

LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT PRESENTING A VISION FOR PEOPLE TO BUY INTO



Q&A with Simon Davey, CEO of Agilico

By Ian Mullett, Executive Director, SH Gillamor Stephens

Agilico is a workplace technology business that offers a broad range of solutions to around 11,000 SME customers. Those services range from managed print solutions, document management, and telecoms and IT services.

In this interview, Simon talks us through the recent history of Agilico, and its key opportunities for growth in the next few years. He also talks us through the importance of resilience in uncertain times, what makes a great leader, and the power of a strong and compelling vision, as well as what he looks for when hiring senior leadership talent into the business.

Q: Tell us about Agilico's growth story

The business was founded via Horizon Capital's investment into DMC Canotec in 2018. Since the original investment we have acquired nine great businesses; integrated each of them into common technical platforms; and, of course, rebranded as Agilico.

Q: What do you see as the key opportunities and challenges for the company right now?

A: The two biggest challenges are the labour market and supply chain – I doubt this is very different to any other business right now. There is a short-term bubble in the labour market, as economic activity has gained momentum and we are working hard with staff to support and retain them.

In terms of the supply chain, this has been particularly hard at various stages of the pandemic, but we do have a strong suite of options available to us which has meant that we have managed to overcome every challenge thrown at us. The combination of microchip shortages and constraints in shipping and logistics was particularly acute, but is slowly easing.

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We all obsess about customer service at Agilico and if we commit to doing something for a customer, we always deliver on it. Now, given the supply challenges, we are probably a bit more cautious when we do set commitments to customers because we want to be sure that we can deliver on our promises.

In terms of opportunities, we have acquired several pieces of proprietary software all of which will make work easy for our customers. We own our hosted telephony product, Agilico Connect; a document management product; and an accounts payable product, Verify. These products are all available to our incredibly loyal customer base – a customer base which has been with us on average for 16 years.

Q: What characteristics and personality traits make a truly effective leader?

A: There are plenty to choose from of course, but I particularly like those leaders that are ambitious and focused. Having been through a pandemic I would also add resiliency to the kit bag. I'm sure that all CEOs have had to push themselves to their physical and emotional limits over the last two years. Indeed, our management team and staff have all been remarkable and shown great resiliency in two very difficult years.



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Q: How would you describe the main differences between leadership and management?

A: Management is simply about task distribution – it's important, but not very difficult. Leadership, however, is very hard: it's about presenting a vision for people to buy into; presenting that vision with passion so everyone wants to buy into it, everyone wants to follow it, and everyone wants to contribute to it – that's the big difference for me.

Q: What core qualities or attributes do you look for personally when hiring – particularly at the C-suite level?

A: Three things, in short:

1. Intellect
2. Ambition
3. Drive

I have worked on and obsessed about this for a long time, and I get very involved in hiring today. I want to make sure that my direct reports, and all of their direct reports, have very high standards. I would much rather have a gap than hire the wrong person. I actually want it to be difficult to get a role in Agilico – for the benchmark to be really high. I work very closely with our HR Director to make sure these standards do not slip.

It's not uncommon for people to be interviewed four or five times and be interviewed by two or three different people.

Q: I understand that you don't have your own office. What's the rationale behind that?

A: In my experience executives with an office usually stay in them too long. I want to know what's really happening in the business and that can only be done by moving around the group and speaking with people across all grades and roles.

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I learn so much that I wouldn't otherwise hear about just because I'm constantly moving around the group and the information I receive is invaluable. I don't want to lose touch with what is really going on – I want to know about any problems that matter to staff and then deal with them.