Is it all just a Question of Balance?

What are the Key Challenges and Opportunities Facing Service Management in an Agile Delivery Model? An apparently simple question, but is the answer as simple?

Before we can do that, let's first understand some basics and put some context around what we are talking about.

Agile is not a single thing, but a concept of being able to do thing quickly, empowering other to accelerate and make rapid change. Agile encompasses frameworks such as SCRUM and LEAN.

Service Management on the other hand, encompassing frameworks such as ITIL and COBIT, is presented as the antithesis of agile, with bureaucratic processes and long-winded mechanisms perpetuating an inflexible waterfall model that is filled with silos.

Are these perceptions fair? Try a different perspective; Agile is the new kid on the block, dynamic and exciting next step in delivery, breaking us free from the chains of bureaucracy and overburdened process that are not fit for purpose.

Some might describe agile as the upstart, reeking anarchy across all that has been done and built up, ignoring the controls and processes in place.

So is service management the haven of the silo and the safety blanket of the control freak and is the lifecycle outmoded? Or is agile all that is wrong with the world today?

What we really have here is a clash of ideals, originating in the cultural clash of the digital native against the digital migrant? Both can be quite polarised and when looked at in isolation, they lack a real-world perspective. There is a need to bring them together and

strike a balance.

However, the origins for these perspectives lay not with the objectives of Agile or Service Management methods, but with the implementations and applications that have been performed. And it is the practitioners advocating a specific way that are at the centre of this problem, a problem that is often exacerbated with a lack of effective training.

Since ITIL V3, the service lifecycle was the key to the value chain and building value. A gold mine for vendors, but they perpetuated the issue by only really focusing on the operational aspects and lip service to change, so good design practices were not embedded and a well constructed customer focused service catalogue was often a complete mystery. This mean that financial modelling was flawed meaning value could never be truly measured. Adding fuel to the fire, asset management (ITAM) grew into its own discipline that some saw as mutually exclusive from service management (ITSM).

When this is combined with a real lack of understanding of service management amongst IT professionals and implementation are driven by vendors, is it any surprise that so many fail?

Why do I think there is a lack of understanding or support for developing skills in service management? Take a look at the number of job adverts for senior roles where ITIL Foundation is considered sufficient! Who is pushing to further the knowledge and understanding?

The net result is a large number of implementations have failed or never progressed beyond a glorified helpdesk.

It is not that people set out to do the wrong thing, but they set about the task the wrong way, with the wrong focus and poorly equipped for the task.

And so the bad reputation built as complex processes were created to cater for every eventuality. Change boards kept the strictest control. All measured with inappropriate metrics.

With the shift to cloud and virtualisation, the question of whether service management was fit for purpose was raised. Surely DevOPS was the answer? As the new kid on the block it would bring about a brave new world that would fix all the problems of the past.

But STOP! Effective service management is not "doing ITIL" or Devops for that matter. Effective service management is a culmination of best practice, bringing together a number of disciplthat serve the purpose of why we, as IT professionals, are here, doing what the business needs us to do. We are here to deliver for our customers. Leveraging our skills and knowledge to not just help solve their problems, but to enable them to do more through better capabilities.

· Our customer is our consumer, so identify and involve stakeholders throughout.

·   Complex processes are replaced by working practices that reflect what actually happens in the workplace.

·   A true service driven target model exists, driven not by product features, but by customer design.

·   Security is no longer an afterthought, but an inherent feature of design.

·   Change is delegated through authorising scope and bounds

·   The customer is no longer expected to take what they are given, Stakeholders are involved throughout on both sides, as the supplier collaborates with the consumer to deliver services that really are fit for use and fit for purpose.

But the same fundamental problem lies at the heart of agile driven tools and technology. The flawed belief that a single framework will answer all ails. That flawed belief is driven by organisational culture, as it is the people that specify, design, deliver, manage, and consume the technology.

