# From Theater to Flow: Rebuilding the System Behind Agility

By Ross Beurmann


## Introduction: When Culture Becomes Theater

For more than a decade, organizations have tried to scale agility through frameworks, ceremonies, and branded playbooks. SAFe. LeSS. Spotify. Each promised structure without rigidity, alignment without bureaucracy, speed without chaos. But despite their appeal and the massive investments behind them most transformations stall. Not because teams refuse to change, but because the system doesn't.

Underneath the branding, the behaviors don't match. Strategic goals are disconnected from delivery reality. Teams are overwhelmed by demand. Governance is fragmented. Measurement is performative. And culture so often celebrated in slide decks is nowhere to be found in day-to-day decisions.

The problem isn't Agile. It's the mismatch between what companies say they value and how they actually work.

This white paper introduces a new approach to solving that disconnect not by scaling frameworks, but by scaling **coherence**. At its center is the **Operations and Measurement Engine (OPME)**: a cross-functional structure that acts as the connective tissue between strategy and execution, branded culture and behavioral norms, governance policy and delivery flow.

We'll explore why most transformations start in the wrong place, how the OPME creates the conditions for true alignment, and why a **middle-out approach** may be the only way to fix what top-down mandates and bottom-up revolts both get wrong.

If you're tired of rebranding dysfunction and calling it transformation this is for you.

## I. The "Death" of Scaled Agility: Why Frameworks Fail

For over two decades, Agile has been the dominant story in the world of software delivery and enterprise transformation. Its promises of empowered teams, faster time-to-market, closer customer collaboration, and continuous learning have been repeated in keynote speeches, company manifestos, and all-hands meetings. The branded culture of agility is everywhere:

posters touting empowerment, values sessions centered on psychological safety, and a stream of certifications promising mastery in the latest frameworks.

But beneath the slogans, a different reality unfolds. The behavioral culture that teams and leaders actually experience is often starkly different. Despite the rhetoric of empowerment, teams still face inflexible delivery timelines, dictated by roadmaps crafted far from the problem space. Frameworks like SAFe, LeSS, and the so-called Spotify Model have been rolled out with great fanfare, only to be abandoned when they fail to deliver results. Product Operations teams, established to “optimize flow,” have often become another layer of process overhead. Agile roles once seen as essential Scrum Masters, coaches, Agile program leads are increasingly viewed as expensive relics of transformations that didn’t stick.

The data reflects the story:

- Agile adoption has grown exponentially, with over 90% of organizations reporting some use of Agile practices in their delivery functions (State of Agile Report 2023).
- And yet, less than half say Agile at scale is working well, with only 11% saying it works very well (Digital.ai 2023).
- Satisfaction with Agile methods declined from 71% in 2022 to 60% in 2023, even as SAFe remained the dominant scaling framework (Agile in the Wild, McKinsey 2023).
- Layoffs of Agile roles have become common: Capital One cut 1,100 Agile-specific positions in 2023, citing Agile as "ingrained" and no longer requiring a dedicated layer of roles (Wall Street Journal, Jan 2023).
- Wells Fargo’s Agile transformation mockingly dubbed “WAgile”was quietly walked back after failing to achieve intended outcomes (Wells Fargo employee forum, 2023).
- Government-led Agile initiatives, such as the UK’s Universal Credit program, stalled due to conflicts between Agile methods and traditional compliance and contracting processes (UK National Audit Office, 2013).

The pattern is clear: Agile is introduced with the language of empowerment but practiced with the behaviors of command and control. It is sold as a way to deliver value faster, but implemented as a way to squeeze more output from delivery teams. The branded culture says “autonomy”; the behavioral culture says “do more with less, faster.”

Over the last decade, scaling frameworks have accelerated this disconnect. SAFe, LeSS, the Spotify Model all emerged to bring structure to large-scale Agile adoption. By 2020, SAFe had become the de facto standard, pushed by consultancies, embedded in tools like Jira Align, and widely adopted across enterprise and government settings (VersionOne State of Agile 2020). But as the frameworks scaled, so did the problems.

As Marty Cagan of Silicon Valley Product Group (SVPG) has observed, many organizations scale processes instead of leadership relying on roles like Product Ops and Agile Program Managers to manage coordination rather than building strong product leaders who can drive outcomes. The result, he warns, is that these roles may end up “enabling dysfunction,” rather than empowering teams to make better decisions.

