Getting Serious About Agile

A STORY OF OWNING CHANGE

Owning Change in Financial Services

Our client, a global banking and financial services organisation, was struggling to deliver working, shippable product with its Agile set up. They were seeking a partner who could help build stable, dedicated, high performance teams to deliver high quality products quickly and with good business engagement and feedback.

THE CHALLENGE: A BROKEN AGILE FRAMEWORK
Implement and Scale True Agile Practices

Our client initially asked us for an assessment to discover how we might assist and accelerate their Agile journey. They were looking for a consistent approach to the structure and scale of their teams, which were distributed across multiple geographies, with complex interdependencies.

There was a lack of clarity around the identification, elaboration and prioritisation of work, leading to teams being very busy, yet not delivering much value. At the same time there was a desire to amplify learning across the teams so that those that were strong in areas such as continuous integration and continuous delivery (CI/CD) or testing could share their skills and expertise with others. Across all of this, there was an ambition to be able to benchmark and measure progress of the teams with a common set of key performance indicators.

OUR SOLUTION: BACK TO BASICS
Observe, Assess and Coach

During the initial assessment we engaged with a few select teams to understand their specific challenges and opportunities. We used the Agendashift™ framework to explore the current situation, survey the teams and use the results during an Agendashift

workshop. Additionally, we observed team events and interactions and had individual conversations with key team members and leaders.

We identified several key themes: The teams were formed around technical constructs with siloed specialist skills and no alignment to business domains. This led to complex dependencies and competing priorities between teams, which resulted in unplanned work and low predictability.

It also meant that planning was not focussed on delivering a flow of value or business benefits but was instead focussed on technical items with low business engagement. Finally, teams were spread across multiple geographies and time zones which made participation in team events and collaboration to deliver work less effective.

By way of intervention, we brought in a team of coaches to improve the fundamental agile practices of the teams. Backlog refinement, estimation and planning, reviews and retrospectives, definitions of ready and done, metrics and reporting, Kanban and flow, and collaboration practices were included as areas of focus.

The goal was to work with each team individually to help them take small steps towards increased agility, without imposing any specific methods or frameworks all at once.

To bring consistency to the transformation, we created a team scorecard to monitor basic understanding of Agile, roles, ceremonies, Jira usage, and flow metrics.

The scorecard (see *Figure 1*) was used by the coaches to enable conversations around opportunities for improvement, what changes could be made and how effective certain practices were.

POWERFUL PARTNERSHIP: AGILE FOUNDATIONS IN PLACE

A Culture of Continuous Improvement and Collaboration

As the engagement wound down, with the foundations now in place, the focus shifted to help the teams' coordinate with each other at scale to further align to business value. A similar scaled scorecard was created as a health check for larger teams.

Like the Team Scorecard, the intent of the Scaled Scorecard was also to emphasise outcomes, with a focus on the work (with vision and business alignment), people (with teams and relationships), practices (with events and cadences) and lifecycle tools (with reporting and metrics).

Similarly, it enabled the coaches to work with the teams to move towards full value streams when the time was right.

Our client now has cross-functional and stable teams, that have a better understanding of delivering product across the full lifecycle. They are also able to manage and track their work so that they can really deliver value.

This has been achieved with better collaboration between product owners and business stakeholders, understanding benefits and breaking the work down into small increments of value, rather than technical tasks.

There is now a clearer understanding of the intent of their work and improved collaboration and trust with the wider business in setting and meeting expectations.

The teams are now focused on continuous improvement, with frequent Agile retrospective meetings to inspect and adapt ways of working. Product demos and reviews for feedback enable iterations of work. Communities of practice have further enhanced learning and knowledge-sharing across the teams.

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Real-World Results

Agile foundations are in place and setup to begin scaling, ready to succeed in future market volatility. We successfully supported our client to evolve their Agile practice. The result has been a significant shift in the way that work is being accomplished for our client. This means that increased benefits can be realised for their customers faster, resulting in improved business results and customer satisfaction.
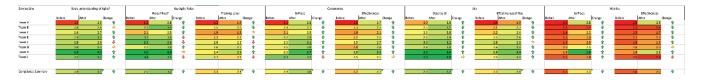

Figure 1: Sample scorecard in the preliminary tages of an engagement

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