Interventions with an IT-department – How we rallied the Kingdom to slay the dragon no one had expected

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For the past three years, 100 people in an internal IT function have been fighting to transform their organization from being traditional and hierarchical to becoming agile. This is the story of an inviting rather than prescriptive transformation, and of why this approach initially failed due to lack of a trustworthy 'why' in a department heavily influenced by an ITIL mindset and an unclear mandate for leader roles. It is a story of sources of resistance and of how to redefine culture and management structure to support the change towards reinventing themselves as 'a development organization' that can deliver relevant infrastructure products in the cloud at high speed. The organization has set out on a 10-year journey and has decided radically to eliminate the traditional line manager role and replaced it with Scrum roles (PO and SM) as well as an additional role for 'handling people'. Most importantly, however, it is a story with an unexpected happy ending, as it is the story of how the organization still has long way to go on to become truly agile but also about how the change prepared the organization for the unforeseeable: Covid-19.

1. INTRODUCTION

What you are about to read is a tale of knights, wizards, trials and sufferings in the realm of a corporate IT organization in a large, Danish manufacturing company. But it is also a true story. Specifically, it is a story about a kingdom within the realm - the Kingdom of IT Infrastructure and Security (I&S) - which, after many years of peace and prosperity, suddenly faced an unfamiliar threat. And it is a story about how the brave inhabitants who, despite not knowing what exactly they were up against, managed to save the Kingdom of I&S - and helped save the Realm and more when the unexpected hit.

For many, many years, our kingdom was prosperous and peaceful and the good citizens went about their lives as IT engineers, project managers and line managers as they had always done, delivering network, compute and storage capacity, personal computers, security technologies and other services to the Realm according to waterfall plans. One day, however, the quiet calm in the kingdom was disturbed by the King of I&S (the CTO) who had discussed ominous news from far away corners of the world with the Emperor of the Realm (the CIO). They believed that a threat was forming just on the other side of the horizon and the intelligence hinted at something as unlikely and fantastic as a troll. Few details were provided, but it was said that the troll was demanding much faster clock-speed on deliverables, adaptability to a constant flux in demands, and a fusion of our world of IT with the world of Business.

The culture of the Realm was so that the Emperor and the King did not want to dictate what was to happen, even though at the time the most common approach in other corporate realms was for the leaders to prescribe and structure the troll defense, based on war tactics such as 'SAFe'. Instead, the King invited the citizens of his kingdom to participate in deciding what the defense - labelled 'an agile organization' - should look like.

Fundamentally, this experience report is a story about how an agile transformation strategy based on invitation to change rather than prescription had a tough and fumbling start but ended up saving the day. The citizens of I&S were initially skeptical – they did not believe the troll to be real and much less that demands of increased speed and new, cloud-based products would ever hit them. However, they reluctantly abided their King's wishes and began figuring out how to kill the imaginary troll that only existed in the King's head. And little did they know that a couple of years later their efforts would have better prepared them for slaying not just a real troll but a much larger, more disruptive and completely real albeit unimaginable up until its arrival monster: the Covid-19 dragon.

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2. THE REALM AND THE KINGDOM AND THE CONTEXT

In August 2017, the Emperor of 'the Realm', a 500+ in-house corporate IT function, proclaimed: "we're going agile!" [Townhall by the CIO, August 2017] The Emperor was beginning to see the need for the organization to adapt to the conditions of the future that were getting closer every day: the need for faster clock-speed, heightened volatility, and blurred responsibility between business and IT. In February 2018, the Emperor's intention was backed by focus in and resources to all of the five kingdoms in the Realm. The defense plan - the agile transformation - was put in full throttle-mode, amongst other things by the newly established internal transformation team of three employees who were joined by four external coaches, including Carsten (author).

The overall experience with the agile transformation in the Realm has previously been described in [Sommer]. This experience report focuses on the distinctive experiences of one of the kingdoms in the realm, the I&S department, which was Carsten's primary focus and included citizens (approximately 90 IT professionals) distributed in nine engineering teams, a leadership team of 12 knights which the King – the CTO – and Anne (author) were part of.

Up until this point, all inhabitants in the Realm had worked with a traditional mindset, in love with waterfall project plans, adhering to strict, yearly financial cycles, and planning strategies 3-5 years ahead. Furthermore, the core value was that "only the best is good enough" [company slogan] and this had fostered a culture of perfectionism. The Realm was under pressure in 2017 as it had been less than a year since 10 % of the inhabitants had been laid off and the aftereffects of increased workload and fear were still visible.

