MAINSTREAM
TECHNOLOGIES

AN AGILE DISCUSSION

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Introduction

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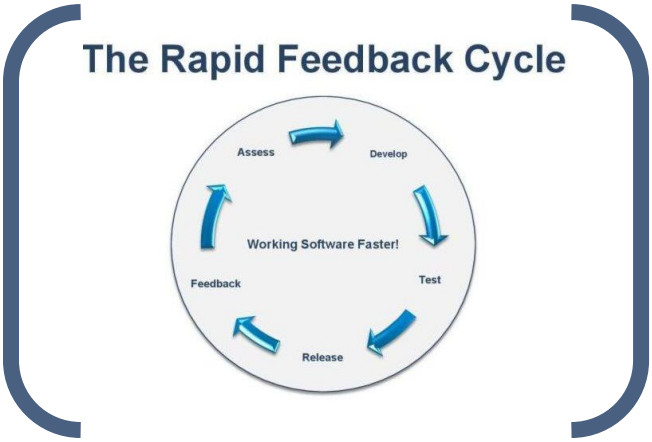
THE TRADITIONAL WAY

Traditionally, the 'waterfall' method required a comprehensive effort to fully document a set of specifications which were then assigned to a development team. Depending on the size and scope of the project, the developers would disappear for the duration, only to reappear if they had questions.

Once they completed the project, they resurfaced, delivered the software for user testing and went back to work on the next project. This was basically an all or nothing approach which meant that from idea to conception could take months. And… anybody who's ever been involved with a software project knows very well that when the solution is finally delivered, the first comment you'll hear is "Wouldn't it be great if……?"

THE BETTER WAY: AGILE



There is a better way to develop software and have the ability to answer "Wouldn't it be great if……"!

According to Wikipedia, "**Agile software development** is a group of software development methods in which requirements and solutions evolve through collaboration between self-organizing, cross-functional teams. It promotes adaptive planning, evolutionary development, early delivery, continuous improvement and encourages rapid and flexible response to change."[1]

Agile methods break down the ***big*** project into smaller bite sized chunks. Ever mindful of the overall vision, developers and users work closely together to prioritize which features should be built first.

[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agile_software_development

Once they receive the go ahead, developers break down the features into smaller units that can be built, tested and released to users for feedback in short time frames or cycles. Once the users are satisfied it goes into production.

This rapid feedback cycle puts a premium on collaboration and input from the end user while effectively refining the software into a product that often exceeds initial expectations. This cycle is repeated over and over again and with each iteration old features are refined while new ones are added until at the end of the day, the 'new' software' surpasses the original vision of the overall solution.

With an agile approach, one can get 20% of the software that 80% of users need most into production faster. Agile also results in minimizing wasted effort as compared to traditional methods, plus user satisfaction shoots through the roof!

Benefits	Results
Increase speed to market	Results in better solutions delivered faster
Reduce the cost of rework	Reduces effort spent on building the wrong solution
Higher customer satisfaction	Leads to less complex products that better meet needs
Higher employee satisfaction	On work delivered, plus better responsive results, produces higher satisfaction
More stable releases	Enables smaller, less risky releases that result in few incidences

THE IMPACT IS THERE

The impact of agile adoption throughout the organization is palpable. Users and developers work hand in hand with each other so that business and technology are aligned in a single purpose. If the original vision shifts or if a feature doesn't work as anticipated, agile gives you a way to address them in a timely fashion.

Agile also creates a sea change for administrators and offloads a portion of their budgeting burden. The 'cost' or ROI discussion shifts from 'How much will it cost?' for a total solution to 'How much can I afford on a monthly basis to keep pace with evolving demands?'

CHALLENGES TO ADOPTION

For the most part, technologists understand the advantages agile can deliver. The biggest challenge is educating decision makers that software is a journey. It's not a destination. Since our reliance on software will only grow and business demands evolve it makes sense to have a structure in place that takes advantage of new opportunities while encouraging innovation and experimentation.

Perceived and Actual Results of Faster Application Delivery

Perceived Risk	Actual Results
Lower Quality	• Faster feedback improves quality by addressing problems earlier. • Continuous delivery techniques increase depth and breadth of testing through automation
Greater Release instability	Smaller, more frequent releases are less complex and easier to roll back.
More rework, higher cost	Earlier feedback reduces overall rework and reduces time and effort spent building the wrong solution
Sending confusing signals to customers	• Smaller, more frequent changes are easier to adopt than large infrequent changes. • Customers see results of feedback sooner, increasing confidence.

HOW MAINSTREAM TECHNOLOGIES CAN HELP

Mainstream Technologies can help you ask the right questions; find the appropriate answers and help you design a strategy that meets your expectations and obligations to your stakeholders.

For more information on how Mainstream Technologies, www.mainstream-tech.com can help, give us a call at 501.801.6700 or send us an email to info@mainstream-tech.com.

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