



slalom

# Build a world- changing delivery team

Create better products, faster by  
building a technology team in-house

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## Picture it:

You have a team of some of the smartest, most innovative and creative tech experts—software engineers, solution analysts, designers, quality assurance testers—working side by side to develop a never-before-seen product. They have pride in their work. They hold themselves accountable to create the best possible product for your customers. And they're excited to come into the office every day.

This can be your reality.

## Billion-dollar question

Today's customers expect to be blown away by every product they buy—or else they'll move on to another brand. In fact, according to a [study by Lab24](#), 84 percent of today's customers say it's somewhat or very important for the company they buy from to be innovative. Two-day shipping is convenient; same-day shipping is better. Booking a hotel room from your mobile app is nice; ordering room service and toothpaste from your hotel room using a mobile app—much nicer.

Which brings us here. Every company in every industry is now a technology company. We're all trying to create better products, faster. And we're all trying to compete against tech giants and startups for people that can build those innovative products. It can feel overwhelming.

The billion-dollar question is: How do we do it?

Maybe you feel like the underdog, unqualified and unprepared, for a matchup against the big dogs for top talent. They've got the big name, stock options, and nap pods. And you don't know how to beat them for the best people.

Or maybe you're outsourcing your software engineering projects, holding on to the hope that it'll keep costs down while helping your company do more faster. But you're struggling to create innovative products quickly—and your teams feel slow, disjointed, and uninspired.

We've got the solution.

## New approach to delivery

Every organization needs to have a team that's invested in its products, close to its customers' problems, and can collaborate closely with each other from day one. To do that, you need to say goodbye to outsourcing technology projects, and start building an inspired, collaborative delivery team in-house.

Here's why: While outsourcing still makes sense for predictable, ongoing operational tasks—like monthly invoicing and time-tracking—it doesn't work when it comes to building innovative products and getting them into customers' hands quickly.

Contractors aren't looped into your organization's core business strategy, and working on a solution without knowing how it fits into your company's big picture is inefficient and ineffective. If you're going back and forth with contractors, negotiating and editing agreements, and explaining why you're shifting gears (because your customers' needs changed, again), you're not saving time or money over the long haul—and you're not getting the value you'd get from an in-house team. Teams that understand and care deeply about your customers are going to boost velocity and drive down your cost per story point. The \$45-per-hour-to-outsource versus \$150-per-hour-to-hire-full-time-employees argument doesn't work anymore.

It shifts  
from cost  
per hour  
to cost per  
value

## More competitive, more creative

Also, creating an in-house team of people that are invested in your company's goals and get to do exciting work will not only help you deliver better products, it will also help you stand out against other tech companies—and attract and retain top talent.

We know, because we're doing it. Five years ago, Slalom launched its delivery network—a collection of regional delivery centers staffed by engineering experts—and it's already 20 percent of our business. It has completely changed the way we build products for our clients—making us faster, more creative, more competitive with talent, and happier.

And we want to share our secret sauce with you. Here, we'll walk through the structure, methods, and culture that make up a successful delivery team, so you can go start building your own.

## Delivery team structure

Establishing the structure of your delivery team, and knowing the types of roles you should be hiring for, is an important first step. Here's what the makeup of a delivery team should be:

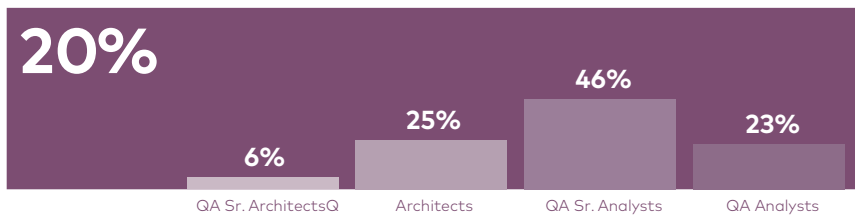
### Solution Ownership



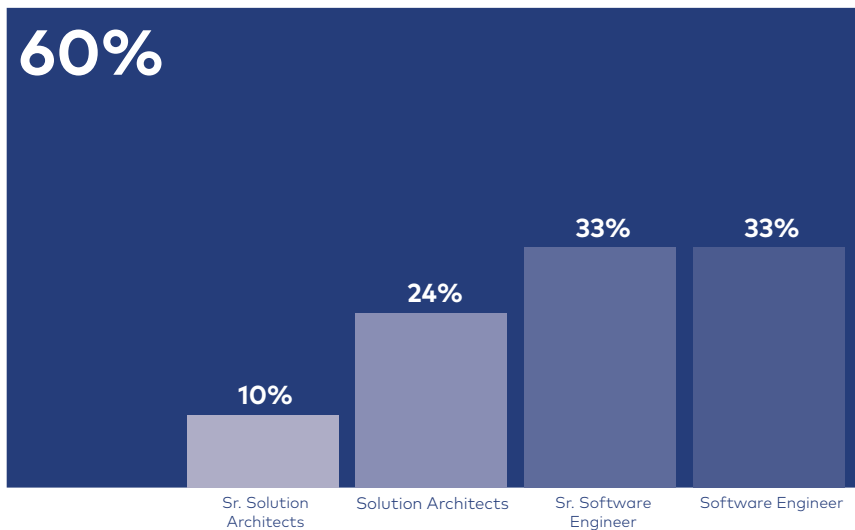
### Experience Design



### Quality Assurance



### Engineering



# Methods

## Work closer and faster

"If a company wants to become a high-performing engineering organization, the people who are leading the teams should be sharing information, talking, operating as one," says Sharon Lynch, managing director of solution ownership at Slalom. "The team should all have the same approach, mental outlook, and use the same tools."

To operate as one, every delivery team needs to embrace two often-interchangeable but different things: Agile and DevOps.

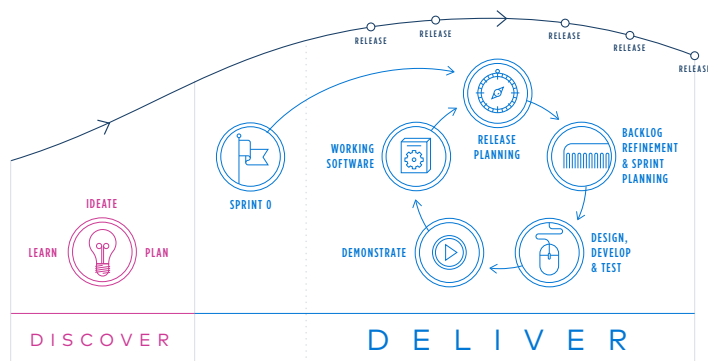
## Live and breathe Agile

Many see Agile as just an engineering process, but it should be more than that. Your delivery team should practice Agile in all areas—from culture to capabilities to infrastructure. Agile is about being able to pivot and respond quickly to change, versus following a long, comprehensive plan. It's about diving into work, developing at a fast pace, and being nimble enough to meet customers' constantly changing needs. It's about daily stand-ups that give everyone transparency into the big picture of what the company is working toward. It's about close collaboration and teamwork.

With Agile, the business doesn't throw something over the wall to engineering. Everyone is working as one team and is in-the-know on customer pain points and company goals. Everyone has a shared purpose and passion.

Below is Slalom's Agile product engineering methodology, which enables our engineering teams to deliver quality results quickly.





# Agile... tears down the walls between IT and the business

One of the biggest advantages of practicing Agile is that it tears down the walls between IT and the business, diffusing tension and making the two sides work more effectively together. With Agile, IT works in close proximity to the business and customers' needs—rather than being siloed in its own department, the last to hear customer feedback or reasons for needing to use different technologies. IT becomes empowered to find the right technology solutions for customers, and both the business and IT become accountable, and passionate about, the end product.

Agile also makes work rewarding. It gives employees new challenges constantly—and the gratification of seeing their results come to fruition every week or two. They can dive headfirst into a project, fail fast, learn by doing, and figure out a solution with the help of a team that's working on the same goals. The work stays fresh, fast-paced, and interesting.

## Deliver value faster with DevOps

Practicing Agile isn't enough. Too many organizations focus solely on building an application while completely ignoring what happens after the product has been written. To get software into production and into your customers' hands quickly and smoothly, you have to

make your operations team a part of the development process. Enter DevOps.

