



Making Innovation Visible in Agile: **A Practical Guide to Capturing and Scaling What Works**

*Insights from a Real-World Transformation
Program in a Large Telco*

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview

Agile has become the dominant delivery model in many large organizations, particularly in industries undergoing aggressive digital transformation, such as telecommunications. Designed to foster adaptability, customer responsiveness, and team empowerment, Agile has undeniably improved delivery speed and operational focus. However, a growing issue is becoming evident in scaled implementations: innovation remains largely incidental, invisible, and often undervalued.

Agile teams are excellent at execution, yet lack the means to surface, validate, and scale innovation in ways that contribute visibly to enterprise-level outcomes. The more Agile matures in delivery-centric organisations, the more it risks becoming a machine for speed, while quietly suppressing reflective learning and innovation (Annosi et al., 2020).

This presents both a paradox and a missed opportunity. Agile promises adaptive learning, but most organizations lack a lightweight, repeatable mechanism to capture the value of ideas emerging in daily stand-ups, sprint reviews, or continuous improvement efforts. Even when innovation happens, it is often anecdotal, difficult to trace, and lost in translation across delivery layers.

1.2 Why This Matters Now

The stakes have never been higher for large, legacy-bound organizations. The telecommunications sector like many industries disrupted by digital entrants, is under intense pressure to deliver measurable value at speed while navigating transformation fatigue, rising complexity, and shrinking margins.

Organisations are realizing that execution alone is not enough. The ability to sense, validate, and scale innovation within Agile ecosystems is now a survival imperative. Yet, in many cases, innovation tracking is limited to formal channels like innovation labs, digital councils, or ideation portals, while grassroots innovation in delivery squads remains underutilised and underreported.

This disconnection is not just operational, it's strategic. Without visibility into what teams are doing differently, what's working, and why, organisations lose the ability to replicate success, adapt deliberately, or learn systemically. Innovation becomes localised, fragile, and siloed.

Moreover, existing innovation measurement frameworks are often too academic, resource-intensive, or detached from actual Agile rhythms. For mature enterprises operating at scale, this becomes a non-starter — even if they recognise the urgency of evolving. Thus, there is a pressing need for a practical, embedded, and context-aware mechanism that aligns with Agile, fits within transformation programs, and supports strategic visibility without adding bureaucratic overhead.

1.3 Background and Industry Context

In the telecommunications industry, digital transformation has led to widespread adoption of Agile at scale. Large incumbent firms have restructured their delivery models, introduced cross-functional squads, and adopted frameworks like SAFe or LeSS to orchestrate delivery across business and IT domains. These changes have yielded measurable gains in delivery cadence, collaboration, and throughput.

Yet, as Agile becomes the “new normal,” the promise of innovation is becoming harder to fulfil. Innovation tends to be invisible, incidental, and reactive. Teams rarely have the time, language, or structures to capture innovation when it occurs, especially when the organisation is preoccupied with traditional OKRs, performance metrics, or navigating complex governance.

In emerging economy settings such as “The Organization,” a large national telecommunications provider, this challenge is magnified. Here, legacy infrastructure, siloed ownership, and high delivery pressure coexist with bold transformation goals. Innovation must happen, but it must also be seen, supported, and scaled to truly create value.

1.4 Objectives of the White Paper

This white paper aims to:

1. Introduce the VINE Framework (Value-based Innovation Evaluation) as a practical, embedded approach to capturing and scaling innovation within Agile ecosystems, without disrupting delivery cadence.
2. Diagnose the innovation visibility gap faced by large, transformation-heavy organisations where Agile delivery excels, but everyday innovation often remains undocumented and undervalued.
3. Bridge theory and practice by grounding the framework in real-world implementation and aligning it with contemporary research on value creation, innovation governance, and organisational learning.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

2.1 The Innovation Invisibility Trap

As Agile becomes the standard operating model across industries, especially in large-scale transformations, organisations often assume that innovation will naturally emerge through continuous improvement rituals. While Agile encourages learning and adaptation, it was never explicitly designed to track or measure innovation. As a result, teams may be innovating. Still, the organisation remains unaware, a phenomenon also observed by Annosi et al. (2022), who describe the depletion of innovation logic when learning is deprioritised in favour of delivery.

