groups with the most influence on the project's success, and also the most interest towards its execution are in the chart's top right corner ("Keep engaged"). They are naturally the core content marketing team itself and the other internal content producers – the people who will be taking the new ways of working into use, participate in the action research, and evaluate the end result of the project by answering the questionnaire. These groups need to be managed and engaged most actively, meaning that I will need to work with them in a close relationship, facilitate the agile ways of working and their individual work, and answer to their needs and concerns as fast as possible.

The groups in the lower right corner ("Keep satisfied") also have a lot of influence on the success of the project, but a little less immediate interest in it. I've placed the target audiences of our content marketing here because their needs are in the center of why we do content marketing in the first place, and their reactions to our content will also be used in iteratively planning new content, as the agile approach requires. Therefore their influence on the project's success is in a key role, even though they have minimal interest if our internal project succeeds or not. That is more interesting for the sponsor of the project, the marketing and communications director. I might have put her also in the top right corner of the chart, but decided to place her in the lower corner because according to my experience, the sponsor wants to be informed of the project's progress but not necessarily about

every detail about it. In any case, the marketing and communications director is also part of the content marketing team, so she is in the top right corner through that role. In the beginning of the project it's also extremely important to commit the managers of the future content team members to the project, since the size of the content team plays a factor in how well we are able to test the agile ways of working.

The groups in the top left corner ("Keep informed") have less influence but are interested in the progress and results of the project. Here I've placed the rest of the marketing department who are not part of the content team. They're of course interested in what's going on in the department. The IT department may also be interested because they're familiar with agile tools in their own domain and are curious about how they work in marketing.

Finally, in the lower left corner ("Keep aware") are the groups that are neither influential to the project's success, nor deeply interested in it. But to make it in the matrix, they should be somewhat relevant to the project topic. Therefore I've placed former colleagues and other industry contacts here, in case they're interested in agile methodologies in general and we could share experiences at some point.

There was a mandate from the marketing and communications director to move towards agile content production, and an online tool called Trello had been selected to be tested in the new agile process. Since the change to the work methods was to be made only for the content marketing team, the decision to move forward was done within marketing and without budget allocation. Trello was a free tool for basic use, and otherwise the change only required internal work hours from me as the project manager, and the other members of the content marketing team as before.

But because of this starting point, the project's idea had not yet been sold to other stakeholders within the company. In Kotter's words, I needed a guiding coalition with enough power to make things happen (Kotter 2012, 23; Kotter & Rathgeber 2005, 130). This would include talking with directors and managers of the people I was going to ask to join the content marketing team, to get their support both for the new ways of working and the involvement of their team members. I was happy to see that our content team members expressed such mental leadership and credibility that they were able to help me in communicating about the importance of the project, and help in involving other people.

I made sure to have proper discussions with the most important stakeholder groups for the project's success: the sponsor, the directors and managers of people needed for the content marketing team, and the current team members.

Within marketing, we had also noticed the need to internally recruit more specialists to produce content along with their other responsibilities, because in a technical industry, there's only so much marketing can produce from beginning to end that goes into enough detail for the target audiences. Of the about 30 people who were asked to join the content effort from all over the organization, many had doubts about their content production skills. So I also needed convince, inspire and coach them once I got them in the team.

In an agile context, also the agility of people and their skills prove to be increasingly valuable. The width of an individual's expertise lays a good foundation for performing well on a variety of tasks, since lean thinking prefers using people with multiple skills and agile drives them to form cross-functional teams. Brinker (2016, 48) calls for full-stack marketers who master a wide spectrum of marketing skills. Olajiga talks about generalizing specialists and T-shaped marketing professionals (see figure 9) who have basic knowledge on a variety of marketing topics and deep knowledge in one specialty area (Olajiga 2017, 27).

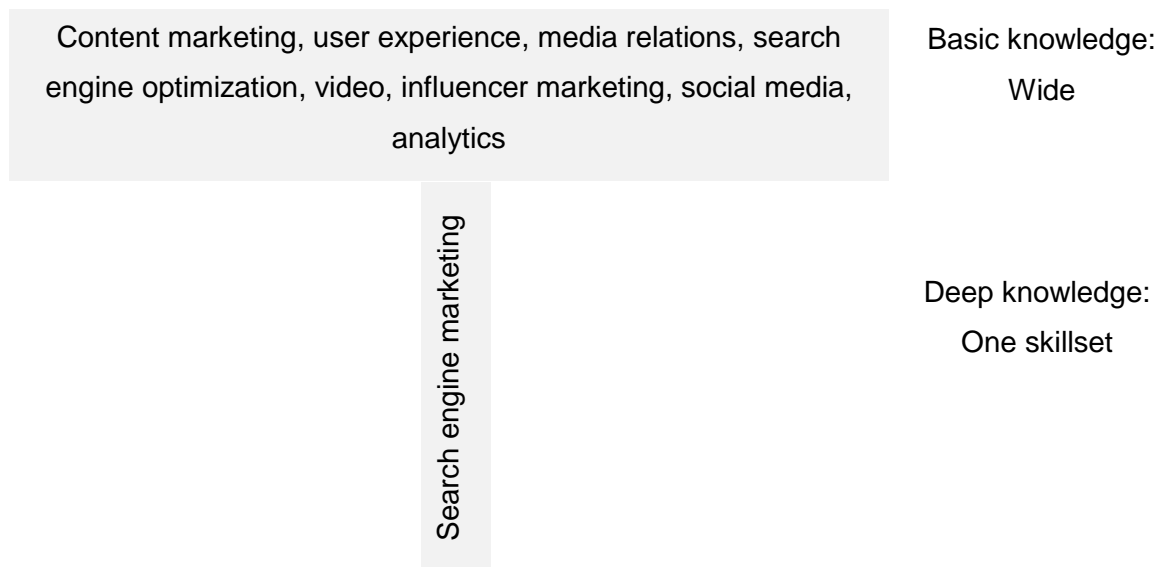


Figure 9. T-shaped marketing professional (Olajiga 2017, 27, paraphrased)

Because there was no possibility to recruit new resources for the marketing department for this project and its possible continuation, the core content marketing team was formed on the basis of the existing team, expanding it with new internal content producers. The potential new team members were listed by the core team before the project started. They

represent marketing, communications, sales and product development, and are located in different countries, whereas the old content marketing team mainly consisted of people from the headquarters. Selling the benefits of content marketing to the business area leaders and other managers who needed to approve their team members' participation was luckily fairly easy in this project. The newly created content strategy served as a good discussion starter, and I learned that one-on-one discussion with directors and managers and paying special attention to their individual concerns was the key to success. All thought that better measuring of marketing activities in the agile cycles will help us in iterating our content work and in concentrating on the activities that produce the best results. Some concern was raised about the content team having time to document everything and use tools and workflows optimally, which turned out to be true as I will discuss later.

The management was also encouraged to add more potential content marketers from their teams onto the list of people I should try to recruit in the content marketing team. In total there were about 25 suggestions, so the content team was able to grow considerably. In addition to having approval from the directors and managers of the new members, I had discussions with everyone who was suggested to join. I think this was one of the most important steps in the whole process, because without people we couldn't do this project, and without people's commitment, nothing would happen. I acknowledged the fact that often these kinds of appointed tasks come as a surprise to the people themselves, and they have no special interest in it without understanding what it is. I took it as a personal goal to talk with everyone who had been suggested to join the content marketing team, to sell the idea to them using the persuasive stakeholder communication strategy, and to get and keep them committed by using the dialogue strategy and making decisions together with them. I presented the content strategy, the idea and potential benefits of using agile methodology, the need for everyone's invaluable knowledge in their own area of expertise, the availability of support from me and the rest of the core team, and the benefits of the content for every specialist's personal professional branding. I did this sometimes for individual people and sometimes for small groups of people who were used to working together, and I think this internal footwork and personal selling was in key position in successfully building a larger content marketing team that would participate in the agile content production.

The guiding coalition of directors and experienced content marketing team members helped me throughout the project by frequently reminding others in the team of the project's importance. Especially the internal specialists who had already learned a thing or two about content marketing were eager to spread their knowledge to newer team mem-

bers, and I was able to use them to leverage my message to the team. Moreover, they acted as role models of the change, adopting the agile way of working in the content process and actively driving others to follow. I think that as a team, we were well able to introduce Kotter's fourth step of change leadership, good repeated communication and role-modeling (2012, 23; Kotter & Rathgeber 2005, 131).

In the case of new content producers, frequent contact and support was also what kept them going. During the two-month project, I was able to nurture eight new bloggers from a state where they didn't have an idea about what they could write about and how writing blog posts actually happens, to active bloggers. I actually created a private Trello board for my own use to keep track of everyone's progress so that I was able to support them at the right moment. They were fast becoming not only expert writers in their own field, but also aspiring content marketing professionals.

As a result from the internal selling to directors and the footwork to convince some of their team members to join the content effort, the team grew from six to about 30 people. In table 1, I've mapped some of the basic and deep knowledge areas of the content marketing team members. I've allowed there to be more than one deep knowledge area for each team member – certainly it would be possible to define a single strongest area of expertise for everyone, but in this project it's more useful to see the wider set of skills that the team members can offer.

Table 1. Ruukki Construction's content marketing team members and their relevant knowledge areas

Team member	Deep knowledge	Basic knowledge
Project manager (1 person)	Content marketing, user experience, search engine optimization, social media, analytics, agile practices	Influencer marketing, video, photography, media relations
Media relations responsible (1 person)	Media relations, content marketing, photography	User experience, search engine optimization, social media, video, analytics
Content team members with content experience (4 people)	Construction industry and technical knowledge, content marketing, influencer marketing	Search engine optimization, social media, analytics
New content team members (~25 people)	Construction industry and technical knowledge	Content marketing

Looking at table 1, it seems that even though the core of our content marketing team is small (rows marked with darker background color), there are a lot of various knowledge areas, and the new team members (row marked with lighter background color) will likely grow their content creation skills and become more widely knowledgeable in the near future, as has happened with the previous additions to the team.

Simultaneously with the internal selling of the project, I started to plan how to facilitate the agile process and using the online tool to manage it.

As discussed in the theoretical framework for this thesis, there's a number of agile methodologies to choose from. There's also a large amount of individual agile practices within each methodology, some common for the entire agile approach, some more specific. Many companies choose to pick a combination of different agile practices that best suit their needs. Often the company-specific agile way of working is even branded with an internal name, but in the case of this small-scale testing of an agile process in the content marketing team, that wasn't needed.

We considered Scrum as the most representative of agile methods and had experience in using it in website development and IT projects, so I started by looking into Scrum's rules with content marketing activities in mind. It soon became apparent that Scrum's strict definitions for time boxes and meetings weren't ideal for ongoing content production. I turned to look at Kanban, of which I had experience from online development projects for a previous employer.

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, Kanban is often a better fit for marketing purposes (Smart 2016, 70). There's a Kanban board with a backlog of tasks and ideas (that will likely turn into tasks at some point). The tasks are pulled into production when the team members have enough resources to do so, and everyone who has access to the board can see the status of the tasks. There are no rules for meetings in Kanban, so here's where we started to combine agile practices from different methodologies. The content marketing team wanted to have regular meetings to check on the Kanban board and discuss the tasks. We took the idea of regular meetings from Scrum's sprint planning and sprint review schedule, but made it into our own.

