Alignment at Scale
or How to Not become Totally Unagile when you have Lots of Teams
keynote, Agile Africa, Johannesburg
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Consultant
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Organizational Refactorist

Dad

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Author

Lean from the Trenches

Scrum and XP from the Trenches
Not too hard

Henrik Kniberg
A bit trickier
This doesn’t scale

WTF!

?!?!?

Hey!!

Huh?

#@%&?!

Henrik Kniberg
WTF! You guys are building a BRIDGE?

WTF! You guys are building a TUNNEL?
Common reaction

Someone needs to take charge!
Alignment & Autonomy

False dichotomy

Alignment

Do what I say!

Autonomy

Do whatever

Henrik Kniberg
Alignment enables Autonomy

High Alignment

Authoritative organization
Conformist culture

Micromanaging organization
Indifferent culture

Entrepreneurial organization
Chaotic culture

Low Alignment

Aligned Autonomy!

We need to cross the river
Build a bridge!

We need to cross the river
Figure out how!

Hope someone is working on the river problem...

Low Autonomy

High Autonomy

Henrik Kniberg
Ingredients for Alignment at Scale
Ingredient 1: Shared purpose
The magic question: “What are you working on, and why?”

Henrik Kniberg

We're working on X. Because Sam said it's important.

We're working on X. Because we think it's going to give impact Y, which matters to the company because of Z.

We're working on X. Because we feel like it.

We're working on X. Because we don't feel like it anymore.

We're done when Sam is OK with it.

We're done when the metrics have moved.
Alignment at different levels

We’re working on the same product

We’re working for the same company!

We’re working on the same feature
Chain of purposes

We’re gathering wood

We’re creating a foundation

... so that we can build a bridge

... so that people can cross the river

... so that we can connect the two villages

... so that we make life easier for everyone!
Ingredient 2: Transparency

Shared Purpose

Transparency
Example

North Star goals
- active users
- world class employer

Company Beliefs

Company Bet
- Launch in Country A

Company Bet
- Build new product capability B

Henrik Kniberg
Bet = alignment point
Company Bets Board
visible to everyone

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Henrik Kniberg
Each bet has a 2-page brief
DIBB – an argument framework

**Data** ⇒ **Insight** ⇒ **Belief** ⇒ **Bet**

**How people listen to music**
- Mobile users are overtaking desktop users as primary music gadget.
- We have very few mobile devs compared to desktop.

**WTF** we’re optimized for the wrong thing!
- For long term survival, we need to become mobile-first.

**Bet**
- Hire a bunch of mobile devs.
- Train a bunch of our desktop devs into mobile devs.
- Build infrastructure for iterating fast on mobile.

**Feedback loop**

Henrik Kniberg
How early can you notice this happening?

WTF! You guys are building a BRIDGE?

WTF! You guys are building a TUNNEL?
Dependency board
who needs what from whom & when?
Early detection of dependency problems
A centralized tool to enable decentralized behaviour
Scrum of Scrums

Henrik Kniberg
Ingredient 3: Feedback loops

- Shared Purpose
- Transparency
- Feedback loops
Agile is like a homing missile

Henrik Kniberg
Single team feedback loops

- Unit tests
- Daily Standup
- Retrospective
- Continuous Integration

Sprint review
Multi-team feedback loops

Cross team sync, retro, etc

Whole Product review
Pattern: Integration Cadence

Spotify "Friday Demo"
Alignment as a social event

Henrik Kniberg & Eik Thyrsted Brandsgård
Bi-monthly alignment event
Full day, 20 teams, 150 people

Henrik Kniberg & Eik Thyrgst Brandsgårđ
Demo video – what have we accomplish since last time?

Henrik Kniberg & Eik Thyrsted Brandsgård
Team breakouts
Team board
Impact-based objectives

1. Enable corporate HR to promote jobs at LEGO on the new LEGO Careers web experience by the end of PI5.

2. Enable LEGO House to administer LEGO Inside Tours sign ups through their own website by November 1st.

Stretch objectives

To improve Scrum process with regards to testing/quality by initiating test automation implementation for regression testing on new projects.

Risks

- Career US Visual Assets
- LTI: Formative project

Deliverables per sprint

- Careers
- Career US Visual Assets
Draft plan "fair"
4 short presentation rounds, rotate after each
Pattern: Plan on a cadence, release on demand

Henrik Kniberg & Eik Thyrded Brandsgård
Ingredient 4: Clear priorities

- Shared Purpose
- Transparency
- Feedback loops
- Clear priorities
So much to do...

- Launch in Country A
- Build new product capability B
- Innovate on C
- Build infrastructure for D

Henrik Kniberg
High-Medium-Low = a broken way of prioritizing

HIGH prio
- Launch in Country A
- Build new product capability B
- Innovate on C
- Build infrastructure for D

MEDIUM prio

LOW prio
-
Only ONE thing gets to be priority one!

