
ACCOUNTABLE AGILITY

How to manage the performance of an agile coaching service



Agile Coaching / Agility Enablement and accountability for outcomes

Agile adoption is now mainstream. The most recent State of Agile Report indicates that 94% of organisations are in some way using agile to get work done. Next, is the trend to move from Agile (framework implementation usually within technology) to agility (delivering more value more often as a business). To make this transition *from Agile to agility* requires a fit-for-purpose, high-performing agile coaching, or agility enablement service. For the remainder of this paper, I will refer to agility enablement services, but the contents of this paper apply equally to an agile coaching service; so please view the two terms as interchangeable as you read through this document.

But how do we measure the impact of these services and manage the performance of the practitioners that deliver them; that's the topic of this paper.

How do we design the best-fit agility enablement service?

In over a decade of building agile coaching capability for some of the largest transformation programs in Australasia, Source has identified some key elements that an agile coaching or agility enablement service should consider in order to impact how an organisation works. Ensuring that these elements are in place and being measured is critical to manage the performance of any agility enablement service.

In the following pages, we detail how categorising and adopting clear *measures* of performance for your agility enablement service can help all parties. These *measures* can then be used by practitioners, internal customers of the service and sponsors of agility to align on the expected outcomes. Having a performance management approach for your agility enablement service helps everyone know what a 'good' service looks like:

- The internal customers of the service will have clarity on what to expect (what they will get and experience)
- Those managing the service/leading the agile coaching team will be accountable for a set of agreed outcomes for the service and can manage the coaching/enablement team's performance
- Those delivering the service will know what constitutes performance and will have a 'scoreboard' to measure if their work is delivering value (or not).

Source Agility defines five key **focus areas** that underpin an effective agility enablement service. We see these areas as mandatory for every coaching/enablement engagement. It is expected that the practitioners delivering the coaching/enablement service would have knowledge and experience in each of the **focus areas** and be able to execute any *associated practices*.

At Source, we either provide (1) practitioners who are able to execute any of the *associated practices* or (2) we support our clients' teams to ensure any *skills gap in the practice* are filled.

The five performance FOCUS AREAs of an agility enablement service

Our work across both Agile change and business agility has shown us that five **focus areas** keep coming up. These areas can be measured and tracked to improve the chances of an agility enablement service delivering the right outcomes. The five **focus areas** are summarised in Figure 1 and explained further in this section. They include: leader's mindset and behaviour, visibility and maturity of the system, delivery of change into the system, delivery of value by the system and, enablement team learning and responsiveness.

