

How a large insurance company used **Agile coaching and training in tandem to accelerate success.**

OVERVIEW

One of the major reasons that Agile transformations fail is lack of experience and training. When larger enterprises set out to transition to Agile, they often overlook the fact that development teams can't "become" Agile in a vacuum. According to PRNewswire, **1/3 of Agile projects fail** and the failure rates are even higher in large companies with more complicated structures. Managers and leaders need to create the right environment for Agile teams to thrive.

While experience and training go hand-in-hand, they are not interchangeable. Training is best used as a level-setter—a tool that helps teams understand the fundamentals of Agile techniques, principles, and concepts. Experience is the ability to take these concepts from training and apply them to real, everyday problems. When employees are trained but lack experience, an Agile coach can bridge the gap and help them understand how to adapt Agile principles and techniques to the needs of the project, team, and organization. That's where Excella comes in.



Increased delivery rate

Increased throughput by 75%, using Agile principles to decompose work more effectively, improve focus, reduce multitasking, and deliver more value in each iteration.



Improved predictability

Improved ability to deliver against commitments by 85%. Prior to training and coaching, teams rarely delivered on their commitment for each iteration. Afterwards, commitments were delivered more than three quarters of the time.



Higher quality

The number of defects introduced by teams during each iteration were reduced by over 90%. The teams' delivered commitments were consistently of a higher quality than what they were delivering before training and coaching.

Often, large enterprises set an ambitious goal of transitioning to Agile quickly because they want the benefits—flexibility to adapt to market changes, better visibility, and improved alignment between business and IT—as soon as possible. Those benefits can become more difficult to achieve if they are not coupled with a coherent strategy for Agile adoption.

Setting clear goals at the beginning of a major Agile initiative is essential.

GOALS

The overarching goal of this Fortune 500 Insurance company was to support their Agile adoption by creating a cadre of experienced Agilists (ScrumMasters) within the company who could help their teams work more effectively and grow Agile adoption from the ground up. Because they felt Scrum was the best fit for their teams, they described this project as a “ScrumMaster Pilot.”

Along with creating a group of highly experienced ScrumMasters who could help progress their Agile transformation, the insurance company had other goals that would support their long-term success:



Agile Community of Practice

Create an Agile community of practice, allowing Agilists to share ideas, learn from each other, and improve the art of practice within the organization.



External Agile Coaches

Augment the existing group of internal Agile coaches with other experienced practitioners who could be called upon to help train or coach internal teams.



Coach Managers

Train and coach managers responsible for development teams, so that they could more effectively support and manage Agile development efforts.



Executive Training

Train the executive team so that high-level leaders within the organization would be familiar with Agile and how they could promote its success.

APPROACH

It is possible to accomplish these goals internally, but Agile is a rich body of knowledge, and to make it work effectively requires expertise gained through diverse experience. Internal efforts often fail for a variety of reasons—biases, well-established processes, lack of buy-in, etc.—and the way to overcome these obstacles is to select a partner that has the experience to not only apply the concepts, principles, and methods, but to adapt them to the specific context of your organization. At Excella, we have the experience and skill necessary to do that. Since lack of experience and training is one of the major reasons that Agile transformations fail, we addressed both:

TRAINING

ScrumMasters

Excella provided three rounds of training for the Agilists:

- Certified ScrumMaster (CSM) training, augmented with Kanban material
- Advanced Certified ScrumMaster (A-CSM) training
- A third, custom course designed to focus on specific emergent needs and challenges

Leaders and Managers

Excella provided Agile leadership training to the managers responsible for the Agile teams so they could support the ScrumMasters and the Agile transformation.

Executives

Excella provided training and seminars to high-level leaders of the organization to familiarize them with Agile. These trainings put Agile into context and helped them understand how it would help them achieve organizational goals as well as what it would mean for them going forward.





