

# AGILE CASE STUDY

Revenue Commissioners, Ireland.



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# AGILE CASE STUDY SUMMARY



- ✓ Over a 6 month period, an **Agile pilot** was conducted which trialled various techniques, tools and approaches. Having tried Agile previously, the **transition** had proved more challenging than expected and thus an Agile Coach was engaged to help **improve throughput, efficiency** and **developer productivity**.
- ✓ Defining a solid 3 tier **Definition of Done** (User Story, Sprint & Release) helped **resolve ambiguity** and ownership concerns around quality.
- ✓ Team **autonomy** was developed by immersing the team in Backlog Refinement and User Story creation earlier in the process, the **team felt more empowered** and provided value in the form of **User Story feedback** to the Product Owner.
- ✓ Adopting some **Kanban techniques** during Sprints enabled the team to complete **more User Stories** each Sprint – this increased **team morale** and **trust** with the Product Owner. These same changes positively impacted the daily Stand-up as the team became more focused on working as a **cross functional team** and on **throughput** rather than **individual tasks**.
- ✓ The **command and control management style** typical in most State Organisations has **little synergy** with the Agile world. Recognising and acknowledging this brought **awareness** which is key to developing more of a **servant leader** management style.
- ✓ Senior Management were fast to realise that having an **Agile Vision** and **Change Management plan** would help drive Agile changes through the organisation with greater determination. Agile training alone didn't create enough energy and drive to deliver a **transformation of this scale**.
- ✓ The **Waterfall Organisation Structure** and **Governance** impeded the Scrum Team's ability to be successful with Agile. Gaining **autonomy** was difficult in this culture so developing the concept of an "**Agile-Pop-Up-Organisation**" created a more **forgiving** and **nurturing environment** for Agile to **grow** in the Organisation.
- ✓ In summary, the pilot delivered a product that was **highly relevant** with **no dead features** and was also of **high quality**. Having a shared team goal improved **efficiencies** while **removing barriers** and **silos** between traditional waterfall departments. The definition of the **Agile vision** is work in progress as **initial pilots** are further **matured** to create the preferred Agile template to **ramp up** the rest of the organisation in line with their Agile Vision.



# CASE STUDY IN DETAIL

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# SETTING THE SCENE

- ✓ Development Teams within the organisation are composed of functional domains rather than products - SME's exist within domains and typically move project teams depending on SME requirements. Therefore teams are **not long lived** and *can* change each quarter.
- ✓ One team were at the beginning of their Agile journey; some team members had tried Agile the previous year and were keen to **evolve** to **gain more benefits from being Agile**.
- ✓ On previous Agile engagements, QA had been implemented **1 sprint behind** outside of the Scrum Team. Testers and Developers were **now working in parallel** (and physically co-located) on a Scrum Team for the **first time**.
- ✓ Following a comprehensive review **7 areas** were identified as the highest priority for **focused coaching, mentoring** and **training** to **increase development productivity**.

# #1. USER STORIES

## Challenge & Impact

- ✓ At the end of some Sprints **incomplete User Stories** were causing **frustrating** for the team. The Sprints were essentially running as **mini waterfall** projects.

## Solution

- ✓ Coaching & Mentoring helped the **team grasp** the concepts of **failing and succeeding together**, leaving behind the **traditional Test and Development** handovers.
- ✓ Focus turned to their shared **team purpose**; **delivering valuable** working **User Stories** each **Sprint**.

- ✓ Adopting the **"T" model** (depth and breadth of skills) and becoming a **cross functional** team drove the team to pick up new **"breadth"** skills and not always focus on **"depth"** skill. Developers picked up testing tasks, focusing on **automating** more and **scripts** to **create use cases** data to speed this process up. This allowed for a **significant increase** in **test execution**.
- ✓ Setting a **Work in Progress** (WIP) limit for the **number** of in-flight User Stories helped **focus** on **throughput** rather than having **all** User Stories **inflight**. This helped to drive cross **functional behaviours** through adoption of the "T" model – the WIP limit essentially forced **behavioural changes** which developed team **morale** and **delivered value faster**.
- ✓ Introducing the concept of individual **WIP limits** for **tasks** helped to further increase throughput and flow by **reducing context switching** whilst driving efficiency.

# #2. STAND-UPS

## Challenge & Impact

- ✓ The Team wanted more value from their **Stand-Ups**.
- ✓ They were verbally reporting progress on assigned tasks which was mostly **already known** on account of the team being co-located.
- ✓ The Scrum Master knew from **daily informal** chats the status of User Stories and tasks and everyone knew their **assigned tasks** for the **duration** of the **Sprint**.
- ✓ The Team assigned fewer tasks at Sprint Kick-Off and focused on just the **initial ones**. In conjunction with the team WIP limits & adopting the “T” model, **Stand-ups** became more of a **discussion** to see how they could help each other get User Stories completed and **self-assignment** of tasks became a **trend**.
- ✓ They started using a **physical Kanban board** to **visualise** the work with Post-its. The **Stand-up** format changed from **individuals reporting status** on tasks to the **team** as a **whole** looking at **User Stories** on the board and asking what it **would take** to get the **User Story** to a **Done** State.

## Solution

- ✓ 2 changes were implemented to make Stand-ups more **useful & engaging**:
- ✓ It drove **real cross functional team work**, and **bonding** was the by-product as they helped and assisted each other to achieve their shared goal; **delivering completed valuable User Stories each sprint**.

