

AMADEUS DTS TRANSFORMS WITH THE HIGHBERG TRANSFORMATION FRAMEWORK

“MANAGING SUCCESSFUL TRANSFORMATIONS”



INTRODUCTION

Since 2018 Highberg has supported the Amadeus Enterprise Agility Program on its Agile transformation journey. The initial collaboration focused on setting up the central Lean-Agile Center of Excellence (LACE), an Agile way of working and creating momentum for the broader Agile transformation.

In 2021 Amadeus Digital Transformation Services (DTS), the internal IT department, with over a thousand resources, led by CIO Santiago Franco, once again, called upon Highberg for the start of its Agile transformation, after the pandemic interrupted earlier collaborations.

DTS is responsible for building and maintaining applications, services and platforms that allow the client-facing Business Lines of Amadeus to provide continuous high levels of value.

DTS joined the Highberg Enterprise Agility Program with the objective of further enhancing and improving: employee satisfaction, time-to-market, quality and reliability of solutions, and transparency.

These parameters are always key to an IT organization, but particularly for DTS, as it's the internal IT partner for all business units and its paramount to measure and highlight the reliability of the organization.

In this whitepaper, we'll dive into the journey that Amadeus DTS has gone through, maturing throughout the different stages of a transformation, aligned with the Highberg-developed, Managing Successful Transformations (MST) framework.

We will describe the actions, learning points and experiences starting with the initiation of the transformation, the validation of the way of working, scaling and accelerating the transformation across more components of DTS, and finally sustaining the change within the organization itself.

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INITIATION PHASE

When initiating a transformation, it's important to spend some time understanding and analyzing the current context within the organization. This means creating an understanding of the current challenges and building the transformational story of why change is needed.

The start of the Agile transformation within DTS found its footing within the Data & Analytics group. The teams, having difficulties managing demands and dependencies, felt the need to further increase transparency, efficiency, and time to market.

Since part of the goal of the initiation phase is to define an MVP and experiment with the change, many of the actions that were performed within Data & Analytics were later performed on a larger scale for the entirety of DTS.

Activities that could be recognized include Value Stream Identification, Lean Portfolio Management (LPM) implementation, implementation of metrics and measurements to measure success, transformation team governance and the set-up of ceremonies and rituals in the organization to support agility within the organization.

Tackling the initial needs of the Data & Analytics group, the objectives, and the signal for the start in the transformation were defined for the entirety of Amadeus DTS.

VALIDATION PHASE

Starting the bigger transformation in DTS, it was important to create governance for the team that will run the transformation. This team can have many different names, the transformation team, the LACE, the Change Team etc.

Within DTS, the team was set up as a Local LACE, executing as a spoke of the Central LACE organization within Amadeus.

This team worked on validating the solution that would tackle the initial challenges and corresponding objectives of the organization.

At this point, Highberg and the Local LACE created the first set-up of the to be situation of the organization. This consisted of a set-up of Value Streams, Value Streams corresponding to Agile Release Trains (ART) or a collection of Agile teams.

The next area of the organization to change their way of working, after the Data & Analytics ART, were the teams focusing on the Order and Billing solutions. As we were validating the transformation in this Value Stream, it was important to focus on engaging the organization, especially those who would be directly involved in the change and sharing the transformation plan through continuous communication.

Order and Billing ART

Performing a light version of the Value Stream Identification workshop with leaders within DTS Order and Billing was imperative. By doing so, sub-streams within the Agile Release Train were created ensuring the people were working in teams focused on creating value.

Here all people who needed to be trained for a specific or new role or in scrum/SAFe methodology were identified and trained. Training people in the new way of working is an essential part of engaging with people to share the benefits of the transformation, give them the required knowledge to change to the new way of working, and to answer their questions and hear any doubts they might have regarding the change.

The next step is to prepare for the first Program Increment Planning (PI Planning). Providing support and coaching to teams and leaders in their preparation ensures a successful first PI Planning and sets the tone for the following PI Planning sessions to come.

The PI planning in this case marked the start of the new way of working for the Order and Billing teams. By the end of the validation phase, we were able to launch the first Order and Billing Playbook, which was the foundation for 'Agile within DTS.'

Introducing Lean Portfolio Management

While the Order and Billing teams were undergoing their change, Lean Portfolio Management (LPM) was introduced at the DTS level.

With this, almost all Value Streams transformed, in transformation or waiting to be transformed, were linked to the DTS LPM.

A Portfolio Kanban is essential for implementing LPM within an organization. To keep things simple, we created a Portfolio Kanban within Microsoft Teams. This allowed us, again, to validate and adjust the Kanban based on what information was needed to make decisions at the portfolio level. Over time, the Kanban developed with additional labels while the governance and way of working within the portfolio team became sharper with hygiene principles, agreements in terms of templates to be used, ceremonies and cadence and finally an LPM Playbook describing the structure, design, and way of working.

The LPM team only discussed and made transparent innovative programs or large projects that the Value Streams were working on.

What was not included was plannable, substantial changes that needed to be worked on by the team and smaller bugs or incidents that needed to be worked on. This caused quite some conflict as not all the work that was being done was represented.

Additional challenges the LPM faced included commitments made to the business without the consensus and alignment from the ARTs.

To address this, we introduced a Value Stream Owner who took on the role of consultant and gatekeeper for their respective Value Stream. They would consult stakeholders on their wishes together with representatives of the Architecture network, but also keep the connection with the LPM organism to report on delivery impediments and collect upcoming prioritized work.