2.1 Strategy for agile adoption

The coaches and leaders were tasked to transform the Realm into an agile organization to defend the company against the troll, and the Emperor had only one requirement for the strategy: To invite people to experiment with new ways of working, as "we cannot think ourselves into new ways of acting, we have to act ourselves into new ways of thinking" [Townhall by the CIO, August 2017].

The King of I&S and Carsten decided that the approach to defend the Kingdom had to be to start with creating successful pilots in a few selected teams, to inspire and show the way for the remaining teams. Three teams stood out by having extra potential as they had already experimented somewhat with agile methods or by being open to experimentation. It was decided to start with a focus on these teams. Interventions would be planned and delivered iteratively as the change unfolded.

What you are about to read in section 3, is a story based on the authors ongoing dialogue regarding our experiences and notes from the extensive journal written by Carsten to document our endeavors, and we will outline how this seemingly straightforward plan turned out to be anything but straight, albeit extremely interesting and filled with valuable learnings.

3. NOT A JOURNEY BUT ENDLESS INTERVENTIONS

In early 2020, we arrived at the conclusion that a transformation, like the one we had set out to make had been - and would continue to be - extremely complex. It consists of an endless chain of interventions that drive a new mindset and culture. We did not initiate the process thinking we could plan it, but we were surprised along the way of how chaotic it turned out to be. What you will get in the next sections is a structured condensation that can seem obvious but is only possible to make in hindsight.

The overall task was clear, as stated above: getting ready to slay 'the troll' of future demands for faster clock speed, higher volatility in priorities and demand, and a fusion of – or blurring of the lines between – 'IT' and 'business', especially driven by a move towards the cloud. We outline some of the most significant issues we faced (*problem impact*), what we believed was the *root cause*, and what we did to tackle the problem (*action*), including some reflections on what we in hindsight could have done differently. The problems centered around two themes:

1. breaking through the initial barriers in the first difficult year by getting a grip on the call to arms (learning and doing agile practices), which is covered in section 3.1.
2. forming the right organizational structure by getting our leadership knights situated around the table (accelerate adoption of a new mindset and culture), which is covered in section 3.2.

The first theme depends on a reason to abandon old ways of working, the second depends on a desire or aspiration for where the new can go.

3.1 The call to arms

The first steps involved activities to unfreeze and challenge the status quo. The strategy in early 2018 was to establish a call to arms by nudging teams individually to create their pull for help in adopting agile methods and an mindset. The assumption was that when teams engaged in a series of small, successful experiments it would eventually create the breakthrough. The first nudge consisted of team workshops on how they would like to experiment and change. However, the teams did not see a reason to change, and the pull for help and coaching did not come. Frankly, very few people seemed to take the bait of becoming actively involved in shaping their new future.

3.1.1 The mad King

Problem impact

The transformation was initiated in the Realm of corporate IT with a clear call to action from the Emperor: "we're going agile because we need to deliver, innovate and adapt more and faster to survive" and everyone was invited by the King to participate in coming up with the right solution. Both the Emperor and the King kept their promise and did not dictate the change. The inviting attitude spawned a lot of good energy in the citizens. Still, however, only a few people in the Kingdom took the bait and actively started or supported new ways of working during 2018 - the people were not changing.

Root cause

The coaching team started a process of establishing Observations and Hypothesis, inspired by Toyota Kata by [Rother] and Managing to Learn by [Shook], and discovered that despite the clear 'why' statement from the Emperor, the citizens did not trust the message.

Firstly, it was a widespread belief in the department that the 'going agile' was a fad and that if they just stayed their course and continued business as usual management would eventually forget about these new ideas and expect them to do what they had always done. Their rationale was rational as there had indeed been a long history of large, top-down organizational change programs introduced to change culture and ways of working only to be put on a shelf and forgotten after a year or two. In the eyes of the citizens, the agile transformation was likely to be yet another mad idea that was better left ignored.

Secondly, even though the call to action was clear, the citizens were not able to translate it to their own reality. The other kingdoms in the realm soon began to see themselves as 'developer organizations' but I&S identified heavily with being an 'operations and support organization', and the issues of speed, flexibility, and customer focus were if not unrelatable, then not convincing. Citizens were expressing how they thought it was not applicable to them because everyone needs 'infrastructure', so they would need to take what they could get – and no one seemed to understand that 'infrastructure' soon would mean instances in the public IaaS/PaaS cloud, not on premise servers. Maybe the King had gone mad in thinking that this applied to us?

