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# Designing HR for Agile Organizations

*A practical paper on agile HR design, self-leadership, salary structures, performance appraisal, and personal development.*

*in collaboration with*



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# Executive Summary

What happens when people set their own goals, own their own growth, and even determine their own pay?

Visma Roxit asked that question when we decided to make the most of our Agile setup.

We removed layers, embraced transparency, and shifted from power over to power with. We then realised that to take the next step, we needed to change our HR approach too. Traditional HR assumes managers set targets, judge performance, and decide rewards. But in a self-managing organization, that logic breaks.

Our ambition was simple and bold: a workplace where people are engaged and are enabled to perform at their best. A place where salary, promotion, and career paths are no longer sources of stress, politics, or negotiation. Where people understand their value, trust the fairness of rewards, and spend their energy on learning and contribution.

We designed an Agile HR system around a few guiding principles:

- Trust over control (Theory Y instead of Theory X).
- Learning over judging (growth beats appraisal).
- Ownership over mandates (colleagues lead themselves).
- Transparency over secrecy (clarity creates calm).

In practice, our HR setup comes together in six parts:

1. Salary as a result of reflection, not negotiation where management checks process and fairness not deciding the outcome.
2. Joint benchmarking through peer committees and one intense “Benchmark Day,” where salary ranges are updated using market data and shared logic.
3. Wide Salary Bands with fewer job descriptions reducing complexity and endless promotion-talk.
4. Social recognition instead of performance appraisal.
5. Broad Job Descriptions focused on values and outcomes.
6. Personal development owned by the colleague, supported by strong coaching, tools, and access to learning.

What did it change? More engagement. More learning. Less politics. And measurable improvements in development.

This paper shares what we wish we had known at the start!

# Rethinking HR in an Agile Organization

What happens when people and teams set their own goals, manage their own growth, and even decide on their own pay?

Six years ago, Roxit set the movement toward a new world. A new culture and a new organization with one clear vision: to become a fully Agile company. Transparency, inspection, and adaptation became our way of working. Open, honest, result-driven, and together.

Then came the big question: *how do you do HR in an Agile organization?* We searched everywhere. No book gave real answers. No training showed the way. And hardly any companies shared examples we could learn from. So we decided to experiment and believed that we would figure it out along the way!

This article tells the story of how Visma Roxit, a Dutch software company, designed an Agile HR setup that improved performance, increased employee engagement, and turned the company into a great place to work.

Curious to know how we did it? Let's start with the Visma Roxit story and then dive into the details.

The goal of this paper is to give you, the reader, the insights we wish we had had years ago when we began our journey. The writers' ambition is to help you understand and accelerate your Agile HR design journey.

## The Start...

It started with a dream. Not a strategy. Not a plan. Just a dream. And that dream came from some very real problems. Visma Roxit was a bundle of companies, each with its own HR culture. Some had formal processes, others barely had any. One had endless job descriptions, but none were up to date. Another had salary scales hidden away in HR's closet. In one place, salaries came as a surprise every year. In another, managers held annual "Conversations" with employees but that was pretty much it.

Every year the salary budget was decided on best guesses, with no clear way to define fair raises. Personal development was treated the same way: little budget, little motivation, and too many hurdles to get training approved. To make things worse, fines were common if you left, didn't graduate, or failed to tick the right boxes.

This situation gave rise to the dream: *What if we turned this upside down? What if everyone had 100% influence over their salary and their development?* Not just a little say. Not just a suggestion box. Full influence. Like freelancers: *if they can say "this is my rate," why can't we?* Imagine the commitment, the satisfaction, the performance that could create.

## **A New Belief - From Power over to Power with...**

That question pushed us to believe something different. Not new, but powerful, an idea first introduced long ago as Theory X and Theory Y. We chose to believe that:

*Theory Y*

*“Most people will exercise self-direction and self-control in service of objectives they truly commit to.”*

**—Douglas McGregor**

And to stop believing that

*Theory X*

*“Most people must be coerced, controlled, directed, or threatened with punishment to achieve goals.”*

**—Douglas McGregor**

To move from our old setup to this new way of thinking, we needed a major HR redesign. We had to leave behind traditional Theory X assumptions and embrace Theory Y thinking and acting.