“ Identify the highest priority and get that work done first, then move on to the next set of ‘most important things’”

–Trent Hone,
Fellow at Excella

EXPERIENCE

ScrumMasters

Since the ScrumMasters came from a variety of internal organizations, we adjusted our coaching to fit with their existing ways of working. Excella provided two different levels of coaching to the ScrumMasters:

Individual

- Individual coaching helped ScrumMasters work through how to apply their new knowledge with their teams and how to overcome obstacles that held them back.
- For those teams operating within a scaling framework, Excella coached on how to align to it, work within it, and get more effective at it.
- Excella coached all ScrumMasters on topics relevant to cross-team collaboration so they could work within their organization more effectively and not just within their team.

Group

- All ScrumMasters worked within certain product areas. On a regular basis, Excella provided coaching to all ScrumMasters and other leaders within a single product area to help ensure their teams were working effectively together and that managers were fostering their collective success.

Leaders and Managers

Excella provided ad hoc coaching to managers and other leaders. This gave them the tools they needed to achieve the goals of creating a cadre of Agile leaders and a group of high-performing Agile teams.

Growing the expertise and knowledge of ScrumMasters and others on Agile teams by utilizing an Agile coach is invaluable because it helps them try new and non-traditional techniques, including [mixing Agile methodologies](#).

For example, several of the Scrum teams experimented with reducing WIP (Work in Progress) during the course of their iterations. Reducing WIP is typically a Kanban practice; it helps to prevent multitasking. Managing WIP is important for Scrum teams because it helps them focus on the most important things first. This prevents the “mini waterfall” that can occur

in a sprint cycle, when all the design occurs at the beginning, the development in the middle, and the testing at the end. When the “mini waterfall” occurs, there is never enough time for testing, and work often carries over into the next sprint—preventing the team from delivering the committed work. By limiting WIP within a sprint, teams can smooth out the flow of their work, get more done (because they’re multitasking less), and create a more sustainable—and more predictable—pace. Several teams took this a step further and transitioned to Kanban once they recognized that method as a better fit for their work.

IMPACT

By providing training and tailored coaching for each of the teams and their ScrumMasters, this Fortune 500 Insurance company reached their goals and then some. There were individual improvements, team improvements, and leadership improvements—moving the entire organization toward a more Agile mindset.



INDIVIDUALS

- Improved skills
- Improved confidence
- A repertoire of techniques for facilitating, coaching, and improving the work of their colleagues and teams
- A community that they can rely upon for support and continual learning



TEAMS

- Delivering more consistently
- Learning more effectively through improved retrospective techniques
- Evolving their processes to be a better fit for their work
- Recognizing the value that Agilists (ScrumMasters & Coaches) bring



LEADERSHIP

- Greater appreciation for the value of Agile and how to do it well
- Better sense of how they can support Agile teams and how Agile can help them achieve organizational goals

NUMBERS

This Fortune 500 Insurance company saw improved soft-skills across all levels of the organization. Teams worked better together. Leaders facilitated cross-team collaboration and started to grow an organizational Agile mindset. However, those weren't the only improvements. Multiple Scrum teams tracked their progress and compared their results before and after the engagement with Excella. They ultimately found that they were able to get more done in the same amount of time with greater predictability and higher quality.

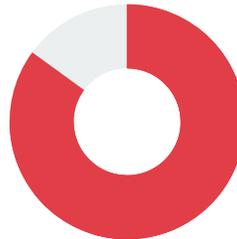
Some Scrum teams experienced a:



75%
Increase in
delivered work
(throughput)

How did they do this?

- Smaller, more specific story slicing
- Reducing WIP
- Better Daily Standups that focused on value, transparency, and a clear sense of upcoming tasks



85%
Improved
predictability
for deliveries

How did they do this?

- Improved cross-team collaboration
- Better estimations of capacity
- More accurate data collection
- Continual improvement efforts guided by ScrumMasters in Retrospectives

This experience is not exclusive to this large Fortune 500 Insurance company. In fact, it happens often, at companies of all sizes and at many stages of an Agile Transformation. Talk to our coaches about creating a specialized approach that helps your teams get both the training they need and the experience we can bring. Contact us about making the most of your training by augmenting it with Agile coaching.

[Learn How Agile Coaching & Training Can Help You](#)