Looking back, it is evident that the issue was rooted in the leadership team's lack of understanding of 'the why' and perhaps somewhat a backlash from the other side of the coin of 'acting our way into new thinking'. It became perhaps too much a pretext for inaction, as understanding 'the why' was clearly a matter of thinking, and it was to take many more months before the reality of the situation truly dawned on the leadership team. The tipping point came when the King addressed the Kingdom and told the citizens that their livelihood was threatened. "Our customers need speed and flexibility - and new products - and they are not waiting for us to give them 'infrastructure' anymore. The cloud has completely changed the reality for us, and we need to step up to survive." [Townhall, December 11th, 2019]

Action

In the first many months, it was a task for the leaders to communicate 'the why' to their teams and ensure that they understood it. The leadership team did express their uncertainty about how to do this, but we did not manage to facilitate a process that enabled each other to translate it to our own context and provide this to the teams. Later, in late 2019, the customers were visibly starting to avoid interacting with I&S [different examples presented by POs to the PO group on January 23rd and February 21st, 2020] and thus the message was suddenly relatable and had urgency. It was communicated very simply by the King to the entire Kingdom: "we are becoming irrelevant if we don't change - fast" [Townhall, December 11th, 2019]. And the message suddenly became trustworthy.

The uncertainty expressed by the leaders was a red flag, and we could have insisted on getting them - and the teams - engaged in translating the message into their own context, i.e. by facilitating workshops. We experienced resistance from them when approaching the topic (a resistance we will explore more in section 3.2), but instead of shying away we should have stood our ground.

3.1.2   Find your armor and suit up!

Problem impact

In 2018, we believed that 'acting our way into new thinking' meant introducing Scrum and assigning people to the Scrum roles in each of the existing teams, and then watch them reach the stars. Our focus was on three teams and relatively fast, we succeeded in creating positive experiences with the roles and working together as a true Scrum team in one of the teams, the I&S leadership team.

This leadership team consisted of the line managers of the nine engineering teams in I&S, the King, his PA and his executive assistant, Anne. These 12 knights worked together on a shared product: the I&S organization, and they had a shared vision for the product: to make the Kingdom an 'awesome workplace', to make the culture 'agile in spirit' and to make sure that we deliver 'benchmark products'. The King acted as product owner (PO), Anne as the Scrum master (SM), and there was a backlog consisting of epics and stories that were a drill-down of the goal.

We did not, however, see the same positive effects in the other two teams of engineers working with personal devices as well as communication technology.

Root cause

In retrospect, the deciding difference between success and failure was education, coaching attention, and having clear mandate. Many of the leaders in the leadership team, including the PO and SM for the leadership team, attended courses in agile ways of working. This gave the team a good knowledge foundation and high awareness of the workings and the benefits of Scum. Furthermore, our coach, Carsten, assisted the leadership team PO and SM on a daily basis as well as attended all team events which made for an effective feedback and improvement loop. The leadership PO and SM had a clear mandate to lead the team and the leadership team focused on establishing a shared purpose and becoming a true team, and the good results from this effort quickly positioned the team as a role model in the IT organization. Based on these experiences it looked like if we could just get our people to step into this new suit of armor – the new Scrum roles – they would automatically turn into warriors. How wrong we were.

In the other teams, the PO and SM roles were appointed by the line manager who in many cases took one of the roles upon him/herself. Training and education were not prioritized on the same level as in the leadership team - some of the appointed POs and SMs attended courses, but except for one or two teams they did not have a daily and structured interaction with coaches over a longer period, and the pull for coaching continued to come mostly from the leadership team.

Furthermore, the mandate for POs/SMs, who were not line managers, was unclear and this clashed with the special culture of I&S, where the citizens identified as individual experts. Due to the amount of technologies and services, which they were responsible for (almost a 1:1 relationship), they were effectively one-man-armies, closely identifying with the technology they were personally in charge of. Even though we had begun aggregating technologies as we were defining work as 'products' many engineers had a difficult time seeing how this would translate into collaboration on technologies they were single handedly responsible for - and used to have a large degree of freedom to decide over. A newly appointed PO or SM was therefore facing a set of dilemmas: Who, if anyone, would take over the tasks that they used to do but could not do anymore as they need to act in their new role? Could they tell their colleagues what to do and how would they make them do it, if they did not agree?

Finally, it was very unclear how the relationship between the line manager and PO/SM was to be understood: Could they overrule the line manager? Would the line manager and top management back them up in their decisions? In the end, this was not clarified to a degree where specifically the new roles could facilitate a significant change.

