

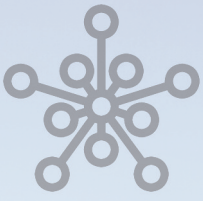
Outdoor Retailer Chooses Evolve Agility To Increase Innovation and Grow Culture.



Evolve Agility



Case Study



Background

A small outdoor equipment company founded in the early 1900s evolved over the years to become a multi-billion dollar retail and experiences juggernaut. From the beginning, it was organized around a shared set of values around a common appreciation for the outdoors. Today, the core purpose shines through in the customer and employee experience, setting this retailer apart from others. Throughout its history, the retailer has protected its unique culture to fight for a future where they can awaken a lifelong love of the outdoors. They aspire to bring out the best in everything they do, without losing sight of their values, founded by a community of friends.

“Evolve Agility offered the company something much more meaningful and much more memorable than a cookie-cutter approach.”

– Dhaval Panchal,
Evolve Agility



In early 2019, Evolve Agility engaged with the company to help accelerate its growth agenda.

The organization extends the retail experience from their popular stores to the online customer relationship, offering personalized service, anytime and anywhere. The shift to online involved a significant transformation in technology architecture, corresponding with a change in work practices. The digital division was leading the way within the overall organization by reorganizing its people, processes, and systems to become a more product-led, customer-centric organization. But it wanted to raise the level of its agile competency.

VALUES



“We were looking for a partner who would work with us in developing a company-centric approach to agile, providing the tools and techniques to help us experiment with better ways of working. We know that agile isn’t a one size fits all and we were less interested in pre-defined templates and models used by other companies.” said the company’s divisional vice president of ecommerce and mobile technology. After all, this organization was no agile rookie. They had already been using agile and lean practices. Which explained why they were looking for a process they could own from, “a partner that could help us reboot our own practices.”

To deliver an agile transformation that would help them innovate with a process customized for their enterprise, the digital division decided to partner with Evolve Agility. They wanted to work with a team that was able to adapt to their needs, able to help them build on the capabilities of their employees so that they could learn from and own their transformation.

What distinguished Evolve Agility from larger organizations was its ability to personalize the process, leading to a customized outcome.

The need for change

This enterprise began its agile journey around 2008 with the adoption of scrum at the team level. During the first several years, it made great progress. But for various reasons, it had plateaued, and in some cases regressed from some of the practices that brought it initial success. In 2018, it reaffirmed its commitment to agile and began the journey to implement better ways of working.

While it had experience with agile at the team level, it needed to evolve the company’s understanding and practice, scaling beyond single teams due to organizational growth and interconnectedness of the work.

The regression from agile began to surface in different forms. Internal employee surveys reflected an increase in employee frustrations, the prevalence of ad hoc processes, and unpredictability in meeting business expectations. Teams struggled to manage the work spanning across multiple teams.

PARTNERSHIP



In mid-2018, with the acceleration to technology across the organization, the company renewed its commitment to agile, extending its legendary in-store customer relationships to digital offerings. It brought that focus to product orientation centered around the customer. Agile ways of working were essential to enabling a transformation in people, processes, and systems.

“This was a purpose-led organization,” says Panchal. “But with all the changes and the sheer speed they were moving, I think they wanted a roadmap that empowered them to boost morale and momentum around the great work they were aimed at.”

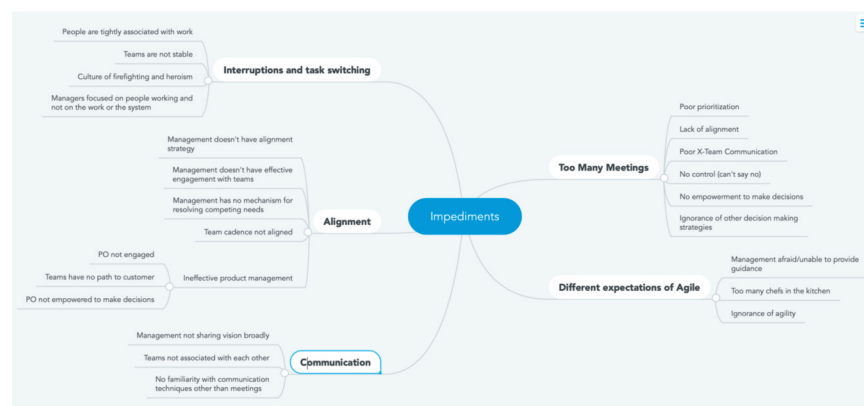
Any real agile transformation is a continuous improvement journey. We designed our approach to develop a sense of ownership, competency, and confidence. Our experience in co-developing internal agile proficiency with prior clients made us the ideal partner for the digital division’s transformation efforts.

