Growing PMI Using Agile
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This is the story of how a group of Agile practitioners within the PMI, spearheaded and launched a formal PMI organization dedicated to Agile Project Management...and did so by actually practicing the management approach we preach.
• When Mike Griffiths issued the challenge at Agile 2007 to form a PMI Agile Specific Interest Group, it was his conviction that a key vehicle for teaching Agile to project managers could be PMI itself.

• At the time PMI was focused on overhauling the existing SIGs. However, when supporters of the idea socialized the idea on online venues and at chapter events, the demand was compelling. PMI saw that this was not the pet project of a few, but rather an initiative that had appeal to a broad community. In April 2008, PMI made a private commitment to the founders that Agile PM would be the first new SIG when they were ready. However, in order to get a charter, we had to generate a business plan.

• At the day-to-day project level, we have all experienced work for the sake of work. However, this can be extrapolated to the portfolio level. Do not simply charter a task order, a project, an organization, a company…simply for the sake of doing work. The endeavor must have a clearly defined objective that offers tangible value beyond those doing the work. Projects chartered merely to employ people, may address the most basic of human needs, but do not ultimately satisfy nor fulfill.
• The next order of business was to form an exploratory committee of Agile thought leaders, to figure out how we will satisfy our sponsor with a compelling business case. Everyone on the team believed in the greater purpose and carried no formal titles.
• This photo is of Team Astana. Despite the tensions between team members Lance Armstrong and Alberto Contador at the 2009 Tour de France, both assumed their team roles. At the end of the race, the team had first place, and both were on the podium.
• Agile values can be exhibited on an individual basis. However, the highest-performing Agile endeavors take advantage of the multiplying effect of excellent teams. The Agile team is much greater than the sum of its parts.
• We had the stated objective of delivering a business plan. The team quickly agreed to iterations of 2 weeks. Each iteration would start with a concall, where the team would perform the retrospectives and planning normally associated with Agile processes. For example, one retrospective yielded the creation of a Yahoo group collaboration site, more effective than communicating simply by email.
• The deliverables requested by PMI a business plan, a metrics scorecard, and an optional Activities Assessment Questionnaire. Initially perturbed at the volume of paperwork associated with the mission, the team embraced the fact that, in our context, these documents conveyed real business value to our sponsors.
• We then developed a product backlog that listed the required documents. Then we decomposed those epic-sized stories into smaller stories focusing on specific sections of a given document.
• Our definition of done for each document section was simply to upload it to the collaboration site.
• PMI would provide feedback during the bi-weekly iteration concalls, which would be incorporated in the next set of stories.
• One benefit from fixed iterations was offering volunteers a reliable time/place for the iteration concall. If they dropped off for a while, they knew where to come back into the fold.
• Although significant progress was being made, there were questions about roles. Who was the real Product Owner, PMI or us? Who is on the team, and how do you get onto it?
• By October of 2008, PMI had matured the new governance framework and officially chartered the launch of a PMI Agile community. At once they required the assembling of a formal Steering Committee, which required each member to sign non-disclosure forms and verify PMI membership.
• The team decided to use this opportunity to clarify some roles:
  • We issued a call for formal membership on a leadership committee, and interest quickly spiked
  • We decoupled the PMI sponsor from the community product owner, because PMI needed someone to balance stakeholder interests outside their sphere of influence.
• During the construction of the business plan, the team exhibited “contagious culture of commitment”. The phrase “I commit to do this” was a common saying.
  • Mike would commit to providing historical stats on the Agile open conferences.
  • Michele would commit to providing another paragraph on the market for Agile PM.
  • Pat would commit to pasting website screenshots into the appendix.
  • Over and over, team members wanted to live up to high expectations they set for themselves and each other.
• The PMI staff liaison attending our concalls would remark that our team’s dynamic of commitment and accountability was unique among all the other SIG boards she worked with.
• Indeed, eventually the PMI staff liaison began declaring more explicit task commitments, even though she was the community sponsor
Invariably, a key attribute of a high-performing team is the ability to tackle challenging problems.
• the PMI governance model had not yet matured to support either sponsorship or advertising.
• Likewise, PMI requires extensive lead times to sponsor a booth presence at a PMI or Agile related conference.

So the team implemented a mechanism to deliver value anyway.
• For one conference, the PMI Agile community was given a booth on a gratis basis. In exchange, the community promoted the conference with 500 flyers passed out on the floor of the PMI Global Congress 2008 in Denver.
• At the Agile 2009, Thoughtworks Inc hosted a reception to celebrate the launch of the PMI Agile community.

In both cases there was neither a formal agreement or financial transaction. The team was able to solve a problem with the required business constraints.
• Originally the team was focused on launching the PMI Agile community’s official organization
• At 2009 Scrum Gathering in Orlando, practitioners were saying “we can’t wait that long for answers to our work questions”
• Accordingly, the team reprioritized delivering a wiki-based PMI/Agile FAQ, before the formal launch.
• Apple released the iPhone only after 2-3 years of consumer demand for it
• An Agile team responds to changes in mission requirements
• The team’s velocity was greater than that of the PMI infrastructure
• Some on the team became frustrated and called for a work stoppage or strike to effect more PMI progress/support
• We learned more information about the political landscape.
  • PMI had to support all the other SIGs transitioning into new governance structure
  • Unlike those other SIGs, our community had been receiving PMI support, without an established membership base
• This new information helped us negotiate new options for a soft launch
Despite all these positives, we continue to face several challenges
Distributed Volunteers are Neither Colocated, Nor Fully Dedicated. One idea to mitigate this was the use of “Pair Leadership”. Each role on the team would be filled by two people, a pair of equals. This allowed one person to fill in for the other when work commitments spiked, and also offered the pair a chance for dynamic feedback and different perspectives within the same role.
• Balancing Team Empowerment with Concrete Direction is difficult on a distributed non-dedicated team. What might be considered too much direction on a conventional Agile team, may not be enough direction on a distributed volunteer team.
• A drill sergeant is required to strike that balance between empowering vs. directing.
Discussion

Learn More:
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