Action

Carsten warned the King and his knights that the current approach could lead to cargo-scrum, where ways-of-working are only changed in name, but where work and decision processes are largely unchanged. We could have tried ensuring that all employees in the new roles received education, dictated that technology responsibility was shared, and facilitated that it was decided how the mandate was divided between the line

manager and the Scrum roles. However, this process would have required support from coaching resources that we did not have: as much as we would have liked to, we could not scale Carsten. Eventually we decided on a radical solution and completely redesigned the leadership structure in the organization. The new leadership model is described in section 3.2.1.

3.1.3   A visit from the Wandering Wizard

Problem impact

In the summer of 2018, we had been working with the transformation for almost a year and we started wondering if we would be done any time soon - or more significantly, if we *should* be done soon? At least the people who had 'seen the light' and started to believe if not in the troll but in the benefit of preparing for troll invasion – the front runners and evangelists – were starting to question themselves if the entire effort would be marked as a failure and rolled back soon. This speculation was starting to have a negative impact on the drive and progress of the transformation.

Root cause

Usually, when going through a large organizational change program in our organization, we would expect to be done or at least half-done at this point in time a year after initiation. But clearly, we were not done yet, so we were getting nervous about the decisions we had made, especially about not wanting to manage the transition top-down. Many of us felt like we had much to learn yet and even though this was not discussed explicitly, it is the authors impression that no one thought that we were able to pull it off completely within the next couple of months. Would we be scolded by top management for not being fully agile yet? Would top management withdraw their support to the process? The latter was extremely likely if we were to judge from our previous experiences with change programs in the company, which almost always ended up like fads, as described in section 3.1.1. If this were to happen, we could foresee an impact on our motivation for going to work as well as a potential negative impact on our careers. The fear became personal!

Action

In the fall of 2018, we were lucky enough to host the Wandering Wizard, Alistair Cockburn, who came to be known as 'our agile guru', in a two-day seance where he engaged with the citizens and teams in the Realm as well as he had a long sit-down with the Emperor and the kings. Alistair's visit became a milestone for our change and the inhabitants of the Realm still refers to his Heart of Agile mantra - 'collaborate, deliver, reflect and improve' - when confusion and frustration surge. The main message was: it is not magic, it is not complex, it is not rigid - it is about finding *your* way. This external input from one of the founding fathers of the agile manifesto was exciting and inspiring and the citizens rode on this wave of energy and entrepreneur spirit for a while, which we believe has made a significant positive difference for the inhabitants of the Realm's perspective on 'being agile'.

The most important outcome of the visit was, however, Alistair's perspective on time. Everyone had - in spite of all efforts not to bring in any of our usual perspectives on change into the mix this time - simultaneously believed that the end goal was one or two years out in the future. Then surely, we would 'be agile', right? The message from the Wandering Wizard was a different one: "This process will take you 10 years! You are one year in - you haven't seen nothing yet!" (October 24th 2018) This message was received with astounding disbelief by the Emperor and his kings, but it was quickly accepted and believed as Alistair has plenty of experience to speak from: he had seen trolls in all forms and places, and he had seen what kind of defense worked. There was initially a worry that if we as leaders preached a '10-year process', the momentum would disappear. This was not the case, however. Instead, we saw that this was a relief to the citizens.

The fact that we were not expected to get it right ASAP allowed us to be honest and realistic in our planning - and this was a real boost in removing the cognitive dissonance that we had experienced so far between explicit expectations from the leadership and internal, personal estimates.

3.2   Gathering the knights around the table

By the end of 2018, teams were doing agile, and agile roles and artefacts were introduced. You might ask: what is it that will take 10 years to change? The agile benefits come from adoption of mindset and beliefs. These mindsets and beliefs are driven by new practices from doing an agile method like Scrum. Everyday Scrum creates new experiences to reinforce an agile mindset. As the agile mindset was gradually experienced in the Kingdom

of I&S, the aspiration for a different future version of the Kingdom manifested. This future version called for a new mindset and a new culture. As practices, mindset, values and culture change a pressure grows to change the structures.

We had already formed product teams and defined products. The next natural step was to ensure old leader habits were adjusted to let the new agile roles live. This was a significant change. Leaving the structures unadjusted as they were, would increase the risk for cargo-scrum significantly. We therefore set out to change the structures.