### **Finding a starting point**

But where to start?

When Stephan joined VismaRoxit, he got in touch with Cesario about Agile HR. Cesario supported with suggestions and sent us a few pages of guiding principles. Simple, but powerful. We wrestled with them, debated them, lived with them. Then we took the leap and formed a transition team to start making them real for Visma Roxit.

Meanwhile, an organization inside Visma was already daring to work without managers. At a company Benelux HR meeting, during an inspiring talk about their way of working, the presenter asked: *who wants this?* The room fell silent. Only Stephan raised his hand. But one hand was enough. They gathered. They started. And from that moment, the dream began to turn real.

So, how did we do it? Well, there is no linear path, only iterations. So, let's start with an important aspect in the change process: Building self-leadership.

## **From Control to Self-Leadership**

Culture change means moving the organization into a new world. It's about org-design, identity, values, vision, leadership, rituals, language, connection, and empathy. It's also about transparency, inspection, adaptation and shifting from *power over to power with*.

## Change the language

One of the first things we worked on was changing the language. As Wittgenstein wrote in 1922, *“The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.”* If we kept using the old, hierarchical, worn-out terms, we would stay trapped in the old way of working. So our words had to reflect the new reality we wanted to build: no longer “power over” but “power with.” By choosing cleaner, more honest language, we opened up a different world of collaboration, shared responsibility, and mutual respect.

For example: we don’t talk about *employees*, we talk about *colleagues*. We don’t say *HR*, we say *People Team* (though in this text we keep HR for clarity). We don’t call them *establishments*, but *work locations*. We don’t run *hiring meetings*, but *matching meetings*. No *mandates*, but *ownership*.

Every shift in language matters.

## Creating our Agile works together

When we set our vision to become a fully Agile company, we began by removing the layer of middle managers and team leaders. Instead, we introduced dedicated Scrum Masters. Development teams took the lead, and step by step we extended the vision into every part of the organization, including HR and the management team.

## The Visma Roxit Manifesto

Our first big step was creating the Visma Roxit Manifesto. Every colleague contributed through reviews, discussions, and communities. It wasn’t about leadership telling people: *look at the great roadtrip we made, now enjoy the pictures*. It was about taking the trip together and creating the pictures as we went.

The Manifesto captured our vision, our culture, our values and beliefs, our strategy, and our way of working.

## Our Vision

A transparent, self-managed HR system where everyone:

- Knows their value
- Understands their growth path
- Trusts the fairness of their rewards
- And focuses their energy not on negotiation, but on learning, contributing, and growing together.

To bring it alive, we embraced methods in the deepest sense not by *doing* them, but by *being* them. Scrum, LeSS, OKRs, Customer Experience (CX) and more. We brought in top trainers, then developed our own Scrum Masters into internal

trainers. We built our own programs for re-boarding colleagues and onboarding new ones.

Along the way, we created a People Valuation Framework. It is like a living “book of growth” for individuals, teams, and the whole organization. Not written in theory, but built in practice.

### **No More Targets from Above**

At Visma Roxit, we moved away from top-down goal setting. No more performance targets handed down from above. Instead, people now set their own development goals: personal or work-related. One colleague, for example, said: *“This year I want to focus on stability at home.”* and another *“This year I want to focus on learning mastering coaching”*

Teams use OKRs to stay aligned, but individuals choose their own direction in the People Valuation framework. This shift gives people real ownership and flexibility. It strengthens motivation and creates a healthier balance between work and life.

In the self-employed world, people take responsibility for their own growth, happiness, and work. We believe colleagues can do the same and we support them in that... fully!.

But the vision was clear: self-guided development. And step by step, we made it real.

