

Article Review: Scaling Agile: Finding your agile Tribe

Typically, agile methodology is more suitable for smaller teams and on smaller projects. Agile methodology does not work well in large complex projects. There are some efforts going on to scale agile to large software development teams of 3 to 30 people but for that there should be right set of people who are motivated and accept change. Finding right people is difficult than doing actual practices in agile.

The report describes an experience with large development team of around 300 people over 3 different sites. The two main challenges faced are continuous integration and dependency management. While these issues were addressed main concern is to find right people for the agile tribe. Most talented developer, analyst and testers were great but did not fit well in large teams and performed better in smaller teams. The project was in Health Service division of Siemens Medical with 3 sites and around 300 developers. The project followed service-oriented architecture. Initially started with 8 teams as and when the project grew the team size increased to 25 SCRUM teams with around 12 people in one team.

When the team size grew there were many challenges which were faced. The first challenge faced was Dependency Management and integration. When the project started out it was planned in such a way that there is minimum dependency between the teams but as and when the project increased dependency between the team also increased. Also, as the project was at different sites at different time zones more traditional form of communication such as emails started which led to unnecessary blockages and communication breakdowns. Next challenge was continuous integration. As we know continuous integration is the key element of agile methodology. But with the size of large team which is working consistently it becomes very difficult for continuous integration also the size of build process and maintenance is massive. Also, there were large number of broken builds which led to downtime in development and other activities. Auto build was the way but with the given size of team it became tough to build auto script for build processes.

The learning point from these challenges were to use basic agile principles to get to overall goal of the system and do not have rigid process and allow flexibility to the developers to take quick decisions. But in this it was observed that people who were effective in smaller teams were less effective on larger teams due to different distractions such as cross team SCRUM activities.

To conclude I think that agile for larger project is a great idea but at the same time there should be people with desired skillsets, behavior on the team. Not just that but it should be also complemented by good processes and infrastructure. Also, getting right set of people may be a challenge but once that is done integrating agile methodology into larger project would help to get project done in organized manner.