

Linker Teams :

from agile project team to agile multi-project organization



Connect
and Create
for Change

IT LINK

Editorial

Whether it's at company or departmental level (IT, operational HR issues, marketing, sales, etc.), the process of digital transformation involves a large number of skills and individuals. More often than not, it takes shape as a series of projects on different scales and with different timeframes.

Putting an end to departmental data silos, encouraging collaborative work, offering a new experience to employees, proposing a new service to the end consumer... Each brick helps to build a new future and contributes to a company's overall efficiency.

For more than 35 years, IT Link has been supporting companies in their digital transformation. We optimize our clients' processes all the way from the sensor to the business application by combining technical and creative skills. Linker Teams are a new way of designing an agile, more autonomous, and more efficient organization. The aim is to give the customer a seamless experience: an optimal organization that supports its digital transformation.

Emmanuel Camus,

Director of IS Business, Cloud & Web division of the IT Link Group





THE CHALLENGES OF **AN AGILE TRANSFORMATION**

Collaborative tools, cybersecurity, low-energy digital tech... to equip their teams with the most effective tools and to meet new customer expectations, companies have had to reinvent themselves over the past few years. Faced with the complexity of the challenges, the ability to adapt and demonstrate flexibility has become more important than ever.

The digital transformation of companies: Change is the key to greater efficiency

The different timeframes that projects require, along with the growing number of stakeholders involved in a digital transformation process, all create additional difficulties. Several questions arise, such as setting priorities, identifying the key players, and deciding how to use data.



\$1.8

trillion invested by
businesses in digital
transformation in 2022.

58%

of SME managers
believe the pandemic
has created new
opportunities.

Understanding difficulties to overcome them: A challenge for every company

In 2022, companies will spend around **1.8 trillion dollars** on their digital transformation, according to the International Data Corporation, an increase of more than 17% over 2021!

Since the pandemic, many companies in France have taken a long hard look at their organizational structures and the services they offer their customers as they look for ways of becoming more efficient. According to a Deloitte study, 58% of managers in SMEs think the pandemic has created **new opportunities** and, better still, 61% believe that it will help to improve profitability over the medium and long term.

However, when it comes to deploying new solutions, there are still obstacles to be overcome. While **McKinsey France** had already signaled before the pandemic that «organizational rigidities» and a «digital skills deficit» were the main difficulties faced by companies, other issues have emerged since. These include **cyber-attacks**, a lack of internal IT and legal skills, and the difficulty in assessing the true return on investment.

Define the scope of a project

To make a success of digital transformation, it is vital to clearly identify the scope of the project. What scale are we dealing with? Is the aim to transform all of a company's processes, or to optimize data management across different departments, or to roll out a new application for a particular department?

If the requirement is to develop a solution with simple objectives in a short period of time, a «V» cycle approach can be adopted, which means carrying out the specifications to the letter. However, the 'tunnel vision' effect of this approach – i.e., developing a solution for a client (whether internal or external) without their involvement until delivery – has its limits, particularly when the project becomes larger and requires more in-depth thought. As soon as it involves rethinking the functions, architecture or development of a tool or a new interface, it makes sense to opt for an agile production approach, so that more thought can go into the project and the solution can be further developed in the future.

The larger the scope of a solution under development, the more likely it is to require complementary expertise to that of its developers, whether for legal reasons (in particular, complying with GDPR data protection rules), cybersecurity, or training in change management. For a solution to make sense, it needs to harness the appropriate skills and be suited to the company concerned.

In practical terms, a project has three key variables: the scope, the deadlines – which include the underlying business constraints – and the budget allocated to the task.



The agile approach: A philosophy and a method

Given the sheer complexity of the problems faced by companies during their digital transformation, the founders of **agile methods** have identified four keys to success:



**"People and their interactions, rather than processes and tools,
Operational solutions, rather than comprehensive documentation,
Collaborating with customers, rather having contractual negotiations,
Responding to changes, rather than sticking to a plan."**

In an «agile» transformation, it is important to have an overall philosophy that puts project leaders at the heart of the change agenda and that values discussions with stakeholders, while also highlighting the need for adaptability.

