

Agile Government Leadership
Case Study



Agile Government and New South Wales – Transport Management Centre

by Cathy Novak

Overview

The Transport Management Centre (TMC) in New South Wales, Australia has been Agile since 2011. In using an Agile methodology, the TMC was able to uncover many sub-workflows, which were only able to be discovered through the elaboration process.

Intro

The TMC previously had numerous cost overruns from various waterfall projects. They found it was difficult to get their subject matter experts to spend time on waterfall projects. The development team was remote and there was a general lack of satisfaction with a waterfall approach. The core agile messaging resonated with TMC and they spoke with other agile groups who offered them words of encouragement on their road to Agile.

The first project TMC used Agile for was their critical Fault Management System. TMC employed a mixed team of developers experienced with Agile and their own staff. This three-month project went really well, with the exception that the prime TMC subject matter expert couldn't commit the time to the project and delegated the responsibilities to one of his staff.

When the final product was reviewed, the subject matter expert had additional requirements. Another quick sprint was performed and the subject matter expert was extremely happy with the timeframe and the results. This allowed the benefits of Agile to be demonstrated to both the business and TMC development teams.

Challenges

Using a mentorship approach for Agile was considered only partially successful for TMC. Their second Agile project was done in-house by a team of inexperienced Agile developers. The project itself was challenging, as it included many interfaces to the new NSW corporate enterprise service bus, which was a technology new to everyone involved.

Although the project was ultimately successful, TMC decided to tackle additional projects with experienced Agile developers.

TMC was challenged with the relationship between the Agile process and their project management methodology. Initially, TMC was advised that an Agile team did not require a project manager for the team. They quickly realized how important this position was to act as a point of escalation and as an interface between the Agile team, business, the project management office and senior management.

Contract management was and remains a challenge with TMC. The New South Wales government, similar to many others, has a pro forma contracting system established around waterfall projects. A waterfall project has the advantage of a definitive product/asset as the result of a contract. TMC worked collaboratively with their corporate procurement group to establish guidelines for procuring an Agile project within the confines of a waterfall contracting environment. Their solution is to contract with an experienced Agile team for a single, Agile project.

Solution

The next project tackled by TMC involved replacing a critical legacy system, which contained many business processes and different rules and served as a single point of failure for TMC. The project had previously been tackled by corporate IT using a waterfall approach, which had failed twice. After breaking the larger project into two separate projects, the back-end business process management and rules portion was developed using an Agile approach. TMC brought in an experienced Agile team to complete the work and the project was deemed highly successful. The benefits of Agile were solidly proven.

Results

Regardless of the amount of time spent on the upfront design and requirements of a new system, once it goes into development, the workflows will most likely be much more complicated than the users originally depicted. Chris Ruwoldt, TMC Manager of Transport Operations Systems, believes that one of the major advantages of using Agile was the fact

that the sub workflows are discovered through the elaboration phase. With waterfall, the requirements are locked in at the time of contract and these new requirements could not have been catered for without an Agile approach. Agile helps requirements become much more detailed and sophisticated.

Another benefit of Agile is the emphasis on business value, requiring the prioritization of requirements to ensure a release contains business benefit.

Also, Agile has been the increased process efficiencies gained. Up until their last project, the TMC was the second largest user of paper in the NSW government. Everything was printed. Now, everything is electronic. There is a far quicker turnaround to evaluate applications which has significant efficiency gains for TMC customers.

Going forward

The NSW TMC will use Agile on all software development projects moving forward (a waterfall approach will still need to be used for procurement of COTS software) and move from developing a single Agile project at once, to multiple projects. The TMC will be offering Agile training for all of their subject matter experts who will be working on these projects.

Chris Ruwoldt offers some final words of advice:

“With Agile you need to let go and not control. You need to learn to delegate and give people the room to try something and fail. As long as they are open, learn lessons, deliver a business benefit and move on.”

About Agile Government Leadership

Mission

By bringing applied Agile practices to government, we want to redefine the culture of local, state and federal public sector service delivery across all aspects of government. We will work with Agile professionals and organizations to support their work in getting Agile infused into government processes. We will foster a spirit of openness and mentor those new to Agile so that they have the necessary practical advice, resources, tools and community support for successful deployment. Through Agile Government Leadership, we will create a responsive, engaged government that more efficiently and effectively serves its citizens.

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