From 30 to 12,000: The 16 Year Journey of an Internal Community of Practice (CoP)

Dr. Suzette Johnson

NG Fellow, Lean Agile Digital, Northrop Grumman

Christopher D. Williams

Consulting Lean-Agile Coach, Northrop Grumman

September 2024

What is a Community of Practice?

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a common scope of work or passion about a topic and want to share ideas, insights, information, best practices, solve problems, advise each other, and deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an on-going basis.

Active Communities of Practice at Northrop Grumman

NORTHROP GRUMMAN

Lean-Agile CoP	Site Reliability Engineering CoP	User Experience (UX) CoP	Instructional Designer CoP	Product Line Engineering	Common Products	GPU Community of Practice
Atlassian CoP	Dev*Ops CoP	DOORS CoP	MBSE CoP	Leading in the Digital Age CoP	Citizen Automator Community	AI Community of Practice

At least 80+ CoPs have existed since 2003

How the Northrop Grumman Agile CoP Started

A Problem to Solve

Scaling agile to the systems level

An Aligned Team

Vision and committed to the mission

Learning Culture

Continuous learning and improvement mindset

Leadership Support

A Vice President who empowered us

**Corporate Sponsorship**

Aligned with corporate initiatives

Initial SEAG Agile SE CoP Charter 2008

- Scope:
  - Cross-Sector participation
  - Both hardware and software development
  - CMMI process areas and System Engineering Agility

- Objectives:
  - Document and mature Agile development methods
  - Share knowledge, educate and train organizations on Agile technologies and practices
  - Provide input on Agile methods to the NGC Systems Engineering Handbook
  - Establish a core group of Agile SMEs
  - Identify tools and implementation methods
  - Capture lessons learned on Agile implementation
  - Recommend project management approaches for planning and monitoring and control
  - Investigate and recommend best practices for melding CMMI and Agile practices
  - Develop communications briefs and training materials
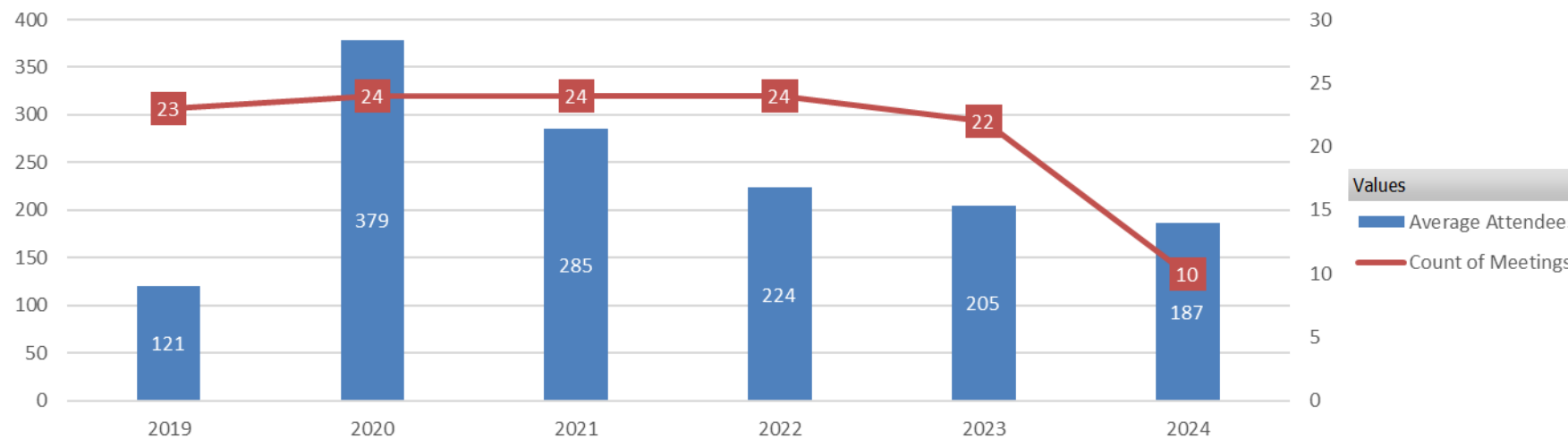
2008 – 2019: Before Agile Transformation Initiative

- Meetings held every other week for a hour
  - 12pm – 1pm Eastern
  - Primarily internal speakers with occasional speakers from industry
  - Focused on Agile topics
  - Lync, Skype, and WebEx (external speakers)
  - Yearly survey started in 2013 to gather feedback