Of course, the journey wasn't easy. We faced big challenges:

- Different companies with different cultures and processes.
- Colleagues spread across many locations in the Netherlands, making connection hard.
- Corona hit just three months after we started, forcing us online immediately.
- No unified HR process as a company. Instead, lots of functions, roles, and closed information.
- Personal development controlled from management, not driven by people.

*Before diving into the Agile HR details we used, let's take a quick overview of Agile HR design to build a shared understanding of what we mean by it and what it aims for.*

## Agile HR Design in a Nutshell

Agile companies don't run HR the way traditional companies do. The rules, the structures, the rewards, even the role of managers are different.

In traditional HR, most decisions come from the top. Managers hand out goals and targets. Feedback is formal in one-on-one sessions and stored in HR-systems. Performance is judged by management, person by person and in isolation. The

HR owns this whole process. The management mostly decides on who learns, who grows, who gets promoted.

Agile flips this. Teams manage themselves. Managers step into the role of coach and partner. Learning happens in the work, while solving real problems. People decide what they want to learn and when, and they can reach out for outside expertise if they need it. So, no more managers carrying the responsibility for “developing their people.”

Another big change is evaluation and feedback. Evaluation doesn't come from an appraisal form. It comes from peers, teams and customers (the people who receive the team's work) often in the moment. Thus Social Recognition / feedback. It's not about who shines alone. It's about who helps the team win. Feedback changes, too. In Agile, feedback carries no power; It's not about control or judgment. It's about growth. Safe, open, forward-looking conversations help people move toward the goals they've set for themselves, not the ones someone else imposed.

And learning? It's self-initiated. People own their own growth, happiness, and careers. HR's job isn't to prescribe courses. It's to create the conditions for easy access to resources, supportive communities, and space for colleagues to learn from each other.

Look at it through three dimensions and the difference becomes clear:

- **Focus** moves from control to learning.
- **Respect** moves from judgment to trust and appreciation.
- **Choice** moves from manager-set objectives to self-chosen personal development goals.

That's our take on Agile HR in a nutshell: moving from power-over to power-with, from managing people to enabling self-leadership.

You might think, yes this is easily said but how to do it. Well, next we share how Visma Roxit did it.

## Agile HR at Roxit

The Agile HR Design / Valuation Principles is key based on systemic thinking. Bert Hellinger is the founder of Systemic Thinking. We work with three principles; and use it as guiding how we design roles and teams.

- **Binding** (everyone has the right to a place in the organisation);
- **Ordering** (each role has its natural and clear position);
- **Balance** (balance in giving and taking).

For example;

Binding: All colleagues have a relevant job description because the organisation is needing these, not because we need to give the colleagues a job description.

Ordering: It is crystal clear what is expected and what is not to be expected. It gives focus on the position in the organisation.

