

ADVERTISEMENT

ADVERTISEMENT



Baseline [SUBSCRIBE TO BASELINE FREE](#)

HOME COMPLIANCE INTELLIGENCE IT MANAGEMENT MID-MARKET NEWS PROJECTS TOOLS

Podcasts | Videos | Slideshows

Home > Application Development > Software Development the Agile Way

HAVE BASELINE COME TO YOU FREE

Baseline magazine can be delivered to your home or office every month.

APPLY NOW FOR YOUR FREE SUBSCRIPTION.

First Name Last Name

Title Company

Address

City State Zip

SUBMIT

Renew Your Subscription

Application Development

Software Development the Agile Way

By Baselinemag
2008-01-30

Article Views: 304
Article Rating: / 1

Poor Best

Can a collaborative, flexible and focused method produce better software?

By Thomas Myer

Imagine planning a trip to a Las Vegas casino the way you plan most software development projects. From your base in Los Angeles, you and your friends spend weeks obsessing over every detail—studying maps, tracking fastest routes and figuring out places along the way to eat and sleep. You even plot the schedule, calculating to the minute how much travel and rest time you'll have at each stop.

Kickoff day arrives, and you hit the road with lots of fanfare and excitement. Everything is peachy until you hit the Nevada state line, where you see a 50-car pileup ahead of you. So you turn around, go back to Los Angeles and rework all of your plans from top to bottom. You'll try to get to Las Vegas a few weeks later.

This whole scenario might sound crazy, but Agile experts use analogies just like it to explain what's wrong with traditional, predictive waterfall methods of software development, in which real marketplace value is sacrificed for discreet planning and analysis about ultra specific deliverables—much of which is pure guesswork. The churn, stress and missed deadlines (not to mention budget overruns)

LATEST STORIES

- SaaS Takes Flight: Web Apps to Take Over the...
- Software Development the Agile Way

eWEEK CHANNEL INSIDER

THIS WEEK ON CHANNEL INSIDER

The Top 12 Channel Execs

Find out now who made the grade.

[View Slideshow Now >](#)

enterprise

eWEEK CHANNEL INSIDER

THIS WEEK ON CHANNEL INSIDER

The Top 12 Channel Execs
Find out now who made the grade.

[View Slideshow Now >](#)

enterprise

ADVERTISEMENT

Related Ads

[Ads by Google](#)

[Understand IP Telephony](#)

Free 96 page IP Telephony eBook: 11 Chapters Focused on Deployment.

[ShoreTel.com](#)

make it difficult to attract and retain great talent.

Visualize software development as a continuum. On one end of the continuum are predictive methodologies, which strive to predict as much as possible about a project at the very start. On the other end are adaptive methodologies, including practices and tools that allow teams to adapt to change instead of predict it. That's what Agile is all about.

"With Agile development, you flip the usual model by 90 degrees," says Boris Portman, program chair of Agile Austin, an Austin, Texas-based education group that advocates the Agile development method. "Instead of the traditional phases, we think of requirement slices, each with their proper scope and priority."

Several Agile methods exist, but each emphasizes requirements derived from the real world—some kind of time box that forces fast, iterative cycles, the flexibility to allow a team to adapt to market forces and face-to-face communication among those team members to share what they've done, what they still need to do and any obstacles that might impede future action.

If we were to plan our road trip along Agile lines, we'd come up with user stories to determine requirements, priorities and scope. "A user story usually follows the model: As a 'blank,' I would like to 'blank' so I can 'blank,'" Portman says. This model creates a one-line requirement that is easy to understand and communicate to team members. As such, a user story for the Las Vegas road trip might be: "As a poker enthusiast, I would like to play poker at a casino so I can have fun and win some money."

A project is usually composed of many user stories, but some projects may need only a few to get the ball rolling. These stories can be broken down into atomic tasks, each with its own priority, and then worked on by team members. For example, in our Vegas user story, the team gasses up the car and makes sure everyone has money for the poker table. Then they hit the road, taking the biggest highway they can find. The group is also free to take advantage of unexpected opportunities. For

example, a sharp-eyed member of the group might spot a billboard for a terrific casino with poker rooms at a nearby Native American reservation. It's not Vegas, but the goal is to play poker and have fun, which makes alternate destinations more than acceptable.

That's an example of focusing on value and the empowerment it can bring to teams. By shifting the focus to outcomes and letting the team self-organize, good things can happen that were never planned by the central committee.