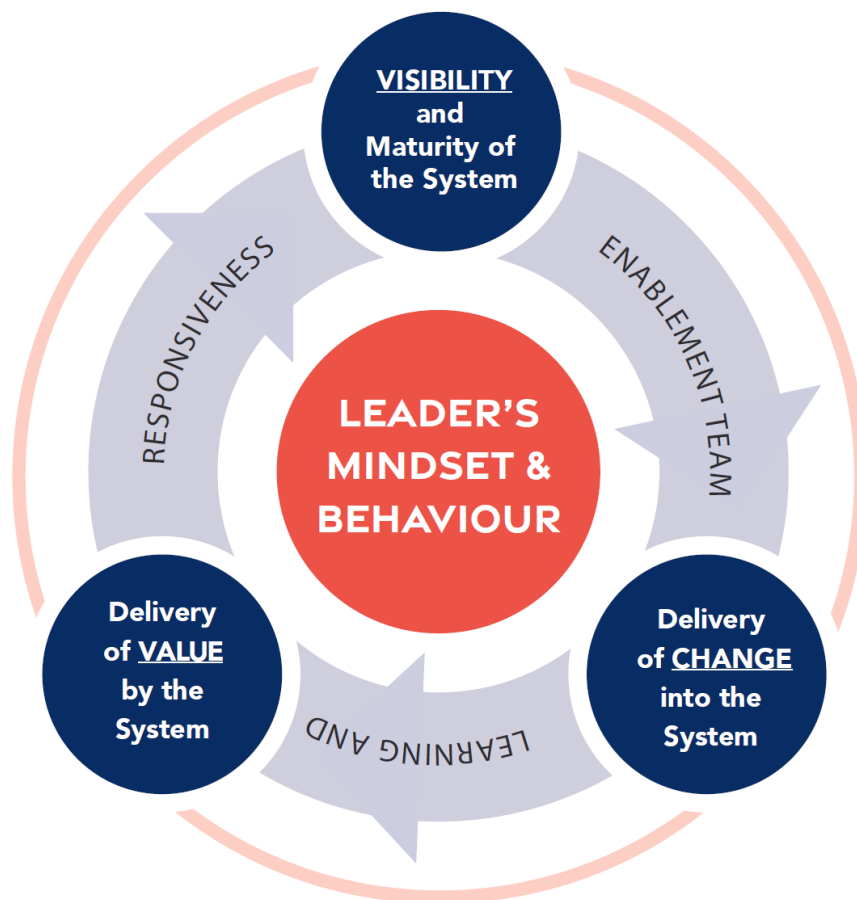


Figure 1: Accountable Agility Systems™ overview - five focus areas

Agile practitioners are often deployed into an engagement without full consideration of how they are set up to successfully enable change. Foundational questions are not asked which are pivotal to the success of the required outcomes. Let's go through an example of how to utilise the above **focus areas** to help those leading agile coaching/agility enablement teams to align on outcomes, team competencies, and customer expectations.

The central red circle in Figure 1 is larger as it represents a critical enabler of all other categories. The leader

of an agile coaching/agility enablement service uses the “Leader’s mindset and behaviour” focus area as a prompt to ask themselves a simple question:

“Are my coaches being invited in to work one-on-one with our leaders giving them the opportunity to influence mindset and behaviour?”

In this example, the focus area can then be assessed as a metric, a set of expected coaching competencies and an indication of what the customer can expect:

- The leading performance *measure* would be “% of leaders engaged actively in coaching conversations”.
- The competency expected of the coach is the “ability to conduct conversations that influence mindset and behaviour”.
- The leader should expect that coaching conversations are part of the service provided by the enablement team.

Let’s now go through each of the **focus areas** and ask ourselves some challenge questions.

Using the Accountable Agility System™ as prompt – a guided challenge

Going through each of the **focus areas**, let's pose a series of "challenge" questions we can ask ourselves as we design and deliver an agility enablement service. For clarity, we use the word "current system" below in reference to the how work is currently delivered (gets done) including people, processes and tools used to operate the business that seeks higher levels of agility.

1. Leader's Mindset and Behaviour

This is the foundation upon which all the other elements rest and depend on. Without the coaches being invited into ongoing conversations with the sponsors/leaders in a system then the change program is at risk. The challenge question to be asked here is...

Do you know which leaders are supporters of the change and who are resistant to change?

2. System Visibility and Maturity

We see many agile coaches who commence work without taking the time to make visible the as-is operating model, delivery processes and status of in-flight work. The challenge question here is...

"Does your coaching/enablement service ensure that the current system is visible (so it can be inspected)?"

3. Delivery of Change into the System

Attempting to implement a new way of working into the same structures can be compared to "putting new wine into old bottles". The challenge question here is...

"Are your coaches using data to implement structural and process change to improve delivery efficiency?"

4. Delivery of Value by the System

Making and keeping promises on when a customer (external or internal) will receive the outcomes of delivery is an important part of building trust in the agile way of working. The challenge question here is...

“Does the agile coaching/agility enablement team have data to support the calculation of delivery predictability?”

5. Coaching and Enablement Team Culture

The last **focus area** is often overlooked. It is not uncommon for the agile coaching /agility enablement team to have a somewhat fixed idea on what they do, their role in the change program and what they are accountable for. The challenge question here is...

“Is the team delivering the coaching/enablement service collectively aligned on their outcomes?”