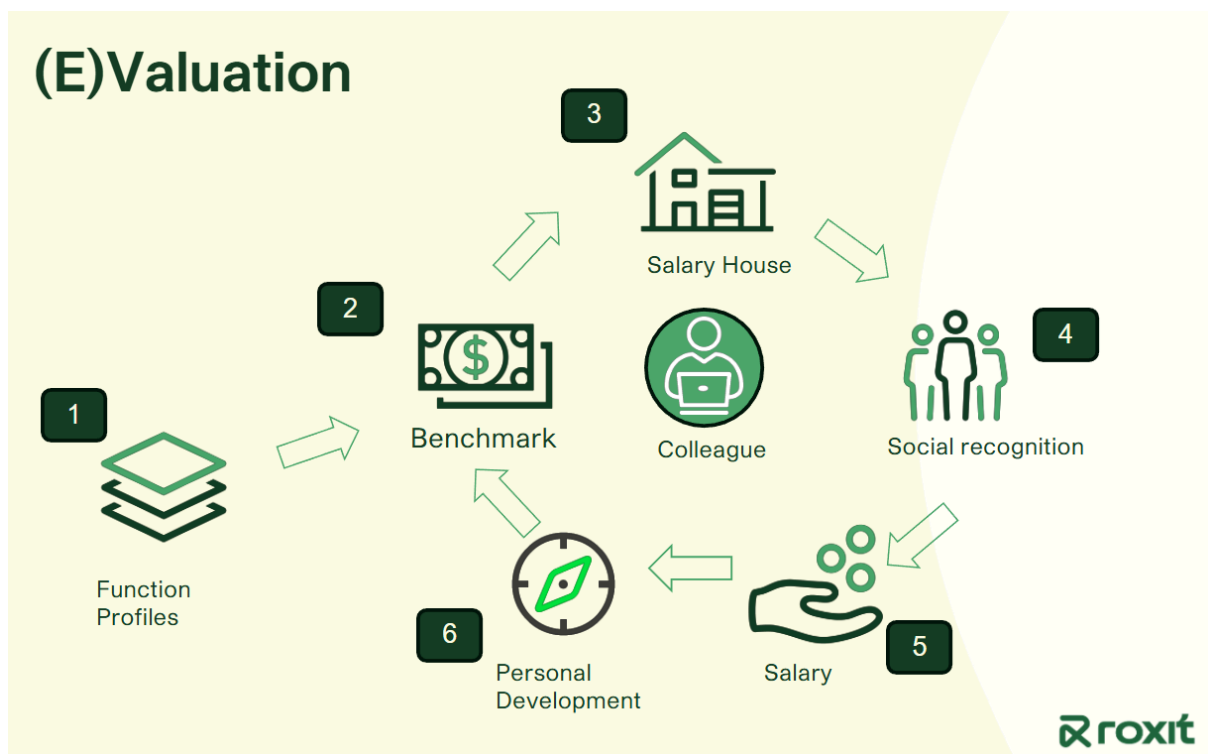
Balance: No matter what: the salary should be in balance with the value of the colleague.

In our Agile HR approach, our ultimate goal is a workplace where salary, promotion, and career paths are no longer sources of stress or discussion. Everything is open and transparent, so that every person feels valued and rewarded fairly for their real contribution.

Over time, this creates a shared understanding:

*I know I have a salary that matches my worth. I understand how it's determined. And I accept it as fair and appropriate.*

The graphic below shows our HR process. It consists of six steps that enable us to achieve our HR ambitions and goals.



We will now explain each step in more detail.

## How we develop function profiles

We keep functions (job profiles) minimal and broad, to encourage flexibility and ownership.

For example, we don't use labels like *junior*, *medior*, or *senior*. Instead, we describe a clear personal development path) focused on how a person's values (behaviors) and results (outcomes) evolve over time.

*By keeping the number of function descriptions low and their scope broad, we shift the focus from completing individual tasks to truly adding value.*

People co-create their own function profiles, and craft their salary ranges, always in open dialogue with peers. Management's role shifts from controlling to coaching. Helping people give honest feedback, do reality checks, and stay aligned with shared principles.

At Visma Roxit, function profiles are created within peer committees. For example, the Finance committee or the Scrum Master committee. These committees work collaboratively to define and refine role expectations, ensuring they reflect our shared understanding of value and contribution. Each profile is reviewed and updated annually, to reflect growth, new responsibilities, and market changes. This keeps personal development transparent, self-driven, and meaningful.

Each function profile is built around three key dimensions:

1. Core values
2. Result areas
3. Skills

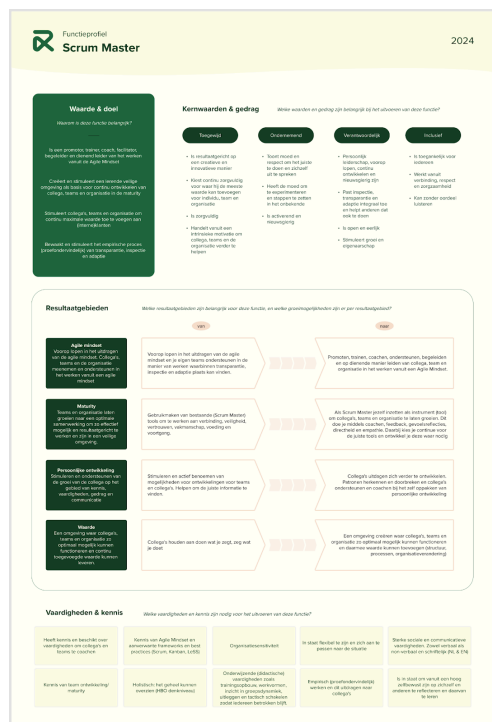
For example, an evaluated Scrum Master behaviour is *"Shows courage to experiment and take steps into the unknown territory"*. An example of result area is *"creates an organization for optimal performance and value delivery"*