This leads to what can be termed the innovation invisibility trap — a pattern in which iterative improvements, breakthrough ideas, or clever adaptations happen on the ground but go unnoticed, unvalidated, and unrewarded. Innovation is happening, but it is either undocumented or misclassified as mere delivery progress. In this context, speed is celebrated, but significance is missed, echoing Annosi's (2020) critique that Agile, when improperly scaled, may inadvertently suppress learning and innovation.

2.2. Evidence from Transformation Programs

Within “The Organization,” a large-scale national telco undergoing transformation, this pattern became visible during early maturity assessments and Agile metrics reviews. Observations from retrospectives, squad health checks, and Agile Operationalisation work revealed a recurring set of issues:

- Low visibility of innovation across teams — squads often made meaningful changes without any consistent method to capture or communicate them.
- Redundancy in problem-solving — multiple teams addressed similar challenges independently, with no mechanism for shared learning or replication.
- No baseline criteria for what constitutes innovation — improvements were either lost in burndown charts or hidden in tribal anecdote.

In fact, innovation-related metrics were only introduced toward the latter phase of the Agile maturity operationalization program, a tacit acknowledgment that innovation tracking had been deprioritized or overlooked in favor of more immediate delivery KPIs like velocity, throughput, and OKR completion. Such experiences are not isolated. Sjödin et al. (2020) emphasize that many large organizations struggle to align value creation with value capture, particularly when innovations emerge outside formal structures.

This misalignment reflects a deeper structural issue: while organizations may invest in innovation labs or digital councils, these mechanisms are often disconnected from Agile teams, leading to innovation becoming a top-down directive rather than an embedded practice.

2.3. Structural and Cultural Barriers

The absence of structured innovation capture is not merely a tooling gap — it's a systemic issue of design and prioritisation. Existing innovation frameworks are often:

- Too complex — requiring heavy documentation, scoring models, or long validation cycles.
- Detached from daily workflows — operating separately from sprint cycles or delivery cadences.
- Perceived as bureaucratic overhead — especially by Agile squads already navigating high delivery pressure

In many cases, Agile itself unintentionally becomes a vehicle for compliance rather than change. Teams chase output, not insight. Innovation, if it occurs, is local, fragile, and unscalable. This disconnection fuels what Day (2024) call the "execution trap" — where organisations optimise for efficiency but fail to capture emergent innovation, thereby stalling their ability to adapt and grow.

2.4. Stakeholders and Organizational Implications

Stakeholder Group	Implications of the Problem
Agile Teams	Innovation efforts go unrecognized; morale and engagement may decline.
Product Owners / Coaches	Lack of data to advocate for team-level ingenuity or share success stories.
Transformation Leaders / PMO	Inability to demonstrate portfolio-level innovation uplift; lose strategic traction.
C-Suite / Strategy Teams	Operate with incomplete insights; may overinvest in top-down innovation while undervaluing grassroots change.

Without a structured mechanism to surface innovation in-flight, organisations risk creating a false sense of transformation. They may be progressing, but not evolving.

2.5 . Consequences of Inaction

Failure to address this visibility gap leads to:

- Transformation fatigue — where teams don't see their contributions reflected in strategy.
- Wasted innovation potential — as ideas are repeated, abandoned, or siloed.
- Strategic stagnation — as leadership misses critical bottom-up signals of what's working.
- Loss of trust in Agile as a change enabler — reducing it to a delivery framework, not a transformation engine.

This paper argues that the solution is not more process, but a lighter, integrated mechanism that allows innovation to be seen, validated, and scaled, coexisting with Agile, not on top of it.