Discovery & Transformation Strategy

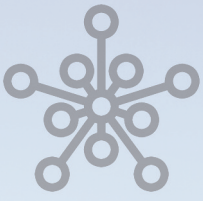
Discovery

Our first engagement with the company was a brief discovery project:

- We conducted surveys with both the business and digital technology divisions
- We interviewed a cross-section of the organization in the digital technology and business lines
- We facilitated focused cross-functional group workshops



DISCOVERY



The discovery process helps develop a shared understanding of an organization's current state of agility. Because we believe that the discovery process must provide direct value to our clients, ours is designed to build shared agreement on the way things are and *how they came to be this way*. The shared understanding of organizational systems dynamics helps drive the appreciation for each other's struggles within the status-quo.

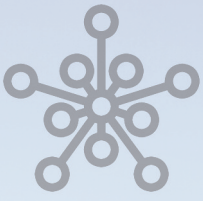
In contrast to traditional assessments that evaluate an organization and its employees against measures they did not develop or agree to, a discovery process acknowledges that people did the best that they could under the circumstances. To build a coalition energized for change, we work to build people up, helping them look forward to participating in the transformation journey.

We co-developed and shared our discovery findings. Here are the key challenges we found:

- **High entropy:** A wide range of communication and collaboration tools and localized team practices made it difficult to set, manage, and communicate business expectations.
- **Consensus dependence:** Roles and responsibilities were unclear. This led to poor prioritization and decision-making authority, requiring numerous meetings to reach consensus before moving forward.
- **Agile organization within a traditional IT organization:** The digital division was attempting to lead an agile transformation within a larger, traditional project-based IT organization.

CHALLENGES





Based on these findings, we made the following recommendations for moving forward:

- **Inch wide, mile deep:** Focus on a single product area for an end-to-end transformation.
- **Rising tide lifts all boats:** Focus on improving shared concerns across teams, such as prioritization process, quarterly planning process, roles & responsibilities.
- **Common practices:** Focus on “light touch” practices that do not impose too much change and helps to start small

After discovery, Evolve Agility began the strategic planning phase. We identified a cross-functional group of approximately 25 people, made up of leaders, managers, influencers, change agents, and skeptics. Our goal was to balance the organization’s attitudinal differences to develop a transformation strategy that incorporated a variety of viewpoints. A diverse group also helped build buy-in for the journey.

Co-creating transformation strategy

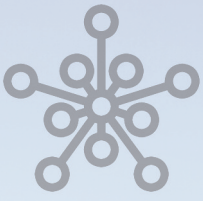
Transformational change is never a straight path. What helps is incorporating safe-to-fail change experiments, enabling a learning mindset. Framing change efforts as experiments (try this or avoid this) also prevents measures from becoming targets and eliminates a superficial checkbox-change implementation.

Through a series of facilitated activities that engaged the group in dialogue and collaborative working sessions, we developed a shared vision statement for the overall transformation:

*“We want to love the way we work together
and for customers to love the things we build.”*

Now that we had agreed on what we wanted to be, the two-day workshop shifted focus toward building consensus on to how best to get there.

STRATEGY



Any transformation strategy needs to acknowledge the organizational culture — its strengths, weaknesses, and operating constraints. Evolve Agility's transformation strategy workshop helped our client cross-functionally develop their personal transformational journey map, involving the people who were expected to walk the path to get critical buy-in.

