: How can we measure the value and success of agile?

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Agile is a complex, abstract concept and there is no single way that individuals and teams "do" agile. Both of these factors make it challenging to identify and measure the value and success of agile in general. The Annual State of Agile reports provide insights into the application of Agile across different areas of the enterprise. The surveys show increasing adoption of agile but there remains disagreement about measuring agile success. It is not easy to measure the agile process, however it is not an option to use these concerns as excuses for not measuring value and success. Rather managers should identify a group of key performance indicators (KPIs) and periodically check the usefulness of the metrics.

To show progress as part of the agile journey, we must assess whether we are living up to the agile principles and delivering value as part of a project. The old adage "what gets measured gets done" is important in agile organizations and for agile projects. Assessing value and success can and should be done at an individual, team, and organizational level. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches may be used to measure project goals. These approaches could include individual employee 360 reviews, individual and team surveys, post-implementation evaluations, and eliciting feedback from a variety of stakeholders including other teams and customers.

There are a variety of frameworks and approaches for measuring the success of agile, both on a day-to-day basis and overall for agile initiatives. We identified four overarching metrics that can be used to facilitate and track agile success, these include:

Productivity: this measure may include: 1) reduction in waste – how is duplication of work and handoffs reduced or even removed; 2) increased efficiency – how much work is done per unit time. For example, how many user stories or features have been designed and developed as a measure of how much the team is actually delivering; 3) continuous improvement - how well work is flowing through the agile development lifecycle, identifying tangible measures of process improvement, and 4) on-time delivery – measuring if the agreed upon high priority backlog items (tasks) are delivered on time.

Predictability: this criterion is directly linked to the productivity of the team and/or organization. Agile teams measure the Planned- To-Done ratio of a project using the product backlog items, to establish what percentage of items are complete in a specific time period and how much can be achieved during the time remaining in the project. This allows the team to measure that extent to which work is completed at a sustainable pace on average. Ask are we meeting expectations?

Satisfaction: this may be measured in terms of 1) client satisfaction with the outputs, and 2) quality. Quality may be measured using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Product/service quality is measured by conducting a technical assessment of the product or service using a variety of DevOps models and tools. Customer satisfaction may be assessed through surveys and interviews with customers and other project stakeholders. Ask are we creating value, and if so for whom?

Stability: this factor measures the "health" or stability of the team (employees) and it impacts productivity, satisfaction, and predictability. If organization members are motivated, collaborative, and share a common goal, the the more stable and sustainable are the other measures over time.

There is no single measure or group of measures that must/should be used to evaluate agility and a specific agile project. Depending on the team, the project, and the stakeholders, different measures may be identified to objectively establish the success and value of an agile project and strategy.

Overall, if we are to understand and highlight the impact of becoming agile, there must be a balance between measuring value and success and its impacts on individual communication, performance, and productivity. We do not want to negatively impact individuals or teams. The suggested metrics should not be used to micro manage individuals or teams, but rather to shine a light on good practice and to help agile teams to build on lessons learned from one project to the next. We must assess the assertion that when Agile is scaled across an organization, everyone experiences the benefits. We must regularly measure the value and success of agile.

References

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