

Scrum@Scale at a Major Telecommunications Company

How Scrum Helped to Turn-Around a Failing Product

Background

- This case study describes how Scrum@Scale concepts were used within a large-scale agile transformation at a major European telecommunications company.
- It focusses on one particular business unit, responsible for a cloud-based personal storage product.
- A similar approach was used for other business units.
- The overall agile transformation was guided and supported by a combined executive action and agile practice team.

Initial Situation

- Long time-to-market for new versions, typically 1-2 major releases per year.
- Low customer satisfaction, indicated by low user retention rate and typically 1-2 star ratings in the App stores.
- Low team morale.
- Poor performance and reliability of the product.
- Separate roles for product management, commercial management, service life-cycle management and project management.
- Development carried out by teams responsible for different layers of the technical architecture

Use of Scrum@Scale Concepts

- Multiple, cross-functional feature teams, each with a development team, product owner and Scrum Master.
- MetaScrum: Chief product owner, team product owners and stakeholders. A single consolidated product backlog was used.
- Scaled Daily Scrum meeting: Basic coordination between teams, backed up with extensive use of communities of practice
- Executive Action Team. Coordination of the overall approach for introducing agile and organisational impediment removal.

Metrics and Results

- The following metrics were used to gauge progress:
 - Customer: The number of active users for a channel (iOS, android, web etc.).
 - Team: Team happiness, captured by teams as part of their retrospectives.
 - Quality: Defects in production.
 - Progress: Velocity was used to measure progress and to make empirical predictions on what could be released by fixed-in-time release points.
- After 6 months, things had improved considerably:
 - App store ratings improved from an average of 1-2 stars to 4-5 stars.
 - There were more active users.
 - Team morale had improved.
 - The product was awarded first place in a review of competitive consumer cloud products (including Dropbox).

Key Lessons Learned

- Moving from functional silo based teams to cross-functional feature teams greatly improved the ability of the teams to deliver regular increments of business value and thus respond to customer feedback.
- Moving from multiple per-team product backlogs to a single product backlog generated greater transparency about the true state of the product.
- The use of a MetaScrum led by the Chief Product Owner enabled a holistic view of the product to be achieved and avoid the sub-optimisations that could occur if each team PO operates in isolation.
- Getting support from senior management is essential. In this case, senior managers took part in custom agile leadership training and were supported with one-on-one coaching. Even if some remain sceptical, it only takes some “champions” to get the ship moving!
- The Executive Action Team was valuable in providing overall direction and support for the initiative and essential when trying to remove “difficult to crack” organisational impediments.