# #3. BACKLOG REFINEMENT & ESTIMATION

## Challenge & Impact

- ✓ Due to their size, the Scrum Team couldn't always be part of **estimation** or **Backlog Refinement** sessions. This was typically completed outside of the Sprints by the **BA, Product Owner and Scrum Master** – with input from Developers as required.
- ✓ At Sprint kick-off, the **pre-estimated** User Stories were **presented** to the **team** and each team member was **assigned** their **tasks** for the next **2 weeks** in advance. Essentially all **planning, design, estimation** and **User Story creation** was done outside of the Scrum Team.
- ✓ The **impact** here was that the **team** were not **autonomous**.

## Solution

- ✓ The **Sprint Kick-off sessions** sometimes provided the **first opportunity** for the team to see the **requirements** and **seek clarifications**. Increasing Team **interaction** with the **Backlog** improved the **product due to early feedback & ideas** from the **wider Team**.
- ✓ More people were brought into the **Refinement sessions**, but never the **entire Scrum** team of **12**. **Reducing the size** of the team over time will better enable Team Backlog Refinement .
- ✓ Having a large Scrum Team meant there was **balancing** act between **engaging** the **entire team** in Backlog Refinement **versus** the **value** they get from **being involved earlier**.

# #4. JIRA SPRINT BURNDOWN

## Challenge & Impact

- ✓ Jira **Burndown Charts** weren't showing **accurate** data.
- ✓ At the end of each Sprint the burndown did not reflect the **amount** of **completed** work and typically had **larger volumes** of **outstanding hours** than **reality** would **suggest**.
- ✓ These reports were also being used for tracking **Earned Value** at a **project** level.

## Solution

- ✓ Issues were resolved by **fine tuning** the implementation & usage of Jira. Following **detailed analysis** on the project reports:
  - ✓ Consistency with logging time increased.
  - ✓ The Sprints in Jira were started only when all estimates were entered against the User Stories to avoid inflating growth when estimates were added.
  - ✓ Updating the "time remaining" for completed tasks ensured all outstanding time on User Stories was negated.
- ✓ **Behaviour** became more consistent and the burndown charts more **reliable**. This **accuracy** helped develop **confidence** in Jira whilst providing **accurate** Sprint status to **stakeholders outside** the team which built trust.



# #5. AGILE PROJECT MANAGEMENT

## Challenge & Impact

- ✓ PMO had previously reported **Earned Value** based on days **completed versus estimated days** from high level requirements.
- ✓ **Tracking** between **High level requirements** and **lower level requirements** (User Stories) was inconsistent, thus there was no way to track growth or decline on backlog. It was being managed & reported in accordance to their **Waterfall project governance**.

## Solution

- ✓ **The PMO Team Challenged** the reasons as to why **Earned Value** was important on Agile Project. Training and Coaching on the **fundamentals of Agile project management** provided guidance on alternative Release Tracking options.
- ✓ Moving from a **'plan-plan-do'** approach to the **'plan-do, re-plan-do, re-plan-do...'** approach was a key change for **tracking** Agile Projects.
- ✓ The **Release Burndown Chart**, which tracks **growth** and **de-scoping** along with **completed** work was introduced to the team.
- ✓ The next release would see **Jira set up** to **track** all the requirements from high level estimates through to completion enabling automatic Release Burndown Chart generation.

# #6. SPRINT TESTING

## Challenge & Impact

- ✓ As Testers and Developers merged into a single Scrum Team, concerns relating to maintaining their high quality Software Solutions and ISO Certification were inevitable.

## Solution

- ✓ Establishing a 3 tier Definition of Done (User Story, Sprint and Release) provided clarity around ownership of testing tasks, both within the Sprint and outside the Sprint.
- ✓ Discussions about Definition of Done strategy focused on moving items from Release Done to User Story Done over time. Establishing a strategy for executing tasks earlier in the development cycle is essential for maturing their Agile practices.
- ✓ The Scrum team could not execute 'Release Done' testing due to specialist skills that didn't exist within the team. The merits of putting these skills inside the team were discussed.
- ✓ The Scrum team were trying to be Agile in a Waterfall organisation. Restructuring to merge Test and Development departments represented a large change so an interim solution was architected:
- ✓ A "Pop-Up-Agile-Organisation" concept was introduced where a modus operandi could be established for Agile projects to separate Agile teams from the Waterfall organisation and supporting them in an Agile way from line management, process and hierarchal perspectives.

# #7. AGILE VISION

## Challenge & Impact

- ✓ Management needed a clear **Agile Vision** to assist them in driving an **Agile Transformation**, defining what was driving them to be Agile and what their Agile Vision was would ultimately help with **alignment** and **implementing lasting culture change**.
- ✓ Developing a **formal change management plan** to accompany an **Agile Vision** could further align the organisation and secure resources for completing a Transformation.

## Solution

- ✓ **Creating an Agile Vision** would help massively to drive a **Transformation** of the **scale**.
- ✓ Senior Management were in **agreement** that this would aid **Agile adoption** with **greater ease** and understood the merits of approaching this **transformation** as a **resourced change management initiative**.
- ✓ A **roadmap** was developed **outlining a change management plan** for undergoing this large scale change which would drive a successful Agile Transformation to develop **greater efficiency, agility, Customer value** and **Employee Satisfaction**.