



Free Resources

In the software development industry free is a magical word. Open or free reflect a willingness for someone to contribute to the betterment of your team. We have a free agile poster for you to print and hang in your team area!

VersionOne.com/AgilePoster.asp

Credits:

• INVEST model for planning and managing good stories:

William C. Wake
<http://xp123.com/xplor/xp0308/index.shtml>

• Being a Better Agile Dad:

V. Lee Henson CST
<http://agiledad.blogspot.com/>

• What is 'Agile Dad'?

V. Lee Henson CST
<http://agiledad.blogspot.com>

• Are we Scrumming?

Jeff Sutherland CST – Excerpt from Nokia Test
<http://www.infoq.com/interviews/jeff-sutherland-scrum-rules>

Agile Dad

1192 East Draper Parkway
Draper, UT 84020
<http://www.phd4u.com/agiledad>

Agile Mentor



About the Author:

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This Certified Scrum Trainer's experience spans a broad array of technical software production roles and responsibilities. Lee has worked hands on as a GUI web developer, quality assurance analyst, automated test engineer, senior product manager, senior project manager, ScrumMaster, agile coach, consultant, and ADDIE training professional. He has worked with hundreds of teams to assist them in successful implementation of thousands of projects. His client list includes Fortune 500 companies, Government sector projects, small and large software production facilities, and multiple successful large scale e-commerce implementations.

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this issue

- Agile Project Management **P.1-2**
- Are We Scrumming? **P.2**
- Being a Better Agile Dad... **P.3**
- Resources & Credits **P.4**

Agile Project Management: A Business Analyst Perspective.

Abstract:

While moving from traditional project management to agile project management will certainly involve learning new tools and techniques, success hinges largely on how well the project manager and the team adopts new ways of thinking about project control. This new approach to controlling projects can have significant impact to how a BA writes requirements and interacts with the team. We will explore the impact agile project management is having on the BA community, what new skills are required, and what BAs can do to ease the transition.

In order to best understand the role of a business analyst on an agile team, we first need to understand the difference between traditional and agile project management principles. This is not to say that there is simply no sound principles in traditional waterfall project management, the thought here is to propose that each methodology has sound principles that can contribute to the overall success of the team. Agile methods are often misconstrued as flying by the seat of your pants, changing requirements on a whim, and disregarding upfront planning all together. Agile does account for planning as much as responsibly needed, carving out the technical details as late as possible, in order to effectively deliver customer requirements to the team for facilitation in iterative cycles. This key differentiator has proven successful in the deployment of many agile projects. Collaboration is a key component of agile that contributes greatly to its success. As a business analyst, you already recognize that the primary component to the success of any team is having well written, clearly defined requirements from the customer for the team to work with. Bill Wake teaches the INVEST model for defining requirements.

INVEST

- Independent -
 - Avoid dependencies with other stories
 - Write stories to establish foundation
 - Combine stories if possible to deliver in a single iteration
- Negotiable-
 - Stories are not a contract
 - Too much detail up front gives the impression that more discussion on the story is not necessary
 - Not every story must be negotiable, constraints may exist that prevent it
- Valuable -
 - Each story should show value to the Users, Customers, and Stakeholders
- Estimable -
 - Enough detail should be listed to allow the team to estimate
 - The team will encounter problems estimating if the story is too big, if insufficient information is provided, or if there is a lack of domain knowledge.
- Sized Appropriately-
 - Each story should be small enough to be completed in a single iteration
 - Small detailed stories for the near future
 - Larger stories are okay if planned further out (Epics)
- Testable -
 - Acceptance criteria stated in customer terms
 - Automate whenever possible
 - All team members should demand clear acceptance criteria

Are We Scrumming?

Nokia has developed a test to check whether a team is really using Scrum.

The Nokia Test is in two parts. First, are you doing Iterative Development?

Iterations must be timeboxed to less than 4 weeks. Software must be tested and working at the end of an iteration. Iteration must start before specification is complete.

The experience is that if you ask a lot of Scrum shops if they can pass this part of the test, they can't. Not a single team.

The next part of the test checks whether you are doing Scrum:

You know who the product owner is. There is a product backlog prioritized by business value. The product backlog has estimates created by the team. The team generates burndown charts and knows their velocity. There are no project managers (or anyone else) disrupting the work of the team.



Following the INVEST model, we quickly discover that the focus on requirements in an agile environment shift toward greater emphasis on collaboration with the team and lighter documentation.

In this case, the business analyst would learn that communication in the agile model is a two-way street that remains high traffic for the entire project duration. In other words, the business analyst is indeed part of the agile team. The team requires timely feedback from the customer in order to best make certain they are on track with the acceptance criteria. Likewise, the customer expects the business analyst to act as a liaison between the team and the customer. This type of increased and enhanced communication yields just in time requirements that are clear and meet the customer's immediate and most desired need.

Another common misconception by teams looking into agile practices is that it promotes zero documentation. This is simply not the case. As with any process some documentation is required to ensure that the line of communication remains constant and consistent. It is equally important that documentation and communications within the team and with the customer remain concise and visible to all parties.

Once the requirements have been gathered and all communication obstacles have been removed, the team can focus on practices surrounding requirements management. It is the responsibility of the customer to work in lockstep with the business analyst to produce a prioritized product backlog that is clearly defined and ready to be submitted to the team for further planning. This backlog should add business value and help control project scope.

Agile teams need to recognize the business analyst as a key contributor. The typical role of a business analyst needs to be adjusted on an agile team to allow them to learn new facilitation skills.