How to use these questions to start a conversation and align on a set of agreed outcomes and performance measures

The intention when asking these questions is to co-design and then co-create an agreed set of outcomes that practitioners, internal clients and leaders agree on. The set of outcomes should be representative of the impacts expected from an agility enablement service.

When we facilitate discussions using this model, we find that it helps to tease out the impediments or blockers stopping anyone reaching agreement on shared *measures of performance*. The model underpins an agility enablement ‘scorecard’.

We recommend that the questions are put to all stakeholders during a formal facilitated workshop ensuring psychological safety and candor from all parties involved.

Next, we expand on how these questions can help highlight the competency required of the team delivering the agility enablement service. Using the **focus areas** in combination with the challenge questions is a great

way of conducting performance reviews and development conversations with the agile practitioners who deliver the agility enablement service.

A note about the coaching or enablement team culture

How the agility enablement team learns and responds to change as they work is often an additional **focus area** when seeking to design and deliver a high-performance service. If the agile practitioners delivering the service are not continuously evolving, then experience has shown us that the team starts to become part of the problem. Instead of resolving impediments to the adoption of agility, the coaching/enablement team become institutionalised and fixed in their view of what agility means. So, in addition to the above **focus areas**, it is useful to check if the coaching/enablement team has a positive, growth mindset towards learning and improving what they do and how they do it (as a team).

Skills and competencies required to deliver enablement outcomes

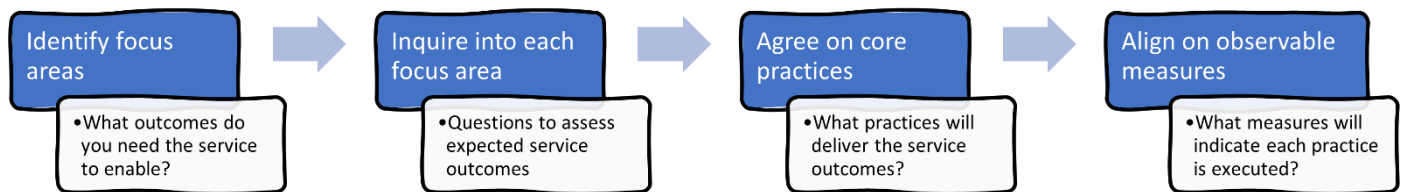
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If some of your answers to the above challenge questions were NO, then this provides you with some guidance on where to uplift your service. But before we can lift the performance of the service, it is important to get more specific on the steps required to create an accountable agile coaching service. Let's use a case study to bring this to life.

A case study example on how to implement the Accountable Agility System™

Let's go through an example of how to create an accountable agile coaching service using this system. The flow shown below represents the steps to take if you are aiming to create a set of executable *practices* that enable the right outcomes in the **focus areas** that clients need addressing.



The challenge

A client of ours asked for a team of agile coaches to come and uplift their business agility. Following interviews across the business, including the CEO, it became clear that the root cause of 80% of the delivery challenges was a lack of delivery predictability. The customers of this organization had lost confidence in the delivery system's ability to deliver the value that it had promised and to deliver it by the time that it was promised. This became our highest priority **focus area**.

The problem statement

Once we knew where to focus our efforts, we then conducted interviews with members of the team doing the work, as well as agile practitioners in the organisation. Using our assessment tool, we collected information about what our agile coaching service was to achieve in much more detail. For example, we discovered the following:

- Delivery data (Jira) was patchy and not being used
- The current operating model was well documented, but no future state existed
- There were many impediments to being able to estimate the work consistently
- No measures were in place to know capacity to take on work

Insights – how we helped the client identify what needed to be done

Once we had the most important focus area and additional details on the current challenges, we agreed on the *practices* required to enable the change process to start. Given delivery predictability required data and a consistent application of some processes across the teams, we agreed on the following *practices* for the coaching team:

1. Propose a new design for the end-to-end delivery processes
2. Implement practices to ensure data is available on delivery predictability
3. Make visible in the work management tool (JIRA) all work in progress

This formed our coaching backlog and ensured all coaches were aligned on both the **focus area** and the set of *practices* that we can measure the execution of. It is important to understand that the coaching team co-created the *practices* and the associated *accountability measures*; this was not imposed upon them. In effect they built their own scorecard so they could be held accountable to deliver the agreed enablement outcomes.