"If an organization lacks the capability to design, plan and document everything up front, Agile can help get a project started by allowing those activities to occur over the life of the project," says Rick Grashel, manager of software development at Initiate Systems, a Chicago-based maker of data management software.

While Agile has critics, many experts agree that enterprise software development efforts could greatly benefit from such common-sense software development approaches. Benefits include teams that know their objectives and hit targets consistently without having to pull weeks of overtime, and product owners with tangible results in a much shorter time frame.

That's not to say pitfalls don't exist. Critics charge that Agile lacks discipline, especially since little documentation is produced. Others say that the only good data on Agile's usefulness centers around "project velocity," but question whether there is a negative effect on quality or security to achieve that velocity. In practice, Agile's common problems fall into three primary categories:

Upper management buy-in. Executives need to trust the self-organizing nature of the Agile process and shift their thinking to explain customer value instead of arbitrary metrics, such as deadlines and launch dates.

Software team discipline. Agile development isn't a free pass. It also doesn't mean "coding without documentation" or random assignments. You need stories (plans), tasks organized into a backlog (essentially a prioritized list of requirements tied to resources and deadlines) and daily, open participation among team

members.

Plenty of communication. "Every single day, you need an open forum to hear about ideas and problems," says Lance Ball, a software developer at New York city-based The Electric Sheep Company, which uses Agile to create add-on software for virtual worlds, such as Second Life.

What should executives and technical team members do if they want to explore Agile? Here are five steps.

1. Pick a small, meaningful project. It's much better to tackle an entire project with Agile methodologies than to try to apply Agile approaches in a project governed by other processes.

2. Build a small team. Small teams communicate better than big teams, and Agile requires unfettered communication to succeed. "The perfect Agile team is seven to 10 developers," says David Biggs, managing consultant of Catapult Systems, an Austin, Texas-based developer of Microsoft enterprise solutions.

3. Get customer buy-in. Let's face it, we've all become used to long, drawn-out software releases with lots of delays and bugs. What Agile does is shift the playing field a bit—the releases are smaller (in other words, fewer features), but they come faster and impact the market more. "Agile's all about adopting an iterative approach and getting your customers to buy into more frequent, much smaller releases," says Colby Thames, president of BSGdelivery at the BSGAlliance, a developer of Web-based enterprise applications, also in Austin. Think of the difference between Microsoft's operating-system release model (six years to produce a problematic Vista) and Apple's (five relatively clean major releases of OS X in the same period). Which set of customers do you think is happier in the long run?

4. Build a solid backlog. Patrick Schramm, a certified Scrum Master who works at Austin-based Vignette, points out that the backlog of features is a record of all the objectives you want to meet. Without it, all you have is random development.

5. Change your attitude. Joel Greenberg, vice president of marketing innovations at The Electric Sheep Company, summarizes it best: "Agile works best for people and organizations willing to face reality." You're going to see daily problems, but you'll also get to fix things daily.

By and large, most Agile methodologies are adaptive, but they work only within certain contexts. You must limit the size of the team, and you have to allow that team to self-organize and communicate daily. You also have to change your organization's cultural DNA quite a bit, trusting your team to adapt to marketplace realities and to produce smaller feature sets faster than you're accustomed to. If you can do all of that, then you have a good chance at succeeding with Agile.

Thomas Myer is a consultant, developer and technical book author. His firm, Triple Dog Dare Media, builds open-source Web applications centered on content creation, management and distribution.



Discuss Software Development the Agile Way

>>> [Be the FIRST to comment on this article!](#)

>>> [More Application Development Articles](#)

>>> [More By Baselinemag](#)

Add This Article To:



[Email Article To Friend](#) — [Print Version Of Article](#) — [PDF Version Of Article](#)

FREE ZIFF DAVIS ENTERPRISE ESEMINARS AT ESEMINARSLIVE.COM

- **Dec 17, 2 p.m. ET**
Perform NTFS Permissions Audits in Minutes with Steve DeGeorge. *Sponsored by Varonis*
- **Dec 17, 4 p.m. ET**
Security for Web 2.0: Surviving Collaborative Content Threats with Michael Krieger. *Sponsored by Blue Coat Systems*
- **Dec 18, 12:30 p.m. ET**
Efficient Backup for Remote Laptops and Desktops with Charlene O'Hanlon. *Sponsored by CA XOssoft*
- **Dec 18, 2 p.m. ET**
Simplify IT environments via Virtualization Technology with Aaron Goldberg. *Sponsored by VMWare & Dell*

virtualtradeshow
ZIFF DAVIS ENTERPRISE
:: ILM

Join us on Dec. 19 for Discovering Value in Stored Data & Reducing Business Risk.
Join this interactive day-long event to learn how your enterprise can cost-effectively manage stored data while keeping it secure, compliant and accessible. Disorganized storage can prevent your enterprise from extracting the maximum value from information assets. Learn how to organize enterprise data so vital information assets can help your business thrive. Explore policies, strategies and tactics from creation through deletion. Attend live or on-demand with complimentary registration!
[Register Today!](#)