Companies that once celebrated their Agile transformations began quietly stepping back:

- ING, once a flag bearer for the Spotify Model, later transitioned to LeSS after discovering the model didn't scale as cleanly as expected (Agile Coaching Exchange, 2019).
- Capital One's layoff of 1,100 Agile professionals became a landmark moment, signaling that the era of protected Agile roles might be ending (WSJ, Jan 2023).
- Wells Fargo's failed transformation showcased the risks of top-down Agile without structural reform: QA departments were cut, program managers removed, and teams left without clarity (Wells Fargo forum post, 2023).
- The public sector hasn't been immune. In the UK, the Universal Credit program designed to showcase Agile at scale was forced into a reset when Agile methods clashed with existing budget, approval, and contract structures (UK National Audit Office). Similar themes have played out in Australia, the U.S., and the EU, where pilots flourish but fail to scale due to structural resistance.

The issue isn't lack of capability, it's fractured delivery governance.

Across industries, a familiar pattern emerges:

- PMOs govern timelines and milestones, anchored in legacy delivery methodologies.
- Portfolio offices handle capacity and prioritization but often lack real-time delivery visibility.
- Product Operations governs process tooling and planning cadences disconnected from execution.
- Agile coaches and transformation leads champion frameworks without authority over budget or staffing.
- Engineering leads focus on technical outcomes without influence on value stream governance.
- Risk and compliance functions impose stage gates outside the flow of delivery.
- Release and DevOps manage deployment but are excluded from early planning decisions.

Each of these roles is essential, but they rarely act as a system of delivery. Instead, they create governance silos, each optimizing for its own metrics and mandates. The result? Teams are left to thread the needle between competing expectations, often forced to prioritize output over outcomes.

This is the environment in which agility fails not because the frameworks are flawed, but because they are applied to systems that were never designed to support flow.

Each group holds a vital piece of the puzzle. Yet rarely do they come together as a unified system. Instead, they operate in parallel competing for influence, defending their turf, and optimizing for their own success measures.

This governance infighting is the silent killer of agility. It explains why even well-intentioned teams, operating under a branded Agile structure, still find themselves blocked, burdened, and blamed. They're told they're empowered but they don't control their priorities, their budgets, or their outcomes. They're accountable without authority.

I saw this play out firsthand at a fintech company.

When I arrived, I inherited the aftermath of a failed Agile transformation run by a well-known consultancy. Their approach followed a familiar pattern: restructure the delivery teams first, address constraints from the team level upward, and assume leadership buy-in would follow once teams became more predictable.

The problem? It attacked the wrong constraints.

Despite claims of team empowerment, the flow of work was still governed by the PMO, the strategic planning cadence, and a deeply entrenched portfolio governance process. Teams were told they were autonomous, but the gates they had to pass through scope approvals, compliance reviews, funding decisions were still held by legacy orchestration functions.

The result was inevitable friction: between the branded intent of the transformation, the team structures meant to execute it, their leadership, and the governance processes that actually dictated the terms. Managers weren't incentivized to support empowerment. They were graded on throughput, budget adherence, and fixed-scope delivery so that's what they prioritized.

The underlying theory  that good team behavior would eventually earn leadership support was flawed. Leaders rarely adopt new behaviors just because teams become more predictable. They respond to what the system rewards. In this case, the system didn't change.

When the initial effort failed, the consultants were shown the door. A new leader was brought in and I was asked to restart the transformation with a smaller footprint and a tighter focus. I launched a pilot with 11 teams: one portfolio, two product teams, and eight delivery teams distributed across the U.S. and India. We didn't over-engineer it. We used a simplified SAFe model, but focused primarily on work breakdown, consistent communication, and radical transparency.

Because we kept governance lean, and middle management gave the team air cover, something important happened: the teams, especially in India, began pushing back. They asked better questions. They challenged assumptions. And for the first time in a long time, they were allowed to act in alignment with the values the organization claimed to hold.

It worked.

Ownership increased. Delivery stabilized. Planning improved. Not because we had the right framework but because we had the right permission.

But as quickly as it succeeded, it scaled too fast.