- Organic growth
  - Mailing list grew to around 1,000 members
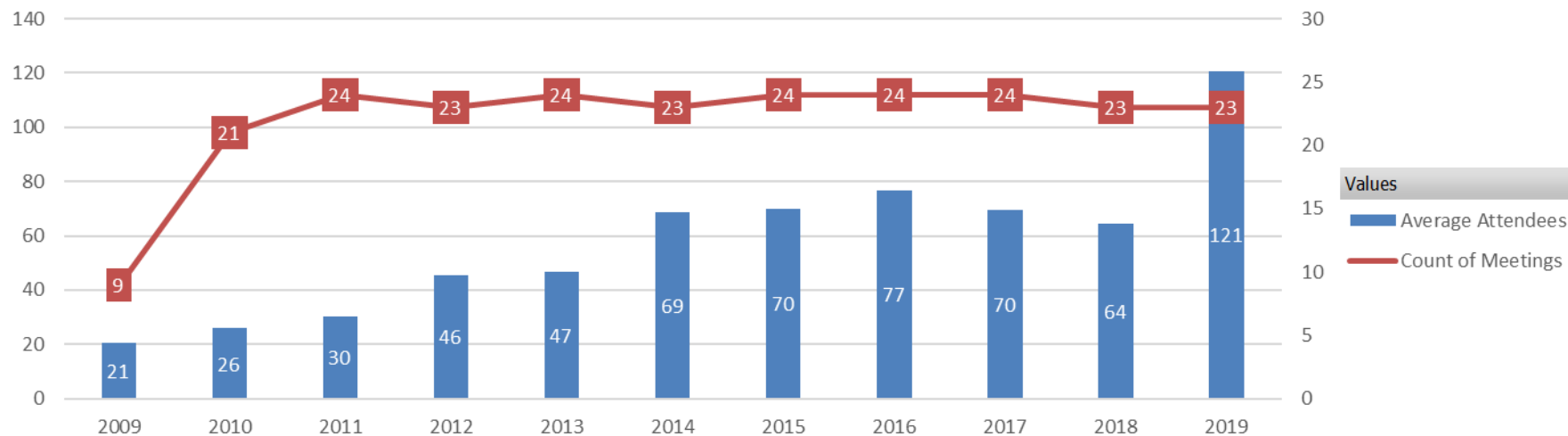
2019 – 2024: Agile Transformation Initiative

- Meetings held every other week for a hour
  - Alternate between 12pm – 1pm and 3pm – 4pm Eastern
  - Primarily internal speakers with occasional speakers from industry
  - Renamed to Lean-Agile CoP and started to include more Lean presentations
  - Skype Large Meetings and ZoomGov Webinar

- Intentional growth
  - Mailing list grew to over 12,000 by adding employees who took introductory Agile training classes