The content marketing team wanted to have one-hour meetings weekly, which meant we would go through nine one-week sprints and action research cycles during the project timeframe. This was a good suggestion from learning point of view until the new agile process would be fully adopted. But it raised my concern in one aspect. People were used to having regular check-up meetings on various projects and weekly team meetings in their own departments. I was afraid that having too frequent and long meetings for the content marketing team would encourage people to keep to their old habits of giving an update on their work only in the meetings. The idea behind the agile way of working and using an always-available online tool is quite the opposite. The sprint planning meetings should be used only to plan the tasks for the upcoming sprint and discuss possible problems with the tasks or the development of the process. But keeping in line with action research's principle of researching and improving the action together with the team, I understood that as the project manager, I need to listen to the team's needs and concerns and act as a servant leader. That could also help me in committing the team members by giving them more ownership of the process instead of trying to keep it to myself.

As the final task in the pre-step before the sprints and action research cycles started, I set up two Kanban boards in the selected online tool, Trello, filled them with some initial content such as suggestions for names of the phases where tasks would be in, and tasks that I knew were being planned (see figure 10). We started with two Kanban boards to sepa-

rate content production tasks and work method development tasks, but the boards were later combined as described in the action research cycle documentation in the next sub-chapters. When the basics were ready, I sent the core team calendar invitations for the sprint planning meetings.

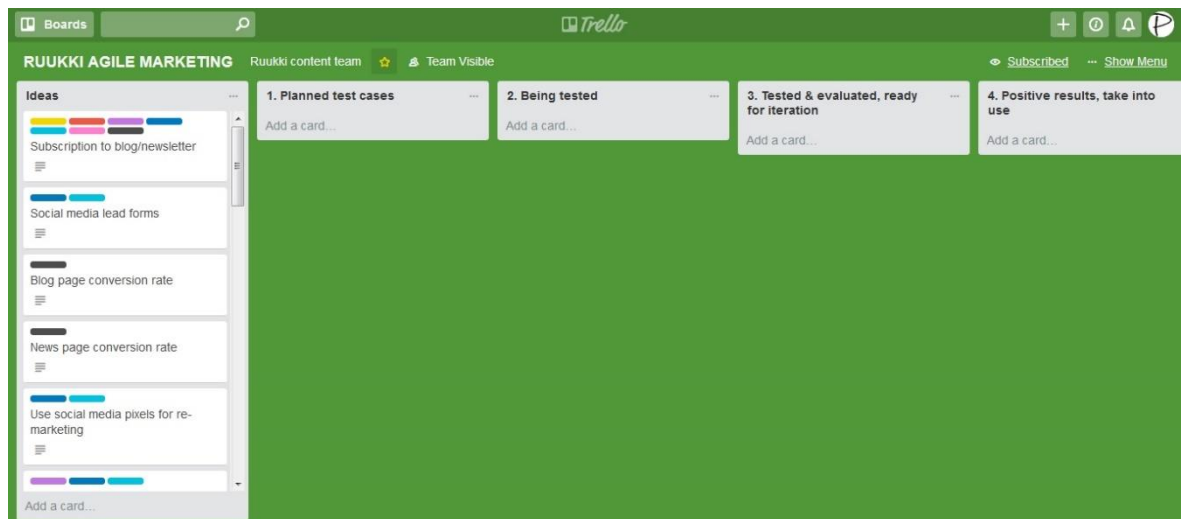


Figure 10. First version of the Kanban board for work method development before the sprints started (larger image in appendix 1)

Now that the boards were ready for action, the agile sprints and action research cycles were ready to start. The next subchapters contain my notes from the nine cycles that we ran during the two-month implementation project. I as the project manager acted like a scrum master in these cycles, facilitating the process, the meetings and the development.

5.2.2 Cycle 1: Setting up the agile way of working

The first action research cycle started with the first sprint planning of the content marketing team. To facilitate the first meeting, the project manager had set up separate Kanban boards for managing both the content production and the development of the work methods. Some initial development task ideas had also been added in the backlog as conversation starters. In the sprint planning there was discussion on what kinds of development tasks could be added during this sprint and in general. All content marketing team members were given access to the Kanban boards, asking them to click through the tool and start adding their own ideas and comments during this sprint. First six content tasks were assigned for team members to work on during this sprint, and people were encouraged to assign tasks to others whenever there's a need, not only in the weekly planning meeting. A decision was made to invite the entire content marketing team to the sprint planning

from now on, to engage them better and to get as many new ideas as possible for both content and work method development.

After the initial set-up of the boards and the first meeting, there were a total of 42 items on the boards (21 under content production, 21 under work methods development). During the sprint, the team would start taking action by familiarizing themselves with the tool and adding and commenting content ideas. Figure 11 shows an example of an individual item on the Kanban board.

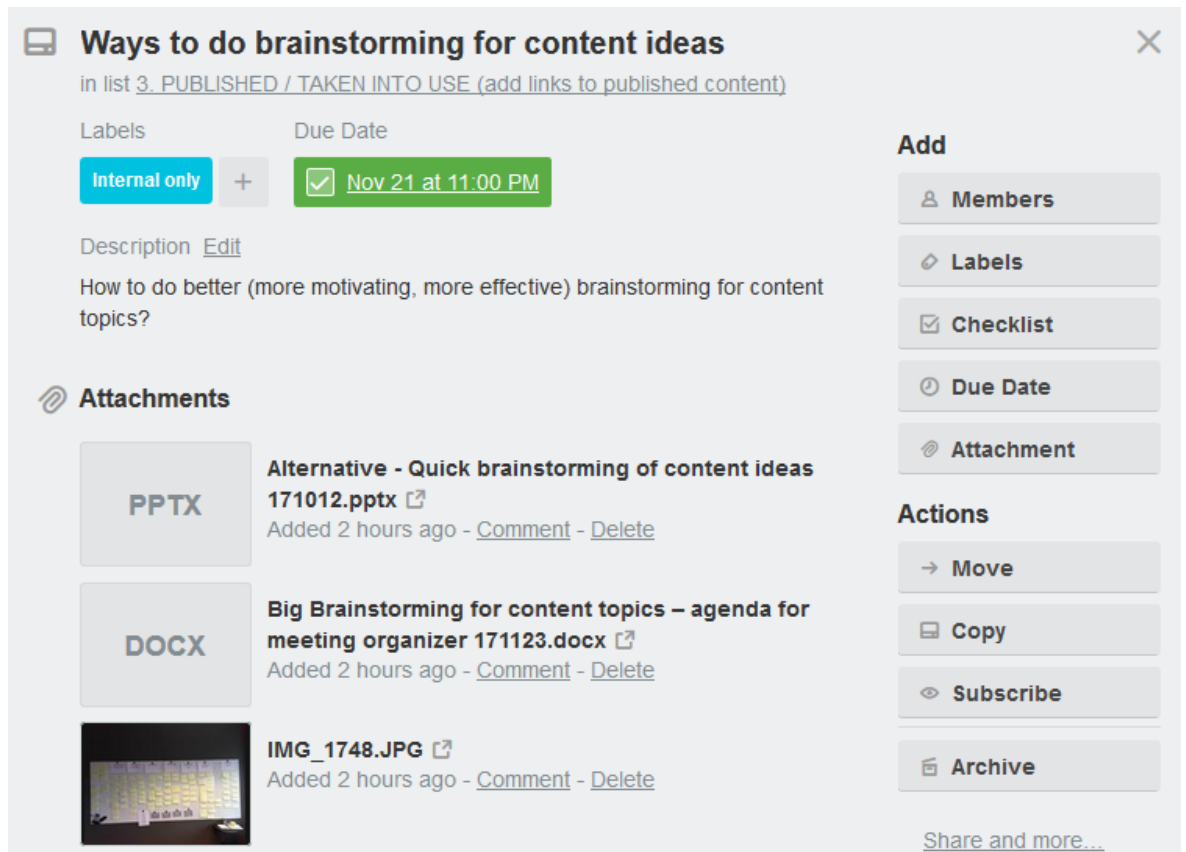


Figure 11. Screenshot of an individual item on the Kanban board, with the task's content, status, work done on it, deadline and other information available for anyone who has access to the board

5.2.3 Cycle 2: Developing deadline setting, analysing results and archiving

This was the first week with people outside of the core content team joining the sprint planning because the invitations were sent after the previous planning. We were happy to see that people committed time from their busy schedules and immediately saw that a larger group enabled more discussion. The participants had familiarized themselves with the tool, as was set as the target for the previous sprint. The assigned content tasks had

been finished and the content published unless there had been an unexpected delay for example in getting reference interviews from customers. The Kanban board was quickly reviewed and updated with some new content ideas, prioritizing and assigning tasks to people.

In the next sprint we will develop some of the basic functions in the process. Kanban doesn't require setting deadlines on tasks, but the team sees useful that deadlines could be automatically added to Outlook. As quite many content tasks have already been finished and the content published, the project manager reminded that the results should always be recorded and attached to the tasks before archiving them.

5.2.4 Cycle 3: Iterating on deadline setting

Recording results from the content marketing activities has developed during the past sprint, and archiving past activities has started to keep the Kanban board cleaner and easier to follow.

The team has noticed that deadlines drive work to be finished in a timely manner. Contrary to the discussion in the previous sprint planning, the team decided to add visible deadlines to all tasks that are planned to be finished in the upcoming sprint. The sprint will show whether this helps in finishing all the tasks that are planned.

There's a work method development task in the backlog about helping content team members to consider some basic things for their content pieces. Team members who are new to marketing, digital marketing or content marketing don't always remember to define the target audience, the theme (of the themes defined in the content strategy), content types to be produced (news, blog post, reference, video, social media posts, newsletter etc.), keywords for search engines and so on. The development task to make this easier is assigned to the project manager to work on during the upcoming sprint.

Practical discussions on some of the content tasks and some prioritization of tasks happen in the planning meeting. Ideally the practical discussions related to individual content marketing activities should happen outside of the meetings. The prioritization should also happen during the sprints so that the backlog would stay prioritized and it would be easy for team members to take new tasks from the backlog in the right order. Kanban allows team members to have specialized roles though, so in the case of this team, a certain kind of content task would be assigned to a certain person regardless of how it's prioritized. In order for the team to learn how to use agile practices, the project manager will continue to

monitor how the practices are being used, and steer the team towards agility. It's not a negative thing to see that the team pushes the boundaries of agile – it shows that they're interested in developing the ways of working. The project manager's most important role after the facilitation is keeping up the good spirit and momentum, so all ideas are welcomed. But the project manager also needs to make sure we stay on the right course towards reaching the goals set for the project.

5.2.5 Cycle 4: Introducing checklist functionality

The weekly deadline setting has worked for the most part in the past sprint. All planned tasks were not completed, but most often this was due to a delay somewhere else in the organization, outside of the content marketing team's control.

