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Title of the Paper:

Effective utilization of Agile Methodologies in fixed price project

Theme:

Project Management Leadership > In a rapidly changing world

Keywords:

Agile, Fixed Price, Project Fusion

Abstract:

Nothing in this world is white or black, its grey. Basically, agile methodologies is not preferable for a fixed bid project. But today's business scenario is quite complex and dynamic. How we deal with projects where deal has happened in fixed price but requirement is not defined clearly? In a situation like this it's a huge challenge to satisfy project triple constraint and customer satisfaction. A lot of time during agile sessions, I get question asking that can Agile be implemented in fixed price project with the aim maintaining customer satisfaction. My view is – yes, we can. Addition, subtraction of any idea and its implementation is in our hand. We can have fusion of Waterfall Model and Agile Methodologies. We can have outer shell as Waterfall (main goal) and Inner Shell can have Iteration model (iterative goal). We can set the expectation with customer of having an effective collaboration and engagement throughout the project for a successful delivery. This continuous engagement with customer (or Business SPOC) is crucial for success of project where scope and requirement gets progressively elaborated with time. Engaging customer in technical discussions also reduces lot of risk, set expectation right in terms of schedule, scope & budget and helps getting to an alternate solution for a timely quality delivery with satisfaction.

Intent: (Mandatory)

(If your abstract does not already specify the Intent or Take-away (from the audience's perspective), then please clearly mention the same immediately after the abstract in brief. (Not more than 150 words))

Table of Contents

TOC format

Introduction

Whenever there is a buzz word, everybody talks about it. Agile is same too. Organizations, client all wants Agile to be followed. But how much we understand Agile and really want to implement Agile for what it meant is very doubtful. Now for a Fixed Price project, scope and requirement should be very clear and frozen so that it can be implemented following water fall framework. But when a project is handed over to Project Manager where budget or price is already fixed with a very high level requirement with lot of open rooms, what does a Project Manager do? Most of IT projects now a days can't be delivered following Traditional Project Management in ideal condition. So can Project Managers still follow Agile to meet customer requirement under above situations? Does Agile really helps keeping the constraint and challenge in mind?

Main body of the paper

Case Study:

In ideal situation, when a deal is done, Project Manager also should be part of that process so that he/she can put thought forward related to feasibility, risk, budget, effort constraint etc.

But in this dynamic business world when all are focused on achieving target, most of time co-ordination is missed out. A deal is sealed. Pre-Sales/Sales team wins a deal. And the project is handed over to Project Manager for execution with already fixed budget, timeline and all sorts of constraints. The onus is on Project Manager to make the project successful though there might be plethora of reasons why the project will not meet it's objective and fail.

PMI suggests that it's Project Manager's job to ascertain risk and highlight it before accepting project. But on ground, if you live in water, don't fight with crocodile. If one must survive as Project Manager in organizations, he/she should live with these constraints and thrive.

I would like to take one of my recent projects as case study. I was called and handed over a project with three points –

- ✓ Project is simple
- ✓ Time to deliver project is set – 4 months
- ✓ Client contact details
- ✓ Scope is set but requirement is not defined

When I met Business SPOC from client side, within few days of interaction below points became clear. And these below points had direct and enormous impact on success of project.

- ✓ High level problem statement and high level solution, what the objective the project was supposed to meet was clear.
- ✓ But detailed understanding to build the system such as business conditions were completely unclear,
- ✓ The more we discuss to connect dots to build the system, more it became clear that Business SPOC also was not aware of lot of process related queries, so gathering necessary information was obviously taking more time than expected or set in Project Plan given during RFP.
- ✓ Generally, when a solution is sold as a configurable tool and later during requirement gathering, it is figured out that most part of solution has to be develop from scratch, risks become high for meeting timeline, budget and quality.

Key Challenges:

Under situation as above, I assessed challenges I had in front of me –

- Budget and timeline was fixed, Go Live date was already set and declared to Client

- Though scope of project was defined but information required to build the system as output of the project was not handy/clear
- Most of team members were freshers with little exposure to work under tight and demanding timeline of client centric project. Hence learning curve became a major portion of executable time.
- Building team, aligning them towards project goal and success was a real challenge. Keeping them motivated though out the project was another challenge.



Fig 1: Key Challenges

Methodology/Process followed:

As per contract and delivery date given to client, project was timeline was provided as Water Fall Model with duration of 4 Months–



Fig 2: Timeline given as Traditional Model

Within few days interaction with business SPOC, it was clear that we (me & my team) **can't wait for complete requirement clarity to get development activity started. Doing so will delay complete schedule increasing risk further.**

2 Options I looked at which I have at my disposal and I could make them my greatest strength for success –

- ✓ Business SPOC
- ✓ My Project Team – a team of 5 people

Quick snapshot of problem statement and probable solution thought about was:

- ✚ **Challenge:** I was clear that if I follow Traditional Project Management, we will not be able to start and end project on time as Requirement Gathering itself is going to consume more time than expected.
- ✚ **Probable Solution:** There was a way to meet the challenging demand and it was to keep overall delivery time line in mind as above (Fig 2) but execution will be completely done with Agile principle as much as possible.

