



Agile coaching case study at BPDTS Ltd

An Agilesphere case study

Version: 1.0
4th June 2019

Louise Jackson

Introduction

Following a successful bid, Agilesphere was awarded the agile coaching contract to support BPDTS in its vision to transform the company from one of traditional delivery to one which uses agile techniques and principles.

BPDTS is the digital technology company set up to provide specialist digital technology services to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The outcome was to improve its delivery and service offerings by focusing on priorities and delivering business value earlier.

Our remit was to support BPDTS in adopt agile working practices across the whole of the organisation, enabling them to be a successful delivery partner for DWP. Specifically, this included the legacy mainframe development and support teams, helping them to keep their skills and experience current.

Our approach

Initially, we undertook a 4-week discovery phase, holding several workshops with technical teams, delivery teams and senior leadership people. Through the workshops, we were able to assess:

- the level of agile understanding across the teams
- the current processes
- Pain points
- team visions
- user needs

To demonstrate what good looks like and embed the agile ceremonies and principles, we made sure our coaches worked in an agile way with the client's Business Product Owner.

Our stories were maintained in the backlog, we held daily stand-ups, weekly refinement and prioritisation/replenishment sessions, led by the BPO. We also held regular retrospectives to help us look for and make improvements continually. We held monthly show and tells/showcases for stakeholders, including the CEO, making sure the teams we worked with were represented. It also allowed senior leaders the

opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback and suggested changes for inclusion in the coaching backlog.

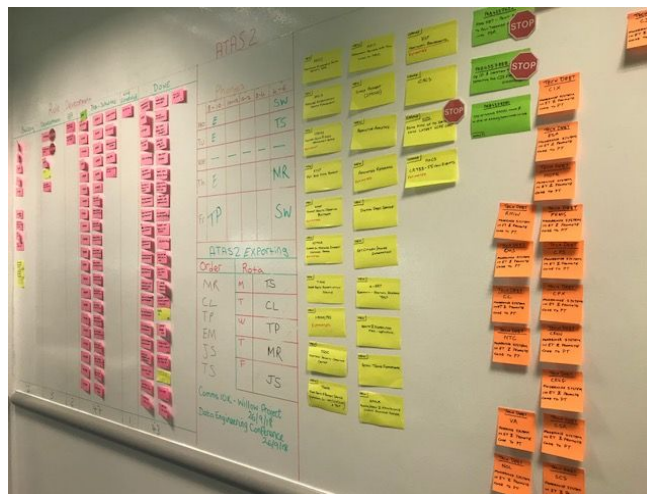
As the discovery phase came to an end and having undertaken a high-level assessment of the organisation’s Agile Maturity, we were able to propose an alpha plan, recommending four teams to embark on their agile journey, developing a flexible but consistent approach to agile.

There was a smooth transition from discovery and we completed an eight-week (four sprints) alpha phase. This included a digital/Agile Maturity assessment with the alpha teams to baseline and track progress for their agile journey.

Our coaches took a hands-on approach with the alpha teams introducing them to the agile ceremonies:

- daily stand-ups
- sprint planning
- sprint refinement
- retrospectives
- sprint reviews and show and tells with stakeholders

We also helped the teams visually manage their workload using Kanban boards, sprint boards and Jira.

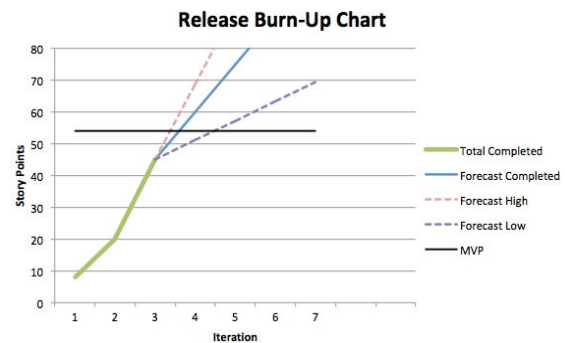


(One of the team’s scrum board)