Helping team members to consider things such as target audience and content types for each content marketing topic has progressed on the work methods board during the past sprint. The project manager had been assigned to develop this, and during the sprint, a checklist functionality was iterated with some of the team members. The idea is to have a checklist template that can be copied on each task on the boards, to remind team members to define the theme of their content piece (according to the content strategy), define the target audience and the call to action, consider different media types that can be produced and relevant keywords to be used for search engine optimization (see figure 12). A decision was made to copy the checklist template on all content tasks during the upcoming sprint and start using it.

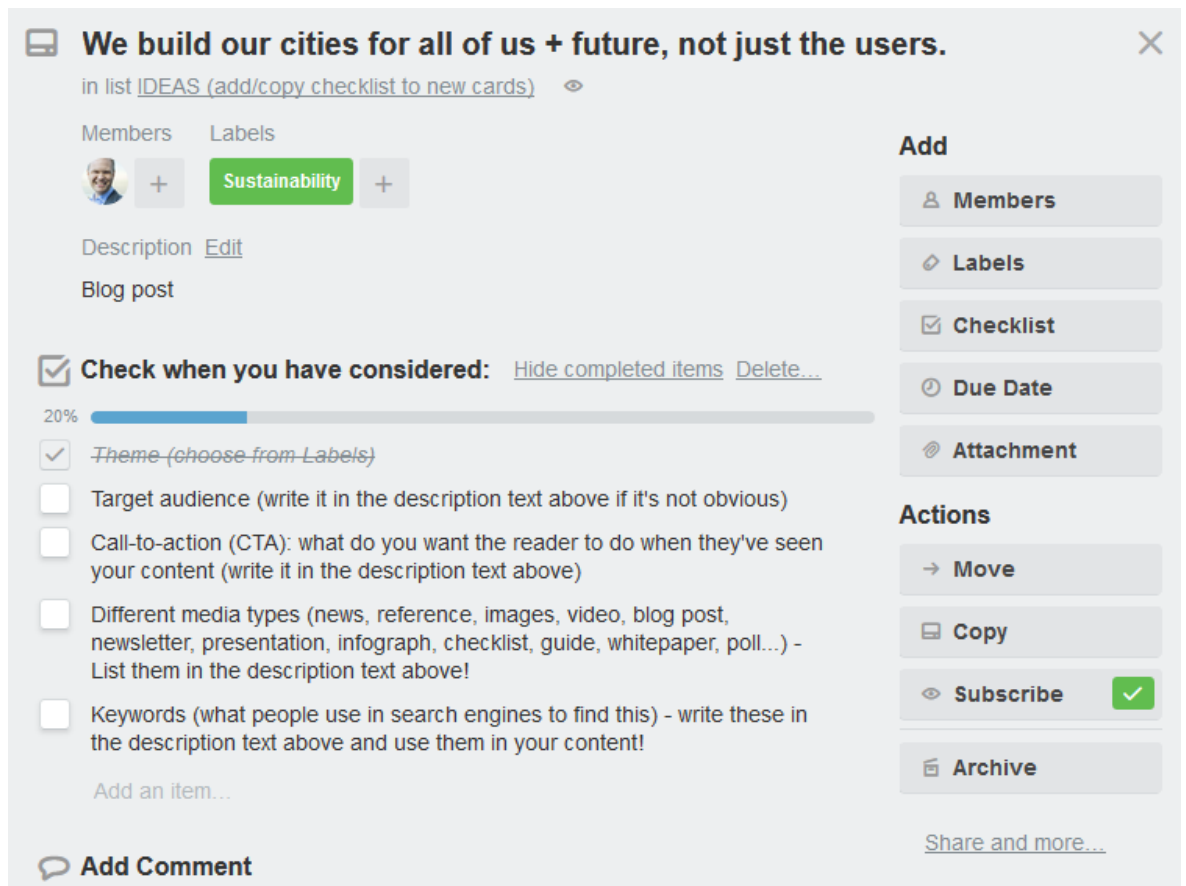


Figure 12. A checklist has been added to a task to remind the content team members about things to check when creating content

Working on the content tasks and publishing content during the sprints is working well, but issues continue with some of the Kanban board management happening in the meetings instead of during the sprints. This seems to be related to general frustration over workload – not only related to content work, since all of the content team members also have other responsibilities. This becomes apparent also in the uneasy reactions from some of the team members when the weekly meeting stretches past 30 minutes, despite the 60-minute time slot reserved for it.

5.2.6 Cycle 5: Developing team communication

The checklist functionality has proved successful during the past sprint. Content team members now consider the things on the checklist more than before, although not always and not all of them. Iteration continues by frequent reminders from the project manager to use the checklist, and by arranging trainings on some of the more specialized things such as how to do keyword planning.

One content producer is notably and rightfully disappointed because he had been assigned to write a tweet from a seminar, but the tweet was never published because the marketing team was too busy. The project manager tried to win back his trust and assure that the team members' work is highly appreciated and will not be missed again. One new team member who joined the meeting for the first time was noticeably excited and continued the discussion on the work method development with the project manager after the meeting. The main target for the coming sprint is to improve communication between the content team members to both leverage the knowledge everyone brings to the team, and also to make sure that work gets acknowledged – otherwise trust in the common effort could be in danger.

5.2.7 Cycle 6: General findings when 75 % of the implementation project has been reached

This weekly meeting is a little different because many content team members have other commitments at the same time and can't attend the meeting. The meeting turns into a kind of review on what has happened so far, as 75 % of the agile work methods implementation project has now been reached and only three full sprints remain before we should have an agile process firmly in place.

There are only three participants in the meeting this week, and in a way the discussion goes back to where we started five weeks ago. There's very active discussion on the content and development tasks among the participants: one "older" team member, one joining for the first time, and the project manager.

The project manager and the project sponsor decide to hold a separate review meeting among themselves to discuss the project's progress. The most notable finding is the remarkable development in which our technical and other specialists have grown into content producers. This has been a sidekick from the agile work methods implementation project, but it shows that we're doing a good job in content marketing. We acknowledge the challenge that people have difficulties in finding time to join meetings, but on the other hand the sprint planning always has a different set of people which makes it easy to come up with totally new development ideas. It's interesting that weekly meetings are requested by the team even though it would be easier to find time for shorter bi-weekly meetings. Perhaps this is related to the new ways of working still being very young, and content team members being uncertain about what kind of scheduling would work best for them.

Some of the team members feel that they have to update the same information many different places, the Kanban board being just one of them. This is because agile methods are being tested only in the content marketing team. But a lot of the marketing campaign planning happens with other internal and external stakeholders that are not part of the content marketing team, and the work methods with them can be different. For example, campaign plans are perhaps saved in PowerPoint files and placed on a network drive, but then the same plans are expected to be updated on the content marketing Kanban board as well. To partly solve this issue, the project manager suggested that the sponsor (marketing and communications director) could start driving the change to start using Trello as a working tool also in those campaign-specific meetings. The sponsor agrees on this, but the change in this work culture will surely take more than a few sprints worth of time.

5.2.8 Cycle 7: Creating more value for target audiences, and continuously iterating the internal process

In this sprint planning, topics emerge from the opposite ends of the content process. First we talk about the importance of putting the customer in the center when brainstorming for content, and how to make sure that content creates value to its target audience. These are topics that we have recently worked on in developing our work methods. The idea from last week about making Trello the default note-taking platform in all kinds of marketing meetings gets support from the content marketing team.

A team member requests help in finding statistics in social media channels – this is a positive sign because social media posts or their statistics hasn't been her core expertise or responsibility area before. The whole team is reminded that it's a good idea to document the results right away, because digging for older results in social media channels is time-consuming. The team members plan to do this more efficiently in the upcoming sprint when they see how difficult it is to dig for the statistics afterwards.

There's discussion that the content production board and the work method development board should be combined to make the big picture easier to follow. The project manager will make the change during the sprint.

Next week we will also test having a shorter, 30-minute meeting instead of the usual 60 minutes.

5.2.9 Cycle 8: Iterating future planning schedule and weekly meeting's role

The test to have a shorter sprint planning meeting – 30 minutes instead of an hour – worked well this week and everything got done within the reserved time. But because the next meeting will be the last one in this implementation project, we decided to keep it 60 minutes long and consider shortening the meetings permanently after that.

Referring back to the previous week's discussion on how to find social media statistics, we now discussed how to document them. Now large or otherwise especially significant campaigns are followed with Excel, and basic social media posts with screenshots of the results to make it as simple and easy as possible. Following social media results more easily is definitely something to develop, since being able to base future decisions on past activity relies on easy but effective reporting.

The project manager was supposed to combine the content production and work method development boards during the past sprint, but wasn't able to finish this due to other work commitments than content marketing. The task was re-scheduled for the upcoming sprint.

Because we're closing in on the end of the agile work methods implementation project, there was a lot of general discussion on how we work in marketing and communications. An idea came up to transform this the sprint planning meeting into a more general marketing and communications meeting, with the Kanban board management happening mostly outside of the meeting as it should.

5.2.10 Cycle 9: Closing of the agile work methods implementation project

In this last weekly meeting within the implementation project, we discussed the future of the new ways of working.

The content production and work method development boards were combined during the last sprint as planned. The sponsor of the project decided to continue with the agile process and is now booking 30-minute weekly meetings, as tested in cycle eight. There's been talk about switching to 60-minute meetings bi-weekly, but the project manager recommends to meet weekly until the agile way of working is truly familiar to everyone, because now tasks seem to be overdue simply because they haven't always been updated on the Kanban board.

The project manager and the sponsor also held a separate hand-over meeting because the project manager is leaving for another position within the company as this implementation project comes to an end. We talked about how an agile process ideally works and what have been the pain points related to that during the past two months. We further discussed the importance of using Trello for notetaking in other meetings as well, to avoid double work and to ensure everyone is kept up to date, not to mention reducing frustration over having to do repetitive tasks. One more work method development idea came up from the experiences with the Kanban boards: from now on, large campaigns will have their own Kanban boards, and on the general content marketing board those campaigns will live as only one task. This should improve clarity when there are lots of tasks related to one individual campaign.

A lot of development has happened during the two-month project, and a lot of content has traveled through the Kanban board from an idea through execution to publishing and following up on results. Figure 13 shows what the Kanban board looks like now when the agile implementation project ends.