Leadership, seeing early signs of progress, rushed to expand the model without changing the system around it. The legacy behaviors weren't gone. They were just dormant. And when the transformation expanded, they returned in full force.

I knew we were losing ground the day I realized that the PMO leader who reported to the same executive as I did was given a higher title. In a hierarchy, titles signal status. And that moment made it clear: the PMO still governed delivery. Transformation was a temporary experiment. The moment it became inconvenient, it would be shuttered.

And that's exactly what happened. When budget pressures mounted, the transformation team was declared "complete" and dissolved despite everyone knowing we were just getting started.

This is how agility dies in large organizations not loudly, but quietly. Not in failure, but in slow surrender to the system that never changed.

Agile isn't dead. But in many places, it's become hollow branded with the right language but misaligned with the structures that shape behavior. The question now is no longer whether Agile can work. It's whether we're willing to confront the system that keeps it from working at scale.

So how do you know if your organization has slipped into this cycle where the branding says "empowerment," but the behaviors say "control"? The signs are there. They show up in decisions, in reporting lines, in meeting agendas. They live in the space between what leaders say and what teams are actually allowed to do.

In the next section, we'll explore how to diagnose that misalignment, not just through anecdote or opinion, but through visible, repeatable patterns that reveal the real culture underneath the one that's marketed.

# II. The Tells: How to Spot Misaligned Agility

If the death of agility is slow, quiet, and systemic, how do you know it's happening in your organization? The signs are almost never loud. They don't usually show up in a failed launch or a missed milestone. More often, they present as symptoms slight misalignments that compound over time. They hide in the everyday: in decision-making patterns, meeting dynamics, and how people talk about the work.

In organizations where the branded Agile story diverges from the behavioral reality, the clues aren't anecdotal, they're structural. They live in the gap between what the organization says and how it behaves.

You'll hear "we're Agile," but teams still need executive sign-off to change scope. They're told they own their backlog, but must pass through gated reviews just to start a sprint. Quarterly plans are cast in stone. "Empowerment" is a word on a wall, not a working condition.

Artifacts abound roadmaps, intake forms, sprint rituals but bold product thinking is nowhere to be found. Product Managers manage inputs, not outcomes. Product Ops runs planning ceremonies, but lacks the power to kill weak ideas or escalate when strategy falters. When a product becomes a set of rituals, not a lever for impact, the system has lost its way.

Governance still happens in a parallel universe. Architecture decisions, compliance reviews, funding gates, and release approvals operate on their own timeline rarely aligned with team cadences. Work pauses not because teams underperform, but because governance can't keep pace. Flow breaks down not in the teams, but in the system around them.

Even metrics designed to inform are turned into weapons. Velocity and cycle time, intended for reflection, are used to compare teams, enforce deadlines, and apply pressure. The result? Teams pad estimates, avoid risk, and optimize for appearances. The system stops rewarding truth and starts rewarding theater.

Meetings reflect this misalignment. Standups happen. Retros run. But decisions? They're made elsewhere in Steering Committees, Risk Councils, and Portfolio Boards. The real power hasn't shifted; it's just been hidden behind Agile theater.

When the belt tightens, the façade slips. Scrum Masters, Coaches, Program Leads those who once led the transformation are often the first to go. The message is clear: agility was a phase, not a capability. And those who were hired to support it are now seen as expendable.

Then comes the final tell: the declaration that the "transformation is complete." It's not a milestone, it's a signal that the organization is done trying. The language becomes a shield, a way to claim success while quietly reverting to old behaviors.

These aren't isolated red flags. They're part of a larger pattern, a diagnostic of misaligned agility. Teams are accountable without being empowered. Product becomes a process, not a strategy. Governance lives outside the flow of work. Metrics are misused. Meetings reinforce hierarchy. Agile roles are disposable. And "transformation complete" becomes the corporate euphemism for surrender.

The seven signals:

- Teams are held accountable without being empowered.
- Product becomes a process, not a strategy.
- Governance lives outside the flow of work.
- Metrics are weaponized instead of illuminating.
- Meetings mirror old hierarchies.
- Agile roles are discarded when budgets tighten.
- "Transformation complete" becomes the corporate euphemism for giving up.

