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ING Direct

Agile Journey in an HR Environment

Background:

- A practitioner of Business Process Management for the last 15 years.
- Last 6 years he has been practising Agile and coaching medium to large teams both in IT and non IT environment applying Agile to transform teams.
- Recent work he implemented Agile in a HR with a huge success.
- His educational background includes Bachelor of Computer Science and Masters in Information Technology. He is passionate about his work and always believes there is a better way to reach an outcome. In his free time, he enjoys exploring and learning new things, cooking and enjoys the nature.



Introduction

I have been Agile/ Lean practitioner for a good number of years applying the methods and the tools mostly on the IT delivery projects. Quiet recently, I had an opportunity to apply it on a non - software development space. There is often a myth that Agile is for IT only particularly software projects and cannot be applied on non IT projects, I personally believe it is now a myth. To name a few, the projects I applied Agile were short to long term strategic initiatives to support the target operating model. So what has been the journey so far:

I was brought into this part of the business to simplify and streamline process across the entire business unit and align to the target operating model. The job was simple and very straight forward, the expectation was, I would come in and quickly turn around and fix the business process problems and it would remain fixed..... ta da magic hey! I suppose things would be different if people were not part of the process. My first few observations were:

- Lack of planning (short and long term), defining goals and objectives and sticking to deliver them.
- Everyone was busy with detailed (dancing floor) stuff and spent less or no time understanding bigger (balcony) picture.
- Work got generated mostly reactively, when deadlines were missed everything became priority no 1. There was no sense of urgency and often things resulted in sense of emergency.
- People were uncomfortable saying "No". Saying no had a negative perception.
- There was a lack of understanding in who was doing what and the communication was poor.

There were some fundamental challenges to be fixed first, before anything else could be looked at.

So what did we do?

- The team agreed to document To Do list consisting of small to large pieces of work (both short and long term). We did not have a complete list to start with but that wasn't the

intent, the focus was to get just enough so that team could prioritise based on customer needs and wants.

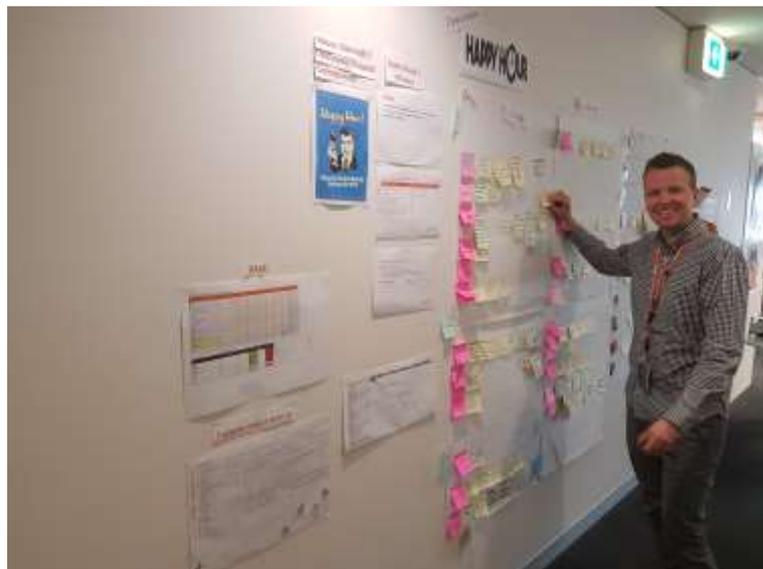
- We introduced “New way of working” based on Agile / Lean consists of:
 - Defined clear roles and responsibility e.g. Product owner (Team lead), Team member
 - Set up two weekly meeting:
 1. Focused on prioritising the To- Do list. Work was allocated based on priority.



2. A planning session where everyone in the team attended (mandatory)
 - Focused on checking in “New way of working” i.e. understand how the team members were doing. This was an opportunity to seek feedback, adapt and change.
 - Team discussed what was left, reprioritised and took new work. This was also an opportunity for the team members to get clarification from the Team lead for the new work.
 - Work was estimated over delivery cycle vs. amount of time each individual team member have in hand.
 - Goals were set and agreed for the delivery cycle
- Set up time boxed 15 minutes max daily huddle (mandatory attendance), people working offsite had to dial in. Everyone shared the commitment they made prior, shared their learning, raised risks / issues and talked about their next commitment. Work was physically moved from “To- Do” to “In Progress” to “Done”. This gave everyone an opportunity to understand who is working on what, share work and help each other if needed. The daily huddle helped the team to overcome some of the communication challenges in the past. As the team got more involved, things started to be clear.