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3. PROPOSED SOLUTION: THE VINE FRAMEWORK

3.1. Overview: Making Innovation Visible in Agile Workflows

To address the innovation visibility gap in Agile transformation programs, this white paper proposes the VINE Framework — Value-based Innovation Evaluation. VINE is a lightweight, practice-rooted method to help Agile teams identify, capture, and replicate innovation as it naturally occurs within delivery environments.

Unlike centralized innovation programs or heavy assessment models, VINE is embedded within the existing Agile cadence — designed to work with stand-ups, retrospectives, and reviews, not on top of them. The framework originated within “The Organization” as a subset of the broader Agile Maturity Operationalization initiative and was created to help teams answer a deceptively simple question:

“What did we do differently that made a difference?”

By surfacing these answers in a structured yet non-burdensome way, VINE turns informal learnings into visible innovation streams that can be scaled across squads.

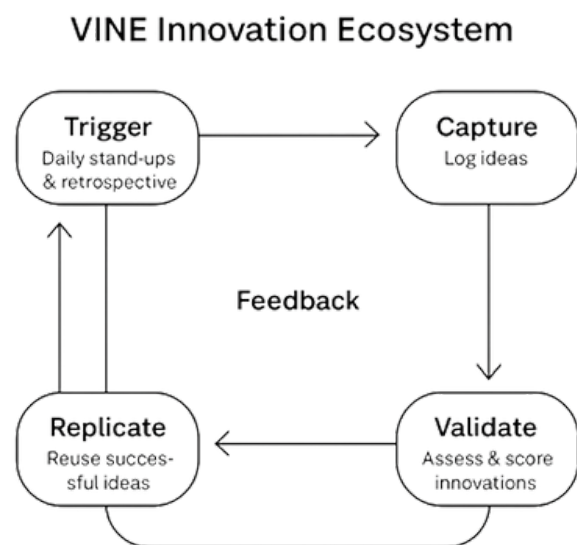


Figure 1: VINE Innovation Ecosystem

Figure 1 illustrates the VINE Innovation Ecosystem, a lightweight continuous loop designed to embed innovation capture within Agile team rhythms. Starting with Trigger moments (typically surfaced during retrospectives, stand-ups, or showcases), teams log meaningful changes or insights during the Capture phase. These entries are then lightly assessed in the Validate stage to determine whether they represent replicable innovation. Validated entries are shared across squads in the Replicate stage, enabling knowledge transfer and improvement propagation. The Feedback loop ensures that reused innovations spark new adaptations, reinforcing learning across the organisation. The simplicity and cadence-aligned design of this framework allows it to function without disrupting delivery, making it ideal for large, transformation-heavy environments where innovation is often present but under-leveraged.

3.2. Rationale: Why This Approach?

The need for VINE arose from the growing realisation that delivery and discovery were out of sync. Agile teams were adapting constantly, but there was no way to systematically validate or propagate those adaptations. More importantly, innovation tracking efforts that did exist were too detached, too academic, or too heavy to gain traction in daily team operations (Carmela et al., 2022).

Alalääkkölä et al. (2023) and Sjödin et al. (2020) have both shown how value creation in large firms often becomes decoupled from value capture. This was mirrored in “The Organization,” where retrospective insights, creative workarounds, and hack-like improvements were repeatedly lost, reinvented, or misunderstood due to the absence of a simple innovation lens.

Moreover, Day (2024) warn that over-optimising delivery while under-tracking learning creates an “execution trap” — where transformation seems fast but is in fact shallow and fragile. VINE emerged to ensure that innovation, no matter how small, had a mechanism to be acknowledged, reused, and celebrated.

