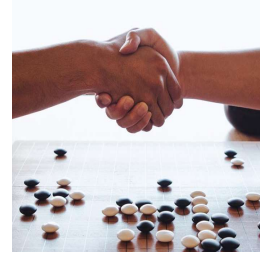
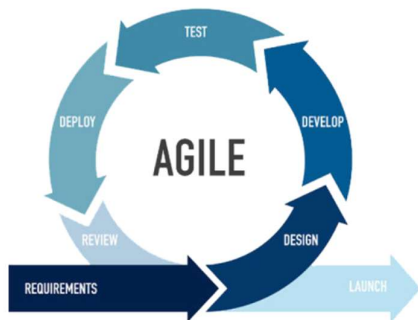


AGILE Methodology and the ancient Game of Go: Finding Synergy in Strategy

In the realm of strategic thinking, parallels can often be drawn between seemingly disparate disciplines. One such intriguing connection lies between AGILE methodologies for project management and the ancient, strategic board game of Go. Both embody principles of adaptability, foresight, risk management and iterative improvement. In this exploration, we'll delve into the shared ethos of AGILE and Go, highlighting the concept of SABAKI as a bridge between these two worlds.



AGILE Way of Working: Adapting to Change



AGILE methodology has become a cornerstone in modern project management for software and hardware development or for organizational projects. At its core, AGILE is about embracing change and responding to it flexibly. The Agile manifesto prioritizes individuals and interactions over processes and tools, customer collaboration over contract negotiation, and responding to change over following a plan. Central to AGILE is

the idea of iterative development, breaking down projects into manageable increments and continuously delivering value to customers. Teams work collaboratively in short cycles, regularly reassessing priorities and adapting their approach based on frequent feedback.

Further key elements beyond the Agile manifesto are setting clear priorities, visualization and fostering transparency.

The Art of Go: Strategy in Simplicity

Go, often referred to as the 'game of encirclement,' is an ancient board game originating from China, but also popular in Japan and Korea. It has now transcended national borders and it is being increasingly enjoyed around the world. Despite its simple rules—placing stones on a grid to surround territory—Go offers infinite depth and complexity. Players strive to dominate the board strategically, balancing offense and defense while anticipating their opponent's moves. Due to its high value for strategic thinking Go plays a key role in schools education in Asian countries and in government official training.



One of the key principles in Go strategy is SABAKI (捌き), a term that encapsulates the art of flexible movement. *Sabaki* involves developing and maintaining a flexible, efficient position that is difficult for the opponent to attack, often through contact plays and sacrifice. The term SABAKI comes from Japanese martial arts and relates to 'whole body movement', or repositioning – meaning

that a player or fighter should always consider the overall board situation and stay light and flexible.

Finding Common Ground: SABAKI in AGILE Methods

The concept of SABAKI in Go resonates deeply with AGILE methodologies. Just as a Go player employs SABAKI to maintain flexibility and control on the board, AGILE teams embrace flexibility in their approach to project management.

SABAKI, which involves developing flexible, efficient positions that are difficult for the opponent to attack, often through contact plays and sacrifice, can be likened to the practice of prioritizing the most significant tasks or features early in a project in AGILE methodology—putting in the 'bigger moves' first. This involves identifying the most critical aspects of a project and addressing them upfront, laying a solid foundation for subsequent iterations. Just as SABAKI channels power efficiently in Go, AGILE teams channel their efforts into achieving the most important goals of a project iteration, maximizing value deliveries and minimizing waste.

Like a skilled Go player, AGILE teams understand the importance of adaptability. By focusing on the most impactful elements of a project initially, teams can pivot and adjust their approach as needed, responding to feedback and changing requirements without being constrained by rigid plans.



This AGILE concept is also called “detail as you go” – start at a high level and iteratively break goals down to smaller pieces. It's like hiking a mountain: you can see the top, but always have to take care about small steps and finding the shortest way around all obstacles by using your compass. The following overview summarizes the commonalities in strategic principles of SABAKI in Go game and AGILE Methodologies (table 1)

Strategic principle	SABAKI in Go game	AGILE Methodology
Flexibility and Adaptability	encourages players to regularly verify and adjust their strategy based on the opponent's moves and the overall flow of the game.	promote adaptive planning and iterative development to appropriately respond to changing requirements, feedback and circumstances.
Incremental Progress	players incrementally build influence and territory on the board, iteratively making small gains throughout the game.	teams deliver working software in short iterations, allowing for continuous integration and continuous delivery (CICD).
Risk Management	players assess and mitigate risks associated with their moves, considering potential threats and opportunities on the board.	employ techniques such as backlog prioritization, frequent testing, and incremental delivery to manage project risks effectively.
Focus on Efficiency	players strive to efficiently use their stones to secure territory and influence.	teams aim to deliver value to customers efficiently through iterative development and continuous delivery.
Emphasis on Collaboration	players often engage in strategic exchanges and tactical maneuvers to outmaneuver their opponent, requiring keen observation and collaboration between their stones.	emphasize collaboration among team members, stakeholders, and customers to deliver value collaboratively and adapt to changing requirements effectively.
Continuous Learning and Improvement	players analyze their games, learn from their mistakes, and study various strategies to enhance their skills over time.	teams conduct regular retrospectives to reflect on their collaboration and results, identify areas for improvement, and adapt their practices accordingly to become more effective over time.

Table 1. Common strategies in Sabaki in Go and Agile methodology

Conclusion: Embracing Adaptability in Strategy

In both the game of Go and AGILE training, success hinges on the ability to adapt and respond to changing dynamics. SABAKI serves as a guiding principle, reminding practitioners to prioritize flexibility and strategic foresight.

By recognizing the parallels between AGILE methodologies and the principles of Go, we gain valuable insights into effective strategy execution and iterative improvement. Whether on the board or in the workplace, embracing the spirit of SABAKI empowers individuals and teams to navigate complexity with grace and agility, ultimately achieving their goals with strategic clarity.

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