3.2.1   Call of duty

Problem impact

In the autumn of 2018, the King of I&S concluded that one of the biggest blockers for change was now the unclear roles and leadership mandate, as described in section 3.1.2. How was the mandate given to PO and SM? Up until now, we had not found a good solution for the issue within the existing structures.

Root cause

The realm and the Kingdom of I&S were still under the regime of the company-wide HR department who were not (yet) a part of the fight against the troll. The implications of this hampered the agile transformation by affecting power and prestige structures. Specifically, the formal structures in the company dictated that it was the manager to whom the engineers were reporting, who was responsible for the product. The same person was responsible for the employees in the team - and the team. The formal structures created a power gap and the line manager ultimately had to be the PO and the SM. In other words, in the existing structure, we could ever only accomplish vague 'empowerment' of the roles, and the line manager would still be accountable for the decisions by PO and SM.

Action

The King and his executive assistant sought inspiration from Carsten, from agile frameworks, and from other agile companies, for how to organize leadership efficiently, but did not find an answer to the question: How can we organize with a PO and an SM ensuring a direction for the product and a well-functioning team? Carsten pointed out that the mandate for the new roles would have to be installed in the roles and proposed different ways to achieve this. It was decided that in the Kingdom of I&S the line-manager should no longer be overall responsible for products, teams and people in the future. To increase *speed* in decisions, the mandate needed to make decisions on products should be with the PO entirely and the mandate to run the team should be entirely with the SM. We needed to create a clear call of duty for all leaders.

We also understood that this was an opportunity to increase *leader motivation* as well as the *quantity* and *quality* of leadership. Firstly, if we divided the leadership responsibility and cast our POs and SMs right, we would allow leaders to be occupied with the elements of leadership that interested them the most, and we believed that *this would increase energy and motivation* in the leadership team. Our experience was that leaders have a preference for working with either technology, people, processes or a combination thereof - but never all of them.

Secondly, if we assigned leaders to handle either technology (products), teams or people, respectively, *the quantity of leadership would be significantly increased*: we would be able to provide the amount of leadership that is actually expected by top management and by employees. There are only 24 hours in a day and there is only so much a manager can manage to do.

Finally, if we separate the areas of the traditional manager, the leaders will have more opportunities to get deep into the subject-matter and learn the skills to provide *leadership of a higher quality*. We expect our leaders to be good at what they do and if you want to be really good at something, you need to really focus on practicing this and do little else. If we accept these statements, it is clear that a traditional line manager will fall short at least in some areas as the line manager does not have the time or the opportunity to become the expert in technology, people and processes that we need.

To sum up: a radical decision was made - the role of the line manager had to go. The PO and SM would be responsible for products and teams, and the only issue left was the fact that we still needed someone to carry out the 'people-side' of the traditional manager: hiring and firing, developing etc. We were not about to cram that into one of the existing roles (i.e. the PO or SM) as this would jeopardize the efficiency of these roles. Instead, we decided to design a new role to handle this as well as the organizational design of the department: The Organizational Lead (OL).

In support of this change we iteratively used the heat map tool from Scrum@Scale to highlight what part of the organizational setup needed to be improved the most. We also established a buy in from the HR department to try out this new structure as an experiment, and looking back now one and a half years later, we absolutely managed to increase both quantity and quality of leadership. It was a success. For a long time, however, this improvement was not visible to us, mainly because both the knights of the leadership team and the citizens' reactions were not positive. We did, at first, not experience increased *motivation* in the leadership team and the increased focus and attention were not received as positively by the employees as we had naively expected.

The latter can be explained, we believe, by the 'missing why' (as described in section 3.1.1) but also that we had not yet created the optimal setup around them, where it made sense to them to have their daily work prioritized by someone and working together with others (as described in section 3.1.2). In the next section we dive into the former and try to understand why the leadership team was not motivated.

3.2.2   Overcoming fear of the unknown and the power of habits

Problem impact

The year 2019 was an *annus horribilis* for the leaders, who had now ventured into the new structure. The official motivation and satisfaction survey in November showed that the team had been at an all-time low (the employees' result was also lower than usual but not significantly).

Root cause

Reflecting upon the time that led up to the change and the months following the change, we have some ideas as to what hampered the spirits of the (leadership) team in 2019:

Firstly, we continued with the leadership team as a Scrum team in 2019 as we had in 2018, but we had grown into a team of 20 people and it did not work. It undermined our belief in the setup to a degree where we started forgetting our initial successes.

Secondly, pressure from 'the unknown' – all the things that were new to us – pushed us back into old habits, and we found comfort in making decisions we used to make even though they were not ours to make anymore.