- A visual space – Visual Management Board was created on the team floor and this consisted of:
 1. Team vision/ mission
 2. Goals
 3. To – Do (Long Term)- Not prioritized list
 4. To – Do (just enough for the delivery cycle) – Prioritized list
 5. A visual work flow consisting of
 - Owner of the work, Status of the work i.e. In progress or Done
- For large pieces of work team prepared a high level business plan broken down by delivery cycle. Work that belonged to the delivery cycle was reflected in the prioritized list.



Why Agile?

- Time was limited and team couldn't afford not delivering.
- Scrum forced us to work within a small delivery cycle (2 weeks in this case) and provided an opportunity to adapt and change.
- Lean helped us in many ways:
 - Minimise work in progress by raising any risks, issues or impediments. Seeking help to escalate or remove impediments.
 - Visualise work, minimise waste and understand how much the team have achieved.
 - Increase the frequency of meetings that are time boxed and everyone spoke about their work and improved the communication.

What were some of the challenges?

- At inception, allocating project work outside of business as usual (BAU) activity was tough. Team did not had visibility of how much time was spent in BAU vs. how much can be spent on projects. People were still busy with BAU where as senior leaders wanted people to focus and deliver more projects.
- Keeping the team focused on prioritised list. Most often the team tried to add new things in the middle of the delivery cycle. For example, ad-hoc work kept on coming in.
- Coaching team to plan ahead and break large pieces of work to consumable chunks.
- Estimate how much time is required to complete initiatives.

What have we seen so far (Voice of the "New way of working" team members)?

The challenges I had:

- Working out the difference between "project work" and BAU.
- Letting go of trying to do everything myself (being responsible for everything I do) and opening myself up to letting other people help me realise that we are all working towards the same goal.
- Transparency – this is a good and bad thing. It was good to demonstrate the work you were doing to everyone so they understood your role and "how busy you are". But it also clearly highlighted when work was not getting completed. This was a big challenge at first to admit when things weren't delivered/finished on time, but after a while this became easier as you were not "blamed" for not making a deadline, but the team worked together to find a solution to ensure the work got done. Whether it was someone else doing the work, or a different piece of work was allocated to someone else so you could focus on what really needed to get done.
- Estimating how much time it took to do things!!
- At the beginning you feel like you are constantly meeting and repeating yourself (telling people what you are doing), however understand the benefits now.
- All the meetings to plan (but obviously see the benefits now!)

I learned:

- That I no longer need a “to do” list daily. I know what I need to achieve to meet my teams long term objective.
- The GREAT importance of planning and goal setting.
- Being honest with yourself (and the team) around estimating your capacity and when you need help
- How a team of “specialists” can actually work together as a team to achieve a common objective. Dependencies are clear.
- How to effectively manage my time.
- Stakeholder management and upfront engagement.

In summary, it will be an ongoing learning journey for this team where they adapt and change as needed. Getting senior stakeholders buy in is crucial for the successful implementation of Agile irrespective of the environment. In my experience implementing Agile takes at least a couple of iteration before the team gets a full understanding and the benefits. Once on the journey, continual coaching is a must and establishing a feedback loop is necessary to be able share learning to adapt and change.

I would also like to thank members of this team for sharing their experiences with “New way of working” journey. Their valuable input has made this blog a pragmatic example of implementing Agile outside of software delivery.

Rupesh Shrestha
Practitioner of Agile / Lean / Process improvement

Additional references for Agile

<http://www.agilehelpline.com/>

<http://www.scrumguides.org/>

<http://www.coachingagileteams.com/>

<http://www.funretrospectives.com/category/energizer/>

My favourite will be “[Youtube](#)” for several Agile resources from beginners e.g. understanding Agile to how to planning poker i.e. estimation in Agile etc.