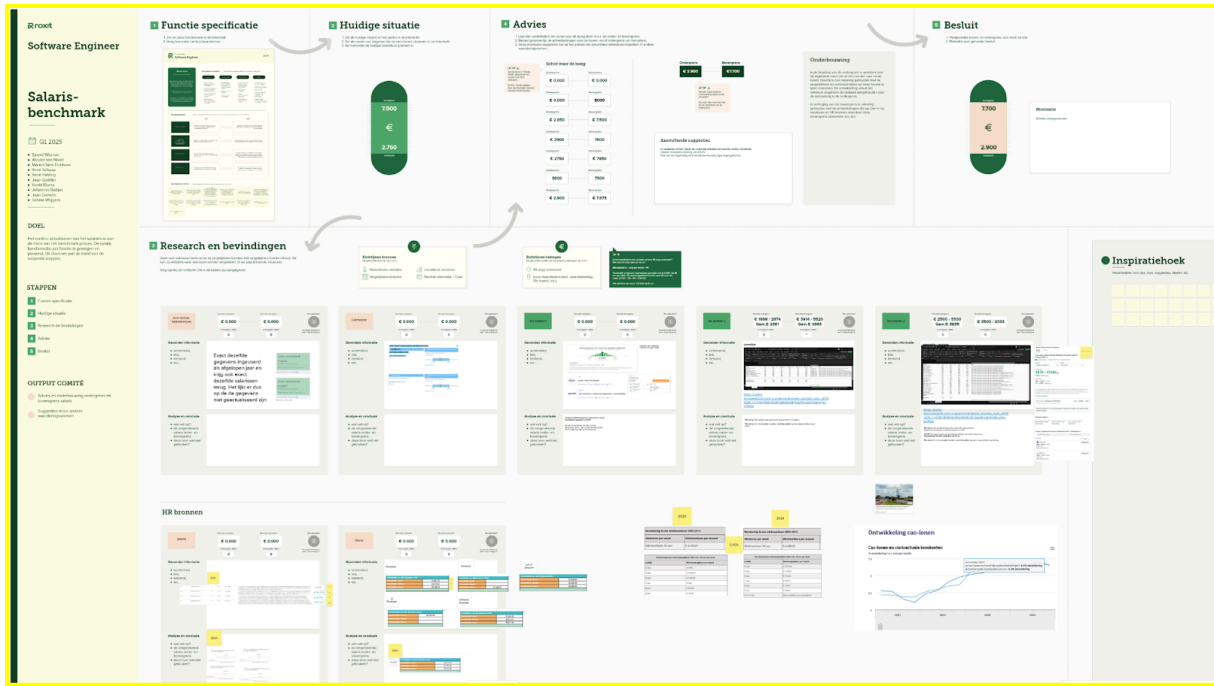
## How we benchmark and update salary bands

Salaries are linked directly to the function profiles. Every year the salary bands for each profile is updated. We run the benchmarking process in what we call **"Benchmark Day."** In a single day, all committees and the managers come together, and by the end of the day all profiles are benchmarked.

The finance committee looks at finance roles, the product committee looks at product roles, and so on.

The benchmarking process is guided by a template that helps each committee update the salary.