Lean-Agile CoP 2008 - 2024

386 Meetings

57,000+ Attendance

12,000+ Mailing List

Speakers

- 180+ Internal Speakers
- 80+ External Speakers

Software Engineering Institute Carnegie Mellon

Department of Defense

planview

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Disney

U.S. Air Force

BOEING

SCALED AGILE

Red Hat

LOCKHEED MARTIN

NORTHROP GRUMMAN
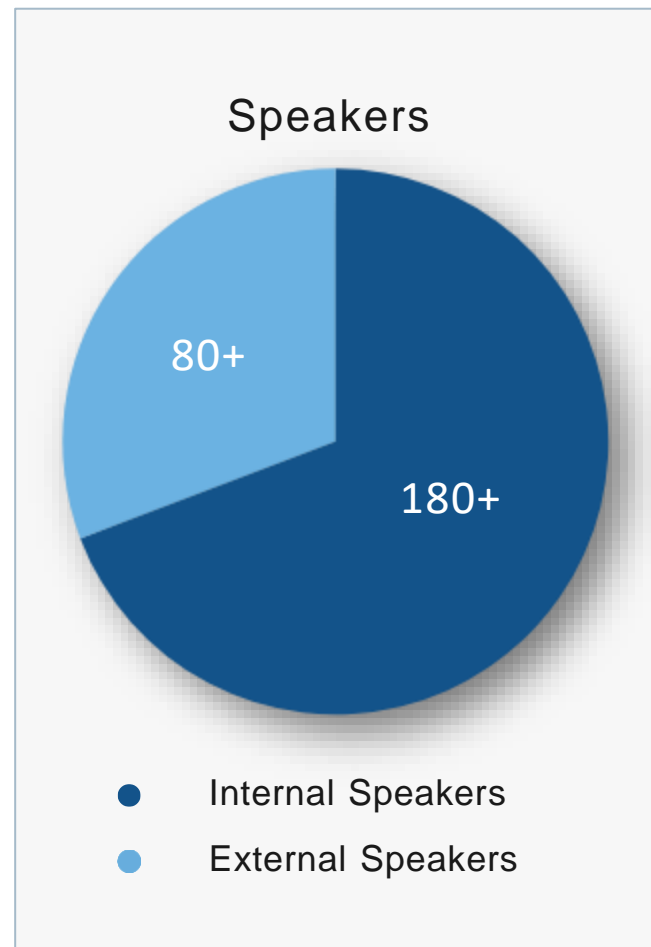
Lessons Learned

- Care
- Get leadership backing
- Send regular communications
- Reach out to champions
- Build relationships in industry
- Include adjacent topics
- You need more than one person to sustain the CoP
- Pick a cadence and stick to it
- Don't cancel meetings, especially if only meeting once a month
- Gather measures to track how the CoP is performing
- Conduct a survey at least once a year to gather feedback
- Show appreciation

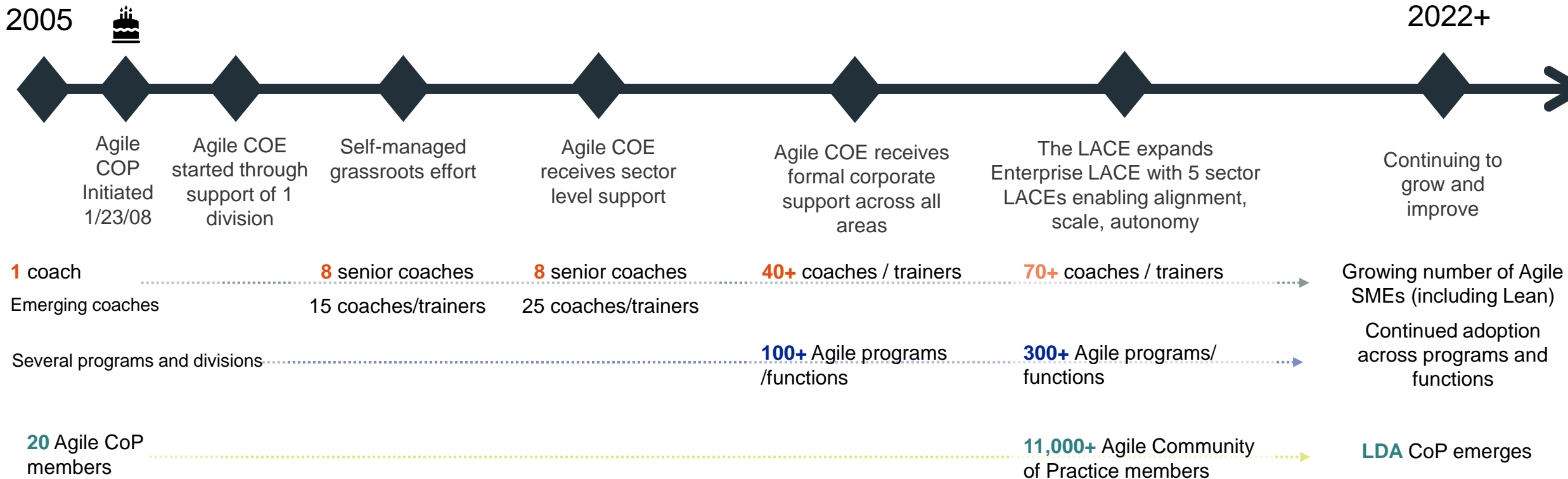| Sample measures |
|---|
| *Attendance and length on call by attendee* |
| *Unique attendees over time and repeat attendees* |
| *Mailing list adds / removes / attrition* |
| *Demographics of attendees (sector, job title, level, location)* |
| *Views on Lean-Agile CoP internal website* |
| *Net Promoter Score (NPS)* |

How Has the Lean-Agile CoP Contributed to the Business

Lean-Agile COE
From Grassroots to Growth & Sustainability

Lean-Agile provides the foundation for billions $ of business

2005

2022+

Agile COP Initiated 1/23/08	Agile COE started through support of 1 division	Self-managed grassroots effort	Agile COE receives sector level support	Agile COE receives formal corporate support across all areas	The LACE expands Enterprise LACE with 5 sector LACEs enabling alignment, scale, autonomy	Continuing to grow and improve

1 coach

Emerging coaches

8 senior coaches

15 coaches/trainers

8 senior coaches

25 coaches/trainers

40+ coaches / trainers

70+ coaches / trainers

Growing number of Agile SMEs (including Lean)

Several programs and divisions

100+ Agile programs /functions

300+ Agile programs/ functions

Continued adoption across programs and functions

20 Agile CoP members

11,000+ Agile Community of Practice members

LDA CoP emerges

Demand-driven, organic growth has shaped future path

Closing

Fostering a community of practice, empowers employees

to learn, grow, and innovate

resulting in an organization that can thrive in an evolving and ever-changing world