DevOps is when operations and development engineers work together throughout the product lifecycle—from design to development to deployment—to improve software delivery and IT effectiveness.

Like Agile, DevOps is a nuanced concept. Depending on who you ask, DevOps is a tool, a process, a practice, a mindset, a technology, or a role. From Slalom’s perspective, it’s all of the above. More important, it’s not optional: You can’t be a digital innovator without it.

DevOps is about more than the technology that feeds into it: cloud platforms, automation tools, continuous integration and deployment tools, documentation systems, and decentralized source code managers. It’s a mindset shift and an organizational muscle you need to help your teams build.

# DEVOPS TRANSFORMATION

FROM	TRANSFORM	TO
Efficiency, Reactive	Strategy	Innovative, Responsive
Hierarchy, Silos, Conflict, Blame	Culture	Collaboration, shared ownership
Low Cost	Talent	High skill
Legacy	Technology	Cloud, mobile, applications
No	Default Answer	Yes
Centralized, Synchronous	Teams	Distributed, asynchronous
Mean time between failure	Failure strategy	Mean time to recovery
Waterfall	Methodology	Iterative (Lean / Agile)
Service, Support, Order taking	Business model	Relationship & partner

# 74% reported improvements in employee recruitment and retention

According to Puppet's [2016 State of DevOps report](#), organizations that practice DevOps deploy 200 times more frequently, have 2,555 times faster lead times, recover 24 times faster, and have three times lower change failure rates.

Bonus: employees love it. According to research by [CA Technologies](#), 74 percent of respondents who added DevOps to Agile implementations reported improvements in employee recruitment and retention.

Slalom's client, [Beachbody](#), completely transformed when it embraced Agile and DevOps. Its IT and business teams were struggling with big communication gaps and a lack of trust and collaboration between the two sides. We helped Beachbody create its own delivery team that practices Agile and DevOps, and the team's culture and processes vastly improved. "The way the business views IT has fundamentally changed. Technology is now at the table helping with solutions. Technology is now seen as an advisor," says Lynch.

## Culture

Company culture can be an intangible thing. It can be a vibe you get when you sit down at your desk on a Monday morning. A boost of energy you feel when you get to sink your teeth into a challenging project. Laughing with your teammates over Thai food during lunch on a Thursday. It may seem vague and fluffy, but even if you nail your processes and have the smartest technologists in the world working for you, your culture will make or break your success.

In Rob Markey's Harvard Business Review blog post [Transform your employees into passionate advocates](#) he states, "Loyal, passionate employees bring a company as much benefit as loyal, passionate



happy  
employees  
stick  
around

customers. They stay longer, work harder, work more creatively, and find ways to go the extra mile. They bring you more great employees. And that spreads even more happiness—happiness for employees, for customers, and for shareholders."

A Columbia University study shows that the likelihood of job turnover at an organization with high company culture is a mere 13.9 percent, whereas the probability of job turnover in poor company cultures is 48.4 percent.

"Our leaders from the highest levels of our company believe that if employees are happy, everything else works. And man, that empowers people," says Arthur Best, practice area lead of Slalom's delivery center in Seattle.

Here are some ways to build a positive company culture that boosts productivity and keeps your employees happy.

### **1) Make your company's "why" known**

Millennials took over the largest share of the US labor market in 2015. And according to Gallup's 2016 study on how millennials want to work and live, "compensation is important and must be fair, but it's no longer the driver. The emphasis for this generation has switched from paycheck to purpose—and so must your culture."

The new workforce needs to understand your company's "why," which is the "purpose, cause, or belief that makes your organization exist," according to author Simon Sinek.

Share your company's why with recruits. Make it about more than cutting-edge technology or profitability or kombucha on tap. Make them understand why your team cares deeply about the work.

## 2) Make your interviews (actually) fun

If you want to stand out from the first moment you meet a recruit, give them an experience they won't get when they interview with tech giants: make the interviews fun.

An interview can be effective without being formal and terrifying. As a part of the interviewing process, we host interactive whiteboard sessions with candidates. Rather than making them stand up and write code on the whiteboard in a stiff, silent room, we talk to them, problem-solve with them, and show them what it feels like to work with us. We treat them like a part of the team.

