CASE STUDY

Coaching Proves Agility Can Work for Platforms and Infrastructure Groups

You may think Agile is primarily designed for appdev teams, where iterative development is a natural fit for fluid product design.

This is not entirely true, as Agile also has a place in other IT and business groups that are not developing products. In this case, we worked with a Georgia-based packaging company interested in improving the operational efficiency of its IT Service Management and Platforms group.

"People have a misunderstanding when they just equate Agile to Scrum," said Craig Ford, VP of Business Development at Motion Consulting Group. "Scrum can be used for a nondefinable outcome or iteration when you just see one piece of the product at a time. The conclusion is that you can't deliver infrastructure projects (like a network closet or conference room buildout) one piece at a time and get ultimate value."

Craig explains, however, that Scrum is only one tool within the Agile ecosystem. Teams can use concepts like transparency, innovation, teamwork, collaboration, and other aspects from the Lean-Kanban side to improve effectiveness.

In fact, the nature of IT Service Management and Platforms work is extremely dynamic in nature and, based on support needs, priorities can change by the minute. This can lend itself to a multitude of context switching activities, calendars full of meetings, and ambiguity for the teams trying to determine the most important priorities.

The Challenge, Solution, & Results ⊙

Challenge

Too much Work in Progress (WIP) impacted this client in providing predictability on delivery time-frames. Leadership had to quickly jump in and begin a process of continuous portfolio re-prioritization efforts to ensure the teams were only focused on the right items as of this moment.

A typical IT Service Management and Infrastructure organization is organized by technology supported such as a Networking Team, Operating Systems Team and Email Team as examples. While this structure is common, it also has been found to create gaps in support for customers and long waiting periods.

The packaging company's VP of Platforms Technology and Global Operations decided to reorganize and train his teams in a way that supports better business alignment.

He decided his teams should become more cross-functional in nature and be centered around service areas trained in Agility, collaboration and work transparency techniques as opposed to simple knowledge silos.

Solution

The original six-month engagement started with Motion Consulting Group training and coaching pilot teams. From there, the remainder of Platforms Operations was trained which included the restructure of the organization into eight cross-functional teams. A standard tool was utilized and built out; leadership facilitation training and coaching was also performed.

These activities set a strong foundation for supporting the changes and speaking the same business and technology language. Teams were provided new kickoff opportunities that gave a fresh start into understanding team vision, roles, process improvement, tool consolidation and cross-team collaboration.

Results

Teams very quickly recognized their newfound focus on increased communication both within their own team but also across the various teams. New roles, such as the Team Facilitator, played an integral part in spearheading that collaboration and were able to quickly identify areas where teams needed cooperation from one another and decreased time to completion/resolution. Leadership now had greater awareness of work in progress and impact of potentially competing priorities or cross-team dependencies.

Other wins that were seen included a greater focus on simplicity of process and architectures, team cross-training to ensure ongoing support capabilities, lean metrics designed around continual improvement and movement towards greater predictability in delivery, understanding team health, and becoming more focused on feedback and responsiveness to our customers.

A major benefit from Agile methods is they shine a spotlight on what we don't do well and what we need to improve on. This engagement was not an Agile Transformation. It was an adoption inside one group. Additionally, many of the groups these teams work with and for may not be familiar with Agile methods and the benefits involved. This has exposed challenges with IT to IT as well as Business to IT alignment.

Nevertheless, according to the lead sponsor of the engagement, expectations were exceeded. The original SOW was extended from six months to 18 months. In a customer satisfaction survey at the conclusion, over 80% gave positive reviews. Today, there continues to be a strong desire to continue the ongoing coaching and training in further capacities.

About Motion Consulting Group

Motion Consulting Group is a premier IT consulting firm with over 20 years of experience delivering Agile Consulting & Coaching, DevSecOps Solutions, and Managed Services for IT Operations that help companies revolutionize their approach to digital organization and excellence.

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