SPONSORED LINKS

- [Download the Windows Server® 2008 Release Candidate today](#)
- [Offer More—Save More—Make More with Seagate®.](#)
- [Your small business. Our big solution. The Satellite A200.](#)

FEATURED CONTENT

DOWNLOADABLE ROI CALCULATORS & TOOLS FROM BASELINE

IT LINK DISCUSSION - MIGRATION

A Windows Vista® migration introduces new and unique challenges to any IT organization. It's important to understand early on whether your systems, hardware, applications and end users are ready for the transition.

Join the discussion today!

Sponsored by



Free Trial - Windows Server 2008 Release Candidate.

With Windows Server 2008 you can develop, deliver, and manage rich user experiences and applications, provide a secure network infrastructure.

[Click to learn more >>](#)

Brought to you by Ziff Davis Enterprise

Calculate Cost and ROI of Spam, VOIP, RFID, Sarbanes-Oxley and more...

Featured Calculators:

- [Calculating an Outsourcing Ratio](#)
- [The Return on Voice over IP Migration](#)
- [Break-Even Point for Search Tools](#)
- [The Return on Consolidating Data Centers](#)
- [Customized Software Versus Build-From-Scratch](#)
- [Computer Expense by the Hour](#)
- [Investing in Sarbanes-Oxley](#)

See More Tools!

[By Category](#) | [Planners](#) | [Calculators](#) | [Quizzes](#)

[Learn Agile Development](#)

Agile Software Development Mgmt. Download Free WhitePapers, Webinars
www.RallyDev.com

[Agile Development Tools](#)

Enterprise-Class Tools for Agile Software Builds - Free Whitepapers.
Electric-Cloud.com

[Scrum Training](#)

Training, Coaching, and Consulting. Scrum Class: San Antonio Jun 16-17
www.WinnowManagement.com

[Team Project Management](#)

Centralize Projects. Manage Tasks. Track Files. Web-Based. Free Trial.
www.CentralDesktop.com

Ads by Google

Baseline: [Issue Index](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [About](#) | [Media Kit](#) | [Magazine Customer Service](#) | [Navigation Guide](#)

Quick Links: [Project Planners](#) | [ROI Calculators](#) | [Enterprise Resource Planning](#) | [Network and Online Security](#) | [Data Analysis](#) | [Process Management](#) | [Storage Devices](#) | [Link to Us](#)



[Ziff Davis Enterprise Home](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Link to Us](#) | [Reprints](#) | [Magazine Subscriptions](#) | [Newsletters](#)
[RSS Feeds](#) | [White Papers](#) | [ROI Calculators](#) | [Tech Podcasts](#) | [Tech Video](#) |

[Baseline](#) | [Careers](#) | [Channel Insider](#) | [CIO Insight](#) | [DesktopLinux](#) | [DeviceForge](#) | [DevSource](#) | [eSeminars](#) | [eWEEK](#) | [LinuxDevices](#) | [Linux Watch](#) | [Microsoft Watch](#) | [Mid-market](#) | [Networking](#) | [PDF Zone](#) | [Publish](#) | [Security IT Hub](#) | [Strategic Partner](#) | [Web Buyer's Guide](#) | [Windows for Devices](#)

[Developer Shed](#) | [Dev Shed](#) | [ASP Free](#) | [Dev Articles](#) | [Dev Hardware](#) | [SEO Chat](#) | [Tutorialized](#) | [Scripts](#) | [Code Walkers](#) | [Web Hosters](#) | [Dev Mechanic](#) | [Dev Archives](#) | [IT Marketplace](#) | [igrep](#)

Use of this site is governed by our [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#)

Copyright ©1996-2008 **Ziff Davis Enterprise Holdings Inc.** All Rights Reserved. eWEEK and Spencer F. Katt are trademarks of Ziff Davis Enterprise Holdings, Inc. Reproduction in whole or in part in any form or medium without express written permission of Ziff Davis Enterprise Inc. is prohibited.