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• Introducing the Agile Marsupial

V. Lee Henson CST
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• Agile Q&A:

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Agile Dad

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this issue

Introducing the Agile Marsupial **P.1**

Introducing the Agile Marsupial **P.2**

Eye On It **P.3**

Resources & Credits **P.4**

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Introducing the Agile Marsupial

Many organizations claim to have adopted some form of Agile. Typically what this means is that someone has heard the term, can spell it, and has read the first twelve pages of some hard hitting agile book. The part that frightens me most is that the organizations typically do adopt some really broken form of Agile. In this discussion, I intend to present to you a new concept that people have been calling a grassroots effort for as long as I can remember.

Have you ever come in close contact with a kangaroo or any other marsupial for that matter? Have you ever wondered what made the pouch so magical or what exactly happens inside the pouch? I recently met a C-level executive who shared these very interesting questions. In what we will call scenario one, the executive came from a large banking institution that was deeply rooted in time honored tradition and great ceremony surrounding everything they ever did. They were comfortable with a heavy-weight process because they knew if they would ever get audited that they had abided by all of the terms governing their compliance related initiatives. Everything was checked, planned, signed, planned, and signed again prior to any real work taking place.

The question I had for the magic man was whether any of his teams could build a project or product using Agile methods and still remain within compliance guidelines?

The answer was exactly as I expected, in any other industry that may work, but in the banking industry where we are heavily regulated, that is just wishful thinking. At first I thought this was going to be a really sad day for me, then I remembered a recent trip to the zoo. I remember looking closely at the kangaroo and the way she took precious care of her young. I observed as she took care of most all of the very important things inside the pouch and let the world happen around her.

That's the answer I exclaimed! Could it really be that simple? Could the key to Agile delivery in a non-agile environment be as simple as watching a kangaroo? Indeed it was if you would allow me to indulge for a moment. Imagine in this high profile bank, if all of the non-agile deliverables could be tracked independently, in a higher level project where they can be watched over as a needed part of the delivery process without interfering with the work in the pouch. What if the work in the pouch was collected and used to create the large scale deliverables as the work was completed? Could it be possible in this situation to do Agile in the pouch and still achieve the level of compliance needed to operate a financial institution?

Agile Dad

READY TO WRITE?

Are you a certifiable Agile nerd with something to say? Do you have a strong inner desire to write something that is certain to get published and share it with the Agile community? Did you know this newsletter is the single best circulated monthly newsletter on Agile principles and practice? As our following continues to grow, I want to reach out and extend the AgileFamily! I have already had a few really great writers step up and contribute to this newsletter. Now it is your turn! AgileDad is seeking 2-4 skilled writers who are passionate about all things Agile to rotate in as guest writers. Do you have what it takes? Can you find a topic the world must know about? Here is your chance to let your voice be heard! Email Lee@agiledad.com for additional details and deadlines. I will be looking forward to your contribution!

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Cont: Introducing the Agile Marsupial

"Marsupials cannot walk backwards, they simply plod forward and adjust direction until they reach their destination."

– V. Lee Henson CST

In scenario two, we can envision a team that has been struggling to deliver CMMI level 'x' projects. The overhead of additional paper trail alone would normally be enough to throw this type of project out of consideration for an Agile delivery? Having worked with teams who deliver a number of government related initiatives, I am here to argue it really is possible! The secret is in the separation. By clearly identifying what happens inside the pouch and out, we can quickly get an idea of where to draw lines and at what level people will have expectations regarding our project. The key to building and maintaining an agile marsupial is setting realistic expectations, and following through on what you say that you intend to deliver. When building a project in this fashion, failure is simply not an option. The other mistake that is very common with the marsupial approach is that people often do not give up the ceremony that goes with a deep CMMI type project.

In order to be successful, the team needs to be clear in their deliverables and consistently feed new information out to the business so that they have a valid opportunity to review, inspect, and adapt as needed at any point in the project. Even if what they wrote in the requirements is different.

We also need to learn to manage to two distinct and independent timelines. This means at any given moment we can be asked how many 'man hours' does this project call for? What is our forecast for delivery?

The truth be told, these are answers we should be able to deliver fairly early on if we are following a sound Agile release process. (See the February Agile Mentor Newsletter for hints.) If we are all on the same delivery page and people know that we will deliver what we promise, all of the rest should fall right into place. There is truly nothing more precious than the look on a product owners face when you ask them to evaluate what you have!

This is especially nice if you are asking for the very first time. In most cases, they are not used to having an early opportunity to let you know whether or not you are on track for exceeding expectations. In many cases, they may think this is a front because you have some request you are about to ask them for. It will be nice for once to have them on your side! New is not always a bad thing!

"New is not always a bad thing!"

– V. Lee Henson CST

The third scenario, though a bit different, drives the point home from a fast moving project perspective.

I was once working with a marketing team that was working in a true services related fashion and they wanted to embrace agile methods. At first this brought me concern as I had not seen or heard of a shared services team embracing Agile as a solution. After a few meetings to evaluate what the team was searching for, I quickly learned that they wanted greater visibility.



People were continually filling their queue with work, without regard for other items on the plate that the team should be addressing. No single business unit within the organization accepted that this creative group was performing work for the entire organization. They also would not accept that their work could fall lower on the totem pole than a different internal initiative. They did not even consider that the group may have had items of their own that they were trying to plan for. Everybody just wanted to see their work get done with ultra quick turnaround.

When moving forward, kangaroos can get going pretty fast! In fact, marsupials cannot walk backwards, they just plod along forwards and change course as needed to reach their final destination. These services related Agile teams are moving very much in the same fashion. We need to shorten their delivery cycle as much as possible to achieve the greatest level of delivery from the team. Some services teams take the time to break work down into tiny bite sized chunks and work without boundaries to deliver as much of the functionality possible in as short a delivery time allowed.

If you have ever tried to chase a kangaroo or a wallaby, you will know exactly what I am talking about. The team performs by delivering short bursts of speed in their functionality.

In other words, I have only scratched the surface in this writing, but I have seen many projects succeed when they stop focusing on delivering every deliverable under the sun and begin to focus tighter on delivering the functionality that makes the greatest difference to the organization. The outside deliverables will all fall into place.

This Month's Agile Q&A

Q: Can I get a discount on registration to your upcoming CSM or CSPO classes in Atlanta?

A: Yes! Any AgileMentor reader can register now for the early-bird discount and save 150 dollars. You can also apply the coupon code AgileMentor and save even more on your registration! Consider it our way of saying thanks for reading the newsletter.



Q: When are your upcoming CSM & CSPO courses?

A: March 22nd and 23rd is set for the CSM course at the Versionone headquarters in Alpharetta, (just outside of Atlanta). The CSPO course will take place on April 19th and 20th at the same location. Additional information on both courses can be found by visiting the official Scrum Alliance Website.

Do sign up today as seats are filling VERY quickly!

EYE ON IT Upcoming AgileDad Engagements:

- Mar. 2nd – 3rd Hollywood, CA
- Mar. 4th – 5th Goleta, CA
- Mar. 9th – 10th Dallas, TX
- Mar. 15th – 17th Vancouver, BC
- Mar. 21st – 23rd Atlanta, GA
- Mar. 24th – 26th Hollywood, CA
- Mar. 30th – 31st San Jose, CA

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- Agile For Executives
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On-Site Agile Coaching and Consulting are also available.

For more information or to book a course today, please contact:

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