These seven tells aren't just observations, they're signals. And they must be surfaced, not just as symptoms, but as data points that inform how change is approached. To build a truly scaled Agile environment, it's not enough to coach teams or roll out frameworks. We must work with the right people across the system delivery leaders, governance owners, and senior executives and assess their alignment, not their intentions.

In one organization I worked with, the branded culture centered around making customers feel “project proud.” The idea was that every team from marketing to installation should do whatever it takes to deliver a seamless, affordable, and timely home improvement experience. It was a promise to treat each project with care, and each customer with pride.

But that branded culture never made it past the posters.

The behavioral culture told a very different story, one dominated by EBITDA targets and rigid margin controls. Every functional area was measured on its ability to protect per-job profitability. That singular focus turned collaboration into competition.

Marketing was praised for generating more leads, regardless of whether those leads could actually convert. Sales was incentivized to close quickly and maximize revenue, even if that meant promising unrealistic timelines. Scheduling was pressured to jam installs into limited capacity, often with little context about upstream commitments. Manufacturing and logistics were pushed to deliver faster and cheaper, while keeping error rates low. And when something inevitably went wrong delays, scope changes, customer dissatisfaction each function pointed to another as the source of the issue.

Rather than act as a value stream, the organization behaved like a relay race, each team optimizing its handoff, but no one owning the full customer experience.

One particular moment captured the disconnect: a project coordinator, seeing that a customer’s windows were delayed due to a manufacturing issue, offered a modest discount as a goodwill gesture. The customer was relieved, grateful even and the fix made them feel “project proud.”

But the leadership wasn’t impressed. The discount dropped the job’s margin below target. The coordinator was reprimanded. The message was clear: protecting the brand wasn’t as important as protecting the margin.

This wasn’t an isolated incident. The structure of the business encouraged siloed excellence over systemic success. Functions competed instead of collaborating. Local optimizations undermined global outcomes. The branded culture said “unite for the customer.” The behavioral culture said “hit your number and if someone else misses theirs, that’s not your problem.”

In retrospect, this was a perfect example of misaligned agility. The customer experience wasn’t broken because of bad intent. It was broken because the system rewarded internal survival over external value. Agility didn’t fail because of the people. It failed because the governance created a zero-sum game.

To illustrate how misaligned agility shows up in practice, let’s apply the Seven Signals diagnostic to the “Project Proud” example:

| Signal | Observed Behavior |
|---|---|
| **1. Teams are accountable without being empowered** | The project coordinator was held responsible for customer satisfaction but punished for making an empowered decision to preserve it. Authority did not match accountability. |
| **2. Product becomes a process, not a strategy** | Each function treated the work as a pipeline to be managed not a product to improve. Strategy was replaced by throughput metrics. |
| **3. Governance lives outside the flow of work** | Margin control, executive approvals, and financial constraints trumped situational decision-making. Governance didn't adapt to context; it imposed static rules. |
| **4. Metrics are weaponized** | Margin per job was the dominant metric. Teams avoided actions that could help customers if those actions hurt local performance indicators. The system punished customer-centric behavior. |
| **5. Meetings mirror old hierarchies** | Decisions were top-down. Frontline workers had rituals (daily huddles, handoffs) but had no influence on larger operational planning. Real decision-making sat with finance and executive leadership. |
| **6. Agile roles are discarded when budgets tighten** | There was no role explicitly responsible for cross-functional flow or agility. Improvement conversations were informal and often ignored when cost pressures increased. |
| **7. "Transformation complete" becomes the corporate euphemism for giving up** | The push toward "project proud" was framed as a completed rollout. Once margin control issues surfaced, the cultural initiative was sidelined, with no structural follow-through or adaptation. |

Because real transformation isn't triggered by a new process. It's triggered by systemic permission: by aligning what the organization says with what it actually rewards.

I've seen these signals firsthand. At first, they seem benign: a roadmap revised without the team, a retro that ends in silence, a manager who speaks the language of empowerment but rewards output over outcomes. Over time, those moments compound. They don't just shape deliverables, they shape behavior. People show up cautious, quiet, performative. Not because they don't care but because the system taught them that nothing actually changed.

And once that message lands, the transformation is already over. The system has won.

In the next section, we'll look beneath the surface. Past the roles, beyond the rituals to the structural root of the problem: flow-incompatible governance.

# III. The Root Cause: Flow-Incompatible Governance

Beneath every failed transformation is a system that refuses to change. Not the people. Not the teams. The system. Specifically: how operations and measurement are handled.

