



**PCCW Global**

# CASE STUDY

## LAUNCHING THE INTERSTELLAR ART

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Using an Agile way of working to unify a globally dispersed organization

**Authors:**



Lisa Van de Voort



Lieselotte Hoegge



Rik de Groot

BlinkLane Consulting



Gladwell Academy





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Organization

PCCW Global

## Industry

Telecommunications

## Challenge

Implementing a unified, Agile way of working in a globally dispersed organization, to help them adapt to changing market needs more quickly

## Solution

SAFe (Scaled Agile Framework)

## Results

Creating a fully operating Agile Release Train, spanning over multiple countries & time zones:

- ✓ More than 70 people trained in SAFe Framework
- ✓ > 25% of ART members and stakeholders changed into an agile role
- ✓ 6 Scrum teams up and running
- ✓ A multidisciplinary Business Owner and Epic Owner group with a joint prioritization process;
- ✓ More focus: from 48 to 12 epics, from 72 features to 27 features
- ✓ A first PI Planning Event with the entire train present

# CASE STUDY



PCCW Global is the international operating division of HKT, Hong Kong's premier telecommunications service provider. Covering more than 3,000 cities and 160 countries, the PCCW Global network supports a portfolio of integrated global communications services including connectivity, applications, and tailored solutions facilitated by its on-demand digital software defined interconnection system.

PCCW Global is headquartered in Hong Kong, and maintains regional centers in Belgium, China, France, Greece, Japan, Korea, Singapore, South Africa, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

BlinkLane Consulting and Gladwell Academy supported PCCW Global in its quest to deliver more value and increase predictability of delivery. This case study describes the start of the Agile Transformation for PCCW Global's mobility and voice business.

## The challenge

The provision of network communications through hardware has been the infrastructure for value delivery. However, the advancements brought by **new technologies like cloud computing and artificial intelligence** urge PCCW Global to improve its development processes to adapt to changing market needs more quickly.

PCCW Global describes the current environment as Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) which requires continuous delivery of new products & services to meet the aforementioned changing market needs.

## The solution

One of the ways in which PCCW Global wants to overcome these challenges, is by **adopting a unified Agile way of working**; the Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe). This way of working helps them to turn the challenges presented by the VUCA environment into strengths: Value, Understanding the products, Clarity and Agility.



The SAFe Framework is a high quality, complete, framework, but also quite complex. To ensure the right level of knowledge of the Framework, PCCW Global and Gladwell Academy organized **tailored in-house SAFe training courses**.

Yet, it is challenging to implement a new way of working based on theory only. Therefore, BlinkLane Consulting was asked to provide **implementation support** for the organization's Mobility and Voice businesses.

# The game plan

BlinkLane has developed a **step-by-step Agile Release Train (ART) Launch Approach**. This approach consists of three steps: engage, implement and coach. Each step incorporates a number of specific activities to achieve the step's objective and has a set timeframe. This **provides clarity** for all parties involved in the change and **creates a pressure cooker** which helps to **push the change forward** and **maintain momentum**. Furthermore, as the limited time frame leaves little room for over processing, it stimulates the **fail fast, learn fast mindset** we aim to get across.

ENGAGE & INFORM	IMPLEMENT & LEARN	COACH & IMPROVE
<i>Define the why, what and how of the change by setting the stage and analyzing the current situation</i> <b>2 weeks</b>	<i>Kick-off change and prepare for first PI Planning</i> <b>10 weeks</b>	<i>Consolidate the change, by identifying the critical areas of improvement</i> <b>ongoing</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Create Change Vision</li> <li>◆ Define ART Design</li> <li>◆ Conduct Maturity Assessment</li> <li>◆ Define implementation roadmap</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Prepare for PI:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communication</li> <li>- Scheduling</li> <li>- Backlog</li> <li>- ART role readiness</li> <li>- Logistics &amp; Facilities</li> <li>- SAFe Training</li> </ul> </li> <li>◆ First PI-event!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Develop ART maturity (roles, events and artifacts)</li> <li>◆ Advance Program Backlog management</li> <li>◆ Manage (Cross-) ART Collaboration &amp; Dependencies</li> <li>◆ Implement Agile in Control Metrics</li> </ul>

