Agile Government Leadership

Case Study

Agile Government and Salt Lake City

by Bill Haight

Intro

Salt Lake City has always been forward thinking in the way we do business. Almost from its inception, the City's IT department, Information Management Services (IMS), has strived to find the sweet spot between the newest flashiest tech trends influencing the industry and the traditional, time proven policies and procedures. For many number of years, traditional waterfall project management was the norm. It was safe, predictable, and comfortable for project managers and teams. Scope creep, missed deadlines, and projects that failed to deliver the desired results were also all too common.

Context

In 2012, I was the City's CIO and was again faced with the quintessential dilemma facing many IT shops. Business partners were frustrated, there was more work to be done than available resources could handle, and getting the funding needed was always a challenge. A new way of managing the workload was needed. IMS needed to shorten the time to production, improve communications, and raise the level of accountability on project teams.

I had been exposed to Agile Project Management through a relationship with a third party software vendor as early as 2004 and was interested in the results we saw. Then, in 2012, the situation was right to implement a new way of thinking about how the department would provide services.

Frustrations

The first few attempts at Agile were frustrating. Project managers were not properly trained in the Agile methodologies if they were trained at all and the project teams were resistant to the change. Scrum meetings devolved into product design meetings that sometimes lasted hours. A reset on the processes was needed.

In 2013, that reset occurred when the department created a formal project management team rather than relying on business analysts and team leaders to provide that function. The first step was to provide formal training for staff on just what Agile is and isn't and what it can and can't do for an organization.

Breakthrough

At about the same time, a member of the City Council became interested in Agile through his day job and asked council staff to look into it as a way to manage their projects better as well. The first successful implementation of Agile in Salt Lake City was actually around the process of staff analysis of initiatives for the City Council. Each initiative was treated as a project and regular Scrums were held to track status and move the initiative forward.

In IMS, a major software development effort was also underway. Now equipped with the understanding of how the process was going to work, Scrum meetings became a way to increase communication among team members and hold each other accountable for delays and setbacks. The end result is a high quality product that meets the business partner's expectations in a shorter timeframe. Agile methodologies are now used for software development efforts, systems upgrades, systems implementations, and a variety of other projects.

Lessons

Lessons learned by Salt Lake City include a need for understanding and buy-in from the project team, a need for training of staff and business partners, and, if possible, an experienced practitioner to get the program rolling.

Results

While we've not been at this for a long time, the initial results are exciting. We are seeing higher productivity and satisfaction on the part of our business partners. We are seeing higher levels of communications between project teams, stakeholders, and business partners. Accountability on the part of all team members has increased and we are able to

identify challenges and mitigate risks earlier in the process leading to reduced delivery times and a product that is a better fit to the business partner's requirements.

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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