Transformation Vs Adoption

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Abstract

"All models are wrong, but some are useful" : George Box

This report is about how we realized and changed the pattern and strategy of our organizational Agile transformation. After Learning from Michael Sahota book, we realized that we were doing an adoption; not transformation. This report is intended to help the reader to identify and differentiate between Transformation and Adoption. Many change agents and companies are using this term interchangeably.

Challenges

"If the only tool you have is hammer, all problems will look like a nail to you!" Our approach was little similar in nature. We were using only Scrum initially and for all the teams, no matter how challenging their business and requirement collection, we installed Scrum practices. This was inviting lot of resistance from the teams. Our approach was not to help the team to perform better by addressing their challenges, instead we were doing a blind installation of Scrum.

Adoption and Transformation

Adoption changes only what you do, Transformation changes what you are. In other words, "Learning how to make a decent coffee is adoption ; Becoming a barista is a transformation." To do a transformation one need to understand the current culture, apply different models, adapt new ideas to fit in traditional contexts, shorten feedback cycles, address both the people and their environment, oscillate between continuous change and radical change, and experiment in safe-to-fail ways. Following a process or framework because it helped your competitor may result in an adoption.

The Journey

Our perspective changed when we read and discussed about the book " An Agile Adoption and Transformation Survival Guide" by Michael Sahota. We did lot of related reading and learnings. (Ex: Kanban and Scrum - Making the Most of Both, Lean from the Trenches - Managing Large Scale Projects with Kanban by Henrik Kniberg, Case studies from Spotify, Kanban: Successful Evolutionary Change for Your Technology Business by David Anderson, Theory of constraints, etc.)

We hardly considered the culture of the organization as an influencing factor. At times we discounted the fact that our job is more of mindset change. We realized that we were doing an Adoption of certain practices or framework and not a Transformation.

After learning Schneider model (image given below) we realized the importance of culture and its role in transformation success. Inspired by this new awareness, we decided to revive our transformation model.
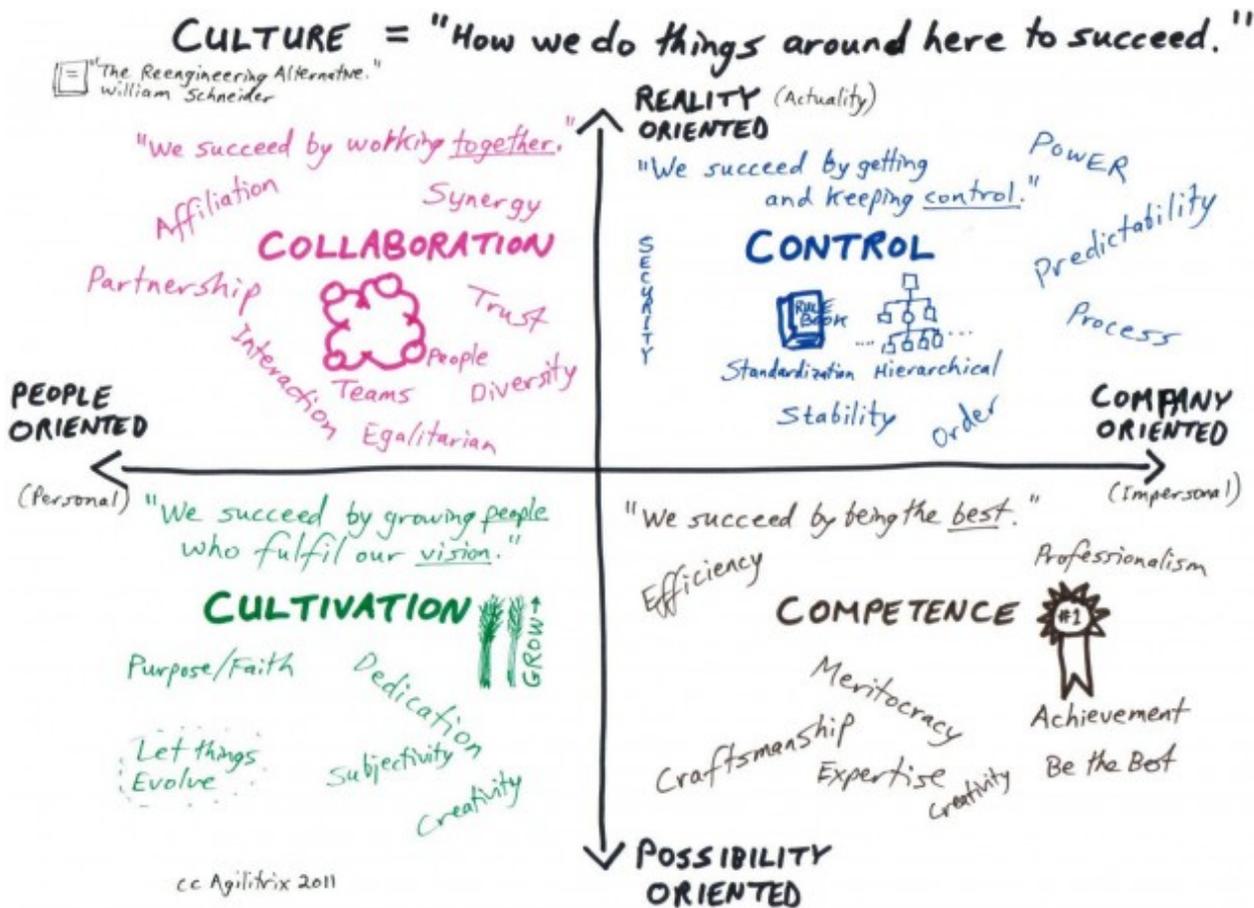
The Schneider Culture Model defines four distinct cultures,
1.   Collaboration culture is about working together
2.   Control culture is about getting and keeping control
3.   Competence culture is about being the best

4.   Cultivation culture is about learning and growing with a sense of purpose.

We started looking at our culture! We realised that the culture of the company is part of our DNA and it does influence our activities directly or indirectly. We understood that as Peter Drucker says "Culture… is singularly persistent".
We also learned that there is no right or wrong culture, there will be advantages and disadvantages for every culture. Depending on the type of business and other factors, the culture may vary. We identified couple of different approaches and patterns initially. We chose the most popular one which is, "Keep it Agile".

When we approached the project teams, we will assess them on different dimensions and one of the derived factor was culture. The assessment is designed to identify the prominent culture among the 4 dimensions "Collaboration, Control, Cultivation and Competence".

With respect to the cultural quadrant, the transformation strategy is defined and designed. The teams are actively involved in all the decision making. At this time the the coach will introduce the basics of different frameworks (Scrum, Kanban and Scrumban) to the team. The coach will create awareness among the team members about the connection between culture and frameworks (Scrum = Collaboration + Cultivation , Kanban = Control, XP = Competence, Scrumban = Control + Collaboration). In ideal situation the coach will facilitate the selection of framework by the team.

The coach or change agent will work with the teams to evolve the corresponding practices such as suitable estimation, visual management, other ceremonies, etc.. The coaches ensure that he/she will introduce changes in a sustainable way. Big bang approach is not entertained.

This process helped us to create strong bonding with the team. The teams had full ownership in what they are doing. Since they are selecting the right suitable framework, they exhibit high level of ownership and commitment. The role of the coach is to facilitate and enable the teams.

Summary

It is been one year since we are following this approach. After this change we have seen a good amount of buy-in from the teams. We have worked with 60 + project teams globally. Most of them responded "At least now we are not living someone else's agenda". The Agile competence center also felt that we are more close to being agile now!