

CASE STUDY



BEYOND THE BOARDING GATE:

HOW SOUTHWEST AIRLINES USES AGILE TO GET
BETTER, FASTER, AND MORE EFFICIENT



Beyond the Boarding Gate:

How Southwest Airlines Uses Agile To Get Better, Faster, and More Efficient

It seems that everyone has a favorite Southwest Airlines story. There's the time a crew helped a husband surprise his wife for a 25th wedding anniversary by reenacting their proposal, the time flight attendants threw an impromptu baby shower to welcome a couple's newly adopted baby, and countless times a priceless stuffed animal was delivered back home after being lost during the journey.

Beyond what passengers experience at the airport, Southwest Airlines is working hard to improve and transform their internal Information Technology (IT) processes and practices in order to deliver on their mission: "dedication to the highest quality of Customer Service delivered with a sense of warmth, friendliness, individual pride, and Company Spirit."

"At some point, I realized that our [software] testing cycles were longer than our development cycles and getting something into production was getting harder and harder," Marty Garza, Sr. Director of Technology for Southwest Airlines said. "Frustrated by our ability to meet the needs of our customers, we analyzed the time it took from ideation to production activation. With all of the approvals needed by the business and technology, it could take 6-8 months for an idea to get to the teams for development. This is when I knew we needed a change."



Crew team members during a quick assessment on Path to Agility capabilities.



Mapping the Agile Flight Plan: SAFe coupled with the Path to Agility®

In November of 2018, an Agile transformation started with “Crew,” a subset of Southwest Airlines’ IT enterprise. Crew consisted of 25 teams and approximately 250 people. Teams were utilizing the Scaled Agile Framework® (SAFe) but having difficulty realizing the benefits, a reason for enlisting the help of a transformation partner like Agile Velocity.

“Most organizations are failing to achieve key benefits of Agile because they’re focused on the wrong goal; all their attention is going to implementing practices. Instead, they should be focused on achieving outcomes,” David Hawks, Founder of Agile Velocity said. “We use our own transformation framework, the Path to Agility® to help organizations navigate through all the practices and focus on the ones that will make the biggest impact.”

The Path to Agility is a transformation framework that maps Agile capabilities and outcomes to 9 measurable business outcomes like speed, market responsiveness, and customer satisfaction. There are five phases in the framework: Align, Learn, Predict, Accelerate, and Adapt.

For a transformation to thrive, leaders need to align on why a change is needed and then to communicate their reasoning to their teams, not just in IT, but across all functions of their organization. It’s also important for leaders to understand how Agile will impact their teams and how they will lead going forward. Crew’s initial

Agile transformation flight plan was co-created with Agile Velocity during an Agile Executive Workshop, after an initial baseline assessment was completed.

“David also drove our Executive Team to define transformation objectives and key results rather than a list of siloed projects,” Katie Morris said. She helps to drive innovation and automation at Southwest as the Director of IT Transformation. “By using the Path to Agility, we were able to centralize our Transformation program while driving accountability and ownership to the development Teams.”

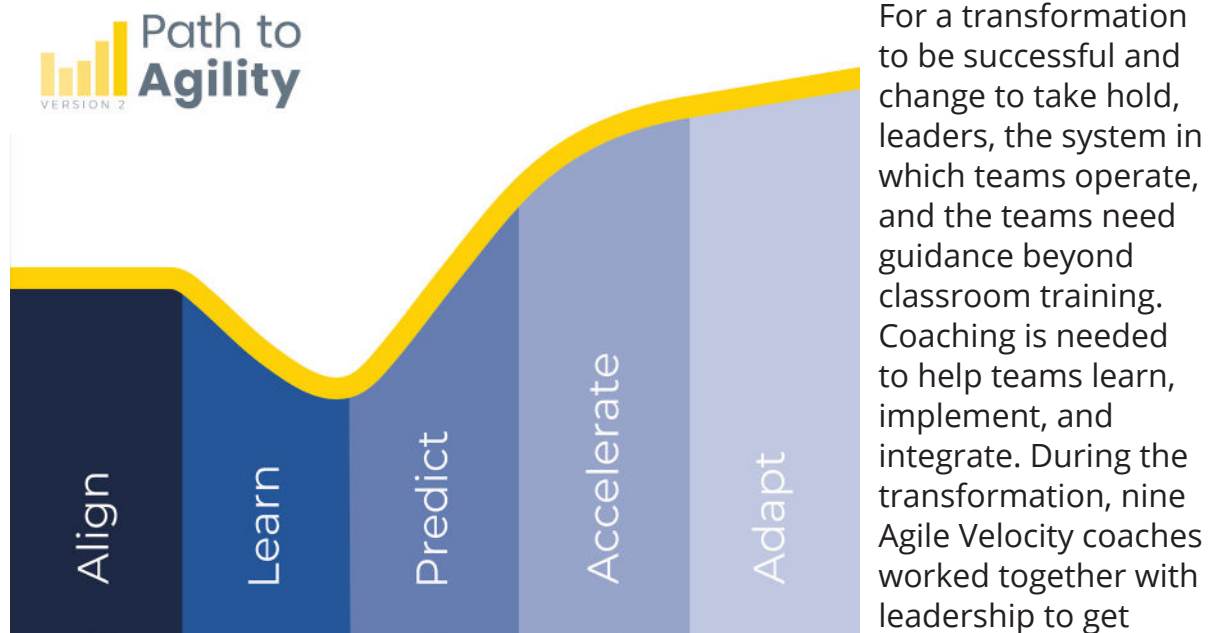
For the Southwest leadership team, it’s all about “Better, Faster, More Efficient”, a phrase they use to describe the reason for the transformation and the purpose of the IT enterprise.