Even before the period of reflection, a number of key issues need to be addressed, such as identifying «resource» individuals who can contribute to the overall thinking behind the project, along with future users of the solution and their daily business needs. Data also has a major role to play in the quality and usability of the solution. Should it be overhauled? Should there be extras? Should it be shared more widely? All these questions can be the subject of preliminary work on the project.

When it comes to delivering a successful project, agile methods have proved their worth. However, more and more digital transformations in companies are taking place in a multi-project environment. The interconnected nature of solutions sometimes requires a coordinated effort among the various project teams (whether agile or not) and can lead sometimes to a loss of agility and efficiency.



AN AGILE MULTI-PROJECT ORGANIZATION: **FOCUS ON LINKER TEAMS**

To help companies succeed in their transformation projects, IT Link has developed a unique organizational structure for its teams, based on agile method principles. The aim is to provide a seamless experience, based on tailor-made, high-performance and lasting solutions.

Linker Teams, the driving force behind the digital transformation of companies

In the case of a strategic development project for a company, either for the whole organization or for a specific department, one of the main difficulties is tackling the multi-project, multi-technology challenge. In response, IT Link has developed Linker Teams, an agile organizational structure designed for the long term.



5-12

people per
Linker Team

Linker Teams, skills for a range of projects

Inspired by the agile organization of 'feature teams' at Spotify, Linker Teams are multi-project, multi-technology and cross-functional teams that can work transversally to co-construct, develop, deploy, and monitor every solution throughout its lifecycle. On average, each team has 5 to 12 people.

Unlike a «classic» agile development team, which comprises staff chosen for a specific project (such as a product), a Linker Team is designed for the long term. The team is organized in a way that enables it to manage several projects simultaneously in complete autonomy. Every member of the team, depending on their skills, can work on one or more projects being developed by the Linker Team.