I conducted few days part time session with team members to give an overview of Agile principles and made them mentally prepared that our style of working be changed, more challenging and at the same time goal will be meeting target.

Action Step Taken:

Took the first step to take Business SPOC and Project Team in confidence. It was made clear to Client as well as team that we will follow iteration model for Requirement Gathering, Development, Testing. It was made clear that:

- Following Agile for project delivery was not the goal, rather adopting Agile principles whatever suits us to meet project goal will be the objective.
- We will be ready to listen to all, any challenge, constraint and mend ourselves throughout project.
- Sought Business SPOC co-operation in that respect. It was made clear that we need maximum coordination and time from them for removing blockages.

Session on Agile was taken with team and Daily Stand Up meeting fixed. Show and tell at regular interval with client was brought in place.

Few aspects of Agile, we considered to apply throughout our project execution and delivery was –

1. **Continuous communication and feedback** with client and team members - it mitigated lot of risk and issues in the bud.
2. **Adaptability to change and accept**– Requirements were changing and evolving each day which is lot of time strenuous but with mindset changed with time team got adjusted
3. **Iteration and rework** – we kept 1 week 'Sprint' as 2 weeks Sprint was risky keeping the non-clarity of requirement in mind . Had regular demo with Business SPOC and absolute necessary changes were included and integrated in system
4. **Continuous Risk Assessment** – complete team along with Project Manager and Client Business SPOC also took interest in highlighting impending risk. Food Court, rest room were also used as brainstorming and risk discussion place.
5. **Learning, sharing and evolving** – Whatever challenges we faced, whatever learning we had was discussed, shared and we evolved
6. **Customer alignment and satisfaction** – Because we had constant touch with Business SPOC, client, our relation became humane with time, not unreasonable demanding. As we involved them in our technical discussion, shared challenges, they too started to understand ground reality of implementation. With time, we started understanding our position w.r.t project and started taking amicable solution for project goal.

Idea was to start development work with whatever requirement clarity was at hand rather than waiting. And whatever is developed with MMF, to showcase to client and take feedback for any modification/changes to incorporate.



Fig3: Iteration Model under the shadow of Waterfall Model

Critical Success Factor:

Out of all the steps taken for meeting project goal, few critical success factor got clear:

- ✓ Customer Collaboration:
- ✓ Continuous Communication and Feedback
- ✓ Team Building and involvement
- ✓ Continuous Risk Assessment
- ✓ Customer Satisfaction and alignment

Quantified benefits to business

There were major benefits realized to business. These are as below –

1. On Time Completion of the project
2. Because of few inevitable requirement inclusion during design phase which were MUST for project success, we needed more time. Client agreed and we delivered project with 5 months' effort time.
3. Major challenges faced during execution of the project was averted because of the Agile principle followed 'Continuous Communication and Feedback'
4. Because of iterations and continues feedback back mechanism, the final delivery was given without any P1 and P2 bugs.
5. System were delivered with such precision that situation never raised to take down the system. This was appreciated and acknowledged by Business Head in feedback.
6. Project Delivery Feedback rating was given by client as 6/7 which was a huge motivation/boost for us.
7. Most importantly, my pleasure as a Project Manager was that my team members evolved as human being and I got very positive feedback from them too.

Lessons learnt:

Few of the lessons learnt from overall exercise –

1. Knowledge are scattered all around as PMI is helping us with PMBOK, ACP certification etc. How we utilize it to benefit our projects depend upon us.
2. Have initiative and courage to do experiment
3. If your effort shows sincerity, team will also follow
4. Ask for help from Client, everybody loves to help others (most of time)
5. Involve Client/Business SPCOC in technical discussion, brainstorm technical challenges. If not technical help, you will get co-operation if any deviation is there in terms of schedule or budget as they see your involvement and understand the challenges faced in execution of project.

Conclusion

Challenges will be around us but how we use tools in hand to meet the challenges depend on us.

It's not about Traditional, Water fall or Agile Mythologies usage in project delivery. Rather it matters most how we use these given knowledges like Traditional Project Management and Agile Methodologies to meet project goal. Fusion of Agile Methodologies with Traditional can be implemented successfully for project success, team building etc.

References

No direct references. Out of certification knowledge with PMI and work experience.