3.3. High-Level Components of the VINE Framework

The VINE framework consists of five components, designed to mirror Agile rhythms and encourage low-friction adoption:

Component	Description
1. Trigger Points	Embedded within Agile events (e.g., retros, showcases, daily stand-ups), where innovation naturally surfaces.
2. Capture Mechanism	Teams log responses to the prompt: “What did we do differently?” using cards, whiteboards, or digital forms.
3. Validation Layer	Team Leads or peers use simple rubrics to assess whether the change qualifies as innovation or contextual adaptation.
4. Replication Gateway	Validated innovations are shared in tribe-level syncs, guilds, or CoPs (Community of Practices) for reuse.
5. Feedback Loop	Teams that adopt the innovation reflect and improve on it, creating iterative refinement.

The following diagram illustrates how the VINE Framework was operationalised within 'The Organisation' through its Agile Transformation Office (ATO), serving as a visibility mechanism embedded across squads, tribes, and leadership levels as part of a broader enterprise transformation initiative.

The AC*, HAC*, and DT* will work together in a cohesive manner, each focusing on their respective level.

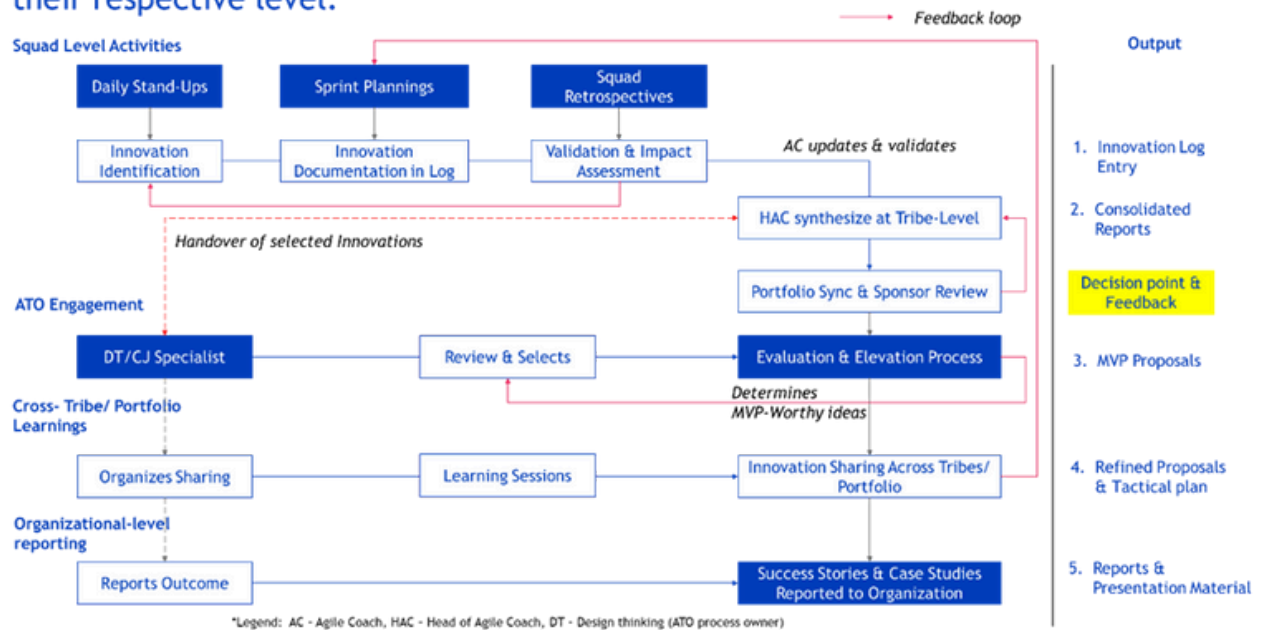


Figure 2: Sample implementation of the VINE Framework in "The Organization," showing how Agile Coaches (AC), Heads of Agile Coaches (HAC), and Design Thinking Specialists (DT) coordinate innovation visibility from squads to portfolio reporting.

This design prioritises traceability, contextual relevance, and actionability, consistent with innovation governance principles suggested by Brand et al. (2021).

