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LEAN AGILE IN USE SOUNDS GOOD BUT DOES IT REALLY WORK?

SIX STEPS TO GAIN A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF LEAN AGILE

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Moving forward with Lean Agile is an important decision and a commitment to a new way of not just doing, but being. This "Lean Agile" approach has very different techniques then we are used to with older methodologies. It is important to understand some of the core differences and gain an overall understanding of the level of commitment your organization will make. As you read through this paper you will gain an overview of the differences between older methods and Lean Agile as well as gain pointers on determining if Lean Agile is right for your organization.

How can I learn to avoid those project nightmares that keep me up at night? What is Lean Agile? How can I get started with Lean Agile? What are the real differences between Lean Agile and older methodologies? Is the transition easy? How can I keep my customers happy? The six steps below will aid you in answering these questions.

Step 1 - Gaining an Understanding of the Core Differences between Agile and Older Methodologies.

Change is considered a risk in traditional Project Management. Locking the requirements down early, creating a detailed plan, executing against the plan and using a process to minimize change is part of the traditional Project Management Cycle; Change is viewed as a project risk that is to be minimized.

Change is considered a competitive advantage in Agile. Creating a list of requirements (backlog) still occurs but the focus is on only a few requirements and for a short period of time (iteration). This short list is executed on and working code is delivered to the customer at the end of the iteration. This cycle allows a quick response to changing requirements and in today's world, responding to a changing environment is imperative to be successful.

Agile is value delivery focused vs. process focused, Agile leads by influence vs. command and control, project status is highly visible in Agile vs. low visibility and one of the crucial parts of Agile encourages whole team consistent collaboration including the project sponsors vs. matrixes team members.

Step 2 – Learning what Lean Agile really is.

Agile can be considered a methodology that has its roots in Lean manufacturing. Lean encourages continuous improvement; Agile utilizes Iteration Planning sessions and retrospectives, thus encouraging constant inspecting and adapting. Lean looks to minimize risk; Agile brings risk to light faster through iterative development and prioritization. Lean looks to minimize inventory and storage, while Agile minimizes work in process and thus avoids surprises which often come at the end of a project. Combining the two makes sense. Lean Agile recognizes changes will happen and plans for this. Lean Agile is dependable because there is adaptation to meet a goal no matter what the obstacles vs. replicating a duplicate improved process to achieve a constant result. Thus Lean Agile looks to improve the process while adapting to meet the customer needs. Lean-Agile is a combination of Lean Thinking and Agile disciplines. In other words, Agile is the way or road to implementing Lean principals.

Step 3 – Determining why you would move to Lean Agile.

Whether we want to admit it or not, projects fail and often even when completed, there is only a small portion of code which is utilized. The Standish Group reports that 45% of features and functions are never used, 16% are sometimes used and then 19% are rarely used.   Thus why would you spend time on planning to develop features which in the end will not even be used?   Lean Agile addresses working on the highest priority items, assumes things will change, negotiates scope vs. having scope creep, and delivers working software at the end of each iteration.   Considering risk is brought to light sooner, risk can be minimized. In the case of Lean Agile, if a project is ended, there is business value which can be delivered, even if there is only 3 iterations worth of code vs. no code and no value.   Thus there is early ROI, increased control and reduced risk, improved communication, and accelerated time to market. Generally customer satisfaction is improved as a result and you are better able to manage your business through metrics.

Step 4 – Understanding Your Journey to Lean Agile.

First, remember moving to anything new is not easy because the move or change involves people. Your teams will need to adjust in their thoughts, actions and processes.   Usually, people tend to resist change.   Determining if Agile will even fit in your organization is imperative.   Things to consider: Can your organization use an iterative delivery method, can frequent deliveries be accommodated? Can staff make the commitment needed to have user involvement, will sponsors be active? Keep in mind that this is a journey and will not happen overnight. Your journey will be different then others, simply because environments, impediments, etc are different. Thus if you obtain management support, determine a Lean Agile strategy, know your current processes, utilize experts you will have a better chance of being successful.   Consider using a lean agile steering committee, building on knowledge, leveraging capabilities, improving communication/collaboration, Addressing organization issues brought to light, review engineering practices, and consistently reevaluating to inspect and adapt. Although some solutions are customized, the basic principles of Lean Agile will work in any organization.

Step 5 – Determining what to do if Lean Agile is too Radical For Your Organization.

Consider using "Blended Agile".   This is a combination of agile practices integrated with more traditional methods.   Your company will slowly initiate agile practices over time along with keeping traditional practices that bring value. It is important to note that Blended Agile is not Agile in its purest form, thus you will not obtain all of the benefits of Agile. However as in the Lean pieces of Lean Agile, your organization will continue to improve. One huge benefit of the Lean Agile switch by taking the "Blended Lean Agile" path is that your organization has time to learn and adjust. You are instituting best practices and improving the existing process.

Step 6 – Knowing What Will Keep Your Customers Happy.

Keeping customers happy is an age old dilemma; however Lean Agile can help solve this. When you consider that you are open to the changes the customers will and are requesting and even plan for these changes, your customers will begin to see you as on their side. Consistently obtaining feedback, delivering workable code thus value every few weeks thus reducing the overall risk, your customers will generally be happier with the results.

CONCLUSION

Finally, Lean Agile is a common sense approach.   Lean Agile helps to align business needs to the project as well as aligning to the vision and mission of your organization, thus there is an improvement to the service provided to your customers. If something changes or goes wrong in your day to day life, you will adapt to meet the change/challenge and learn from it.   Thus, being Lean Agile may not be that far away from your daily approach. Lean Agile is not just a way of working; it is a way of being.

Source: The Standish Report