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
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
Questions

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