While most transformations start either at the top (with strategic vision) or the bottom (with team-level rituals), they almost always ignore the middle, the operational heart of how work flows, decisions are made, and accountability is enforced. This is where the behavioral culture lives. And it's where most transformations fail.

Middle management, caught in this neglected tier, becomes the pressure valve for the entire system. The top communicates intentions, but not strategies. The bottom is overwhelmed, swimming in demand without adequate design or architectural resourcing. In the void, middle managers are tasked with reconciling conflicting signals, managing unrealistic expectations from above, and shielding teams below from chaotic demands.

They become the hammer trying to put in a screw, ill-equipped for the job, but still responsible for the outcome. This is where the branded culture and behavioral culture collide. Instead of aligning toward shared goals, these managers navigate a reactive landscape, trying to appear empowered while managing up, and trying to appear in control while placating teams operating at their limit. It's not a strategic tier; it's a seismic zone, where the misalignments rumble until the aftershocks are felt across the enterprise.

Governance is often miscast as a set of guardrails: compliance checks, budgeting rhythms, release approvals, reporting templates. But in reality, operational and measurement structures determine how ideas become investments, how investments become work, and how work becomes value. If that system isn't reimagined, no amount of agile coaching or executive training will change the outcome.

The functions that shape this flow are rarely aligned. Portfolio Management Offices prioritize initiatives based on capacity, not value. PMOs govern fixed timelines and legacy milestones. Product Operations sets planning cadences without authority to shift priorities. Engineering manages delivery but is excluded from portfolio-level tradeoffs. Risk and Compliance impose controls outside of sprint cadence. DevOps enables deployment but doesn't shape what gets built or when. Each group optimizes for its own metrics, leaving teams to navigate a gauntlet of disconnected expectations.

This operational misalignment isn't a failure of intent. It's a failure of integration.

To address it, we need a different kind of transformation model, one that starts not with frameworks or team rituals, but with the connective tissue between strategy and execution.

This is the opportunity for a new construct: the **Operations and Measurement Engine (OPME)**.

I had a chance to experiment with this idea though in a more limited form at a large pharmaceutical company undergoing a transformation inside a highly regulated environment. I was coaching a cross-functional leadership team working across product, regulatory, IT, and compliance functions. What we found wasn't a lack of governance, it was too much of it, scattered across every tier of the organization.

Financial decision-making and investment planning were governed at the top. Product roadmap approvals and solution definitions were handled in the upper middle. Design, content, and architecture lived in the lower middle. Execution and release decisions, ironically, were governed all the way through. Every stage of the work had its own checkpoint, its own approver, and its own success criteria.

We were able to make some meaningful progress. By embedding key governance roles directly onto delivery teams compliance, regulatory content reviewers, even legal we reduced the back-and-forth and started building documentation incrementally. This alone led to fewer review cycles, fewer defects in design and documentation, and improved overall quality.

But even with these gains, the governance system remained fractured. Titles still outranked team dynamics. Policies still created handoffs that couldn't be removed. Interdependencies between governance layers between financial controls, product strategy, architecture, and compliance were outside any single team's control. No one was coordinating across all governance types.

In short, we had stirred the governance pot but we hadn't yet blended it into something unified.

This experience made something clear: even when individual governance functions start modernizing, the absence of a *cohesive governance tier* what we now call the OPME limits how much agility can be gained. We sped up part of the process, but without a single layer responsible for orchestrating all governance functions, we hit the same constraint that stops so many transformations:

Good delivery. Bad system.

Had an Operations and Measurement Engine (OPME) been in place, governance wouldn't have been fragmented across titles and tiers. Instead, it would have functioned as a unified layer cross-functional team accountable for orchestrating all governance types in service of flow. Financial, regulatory, product, and architecture decisions could have been aligned and sequenced intentionally, not reactively. By designing governance as an enabler of delivery not a checkpoint against it the OPME would have turned isolated improvements into systemic change. The result? Faster value, fewer handoffs, and a culture where behavioral agility could actually match the brand.

The OPME isn't another overlay or center of excellence. It's a cross-functional operating layer responsible for designing and managing the flow of work across the organization. Its mandate is simple but radical: align the organization's branded intent with its behavioral reality by shaping the systems that govern flow.