## Tailoring to the globally dispersed context

Due to PCCW Global's geographical dispersity, this ART included multiple countries, time zones and nationalities. PCCW Global, Gladwell and BlinkLane worked together to overcome this challenge, by **tailoring the execution of the Launch Approach to the specific context**:

- ◆ All preparatory SAFe courses, workshops and other activities were scheduled logically over a period of ten weeks and communicated (at least) 3 weeks in advance;
- ◆ We identified the minimum number of face-to-face meetings without losing efficiency and hampering team building;
- ◆ Role based training and face-to-face workshops were planned together;
- ◆ We filtered the activities from the face-to-face that could be done via Video Conference;
- ◆ As people had to travel from all over the world, all face-to-face workshops were adjusted such that they would take place once, while still ensuring a valuable results;
- ◆ Face-to-face workshops and training were scheduled on three locations: Athens (Greece), Reading (United Kingdom) and Gosselies (Belgium) followed by Scrum team workshops and coaching;
- ◆ Agile Program Management Office played a crucial role in the launch of this ART by participating the content workshops and training;
- ◆ Management showed full support by making themselves available when necessary and making quick decision to stimulate the ART the continue.




## Zoom in: backlog preparation

To increase value delivery of teams, preparation of the program backlog is crucial. We created a prioritized and realistic feature backlog through multiple workshops to maximize value delivery in the Program Increment.

### Epic Workshop

A 2-day workshop to provide practical tools to prioritize epics as teams deliver more value if they are focused.

Participants of the Epic workshop are all Business and Epic owners. Slowly, but surely, we prioritized all of their 48 epics via the following slicing steps:

 1	 2	 3
What can be done later?	Is this really an epic?	What is non-negotiable?

To ensure debates, compromises and fierce discussions we used the Weighted Shortest Job First (WSJF) during the final prioritization process.

**Result:** In the end all Epic Owners and Business owners agreed on a prioritized list of 12 epics.

### Feature Workshop

A 3-day workshop in which the Epic Owners, Product Manager and Product Owners sliced, refined, sized and prioritized features using WSJF.

All features met the INVEST criteria to be accepted for the program backlog.

- "I" ndependent
- "N" egotiable
- "V" aluable
- "E" stimable
- "S" mall
- "T" estable

**Result:** The 27 most valuable features for the first Program Increment were prioritized (including work-in-progress) and supported by all participants.



Figure 1: Feature Workshop at PCCW Global's office in Gosselies, Belgium



Figure 2: RTE, SA, PM and BlinkLane Consultants at PI Planning Event in Reading, United Kingdom.

## Zoom in: the first PI Planning Event

The Agile Way of Working for the Voice and Mobility business officially kicked off at the first PI Planning Event in Reading (UK), July 18 and 19 in 2019. More than 70 people of multiple countries participated in the event.

- ◆ All Agile Release Train members were in one room which fostered interaction and collaboration between historically split business departments happened organically;
- ◆ Teams realized joint dependencies with other teams and negotiated when to best plan which user stories based on each others planning for the coming three months;
- ◆ Solving dependencies based on the priorities in the program backlog, resulted in delivering the most value with the shortest lead time;
- ◆ Clear Senior Management support as the opening speech was provided by PCCW Global. Additionally, C-level managers and Agile Program Management Office attended the PI event and specifically the management review;
- ◆ Teams started divided their features in such a way to deliver a more matured product than originally initiated;
- ◆ A committed plan despite holiday season, increasing employee satisfaction;
- ◆ Business got more insight in the complexity and duration of product development and acted upon those insights;
- ◆ Active involvement of RTE, PM & SA in event preparation and execution.