The solution

A month after this engagement commenced if the CEO were to walk in and ask the coaching team this question, then they'd have the expected answers

“Show me the current system, how it works and give me some data to know how predictable the delivery system is”

Each of the *practices* the team were executing were related *measures of accountability*; see below for the measures involved in this case study:

Practice	Indication of execution	Measure
1. Propose a new end-to-end delivery process	A process map showing how the system works including policies and rules	Document prepared and regularly updated
2. Implement practices to ensure data is available on delivery predictability	An agreed approach to measure delivery velocity and the achievement of team objectives	Approach implemented and providing data for use in calculating predictability
3. Make visible in the work management tool (JIRA) all work in progress	JIRA workflows and work lifecycle designed	Implementation and adoption of JIRA workflows; all work is visible

The results

Working as an agile coaching team of three, a new operating model was designed and adopted across 7 agile teams together with a lean portfolio process and JIRA data model implementation. With our 'north star' defined as "delivery predictability", the coaching team was able to always know their top priority when selecting the next change intervention from the backlog. Data was becoming available to utilize for planning purposes whilst top-down capacity planning was able to be done.

At Source we have a standard set of five **focus areas** and *associated practices* that we utilise in combination with any additional focus area that the client is aiming to improve. We assess any engagement against this common set of **focus areas** and then agree on what *practices* and *measures* would hold the agile coaching service accountable for the outcomes expected.

Most of this approach seems common sense, but in our experience, it is rare to see such an approach implemented consistently. It is common for teams of agile coaches to approach problems in different ways with varying practices; this is ok as long as all efforts are aligned to the delivery of agreed enablement outcomes. We suggest *practices* should also be agreed to and that the team co-design how each practice is executed. Agreeing on the outcomes, co-designing the practices and how practices are executed support a more consistent experience for clients. It helps coaches learn from each other whilst maintaining coaching quality. We encourage you to experiment with this approach for your next agile coaching engagement.

Building a performance scorecard for your agility enablement service

At Source we are often brought in to establish an agile coaching team or agility enablement service. Upon discovery, we usually encounter a range of competency levels amongst the incumbent practitioners. Some are highly skilled in one area and others have different strengths. We believe it takes a team of agile specialists with a variety of skills to deliver an impactful service. This means that having a clear map of who can (and can't) execute specific *practices* is critical if the agility enablement service is to deliver the expected outcomes.

We recommend mapping the diversity of skills required to achieve the coaching outcomes by using our approach: identifying performance **focus areas** for your agile coaching service and, agree on *associated core practices*. These *practices* can then be assessed for the practitioners delivering the service prior to them commencing a coaching engagement. Unfortunately, many coaches are not trained or lack competence in how to execute one or multiple *core practices* expected from most agile coaching services.

At Source, we suggest that a quick audit of your current team and the service they provide should be undertaken to ascertain competency gaps. You can then prepare development plans and/or go to market and recruit the required skills into your workforce.

An example of the audits we undertake is shown in Figure 2. Such artefacts help leaders of agile coaching or agility centres of excellence to support their teams to learn the required competencies, align all stakeholders on the expected outcomes, and provide a 'scorecard' on how the service is performing.



Figure 2: Example of an audit report

Final words/conclusion

Having a scorecard for your agile coaching or agility enablement service is important in order to manage it. Whatever you put in place to monitor and measure how well your service is performing, it should contain hard metrics that support insights, learning and continuous improvement both for the service and for the team delivering it.

If you are interested in learning more about how to audit your service and how to prepare a performance scorecard, please reach out to our team for a personalised conversation.

In the meantime, ask yourself and your team the challenge questions, discuss and try to draw up the set of measures that indicates whether your agile coaching or agility enablement service is delivering the outcomes expected of it.



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info@sourceagility.com.au

ph: 1800 577 467

www.sourceagility.com.au