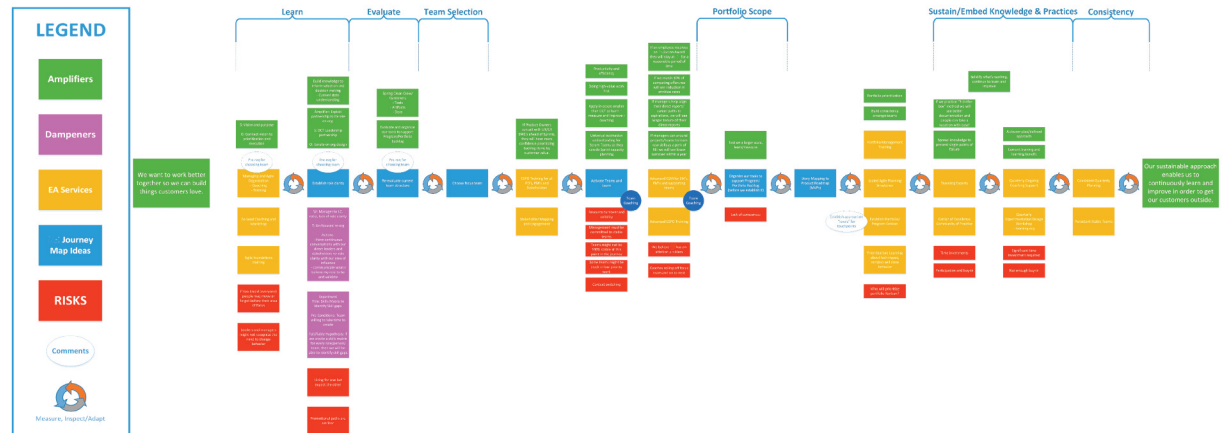


The resulting journey map was a unique mix of strategic options that we recommended after the discovery workshop. Participants also contributed ideas to make the overall journey unique to their circumstances.

To manage the transformation, the journey map identifies the key increments, measures, risks, and feedback checkpoints. Participants also identified the services that Evolve Agility could provide to support the digital side's transformation journey. Instead of driving (inflicting) change on others, we supplement our clients' transformation journey with our packaged services. We encourage client organizations to 'pull' our services as needed. Evolve Agility plays a supportive role.

This approach flows from our belief those on the path must own the change journey.

JOURNEY



Following were the company’s overall transformation increments:

1. Learn: Establish role clarity
2. Evaluate & Team(s) Selection: Re-evaluate current team structure, and choose focus teams
3. Activate teams: “Inch wide, mile deep” transformation for product areas
4. Sustain/Embed Knowledge & practices: Develop an internal competency to lead transformative change in new product areas
5. Consistency: Practice a sustainable approach to learn continuously, and improve

It is best to think of increments as starting points as opposed to endpoints (milestones). Each adds value to the transformation journey, providing a stable reference point to collect feedback and determine next steps. This is a classic agile approach to change management.

A core transformation team that coached and energized change-agents was then formed to develop and work on the transformation backlog.

What makes Evolve Agility’s approach unique is that we develop internal client competency in leading change efforts while also transforming how the organization works. Evolve Agility’s coaching team partnered with the core transformation team to develop internal coaching competency as they engaged with the digital organization to help guide the transformation efforts.

ROAD MAP



The way we work engagement

"It's always farther than it looks, taller than it looks, and harder than it looks."

- The 3 rules of mountaineering

In other words, change is not a simple, linear, step-by-step process.

In agile transformations, we work with the client to identify a set of experiments we can develop, implement, and support. The dance of change needs to account for:

- Internal readiness
- In-the-moment-friction and/or excitement for change
- Current business conditions

So, we set a monthly cadence to manage a backlog of change experiments. This helped us acknowledge what was happening at any given moment, allowing us to adapt to reality versus sticking to a "change plan."

After the strategy workshop, the core group of change-agents formed a "Way We Work" team. With support from the Evolve Agility coaching team, the digital division embarked on its transformation journey, applying a set of change experiments aligned with their journey map increments.

Increment 1: Learning

From the start of our engagement, we focused on developing the internal coaching team competencies and integrating with other organization change agents. Here is how we did this:

Coaching Dojo: With deliberate practice, coaching skills can be developed. To help leaders and internal agile coaches practice and improve their coaching skills in a safe-to-fail supportive environment, we developed an internal coaching dojo. This also helped socialize the practice of coaching and set expectations from coaching interactions.

TRANSFORMATION



Build upon existing cultural norms: When it's aligned with existing organizational systems, change can be successful. The company has a strong "lean operator" culture, with an internal group of lean coaches. They support employees in the stores and the corporate offices to adopt lean thinking and practices. This is a familiar and socially acceptable norm. To empower people to accept agile coaching support, we included lean coaches in the Way We Work team. It helped the lean coaches to strengthen their agile capabilities and added internal capacity for future coaching efforts.

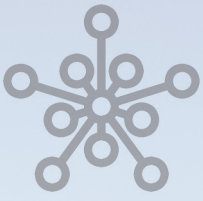
Management Education: For agile to succeed, leadership must understand its values, principles, and effect on day-to-day work. We supported internal development of an Agile Foundations course to be led by internal coaches. The desired outcome from this experiment was leadership buy-in. But we soon learned that to prepare for the holiday buying season, business pressures rise in the retail industry in September and October. This left little time for leaders to engage. We needed to pivot on how we approached management.

Role-based certified training: While teams were practicing agile, the Product Owner and Scrum Master roles were played by project managers. And the practices within teams varied significantly. The Way We Work team also acknowledged that management and business line stakeholder understanding was necessary for agile teams to succeed. Evolve Agility offered the following Scrum Alliance certification training:

- Certified Agile Leadership
- Certified Scrum Master (CSM)
- Certified Scrum Product Owner (CSPO)

The certification training assisted in developing role clarity and signaled the organization's commitment to being agile. Meanwhile, the inclusion of business line partners helped leaders take a systems view of their organizational norms and practices.