Where traditional transformations push agility down or cascade strategy from above, the OPME takes a middle-out approach:

- **At the top**, executives define business, product, and architecture strategies.
- **At the bottom**, teams build solutions and ship value.
- **In the middle**, the OPME governs how work flows between these layers: managing risk, aligning funding, resolving dependencies, and enabling cross-functional coordination.

In effect, the OPME becomes the steward of alignment. Not just between teams, but between the culture organizations claim to have and the one they actually live.

This concept isn't theoretical. It emerges directly from pattern recognition across dozens of failed and successful transformations. When we analyzed the breakdowns at companies that had strong branding around agility but struggled to deliver, the problem was always the same: teams were being asked to change their behavior without the operational systems changing with them.

That's why the "Project Proud" case matters. It's a real-world example of what happens when operational systems prioritize internal optimization over customer value. Every function was told to win its game. But nobody was responsible for the handoffs, the friction, or the flow. The result wasn't pride, it was dysfunction.

The OPME exists to prevent that.

It brings together the often-siloed players of transformation Portfolio Management, Product Ops, PMO, Engineering Leadership, Risk & Compliance, Architecture, and DevOps and tasks them with a singular shared mission: enable fast, frictionless, value-aligned flow from strategy to execution.

This isn't about replacing existing roles. It's about giving them a shared forum, shared metrics, and shared accountability for delivery flow. And most importantly, it's about ensuring that when an organization claims to be Agile, it behaves accordingly not just at the team level, but everywhere work flows.

In the next section, we'll begin to define the core capabilities of an Operations and Measurement Engine and how to build one.

# IV. Designing the OPME

If the root cause of transformation failure lies in governance that is incompatible with modern delivery flow, then the solution must begin by reshaping how that flow is designed, monitored, and sustained. The Operations and Measurement Engine (OPME) is more than a concept; it's a functional layer that bridges the gap between strategic aspiration and delivery execution. It operates as the connective tissue between leadership and teams, ensuring that cultural alignment and operational flow are not left to chance.

Where traditional organizations assign governance to siloed committees or legacy functions, the OPME brings together a cross-functional coalition. This isn't about functional representation. It's about co-ownership of how work gets prioritized, executed, and evaluated. The OPME shifts the focus from oversight to orchestration, from control to coordination.

The OPME doesn't prescribe how individual teams should operate. It doesn't replace architecture, product management, or compliance functions. Instead, it ensures the intersections between those teams are designed deliberately and maintained effectively. In essence, it serves as the steward of alignment not just in process, but in daily behaviors.

At its foundation, the OPME delivers three critical capabilities:

First, it **designs flow**. This means mapping how strategic intent translates into actual work not as abstract backlogs or quarterly objectives, but as tangible investment decisions, sequencing logic, planning cadences, and feedback loops. Flow is treated as a design principle, not a buzzword. The aim is to make value creation and delivery intuitive, visible, and scalable.

Second, it **measures reality**. The OPME is accountable for building a measurement system that reflects both performance and culture. This includes classic metrics like throughput and cycle time, but also new diagnostics tied to cultural alignment like decision autonomy, role clarity, and the integrity of team behavior. The Seven Signals Scorecard becomes a central tool, enabling ongoing assessment of whether teams are functioning in line with the branded culture or simply surviving the behavioral one.

Third, it **orchestrates integration**. Governance seams between risk, compliance, architecture, and funding are a major source of friction. The OPME brings those seams into the flow of work, resolving constraints early and incrementally. This capability is essential for agility in regulated and complex environments, where delivery is often delayed not by the teams, but by the systems around them.

To function well, the OPME must be more than a loose coalition. It needs clear roles, shared responsibilities, and consistent operating rhythms. Its strength lies in integration, not hierarchy. It enables transformation not through mandates, but through operational coherence.

Key roles within the OPME often include portfolio leaders, product operations, program and project managers, architects, compliance and risk officers, DevOps leads, and finance partners.

Each role contributes not only functional expertise but shared ownership of how work moves, how it's governed, and how it's improved.

Responsibilities of the OPME span several domains. It is accountable for defining how work flows from idea to execution. It must visualize dependencies and integration points, align planning cadences across teams, and simplify governance. It manages cultural alignment through tools like the Seven Signals, ensuring that behavioral drift is detected early and acted upon. And it plays an active role in removing systemic impediments and enabling faster, more responsible decision-making.