I have long held the belief that success within an organisation takes the right culture. Culture defines the people within an organisation and their approach to work. It is how things get done… or not as the case may be! The desire to be on the bleeding edge, the leading edge or wallow on the trailing edge is a reflection of the culture.

So to change the culture, it is necessary to change the people, or their attitudes at the very least. In so doing transform the workplace into a collaborative environment where new ideas are not met with resistance, but curiosity and interest, fostering ideas for how new concepts can improve upon what is done today. Therein lies a vision, but there is no panacea for the culture, no one has the magic pill that will just make it happen.

It is understood that the modern working place is transforming, and many people want to be part of something more collaborative.

To start, what is the guiding vision? Where do we want to be and what will happen if we do not change? Don't worry, I am not just going to elaborate through Koetters model, but at its very simplest level we break this down into a CI programme, built not on a big bang, but incremental delivery. Small steps that mean we can fail fast, adapt and move on and move forward.

One thing that has not changed is the mantra of the CI model, it is as valid today as it has always been.

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·   Where are we today?

·   Where do we want to be?

·   How do we get there?

· How do we know we have arrived?

CI is getting there through a journey of steps, steps that everyone takes, not just the select few. This is also knowing that to be effective, change must take hold and be normalised to become the new behaviour.

Focusing on "where do we want to be", we have the longer-term vision, but we embrace the SCRUM methods and shorten our horizons. What do we want to get done in the next 2 weeks?

A lot of theory, but how might this look in practice and how do we use it to break down barriers? One of my favourites is problem management and the opportunity for collaboration and operational service improvement.

Why?

1   From the operational perspective the more stable an environment, the more we can do – stability supports agility.

2   For our teams, they are involved in improving their lot, they are exposed to the rest of the business and play an active part in eliminating the problems.

Is it a cliché when we say be part of the problem or be part of the solution? In a traditional environment, the service desk team sits resolving tickets, they come in pop on their headsets and set to work, then leave at the end of the day. The classic silo!

We start by training them with some new skills. Such as 8D problem analysis and how to use the 5 whys. How to recognise waste through over processing or excessive waiting time.

Take them beyond treating the symptoms and give them the tools and skills to shift to pro-active working. Make them an active part of developing knowledge and workarounds. Recognise and reward them for doing so.

Then we can try something different. We create pods that work across the value stream. Put designers, configuration and ops together. Bring them together for a daily stand-up, what are they planning to do, do they have any pressing issues, have they had any particular frustrations? Have they seen anything repeating? They are now becoming part of the solution.

Through this transition, we still need to service customers – remember the panacea paradox? One pod will go back to core activities but now they work as a team, bring the lifecycle to a one piece flow. The other pod actively works those issues. Kanban to start with, take them out into the business and work with the customers to see the problem first-hand. Take note and observe.

We want to make bigger changes or have bigger problems? Run a Kaizen event and map where we are today? what do we want to change? what adds value? Map out what is to be done and use the sprints to bring in the changes bit by bit.

Technology will also play a part in the shift left to serve our customers. Predictive monitoring tools, chat bots, self-healing, apps and containers. This new environment still has capacity, continuity, availability, and security. It still has configuration and change control, but when coupled with new practices that are designed with the customer in a target operating model in mind, the customer has more freedom to operate in a dynamic model. An end user computing model that remains compliant with legislation but gives them the freedom to work their data and use resources without running into problems.

The last part of the CI cycle is measurement. Metrics with meaning. Do not just do what you think people want to see. Ask the customer what is important to them as well as what is important to the delivery team.

Over time, are the improvements having the desired effect? What better way to know if our customer is better enabled than listening to them and acting upon what they tell us.

Visual management is a powerful tool, active measurement and driver measure boards encourages transparency. Help the shift in the way we view success and means there are a few less surprises in our world. This forms part of our ongoing communication, communication that reinforces our progress and celebrates our success.

And tomorrow... tomorrow we will learn a bit more, improve a bit more and keep on doing it. That is evolution!

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