Yes we can! Team members raise their hand to show their vote of confidence on their ability to accomplish the work they committed to during PI Planning.

Climbing to Cruising Altitude

It is normal for organizations to experience a dip in productivity when they undergo a transformation, as diagrammed by Virginia Satir in her change model. This drop is called “Chaos and Resistance.” Here, organizations reach an inflection point. Either they stay in the resistance phase until they give up and regress to the old ways of working; or, they persevere and begin to climb out of “Chaos and Resistance” into “Practice and Integration”, a period where teams get better and progress is made. Eventually, teams are able to utilize new practices, processes, and behaviors to reach a new and better status quo.



teams into integration as quickly as possible and into an improved operational state.

After each SAFe Program Increment (PI) the Path to Agility was used to assess their progress through the change curve. Through a combination of regular measurements, training, and coaching, Crew was able to move through the Learn phase, becoming more predictable and eventually faster.

“I believe we are getting Better, Faster, and More Efficient in the Crew area,” Garza

said. “Due to a change in airline demand, the Crew department faced a massive schedule change. The team collaborated with the business on a potential solution. Using the new capabilities acquired during the transformation, we were able to develop an application that handled large scale schedule changes and the solution was built and deployed into production in 3 weeks. Prior to the transformation, this effort would have taken months to complete. We were able to save the company over \$5 million dollars in the first two months.”

Everyone Onboard the Path to Agility

Most Agile transformations fail to deliver the desired business value, according to the latest State of Agile report. This is why it's not uncommon for organizations, even elite companies like Southwest, to have attempted more than once to transform.

Morris believes this time is different.

“This has been the first transformation that has had Agile and business agility at the core of it,” Morris said. We also involved the internal customer base from the very beginning, which is different from past transformations. I learned that from a technology perspective we can't efficiently and effectively deliver solutions that meet our customer's needs without having them onboard with us.”

To this day, the Path to Agility continues to be used within the Southwest Airline's IT department and it has been adopted even by Southwest's marketing teams. Garza, Morris, and other technology leaders use the framework to build upon their transformation backlog and focus on the Agile capabilities that will allow them to get even faster, better, and more efficient.

“If Southwest Airlines was going to maintain an elite technology department, we had to provide an environment that would attract great people,” Garza said. “This includes new technologies and an operating model that would allow for creativity, agility, and speed. I knew the Agile transformation was a necessity if we were going to be an elite department that could meet the needs of our broader Southwest team and our customers.”

ABOUT SOUTHWEST AIRLINES

The mission of Southwest Airlines is dedication to the highest quality of Customer Service delivered with a sense of warmth, friendliness, individual pride, and Company Spirit. We are committed to provide our Employees a stable work environment with equal opportunity for learning and personal growth.

ABOUT AGILE VELOCITY

Agile Velocity serves Fortune 500 companies nationwide. It has grown into an organization filled with people who are passionate about helping companies react quickly to market demands and compete on a global scale through iteration, collaboration, and a shared understanding of both vision and practical execution.

Change can feel unmanageable--it's complex and risky in business. That's when companies partner with Agile Velocity. The firm is a trusted, full-service transformation partner, equipping organizations with tools to implement and practice Agile principles through training and on-site coaching. Agile Velocity utilizes their proven change management framework, The Path to Agility®, to teach leaders how to guide their organizations through initial chaos and onto accelerated success.

To learn more contact info@agilevelocity.com.