Most importantly, the OPME maintains the organization’s cultural integrity. It ensures the culture that appears in town halls and vision decks is the one lived by teams on the ground. It is the mechanism that connects the code being written to the strategy being pursued.

Without this structure, alignment fades. Transformation stalls. Culture fractures. But with it, the organization becomes not just more Agile but more honest. It builds what it says it values. It behaves how it claims to lead. And it does so at scale.

In the next section, we’ll explore how to pilot the OPME inside a complex organization and what signals indicate that the model is working as intended.

# V. Piloting the OPME: Start Small, Integrate Deep

Introducing an OPME into an organization is not a call for wholesale restructuring. It’s a reorientation, a fundamental shift in how strategy becomes execution and how governance becomes support rather than friction. Its success depends not on mass adoption but on focused proof. Piloting the OPME in a contained but strategically meaningful context allows organizations to test, learn, and refine before scaling.

The goal of the pilot is to replace fragmented oversight with coordinated flow design and measurement. You don’t need enterprise-wide mandates or massive org charts. What you need is one portfolio, one leadership group, one delivery stream somewhere the gaps between strategic intent and execution are already causing pain. That’s where the OPME begins.

**Identify a Friction Point** Look for the places where flow is broken. These are not just inefficiencies, they’re symptoms of misalignment. Late escalations, repeated rework, roadmaps detached from team capacity, or compliance bottlenecks that slow down delivery are all strong candidates. These aren’t just delivery issues. They’re invitations to design better flow.

The pilot site should be somewhere where the disconnect between branded and behavioral culture is already felt, where empowerment is promised but blocked, and where operational complexity demands coordination.

**Form a Real Working Group Not a Committee** The success of the OPME depends on the composition of its pilot team. This group must span key domains: delivery, finance, architecture, compliance, product, and operations. But more than functional representation, it must include individuals who can jointly make and enact decisions. If this group can't shift priorities, unblock teams, or align reporting without jumping through hoops, it's not an OPME it's just another advisory panel.

**Operationalize Shared Accountability** This is not another meeting. The pilot OPME should function as an operational engine. That means defining shared responsibilities for:

- Aligning budget cycles, planning rhythms, and governance reviews.
- Visualizing how work moves from strategy to deployment, with transparency around dependencies and decision points.
- Establishing an engagement model: how priorities are adjusted, how blockers are resolved, and how feedback loops operate.
- Building a measurement model that captures performance and culture alike.

This last point is key. The Seven Signals assessment is not just a transformation tool, it's a cultural barometer. Embed it early.

**Watch for the Right Signals** The success of the pilot is not just in increased throughput or fewer escalations. It's in the emergence of a new way of working. Ask:

- Are decisions happening closer to the teams?
- Are compliance and architecture inputs arriving early instead of as roadblocks?
- Are teams constructively pushing back and being heard?
- Are metrics informing action instead of driving fear?

These are not just indicators of flow. They're signs that branded culture and behavioral culture are beginning to align.

**Collect Stories That Prove the Shift** What moves an organization isn't just data, it's stories. A compliance officer who feels like a partner, not a gatekeeper. A product manager who finally sees trade-offs resolved in real time. A delivery team that knows what matters and feels empowered to act. These stories are evidence of coherence. Capture them.

As the pilot stabilizes, momentum grows. The model moves from idea to asset from a conceptual framework to a practical, embedded capability.

In the next section, we'll explore how to evolve the OPME from a local pilot into a system-wide operating model without losing its agility or falling into the traps of bureaucracy.

# VI. Sustaining the OPME: One Team, One Flow

If the pilot is the spark, scaling the OPME is the careful management of the flame. But sustaining it? That's the art of protecting coherence in the face of growth, pressure, and entropy.

This isn’t about multiplying teams. It’s about maintaining the integrity of a singular capability that spans the enterprise.

In many transformation programs, particularly those shaped by scaled agile frameworks or traditional matrixed governance models, the instinct is to replicate structures. One OPME per portfolio. One orchestration team per value stream. But this thinking leads us back to the same fragmentation that created misalignment in the first place.