Relationships take on a whole new meaning in an agile environment. Business analysts will see a notable difference in the level of collaboration within the team and with the customer. I would even go as far as to recommend that the business analyst be co-located with the team if at all humanly possible. This higher level of communication will also reveal a parallelism between design, requirements, & documentation.

Agile Project Management: A Business Analyst Perspective Continued

“Requirements should be functionally distinct, and should deal with breadth first then depth.” – Lee Henson

“Agile teams need to recognize the role of business analyst as a key contributor”

– Lee Henson

The most critical success factor component of the business analyst on an agile team is the clear understanding of their role and responsibilities. The business analyst can assume a few different roles on the agile team. In some cases, they may work in the role of project manager or scrummaster. In this situation their focus should be on coaching and teambuilding. It will be their role to act as a leader to the group and remove impediments as they arise. The biggest adjustment to this role is having great responsibility & minimal authority.

A business analyst may also be asked to act as a customer proxy to the agile team. In this role they need to clearly understand the business and must be empowered to make decisions

Even with all of the evidence on the table, many teams still choose not to adopt agile methodologies as they are knee deep in a different process. This does not restrict you from taking some steps to help your organization see value in agile principles. The key is to remain focused. Focus on business value. Focus on requirements that reflect distinct functionality. Focus on better team communications. Focus on success.



Being a Better Agile Dad...

One concept I learned early on in my project management career is that managing and coaching an agile team really is a lot like being a dad. The team really does look to you as a leader and expects that you will work hard to make certain their work environment is everything they have ever dreamed of.

The first step is to gain the teams trust. All too often I see projects fail because team members do not trust their leader or each other which results in instant tension in the team relationship. Setting realistic expectations with corporate leadership with regard to deadlines and what the team is working on is critical in gaining the trust of the team. Only make promises on behalf of the team that they have already committed to as a group.

A great second step is establishing your commitment to the team and making them aware of your expectations as a leader. Letting the team know where you stand right out of the gate is critical to their ability to exceed your expectations. My Commitment to the team is to provide them with a safe, fun, and fair working environment. I also promise to shield the team from outside interruptions and remove any obstacles that prevent them from making forward progress. A great project manager should be able to handle great responsibility without having authority. The project manager is responsible for helping the team be successful even if it means suffering great mortal plight. The success or failure of the iteration and release rest squarely on the entire agile team.

A final gut check is to treat your team like you would treat a family member that you like. Compliment the team on their achievements and never tell them they look fat in that dress, even if they do. Support the team and encourage them to hold meaningful retrospectives. Remind them at the daily update meeting that they are reporting to each other and should be excited to share their accomplishments with their peers. Remember to hang their artwork on the refrigerator and let them demo their creations at the end of each iteration. Be there for the team and let them know how much you are counting on them to assist you in bringing the iteration to a successful closure. The team will love you for it and you will love their productivity.

This Month's Agile Q&A

Q: What is 'Agile Dad'?

A: Throughout our lives we can expect to hit a number of high and low points. How we deal with these issues, each with varying degrees of priority and severity shape and mold the way our lives turn out. Each decision we make leads to another larger more important decision. The choice we make at any point can shape or re-shape the path our lives lead. Such is the life of an Agile Dad.

Likewise in the business world we are all faced with decisions that could potentially shape the future of a product or company. Each correct decision brings great reward. On the other hand, an incorrect decision could prove costly for even the strongest of companies. Choosing not to make a decision at all can even prove more costly. This is why many companies choose to adopt agile principles and methodologies.



Hopefully by this point you are already fully aware why you chose to purchase this book. Just in case you are still considering, this book will help even the most uncertain agile manager or team member become familiar with agile processes by equating them with real-life scenarios that we encounter on a near daily basis. The fact is, each of us live our lives in an agile way and often fail to take notice. Your decision to read and review the findings in this book is a reflection your undying commitment to success both in your life and business decisions.

Some of the analogies are light-hearted, others are contemplative and each is intended to introduce you or re-acquaint you with a principle of the agile process. As we travel together down the path of success together, many of these situations may seem a bit like 'deja-vu'. This is indeed perfectly normal and all a part of the process of recognizing just how agile each of us are.

EYE ON IT Tool Selection

More and more people are looking for a software application that integrates with tools they may currently be using. As a leader in the agile software industry, I would be remiss if I mentioned or even hinted that a silver bullet solution existed. The fact remains that every organization goes through a period where they try to map their process to a single tool. One of the most powerful features of the VersionOne V1 application is it's ability to remain flexible and not strong arm an organization into a specific prescribed process. When evaluating the tool solution for your organization, remember to ask how many leading industry integrations currently exist and how easy would it be to integrate with all of the smaller homegrown applications we have created in the past. Healthy teams use tools that help them operate more effectively and healthy tools allow teams to continue to use the tools that help them operate most effectively. The relationship between team member and tools should be seamless and enjoyable!

SOFTWARE Super Villain SDK Contest

The VersionOne SDK is here and they are throwing a contest to celebrate! The SDK makes it possible to build really cool gadgets that will ultimately make the VersionOne user experience better.

The self-serving reason they are putting on this contest is to get feedback from our community about the SDK. They strongly encourage feedback from users of the SDK and will follow up with entrants to see how the experience was. (Don't worry -- a development team member will follow up, not a sales person) Prizes are valued in the thousands of dollars! More details at: www.versionone.com/sdkcontest/

