

Mobilising Agile Transformation Across Teams



Example of minding
optimization gaps

Finance, Culture gap

Optimization
Gap

Client Request

An international finance institution looking to build a more agile organization was searching for a senior coach, a native speaker, to lead agile coaches in several local branches that had begun or were about to undertake organizational restructuring.

They were using Spotify agile as a model. One local branch office had reorganized into a new, cross-functional, multi-team structure called Tribe, and two more Tribes were planned within a year.

Client's understanding of their challenges

The organization was seeking to build a competitive edge in digital finance services and emerge as a market leader. While they had implemented agile processes, restructured teams, and developed an agile playbook, agile coaches were not accepted as transformation agents and there was a general lack of an agile mindset: employees did not view customer satisfaction as central to their work, nor did they plan with a clear outcome in mind.

They were attributing this to:

- **Lack of experience and skills** in the Transformation team (agile coaches and Transformation lead);
- HQ forcing a **top-down restructuring** without enough preparation;
- Local workforce conforming with slow-paced, short-term orientation and **“tell me what to do” attitude**;
- **Organisational culture** de-facto normalizing delays, slow bureaucracy, top-down tasks and long delivery cycles;
- **Inability** to attract and **pay top talent** for both teams and agile roles.

Optimization
—— Gap

What we discovered

Working with the Transformation lead and her team, we interviewed 17 people (ranging from department heads to leased developers), inspected various organisational artefacts and observed key team meetings. Common barriers to transformation soon appeared:

Lack of Collaboration & Outcome Orientation – Employees were accustomed to working in silos and responding to top-down management rather than collaborating in and across teams. Outcome-driven thinking was weak as strategy was broken into tasks that the management pushed onto individuals.

- **Metrics were a punishing mechanism** that everyone tried to avoid; management practices were 1:1 coordination and misstep prevention.
- There was **no line of sight to the organisation's strategic goals** from tasks performed by the team, nor with how tasks would contribute to a desired impact.
- **Unresolved conflicts** – Nearly every manager not reporting to the first Tribe Leader commented on difficulties in working with him - peers and higher ups included. A similar situation operated in most departments.

Continued →

Optimization
Gap

What we discovered

The transformation team had a weak position, pigeon-holed in the HR department, and with no channels to partner with key stakeholders.

- **Resistance to agile coaches** – agile coaches were not recognized as partners for change nor central to organisation strategy, but rather as traditional HR, temporary teachers or process enforcers.
- First Tribe Leader generated **narratives that teams have outgrown agile coaches**, including most external consultants.
- **Change was ordered by HQ**: change date, organisational structure and standards were imposed top-down: diminishing Transformation team's ownership and positioning.

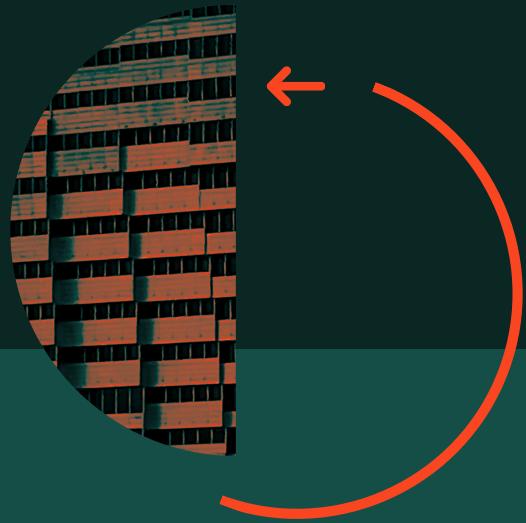
Individualized and siloed change management – While the Transformation team was envisioned to drive the Change, actual change was siloed with weak alignment and fragmented focus.

- **Change was approached through one-on-one coaching**, including among top management, rather than collective transformation at the organisational, team or Tribe level.
- **Their agile playbook did not cover cultural, relational and mindset aspects** of the agile transformation: focusing heavily on the process, behavior and structure part.

I confronted the department head with cultural issues and first Tribe Leader dynamics and asked if letting go of the person was an option, he said "no, not in the near future". **We were challenged to develop resilience and endurance working against the tide**, in a structured social environment controlled by an embedded individual

Optimization
Gap

Interventions



Understanding System Dynamics

- **Mapped current system.**
- **Partnered with stakeholders** beyond the immediate engagement scope to understand broader systemic challenges. This included '**hard conversations**:' straightforward inquiry into organizational dynamics and constraints - including talent retention, cultural fit, bureaucratic barriers and possible opportunities and leverage options available.
- Facilitated collective **sense-making sessions** to align everyone on the findings, gather insights, and create shared ownership of the transformation process. These were also designed to surface misunderstanding, conflicts, energy wasters, hidden pain points, conflicting views and expectations - and to normalize these as unwanted byproducts of change that can and will be addressed.
- Set **clear boundaries of my engagement**: the goal, what is in and out of scope, what is my relation to them and what is confidential info.

