

# A Call to Agile

How a major telecom made the call to transform into an Agile enterprise

*A Success Story*



# A Call to Agile

## Engagement Type

Agile Transformation

### Just the Facts

#### Industry

Telecommunications

#### Number of Employees

240K+

#### Annual Revenue

\$130 Billion+

#### Length of Engagement

12 Months

#### People Served

2,000

## The Challenge

Help client “create a quality and effortless experience” through an organization-wide change program and by innovating their software delivery capabilities

## The Goal

- » Transform from Waterfall to an Agile mindset
- » Achieve alignment around Agile goals through the organization
- » Stand up dozens of Scrum teams
- » Set client up to be self-sustaining

## The SolutionsIQ Solution

- » Assess the current situation and rally leadership around an organization-wide change roadmap.
- » Design a plan leveraging Scrum, XP, Lean Startup and other change approaches and techniques and begin execution.
- » Adjust the plan as needed, scale out small successes, and offer recommendations toward sustaining results.
- » Help client initiate culture shifts throughout the organization.

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*How a major telecom made the call to transform into an Agile enterprise*

## ► ABSTRACT

Customers interact with any enterprise through many touch points: the company website, desktop and mobile apps, call centers, and thousands of retail stores. This is even more so the case for our client, a telecommunications giant that ranks among the top five retail sites visited on both Black Friday and Cyber Monday. It was essential, therefore, for this client to “create a quality and effortless experience” that made it easy for customers to do business with them every time, regardless of the chosen platform.

To achieve this goal, the client’s consumer Web organization needed help transforming their software development methodology from a traditional Waterfall project management approach to an Agile approach. With over a hundred projects underway and approximately 2,000 people involved in delivering high-quality software, they needed expert guidance, so they called on SolutionsIQ. We helped them form, train and coach dozens of teams while also assisting them to establish and maintain a comprehensive organizational change management program that the client would be to sustain by the end of the engagement. The key to the engagement’s success was the innovative Agile Coaching Office: a central hub of Agile coaching knowledge and experts that the client could leverage toward a successful transformation.

## ► OVERVIEW

When your enterprise is one of the top five retail sites visited on both Black Friday and Cyber Monday, you have to ensure that your UX is flawless. But when the times necessitate change, you comply or risk being relegated to the annals of irrelevance and bygone eras. Big as it is, our client — one of the world’s largest telecommunications companies — was at a disadvantage because it simply

could not flex in time to respond to real-time market opportunities. This challenge, while pervasive in the product sector, is no less difficult: how to deliver high-quality products to the market when the demand arises and without upsetting your faithful followers. The traditional ways of designing, architecting, developing, and delivering something new to the waiting masses simply took too long. Our

client needed guidance through their Agile transformation to be sure that their end users wouldn't be unnecessarily inconvenienced. The client wanted to "create a quality and effortless experience" that would delight their customers and keep them calling back for more. They knew what they wanted; they just had to get over their antiquated ways. Waterfall was the hurdle and Agile, the bridge to get over it.

## Waterfall was the hurdle and Agile, the bridge to get over it.

The telecom's consumer Web organization called on SolutionsIQ for guidance transforming their software development methodology to an Agile approach. The goal was to launch a full-scale Agile transformation, while also forming, training, and coaching dozens of Scrum teams. The stakes were high: the Web organization already had over a hundred projects underway with approximately 2,000 people involved in delivering high-quality software. In addition, an organizational change program would have to be established and maintained across a diverse group of domains and contributing specialty areas. The client also wanted to create a pool of internal Agile coaches capable of maintaining their hard-earned Agility.

Something else that required particular delicacy was transitioning management staff into more supporting roles. Through Agile, we

trained the middle management group to stop directing teams and start empowering them.

### ► LAUNCH

At the foundation of the business problem was the need for the client to quickly ramp up an Agile change program that would drastically transform the organization as a whole and their software delivery capabilities in particular. SolutionsIQ consultants were brought in early to conduct a baseline assessment of the company's pain points as well as how the telecom hoped and expected a Agile workflow and mindset would alleviate them. Our executive consulting team collaborated with C-level staff to design a custom program to roll out the Agile transformation, using their objectives as a compass and course-correcting as needed. This program included a group of charter teams tasked with addressing the full spectrum of organizational aspects within the scope of the transformation, including financial governance, communication, work intake (experience design and feature prioritization), as well as the physical work environment. Once the initial steps on the path to change were clear, we were ready to begin training.