Example benchmark template Product Developer

The template works in **5 steps**:

1. **Role specification**
  - Start from the official function profile.
  - Clarify responsibilities, seniority level and required skills for this role.
2. **Current situation**
  - Map the current salary band for this role.
3. **Research and findings**
  - Committee researches market data (vacancy sites, benchmark reports, etc.).
  - HR adds internal data and trends.
  - Summarise key insights and what they imply for this role.
4. **Recommendation**
  - Translate the findings into a proposed new lower and upper band.
  - Note any transition proposals (e.g. how to move people into the new range).
  - Document the reasoning behind the advice.
5. **Decision**
  - Manager (e.g. Product Director) reviews the advice.
  - Approves or asks for clarification;
  - Final salary range is confirmed and recorded by management

The result is a salary range for the role at hand.

Prior to benchmark day, management provided an estimate of the overall salary increase to company investors and included it in the annual performance forecast.

## How we organize our Salary House

The Function Profile scale links directly to our salary benchmark.

Each level has a clear pay range, from low to high.

Below are our current job descriptions. We still have many. But we reduced them a lot. Before, we had twice as many. We simplified them so people can focus more on shared goals.

We also changed how we set pay bands. In the past, we used many small pay bands. The idea was simple: more levels feels more fair. It also makes promotions easier to “show” with a new pay grade.

We moved to fewer, wider pay bands. This is called broadbanning. It reduces complexity, it gives more flexibility. It also cuts long talks about promotions and pay. Less talk about money can help people stay motivated.

So our approach is: Use a few broad pay bands, stay flexible and avoid long discussions and unnecessary conflicts.

We also moved from closed salary ranges to open, transparent ranges. Now all can see what people can make, so this gives stability and focus discussion away from money and promotion to development and growth.

## How we do performance appraisal

There is **no** formal performance appraisal where people are judged against performance commitments. Instead there is a value check by peer feedback and social recognition. Where are you in your growth path? And this equals a salary.

*We lead through coaching, not bossing. Feedback isn't a judgement with consequences, but a shared, curious reflection focused on growth.*

In our world things change fast, so setting fixed goals far in advance doesn't make sense. We focus on progress, the difference between yesterday and today, rather than absolute targets.

Goals like moving from Junior to Senior (which we do not use) are personal development goals that you set and review yourself. They are **not** used in performance evaluations.

This keeps you in charge of your own growth and salary progression, while we focus on giving you the support you need to do your best work.

2025		
Functiehuis		
Portefeuille	Functienaam	Onde
Sales	Sales Executive	€ 3
	Bid Manager	€ 2
	Legal Counsel	€ 2
	Marketing & Communication Advisor	€ 2
	Sales Consultant	€ 2
	Sales Operation Specialist	€ 2
Development	Product Owner	€ 4
	Software Engineer	€ 2
	Information Analyst	€ 3
	Platform Engineer	€ 2
Delivery	Delivery Executive	€ 3
	Delivery Consultant	€ 2
	Support Specialist	€ 2
	Data Support Specialist	€ 2
People & Organisation	People & Culture Specialist	€ 2
	People & Culture Support	€ 2
	Scrum Master	€ 3
	Product Owner Q&C	€ 4
Finance & Control	Financial Administrator	€ 2
	Financial Controller	€ 3
	Data Specialist Finance	€ 3
Management	Director	€ 9
Membership	PLT member rol	€

## How we assess a colleague's position in the salary scale

### Step 1: Peer recognition and Self-Reflection

The appraisal process begins with a peer recognition feedback round.

Each co-worker invites at least five colleagues that are peers and customers that receive the work performed from different teams or parts of the organization) to give non-anonymous feedback through a standard form. Because feedback is not anonymous, it allows for open dialogue and clarifications as people can ask questions and deepen understanding.

*Team and people commit to customer and team members not only to their managers*

This feedback is combined with self-reflection, where employees also provide their own assessment of what their monthly salary should be. Together, these two perspectives create a balanced view of performance and growth.

### Step 2: Positioning on the Function Profile Scale

Each role has a Function Profile, which describes the journey from good to great. A Scrum Master for example:

- From supporting one team
- To enabling business strategy executing through guiding organization redesign)

This profile is built around two dimensions mentioned above (Core Values, and Result Areas) with a 1-to-10 scale for each dimension. The person's answers to the reflection questions, together with peer feedback, determines their position on the scale.