While working with an agile consultancy, there was a proposal to establish an "orchestration team" , a group that sat horizontally across the enterprise, similar in function to SAFe’s Communities of Practice or Guilds. It was one of three intersecting matrices: the first being the traditional reporting structure, the second the delivery structure, and the third this horizontal network of skill sets and governance functions. On paper, it looked comprehensive. In reality, it created chaos.

Teams were suddenly getting direction from every axis policy from compliance, process changes from the SDLC team, new intake practices from product ops, and evolving tooling guidance from engineering support. No single signal stood above the rest. When overwhelmed with competing mandates, teams defaulted to the only structure that reliably impacted their performance reviews: their direct manager. And with that, behavioral culture overtook branded culture. Strategic intent dissolved into local optimization. Bad guidance stuck. Pet projects took root. And value got lost in translation.

Worse still, the horizontal functions tasked with enabling flow weren’t even coordinated among themselves. Risk defined one set of gating criteria. SDLC governance operated on another timeline entirely. Architecture reviews came late. Finance cycles didn’t align with product planning. The delivery system suffocated not because teams were underperforming, but because the structures around them were misaligned, redundant, and reactive.

I witnessed this vividly at a large financial institution. The organization’s appetite for risk was low, but its mechanisms for managing that risk were overbuilt in silos. Each domain overcorrected independently, layering on control after control without collaboration. The result was tragic in its predictability: a strategy engine handcuffed by incompatible governance models, and a delivery engine overwhelmed by ever-shifting demand, guidance, and constraints. Teams lived in a state of constant churn; priorities changed weekly, backlogs collapsed under rework, and quality eroded under the weight of process friction.

This is exactly the kind of dysfunction the OPME is designed to prevent but only if it stays whole.

Rather than splitting into smaller, semi-autonomous governance pods, the OPME must remain a **single, integrated team**. A team that spans the enterprise. A team that governs not by pushing process, but by orchestrating flow. Different members may own different domains finance, architecture, compliance, delivery but they operate from one playbook, with one mission: to maintain alignment between strategic intent and tactical execution.

The OPME, in this configuration, becomes the **cardiovascular system** of the enterprise pumping insight, decisions, and alignment from the executive tier to the delivery layer and back. When change is needed whether a new regulatory requirement, a shift in risk policy, or an architectural reorientation, the OPME ensures it flows smoothly across the entire system. No chokes. No surprises. No cultural whiplash.

By staying centralized, the OPME avoids the fate of becoming just another layer of control. It remains a conductor not a controller. A connector not a constraint. It's not just how agility is scaled. It's how it's sustained.

In the final section, we'll look at how to protect the OPME over time, prevent institutional decay, and keep the model resilient even as the organization around it continues to change.

# VII. Conclusion: Coherence Over Control

Agile transformations fail not because teams can't learn new methods or adopt new tools but because the organizations around them are not designed to support the behaviors they claim to value. Culture gets misbranded. Governance gets misaligned. And the flow of work gets blocked not by lack of effort, but by structural incoherence.

The Operations and Measurement Engine (OPME) is not a silver bullet. It doesn't fix executive misalignment with a charter. It doesn't eliminate delivery pain with a stand-up meeting. What it does is much harder and much more lasting. It creates the conditions for coherence.

It aligns intent with execution, process with principle, and culture with behavior.

It turns governance from a bottleneck into a bridge.

It shifts transformation from a top-down initiative or bottom-up struggle into a **middle-out operating model** where the flow of work is designed intentionally, monitored meaningfully, and adjusted collectively.

But for the OPME to work, it has to be built as a capability, not a committee. A team, not a layer. A system, not a structure. It must span the enterprise without fracturing, enabling teams to deliver value with clarity, not compliance theater.

This isn't about managing transformation, it's about outgrowing the need for it. When the branded culture becomes the behavioral culture, change isn't a program. It's a property of how the organization works.

The OPME is how we get there.

What comes next is implementation building the materials, processes, and tools that bring this capability to life: pilot playbooks, decision frameworks, operating cadences, and diagnostic instruments like the Seven Signals scorecard. But before the first deck is built or diagram drawn, remember this:

The goal isn’t speed.

The goal is **alignment at scale**.

And that starts not with new ceremonies or vocabulary, but with a new commitment: to coherence over control.