CASE STUDY

Agile Project Management empowers teams at Mastek

"Agile project management doesn't change your core job, but it changes your whole perspective. Every team member is transformed into a key player who is part of successful delivery." says Vishal Somal, Project Manager, Mastek.
"Any company – but especially those managing remote or international teams, should be managing projects this way if they want value for money."

Agile project management (PM) has changed the way Vishal's current 40 -strong project team (onshore and offshore) report to him. While they are based in Mumbai, India, Vishal works in Bedfordshire, UK. Using an agile approach has improved the way Mastek develops educational software products for one of its key UK clients. It is Mastek's job to increase IT value generation to its clients through onsite and offshore deliveries.

"Off-shoring represents huge opportunities for agile working," Vishal says. "Agile PM helps deliver projects on time and to quality. In any offshore organization people need to work in an agile way otherwise products tend to be delivered that are not what the customer wanted."

Vishal Somal
Project Manager
Mastek

Traditional Projects vs Agile Projects

On a traditional project, Project Managers may be actively involved in directing work and telling their team what needs to be done – a style often referred to as command and control. Agile PM is different. In the early stages, the agile PM creates a high level plan, based on outline requirements, and a high level view of the solution to be created. From that point onwards the end project is created iteratively and incrementally, with each increment building on the output of increments preceding it. Unlike a traditional project, the detailed plans for each step are created by the team members themselves and not the Project Manager.

Vishal says, "The principles of agile working are essentially based on communication and transparency. Instead of waiting for something to be delivered, and not really knowing what the end result is going to be, there are checkpoints to track progress."

Another important benefit agile working has brought Mastek is to help keep costs under control. Without it, the cost of quality increases. "It's much harder to correct mistakes when a product is nearing its final phase of development," Vishal says. "It's much better to develop it as you go along. I think agile project management would help any software developer."

Agile PM comprises established and proven components that provide a holistic approach to the management and governance of projects. It has an overarching philosophy and guiding principles, together with a lifecycle (or process) and a set of deliverables to be created and maintained as the project progresses from a controlled start through to completion. It provides clearly defined roles with specific responsibilities designed to bring together all the stakeholders involved in the project.

It can work alongside more formalized Project Management approaches such as PRINCE2® – and it can be applied to projects regardless of scale or discipline. It can be dovetailed into formalized quality processes such as ISO9001 and CMMI – and shows project Sponsors that they can adopt agile PM with confidence, while providing focus to the entire project team.

Vishal explains, "For those using PRINCE2, the mandate requires precise details about the project. However, although PRINCE2 Project Managers complete their reports, that alone doesn't give them a real insight into the health of their project. While agile takes care of the PRINCE2 mandate it does not require all documentation and requirements to be ready. It allows estimates at a high level. It's difficult for people to change their mind-set but agile just makes so much sense. When you understand it you just think "Why didn't we do it this way before?""

> ## Why didn't we do it this way before?

Agile Empowers Teams

Within each stage of the agile project, the team collaborates closely with a representative of the business or customer so they understand the detail of the next step and can create an evolving solution. This has facilitated and improved Mastek's customer relationships. "Our customers can reap the benefits of developing smaller chunks of the product. Before the software goes into production the business can decide if they want to continue on the same path or make alterations."

Trust is also built into the team, and staff are encouraged to work through and overcome difficulties.

"It's a real team effort but you need both parties to have complete confidence and trust in each other. Before we adopted agile working, Mastek's clients were not in touch with how the team in Mumbai were doing; they did not understand the pressures they were under, how they worked, who they were or how the software development process evolved using the CMMI processes. Now we are using agile, there is much more interaction and an understanding on both sides. We both accept the challenges and pressures and we are able to help each other achieve the best possible outcomes."

Training at Mastek

Vishal is an Computer Science engineering degree graduate from Mumbai. He joined Mastek in 2002 and has run a number of successful major projects since then. In 2008 he became the Engagement Manager for one of Mastek's key UK accounts and is responsible for on-offshore service operations. He manages the complete range of services – project management, software deliverables, people capabilities, processes, infrastructure and resources. Vishal was invited to take part in training for Agile PM, a new qualification from APMG and DSDM.