At the end of this phase, we had two full ARTs running and a first working version of the LPM competence. In the following phases it was key to start maturing and scaling the way of working within the Agile transformation towards more areas of the DTS organization.

SCALING PHASE

By 2023, nearly 200 people are now working in Agile. At this point we are entering the Scaling Phase of the transformation journey.

In scaling, the focus is on accelerating the implementation of the way of working to other teams, extending the transformation to the leadership level while monitoring the progress of the transformation.

We have reached the point what we like to call: jumping the chasm, in which we no longer restrict the transformation to the specific teams, but we jump the chasm towards the full system. This includes leadership, governance, funding, and HR (Human Resources).

DTS Leadership

Engaging with the DTS leadership team about the importance of its role in the transformation helped everyone to understand that a successful transformation does not only hinge on teams changing their way of working and behavior but also hinges on leadership transforming too.

This initiated improvements in the way of working within the leadership team as well as their role in managing and shaping the organization as the vehicle that achieves strategic objectives.

Maturing and accelerating the implementation

During the Scaling Phase, it is good practice to reevaluate the set-up of the Transformation Team and transformation governance to fit the size and scaling of the new design.

Adjustments to key processes and structures in the organization were made to fit the new way of working while more value streams and teams were on the Agile working model including Data, Integration, Finance and People. This meant that more Agile coaches were trained and getting acquainted with the first version of the "transformation playbook", which outlined essential steps and prerequisites for transforming teams and their way of working.

The Local LACE moved to being an Agile team itself, including a quarterly planning, refinement, sprint goals and retrospectives as well as the collaboration with the Central LACE as DTS executed its transformation as an independent spoke in the Enterprise Agility Program.

We kept improving the ways of working in the LPM competence and decided to take the next step to provide an integral overview of the upcoming, current, and finished initiatives by moving the LPM Kanban towards JIRA.

By the end of the Scaling Phase, the groundwork for sustaining the transformation had been laid, making the conditions ripe for Highberg to soon step out of the transformation.

SUSTAIN PHASE

The last six months of the Amadeus DTS and Highberg collaboration was geared towards Highberg leaving DTS with the tools, knowledge, and experience to continue and sustain its transformation journey.

Activities in the sustain phase vary widely in different organizations as it is up to the Transformation Team to understand what still needs to be improved and what needs to be implemented for the organization to sustain the transformation.

We had to solve two main problems for Amadeus DTS: how to increase our capacity to transform and implement the value streams in the Transformation roadmap, and how to transfer knowledge and skills to the Local LACE members to continue tackling transformative challenges.

We also wanted to reassess the Value Stream structure of DTS and create a single source of truth for the Agile Blueprint in DTS.

Increase capacity to keep accelerating the transformation

We created a structure of task forces to deal with the capacity issue when Highberg would depart and to work on the remaining implementation while staying focused on solving concerns raised by leadership.

These task forces included members of the Local LACE and people from the organization who were eager to help and lead the Agile transformation in a specific topic. Examples such as the LPM competence, Benefit tracking, Supplier collaboration and Communication & Change were important task forces that would help the Local LACE create an engaged support base in the organization as well as increasing their 'striking power'.

These taskforces were steered by the Agile transformation roadmap that was being built which is similar to an ART with an ART roadmap for the attentive reader. This roadmap was subjective to continuous prioritization and refinement between the leadership team and the Local LACE, to make sure we worked on the most imminent challenges and keep leadership actively engaged in the transformation.

Transfer needed knowledge and skills

To transfer all the necessary knowledge and skills, a series of topic-oriented workshops were given to the Local LACE, but also to the extended team of specific roles in the Value Streams. Combining these theoretical sessions with practices such as the Value Stream Reassessment, workshops for Value Streams and much more made sure we moved most of the weight in the transformation towards the Local LACE members. Meanwhile, Highberg moved more towards the background, fulfilling the role of coach rather than the role of consultant.

As one of the final deliverables, the Local LACE created with Highberg the start of the Target Operating Model, which describes how DTS was operating from Strategy to Execution in the Value Streams. It became the blueprint on how certain ceremonies, roles and definitions were used within DTS. Questions or gaps derived from the Target Operating Model were also important input for the task forces to tackle.

CONCLUSION

Reflecting on the collaboration between Amadeus and Highberg, we fully utilized what the MST framework offers. This involves making practical decisions when the opportunity arises to incorporate certain steps as well as postponing some parts, when necessary, too.

For us, this characterizes the nature of transformations where you cannot just follow a plan but are always seeking the most value at that moment in time.

The collaboration evaluation showed that the transformation had some effects in the organization. Compared to other organizations within Amadeus, DTS employees were more satisfied with Agile practices in the Central LACE's yearly global survey. Also, the way of working between the Local LACE of DTS and the leadership has strongly improved their awareness of managing the system compared to the more siloed departments. By introducing the task forces, this system itself became more in a way that the transformation became everyone's responsibility rather than the sole for the Local LACE, creating an environment of decentralized ownership. The LPM brought better visibility of the big change initiatives but also on their lifecycle, throughput, and benefit tracking.

The organization is in control and in the full ability to run the transformation by itself. While this means that things are still challenging and not everything will go according to plan it is equipped with the ability to deal with that and define a solution that will work best for DTS.

We look back on a most enjoyable and fruitful collaboration, which made working with Amadeus much more than just a professional connection.

