

# **Evolving to Agile**

**A story of agile adoption at a small  
SaaS company**

# Agenda

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ Setting the Stage – Why Agile?
- ▶ Iterating to Agility
- ▶ Additional Considerations
- ▶ An Outside Perspective
- ▶ Conclusions

# Introduction

- ▶ Who am I?
  - Brought into IASTA in 2007
  - Previously developer/analyst at a manufacturing facility
- ▶ Who is IASTA?
  - Founded in 2000 by 3 individuals
  - Grown from a RFX/Reverse Auction services company to a software company with a complete strategic sourcing software suite
  - Funded by complete organic growth
  - Now 50+ employees, ~\$10M revenue, 150+ clients



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# Setting the Stage – Why Agile?

- ▶ Issues growing the development team
  - How to work together as a team?
  - How much up front work needs to be done?
  - How to improve technical practices?
- ▶ Transparency
  - When will it be done?
  - Where is my feature?
  - Which features should we be working on?

# Iterating to Agility – First Attempt

- ▶ What first? Iterate
- ▶ How Frequent? 4 weeks
- ▶ How did it work?
  - Work still completed component by component with a lot of up front design
  - Features wouldn't come together until right at the end and often required extensive rework at that point so the commitment would not be met
  - Wasn't really a drastic enough change to force a change in our habits
- ▶ Kept with it for one full release cycle
  - Originally planned for end of 2009 (6 sprints)
  - Actually released May 2010 (10 sprints)

# Iterating to Agility – Take Two

- ▶ What should we change?
  - 2-week sprints
  - Stock the backlog to build confidence
- ▶ What was the result?
  - Team delivered on commitment more often than not
  - Released on time with desired scope
  - Team velocity improved

# Iterating to Agility – Product Owner

- ▶ Common Questions...
  - What project should we do next?
  - Why is this item more important than that one?
  - What is the big picture, what is the vision?
- ▶ Who should be answering these questions?
  - One dev team, 5 products
  - No budget for a dedicate product owner
  - Had subject matter expert from Support/Services fill the role

# Iterating to Agility – Release Backlog

- ▶ Need one common backlog, but have 5 product owners
- ▶ Enter – The Release Backlog
  - Each product owner maintains his/her own prioritized backlog.
  - At the beginning of a release cycle, all product owners come together and collectively fill 60-80% of the available capacity for the release.
  - Meet as a group at regular intervals to review and maintain the release backlog.
- ▶ Results?
  - Hindered communication
  - Need centralized point of contact for communication and to resolve disputes.



# Additional Considerations - Chartering

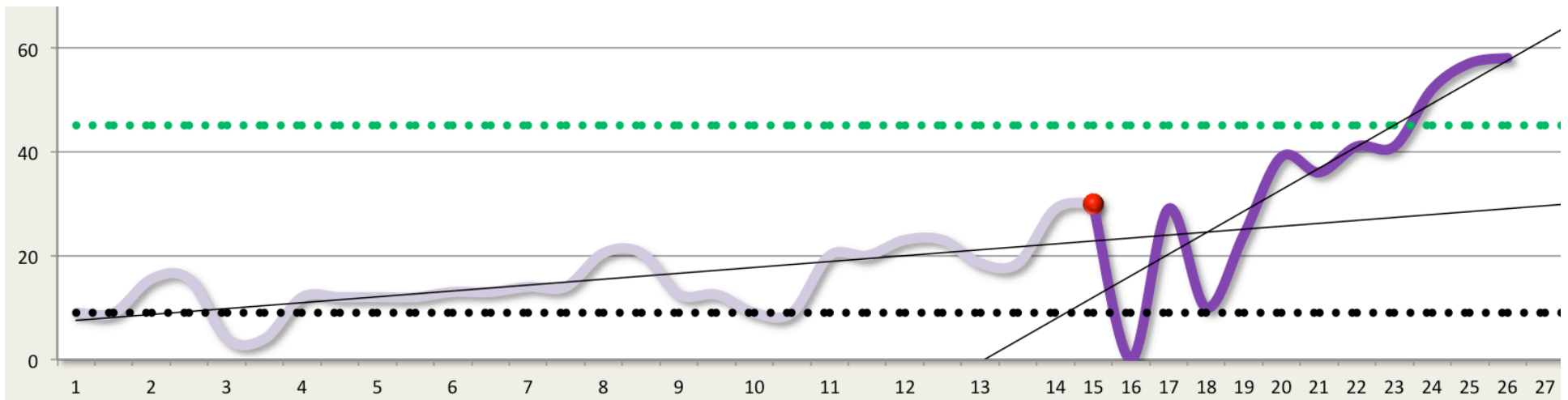
- ▶ What issue were we having?
  - A project was kicked off with a time expectation
  - Project was fleshed out by PO/Designer
  - Team would estimate and then begin iterating
  - Project would take much longer than initial expectation
- ▶ Solutions?
  - Dedicated Product Owner
  - Chartering
  - Earlier Team involvement

# Additional Considerations – Technical Practices

- ▶ Sound technical practices are key to agile development
  - Maintainable code
  - Easy branching and merging
  - Automated Testing
  - Test Driven Development
  - Continuous Integration

# An Outside Perspective

- ▶ Hired an Agile Coach – Scott Downey
  - Changed to 1 week sprints
  - Switched to 1 dedicated Product Owner
  - Clarity on estimating and rules/boundaries of Scrum
  - Metrics for tracking progress





# Conclusions

- ▶ Where are we now?
- ▶ What were the biggest hurdles?
  - Scarcity of resources
  - Lack of Experience
  - Where to start?
  - Technical Practices
- ▶ Change Management
  - Be upfront and honest about the timeframe
  - Names are important

~~Scrum~~ not-scrum-yet

# Questions



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