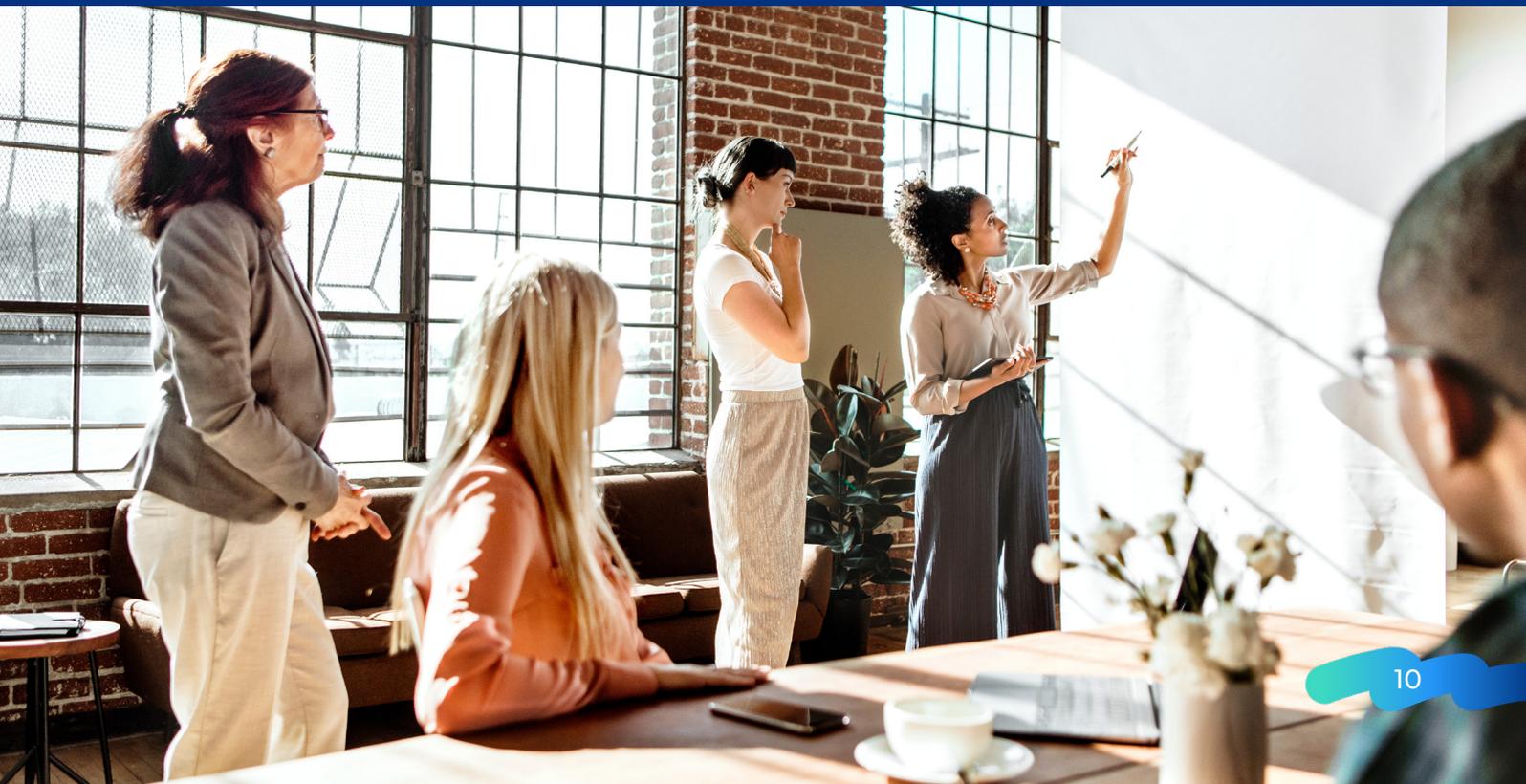
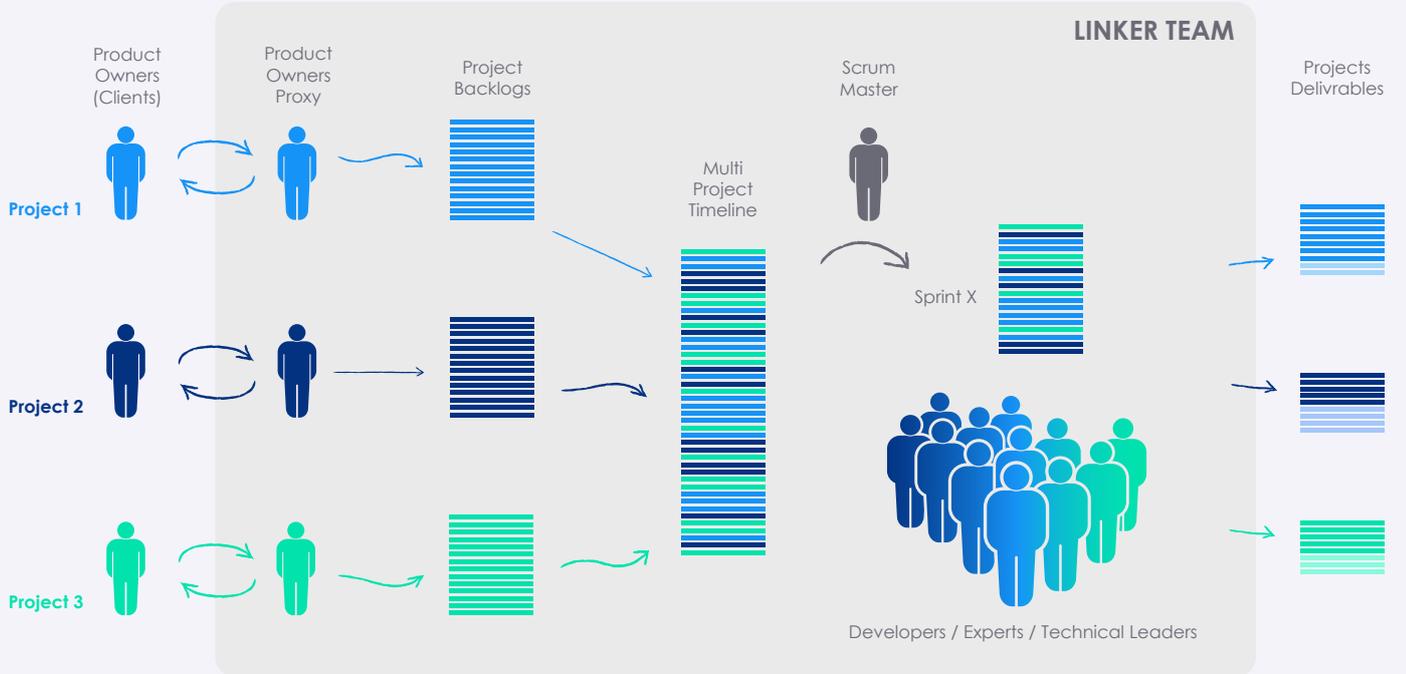
Some team members have a particular role:

- **Product Owners Proxy (POP)** define the scope of each project (including the commitments in terms of quality/cost/timescale), receive feedback during the production stage, and then share it with the rest of the team. They are responsible for the smooth running of one or more projects given to the team. For the client, the Product Owner Proxy is the key contact at each stage of the project.
- **Tech Leaders** are specialists in one or more areas that are vital for the team's day-to-day operations.
- **Each Linker** in the team carries out work with specific objectives within the overall team goal.
- **The Scrum Master** acts as a facilitator. These individuals lead their teams' processes and ensure that best practices are applied.

Regardless of their role, all team members are responsible for the success of a project.



Organization of the Linker Team



Co-constructed projects from A to Z

During the scoping phase of a project, the Product Owner Proxy carries out a functional analysis to identify the client's needs, understand the expected uses of the solution, and to clarify any potential ambiguities. In particular, it means establishing a hierarchy of the strategically important features and the secondary ones. This analysis forms the basis of the list of tasks to be performed by the Linker Team, known as the backlog. In short, the solution is designed in collaboration with the client from the very beginning of the project. A retro-planning exercise is then carried out with the company, setting out the timeline for the progressive handover of deliverables. Depending on its scale, a project could last from one month to one year.

Regular discussions are scheduled between the project manager on the client side (the Product Owner) and the Product Owner Proxy. Each week, indicators are used to collate and share information, to escalate client requests, and to discuss any problems that have arisen. The Product Owner Proxy then liaises with the Linker Team and ensures that the production schedule is adjusted according to the latest decisions about the project.

Specific times are set aside during the production process for discussing the sprints that are under way. In particular, these discussions enable the Linker Team to raise questions about the business and the possible uses of the new features.

For long-term projects, a steering committee meets every two months to check that the indicators and production deadlines are being monitored and met.

Clearly, the client is involved in every stage of the development of its solution. However, the Linker Team operates as a totally autonomous organization, which helps to create a seamless customer experience.



**1**

**1 sprint goal per sprint
Each sprint can last from
2 weeks to 1 month,
depending on the project.**

An efficient internal organization

Internally, the Scrum Master is responsible for the smooth running of the multi-project organization. Liaising with the Product Owner Proxy, the role involves collating all the various deadlines within the Linker Team schedule and dealing with arbitration that may be needed between projects in the event of any scheduling clashes. The Scrum Master also assigns Linkers to the various projects according to their skills and availability, ensuring that each project has a Product Owner Proxy and a core team that is familiar with the client's business, the technical architecture, and the project's history.

Production is organized in two-week sprints. Each one has a 'sprint goal' with precise targets, enabling the team to decide its priorities on a daily basis.

Meanwhile, a 'global daily meeting' gives each Linker the chance to talk about their activities and for the team to work together and find solutions to the problems confronting individual team members.

At the end of each sprint, a review session is held to assess what has been produced and to set the targets for the next sprint. Reviewing the earlier sprint is an opportunity to take stock of the difficulties faced and the successes achieved, and forms part of a process of continuous improvement.





Establishing a long-term relationship of trust

As a Product Owner Proxy, my mission is to help companies in their strategic thinking. Problems are often identified following a difficulty encountered by business experts (in IT, marketing, sales, etc.). The company calls on the Linker Teams to help them understand their business needs and to take the solution to the next level, thanks to the expertise available.

During the functional analysis, I try to understand the nature of these difficulties and how the client sees the solution being deployed. What are the expected uses, who will use the solution over time, etc. We also clarify the true expectations behind the technical terms – to be sure of starting from a base that is solid and commonly agreed. I also listen to the project leader and help them to express the operational issues they face.