We introduced the teams to agile ways of working, which included:

- agile mindset workshops (manifesto and principles/why we do what we do)
- setting high-performing teams workshops (team charters)
- introduction to other core practices (Refinement, defining Done, defining Definition of Ready)
- release planning, including estimations/planning poker/measures of velocity
- agile reporting
- writing good user stories using the I.N.V.E.S.T. (Independent, Negotiable, Value, Estimable, Small, Testable) principles and behaviour driven development acceptance criteria
- coaching use of collaboration tools such as Jira and Confluence

	Sprint	Story Points Completed	Total Completed	Forecast Completed	Forecast High	Forecast Low	MVP
Historical	1	8	8				54
	2	12	20				54
	3	25	45	45	45	45	54
	4			60	69	51	54
	5			75	93	57	54
	6			90	117	63	54
	7			105	141	69	54
Forecast	Average Points Completed Last 6 Sprints:			15		Assumption	
	Standard Deviation Points Last 3 Sprints:			9			



(Sprint velocity table)



(Planning poker game)

Our Technical Coach also held sessions with each of the alpha teams and provided coaching and support with:

- agile delivery techniques (e.g. pair/mob programming)
- CI/CD pipeline principles
- good characteristics for selection and use of open source products

What we achieved

Through the four sprint alpha phase, we worked with four teams (approximately 25 people), helping them start to adopt agile methodologies to improve the collaboration, transparency and delivery of their work.

At the end of alpha, we moved into beta phase and started to expand our agile coaching with more of the legacy teams in Newcastle and Blackpool. At the same time, we continued to coach and support the alpha/pilot teams, making sure their learning was embedded across the teams and they maintained agile ceremonies, regardless of whether they were a Kanban or Scrum-based team.

We coached:

- development teams
- service support teams
- product teams
- operational teams (HR)

We provided agile coaching collateral, which made sure our coaching approach remained consistent across the teams and locations and this consistency would remain after our assignment ended. We iterated the collateral following feedback and learning.

We measured agile learning by developing a client-specific Digital Maturity Assessment and conducting assessments at the beginning of each team's agile coaching journey. This provided a benchmark and then quarterly to understand the progress being made. These helped the teams and the organisation identify and focus on priorities for their development.

It also made sure we focused our attention on the teams who needed the most support and enabled the organisation to prioritise key areas in its organisational level business plan.

By the end of the first nine months of working with the teams, we will be on target to have taken approximately 450 people on their agile journey. To enable BPDTS to become sustainable in agile coaching in the future, we worked with the Business Product Owner to devise and agree a plan for knowledge transfer to their new permanent team.

This included the client's staff:

- shadowing our coaches
- pairing with our coaches
- leading coaching sessions with their team, with support from our coaches
- being responsible for coaching their teams and the coaching backlog with advisory support as and when needed from our coaches

Lessons learned

As with any engagement, a successful outcome is dependent on engagement from the client. Our end-of-sprint coaching reports record an amazing level of engagement and enthusiasm from the client. The Product Owner was always available and willing to lead and manage the backlog to make sure it was detailed appropriately and refined in time for coaches to pull in the priority work from the Kanban board.

It is always better to have an initial set of volunteers who want to start the agile journey and with BPDTS, we were fortunate that several teams stepped up to the challenge early on. Teams participated enthusiastically in workshops and scrum/Kanban events where they showed an enormous willingness to learn and take on new ideas. Many of the teams published blogs on the BPDTS internal intranet, telling their colleagues about their agile journey. These great stories helped spread the positive work and encouraged more teams to get involved.

Generally, teams settled into the rhythm of events and moved from nascent agile practitioners to more self-organising teams. The alpha teams matured nicely and were used as exemplars for other areas of the organisation to follow. Unsurprisingly, these teams still speak highly of the difference that an adaptable, creative mindset and practices have brought to their ability to deliver value to their clients.

It is important that in instances where teams cannot be fully co-located, collaborative tooling for the backlog of work is available to teams at the start.