Leadership @ Spotify

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The right music for every moment
40M active users.
10M paying subscribers.
1.5B playlists.
56 countries.
5 dev sites.
3 timezones.
500+ devs.
Scaling Agile @ Spotify

with Tribes, Squads, Chapters & Guilds

Henrik Kniberg & Anders Ivansson
Oct 2012

Dealing with multiple teams in a product development organization is always a challenge!

One of the most impressive examples we’ve seen so far is Spotify, which has kept an agile mindset despite having scaled to over 30 teams across 3 cities.

Spotify is a fascinating company that is transforming the music industry. The company has only existed 6 years and already has over 15 million active users and over 4 million paying. The product itself can be likened to “a magical music player in which you can instantly find and play every song in the world”.

Alistair Cockburn (one of the founding fathers of agile software development) visited Spotify and said “Nice - I’ve been looking for someone to implement this matrix format since 1992 :) so it is really welcome to see.”

Scaling Agile @ Spotify

• Released oct 2012
• Presented at Agile 2013
• Many questions around leadership
• How do you make decisions?
The best organizational structure. Ever.

No Problems Model™

* Everyone working at the right thing, at the right moment in the right way. No structure. No communication. No problems.
Any act in support of these is an act of leadership.
Product Owner

- What do we do – and why?
- Product vision
- Squad mission
- Purpose
- Alignment
- Support the squad
Product Owner framework

- Working with the world
- Working with the product
- Working with the squad
- Working with the process
Product Owner

Example

How we created an artist page roadmap together
Agile Coach

- Grow high performing teams
- Continuous improvement
- Ways of working
- Collaboration
- Agile and lean practices and values
- Grow a high performing organization

Levels of agile coaching. The agile coaching institute
We definitely do the basics...
1 on 1 coaching

- Team members
- Product owners
- Chapter leads
- Senior management
Squad **roadmapping**

- Group of coaches came up with new visualization
- Ran workshops with all squads in a tribe
Continuous delivery

- Maturity workshops
- Big cultural shift
- Cross tribe initiative
Chapters

Chapter

Chapter

Squad  Squad  Squad  Squad
Chapter Lead

- Grow individuals
- Grow engineering culture
- Support the squads
- Hire the right people
Chapter Lead

Examples
- Dev practices
- Tech backlog and tech debt
- Hiring
Chapter Lead

Common patterns
- 50/50
- Prioritize squad
- Bumble-bee
- All-in
High-performing squads

TEAM DYNAMICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust and structure</th>
<th>Dependency and inclusion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work and productivity</td>
<td>Counter-dependency and fight</td>
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RESULT DRIVEN ACTIVITIES

- Lean & Agile methods
- Innovation
- Quality
- Value
- Speed
IMGD – Integrative Model of Group Development

Trust and structure

Counter.Dependency and fight

Work and productivity

Dependency and inclusion
Characteristics:

1. Endless discussions
2. Counter-dependency and fight
3. Trust and structure
4. Work and productivity

- Polite
- Cautious
- Avoiding conflict
- Depending on leader
- Endless discussions
Counter-dependency and fight

Trust and structure

Characteristics:

- Questioning the leader and the goals
- People profiling themselves
- People trying to convince of "their way"
- Conflicts
- People don't listen to each other
- Competition
- Rather attack than support

Work and productivity

Dependency and inclusion
Trust and structure

Dependency and inclusion

Counter-dependency and fight

Work and productivity

Characteristics:

Clarity around goals

Conflicts handled

Openness

Consideration and care

Listening

Playfulness

Clarity around goals

Conflicts handled

Openness

Consideration and care

Listening

Playfulness
Characteristics:

1. Clarity around goals, roles and responsibility
2. Effective communication and handling of conflicts
3. Strong feedback culture
4. Engagement

Trust and structure
Counter-dependency and fight
Dependency and inclusion
Work and productivity

Warmth and connection
Awareness of improvement possibilities
### High-performing squads

#### TEAM DYNAMICS

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#### RESULT DRIVEN ACTIVITIES

- Lean & Agile methods
- Innovation
- Quality
- Value
- Speed
Squad autonomy

What?

How?
Autonomy vs. Alignment
Autonomy vs. Alignment

- Authoritative
  - organization
  - Conformist
  - culture

- Micromanager
  - organization
  - Indifferent
  - culture

- Innovative
  - organization
  - Collaborative
  - culture

- Entrepreneurial
  - organization
  - Chaotic
  - culture
Example:
Ongoing experiment with Priorities
Squad support

How can we support our squad?

Product Owner
Chapter (Team) lead
Agile Coach

"POTLAC"
Supporting squad autonomy

Be a good citizen in the Spotify ecosystem!
Balance these:

1. Benefit Spotify as a whole
2. Serve the squad’s mission and OKR:s
Example: Dominating individuals in a squad

1. Give feedback
2. Improve team dynamics
3. Reinforce feedback culture
4. Nurture informal leadership
Example:
A squad is growing too big

1. Draft new missions
2. Facilitate squad split
3. Support individuals
4. Kick-off new squads
Leadership teams

- Strong leadership team
- Good manager
- Dysfunctional leadership team
- Bad manager
Leadership – everyone!

- Leadership is an act, not a role – everybody is a leader
- Informal leadership is the backbone of a strong squad
- Leadership guild ¼ of the tech/prod organization
Tribes
Tribe Lead

- High-performing tribe
- Grow strong chapter leads
- Coach the agile coaches
- Build a strong tribe leadership team
The reporting structure

- CTO
  - Tribe lead
    - Chapter lead
      - Engineer
    - Chapter lead
      - Engineer
    - Agile coaches
  - Tribe lead
  - Tribe lead

- CPO
  - VP Product
    - Product Owner
  - VP Product
    - Product Owner
The reporting structure supporting
Organic structure

If you need to know exactly who is making decisions, you are in the wrong place.
Tribe Leadership Team

Tribe lead, CL, PO, AC

Examples
- Recruitment / onboarding
- Grow high-performance teams
- Culture
- Tribe WIP
- Alignment
Example: Leadership post-mortem

Pressure and stress spreads, and drives bad behaviors

Post-mortem – breakdown of leadership

Improvements
• Multiple stakeholder channels
• Share pressure within lead team
• Continuous delivery
• No Friday releases
How do we know how we’re doing?
A recent model
An Example...

Squad Health Check Q4 - Tribe X

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Team A</th>
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<th>Team D</th>
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Maslow

- Self-actualization
- Self-esteem
- Belonging
- Safety
- Physiological
Maslow

- Physiological – kickass work environment
Maslow

We aim to make mistakes faster than anyone else.

- Safety – no fear culture, embrace failure
Maslow

• Belonging – social events, strong teams, tribes...
Maslow

- Self-actualization
- Self-esteem

are very important

BUT don’t forget – no fish air
Values ➔ Culture ➔ Org Structure

Empowerment ➔ Autonomy ➔ Squads
Trust ➔ Servant leadership ➔ Chapters
Collaboration ➔ Teamwork ➔ Teams on all levels
Summary

Org structure  < formal leaders  < informal leadership  < culture and values
Thank you!

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