Some projects are planned over several years. For example, this might be the internal restructuring of a department around data sharing or developing a website for a public audience. In cases like these, we work on roadmaps to define the expected deliverables and quantified objectives on a yearly basis.

Personally, I started my experience at IT Link five years ago as a developer in a Linker Team. I developed my skills by gradually taking over part of the customer relationship management role until I became a Product Owner Proxy on long-term projects. Today, I am happy to be supporting a number of companies in their digital transformation.

Blandine Seznec, Product Owner Proxy, IT Link





LINKER TEAMS : A STIMULATING, LEARNING AND SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZATION... THAT'S BUILT TO LAST



Linker Teams listen to their clients and work with them to co-construct tailor-made solutions. What's more, this organizational approach also creates an environment that helps employees to flourish.

A team built for the long-term... that creates long-term solutions



The needs of companies change over time, as do the solutions provided. Continuity in development is a way of ensuring consistency for each new requirement.

Results-based approach

While the «classic» Scrum method is based on developing the most effective solution without necessarily taking time constraints into account, Linker Teams go even further. By drawing on their expertise and past experience, they can make commitments to clients based on a three-part combination of cost/quality/deadline, while also ensuring that the appropriate processes are in place to meet those commitments.

Stable teams

For clients, this approach brings many benefits. They can rely on a «core» team that is built for the long term and that understands their challenges. The skill-sets of team members are aligned with the changing requirements of each new development, with the size of the team being increased, if necessary, to meet the project's needs.

Co-construction process

At each stage, the client co-constructs its solution with the Linker Team, but the latter remains autonomous in its execution. This approach limits the 'tunnel vision' effect that can occur when there is no discussion before the solution is actually delivered.

Stimulating environment

The multi-project nature and the autonomy of Linker Teams offers many benefits for employees. The diversity of the tasks and the sharing of skills creates a stimulating environment that fosters stability within the team and a rapid increase in its members' skills. These are essential factors for retaining talent.

Five key benefits of Linker Teams



A single point of client contact from solution design to delivery.



Results-based project management, using a cost/quality/deadline approach.



Long-term follow-up thanks to permanent teams.



Skillsets tailored to the project, with the option to enlarge the team if necessary.



Co-construction of each project, using in-depth functional analysis and regular discussions.





Technical expertise and business knowledge, the Linker Team's watchwords for the Geod'air project

IT Link has been supporting us for the past six years with the Third Party Application Maintenance of the **Geod'air** platform, which Ineris is managing as part of its activities for the Central Air Quality Monitoring Laboratory (LCSQA). As the benchmark database on air quality in France, Geod'air is also responsible for reporting to the European Commission, thereby playing its part in health and regulatory issues on a national and international scale.

We call on IT Link for corrective maintenance projects and the development of new features. IT Link's IS Business & Web Team has enabled us to improve the integration and checking of data on the platform, along with the quality of statistical calculations based on this data and the generation of official files for the European Union. It has also helped us with the launch of the Geod'air website for the public in September 2021 and with the development of new air quality indicators.

