

THE AGILE METHOD BETTER CODE QUALITY DELIVERED MORE EFFICIENTLY

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Frank Barner explains why skyguide uses an Agile method for the very complex task of introducing a new Air Traffic Management (ATM) system. As an experienced project manager, he has to bridge the requirements of business on the one hand and IT on the other. “Agile” as an adjective means to be “able to move quickly and easily”; as a working method, “Agile” is a time boxed, iterative approach that builds software incrementally from the start of the project, instead of trying to deliver it all at once near the end.

SKYGUIDE What does it imply to use the Agile method instead of other ways to handle complex projects?

FRANK BARNER Agile teams make smaller deliveries of software more frequently. This provides faster feedback and therefore higher customer acceptance. Agile delivery shows an increase in code quality, less bugs and smaller, faster releases. Business value is delivered sooner and the risks are reduced because of earlier feedback from the customer. Due to the time-boxes, it brings the teams to constant planning and continuous improvement, resulting in much better visibility of project progress. Finally, with a re-planning every 2 weeks, agile teams are far more adaptable than waterfall projects. Working Agile means to consequently put the customer value and benefits into focus, and it is most of all a mindset.

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Could you please tell us how agile teams are structured and how they work?

FB An agile team is typically five to nine individuals working towards a common goal. The team is cross-functional, self-organized and co-located. This supports the agile principle that face-to-face communication is by far the most efficient and effective method of collaboration in a team. Within the Software Factory of Virtual Centre, the activities are organized in “sprints” and the teams have regular events in their sprint cadence. It starts with the sprint planning, refinement of the backlog for future sprints (grooming), showing progress with working software (sprint review) and reviewing how the efficiency can be improved (sprint retrospective).

Could you please explain what the Programme Increment (PI) within the Agile method involves?

FB The PI is a time frame of 13 weeks or 3 months for development that uses cadence and synchronization to align the work of a number of agile teams. It supports the regular delivery of small amounts of work, thus improving the workflow. A PI starts with a face-to-face planning session for all the teams involved. Approximately 50 to 60 directly involved people, plus a dozen key stakeholders meet outside the skyguide premises. All the teams are in one large room, which makes communication easier. Socializing plays a vital role too. Once the plans are agreed, the teams work in their normal agile way in the so-called sprints.

AGILE



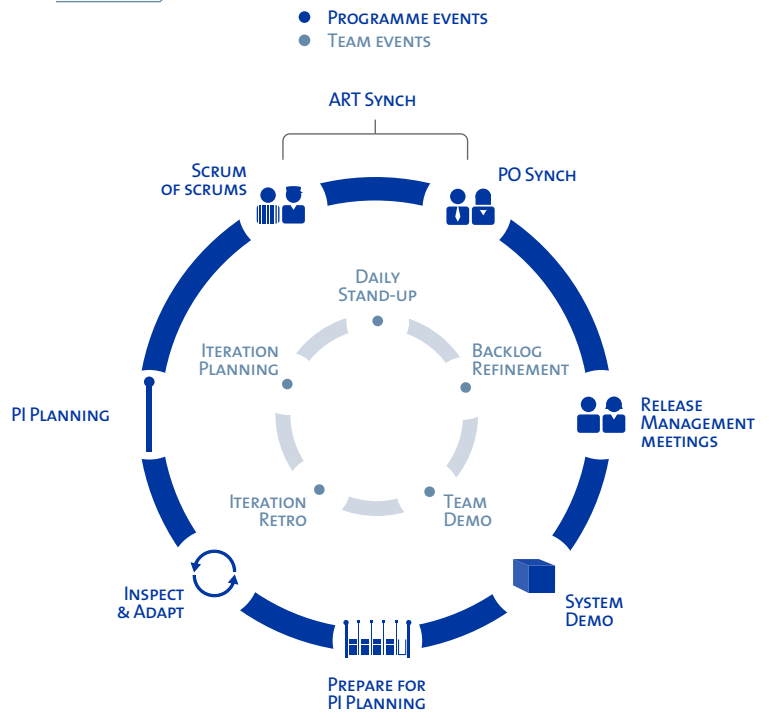
“ Agile is more a mindset than a working method ”

What are the benefits of the PI?

FB We get better code quality delivered more efficiently. The work of the teams is coordinated at a programme level with regular meetings. A major element of the PI is the system demo. There is one of these every sprint. All the delivered results from the various teams are integrated together and then shown to stakeholders to get their feedback. These events saved us countless meetings and asynchronous coordinations as well as numerous telephone calls. It is a powerful way to drive the maturity of the agile teams, and it is based on the agile principle: “Working software is the primary measure of progress”.

When will the agile transformation at skyguide be finished?

FB Agile is more a mindset than a working method. For me there is no end to this road as we speak of continuous learning and improvements, continuous integration and continuous deployment. ■



ITERATION – THREE WEEKS SPRINT