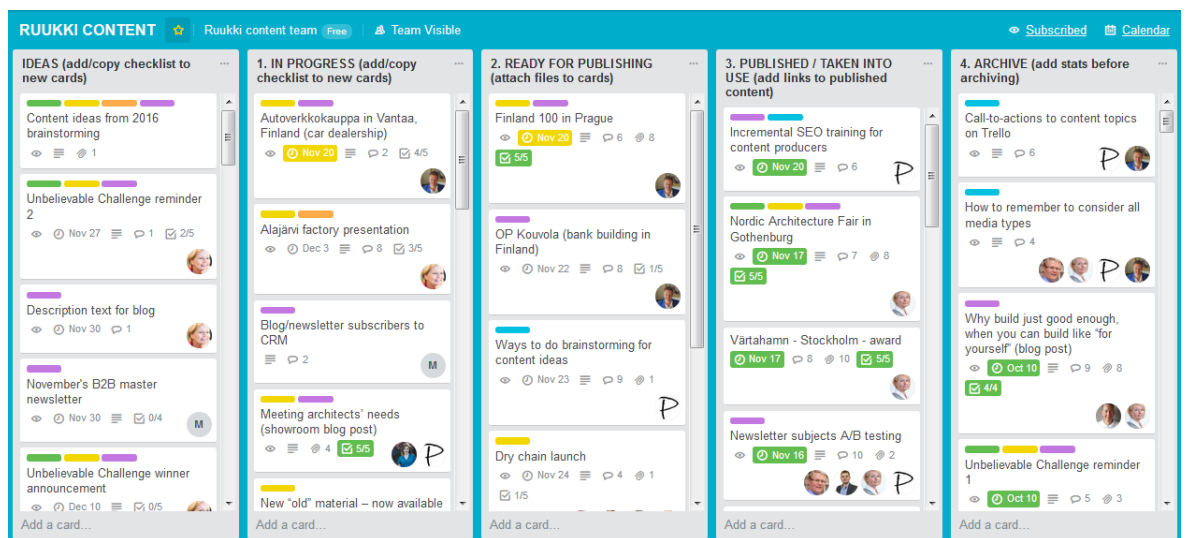


Figure 13. The final state of the Kanban board before the implementation project ended (larger image in appendix 1)

6 Findings

During the nine sprints, a fair amount of content was published to the target audiences in various channels. All activities were measured and the results were documented and used in planning for next activities. Iterative changes were made also to the work methods during the action research cycles.

Due to lack of external judgement if the content production process had really turned agile, I had planned a questionnaire to ask that from the content marketing team members at the end of the implementation project. To ensure that the team members would remember what it meant to be agile, there was an introduction to the agile approach in the beginning of the project, a reminder in the last weekly meeting, and a brief description in the questionnaire itself.

The questionnaire was created with Webropol and sent one week after the implementation project ended by email to everyone who had participated in the content marketing team during the project, a total of 30 respondents. The importance of answering the questionnaire was emphasized to the team, and it got a good response rate with 26 respondents. The questions were formulated as statements, and the respondents were asked to answer if they agreed or disagreed with the statement, or if they didn't know or couldn't answer the question. Next I will introduce the findings – the full questionnaire and its answers are found in appendix 3 and the cover letter in appendix 2.

First I asked if the respondent had participated in the content process, to make sure that the rest of the questions would be answered by those who had. Of the 26 respondents, 25 answered that they had participated.

To find out if the respondents thought we now had a consistent process in place, I claimed that "Ruukki has a consistent process for managing content marketing activities". We can say that it does, as 23 of the 25 respondents agreed (figure 14).

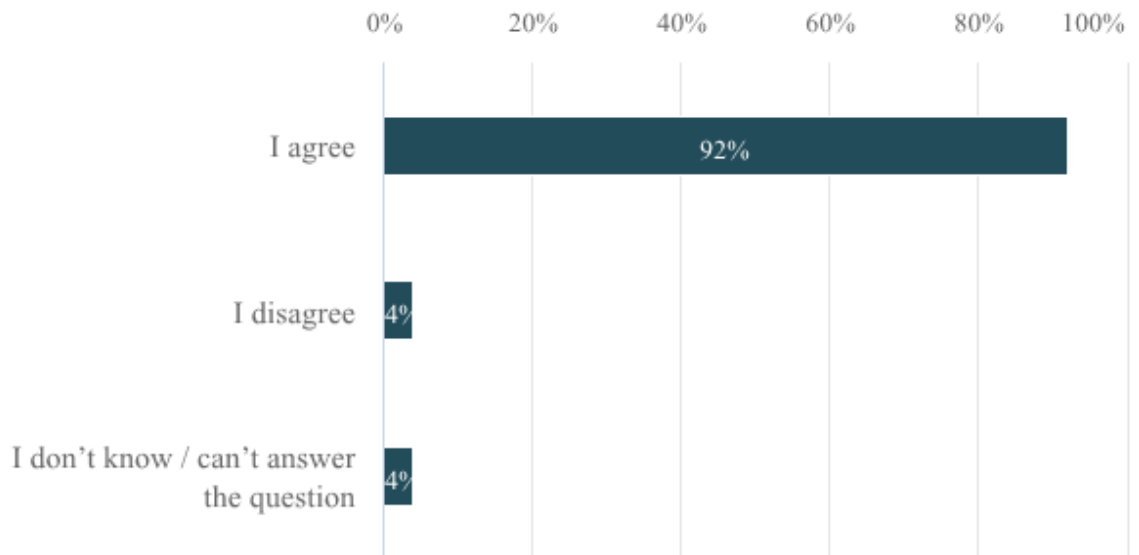


Figure 14. Questionnaire result on question 2, “Ruukki has a consistent process for managing content marketing activities” (n = 25)

Next I asked if the respondents considered the process agile. I reminded the respondents of the meaning of agile by stating the question as “The process on Trello is agile (content work is divided into small tasks, development is done fast in continuous small steps)”. Again 23 of 25 respondents agreed (figure 15).

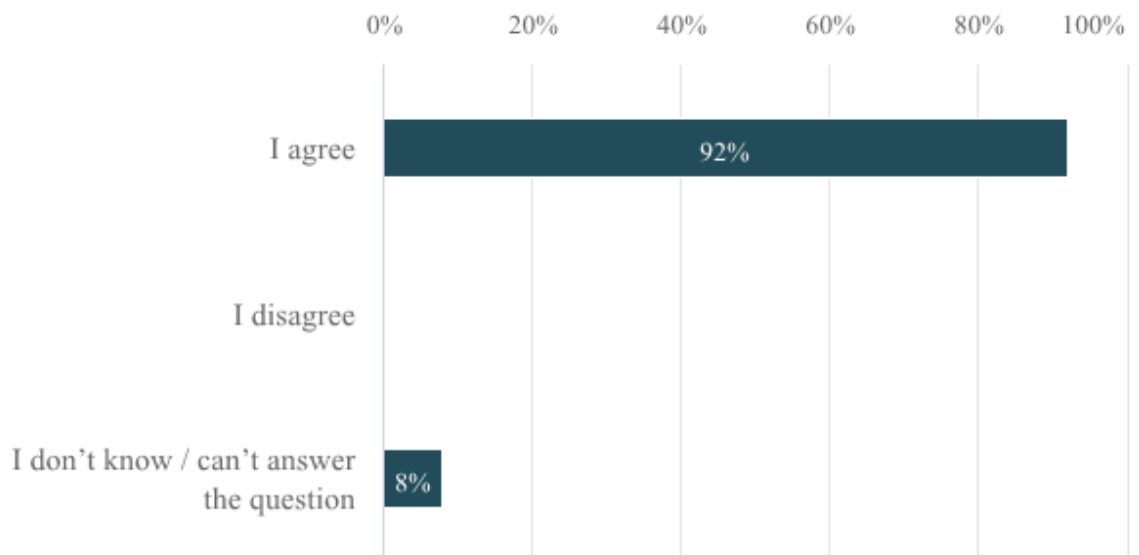


Figure 15. Questionnaire result on question 3, “The process on Trello is agile (content work is divided into small tasks, development is done fast in continuous small steps)” (n = 25)

To further dive into the meaning of agility, I wanted to ask about the transparency of the content production process on Trello (figure 16). Nearly as many as in the agility question, 22 out of 25 respondents said they agreed that Trello makes the content marketing process easy to follow.

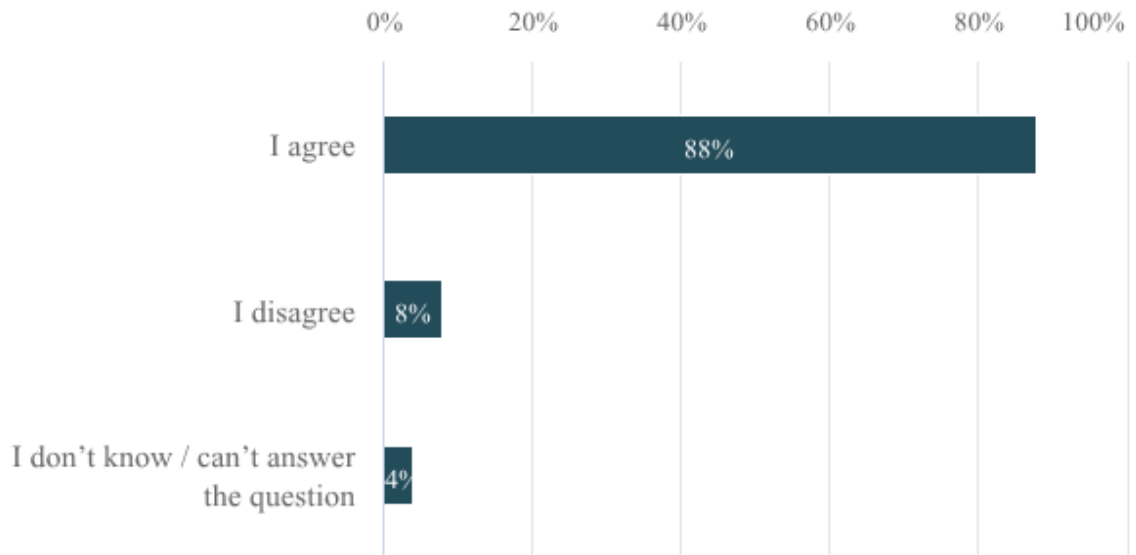


Figure 16. Questionnaire result on question 5, “Trello makes the content marketing process easy to follow” (n = 25)

Because my subobjective was to have an agile process in place also to develop the work methods themselves, I asked the same kinds of questions about the agility of the development. It became clear during the project that the content marketing team members didn't always fully understand my idea of leading these two processes on separate Kanban boards, and I assume this led to five of the respondents to answer “I don't know / can't answer the question” when asked if there was a consistent process to develop work methods. However, 17 out of 25 respondents agreed that there was (figure 17).