"People always say they have fun when they interview with us," says Best. "At many companies, you're solving problems on your own in the interview, and it's awkward and uncomfortable. Here, we're discussing problems and solutions together, and trying to simulate what we do on our jobs every day. It's interactive."

There's no better way to see if someone is a culture fit than witnessing how they interact with your team in a mock-work scenario.

To make the interviews feel relaxed and seamless, give your teams plenty of training before they interview candidates. Have your interviewers shadow two people and be shadowed by two people before conducting interviews on their own. Make sure everyone is aligned on messaging, processes, and goals of the interviews.

## 3) Empower employees to take control of their careers

Establish clear career path options for roles on the delivery team—for example, the path of going from an engineer to a general manager—but don't require that people follow them. If someone wants to be a solution architect forever, let them. If someone wants to grow into a people manager, help them. Encourage people to take



**purpose**

charge of their own careers based on what fulfills them at the end of the day.

#### **4) Enable constant learning**

People want to be continuously challenged and constantly grow in their roles, or else they'll start looking for new work. Here are some ways to help your teams expand their skill sets every day.

##### **Commit to mentorship**

"Hire leaders who care about mentorship and care about the next generation that's coming in," says Best.

Senior leaders should be constantly collaborating with employees that are earlier in their careers to help the early-career people grow their skill sets. Make sure employees are also getting constant exposure to people with different technology chops, experience, and perspectives. Practicing Agile, with its required close collaboration and daily standups, helps.

"When you have an atmosphere where people want to make each other better, it starts to spill over into things people are passionate about outside of work," says Best. "The same kind of dynamic that we have around technology when we're collaborating with each other—you see that pop up around all these other things. So now you've got movie nights, poker nights, board game clubs."

##### **Spice up tasks**

Be mindful of employees' recent projects when you're assigning them new ones. If they've been working on a long, dry project, and they want to try something new, do your best to give them something fresh. If they've just learned Java and want to dive into it and challenge themselves, see if you have a Java task they could work on. Help your team find new ways to try new things and continually stretch their skills.



## Organize hackathons

Hold regular hackathons where your delivery teams can put their heads together, experiment, and push the boundaries of what's possible with technology. For example, in February 2017, Slalom partnered with Microsoft to host a [HoloLens Hackathon championship](#). Seven teams from Slalom's delivery centers came together to present the HoloLens creations they'd worked on for six months. One team created a HoloLens sous chef; another team created a realistic baseball stadium hologram where users can watch famous baseball plays from new angles. As teams presented their creations in front of a panel of judges, the energy and excitement in the room was infectious.

The creations don't need to be applicable to your business. The goal is to encourage your people to stretch themselves, learn new skills, and have fun along the way.

## Host brown bags

Set up weekly or monthly brown bag trainings over lunch, where employees can share their expertise and passions with the rest of the team. Let them be creative with topics—anything from how to master Git, to New Relic tips, to introducing the team to a new video game they're excited about. It's a low-key way for people to learn new skills and learn more about their peers.

## Get ready to shape the future

We're all facing the challenge of trying to create innovative products that will excite our fickle customers. And with this challenge comes an opportunity: To work more collaboratively. Challenge ourselves. Break down silos. Brainstorm with one another. Show up for one another. Take ownership of our products. Care about our companies' missions. Put our hearts into our work, every day.

## About Slalom

Slalom is a purpose-driven consulting firm that helps companies solve business problems and build for the future, with solutions spanning business advisory, customer experience, technology, and analytics. Founded in 2001 and headquartered in Seattle, WA, Slalom has organically grown to nearly 4,500 employees. We were named one of Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For in 2017 and are regularly recognized by our employees as a best place to work. You can find us in 25 cities across the U.S., U.K., and Canada. Learn more at [slalom.com](https://slalom.com).

## About the author



### MIKE COWDEN

is the general manager of Slalom's delivery network, a collection of regional delivery centers that create digital products and experiences for companies around the globe. Cowden has 25 years of experience helping companies solve complex technical problems and maximize investments in people and technology. He thrives off building self-sustaining teams and believes that building teams around a shared purpose drives commitment, productivity, and passion.

*Love your future*

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