CULTURE



Increments 2: Evaluate & Team Selection

Two product areas were identified as candidates for the “Inch wide, mile deep” transformational change. Each product area had 4-5 agile teams in addition to other product areas that interacted with the core teams.

Informed Consent

We believe that change efforts are successful when the people involved in the change process are informed and consent to participate in the change process. As clients progress through our agile journey map *change increments*, we formally check for “informed consent” before starting the next change increment. This allows people to voice their concerns and acknowledge the organizational shifts that need to be made to support the change process.

Both candidate product areas could not be more different.

Candidate Product Area 1

This product area was the lead revenue generator; it already had established business and digital interaction patterns that had grown over the years.

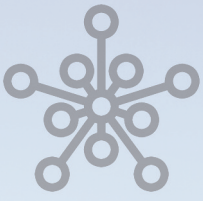
They were most motivated for change and aligned with the overall mission to “continuously learn, improve, and reduce barriers to execution.”

Implementing the change management principle of “informed consent” was straightforward. Key representatives from business and digital participated in a short session to signal their intent to participate in the “Inch wide, mile deep” transformation journey for their area. Business and Digital together in a shared transformation journey.

Candidate Product Area 2

As a newly formed area, the group members were unfamiliar to each other and the digital organization. The leaders in this group fostered a more collaborative consensus-based approach. We were not surprised because this aligned with our earlier findings from the discovery stage.

CONSENT



Along with internal coaches, Evolve Agility hosted and participated in information-sharing sessions where we gradually built consensus for change. Our role was to inform the participants and support them in their own decision-making. We cannot force coaching on others. As a result, all of the 27 members in the product group supported the final decision-making session. They gave *informed consent* to participate in the change process.

Increment 3: Activate teams

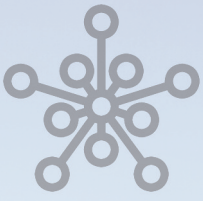
Evolve Agility's approach to product area transformation takes a systems view and treats an organization as a dynamic system capable of transforming itself.

We believe in *revealing the system to itself* so people within it can own their change process. Evolve Agility supports transformation by sharing our expertise and coaching teams through the change process. We focus on developing competencies in teams, managers, and leaders so that they can lead in adopting agile practices.



Our unique approach is not oriented to install agile practices. Superficial checkbox implementation harms organizations, their people, and their relationships. *Do no harm* is an essential tenet of our transformation engagements. Our clients trust us to improve their organizational systems, leaving them in a better state than before.

SYSTEMS



Evolve Agility’s product area transformation approach is a quarterly change implementation approach that involves the following phases:

Engage (~2 weeks)

We started with leadership on business and Digital Technology to develop a systems view of the organization ecosystem. Developing an understanding of how the organization system is currently working is essential to formulating change interventions. Too often, agile transformation interventions are implemented without understanding the impact on existing mechanisms. This is an outcome-oriented, change-management approach that engages the business in a transformation journey.

Through a series of short facilitated systems thinking sessions we teach, and diagram to hold dialogue.



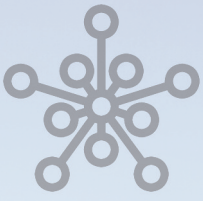
“Success is not counted by how high you have climbed but by how many people you brought with you.”

– Will Rose

ENGAGE

The engage phase ends with an Informed Consent workshop. At the digital division, it involved at least a pair of representatives from each of the agile teams and business groups, senior leadership from business and digital, and the internal Way We Work coaching team.

In this one-day workshop, we collectively review all the information gathered, develop and rank hypotheses for change, and design measurable experiments to initiate incremental change.



“It's a round trip. Getting to the summit is optional; getting down is mandatory.”

– Ed Viesturs

Stabilize (~1-2 months)

Experiment owners championed change interventions, implemented with the support of the coaching team. Some interventions are minor and do not require extended support from the coaching team. Others are more involved and call for hands-on role modeling, training, and coaching for participants to absorb different ways of working.