3.4. Use Case: Applying VINE in “The Organisation”

During an Agile metrics recalibration within a transformation program, VINE was piloted across several squads. The approach was deliberately lightweight and activated within 30 days using existing coaching routines and team rituals. Early results included:

- 60–70% replicability of captured innovations across squads
- 40% integration of “innovation cards” in retrospectives
- Visible improvements in lead-time and rework reduction

These outcomes validated that innovation was present but often obscured by delivery metrics. VINE helped make it visible, measurable, and shareable.

3.4. Comparative Advantage Over Traditional Models

Traditional Innovation Models	VINE Framework
Centralised, top-down innovation councils	Bottom-up, embedded in teams
Heavy scoring matrices and stage-gate reviews	Simple peer validation and contextual tagging
Annual or quarterly innovation cycles	Continuous, sprint-by-sprint reflection
Separated from delivery	Integrated into Agile rhythms
Focused on big bets or disruption	Captures incremental and emergent value

This embedded, continuous model echoes the recommendation of Annosi et al. (2020), who caution that Agile can “harm learning and innovation” unless innovation is made visible and actionable in real time.

4. BENEFITS AND IMPACT

The VINE Framework provides a structured, low-friction method for organisations to recognise, quantify, and scale innovation embedded within their Agile ways of working. In transformation programs where outcomes are often tracked by top-down KPIs, VINE fills a critical gap by surfacing bottom-up innovation that often goes undocumented or unmeasured.

1. Visibility and Recognition

VINE enables organisations to capture "work done differently" in real time, offering tangible visibility into emergent practices. This not only supports strategic decision-making but also helps recognise and celebrate innovative efforts that may otherwise go unnoticed, enhancing team morale and ownership.

2. Replication and Knowledge Flow

By codifying successful practices, VINE creates a reusable repository of innovation episodes, enabling cross-team learning and accelerating adoption of what works. In the pilot implementation, innovation replicability across squads reached up to 70%, demonstrating its role in amplifying impact without increasing effort.

3. Strategic Alignment

The framework ensures that grassroots innovation aligns with broader transformation goals by making value-based innovation visible across levels—from squads to strategic portfolios. This helps transformation leaders connect operational improvements to measurable business outcomes.

4. Measurable Impact

Initial deployment within a telco enterprise showed:

- 60%+ innovation reuse rate within three months
- 40% adoption at the initiative level
- Positive feedback from agile coaches and team leads on its usability and relevance

5. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

In an environment where Agile is increasingly mainstream, the challenge is no longer adoption, but sustaining relevance, delivering measurable value, and recognising emergent innovation. The VINE Framework responds to this challenge by offering a lightweight, embedded approach to capture and scale innovation that typically remains hidden in day-to-day delivery work.

By reframing innovation as something that is already happening—but poorly surfaced—VINE shifts the narrative from “doing more” to “recognising more.” It bridges the common gap between grassroots improvement and enterprise strategy, providing transformation leaders with a bottom-up lens to complement top-down KPIs.

Early results from pilot implementations have shown VINE to be:

- Practical and low-friction – integrated into existing Agile rituals
- Scalable and adaptive – replicated across teams with minimal effort
- Impact-driven – contributing to faster delivery and reduced rework

5.1. Recommendations

1. Adopt VINE in Agile Health Checks: Integrate VINE into existing retrospectives and sprint reviews to uncover innovation episodes in real time.
2. Institutionalize Innovation Cards: Encourage teams to document and reflect on “what was done differently” and feed this into organizational learning loops.
3. Align with Strategic Portfolios: Use VINE outputs to support investment decisions, capability reviews, and continuous improvement backlogs.
4. Enable Cross-Team Sharing: Create lightweight channels (e.g. playbooks or CoPs – Community of Practices) to amplify replicable innovation across squads and business units.

VINE is more than a framework — it is a visibility engine that transforms everyday delivery into a source of measurable innovation. By making the invisible visible, it empowers organisations not only to adapt faster, but to learn better — ensuring that what works doesn’t just happen, but gets captured, validated, and scaled."

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