For each dimension there is a scale ranging from 1-to-10, or as we call it from good-to-great.

Just like we do for the salary benchmarks, we also have function role profile committees that update function role profiles every year to reflect the latest market developments. (These updates follow a process similar to our

annual salary band benchmark day.) Technology and skills evolve, and sometimes entirely new profiles are needed. For example, as we shift strategy more towards customer focus, we'll introduce new roles, just as we've done in the past.

**Marketing & Communication Advisor**

\* Required

Verantwoordelijk

5

In hoeverre laat ik gedrag zien dat past bij de kernwaarde Verantwoordelijk?

1: In zie dit gedrag op dit moment nog niet terug

2: In zie dat dit gedrag af en toe zichtbaar is, meestal na een aanmoediging, met wissel nog

3: In zie dat dit gedrag regelmatig en op eigen initiatief wordt getoond

4: In zie dat dit gedrag volledig eigen is gemaakt en ook in lastige situaties effectief wordt ingezet

5: In zie dat dit gedrag sterk aanwezig is en anderen inspireert - collega's nemen het over of vragen om advies

	Nog niet zichtbaar	In ontwikkeling	Voldoende zichtbaar	Sterk ontwikkeld	Inspirerend
Neemt eigenaarschap van persoonlijke en team ontwikkeling	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Geeft en ontvangt feedback	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leverf resultaten (betrouwbaar)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6

Verantwoordelijk - toelichting \*

Welke voorbeelden of toelichting kan je hierover delen?

Enter your answer



Management does not decide the appraisal outcome. Their role is to check that the process is done properly and that the outcome is realistic and consistent with others.

They compare evaluations across peers to ensure relative fairness. If an outcome seems out of touch. For example, if all peers gave top scores but the person self-assessed lower, or vice versa this becomes a signal for investigation, not judgment. A dialogue is then started with the co-worker to explore together what's behind the difference. The goal is learning and alignment, not correction.

## How We Handle Salary

At Roxit, salary follows from reflection, not negotiation. It's a transparent process based on the Function Profile scale, which shows each person's growth from *good* to *great* across our core values and result areas.

### **Step 1:** Linking to the Salary Scale

The Function Profile scale is directly linked to the salary benchmark, which defines a clear range (from low to high) for each level. Once a co-worker's position on the profile is clear through self-reflection and peer recognition feedback the corresponding salary level follows automatically.

There's no salary negotiation. Instead, as described above, the focus is on reflection, dialogue, and fairness, ensuring that compensation matches real growth and contribution.

### **Step 2:** Management Check

Management's role is not to decide the salary, but to verify the quality of the process. They ensure that:

- Feedback was collected properly and from a diverse group
- The reflection is honest, complete, and well-founded
- The positioning is consistent with others in similar roles

If the process has been carried out properly and the evaluation is well supported, then the salary that follows from the reflection is the salary you receive.

### **Step 3:** Set the salary:

The outcome of the Social Recognition round is the outcome. This means that the Social Recognition valuation is set into the new salary for the coming year, despite how the organisation is doing. You will get your Salary valuation no matter what. (It is not like: "ok... this year we are not doing great, so no salary increase for everyone..."). We stick to the plan.

For example, if the process you followed is correct and your average score is 5. That means you are at about 50% of the scale, provided your values score is also good. Values are the basis of performing and matching.

## When Evaluation and Salary Don't Match

Sometimes, differences arise between the salary implied by the evaluation and management's expectations.

For example:

- All peers may give top scores, but the individual self-assesses more modestly
- Or the individual rates themselves higher than peers
- Or the result stands out when compared with similar profiles

In such cases, the outcome is not adjusted immediately. Instead, it becomes a signal for dialogue.

Together with the co-worker, management reviews the feedback, reasoning, and context to understand what's behind the difference. Many factors could play a role such as feedback culture, limited diversity of input, or unclear expectations.