The training was delivered by Barbara Roberts, Senior Consultant, RADTAC. Barbara says, "Mastek is a highly professional organization employing a large number of staff who in turn work on hundreds of projects. It is inspiring to meet delegates who embrace a mature agile approach. It was a pleasure to train Vishal and I was pleased that he scored very high marks in his Agile Project Management Practitioner examination."

Vishal says about the training, "The training I underwent through RADTAC helped me understand agile more deeply or rather more correctly. The course helped me focus on how agile could help me in my role and also our wider organization. It was an eye-opener and presented a different way of looking at the software development process. Our whole team is under pressure to deliver on time. Agile enables them to focus on priorities so we get the most important things done first."

Agile – it's about collaboration

Vishal is convinced that this way of working would help not only software developers but any international organizations.

Essentially, Vishal believes that Agile PM makes life better for software development teams and their clients.

"It just makes sense to work together to develop something that will make our customers happy," he says.

'Agile PM delivers early benefits and value for money. The communication between client and service provider is very smooth. Bad news is known early on in the product development so there's an open atmosphere and no hiding. We have further improved communication between on and offshore teams by using social media. We encourage and support interactive and collaborative ways of working.'

About Mastek

Mastek is a high-end global provider of vertically-focused enterprise technology solutions and platforms that unleash the potential of its clients' organization and enable business transformation. With revenues over 201 million USD (FY 2009), Mastek is a publicly held (NSE: MASTEK), leading IT company with global operations providing enterprise solutions to insurance, government, and financial services organizations worldwide. With its principal offshore delivery facility based at Mumbai, India, Mastek operates across US, Canada, UK, Europe, Asia-Pacific and the Middle East.

About RADTAC

RADTAC is a leader in Lean and Agile software development, consulting and training - and the only company in the world accredited for both Scrum and Agile Project Management. We have a depth and breadth of expertise across all Agile and Traditional methods that we believe is unmatched; and a track record of success with clients large and small of which we are very proud. Since 1998 we have built a unique, comprehensive, pragmatic and flexible suite of services that allow us to deliver the right Lean and Agile solution to meet your needs, whatever your environment.

About APMG's Agile Project Management Qualifications

The Agile Project Management qualification aims to address the needs of those working in a project-focused environment who want to be Agile. Based on the proven fundamentals within DSDM Atern, the certification provides the ability to deliver Agile Projects in organizations requiring standards, rigour and visibility around Project Management, while at the same time enabling the fast pace, change and empowerment provided by Agile. Examinations are available at Foundation and Practitioner levels.

Details of new working practices

- Synchronous way of working, offshore set up now an extension of onshore team
- Common development and testing practices used between onshore (client) and offshore (Mastek) teams
  - Same code base used between the locations
  - Code reviews happening online using MS BPOS
  - Offshore team working on the same product back log as onshore team
- Reduce governance
  - A single SCRUM team located across locations
  - A common SCRUM Master managing the work (stories) with the team

- Increased communication between the onshore/offshore teams
  - MS - BPOS used as collaboration tool between the locations
  - Works over a 2MBS internet line offshore
  - Allows Audio, Video, IM and Desktop Sharing between multiple attendees
  - Offshore team use this tool to participate in all SCRUM ceremonies
- Intimacy of engagement increased due to regular face -2- face interactions using video chat in BPOS
- Quick understanding and adoption of each organisation's cultural differences to ensure us a harmonious working environment

About APMG

APMG-International is a global examination institute accredited by The APM Group, OGC's official Accreditor. Our portfolio of qualifications includes PRINCE2®, MSP®, M_o_R® and P3O®. Our Accredited Training and Consulting Organizations have gone through the most rigorous assessment process in the industry. Our commitment to high standards means that all candidates and organizations awarded an APMG certificate can be assured they have reached our stringent quality standards.

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