

Enabling Agile Through Teamwork

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Abstract

For more than a decade, the Agile development process has seeped into the lives of software developers and customers, changing the way projects are planned, how teammembers and teams interact, and how customers receive their product. Agile is a teamwork heavy process, demanding superb communication and technical skills to develop projects where requirements can change the flow of the project between sprints. Similarly, multi-team agile projects need to consider team management and team communication, as well as using distinct architectures and designs.

Keywords agile, teamwork, design, architecture, software development process

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1 Introduction

Agile development considers an element crucial to all software processes in a uniquely different manner: customers as team members. The basis of all software development is planning out a project from start to end, but requirements are prone to change when considering the fluctuating world of technology. Agile handles change by valuing the people involved, customers and developers [5]. By interfacing

with customers frequently, and considering their changing requests as the project progresses, change is a byproduct. However, the success of Agile is reliant on what Cockburn and Highsmith call "responsive people and organizations" as well as "[focusing] on the talents and skills of individuals" [4]. As a result, teamwork and communication become unavoidably ensconsed in the agile process. In this work, we first, introduce a quick overview of Agile and agile teams in order to discuss multi-team projects in agile. Second, we discuss the different architectures used alongside these projects and design considerations.

2 Teams in Agile

A single team in agile consists of the product owner, the scrum master, and the developers. In order for their team to be successful, they must "have a common focus, mutual trust, and respect," be "collaborative, but speedy [in their] decision-making process" and be adept at handling ambiguity [4]. The Agile Manifesto reinforces these attributes by valuing customer collaboration and responding to change over contracts and plans [7]. Daily stand-ups incite communication, updating each other on task statuses, and conveying problems if they exist. Depending on the needs that follow the stand-up, the team will respond accordingly. e.g. team members may pair up to get a difficult or time sensitive task done.

2.1 Scaling Up Teams in Agile

As projects scale up, so does the number of teams. When considering this in an agile workspace, there is more work that must go into ensuring that teams themselves can collaborate effectively. If teams are in the same location, then promoting a collaborative environment is key. However, teams across more than one location must account for different cultures and providing as much possibility for communication as possible [6]. Distance increases the potential for misunderstandings. Other recommendations include having a single product backlog [11], cross-team daily stand-ups (and other cross-team activities) [10], and having communities of practice [1]. Each of these suggestions tackles a unique but very real and potential problem that occurs in large scale agile practices. Having a single product backlog allows all teams

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to see the whole picture, and see where work is needed. Cross-team activities allows for a deeper understanding of the project and each team's accomplishments and troubles. Finally, communities of practices creates a valuable way to share information about relevant topics from other perspectives.

3 Design and Architecture in Agile

3.1 Architecture

Organizations tend to fail if their agile process is not bounded by a fail-safe plan.

Constraints such as financial, regulatory, technical or customer driven becomes a fundamental reason for the very existence of this issue. There is a new emerging trend, which explores the possibility of using Agile practices in order to manage traditional business functions. [9]

The SAFe (Scaled Agile Framework) introduces two distinct elements of Architecture in SAFe:

- Emergent Design
- Intentional Architecture

Technical basis for development and the incremental implementation of initiatives are provided by *Emergent Design*. In order to ensure the initiative continually delivers value, Emergent Design helps the Designers and Architects to be highly responsive to ever-changing customers/ stakeholders. At this juncture, Architecture in SAFe can be seen as a collaborative and interactive exercise through which the design element can emerge.

Intentional Architecture is a more traditional Architecture where the performance and usability of the initiative is supported and enhanced by a set of well-defined and planned Architectural initiatives. The severity and importance of the constraints such as choice of technology platform, financial budget, etc is clearly visualized using this Intentional Architecture. The probability of the initiative being successful and delivering value is increased if these constraints can be identified and incorporated into the initiative.

The key to the success here is the level of abstraction at which the balance of Emergent Design and Intentional Architecture occur. The fundamental behavior that will determine this is collaboration.

Agile requires Architecture that supports how Agile Practices deliver outcomes (value). This is achieved through a combination of a nimble reactive style of Architecture supported by a more traditional structured approach to Architecture [3]

3.2 Design

Given the fact that design is an important part of a software project, yet the development team usually struggle for coming up with a right design. This happens due to many reasons such as, focusing on high-fidelity design, which in-turn forces the project to adapt waterfall approach, etc.,

Effectively integrating design into agile process is major software developers' struggle. There is potential danger that extra work could be generated if a designer doesn't work closely with their team. This could lead to a creation of harmful silos of knowledge within the team.[2]

In order to avoid this a proper design is required, especially when a cross functional team is involved in developing a product for the intended customers/shareholders.

This can be effectively done when designers are included in agile planning process and paired with a developer to share their knowledge. This can be further improvised when all the work flow is made visible across entire project. This can be ensured by having a demo or a prototype display periodically, so that every one in the team can have an idea. Having this approach enables a collaborative view, rather than a traditional linear view.

4 Conclusion

In conclusion, agile projects with multiple teams are heavily dependent on communication, collaborative cultures, and extra information resources. As with team scaling, architecture must scale too, in order to promote the success of the project. [Design conclusion]

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