### ► EXECUTE

It was imperative for our client to ensure that their delivery teams *were* Agile, not just that they did it or simply went through the motions. Therefore, we started with foundational training in the Agile basics, especially Scrum and eXtreme Programming (XP) — an Agile software development approach — but also

Lean, and Kanban. We developed a custom training program that would help the client reach their goals of faster time to market, better quality products, and reduced delivery cycle time. During this process, we supported the launch of 19 groups of software development teams. Each group — with typically 10 to 20 members — consisted of a definition team and one or more delivery teams. New teams received dedicated support from an embedded coach whose goal was to get the team to a point where they were fully capable of producing consumable value in a Sprint. SolutionsIQ delivered onsite coaching focused on improving workflow and technical practices. For example, workflow coaching might focus on helping individuals in their new roles as ScrumMaster, Product Owner, or delivery team member. Meanwhile, technical coaching would target improving software development through XP practices, such as code refactoring, pair programming, and test-driven development.

To support business and technical coordination at scale, we designed and rolled out, a program of regular MetaScrum and Scrum of Scrums meetings, also provided coaching in this. In addition, we monitored progress and areas of developmental need through daily contact with the teams as well as periodic assessment questionnaires and value stream mapping events.

SolutionsIQ also organized and initially staffed a Coaching Office (see *inset*). The Coaching Office was comprised of senior SolutionsIQ

## GAME-CHANGER: Agile Coaching Office

One of the client's primary goals was to create a pool of internal Agile coaches that could help them sustain their hard-earned Agility beyond our involvement. To achieve this goal, our team of coaches and consultants created an Agile Coaching Office: a central hub of subject matter expertise. True to form, our Agile coaches used Agile to establish the coaching office. Transparency into workflows through highly visible charts and Kanban boards, a single prioritized Product Backlog to ensure alignment, the team *pulling* work into Sprints rather than having an external party push work onto them — these were just a few of the principles and practices that our team modeled so that individuals training to be internal coaches would understand what was expected of them.

Regardless of the client in question, once the coaching office is established, it is made responsible for a myriad of coaching-related tasks beyond simply supporting the overall transformation program, including:

- » Furthering client internal coaching capability
- » New team starts
- » New team member onboarding
- » Prioritizing coaching service requests and responding to them in priority order
- » Periodic team assessments
- » Building communities of practice
- » Supporting program scaling via a plethora of scaling pattern options including Scrum of Scrums and MetaScrum
- » Evolving the Product Backlog as the program roadmap evolves

SolutionsIQ continues to use the Agile Coaching Office as an instrument for building client-internal coaches, continually evolving this tool as needed.

## OVERCOMING OBSTACLES: Managing Middle Management

The old refrain in the industry is that Agile “doesn’t need” managers. Truth or fiction, the statement misses a fundamental fact: middle management accounts for a decent portion of the workforce in an enterprise. Even if Agile didn’t have a place for managers, our clients have built their enterprises around a system that leverages managers; simply removing them would be catastrophic and rather short-sighted.

During this engagement with our telecommunications client, SolutionsIQ consultants learned that, in order for the overarching transformation to succeed, you have to obtain buy-in from everyone, managers included. Waiting too long to get them involved leaves space for doubt, a necessary ingredient for failure.

To address the challenge of rallying middle management behind Agile — which *does* in fact have a place for them — SolutionsIQ collaborated with our client to design a program to ease individuals into their new roles as “Agile Managers”. Agile management differs from traditional management in at least one key way: in Agile, teams are composed of all of the individuals needed to create consumable value, therefore “Agile managers” find ways of *supporting* their teams rather than telling them what to do or how to do it.

coaches who worked directly with teams to increase their competency. We also brought in specialized coaches to assess, develop, and deliver a coaching strategy to support the adoption of Agile User Experience (UX) techniques. To facilitate the evolution of high-performing teams, we designed and delivered a series of programs with integrated teaming assessments, and coached teams in effective strategies and behaviors.