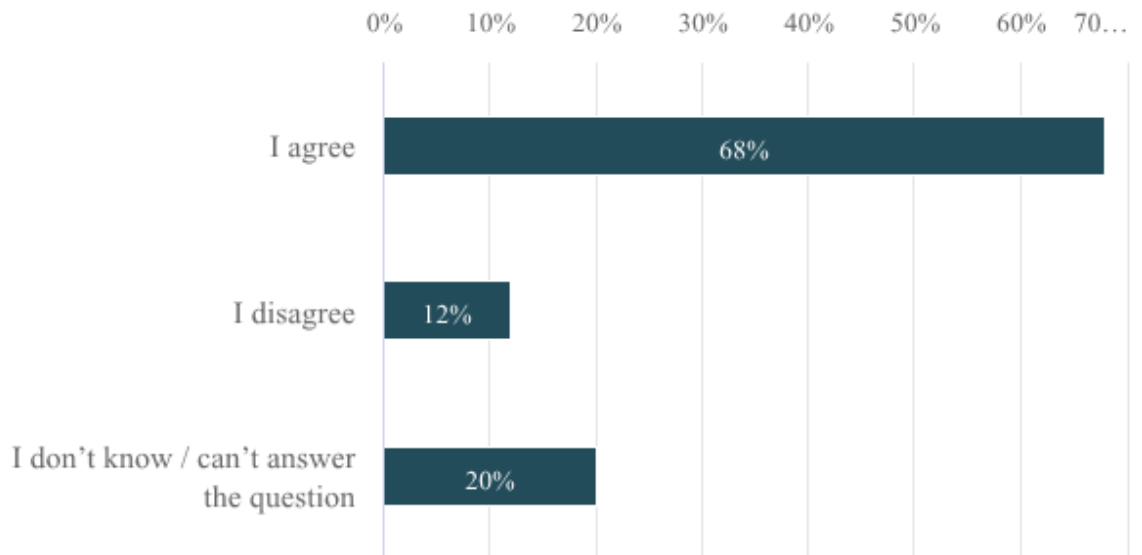


Figure 17. Questionnaire result on question 6, “Ruukki has a consistent process for developing working methods related to content marketing” (n = 25)

The amount of respondents who didn't know or couldn't answer the question grew to seven when I asked if the process to develop work methods was agile. Still, 16 out of the 25 respondents agreed that the process was agile (figure 18).

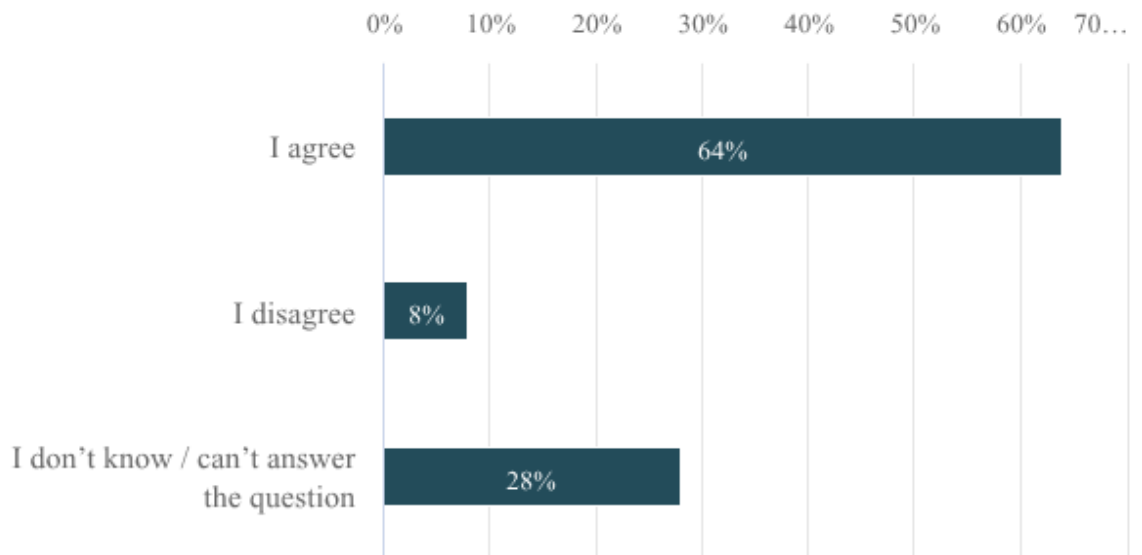


Figure 18. Questionnaire result on question 7, “The working method development is agile (development is divided into small tasks, and done fast in continuous small steps)” (n = 25)

To summarize, it was nice to see that a large majority of the content marketing team saw that we had implemented a consistent agile process to manage our content marketing

efforts, as it was the objective of this project. The result was further validated by the fact that the project's sponsor wanted to continue on the same tracks.

The marketing and communications director who sponsored the project and is the owner of marketing processes was happy with the results and decided to continue using agile practices in the content marketing process, despite the fact that I was about to leave for another job opportunity with the company, and the content marketing team would have to continue without me. At first I thought changing the project lead in the end of the implementation would be a risk to its continuation, but it turned out that the content marketing team had committed themselves to the new process and tool and were well off in continuing on their own.

The team took ownership of the new way of working also by continuing to develop the process right away. They started to book 30-minute weekly meetings instead of the one-hour meetings we had during the project, and I'm sure the time and frequency of these sprint meetings will continue to be fine-tuned as the process becomes routine. The team also planned to start separate Kanban boards on Trello to work on larger campaigns. All of this further convinced me that they managed to take in the core of the agile approach and are now developing the specific, most useful set of agile practices for Ruukki Construction's content marketing.

7 Discussion

Agile thinking has evolved from its original software context to project management methods that are used in various fields from sales to human resources (Olajiga 2017; 171-180, 189-192, 237-250), from house remodeling to teaching (Sutherland 2014; 10, 82-83, 204-211).

I had not heard the term agile marketing until the fall of 2016 when I started to think if something like this should be developed. When I looked into the topic, despite agile marketing already being a decade-old term, it struck me like lightning. Combining marketing with agile methods – those were the two frameworks I had been working with the most for the past 17 years of my work life in both marketing positions and other jobs. I was already coordinating content marketing in my role as digital marketing manager at Ruukki Construction, and had been contemplating how the content production, publishing and analysis process could be made more systematic and transparent. Thrilled about my revelation about agile marketing, I felt that it was shouting my name to be made into a project.

In the next subchapters I will discuss how the major parts in this project succeeded and what marketers should take into account when planning a similar agile marketing implementation project. I will also consider the usefulness and limitations of this research and give suggestions for further research. Finally I will reflect on my own learning from the thesis process.

7.1 Change leadership and managing stakeholders

The agile marketing implementation project started with stakeholder mapping as presented in chapter 5.2.1. In many projects I've been involved in, stakeholders have simply been listed and noted, but most often not prioritized. I think this was a good exercise in understanding who really were the people whose commitment and support I needed, and who would be generally interested in the project but not crucial to its success. This helped me in prioritizing my own limited time towards having the right discussions with the right people.

I learned a lot about internal selling and taking the viewpoint of business area leaders in the process. It's no use to try to sell an idea with arguments that would win me over, but arguments that answer the stakeholders' concerns, both on stakeholder group level and individual level. I adopted an attitude of listening and making others' concerns my concerns all the way from the beginning. We discussed the role of marketing in our business,

the increasing role of content marketing and its benefits, personal branding of our specialists, the time investment that it would require and how to manage it, and how we would be able to measure the return on investment. I also think that one-on-one talks emphasized the impact more than a common meeting for all business area leaders would have.

That being said, my original goal was to involve also the business area leaders themselves in the content production, not only their designated team members. The main obstacle was the leaders' limited time, but I think that with more background work on personal branding, they would have been more interested in making the investment in time. All of them were already familiar with the concept of personal branding and understood its power in marketing in general, but were not ready to fully engage themselves in it. In fact, I would like to do a project with directors to train them to make themselves personal brands, with proper benchmarks from the industry and hands-on training on every aspect of personal branding. However, it was too much to be included in the timeframe of this project, and as expected, I didn't manage to make them part of the active content marketing team with just the talks that we had.

The guiding coalition formed by these directors and the more experienced content marketing team members was the most useful asset in driving the project. Having a mandate from higher up made it easy to sell the idea to specialists who would join the content marketing team, and the already existing content producers acted as inspiring role models for the newcomers. But like with directors, also with the team members I noticed that individual attention was the best way to create commitment. As mentioned earlier, I took it as my personal goal to coach each new content marketer in how to produce content from the beginning, and was extremely proud and happy to see how they grew into that role. The older members of the team were valuable experts in content marketing already, so I made sure to utilize their experience and also constantly boost their identity in that role by giving positive feedback. Their knowledge on the content marketing process proved helpful also in the selection and fine-tuning of our agile practices during the action research cycles.

To ensure the change that happened in the working methods sticks long-term, I would suggest that the organization follows Kotter's (2012, 23) eighth and final step about making the new way of working part of the corporate culture, or "this is the way we do things here". In the case of implementing an agile mindset, I think that this would be easiest if the whole company would turn agile in all its operations. But in smaller scale, I think it would be worth a try to make agile thinking part of the culture inside the marketing team, and continue teaching it to new members of the content marketing team as they join it. As

Welch and Jackson (2007, 192) describe it, team communication passes on information about conventions, for example on how projects have been run.

7.2 Selecting agile methods and practices

Being the most experienced of our team in content marketing and agile methodologies, I prepared the suggestion for our set of agile practices by myself. My suggestion was approved and we started to test the selected practices, fine-tuning them during the action research cycles. We saw this as an acceptable approach for a small-scale test like this project, but we could have taken a step back and evaluated the agile methods in a larger group. I think these are two sides of the same approach: either we could have started with something and iterate as we did, or we could have evaluated choices beforehand and then start the project with presumably a little less iteration needed. It's up to each organization to choose which approach suits them best. From my experience, even though I think that our approach enabled faster iteration, there is the risk that the first assumptions and decisions are no longer questioned and the project could grow into the wrong direction in the long run.

The agile practices selected in the beginning of our project were based on agile in general, and Kanban and Scrum for some of the specifics. From the agile approach, we adopted the principles of incremental iterative work with fast pace, the regular re-prioritization and changing plans when needed, and the transparency of work. We decided to use a Kanban board to keep track of our process because of its flexibility for ongoing work. And from Scrum we took the regular meetings and tied that together with the action research cycles. They were all good choices, but the sprint-like thinking with the regular meetings might need some further development in the future.

7.3 Agile process in practice and action research

As could be seen from the weekly cycle notes, the content team members sometimes had difficulty in both finding time for the regular meetings and keeping the Kanban board up to date between the meetings. The dilemma of the team wanting to have meetings but not having time for them needs further consideration. It should also be made sure that the regular meetings don't become yet another forum where team members come to report on what they've been working on, like often happens with different weekly and monthly team meetings. I would like to develop the content marketing meeting more towards what Scrum calls "daily scrum", or the daily 15-minute meeting where everyone briefly tells what they've worked on since the previous daily, what they will work on today, and if they

have any obstacles in doing that. The actual work should happen outside of the meetings, which is not what always happened during this project – sometimes the weekly meeting turned into practical discussions about individual content marketing activities, when all those discussions should have happened and been documented on the Kanban board during the sprints between the meetings. Nevertheless, I was happy to see that the team was extremely committed to their content marketing work, which was expressed by requests to have regular meetings about the activities on the board.

The Kanban type of board and the Trello tool proved to be good choices for managing this team's work. The tool was easy to use and the idea of moving tasks from one phase to another, re-prioritizing and adding new plans were intuitive for the team members. I also made sure that everyone felt empowered to edit the board as they saw fit, so that we would be truly agile also in terms of having a self-organizing team that makes decisions as they are needed. In my opinion this approach also contributed to the atmosphere in the content marketing team. In a team formed around a common goal, where everyone has joined because they want to produce content on top of their other tasks, and where people come together from different parts of the organization, I personally think that it's important to give everyone the same rights to act. The Kanban board also fulfilled its job in increasing the transparency of what everyone is working on, and acting as the storage place for all material related to each content marketing activity. Before we started, I doubted if everyone would remember to use Trello as the storage location for all this information, but perhaps thanks to the simple intuitive functionalities in the tool, material was easy to attach and team members acted as good role models for each other in this aspect as well.