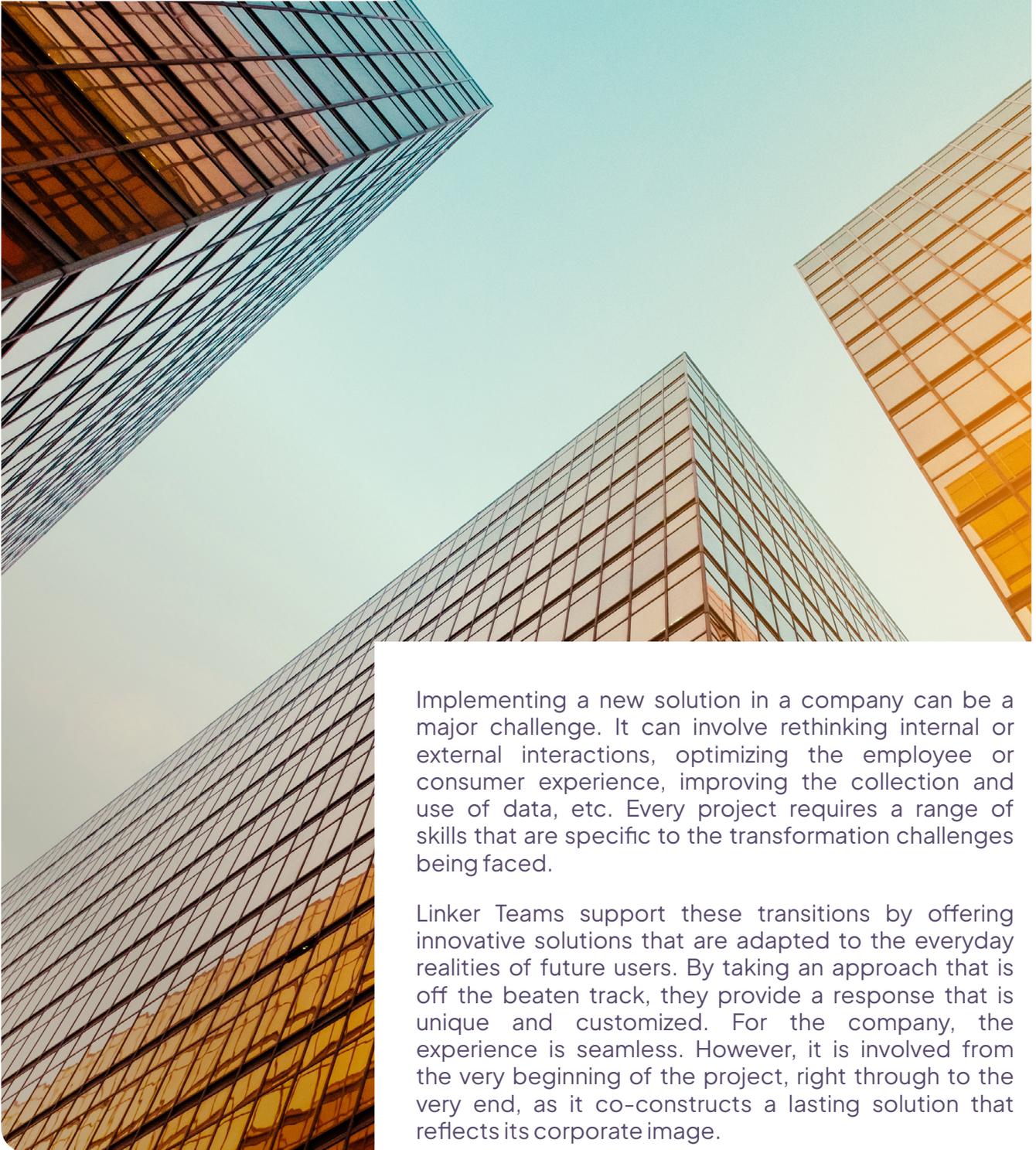
The Geod'air project includes a significant business component that can be quite complex for people to understand. IT Link was able to take this information on board and then make proposals based on some of our requests. This understanding of our business issues, along with their technical expertise, is vital when it comes to giving us advice in response to our expression of needs and to steering the platform's development in the right direction.

The agile method used by IT Link is well-suited to a project like Geod'air. Breaking down a long-term objective into shorter periods means that project milestones can be adjusted as necessary and actions can be given different priorities if there are delays. We generally proceed in three stages: after the Ineris team expresses a need, IT Link carries out a feasibility study and then launches the development process, which is followed by several testing and delivery phases, depending on the complexity of the project. After collaborating for six years, and with three and a half years to go before the next call for tenders, we are moving forward in complete confidence with IT Link on the Geod'air project.

Laurent Létinois, Geod'air project manager, Ineris



Conclusion



Implementing a new solution in a company can be a major challenge. It can involve rethinking internal or external interactions, optimizing the employee or consumer experience, improving the collection and use of data, etc. Every project requires a range of skills that are specific to the transformation challenges being faced.

Linker Teams support these transitions by offering innovative solutions that are adapted to the everyday realities of future users. By taking an approach that is off the beaten track, they provide a response that is unique and customized. For the company, the experience is seamless. However, it is involved from the very beginning of the project, right through to the very end, as it co-constructs a lasting solution that reflects its corporate image.

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