



Case Study

Creating Organizational Momentum for the Adoption of Agile in a Large Government Agency

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Company Details

Industry: Government Agency

Company Size: Over 58,000 employees

Location: Europe

Products: Digital and IT Services and Procurement

Cprime Services: Agile Transformation

Executive Summary

This large government agency had been experimenting with the use of Agile for a number of years, with several teams and projects attempting to practice Agility, with limited success. They faced some high profile Agile failures, in part because the organizational governance and highly regimented management processes did not support Agile delivery. With the help of Cprime's Agile transformation experts, the agency has achieved successful change and fostered a new attitude toward agility.

Overview

The agency's digital division shoulders tremendous responsibility, delivering and operating the digital solutions that support vital transportation, communication, and strategic defense systems.

However, they struggled with delivery challenges—projects regularly running significantly over budget and over time, poor solutions being delivered, and being unable to react to new requirements being driven by a changing global environment.



The Challenge: Creating Organizational Momentum

For over twenty years, this government agency has been trying to transform themselves for the digital world, including moving to a more Agile way of working. Many complications stood in the way of success:

- The inherent bureaucratic scaffolding underpinning the agency's mission and activities
- Decades of regulated processes presenting a formidable "how we've always done it" mentality
- The glacial speed of change inherent to all government procedures
- Team members suffering from transformation fatigue after such a long period of effort

Cprime was brought in by the Deputy Director of a delivery area that had been successfully delivering using an Agile methodology to the extent they could. They were running into friction as they tried to operate within an organization who's reporting and governance model expected all delivery to follow a traditional waterfall model, and where there was no organizational support for the use of Agile, and no organizational consensus that Agile should be used.

Matt White, a Cprime consultant, explains, "We faced the challenge of influencing the thinking around Agile within the organization, to demonstrate the art of the possible and the potential benefits, to remove any perceived blockers and impediments, and to create some organizational consensus and momentum around the adoption of Agile."

The Solution: Harnessing Enthusiastic Volunteers Under a Guiding Coalition

The first step was a Discovery period and summary report that established the current state of agility within the organization. This was handled by consultants Peter Gardiner and Matt White.

Peter recalls, "This discovery period resulted in a formal assessment and a backlog of problems to be solved. Perhaps most importantly, it allowed us to network within the organization so that we could build our change strategy in concert with those leaders and subject matter experts in the best positions to support the process."

As Cprime experts got a handle on what was required, they realized that organizational consensus and momentum around Agile would require the entire organization to be involved in understanding what the introduction of Agile might mean, what the potential benefits could be, and to test and remove perceived blockers and impediments.

Matt states, “We knew immediately that there were too many stakeholders higher up the chain of command for us to simply identify root problems and expect solutions to be implemented. Instead, our focus was on creating a viral change movement within the organization.” The strategy was built around Dr. John Kotter’s [Accelerate](#).

Early on, Peter and Matt helped establish a Guiding Coalition of internal leaders and executives championing the project. This group met weekly to agree on a vision for Agile within the organization and to oversee a portfolio of transformation Epics, prioritizing, reviewing progress, and removing impediments using Lean Portfolio Management (LPM) techniques.

A series of Agile briefings supported this effort. These talks by representatives from Cprime, other government agencies, and the wider industry, aimed to build knowledge and inspire people on the art of the possible. They were supplemented by a series of formal “Introduction to Agile” lunchtime training courses run for hundreds of people across the organization. This created a pool of enthusiastic volunteers that came together as a series of virtual teams around the Epics being overseen by the Guiding Coalition.

Cprime coaches Jon Malcolm and Alan Jennings then worked closely with the teams to help them deliver their Epics.

Jon notes, “Our approach was novel in that we never established a long-term two- or five-year strategy, which is common in government agencies. Rather, we took an experimental approach in which every aspect of the work gets broken down into very small tests. We coached the teams through establishing a hypothesis and testing it against real-world results. They learned from each test and moved forward in the right direction, performing bigger and better tests.”

Alan adds, “This approach allows us to deliver transformational change in a broader, bottom-up, iterative way that is far more sustainable than top-down, design-and-launch transformation efforts that we see regularly failing. We empowered small teams to make slight changes that eventually changed systems, processes, and ultimately the organization’s culture.”

Results:

The most notable result of Cprime’s involvement over the first fourteen months of the program was that the attitude of the organization towards Agile changed.

“We saw a fundamental shift,” says Peter, “to the point where the organization no longer felt the need to make a formal decision around the adoption of Agile because it had reached a broad consensus that it should be done. All the perceived blockers and reasons for not adopting it had been debunked, and senior leadership now shared a new vision of how the organization could operate in an Agile way.”

“We also saw a real change in attitude from the people on the ground who were previously so transformation fatigued,” adds Jon, “to where they were excited about what’s being accomplished and there was a huge appetite for working in an Agile way.”

Hundreds of team members have directly been trained, but the program’s impact has reached thousands.

“To me,” says Matt, “the most exciting part of this story is that other teams and leaders within the organization that had not been directly involved in the program took a keen interest in what we’re doing. They could see it was working, and it’s proven the effectiveness of Agile methods, so they wanted a chance to be involved.”

Alan concludes, “I think we successfully showed an alternative way of delivering organizational change. As a result, the agency adopted the same methods on a much larger scale to formally introduce a new operating model built on Agile, and to engage Cprime in supporting them through this process.”

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