Thirdly, the uncertainty in process, roles and responsibilities increased fear. This was new ground for all involved and nobody knew exactly how to 'live it' and how it would affect them personally.

Fourthly, the leadership team was given a huge degree of freedom in 2019 and was invited to shape the future, but we – like many others – reacted by becoming paralyzed with this freedom.

Finally, we had missed some key responsibilities of the leadership team (such as coordination to other kingdoms on projects and major incidents) that were not included in the new setup, and this led to mounting frustration.

Action

For most of 2019, we were hesitant to make more changes and adjustments. However, slowly we started to accommodate for the issues we saw.

Firstly, in medio 2019, we broke up the leadership Scrum team and established three teams, one for each of the roles, who today have a few shared events where we create transparency around what is moving in the products, teams and the organization. The three teams decide for themselves how to work together, but the contours of a Scrum@Scale structure (with an Executive Action Team and Executive Meta Scrum) is starting to emerge.

Secondly, time is working for us and as it goes by and we get more and more positive experiences under our belt, the initial knee jerk reactions are becoming fewer and fewer – we are starting to keep to our own turf.

Thirdly, again time has worked for us and we have become better at understanding what the expectations of us are and we have experienced a yearly people review cycle and seen the (limited if any) effect the organization change has had for our power and prestige: we have seen how we are formally rewarded for living our roles.

Fourthly, we are starting to embrace freedom and the three leadership teams decide their own backlog. Overall the direction on a vision-level is still being provided by the King, but we are getting into the rhythm of translating this into 'bite sized' tasks and deciding on timing.

Finally, the responsibilities and tasks that were initially not a part of the structure were all through 2019 handled by dutiful leaders out of interest, and today people are recognized and appreciated for it, albeit it is still informal.

If we had known how the change would affect the leadership team, we might not have been bold enough to make the radical change we made. We were saved by time and endurance and today we are in a good place, but

we could have mitigated some of the frustration and fear that were a significant part of 2019. More explicit communication of job guarantee, but not role guarantee and better recognition of title and competencies may have been effective in alleviating the aggravated leadership team.

4. ENTER THE TROLL – AND A DRAGON

Throughout the change so far, people moved emotionally between a 'yes let's do it'-attitude to a 'I give up, this is a dead end' [from conversations between coach and a PO in 2019], however, by the of 2019 things had changed through a change of the leadership structure and the culture supported by a clear 'why'. The King was able to describe the troll in a way, where citizens and knights believed in its existence; POs were starting to share how they had dialogues with unhappy customers about the time it took to get services from the teams [value stream mapping example presented by a PO to the PO group on February 21st 2020]; and how there was a positive interest from customer in getting new IaaS/PaaS cloud foundation services that we had not yet managed to provide [presentation by PO to the PO group in January on January 23rd 2020]. We are definitely equipped better to fight the troll, but we still have much way to go before we can safely say we can accommodate for the increased need for flexibility and speed by agility.

And the story could have ended with this lukewarm conclusion, but lo and behold, 2020 brought a completely new reality: we had to face an even bigger and much more disruptive threat. The threat was a dragon named Covid-19, and unknowingly our preparations had prepared us extremely well for it.

In March 2020, it became evident that the specialization of leadership roles ensured that we simultaneously could crisis-handle people, products and processes. The Kingdom of I&S was responsible for ensuring that the entire company could work securely and efficiently from home, and had we stayed in the mindset and leadership structure, most leaders would have been sucked into coordinating tasks related to setting up new VPNs, improving communication toolboxes and providing the company with other working from home equipment. With the new setup, however, the group of POs could fully engage in this work, while the SMs could concentrate on making teams productive in this new reality, and the OLs could focus on each employees' mental well-being. Today, we are experiencing high productivity still and the citizens of I&S report high spirits. This experience of slaying a dragon we had never imagined having to fight shows that dedicating leadership efforts to people, teams and processes works – "thank god, we did this!", as one of the OLs expressed [dialogue between coach and OL, April 21st 2020].

When the Wandering Wizard, just before Christmas 2018, declared that this would be a 10-year undertaking, it was a mystery to us how this could take so long. After meeting the dragon, we understood that success came from significant changes of beliefs and mindsets. Previously, we would have spent days preparing the battle, now we knew that the battle would come without notice and call for an immediate shared collaborative response. What we know now is that what we have learned in the past three years will need ongoing rehearsal, and just like an instrument the skill will – and must – improve over time.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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