The action research cycles added another development layer in the project. As the researcher I tried to pay particular attention to how people talked about our process and what kinds of concerns they raised either directly or by linking it with a practical content marketing task. Because our meetings were mostly held in a physical space (with some team members joining by Skype), I was able to follow facial expressions, tone of voice and other subtle signs of feelings about the ways of working. This information I used in deciding to lead the discussion towards the concerns and trying to find solutions to them. I think that we pulled off the action research and the development of work methods quite nicely, making small improvements to for example the meeting schedule and content, the information we decided to share on Trello, the renaming of the phases on the Kanban board to fine-tune the process, and the way we decided to document results from content marketing activities. To me the action research part was interesting because it made this project a little different from other projects. Usually we haven't decided to have a researcher within projects, not to mention one who would be paying special attention to

team members' feelings. I think it was a good learning experience that made the mental part of working together more visible to me than before.

7.4 Usefulness and limitations

This project concentrated on making one team's process more agile. It was a success and serves as a case example how to implement agile practices in the daily work of around 30 content marketers, some more actively participating than others. The findings support earlier studies that agile methodologies can well be implemented in marketing processes. But one has to remember that agility doesn't mean that anything would happen by itself. Based on the experience from this project, there definitely needs to be at least a half-time person facilitating the work process. Otherwise the tasks will soon end up in chaos and meetings will turn into free-form discussion on other things than were supposed to be on the agenda.

The team's existing interest towards developing agile work methods made running this project fairly easy, something that isn't given if the people in the team have a different mindset. In that situation, even more change leadership would be needed to re-orientate their thinking and ways of working. I was also lucky that the business area leaders were initially interested in content marketing and knew about its benefits – it made my work of committing them a lot easier. If there's a similar agile implementation project but with directors known to be opposed to the project, I would recommend spending even more time on building the case for content marketing from the business point of view, having individual discussions and perhaps even bringing in external experts to boost the message to the management.

This project tested just one technical tool to manage the process, Trello. Although there are other similar tools on the market, only Trello's functionalities were utilized in this project. Also, the content marketing team in this project consisted of only Ruukki Construction's own employees. As can be seen in software projects, agile tools can very well be used also with vendors and other partners. This wasn't tested within the scope of this project.

7.5 Suggestions for further research

More research is needed to study the applicability of all different agile methodologies and practices for marketing needs. Because Agile and its predecessor Lean have their roots in

software development and the manufacturing industry, not everything in the methodologies is easily transferrable to the marketing context. The usefulness of all agile practices for marketing could be mapped, and perhaps an agile model could be developed specifically to answer the needs of the marketing function.

It would also be interesting to follow research on a marketing organization where agility has been practiced for a longer period of time than in this project – maybe over the course of several years. The experiences from that kind of organizations would offer a useful benchmark for others to follow and to bypass the biggest obstacles.

7.6 Reflection on my learning from the thesis process

The opportunity to do the agile marketing project in my workplace came at an early stage of my studies. I was extremely interested in the topic so I immediately took the opportunity, but from the thesis process point of view, the empirical project happened a little too early. It was during the first months of my studies when I had to simultaneously concentrate on many demanding courses, and didn't yet have a good understanding what I would like to focus on in my studies. I knew that I wouldn't have time to work on the thesis for a while after finishing the project at work, so ideally the project could have happened a little later. In any case, the opportunity has to be seized when it's possible, and I'm now truly happy that I did.

The most learning for me happened in facilitation and change leadership skills. I gave my everything to support and serve the content marketing team in its new ways of working and the new team members in their content production skills. I also got to practice convincing the management of my ideas – a skill which is always needed and where there's always room for improvement.

7.7 Conclusions

The agile content marketing process is now in use in Ruukki Construction and it's nice to conclude a project that reached its goals. Iterations on the work methods continue, and it will be interesting to see how the process evolves in the future. The content production is more transparent than before, and changing plans and re-prioritizing is easy and visible to everyone. Content marketing activities are being analysed and iterated based on results. To answer my research questions, it looks like agile practices definitely support the content marketing process, and that work methods can also be developed in an agile way.

Lastly, I would like to say that passion drives results. This project started from a personal revelation that the frameworks of marketing and agile thinking could be combined. I was relentlessly driven throughout the project by passion towards creating something that would change the ways of working in our team. That is why it was easy to keep the target clearly in mind and always correct the course towards it. It compensated for all the footwork and the endless discussions to win people over. And this is the story of what happened.

References

Adkins, L. 2010. Coaching Agile Teams: A Companion for ScrumMasters, Agile Coaches, and Project Managers in Transition. Pearson Education, Inc. Boston.

American Marketing Association 2013. Definitions of Marketing. URL: <https://www.ama.org/the-definition-of-marketing>. Accessed: 7 May 2019.

Armstrong, G., Kotler, P. & Opresnik, M. O. 2017. Marketing: An Introduction. Pearson Education Limited. Harlow.

Beck, K., Beedle, M., van Bennekum A., Cockburn, A., Cunningham, W., Fowler, M., Grenning, J., Highsmith, J., Hunt, A., Jeffries, R., Kern, J., Marick, B., Martin, R. C., Mellor, S., Schwaber, K., Sutherland, J. & Thomas, D. 2001a. Manifesto for Agile Software Development. URL: <https://agilemanifesto.org>. Accessed: 27 April 2019.

Beck, K., Beedle, M., van Bennekum A., Cockburn, A., Cunningham, W., Fowler, M., Grenning, J., Highsmith, J., Hunt, A., Jeffries, R., Kern, J., Marick, B., Martin, R. C., Mellor, S., Schwaber, K., Sutherland, J. & Thomas, D. 2001b. Principles behind the Agile Manifesto. URL: <https://agilemanifesto.org/principles.html>. Accessed: 27 April 2019.

Brassington, F. & Pettitt, S. 2013. Essentials of Marketing. Pearson Education Limited. Harlow.

Brinker, S. 2016. Hacking Marketing: Agile Practices to Make Marketing Smarter, Faster, and More Innovative. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Hoboken.

The Chartered Institute of Marketing 1976. Glossary. URL: <https://marketingexpert.cim.co.uk/glossary>. Accessed: 7 May 2019.

Coghlan, D., Brannick, T. 2014. Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization. SAGE Publications. London.

Cornelissen, J. 2014. Corporate Communication: A Guide to Theory & Practice. SAGE Publications Ltd. London.

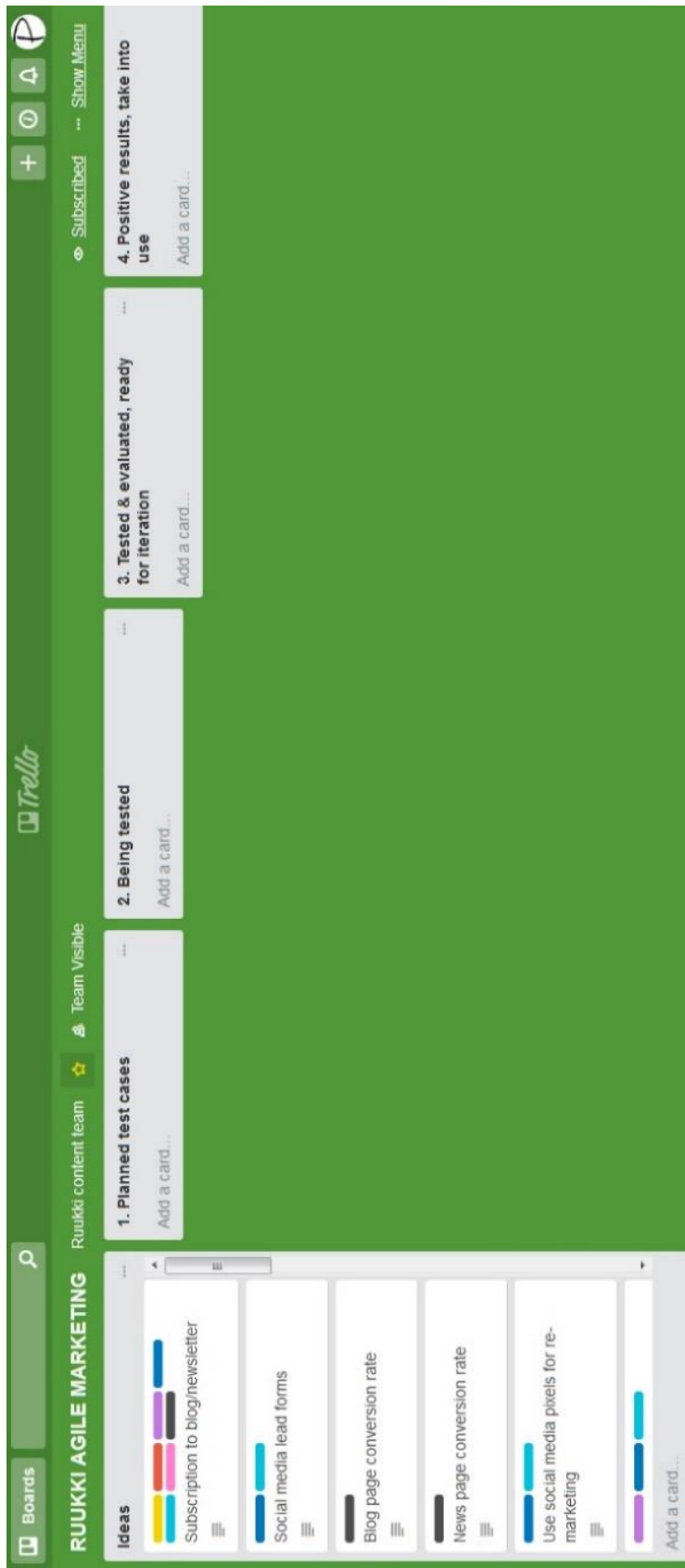
Fill, C. 2013. Marketing Communications: Brands, experiences and participation. Pearson Education Limited. Harlow.