Figure 3: Opening speech by PCCW Global.

## Result: a fully operating ART, spanning over 8 countries

Over 70 people trained in SAFe Framework



A first PI event with entire train present

6 Scrum teams up and running



More focus from 48 to 12 epics, from 72 features to 27 features

A multidisciplinary Business Owner and Epic Owner group with a joint prioritization process



ART members efficiently changed roles

## Critical success factors

The challenge of this transformation was the limited time frame combined with the dispersed location of the ART. To overcome this challenge six critical success factors were identified:

- ◆ Representation from different countries on Program Level (RTE, PM, SA) to create and maintain team engagement;
- ◆ Incorporating team building activities and use of a specific ART theme (i.e. space; hence the ART's name Interstellar) in the implementation phase to unite the teams across countries;
- ◆ Combination of training and consulting in a condensed period of time to maintain momentum
- ◆ Religious use of digital collaboration tools to foster communication;
- ◆ Schedule the full implementation period to increase effectiveness;
- ◆ Willingness to learn and change among all people involved (from SMT to team members!).

*"PCCW Global engaged BlinkLane to provide the consultancy service to guide the launch of its Interstellar ART. Over a period of 3 months, the BlinkLane consultants advised us on the formation and composition of the agile teams, facilitated all the necessary workshops on defining the epics and features, and eventually guided the launch of the Program Increment Planning event. The key roles of the ART, i.e. Product Manager, Release Train Engineer and System Architect, received intensive mentorship from the BlinkLane consultants, while Gladwell, the sister company of BlinkLane, provided the formal SAFe role-based training to all the ART members in lean-agile practices. The consulting from BlinkLane and the trainings from Gladwell are very complementary to each other, and enabled all the ART members to be well prepared for the launch of the Program Increment."*

*The adoption of SAFe delivered alignment between the business and development teams. The business owners now have much more communications with the development teams - this has steadily improved since we adopted SAFe practices. The development teams also gain a much better understanding of the business requirement throughout the project. There is now a more systematic approach for the development teams to document their work throughout the process. The development roadmap is transparent to the business users, and progress can be monitored in real time. We now also see the teams are very much energized in their daily work. We are looking forward continuing to realize the sustainable and predictable outcomes of the SAFe program."*

## ABOUT BLINKLANE GROUP

BlinkLane Consulting, Gladwell Academy are part of BlinkLane Group and based in Amsterdam (the Netherlands), Paris (France) and Bangalore (India). Since our establishment in 2007, we have grown into one of the world's leading consultancy, Agile coaching and global training firms in large-scale Agile transformations (Scaling Agile). We guide the Agile transformations of highly-regarded clients in all industries, including aviation, financial services and technology.

BlinkLane Group has top-of-market expertise in leading organizational change. When BlinkLane and Gladwell combine forces, we – together with our client – develop an Agile organization structure, implement the change and create a self-sustaining Agile organization through knowledge, experience and education.

Our consultants, coaches and trainers are considered global Thought Leaders in lean-Agile organization theory, with academic and management literature publications, and presentations and speeches at leading international conferences. We are Gold Partner of the Scaled Agile Institute. After Scaled Agile Institute itself, we are the world's second organization in terms of consultants/trainers with the highest level of SAFe certification (SPCT\*).

[Visit our website](#)

## ABOUT PCCW GLOBAL

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PCCW Global Marketing Contact: [marketing@pccwglobal.com](mailto:marketing@pccwglobal.com)

## CONTACT

BlinkLane Group  
Barbara Strozzilaan 201  
1083 HN Amsterdam  
The Netherlands

Phone | +31 (0) 20 40 80 860

Email address | [info@blinklane.com](mailto:info@blinklane.com)

**PCCW Global**

**BlinkLane Consulting** 

**Gladwell Academy** 