Agile Coaching @ Spotify

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Agile coaching doesn’t stop once the transformation is done.
1. **Coaching in already agile organisations is different**
   Than coaching in a transformation setting

2. **What Spotify coaches do**
   And how we do it

3. **What makes it work**
   1. Clear Accountabilities
   2. Managing coaches well
   3. Focusing on impact
Coaching in already agile organisations is different.
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**Coaching in a transformation**
- Make things very different
- Clear mandate
- Results are easily seen

**Coaching in an already agile org**
- Incremental improvements
- Mandate is less clear
- Results are often not so easily seen
Coaching in already agile organisations is different

What does this mean?

- The job of an agile coach changes
- Coaches need to use their skills in different ways and different combinations
- It’s easier to question the value of agile coaching
Spotify context.
We optimise for **full stack coaching**.
Mission & Leads
  - Tribe & Leads
    - Product Area & Leads
      - Squad & Leads
        - Individuals

Coaching across the stack
What Spotify coaches do.
Our primary goal is high performing teams and a high performing organisation.
Key Success Indicators (KSI)

- Teams are engaging in effective processes, frameworks, tools, and behaviours, and using qualitative and quantitative measurement to continuously improve.
- Teams are measurably improving:
  - Choosing the right things to work on
  - Aligning and coordinating efforts
  - Delivery outcomes (impact, timelines, quality, health)
We definitely do the basics...
They are only a **peripheral** part of the job at Spotify.
What are micro-interactions?
What are we **doing** in those moments?

What Spotify coaches do.
Establishing & reinforcing simple principles

What Spotify coaches do.
Increasing context sensitivity

What Spotify coaches do.
Observing & influencing group dynamics

What Spotify coaches do.
What Spotify coaches do.

Making the unseen visible
What Spotify coaches do.

Boosting & supporting other leaders
What Spotify coaches do.

Facilitating & encouraging constructive dialogue
What Spotify coaches do.

Establishing & reinforcing simple principles

Increasing context sensitivity

Observing & influencing group dynamics

Making the unseen visible

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Doing complexity leadership theory: How agile coaches at Spotify practise enabling leadership


by Gisela Bäcklander, Department of Industrial Economics and Management, Kungliga Tekniska Högskolan, Stockholm, Sweden.
What makes it work.
1. Clear accountabilities

What makes it work?
What makes it work? - Clear accountabilities

Agile Coaches are primarily accountable for driving the continuous improvement of team-based delivery of value.
What makes it work? – Clear accountabilities

One coach, many hats.
What makes it work? - Clear accountabilities

- Leader with a big picture view
- Catalyst for change & improvement
- Delivery Coach
- Teamwork Coach
- Advocate for agile processes & values
- Facilitator
2. Managing them well

What makes it work?
What makes it work? – Managing them well

Understand the role of agile coach

If managers don’t, then a coach will:

- Have trouble showing impact
- Struggle to grow and develop
- Miss out on being given interesting and challenging opportunities
Understand the role of agile coach

Managers/Leaders: If you haven’t worked with coaches before, educate yourself - read the role description, talk with coaches, talk with other leaders who have worked with coaches.

Coaches: Learn how to explain your role and demonstrate the incremental improvements you’re making.

What makes it work? – Managing them well
What makes it work? – Managing them well

Advocate for your coaches

- Not all coaches can do this for themselves, and even if they can they may still meet resistance
- A good manager will help by smoothing the way and opening doors
Advocate for your coaches

Managers/Leaders: Be a salesperson for your coach. Make spaces for them.

Coaches: Ask for this help from your manager, especially if you are being asked by them to work with a team (rather than the team asking to work with you).
What makes it work? - Managing them well

• A coach needs input like anyone else

• Give concrete and constructive feedback on things the coach could do differently

Give feedback
Give feedback

What makes it work? – Managing them well

**Managers/Leaders:** Make sure you know what your coaches are doing, why they are doing it, and see them in action, so you can talk to them about their work in a constructive way.

**Coaches:** Make sure your manager understands what you are doing and what help you need.
What makes it work? - Managing them well

They don’t coach their manager

- Don’t put your coach in a position that they have to coach their manager
- Managers need to be skilled people managers
- If necessary, change who the coach reports to
They don’t coach their manager

Managers/Leaders: You need to know how to be a good people manager, mentor and coach.

Coaches: Don’t do it. Find someone else to coach your manager, or find a new manager.
What makes it work?

3. Focusing on impact
What makes it work? – Focusing on impact

**Objectives & key results**

**Objective:** Consistent use of beyond-quarter roadmaps across the Mission.

**KR:** 100% of Product Areas are using some form of beyond-quarter roadmap
What makes it work? – Focusing on impact

Engagement Models

[Engagement Template]

Description
A brief description.

Why are we doing this?
- Top 2-3 reason why we are doing this
- Cost of delay, i.e. the consequence of not doing this right now

Desired Outcome
- What is the result we want to see as a result of the engagement.

Scope
- In the form of acceptance criteria, or activities.

How the coach will engage/support
- How the AC will engage, including the mandate of the AC.
- Example: Coach squad, be part of PA leads team

Engagement Review
- The cadence should the engagement be reviewed
- How the engagement will be reviewed.

Exit, Evaluation & Ramp-down
- When and how the coach will start to ramp-down and eventually exit.
- How to evaluate the engagement
1. Identify
A list of high-level needs in the tribe right now.

2. Verify
Description of the opportunity, it’s importance, the cost of not doing anything.
Decision to scope further or deprioritise.

3. Scope
Defined engagement goal, scope and desired outcomes
How the coach will engage/support, and when (or under what conditions) the coach will exit.
What makes it work? - Focusing on impact

4. In progress
Review and evaluate progress on a continuous basis, refine and update the engagement

5. Ramp down & evaluation
Evaluating the desired outcomes
Prepare the team to continue without the support from an Agile Coach
What makes it work? – Focusing on impact

Conditions that help this work:

1. Coaches keep a finger on the pulse of the Tribe so they can spot where there are opportunities

2. Coaches make the final decision, using an advice model rather than trying to stack rank

Engagement models
What makes it work? - Focusing on impact

**Hiring**

- Not all coaches are the same
- Create a clear hiring rubric for your context
- Example: Focuses on the right things

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators of a strong response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Approach demonstrates flexibility and understanding of different agile approaches</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Open to teams choosing among a variety of practice -- no “one size fits all” with regard to what processes are followed</td>
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<tr>
<td>● If coach chooses to be more directive it is based on assessment of team (e.g. team seeking more guidance, new team that is still forming)</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Things that are considered “sacred” have very strong rationale -- are more about desired outcome than about specific process</td>
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Takeaways.
Coaching doesn’t stop when the transformation is done.
Coaching in an agile organisation delivers incremental value.
Incremental value is harder to see.
Set your coaches up for success!

1. Give them clear accountabilities
2. Manage them well
3. Help them focus on their impact
Tack.

That’s Swedish for thanks.

(Psst. Spotify is hiring coaches.)