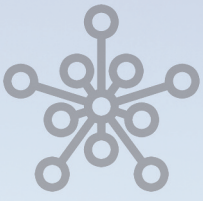
Title: <i>Concise, self-explanatory</i>		Date:
Pre-Conditions <i>What is necessary to run this experiment? Baseline measures? (qualitative/quantitative)</i>	Falsifiable Hypothesis <i>IF ...Specific testable action... THENSpecific measurable outcome.....</i>	Results/Post-Condition <i>Record qualitative/quantitative measurable outcomes</i>
Assumption <i>We believe that ...</i>	Experiment Setup <i>What kind of experiment? What are you measuring? How are you measuring? How often?</i>	weak ←————→ strong strength of evidence
		Conclusion <input type="checkbox"/> Validated <input type="checkbox"/> Invalidated <input type="checkbox"/> Inconclusive

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The following change interventions were agreed upon for Product Area 1 by both business and digital parts of the company.

- Shared definition of value between business and digital product owner to assist with agreement on priorities
- Unified portfolio view of initiatives that are “to do,” versus “in progress,” and “done” to enable a clear understanding of priorities for initiatives
- Organize work to deliver on end-to-end customer journeys. Use story mapping technique to identify the backlog items that support customer journeys
- Feature team swarm for 4-6 weeks so that product areas teams can experiment with different team configurations to reduce inter-team dependencies and increase their ability to test and deliver value more rapidly

STABILIZE



The Stabilize phase's objective was to introduce incremental change for improvement, while avoiding major disruptions to business operations and desired outcomes. Change efforts that negatively impact the organizational and operational goals erode confidence in the transformation journey. With the stabilizing phase, our approach was to support people in owning their change, versus forcing a change agenda. We followed the energy of the product area and empowered them to lead.

An inclusive from-the-ground up-change approach builds trust among team members that they come to rely on when in times of crisis. We don't want to force an artificial sense of false urgency.

The digital side was experiencing rapid growth, and we were in the peak retail season. So, we tempered our interventions' scope and aligned with the company's larger mission of developing a sustainable approach to learn and improve.

Align (~2 weeks)

In the align phase, our purpose was to take the results of the experiments we ran previously and align them with existing organizational practices. This enabled us to reflect on the experiment results implemented in the stabilize period. We also captured learnings from the change interventions and coaching capabilities developed to support the ongoing transformation journey. The outcome was that the group was able to internalize what they had learned and come up with new ideas and experiments to explore.

"When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world."

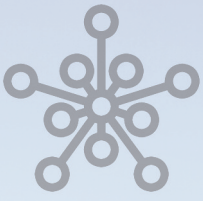
– John Muir

ALIGN



These ongoing quarterly cycles to design, prioritize, and pull change experiments become part of the organizational practice. The digital division already had institutionalized a quarterly planning process, facilitating a two-day event that oriented the digital organization to align with the next quarter's corporate strategic objectives. We tailored the approach to engage, stabilize, and align, integrating with existing mechanisms. The design intent was to lead a product area to adopt agile ways of working and develop the internal competency for coaching and transforming the organizational environment to sustain agile teams long term.

INTEGRATE



Results

As an agile coaching and transformation company, Evolve Agility plays a secondary role in our client's transformation journey. It is not our transformation to make. As sherpas, we guide, encourage, support, and take pride in enabling the successes of others.

Four months into our engagement with the company, the Coronavirus pandemic hit. For retailers, it was a particularly challenging time; they had to face a radically changed business environment.

Our client couldn't have known at the time, but when they chose to partner with Evolve Agility, they were actively building skills that their teams would use to stay productive during COVID-19.

"Evolve did a survey of 60-plus people, and they also did interviews. They came up with an assessment from what they had heard," said an Agile Coach at the company. "Then they developed what an engagement plan might look like for us," based on assumptions that the internal team later confirmed.

Evolve Agility's engagement was able to build experimentation into their organization systems, formalize the way they arrived at testable hypotheses, and build a repeatable process to determine success.

"What sprang from that was a lot of highly-interested people taking the customer experience and extracting that into work the teams could actually do," said one of the clients who hired us. Evolve Agility's efforts "pivoted into a much larger journey than we had outlined on their journey map."

"If it is a shame to be the second man on Mount Everest, then I will have to live with this shame."

– Tenzing Norgay

EVOLVE



The personalized approach that Evolve Agility offered, with in-person training and hands-on expertise, gave the teams a deeper understanding of their day-to-day roles and how to deliver results. We were able to bring in examples, develop internal competencies, and coach leadership for the change to be much stickier for those teams. And we did it in a way that supported the unique cultural values of the company.

Evolve Agility offered this retailer something more meaningful and memorable than a cookie-cutter agile transformation approach.

“We were able to try some more advanced cross-team experimentation to see if we could iterate on problems quicker,” an Agile Coach and Senior Project Manager of the company. “My team wanted to continue to grow and take it even further. They were excited and wanted to keep going.”

In short, they bought in, saw the value, and wanted to continue on the Agile journey, thanks to their work with Evolve Agility.



AGILITY