- Grönroos, C. 2009a. Marketing as Promise Management: Regaining Customer Management for Marketing. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 24, pp. 351-359.
- Grönroos, C. 2009b. *Palvelujen johtaminen ja markkinointi*. Talentum. Helsinki.
- Halligan, B. & Shah, D. 2010. *Inbound Marketing*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Hoboken.
- Kotter, J. P. 2012. *Leading Change*. Harvard Business Review Press. Boston.
- Kotter, J. & Rathgeber, H. 2005. *Our Iceberg Is Melting: Changing and Succeeding Under Any Conditions*. Macmillan. London.
- McNiff, J. 2016. *You and Your Action Research Project*. Routledge. Oxon.
- Measey, P. & Radtac Ltd 2015. *Agile Foundations: Principles, practices and frameworks*. BCS Learning. Swindon.
- Olajiga, F. 2017. *Lean Agile Marketing: How to Become Agile and Deliver Marketing Success*. CX Conversion Ltd. London.
- Project Management Institute & Agile Alliance 2017. *Agile Practice Guide*. Project Management Institute, Inc. Newtown Square.
- Pulizzi, J. 2012. Six Useful Content Marketing Definitions. Content Marketing Institute. URL: <https://contentmarketinginstitute.com/2012/06/content-marketing-definition>. Accessed: 31 March 2019.
- Smart, R. 2016. *The Agile Marketer: Turning Customer Experience Into Your Competitive Advantage*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Hoboken.
- Sutherland, J. 2014. *Scrum: The Art of Doing Twice the Work in Half the Time*. Crown Business. New York.
- Welch, M. & Jackson, P. R. 2007. Rethinking internal communication: a stakeholder approach. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*. 12, 2, 177-198.

Womack, J. P., Jones, D. T. & Roos, D. 2007. *The Machine That Changed The World: The Story of Lean Production – Toyota’s Secret Weapon in the Global Car Wars That Is Revolutionizing World Industry*. Simon & Schuster, Inc. New York.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Screenshots from the online Kanban boards in Trello



RUUKKI CONTENT | Ruukki content team | Free | Team Visible | Subscribed | Calendar

IDEAS (add/copy checklist to new cards)

- Content ideas from 2016 brainstorming 1
- Unbelievable Challenge reminder 2 Nov 27 1 2/5
- Description text for blog Nov 30 1
- November's B2B master newsletter Nov 30 0/4
- Unbelievable Challenge winner announcement Dec 10 0/5

1. IN PROGRESS (add/copy checklist to new cards)

- Autoverkkokauppa in Vantaa, Finland (car dealership) Nov 20 2 4/5
- Alajärvi factory presentation Dec 3 8 3/5
- Blog/newsletter subscribers to CRM 2
- Meeting architects' needs (showroom blog post) 4 5/5
- New "old" material – now available

2. READY FOR PUBLISHING (attach files to cards)

- Finland 100 in Prague Nov 20 6 8 5/5
- OP Kouvola (bank building in Finland) Nov 22 8 1/5
- Ways to do brainstorming for content ideas Nov 23 9 1
- Dry chain launch Nov 24 4 1

3. PUBLISHED / TAKEN INTO USE (add links to published content)

- Incremental SEO training for content producers Nov 20 6
- Nordic Architecture Fair in Gothenburg Nov 17 7 8 5/5
- Värtahamn - Stockholm - award Nov 17 8 10 5/5
- Newsletter subjects A/B testing Nov 16 10 2

4. ARCHIVE (add stats before archiving)

- Call-to-actions to content topics on Trello 6
- How to remember to consider all media types 4
- Why build just good enough, when you can build like "for yourself" (blog post) Oct 10 9 8 4/4
- Unbelievable Challenge reminder 1 Oct 10 5 3

Appendix 2. Questionnaire cover letter

Subject:

Survey on Ruukki's content marketing process - Please answer asap

Text:

Dear recipient

Thank you for being part of Ruukki's content marketing team. As promised last week, here is a short survey on our content marketing process - please take the time to answer it as soon as possible. There are only eight agree/disagree type of questions, so it will not take a lot of your time.

All answers will be highly appreciated and needed for my thesis work, even if you think you haven't participated in the content process very much. The answers will be anonymous.

Answer the survey >

Thank you

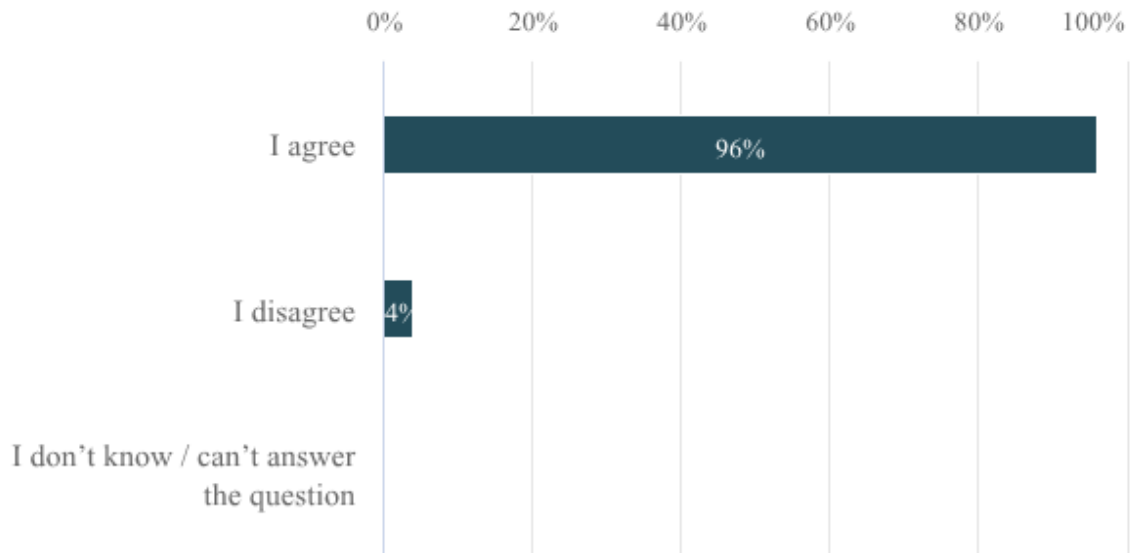
-Pauliina

Appendix 3. Questionnaire results

Below are the questionnaire results, collected at the end of the agile work methods implementation project to find out whether the content marketing team thought that their process had become agile during the project, and if they thought agile methods were useful. There were a total of 26 answers from the 30 team members invited to answer. One of the invitees answered in the first question that they hadn't participated in the content marketing work, so the rest of the questions were asked from the 25 people who had participated.

1. I have participated in Ruukki's content marketing work in 2017 (attended meetings or produced content)

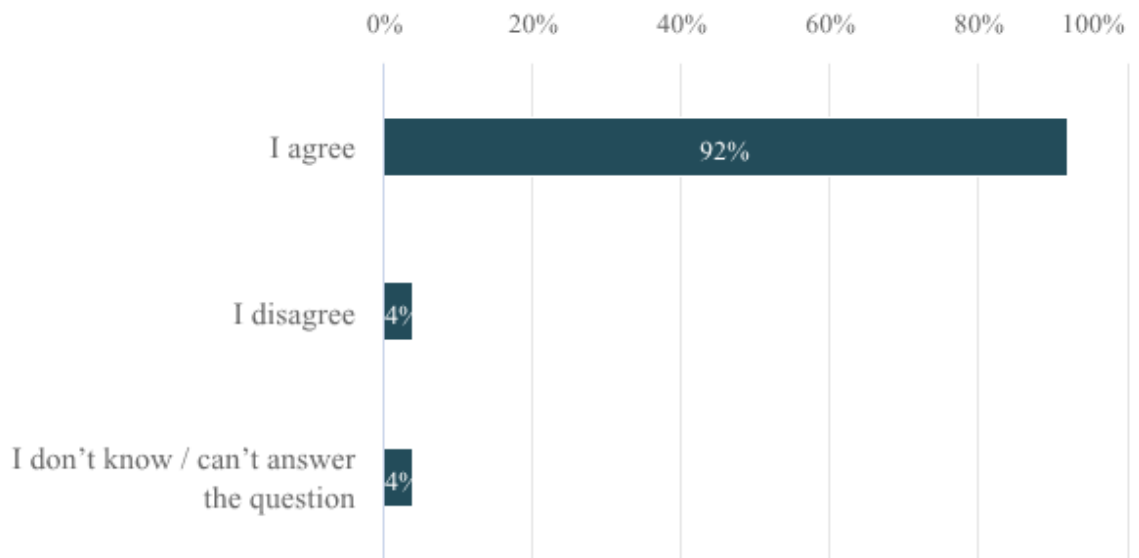
Number of respondents: 26



	N	Per cent
I agree	25	96.15 %
I disagree	1	3.85 %
I don't know / can't answer the question	0	0 %

2. Ruukki has a consistent process for managing content marketing activities

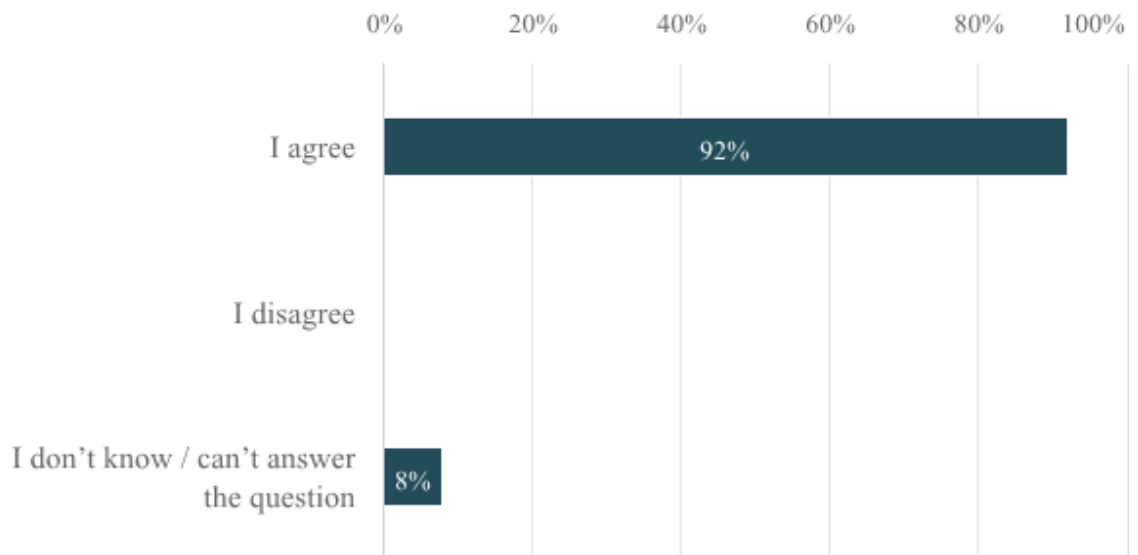
Number of respondents: 25



	N	Per cent
I agree	23	92 %
I disagree	1	4 %
I don't know / can't answer the question	1	4 %

3. The process on Trello is agile (content work is divided into small tasks, development is done fast in continuous small steps)