SolutionsIQ delivered targeted team-based training events to help create a common understanding of the Agile transformation and to ensure alignment around the Web organization’s business objectives. Events included team kickoffs, release planning, user story workshops, and value stream mapping sessions. Course evaluations show that these events had substantially more “promoters” than “detractors”:

“Well-structured and efficient.”  
“Some of the best training I ever received!”

“Agile overview and training in [an] Agile way”

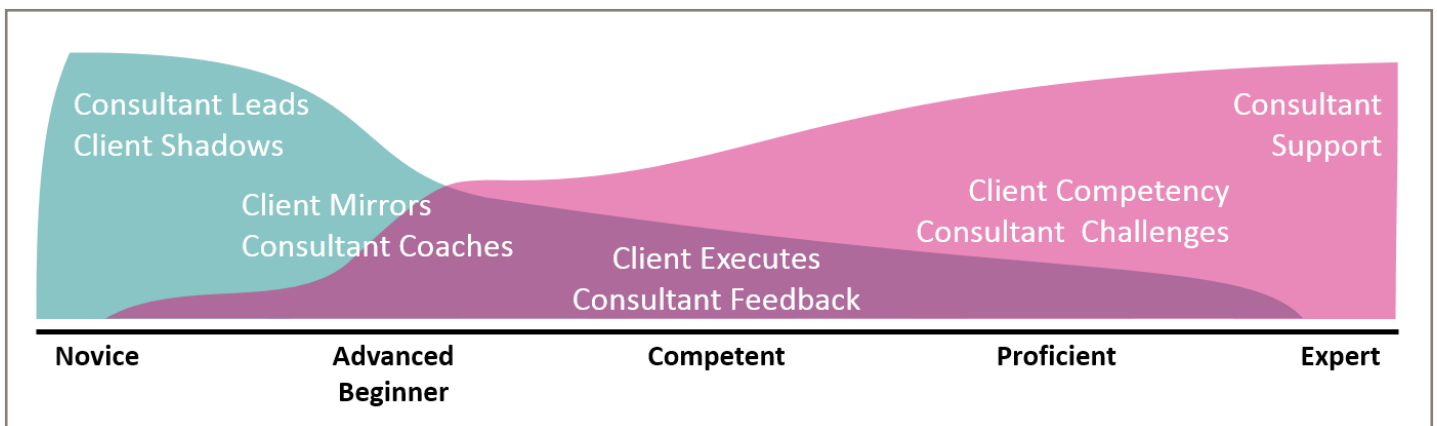
Great job!  
Thank you!!!

## ► SUSTAIN

To foster continued transformation and persistence, the Coaching Office created a custom eight-month “Coach the Coaches” transition plan with the goal of leaving the client with a skilled coaching staff capable of continuing to support their coaching needs into the future. The program involved transitioning leadership of the Coaching Office as well as the Agile coaching to the client. It also leveraged a competency assessment framework that we developed to assist individuals in acquiring skills in Agile practices. Interested individuals were able to work through the Coaching Office and an apprenticeship system that fostered graduated skill acquisition and grew the client’s internal coaching competency (see diagram). The program uses a combination of structured training, self-guided education, pairing with experienced coaches on real-world problems at the client offices, and individualized learning programs under mentored guidance.

## ► THE BOTTOM LINE

After more than a year of collaboration, our client’s consumer Web organization made substantial progress in the transformation from a traditional approach to one that is Agile. Through close collaboration and transparency, we were able to help the client create stable, effective, and continually evolving organizational structures to ensure a sustainable Agile business. Using Agile to deliver an Agile transformation was widely embraced and key to the success of the engagement. By the end of the engagement, the client had 19 groups comprising many more delivery teams, all delivery value Sprint after Sprint. By the end of the engagement, many were delivering high-quality software far more rapidly than before with drastically reduced bug counts, and the typical yearly release cycle time had been reduced to quarterly in some cases.



Coaching Office Transition Program based on the Dreyfus model

# BIG WINS

- » Transformed from a traditional Waterfall project management approach to an Agile mindset
- » Achieved enterprise-wide alignment around Agile goals
- » Stood up dozens of cross-functional teams
- » Set client up to be self-sustaining by establishing an Agile Coaching Office

Replicate this success with SolutionsIQ!

## Want to be the next success story?

Contact us now to learn more about how SolutionsIQ can guide your Agile transformation!

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