Optimization
—— Gap

Interventions

Strengthening Collaboration & Agile Structures

- Identified gaps in **team-level and multi-team collaboration** and introduced agile ceremonies that focused on cross-team engagement.
- Shifted the focus **from individual-level questions and strategies** (e.g., "How are you in this sprint?") to **team-level reflections** (e.g., "How are we as a team in this sprint?").
- Helped the transformation team work as a **cohesive unit**, with a clear purpose, strong **partnering relationship with management** and **strong internal collaboration**, rather than as separate individuals assigned to different teams.

Measuring & Elevating Agile Coaches' Impact

- Introduced **360-degree assessments** to evaluate the perceived value of agile coaches and their effectiveness in supporting teams.
- Introduced **team level skill matrix** scoring for the transformation team and a **development plan** that **balanced the transformation team as a unit** while increasing individual impact of agile coaches.
- Introduced **team and multi-team level** metrics for **team efficiency and engagement**.
 - **Lead time** and **cycle time**, measuring total time from idea to market and from starting the work as a team to finishing it.
 - **Team health** as a unit, measuring team engagement, team autonomy, team perception of value creation etc.

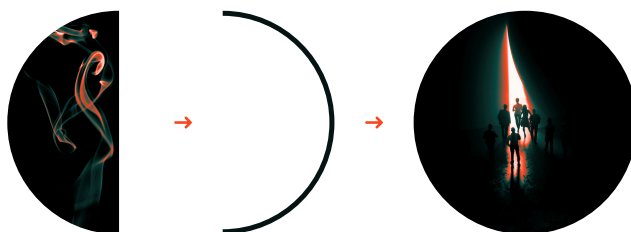
Optimization

— Gap

Interventions

Leadership Engagement & Repositioning the Transformation Team

- While working closely with team-level leaders, addressed **mindset resistance** by coaching on **empowerment, collaboration, and psychological safety**.
- In conversations with the team and Tribe leadership, **positioned the transformation as a long-term journey and the Transformation team as a long-term partner** supporting the teams and Tribe leaders in different ways throughout the journey.
- Strengthened connections between the **transformation team and top management (HR, IT, Retail, different business units)**, repositioning agile coaches as strategic transformation partners.
- Increased **awareness** of different **leadership style and team cultures** equipping the Transformation team to **adjust their approach to specific environments** in which they were supporting or introducing change initiatives to minimize resistance and maximise sustainability of change.



Intent

Conditions

Outcomes

When we identified the conditions which shape thinking, relating and deciding, we can shifted them, and outcomes improved.

Results & Impact

Cultural & Behavioral Shifts

- Initial skepticism from teams and leaders gave way to **increased openness and proactive collaboration** within new collective structures and events.
- Agile coaches gained credibility, **exceeding expectations in 360 assessments**, with some showing significant improvement between two assessments.
- Teams **began to take ownership of their agile journey**, engaging more deeply in workshops and actively seeking cross-team collaboration as well as **owning their team metrics** rather than seeing them as an external correcting factor.

Leadership & Agile Coach Positioning

- Agile coaches **were repositioned from HR-like roles to true transformation partners**, with management recognizing their strategic value.
- The transformation team became more **aligned with top-level leadership**, allowing for better coordination of change efforts.
- As the cultural shift took off and the Transformation team successfully launched and supported the second Agile Tribe, **the impending 'leader' chose to leave**.
- Some challenges remained at the **Tribe leadership level**, where exposure to agile coaches and transformation practices was more limited.

Optimization

—— Gap

Results & Impact

Metrics & Continuous Improvement

- The introduction of **team-level engagement, cycle time, and lead time metrics** allowed teams to track their own progress.
- Initially, teams resisted metrics as a control mechanism, but over time, they **took ownership of the data and used it for improvement** rather than feeling punished by it.
- Agile coaches' impact was **measurably improved** through ROTI and 360 assessments, validating their role in the transformation.

Conclusion

This engagement helped shift agile transformation from a process-driven change to a culture-driven movement, empowering teams and elevating agile coaches into strategic roles.

While challenges remained, particularly with higher-level leadership buy-in, the transformation laid the groundwork for sustained agile adoption and organizational growth.

“At first I thought Miloš was just another superstar consultant. What surprised me was how grounded he is — clear boundaries, no arrogance. He anchored my role, and my team’s role, in the wider system. That clarity forced us to step up, take responsibility, and move with direction.”

Transformation Lead

Optimization
—— Gap



Mind your
Optimization
—— Gap

Ready to
—— explore yours?

We will go into your context, sense the gaps and consider if this may be the right partnership. No cost. No pressure. Full confidentiality.

Milos.zekovic@optimization-gap.com