Launch in Country A
Innovate on C
Build infrastructure for D
Build new product capability B

If we only can do one of these two things, which one would we do? Why?
All bets are stack ranked

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<tr>
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Last Strategy Team meeting: March 21
Next Strategy Team meeting: June 15
Company Bets Prioritization Process

We have done the experimenting, we have learned, and we’re ready to build it for the world. It’s fully funded, plans are clear and we can predict with reasonable confidence what impact the bet may have.

We’re experimenting with different ways to create value with an opportunity we’ve identified so we can build the right thing, the right way, at the right time.

We believe there’s an opportunity to drive toward our Mission and Vision, and we’re investigating it's true, and how much we should invest in it.
Higher level priorities inform lower level priorities

Company Bets Board

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Tribe X Bet Board

Now | Next | Later |
--- |------|-------|
1   | 2    | 3     |
2   | 2    |       |
3   | 4    |       |

Tribe Y Bet Board

Now | Next | Later |
--- |------|-------|
1   | 1    | 1     |
2   | 2    | 1     |
3   | 3    |       |
4   | 4    |       |

Content, Revenue, Marketing, etc

Henrik Kniberg
Stack-ranked bets make it easier to decide what to work on

#1 Bet
Sony Playstation Integration

#2 Bet
Innovate on Running

Tools / infrastructure

Support

Henrik Kniberg
Squads are still responsible for figuring out how to make best use of their time.
- Bet Boards & DIBBs provide context

Hey, we need your help

Hey, you need to upgrade to the new build server

North star goals

User data

Backlog

Now

Next

Later

Company Bets

TPD Bets

Tribe Bets

Henrik Kniberg
Team breakout: Pulling from the program backlog

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Team breakout: Pulling from the program backlog

Program backlog

Team 1

Team 2

Team 3

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Team breakout: Pulling from the program backlog (digital version)
Management review / problem solving

Henrik Kniberg & Eik Thyrsted Brandsgård
Ingredient 5: Organizational Learning

- Shared Purpose
- Transparancy
- Feedback loops
- Clear priorities
- Organizational Learning

Alignment

Henrik Kniberg
Everything can improve

- Velocity
- Motivation
- Focus
- Quality
- Customer communication
- Release capability
- ......
Too busy to improve?
Need more slack in your system!

Can’t you see?
I’m BUSY!
Where slack comes from

Pull scheduling

=> Non-full plans

Spare capacity!

Culture that promotes learning over busy-ness

Scheduled slack (retrospectives, etc)

Henrik Kniberg
How does learning spread across teams?

- Lunch 'n learn
- Cross-team retrospective
- Embedding / team changes
Don’t go overboard with stable teams

Henrik Kniberg

Team stability

100% stable teams

- Efficient teams!
- Silos!
- Slow organizational learning!

Mostly stable teams

OK I’m joining your team

+ Efficient teams!
+ Organizational learning!

Totally unstable teams

- Chaos

Efficient teams!
Ingredients for alignment at scale

- Shared Purpose
- Transparency
- Feedback loops
- Clear priorities
- Organizational Learning
but... wait!
Who puts the ingredients in?!
Leaders!

Henrik Kniberg
Sometimes we like to pretend we have no leaders

We’re like SO self-organizing!

Yeah man! Like who needs leaders!
Leaderphobia (n)
- Irrational fear of leaders and leadership
- The mistaken belief that all leaders are evil and all leadership is bad
Poster childs of self-organization
... but who ENABLED this self-organization?
Leader? Who, ME?

Ricardo

Gabe

Tony

Managing Without Managers

By Ricardo Semler

Valve: How going boss-free empowered the games-maker

Zappos: A Workplace Where No One And Everyone Is The Boss
Call it what you want

High Alignment

High Autonomy

Build a bridge!

We need to cross the river

We need to cross the river

Figure out how!

Low Alignment

Low Autonomy

Authoritative organization

Conformist culture

Innovative organization

Collaborative culture

Micromanaging organization

Indifferent culture

Entrepreneurial organization

Chaotic culture

Hope someone is working on the river problem…

Chief PO?
Project Leader?
Road Manager?
Lead Coach?
UberScrumMaster?
Head Honcho?

Henrik Kniberg
Leader’s job in aligned autonomy

Henrik Kniberg
Leader’s job in aligned autonomy

Not this!

- Single wringable neck
- Align the teams
- Make decisions
- Keep people busy

This!

- Create a shared sense of accountability
- Create conditions that enable teams to align
- Ensure that decisions can be made
- Create slack in the system

Henrik Kniberg
Leader doesn’t have to be a single person

Henrik Kniberg
Pattern: Core team

Henrik Kniberg
Wrapup
Ingredients for Alignment at Scale

- Shared Purpose
- Transparancy
- Feedback loops
- Clear priorities
- Organizational Learning

Henrik Kniberg