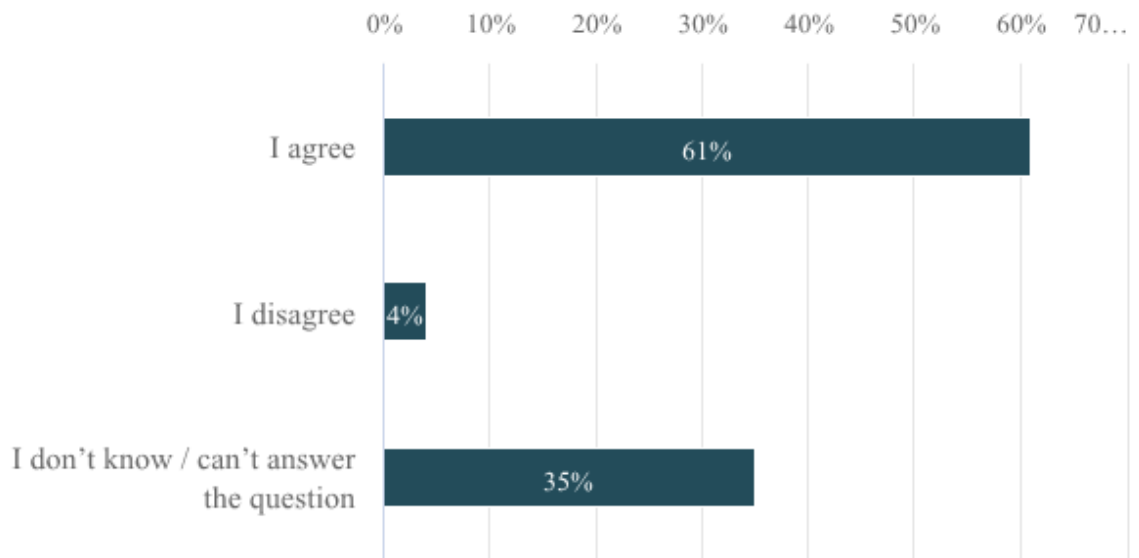
Number of respondents: 25



	N	Per cent
I agree	23	92 %
I disagree	0	0 %
I don't know / can't answer the question	2	8 %

4. The process on Trello supports my work

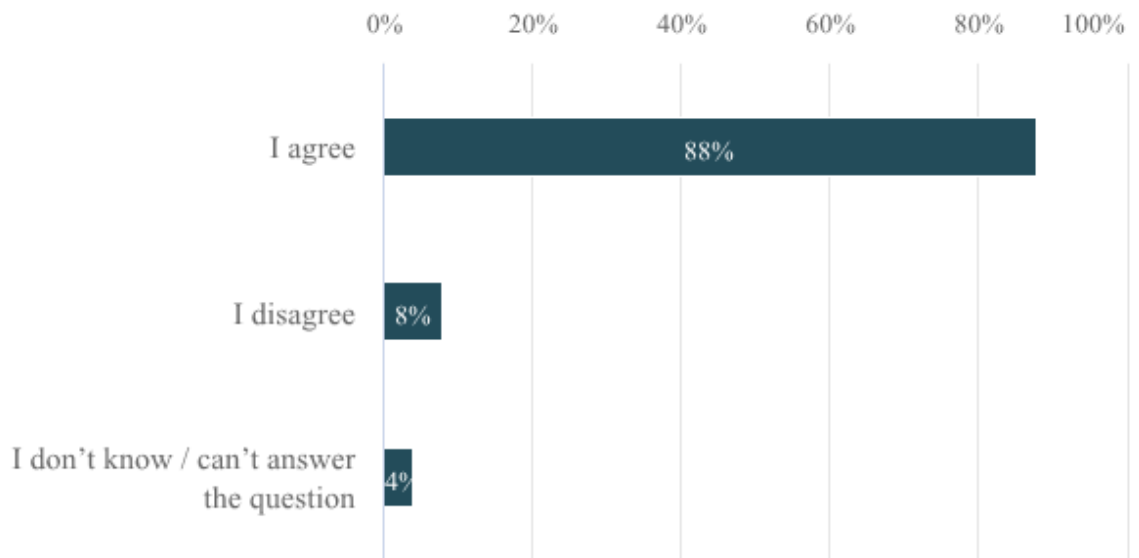
Number of respondents: 23



	N	Per cent
I agree	14	60.87 %
I disagree	1	4.35 %
I don't know / can't answer the question	8	34.78 %

5. Trello makes the content marketing process easy to follow

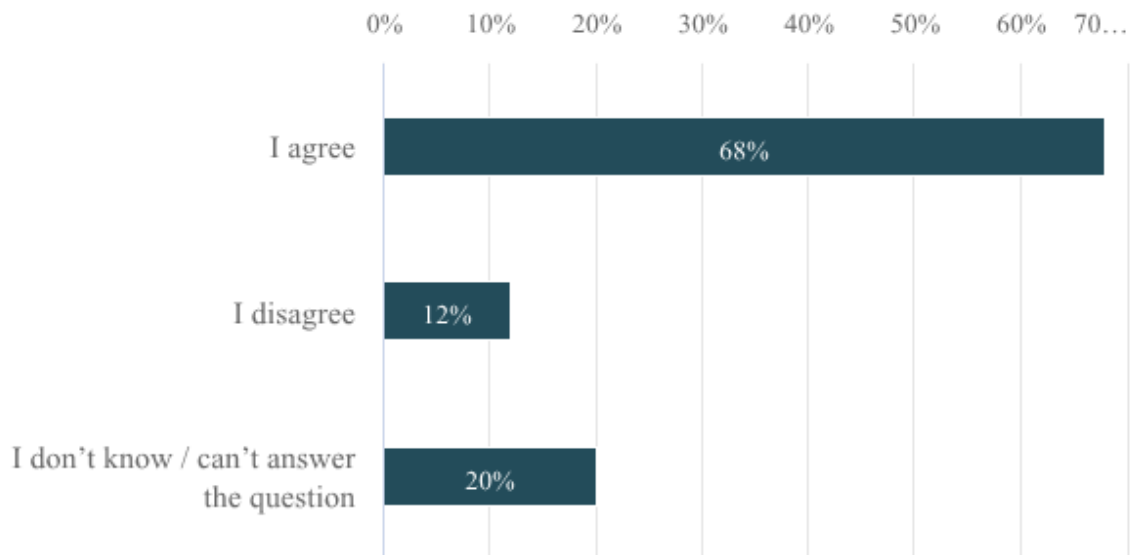
Number of respondents: 25



	N	Per cent
I agree	22	88 %
I disagree	2	8 %
I don't know / can't answer the question	1	4 %

6. Ruukki has a consistent process for developing working methods related to content marketing

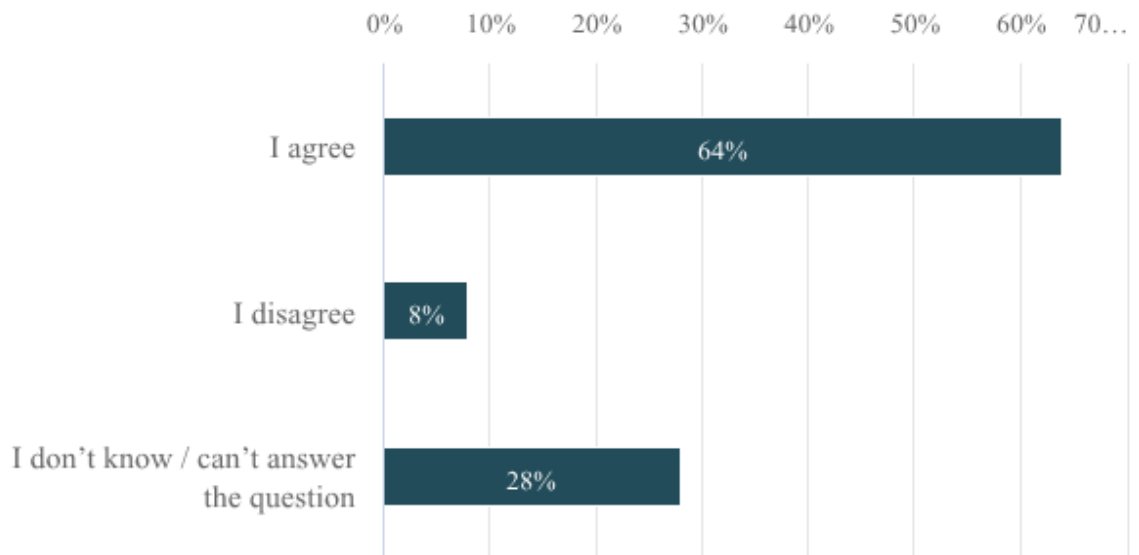
Number of respondents: 25



	N	Per cent
I agree	17	68 %
I disagree	3	12 %
I don't know / can't answer the question	5	20 %

7. The working method development is agile (development is divided into small tasks, and done fast in continuous small steps)

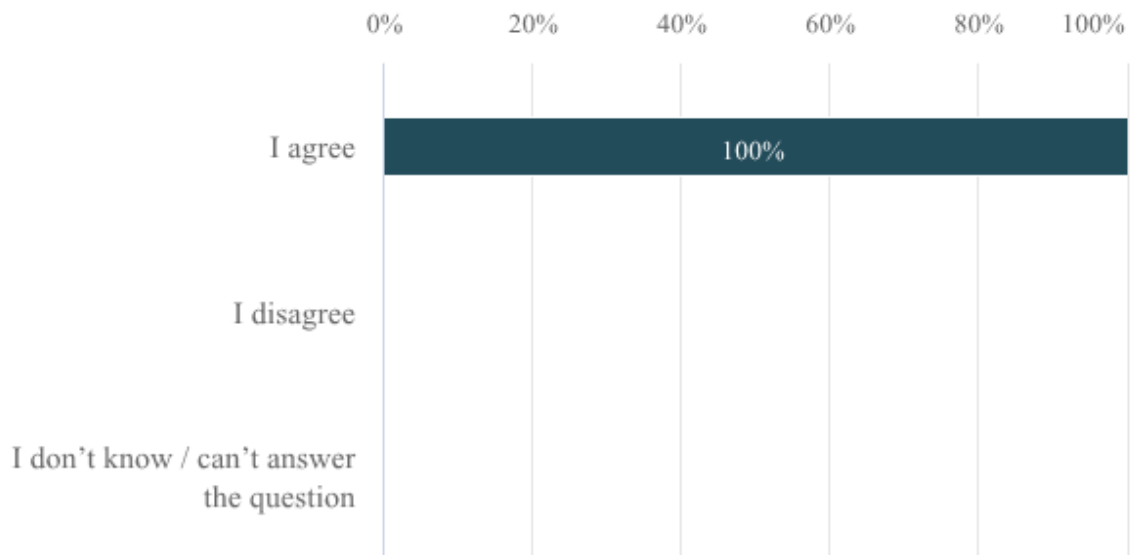
Number of respondents: 25



	N	Per cent
I agree	16	64 %
I disagree	2	8 %
I don't know / can't answer the question	7	28 %

8. Ruukki's working methods related to content marketing should be developed in an agile way

Number of respondents: 25



	N	Per cent
I agree	25	100 %
I disagree	0	0 %
I don't know / can't answer the question	0	0 %

9. Any feedback, ideas or questions that you may have on the content marketing process:

Number of respondents: 5

Responses
Very well set up process, thank you!
Due to the many open projects I could not spend too much time on Trelo. Training only. I believe it is a good tool.
We are on the right track, but we still need to develop our way or working in some areas.
Trello could be a great tool, but I do not use it at this time, from various reasons.
There should be more marketing professionalism in Ruukkis marketing to take function to other level(where many of competitor are), now basicly all marketing related ideas are coming from sales functions.