If the process is solid and the reflection sound, then the evaluation stands and the resulting salary is applied.

The goal is not perfect alignment, but shared understanding, transparency, and a fair position on the benchmark scale. This way, salary at Roxit is a natural outcome of growth and recognition guided by reflection, grounded in peer feedback, and checked for fairness, not controlled.

### **What If Everyone Scores an A?**

And what if, after a fair process, everyone truly earns an A, and the total salary increase exceeds the available budget? Then we still pay it.

Because the budget is arbitrary, it's a number we set, not a reflection of real value. If the evaluation is honest and shows that people deserve more, then it would be unfair not to pay what they've earned. Otherwise, we would be underpaying our people, effectively stealing from them.

And if that happens, we'd rather be honest and say:

*"You should either find a place that pays your true value, or adjust your working time to match what we can afford."*

At Roxit, fairness to people comes before financial convenience.

We trust the process. When the process says "A," then we pay "A."

## How We Enable Personal Development

After reflection and evaluation, each colleague decides what is valuable for their future what they want to develop, how they want to develop it, and which skills or behaviors will help them grow toward their next step in their life.

Every person designs their own development plan in a free format, guided by reflection and feedback. The process is transparent, self-driven, and focused on growth rather than control.

This marks the start of a new learning cycle.

Each co-worker is the owner of their own development. The organization provides maximum support with tools, coaching, and even 'unlimited' budget for training and development.

## Annual (E)Valuation Review

Each year, we review and improve the (E)Valuation process and its outcomes.

### How we do this

- **Transparency:** We share each step and ask for input from all colleagues.
- **Review:** We collect insights and discuss the results together.
- **Improvement:** We use what we learn to improve the next (E)Valuation round.

### What we measured

- **Personal development:** Training participation grew from 2023 to 2024 (+114% in Self Start personal development).
- **Recognition Value Index (NPS):** Increased from 29 (before the start) to 56 (Dec 2026) — a +93% increase.

### Yearly feedback survey (scale 1–10, 2024–2025)

- "I recognise myself in my Function Profile" (7.1 → 8.0, +12%).
- "I understand the lower and upper salary limit for my function" (6.8 → 8.0, +17.6%).
- "The feedback training helped me" (7.0).
- "I feel free to give honest, real feedback" (7.6).
- "I recognise myself in the feedback I receive" (7.9 → 8.4).
- "My salary matches my role" (7.9).

## Closing Reflection

At Visma Roxit, continual people development is not a project or a yearly cycle, but a daily habit. Our "Feedback Factory" runs every day: short reflections, retrospectives, spontaneous check-ins, and structured 360° moments. People set their own personal development goals, actively seek feedback, and use it for self-reflection rather than to brace for judgment.

Peers and customers are the primary mirrors; managers step in as coaches and quality check the process. Managers are judges with scorecards while still carrying the formal responsibility the law assigns them.

Roles and salary follow the same logic: transparent benchmarks, peer-shaped role profiles, self-proposed salary positions, and a final decision that balances fairness, realism, and sustainability.

HR no longer “owns” the people process; teams and individuals do. Our task as an organisation is to create the conditions, guard the integrity of the process, and trust the outcomes, even when that is less convenient financially.

Because in the end, our interpretation of agile HR is not about more tools or tighter controls, but about more trust, shared responsibility, and adult-to-adult collaboration.

## About The Authors

**Cesario Ramos** is an organizational design and management advisor at AgiliX Consulting. He is the author of three books on agile organizations and co-creator of the Creating Agile Organizations (CAO) approach. He supports organizations in evolving structures, leadership, and management practices for adaptability and better value delivery. Cesario can be contacted at [cesario@agilix.nl](mailto:cesario@agilix.nl).

**Stephan Scholten** is the People & Organisation (HRO) Director at Visma Roxit. He works every day to help make Visma Roxit the most inspiring and engaging place to work. Great for the individual, the team, the organization, and, importantly, for society.

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